

Love Scam as a Manifestation of Online Gender-Based Violence: Aligning Legislation to Ensure Victim Protection

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Abstract

Love scams represent a fraudulent activity conducted under the guise of romantic involvement, thereby contravening legal statutes. This study aims to elucidate the historical development of love scams and their manifestation as a form of gender-based online violence (KGBO) in Indonesia, as well as the harmonization of legal frameworks for victims of such scams within the country. This research uses a normative legal methodology to examine secondary data, including laws, regulations, and literature relevant to the practice of love scams, their historical context, and legal harmonization. The findings of this study indicate that the proliferation of love scams can be attributed to several factors, namely economic, technological, and psychological. The relevant legal frameworks include the TPKS Law, ITE Law, and Criminal Code; however, these regulations have yet to explicitly provide legal protection for victims of love scams or address sexual harassment that constitutes online gender-based violence or cybercrime.

Keywords: *Love Scam, Online Gender-Based Violence (KGBO), Legal Protection.*

Abstrak

Fenomena *love scam* merupakan sebuah tindakan penipuan yang berkedok asmara dan melanggar hukum. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengetahui historisitas munculnya *love scam* dan praktik *love scam* sebagai bentuk KGBO di Indonesia dan harmonisasi peraturan perundang-undangan bagi korban *love scam* di Indonesia. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode yuridis normatif, dengan menganalisis data sekunder berupa peraturan perundang-undangan dan pustaka yang terkait dengan praktik *love scam*, historisitas dan harmonisasi undang-undang. Hasil penelitian ini menunjukkan bahwa munculnya *love scam* disebabkan beberapa faktor yaitu ekonomi, teknologi dan psikologi. Adapun peraturan yang relevan diantaranya yaitu UU TPKS, UU ITE dan KUHP namun aturan tersebut belum mengakomodir secara eksplisit terkait perlindungan hukum bagi korban *love scam* maupun pelecehan seksual yang masuk dalam kekerasan gender berbasis online maupun dalam konteks kejahatan siber.

Kata kunci: *Love scam, Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online, Perlindungan Hukum.*

Istinbath: Jurnal Hukum

Website : <http://e-journal.metrouniv.ac.id/index.php/istinbath/index>

Received : 2025-03-15 | Published : 2025-06-30.



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Introduction

Online gender-based violence (OGBV) has occurred in several countries, for example, in the United States¹, the United Kingdom,² Australia,³ and Brazil.⁴ Many factors, including social, cultural, and intricate regulatory influences, shape this phenomenon's emergence. The primary motivations encompass deeply rooted gender inequality, the normalization of misogyny, ineffective regulatory frameworks, and a general lack of awareness or tolerance of gender equality.

The escalation of gender-based violence in cyberspace can be attributed to the shift of various activities to the digital realm, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. The Internet-based digital space, which initially served as a supportive medium for numerous human activities during the pandemic, has also facilitated opportunities for specific individuals to engage in "online-based gender violence" or KGBO.⁵

¹ Jone Martínez-Bacaicoa et al., "Online Gendered Violence Victimization Among Adults: Prevalence, Predictors and Psychological Outcomes," *Psicothema* 36, no. 3 (2024): 247–256.

² Kim Barker and Olga Jurasz, "Gender-Based Abuse Online: An Assessment of Law, Policy and Reform in England and Wales," *The Palgrave Handbook of Gendered Violence and Technology* (2021).

³ Molly Dragiewicz et al., "Digital Media and Domestic Violence in Australia: Essential Contexts," *Journal of Gender-Based Violence* 5, no. 3 (October 2021): 377–393.

⁴ Gisella Lopes Gomes Pinto Ferreira, "Mapping Digital Dating Abuse in Brasil and Australia: A Review on Victimization Experiences from the Global-South," *Ciência & Saúde Coletiva* 28, no. 11 (November 2023): 3259–3272.

⁵ Ratna Noviani, *Menggugat Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Di Masa Pandemi COVID-19: Refleksi Atas Aktivisme Feminis Digital Pada Media Online Magdalene.CO & Konde.CO, Kekerasan Di Masa Pandemi* (Yogyakarta: Fakultas Ilmu Budaya Universitas Gadjah Mada, 2021).

Limited activities during the pandemic have made people spend their time on various smartphone applications, mainly to obtain information, even when they must be on guard.⁶ During the pandemic, limited physical activity led people to spend more time in the digital world. ZA (23), a young woman, filled her free time by playing TikTok to entertain and escape boredom. However, this activity leads to an unpleasant experience. Whenever ZA uploads a video on her account, she often receives negative comments from anonymous accounts. The comments were demeaning to her physique and personal status, such as "Why are you getting fatter?", "You have so many pimples," and "You're not married yet." These comments made ZA feel anxious and insecure, and she even decided to deactivate her social media for a while. Indirectly, this experience reflects a form of online-based gender violence in which women are subjected to sexist comments and dehumanizing body shaming in the digital space.

Apart from ZA, a case of gender-based violence in the digital space was also experienced by AL (25), a young man. Out of curiosity, AL⁷ tried an online dating app and got into a relationship with a woman. During the pandemic, they interacted virtually exclusively. However, the relationship turned out to be fake, and the woman was married and used a fictitious identity just for "trial and error." AL felt cheated and disrespected. AL's case reflects another form of digital violence, the love scam, which can also affect men.

The cases experienced by ZA and AL in the illustration at the beginning of this paper are only a few of the many cases of GBV experienced by women and men that occurred during the pandemic. Before the pandemic, online-based gender violence had become widespread in practice, with the rapid development of the Internet and various social media platforms, allowing humans to quickly respond in the form of emoticons, sentences with positive and negative narratives, or falsifying identities to get something, for example, to commit love scams.

Online romance scams are among the most common and profitable (for criminals) scams that use cyber technology. The sophistication of smartphone technology today can

⁶ Jakob Ohme et al., "Staying Informed and Bridging 'Social Distance': Smartphone News Use and Mobile Messaging Behaviors of Flemish Adults during the First Weeks of the COVID-19 Pandemic," *Socius: Sociological Research for a Dynamic World* 6 (January 3, 2020).

⁷Maulidia Mulyani, *Interview AL Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Dalam Love Scam* (2022)..

bring about various innovations and differences from year to year. Its function is now a means of communication and the availability of complete features. It is always connected to the Internet, and social services make smartphones a multifunctional tool. Therefore, it is necessary to be careful when using Internet services to avoid becoming victims of cybercrime.

The development of social media has opened new spaces for the emergence of forms of gender-based violence in the digital realm. This violence includes various forms such as online harassment (cyber harassment), manipulative approaches (cyber grooming), hacking, invasion of privacy, threats of personal content distribution, revenge porn, impersonation, defamation, and misleading online recruitment.⁸ Unfortunately, the legal handling of these cases is still weak and not in favor of the victims. Law enforcement in cyberspace is often hampered by inadequate regulations, difficulty tracking perpetrators, and a lack of courage for victims to report due to fear, shame, or distrust of the system. Online gender-based violence can make violence a serious problem that continues to grow without effective handling.⁹

One of the more prevalent forms of online gender violence is love scams, which are online romance scams. Perpetrators often create fake profiles on dating sites or social media, such as Facebook, Skype, and LinkedIn, using stolen photos, such as those of models or military officers, to construct an attractive fictional identity. Of course, the goal is to emotionally manipulate the victim into believing in the relationship built through that identity and then trick them into giving money or other favors. This phenomenon not only causes financial loss, but also leaves deep psychological trauma to the victim. Love scams reflect how digital space can be utilized to exploit trust and emotional vulnerability, especially when regulations and protections for victims are weak.¹⁰

⁸ Jihan Risya Cahyani Prameswari, Deassy Jacomina Anthoneta Hehanussa, and Yonna Beatrix Salamor, "Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Di Media Sosial," *PAMALI: Pattimura Magister Law Review* 1, no. 1 (February 24, 2021): 55.

⁹ Neri Widya Ramailis, "CYBER CRIME DAN POTENSI MUNCULNYA VIKTIMISASI PEREMPUAN DI ERA TEKNOLOGI INDUSTRI 4.0," *SISI LAIN REALITA* 5, No. 01 (June 15, 2020): 1–20.

¹⁰ Monica T. Whitty, "Who Can Spot an Online Romance Scam?," *Journal of Financial Crime* 26, no. 2 (April 1, 2019): 623–633.

This research is not the first time there have been several other studies that have been conducted by analyzing the phenomenon of love scams concerning online-based gender violence. For example, Frans explained in a criminal law approach. He concluded that existing regulations, including the TPKS Law, ITE Law, and Criminal Code, still have gaps in dealing with gender-based violence, and policies that are adaptive to technological developments refer to strengthening digital forensic capacity and cross-sector collaboration.¹¹ Then Mahayu, using the case of High Court Decision Number 150/PID/2020/PT BDG, the result of her analysis is that the protection of victims in the decision has not provided maximum protection to victims due to overlapping arrangements that cause unclear legal protection and the existence of rubber articles in the ITE Law which become a tool to criminalize victims of cyber gender-based violence.¹²

Alip shows that Law Number 12 of 2022 concerning Criminal Acts of Sexual Violence provides a strong legal basis for the protection of victims. Still, he also reveals that the TPKS Law has challenges in law enforcement and the context of making people aware of the law.¹³ Sorrel¹⁴ and Fangzhou¹⁵ identify the psychological consequences and risk and protection factors for scam perpetrators, how they survive in the relationship, and understand the social interaction and behavior between victims and perpetrators during love scams, so it is easy to determine preventive measures.

Departing from several studies that have been conducted, this paper aims to explain the historicity of KGBO in Indonesia, the forms of crime and the influence of KGBO on victims, identify the weaknesses of existing legal regulations in dealing with cases of digital violence, and the need for harmonization of the TPKS Law, ITE Law, and

¹¹ Frans Reumi et al., "Online Gender-Based Violence(GBV) Crime In The Perspective Of Indonesian Criminal Law," *Journal of Strafverordening Indonesian* 1, no. 6 (January 27, 2025): 1–13.

¹² Mahayu Rinta Ariania and Wahyu Widodob, "Juridicial Review of Legal Protection Victims of Cyber Gender-Based Violence (Case Study of High Court Decision Number 150/PID/2020/PT BDG)," *Widya Pranata Hukum : Jurnal Kajian dan Penelitian Hukum* 5, no. 150 (2023): 62–70.

¹³ Alip Rahman et al., "Legal Protection for Victims of Online Gender-Based Violence (Cyber-Based Violence)," *Edunty Kajian Ilmu Sosial dan Pendidikan* 3, no. 12 (December 25, 2024): 1210–1220.

¹⁴ Tom Sorell and Monica Whitty, "Online Romance Scams and Victimhood," *Security Journal* 32, no. 3 (September 21, 2019): 342–361.

¹⁵ Fangzhou Wang and Volkan Topalli, "Understanding Romance Scammers Through the Lens of Their Victims: Qualitative Modeling of Risk and Protective Factors in the Online Context," *American Journal of Criminal Justice* 49, no. 1 (February 16, 2024): 145–181.

Criminal Code, which are more adaptive to technological developments and victim protection needs.

Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with descriptive methods to analyze the phenomenon of online-based gender violence, especially in the context of love scams. The research subjects included case documentation, court decisions, relevant literature, and laws. Research procedures with literature studies discuss online gender-based violence and victim protection. The materials and instruments used included legal documents such as the TPKS Law, ITE Law, Criminal Code, and the results of previous research. Data collection was performed through a literature review and published case documentation. The data obtained was analyzed qualitatively with a content analysis approach¹⁶ to identify patterns, regulatory weaknesses, and social and psychological impacts on victims concerning the context of providing protection.

Results and Discussion

The Historicity and Practice of Love Scams as a Form of Online Gender-Based Violence in Indonesia

The history of Internet entry in Indonesia began in the 1990s, underwent the initial transformation, and provided opportunities for people to move, so they were no longer limited. The emergence of the Internet also led to social networking sites, which began as an initiative to connect people from all parts of the world.¹⁷ The various social media that have emerged also vary, ranging from Twitter, Instagram, Telegram, and WhatsApp to online dating applications such as Tinder. This vast and unlimited network allows people to spend most of their activities on social media.

The increasing use of social media has changed how people establish relationships. Social media has introduced new ways of connecting, communicating, and presenting oneself. This emerging social media trend has combined the stages of relating

¹⁶ Maryam Salehijam, "The Value of Systematic Content Analysis in Legal Research," *Tilburg Law Review* 23 (September 14, 2018): 34.

¹⁷Ghobadi Alcianno, "Sejarah Dan Perkembangan Internet Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Mitra Manajemen* 5 (2020): 68–71.

and increased opportunities for relationships while affecting perceptions and satisfaction in romantic relationships. The convenience of social media can be used to summarize the stages of a relationship. It lets users quickly gather information, initiate or avoid interactions, and manage online relationships.¹⁸

However, this transformation does not imply that it leads to something else. On the positive side, social media can improve relationships by making it easier to remain in touch.¹⁹ On the negative side, social media creates a new gap in online gender-based violence, especially against women. Platforms intended to form connections and empowerment can facilitate harassment, threats, and violence in the digital realm.²⁰

Meanwhile, in Indonesia, online gender-based violence is not a new form of violence, as can be seen from the reports of victims, the majority of whom were women, to Komnas Perempuan. The increase in Internet users every year and the number of new Internet users have become the starting point for Komnas Perempuan to convey that there is a severe phenomenon in the type of violence, namely online gender-based violence.²¹

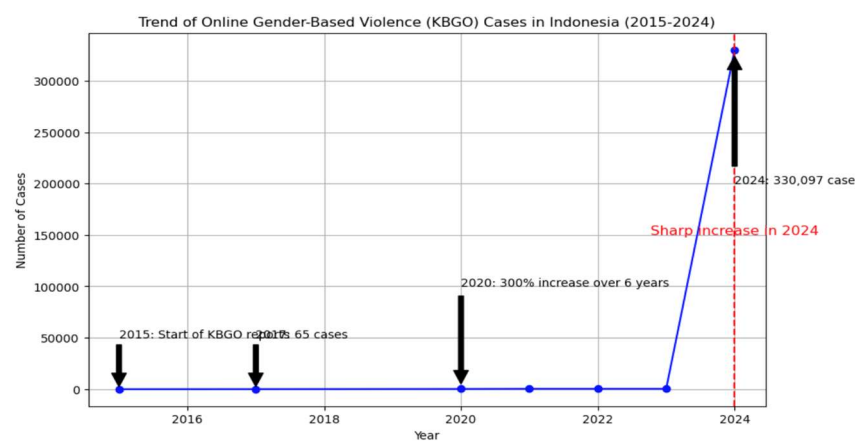


Figure 1: Increase in the number of online gender-based violence cases

¹⁸ Sharon Goldberg, Daphna Yeshua-Katz, and Avi Marciano, "Online Construction of Romantic Relationships on Social Media," *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships* 39, no. 6 (June 7, 2022): 1839–1862.

¹⁹ Shipan Yu, "The Influence of Social Media on Interpersonal Relationships," *Communications in Humanities Research* 9, no. 1 (October 31, 2023): 90–97.

²⁰ Adelia Octavia Siswoyo and Ahmad Gimmy P. Siswadi, "Social Media as a Digital Space for Online Gender-Based Violence (GBV)," *Journal of Feminism and Gender Studies* 4, no. 1 (January 31, 2024): 96.

²¹ Andriany dkk Illene, "Perancangan Kampanye Sosial Mengenai Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online," *Jurnal DKV Adiwarna* 1, no. 14 (2019): 1–10.

This timeline reveals that the beginning of the emergence of KGBO in Indonesia was marked by an influx of reports received by Komnas Perempuan (National Commission on Violence Against Women) since 2015. Komnas Perempuan has provided records on women related to the online world and underlined that violence and cybercrime have increasingly complicated case patterns. The emergence of this increasing violence is marked by reports of violence against women in cyberspace again in 2017, with as many as 65 cases.²² Furthermore, in 2020, Komnas Perempuan noted that violence cases have increased by 300% over the past six years, compared to 2019.²³ Then, in 2021-2023, this trend will gradually increase to 330 cases. Finally, in 2024, the Annual Report of the National Commission on Violence Against Women reported 330.097 cases, which shows a remarkable increase. However, it includes all forms of violence against women, with dominance in the personal sphere.²⁴

The scam motif generally takes the form of a fraudulent act under the guise of love.²⁵ The emergence itself can be seen in the development the types of violence that occur in the digital realm. There are various types of online GBV. The form of the love scam itself is also included in the types of gender-based violence.

As described earlier, social media affects the pattern of human interaction. The interactions that occur are not only about establishing relationships, but also about changing dating practices. The dating trend that has shifted from meeting in person to online is also one of the factors contributing to the increasing phenomenon of love scams. For example, during the pandemic, a few online dating apps showed a significant increase in users. Tinder usage in Indonesia has increased by an average of 23 percent.²⁶ The shifting dating trends arise for a variety of reasons, ranging from introverted reasons so

²²Eny Ratnasari, Suwandi Sumartias, and Rosnandar Romli, "Penggunaan Message Appeals Dalam Strategi Pesan Kampanye Anti Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online," *Jurnal Ilmu Komunikasi* 18, no. 3 (December 31, 2020): 352..

²³ Prameswari, Hehanussa, and Salamor, "Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Di Media Sosial."

²⁴ Komnas Perempuan, "CATAHU 2024: Menata Data, Menajamkan Arah: Refleksi Pendokumentasian Dan Tren Kasus Kekerasan Terhadap Perempuan," <https://komnasperempuan.go.id/catatan-tahunan-detail/catahu-2024-menata-data-menajamkan-arrah-refleksi-pendokumentasian-dan-tren-kasus-kekerasan-terhadap-perempuan>.

²⁵ Sri Wiyanti Eddyono, *Webinar Series: Love Scam 30 Tahun Pusat Studi Wanita* (Yogyakarta, 2021).

²⁶CNN Indonesia, "Wabah Corona Bikin Aplikasi Kencan Online Laris Manis," accessed April 2, 2025, <https://www.cnnindonesia.com/teknologi/20200402144747-185-489624/wabah-corona-bikin-aplikasi-kencan-online-laris-manis>.

that they feel comfortable using video platforms, because it is more practical not to have to dress up and go, and the factor of the pandemic, which causes a reduction in in-person activities so that online dating becomes an option.²⁷

Other studies also agree that the emergence of the KGB0 phenomenon is a form of violence facilitated by digital technology and targets individuals based on their gender or sexuality.²⁸ Social media, in this case, helps sexual or material extortion with the threat of spreading the intimate content of the victim. In contrast, social media is the main space for KGB0, mainly because of the weak regulation and anonymity of perpetrators.²⁹

Apart from social media, the phenomenon of love scam tactics generally aims to commit fraud, namely, sexual exploitation, seeking material gain, stealing, or taking specific data. This is done by manipulating the helplessness and expectations of women under certain conditions. Because love scams contain elements of coercion, manipulation, and exploitation, victims of love scams indeed show mental health symptoms such as anxiety disorders, stress, and even depression.³⁰

Practically speaking, this scam exploits emotional vulnerability, targets women, and is rooted in patriarchal and misogynistic patterns of behavior that are more prevalent in the digital space. If observed, online dating that leads to love scams involves five distinct stages: Stage 1 is an attractive profile, Stage 2 is seduction, Stage 3 is a request for funds, Stage 4 is cyber sex harassment, and Stage 5 is disclosure.³¹ If connected to Sternberg's Love Triangle theory, these stages fulfill the basic elements of the formation of love: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Intimacy is a form of closeness and a bond of affection that involves sharing emotions, feelings, and ideas.³²

²⁷ Shamira Priyanka N, "8 Orang Ungkapkan Alasan Mengapa Kencan Virtual Lebih Baik," *Cosmopolitan*, last modified 2020, accessed April 2, 2025, <https://www.cosmopolitan.co.id/article/read/5/2020/19635/8-orang-ungkap-alasan-mengapa-kencan-virtual-lebih-baik>.

²⁸ Jordy Herry Christian, "Sekstorsi: Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Dalam Paradigma Hukum Indonesia," *Binamulia Hukum* 9, no. 1 (2023): 83–92.

²⁹ Rendika Azhar Musyaffa and Sofyan Effendi, "Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Dalam Interaksi Di Media Sosial," *Komunikologi : Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Komunikasi* 19 (2022): 85–95.

³⁰ Eddyono, *Webinar Series: Love Scam 30 Tahun Pusat Studi Wanita*.

³¹ Monica T Whitty, "Anatomy of the Online Dating Romance Scam," *Security Journal* 28, no. 4 (October 11, 2015): 443–455.

³² Margaret S. Clark and Judson Mills, "Interpersonal Attraction in Exchange and Communal Relationships," *Close Relationships: Key Readings* 93, no. 2 (2004): 295–310.

The emergence of romanticization patterns that often occur in women, it turns out that sometimes it results in the position of women becoming weak, which then affects the low self-esteem, starting to submit, unconditional service, and the tendency to depend on the partner. The existence of this tendency has led to the attitude of women who prefer men who like to form romantic frames because they feel more loved, protected, and respected.³³ Meanwhile, another source mentions that this romance scam has targeted single female victims by exploiting them through romantic relationships. The tactics used reflect and reinforce gender stereotypes and power imbalances, thus forming a KGBO pattern.³⁴ Thus, understanding the social and behavioral interactions between victims and perpetrators during a love scam is essential to identifying risk and protective factors that can inform preventive measures.³⁵

For example, how can one observe abuse occurring in a love scam? The first observable signs of abuse begin early in the love relationship in the form of restrictive behavior, control, and psychological abuse to minimize the woman's position. These forms of treatment increase over time, possibly inhibiting the breakup of toxic relationships.³⁶ However, often in the context of love scams, these signs are difficult to detect because, in practice, love scams use romantic means to attract victims.

The key to success in love scams lies in the perpetrator's ability to build trust and strong emotional bonds through intense personal communication. Scammers utilize persuasive techniques, such as excessive praise, dramatic expressions of love, and fabricated life stories, to manipulate victims' emotions. These strategies often resemble the patterns of domestic violence, including attempts to isolate victims and create emotional dependency. Once trust is established, the abuser begins to make requests for money, usually citing an emergency or an urgent opportunity that requires financial

³³& Ferrer-Pérez Bosch-Fiol, E., "New Map of the Myths about Gender Violence in XXI Century," *Psicothema* 4, no. 24 (2012): 548–554.

³⁴ Sharen Thumboo and Sudeshna Mukherjee, "Digital Romance Fraud Targeting Unmarried Women," *Discover Global Society* 2, no. 1 (December 10, 2024): 105, <https://link.springer.com/10.1007/s44282-024-00132-x>.

³⁵ Wang and Topalli, "Understanding Romance Scammers Through the Lens of Their Victims: Qualitative Modeling of Risk and Protective Factors in the Online Context."

³⁶ Nerea Jiménez-Picón et al., "Internalization of the Romantic Love Myths as a Risk Factor for Gender Violence: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Sexuality Research and Social Policy* 20, no. 3 (September 1, 2023): 837–854.

assistance. If the victim complies, requests may be repeated and become more urgent over time.³⁷

Some scams involve sexual manipulation or blackmail through cybersex activities. These scams were run systematically, with perpetrators carefully tailoring their language and strategies to maintain the illusion of a seemingly genuine romantic relationship for maximum financial gain. Victims are generally selected based on specific psychological characteristics such as high trustworthiness, impulsivity, and belief in an idealized romance, making them more vulnerable to manipulation. The impact on victims is severe, both psychologically and financially. Many victims experience feelings of shame and self-blame and suffer significant and prolonged economic losses.³⁸

From the results of the interview, there are two descriptions of love scam patterns that lead to acts of violence, which are not always in the form of physically painful actions but can also hurt the mind. For example, as experienced by AL (25), a young man, he finally tried to download a dating application on his smartphone because of his curiosity. His curiosity led him to meet a woman in cyberspace. At that time, the conditions were pandemic, which made it difficult for the AL to meet his partner. During the relationship, he was in love, not knowing that he was dating a woman who already had a husband. AL felt their relationship was serious until he received a message, "Don't contact my wife again." AL was confused about who the message was sent from, but in short, the woman confessed that she was married and had a child. The woman covered up her identity by creating a fake identity. She did this because she wanted to try it out. The incident that AL experienced could be part of a love scam, where he was deceived and made to feel disrespected.³⁹ If observed, the pattern experienced by AL at least fulfills the motif of three stages, namely, attractive profiles and seduction to cyber harassment, which, in a sense, is not serious in establishing a relationship. Although the form of violence was not physical, the relationship was manipulative by creating a fake profile and claiming to be single.

³⁷ Pamela Faber, "The Frames of Romance Scamming," *Research in Language* 22, no. 1 (December 31, 2024): 1–23.

³⁸ M. T. Whitty, "The Scammers Persuasive Techniques Model: Development of a Stage Model to Explain the Online Dating Romance Scam," *British Journal of Criminology* 53, no. 4 (July 1, 2013): 665–684.

³⁹ Mulyani, *Interview AL Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Dalam Love Scam*.

In contrast to SV (25), a university student, she admitted that she was initially interested in dating apps because some of her friends tended to establish relationships at the level of marriage successfully. SV then tried her luck by activating the application around the campus, hoping that the application could connect to the expected man. SV said that in the application, there were many choices of men and, overall, they looked good. After choosing, SV connected with one of the men; the reason for choosing was that the profile displayed was convincing enough if brought into a serious relationship.

After being acquainted for several weeks, the man invited the SV to establish a relationship. In this relationship, SV realized that the man often owed her, and the lifestyle displayed in the application profile did not match reality. On the other hand, when SV collected debts, the man always looked for excuses while seducing and praising SV so as not to collect on the grounds of love. Because she could not stand it, SV asked to break up the relationship because the man asked for money too often. SV broke off the relationship and tended to get upset, while the man accepted the decision. However, what happened, the man then demonized SV on various social media platforms to make the issue that SV was a *pelakor* (grabber of people's men) and shared photos of SV not wearing a hijab. SV in this condition was very depressed; on the other hand, the money that had been given was not returned, and untrue issues spread.⁴⁰ In the case of SV, it can be observed that the pattern of violence experienced refers to a form of financial fraud, meaning that during the relationship, SV suffered financial losses through a fake romance.

From the two cases above, the fraud patterns that have been established involve the tactic of creating a fake profile to build an emotional connection with the victim, which leads to financial and psychological losses. In technical terms, perpetrators then commit fraud by composing neat sentences sometimes assisted by sophisticated technology such as AI, chatbots, and deepfakes to create a convincing persona to take money or sensitive information.⁴¹

Some of the emerging patterns align with the thoughts of Berger and Luckmann in *The Social Construction of Reality*. They explained that power in society does not just

⁴⁰ Maulidia Mulyani, *Interview SV Dalam Kekerasan Basis Gender Online Love Scam* (2025).

⁴¹ Rachel Fletcher, Calli Tzani, and Maria Ioannou, "The Dark Side of Artificial Intelligence – Risks Arising in Dating Applications," *Assessment and Development Matters* 16, no. 1 (February 20, 2024): 17–23.

appear but is formed and maintained through social processes. This theory discusses how apparent social structures (objective) and personal experiences (subjective) are interrelated. In this context, social relationships are part of a larger system, and individual perceptions of these relationships show how power can be embedded in society and accepted naturally by individuals.⁴²

The phenomenon of love scams targeting women exemplifies the social construction of power dynamics and gender-based violence. As articulated by Berger and Luckmann in "The Social Construction of Reality," social reality is not inherent but is shaped through repeated and institutionalized social interactions.⁴³ The societal construction of women as emotionally vulnerable and men as dominant facilitates the occurrence of love scams. The perpetrator's use of emotional manipulation through romantic language and social engineering not only mirrors personal relationships but also perpetuates gender power structures entrenched in society. Thus, the phenomenon of love scams is not isolated but is embedded within the social system where gender power dynamics are established, sustained, and internalized by individuals.

The impact of KGBO is legal, social, and psychological. Several studies have shown that KGBO victims, especially women and children, experience mental distress, shame, and prolonged trauma.⁴⁴ Why women then become victims, this context has to do with what bell hooks said in the feminist theory of gender-based violence: violence against women is not just a matter of individual bad behavior, but also related to the imbalance of power in society and the cultural norms that support it. The root of this violence is the patriarchal system, which places men as more powerful parties.⁴⁵ From this perspective, love scams cannot be seen as isolated incidents but rather as part of a

⁴² Jochen Dreher, "The Social Construction of Power: Reflections Beyond Berger/Luckmann and Bourdieu," *Cultural Sociology* 10, no. 1 (March 11, 2016): 53–68.

⁴³ Hubert Knoblauch and René Wilke, "The Common Denominator: The Reception and Impact of Berger and Luckmann's The Social Construction of Reality," *Human Studies* 39, no. 1 (March 7, 2016): 51–69.

⁴⁴ Amanda R. Champion et al., "Examining the Gendered Impacts of Technology-Facilitated Sexual Violence: A Mixed Methods Approach," *Archives of Sexual Behavior* 51, no. 3 (April 18, 2022): 1607–1624.

⁴⁵ Bell Hooks, *Feminist Theory From Margin To Center* (United State of America: South End Press, 1984).

pattern of violence against women that continues to occur because society is reluctant to question or challenge entrenched patriarchal values.

From the above description, it can be concluded that the emergence of the Internet in 1990 became the starting point for the existence of social media in society. A report by Komnas Perempuan in 2015 showed that the pattern of crimes against gender is becoming increasingly widespread in the digital realm, which also has an impact. The emergence of various choices for dating applications has also become a new way of forming a relationship, and the shifting phenomenon of dating has also triggered crimes that can specifically attack a person physically or psychologically. Many elements are formed so that gender violence crimes emerge in terms of love scams, from strategies and stages carried out to cause violence, even though these elements still harm and traumatize only in cyberspace.

Expansion of Regulations in Handling Gender-Based Violence in the Virtual World

The urgency of legal protection for love scam victims is increasing, given the increasing number of love scams in Indonesia's digital space. Data from the Financial Services Authority (OJK) reveal that over the past three months, digital fraud has caused losses of Rp700 billion based on more than 42 thousand complaints through the Indonesia Anti-Scam Center (IASC).⁴⁶ The complexity of this case is exacerbated by deepfake technology and fake identities, which make it increasingly difficult for victims to distinguish between genuine love and fraud. Thus, in responding to the issue, three laws and regulations will be used, namely the Electronic Information and Transaction Law (UU ITE), the Sexual Violence Crime Law (TPKS), and the Criminal Code as the primary legal basis. The three regulations will be analyzed to determine the extent to which each responds to and accommodates the phenomenon of gender violent crimes that occur in the digital space.

The ITE Law currently has limitations in handling love scam cases because, in terms of content, it only focuses on emphasizing aspects related to technical and electronic transactions. Although the ITE Law regulates electronic fraud, it has not specifically accommodated the gender and psychological dimensions that are one of the

⁴⁶ Ade Hapsari Lestarin, "Awat Love Scam! 1 Dari 4 Orang Pernah Tergoda AI," *Metro TV News*.

main characteristics of love scams as part of the KGBO. For example, the ITE Law, especially Article 28, paragraph (1), provides a legal basis for ensnaring perpetrators who spread false or misleading information that harms consumers in electronic transactions. In the context of love scams, perpetrators often spread false information about their identity, profession, or personal conditions to build the victim's trust. However, the application of this study is still limited because it does not explicitly target forms of fraud based on emotional relationships. In addition, Article 27 paragraph (1) of the ITE Law can also be used if the perpetrator makes extortions or threats, for example, by spreading the victim's content.⁴⁷

One of the significant challenges in addressing online gender-based violence, such as love scams, is the difficulty of legally proving a crime. Many perpetrators' actions, such as falsifying identities or spreading false information, have not been regulated by the law. As a result, legal authorities are often confused about which article to use to charge perpetrators. In addition, proving that the perpetrator had malicious intent and acted without authorization is also not easy, as not all laws directly include the element of malicious intent. In love scam cases, perpetrators usually use fake identities and emotionally manipulate victims; therefore, evidence is often scattered, incomplete, or difficult to prove. This complicates the legal process and makes it difficult for victims to obtain justice.⁴⁸

On the other hand, the ITE Law does not explicitly regulate the use of advanced technologies, such as deepfakes and artificial intelligence (AI), which are increasingly used in romantic scams to create the illusion of digital emotional closeness. The sophistication of these technologies complicates the ability of victims to distinguish between authentic human interactions and algorithm-based manipulation. The absence of regulations addressing this phenomenon creates legal uncertainty and weakens victim protection. Therefore, it is necessary to establish a more comprehensive and adaptive

⁴⁷ Soleha Liliani Malik and Fakhris Lutfianto Hapsoro, "Love Scamming Di Era Digital Perlindungan Hukum Dan Tantangan Dalam Penanganan Kasus Love Scam Di Aplikasi Kencan Di Indonesia," *AT-TAKLIM: Jurnal Pendidikan Multidisiplin* 2, no. 4 (April 19, 2025): 110–124.

⁴⁸ Syafirah Khansa Aribah Milansari, "Pertanggungjawaban Pidana Terhadap Pelaku Perbuatan Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Dengan Tipe Morphing," *Jurist-Diction* 7, no. 1 (2024): 145–164.

legal framework to respond to the dynamics and complexities of contemporary cybercrime.⁴⁹

In 2022, Indonesia enacted Law Number 12 of 2022 on the Crime of Sexual Violence (TPKS Law), which is designed to regulate prevention, protection, and recovery efforts for victims of sexual violence. One form of violence regulated explicitly in Articles 14 (1) and (2) relates to electronic-based sexual violence. The description in the article indicates that the existence of sexual violence, in this case revenge porn or extortion, threatening and others, is punishable by a maximum imprisonment of six years and/or a maximum fine of Rp. 300 million.⁵⁰

However, although the TPKS Law covers electronic-based sexual violence in Article 14, no provision explicitly mentions or specifically regulates the practice of love scams. Love scams are a form of fraud that utilizes emotional relationships online and are often accompanied by elements of extortion or sexual manipulation. This phenomenon is still included in the general category of electronic-based sexual violence or online gender-based violence (KGBV). As a result, there is a legal vacuum because the complexity of love scams involving fraud, emotional distress, and sexual violence has not been fully accommodated in one specific and comprehensive regulation. The absence of a specific article is an obstacle to providing optimal legal protection for victims. Many victims experience psychological pressure but have difficulty reporting because there is no apparent legal certainty.⁵¹ In addition, law enforcement officials face challenges in interpreting existing articles, especially since perpetrators often use fake identities and operate across borders.⁵² Therefore, a regulatory update is needed so that love scams are explicitly recognized as a form of gender-based sexual violence in the digital realm.

In addition to the TPKS Law, it is essential to review the role of the Criminal Code (KUHP) in providing legal protection to victims of online-based gender violence, given

⁴⁹ Rizka Syafriana, "Analysis Of The Impact Of Love Scam Fraud In The Digital Business World" 10 (2025): 131–138.

⁵⁰ UU RI, "Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 12 Tahun 2022 Tentang Tindak Pidana Kekerasan Seksual," *Kementerian Sekretariat Negara Republik Indonesia* 1, no. 69 (2022): 1–84.

⁵¹ Istiqomah Yungsiana and Yayi Suryo Prabandari, "Dinamika Psikologis Korban Sekstorsi: Sebuah Kajian Literatur," *Jurnal Psikologi Forensik Indonesia* 4, no. 1 (2024): 279–290.

⁵² Nabillah Rahmawati, Maidina. Saputri, *Jauh Panggang Dari Api: Menilik Kerangka Hukum Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Di Indonesia* (Jakarta, 2022).

that there are still no explicit regulations regarding love scams. For example, Article 378 of the Criminal Code on fraud can be applied when the love scam perpetrator uses a false identity to obtain benefits from the victim. In contrast, Article 368 of the Criminal Code on extortion can be used if the perpetrator threatens to spread the victim's personal information or intimate content. However,⁵³ from the two approaches of articles in the Criminal Code, both are still considered not to accommodate the protection of victims due to the lack of focus of the article on the act of love scam explicitly and does not consider the dimensions of gender-based violence and the psychological impact experienced by victims in the digital space.

| Aspect | Law on Sexual Violence (Law No.12 of 2022) | ITE Law (Law No. 11 of 2008 jo. Law No. 19 of 2016) | Criminal Code 2023 |
|----------------------------|--|--|--|
| Type of Violence | Recognize KGBO as part of sexual violence, including non-physical abuse, sexual exploitation, and forced distribution of intimate content. | It prohibits distributing content that violates decency (Article 27 paragraph 1) and extortion/threatening (Article 27 paragraph 4). | It regulates extortion (Article 368), sexual abuse, and sexual harassment, but does not explicitly mention KGBO. |
| Victim Protection | Guarantee victims' rights to recovery, assistance, rehabilitation, and restitution. | Gives victims the right to sue civilly for personal data breaches (Article 26). | Victim protection is not specific; it focuses more on perpetrators and general offenses. |
| Conviction of Perpetrators | Strict criminal penalties for perpetrators of sexual | The penalty is 6 years and/or a maximum fine of Rp1 billion for violation of Article 27. | The maximum penalty for extortion is 9 years (Article 368), but |

⁵³ Yungsiana and Prabandari, "Dinamika Psikologis Korban Seksstorsi: Sebuah Kajian Literatur."

| | | | |
|--------------------|--|--|---|
| | violence, including online-based. | | it is not specific to KGBV. |
| Gender Perspective | Gender and human rights perspectives, recognizing unequal power relations. | Not explicitly gendered, multiple interpretations of the term "decency". | It is not a gender perspective, but it still uses the classical legal approach. |
| Weaknesses | Not all forms of KGBV are explicitly regulated. | Prone to criminalization of victims, multiple interpretations, and gender insensitivity. | It does not accommodate digital forms of violence and gender-based power relations. |

Table 2: Comparison of Legislation Content

In response to the constraints imposed by the laws and regulations outlined in the preceding section, the author identifies an urgent necessity to harmonize the three existing legal frameworks. At least three conditions contribute to the misalignment of these regulations, which hinder the realization of explicit protection for victims of love scams, as categorized under the KGBV section. Firstly, from a legal-political perspective, the enactment of the TPKS Law was primarily motivated by the need to address instances of sexual violence that occur directly and physically. Although this legislation encompasses electronic-based sexual violence, its normative provisions do not comprehensively address forms of violence that manifest through digital emotional relationships, such as love scams. The legislative process of the TPKS Law was further influenced by political dynamics and divergent moral perspectives within society. The tensions between progressive factions advocating for victim protection and conservative groups opposing certain aspects of the bill resulted in compromises within the regulation's content. Consequently, more complex and less visible forms of online gender-based violence have not been prioritized in the formulation of legal norms. This indicates that the legal-

political framework underpinning the TPKS Law has not fully adapted to the evolving nature of sexual violence facilitated by digital technology.⁵⁴

Second, concerning the limited legal knowledge, there exists a substantial gap in understanding among policymakers and law enforcement officials concerning the characteristics of online gender-based violence. This gap occasionally results in practices that tend to attribute blame to the victim. Love scams, which involve elements of deception, emotional manipulation, and sexual exploitation, are often not recognized as a form of sexual violence due to the absence of physical contact. Consequently, the legal approach remains partial and lacks comprehensiveness. Third, concerning the legal framework, the absence of a robust coordinative mechanism between law enforcement and victim protection agencies exacerbates this disconnect. This lack of harmony results in suboptimal victim protection, particularly in cases that are cross-issue and cross-sector, such as electronic-based sexual violence. Furthermore, the TPKS and ITE laws operate within different sectoral frameworks, leading to a lack of integration in addressing cross-issue cases, such as love scams. As a result, victims often find themselves ensnared in complex and impartial legal procedures.⁵⁵

The Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP) currently does not explicitly respond to the phenomenon of love scams as a form of online gender-based violence. If you look at the form of sexual violence regulation, it is limited to rape, sexual abuse, and sexual intercourse.⁵⁶ Although Article 378 of the Criminal Code regulates fraud, this article is still general and does not cover the modes of crime that involve emotional manipulation in online relationships. If observed in the Criminal Code, love scamming is regulated in Article 378 of the Criminal Code in the context of "fraud." In this case, the context of the act is:⁵⁷

- a. To induce a person to give goods, incur debts, or cancel receivables.

⁵⁴ Leony Sondang Suryani and Ahmad Khozi, "Ketentuan TPKS Dalam KUHP Baru," *Jurnal Hukum & Pembangunan* 53, no. 2 (2023).

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Sahat Maruli Tua Situmeang Ira Maulia Nurkusumah, "Kajian Hukum Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Dihubungkan Dengan Tujuan Pemidanaan Dalam Perspektif Negara Hukum Pancasila," *Res Nullius Law Journal* 3, no. 2 (July 29, 2021): 162–177.

⁵⁷ R. Soesilo, *Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Acara Pidana Dengan Penjelasan Resmi Dan Komentar* (Bogor: Politeia, 1997).

- b. The purpose of inducement is to benefit oneself or another person against their right.
- c. The inducement is utilizing a false name or a false situation, trick (trickery), or fabricated falsehood.

The description in the article above illustrates that the existing Criminal Code focuses more on traditional forms of fraud, and, if observed, each section of the article does not have provisions that explicitly regulate fraud based on emotional relationships in the digital space. As a result, victims who experience financial losses, psychological pressure, and other social impacts do not receive optimal legal protection.⁵⁸

The Criminal Code applicable in Indonesia is a legal product of the Dutch colonial heritage that has undergone a few adjustments. However, considering that the current social and technological context has developed significantly, it is not surprising that there is a gap between the legal substance of the Criminal Code and the contemporary reality of society. The limitations of the Criminal Code in accommodating the protection of victims of love scams may be due to several factors. First, the Criminal Code was drafted in a social and technological context that differs from the current conditions; therefore, it does not consider the complexity of cross-border and technology-based cyber crimes.⁵⁹ For example, the perpetrator claims to be a successful professional to build an emotional connection with the victim and then gradually asks for financial assistance under the guise of a medical emergency, travel expenses, or legal issues. Second, the absence of a clear legal definition of emotional manipulation in online relationships makes it difficult to enforce the law effectively.⁶⁰ For example, in the context of sexual harassment, the forms are very diverse compared to obscene acts, so the provisions of Article 289 of the Criminal Code in this case still do not provide legal certainty for victims of the KGBO. Third, the Criminal Code has not integrated a gender-based approach to responding to

⁵⁸ Ahmad Mamun Fikri, "Legal Policies for Eradicating Perpetrators of Online Romance Fraud in the Digital Sphere," *JCIC: Jurnal CIC Lembaga Riset dan Konsultan Sosial* 6, no. 2 (2024): 137–148.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Fadillah Adkiras, Fatma Reza Zubarita, and Zihan Tasha Maharani Fauzi, "Konstruksi Pengaturan Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online Di Indonesia," *Jurnal Lex Renaissance* 6, no. 4 (2021): 781–798.

digital crimes, while love scams often target vulnerable groups, especially women.⁶¹ Therefore, the Criminal Code needs to be more responsive to the dynamics of digital crime and able to provide comprehensive legal protection for victims of gender-based violence in cyberspace.

In this context, harmonization between the Law on Sexual Violence (UU TPKS), the Electronic Information and Transaction Law (UU ITE), and the Criminal Code (KUHP) is significant for providing comprehensive legal protection for victims of love scams, especially those that fall into the category of online-based gender violence. Each existing regulation has a different focus and scope: The TPKS Law emphasizes the protection of victims of sexual and gender-based violence, the ITE Law regulates legal aspects in the digital space, and the Criminal Code is the basis for general criminal law. Without harmonized integration, there is potential for overlap, legal vacuum, or even ineffectiveness in law enforcement against perpetrators of love scams that utilize loopholes between these regulations.

Harmonization is needed so that the legal approach to love scams is repressive, preventive, and rehabilitative. In terms of the theory of responsive law formation expressed by Philippe Nonet and Philip Selznick, the law should ideally not only be a tool of state power but also be able to respond to the needs and dynamics of society.⁶² In this case, the phenomenon of love scams as a form of online-based gender violence is a social reality that has developed along with advances in digital technology. However, the three existing regulations, KUHP, ITE Law, and TPKS Law, are still running partially and have not been integrated systemically to provide complete legal protection for victims. Thus, harmonizing the three is a legal response to urgent social needs.

Conclusion

The phenomenon of love scams has historical roots that have evolved alongside the global proliferation of the Internet and social media, including Indonesia. This practice became prevalent as perpetrators employed fictitious identities on digital

⁶¹ Puteri Hikmawati, "Pengaturan Kekerasan Berbasis Gender Online: Perspektif Ius Constitutum Dan Ius Constituendum," *Negara Hukum* 12, no. 1 (2021): 59–79, <https://jurnal.dpr.go.id/index.php/hukum/article/view/2124/pdf>.

⁶² Teja Sukmana, "Responsive Law and Progressive Law: Examining the Legal Ideas of Philip Nonet, Philip Selznick, and Sadjipto Raharjo," *Peradaban Journal of Law and Society* 2, no. 1 (June 18, 2023): 92–105.

platforms to establish emotional connections with victims, subsequently manipulating these relationships, rendering the crime challenging to detect. The evolution of love scams through romantic strategies and tactics has predominantly affected women. The resultant losses are not only material but also psychological and social. Love scams exploit power dynamics and information asymmetries in digital interactions, constituting a complex form of gender-based exploitation that existing regulations struggle to address.

In the context of legal protection for victims, harmonizing the TPKS Law, ITE Law, and Criminal Code is crucial to address the normative gaps and overlapping authorities in handling love scam cases. The TPKS Law provides a framework for protection against gender-based violence, the ITE Law governs legal aspects in the digital realm, and the Criminal Code is the foundation for general criminal law. However, these three legal instruments have not been systematically integrated to address cross-border digital crimes rooted in emotional relationships effectively. Therefore, it is imperative to update and harmonize regulations that effectively prosecute perpetrators and ensure comprehensive recovery and protection for victims. This harmonization represents a strategic step towards creating an adaptive, responsive, and equitable legal system to confront the challenges posed by modern cybercrime.

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