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Legal Analysis of Child Sexual Abuse through Grooming: A Study of Rokan Hilir District Court Decision Number 410/Pid. Sus/2025/PN Rhl

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ABSTRACT

*The phenomenon of child sexual offenses disguised behind a romantic narrative or dating constitutes a serious challenge for law enforcement in Indonesia. The child's consent is frequently misinterpreted as grounds for abolishing the penalty in such cases. This research aims to analyze the legal construction in Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl. The decision penalizes the perpetrator of child sexual intercourse although the Child Victim actively lied to their parents in order to meet the perpetrator. This research employs a normative legal research method through the statute and case approaches. This research examines the judicial interpretation regarding the grooming element and the application of the *voortgezette handeling* doctrine in sentencing. The analysis results indicate that the judge progressively constructed the promise of marriage as a form of deceit that paralyzes the child's critical reasoning. Therefore, the given consent is deemed vitiated. However, this research also found a gap in substantive justice due to the absence of restitution imposed on the Defendant. This reflects the persisting strength of the retributive paradigm compared to the restorative paradigm within the juvenile criminal justice system. It is concluded that although a custodial sentence was imposed, the state failed to execute its constitutional obligation to comprehensively restore the rights of the victim. This research recommends a reform of the prosecution paradigm in which the Prosecutor and the Judge actively demand and adjudicate restitution *ex officio*. Furthermore, integrating a victim impact statement is essential to accurately assess the victim's actual damages and achieve comprehensive justice.*

Keywords: *Child Sexual Offenses; Grooming; Restitution; Victim Impact Statement; Voortgezette Handeling.*

INTRODUCTION

The protection of children from sexual offenses is a constitutional mandate and a moral obligation of the state, manifested in various positive legal instruments in Indonesia. However, the phenomenon of child sexual offenses continues to escalate with increasingly complex *modi operandi*. These *modi operandi* have shifted from visible physical violence to subtle psychological manipulation. In the criminological context, children are frequently positioned as objects of exploitation within unequal power relations. Their vulnerability is exploited by perpetrators to achieve sexual gratification. As noted in various literature, these offenses do not merely damage physical integrity but also destroy the mental construction and future of the child. Ironically, although legal frameworks such as Law Number 23 of 2002¹ and Law Number 12 of 2022 are available, law enforcement implementation frequently encounters challenges. These challenges are particularly evident in interpreting consent involving children, specifically when the relationship is disguised within a romantic narrative or dating (Sinaga, 2022; Lestari et al., 2025).

One of the most crucial legal problems frequently escaping analytical sharpness is the blurred boundary between mutual consent and the element of grooming in sexual offenses involving children. In numerous cases, law enforcement officials and the public are trapped in a flawed perception. They assume that the absence of physical

¹Law Number 23 of 2002, as amended several times, lastly by Law Number 17 of 2016.

coercion or the child's initiative to meet the perpetrator can annul the unlawful nature of the act. In fact, child protection legal doctrine explicitly adheres to the principle that children lack the legal capacity to provide sexual consent, constituting statutory rape. The elements of deceit or a series of lies frequently manifest as false promises, such as a promise of marriage. Such promises effectively paralyze the child's critical reasoning and manipulate their will (Arief & Wicaksono, 2024; Wijayanti et al., 2024). On the other hand, exposure to pornography and the misuse of digital technology frequently become stimuli for perpetrators, both children and adults, to commit these exploitative acts. This necessitates a more adaptive legal response (Rivanie et al., 2021; Rambe et al., 2024). The disparity between rigid statutory texts and the psychological dynamics of victims within romantic relationships and external influences constitutes the focus of the gap analysis in this research.

The urgency to investigate this issue is further strengthened by the existence of Rokan Hilir District Court Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl. This case presents unique and challenging legal facts. The Child Victim actively lied to their parents in order to meet the Defendant. This fact is frequently constructed by the defense counsel of the Defendant as evidence of consent. However, the Defendant committed the sexual intercourse repeatedly across different time periods. These repeated acts were subsequently constructed by the Public Prosecutor and the Judge as a continuous act (*voortgezette handeling*). This phenomenon diametrically differs from cases of physical coercion by biological parents or close relatives (Aida & Mahzaniar, 2022; Majib et al., 2024), or child trafficking cases (Nasrullah, 2023). The Rokan Hilir District Court case demands meticulous evidentiary processes. This is because the testimony of the Child Victim frequently serves as the crown witness, and its evidentiary weight must be carefully assessed by the judge (Darma, 2023). Meticulous assessment is required regarding how a promise of marriage is qualified as an instrument of grooming that extinguishes the free will of the child, even when the child appears cooperative.

Previous research has extensively examined aspects of child sexual offenses; however, there is a clear distinction from this study. A study by Firmayanto and Mamu (2025) highlights acquittals resulting from insufficient evidence. Meanwhile, Alimuddin et al. (2022) focus on the concurrence of crimes (*concursum*) in sentencing. On the other hand, research by Rosalin and Abdillah (2024) and Silitonga (2025) emphasizes the importance of restitution as an instrument for restoring victim rights, which is frequently neglected in judicial decisions. Furthermore, Sari and Rosnawati (2023) and Lestari (2025) highlight sentencing disparities in child sexual offenses, indicating inconsistencies in legal application across various jurisdictions. The novelty of this research lies in integrating the analysis of judicial interpretation of the grooming element in a romantic relationship with the analysis of children lying to their parents. This analysis is correlated with the application of Article 64 of the

Penal Code concerning *voortgezette handeling*, alongside a critique of the absence of restitution considerations in the Decision amidst the spirit of victim recovery echoed in Law Number 12 of 2022 and contemporary legal literature (Salsabilla et al., 2023).

This research aims to analyze two fundamental matters. First, it analyzes the judicial interpretation of the grooming element within a romantic relationship accompanied by a promise of marriage as the negation of consent of the Child Victim. Second, it analyzes the legal considerations of the Judge in applying *voortgezette handeling* in child sexual violence cases to achieve sentencing proportionality. In addition, this research examines the implications of the absence of restitution imposed upon the Defendant. This reflects the prevailing weakness of the victim recovery perspective within criminal justice practice. Theoretically, this research is expected to contribute to the development of juvenile criminal law. This contribution specifically enriches the discourse on the interpretation of deceit and grooming in romantic relationships involving children. Furthermore, this research strengthens the argumentation for the necessity of comprehensive legal protection. Practically, the results of this analysis are expected to serve as input for judges and public prosecutors. They are expected to be more progressive in uncovering manipulative motives behind a child's consent, and more active in applying restitution claims by virtue of office (*ex officio*) for substantive justice. Therefore, law enforcement does not merely culminate in the penalization of the perpetrator (retributive) but also addresses the recovery aspect (restorative) for the victim whose future has been seized.

METHOD

This research is a normative legal research focused on an in-depth analysis of written legal norms and their application in judicial practice (Qamar & Rezah, 2020). The approaches utilized are the statute approach to examine regulations concerning child protection and the case approach to dissect the *ratio decidendi* (reasoning of the decision) of the judge in the Decision. The selection of this research type is based on the urgency to examine the coherence between positive legal norms and the judicial interpretation regarding the grooming element in child sexual offenses disguised within a romantic relationship. Furthermore, this method aims to evaluate the accuracy of applying the *voortgezette handeling* doctrine in sentencing. Through this method, the research aims to provide a legal prescription that does not merely culminate in a case description but also offers a critical analysis of the legal construction formulated by law enforcement.

The data sources used in this research are entirely secondary, including primary, secondary, and tertiary legal materials (Sampara & Husen, 2016). Primary legal materials encompass Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl as the primary object of study, the Penal Code, Law Number 23 of 2002, and Law Number 12 of 2022.

Secondary legal materials are obtained from relevant legal literature. This literature includes scientific journals discussing jurisprudence and doctrines of juvenile criminal law, previous research findings examining sentencing disparities and the evidentiary weight of child witnesses, alongside criminal law textbooks. Data collection was conducted through library research by inventorying, classifying, and systematizing legal materials relevant to the legal issues under investigation. This procedure was executed to ensure the validity and reliability of the constructed argumentation.

Data analysis was conducted qualitatively using legal interpretive methods, specifically grammatical and systematic interpretation, to understand the meaning of statutory texts and judicial considerations (Irwansyah, 2020). Deductive logic was used as the primary instrument in the conclusion. This logic commenced from the major premise in the form of normative legal rules regarding child protection and sentencing theories, which was subsequently correlated with the minor premise consisting of legal facts revealed in the Decision. This analytical process aimed not only to assess the decision's conformity with the law but also to uncover the substantive justice underlying its text. The primary focus was on protecting the victim's rights and ensuring the punishment was proportionate. The results of the analysis are subsequently described prescriptively to address the problem formulation regarding the interpretation of the grooming element and the application of the *voortgezette handeling* article. Furthermore, this description provides recommendations for improvement in future juvenile criminal justice practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Reconstruction of the Grooming Element in Romantic Power Relations: A Critical Analysis of the *Mens Rea* of the Defendant

The analysis of Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl indicates a significant paradigm shift in the interpretation of the grooming element. This element is regulated in Article 81 section (2) of Law Number 17 of 2016. The Judge, in their legal considerations, explicitly constructed that the dating relationship between the Defendant and the Child Victim is not a valid basis for consent, but rather a manipulative instrument utilized by the Defendant to execute his acts. The legal fact that the Child Victim was willing to engage in sexual intercourse because she was persuaded and promised that if anything happened, the Defendant would marry her, was assessed by the Judge as a perfect manifestation of the deceit or grooming elements. This approach aligns with the view of Sinaga (2022), who asserts that in the context of child protection, persuasion or false promises in an unequal romantic relationship must be viewed as a form of psychological violence. This psychological violence paralyzes the critical reasoning of the child; therefore, the given consent constitutes vitiated consent.

Furthermore, the legal construction formulated by the Judge in the Decision implicitly rejects the common defense frequently emerging in similar cases. This defense is based on mutual consent, evidenced by the child's initiative to meet the perpetrator. In this case, the Child Victim was proven to have actively lied to her parents by asking permission to go with a school group, whereas in reality, she went with the Defendant to an inn. However, instead of viewing this as evidence of juvenile delinquency or pure consent of the child, the Judge viewed it as evidence of the success of the Defendant in embedding his manipulative influence. This aligns with the findings of [Wijayanti et al. \(2024\)](#), who state that, in unequal power relations between adults and children, the lies of the child to authority figures (parents) are frequently the product of grooming or psychological conditioning by the perpetrator to isolate the victim from the protection of their family. Therefore, the *mens rea* of the Defendant is proven to exist not only when the sexual intercourse occurred but had already commenced since he built the misleading romantic narrative to deceive the victim.

It is essential to distinguish the characteristics of this case from other, more conventional typologies of sexual offenses. Studies by [Aida and Mahzaniar \(2022\)](#) and [Majib et al. \(2024\)](#) highlight sexual offenses involving physical coercion or threats of violence, frequently within the domestic sphere or blood relations (incest). In such cases, the absence of consent is apparent from the victim's resistance or fear. Conversely, the violence in this Decision is subtle and invisible. [Darussalam et al. \(2025\)](#) emphasize that Islamic and positive legal protection must be capable of reaching such subtle *modi operandi*. In this mode, the perpetrator exploits the emotional vulnerability of a child who is in the phase of searching for identity. Therefore, the astuteness of the Judge in qualifying the promise of marriage as a delict element of grooming constitutes a progressive step that closes the impunity loophole for perpetrators hiding behind the mask of affection.

External factors cannot be neglected in analyzing the formation of the Defendant's *mens rea* and the victim's vulnerability. As elaborated by [Rivanie et al. \(2021\)](#) and [Rambe et al. \(2024\)](#), exposure to pornography and the ease of technological access frequently act as catalysts for the occurrence of child sexual offenses. Although the Decision does not deeply explore the pornography consumption of the Defendant, the modus of inviting the victim to stay at an inn (Duri) indicates mature premeditation. This premeditation might be inspired or facilitated by unrestricted digital interaction patterns. This strengthens the argument that the actions of the Defendant are not a momentary lapse, but rather a series of conscious acts exploiting the innocence of the child for sexual gratification. From the perspective of juvenile criminal law, these actions must be penalized with aggravation, rather than pardoned.

The judicial interpretation regarding the grooming element in this decision also holds profound sociological implications. By penalizing the Defendant despite the absence of physical violence, this decision sends a strict message to the public that the law does not tolerate child sexual exploitation in any form, including those disguised as romance. This refutes the stigma frequently attached to Child Victims in dating cases, where victims are frequently subjected to victim blaming for being perceived as mutually consenting or delinquent. The approach of the Judge focusing on absolute protection over the bodily integrity of the child affirms that the state, through its legal instruments, takes over the protective role when the child is unable to protect themselves from adult manipulation.

In terms of legal dogmatics, the considerations of the Judge in this decision enrich the treasury of jurisprudence regarding crimes against decency. The Judge is not fixated on rigid textual evidentiary processes for the elements; rather, they employ teleological interpretation to understand the law's protective objectives. The promise of marriage is constructed not as a civil obligation, but as an instrument of crime (*instrumentum sceleris*) to dismantle the psychological defense of the victim. This construction is crucial because, in numerous similar cases, perpetrators frequently escape or receive lenient sentences because judges fail to recognize the manipulative dimension of the relationship. Therefore, this decision serves as a significant precedent affirming that child consent is a legal myth that must be deconstructed. Any sexual intercourse with a child, with or without consent, is a completed crime.

B. The Application of the *Voortgezette Handeling* Doctrine in the Sentencing of Child Sexual Offenses

Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl presents a compelling precedent in the application of Article 64 section (1) of the Penal Code concerning *voortgezette handeling* in child sexual offense cases. In their considerations, the Judge constructed three incidents of sexual intercourse committed by the Defendant—once at the residence of the Defendant in February 2025 and twice at an inn in Duri in April 2025—as a single uninterrupted act. This legal choice differs from the application of material concurrence (*concursum realis*) as regulated in Article 65 of the Penal Code. In *concursum realis*, each criminal offense is deemed independent, and the sentences can be accumulated. Referring to [Alimuddin et al. \(2022\)](#), the application of *concursum realis* in child sexual violence cases is frequently preferred to provide a maximum deterrent effect. This is because *concursum realis* allows judges to impose a sentence one-third heavier than the maximum sentence. However, in the Decision, the Judge opted for the *voortgezette handeling* route, which technically restricts the sentencing to only one of the heaviest principal penal threats.

The accuracy of applying Article 64 section (1) of the Penal Code in this decision merits examination against the dogmatic criteria of criminal law. The absolute requisite of *voortgezette handeling* is the existence of a single decision of will (*een wilsbesluit*) underlying a series of acts. In the analysis by [Arief and Wicaksono \(2024\)](#), a single decision of will must be interpreted as a persistent *mens rea* that remains uncompleted until the series of acts concludes. In this case, the Judge found that the period from February to April 2025 was not excessively prolonged. The Judge further considered that the entire series of grooming and sexual intercourse was driven by a single intent of the Defendant to sexually exploit the Child Victim. Although there was, in fact, a significant time lapse, the Judge ostensibly viewed the dating relationship as the common thread unifying the *mens rea*. Therefore, each sexual intercourse is merely a repeated manifestation of a single grand design of manipulation by the Defendant.

However, the application of *voortgezette handeling* raises questions about the sense of retributive justice. By considering the three incidents as a single package, the Defendant is advantaged as he avoids the threat of sentence accumulation. This contrasts with the findings of [Firmayanto and Mamu \(2025\)](#), who highlight the sheer difficulty of evidentiary processes in child sexual cases. Consequently, when evidence is strong (such as medical examinations and confessions), the public expects the maximum punishment. The sentence of 7 years and 6 months of imprisonment imposed by the Judge, although above the specific minimum of 5 years, remains well below the maximum of 15 years. The question arises whether the sentence reduction resulting from the *voortgezette handeling* construction is proportionate to the psychological suffering of the victim experiencing repeated trauma. [Sari and Rosnawati \(2023\)](#), in their study on decision disparity, demonstrate that judges' sentencing trends in similar cases are often confined to moderate numbers. This number does not fully reflect the repetition of the crime as a significant aggravating factor.

Furthermore, the analysis of sentencing proportionality in this decision must be correlated with the objectives of sentencing itself. [Lestari \(2025\)](#) argues that in child sexual offense cases, the objective of sentencing must shift from mere retribution to social defense and victim recovery. A sentence of 7.5 years might be deemed sufficient to penalize the Defendant, but is it sufficient to prevent recidivism? The application of Article 64 section (1) of the Penal Code, although juridically and normatively accountable, risks reducing the weight of the culpability of the Defendant. It is as if raping a child once versus three times is considered to possess the identical weight of moral reproach in the eyes of the law, solely because it is based on a single dating intent. This is a dogmatic loophole that necessitates critique. Every act of sexual penetration against a child inherently

brings a new, independent damaging impact on the physical and psychological well-being of the victim.

In a comparative perspective, this decision differs from the trend in several other jurisdictions which tend to apply a limited accumulation system (*concursum realis*) for repeated sexual offenses to maximize the deterrent effect. [Alimuddin et al. \(2022\)](#) note that the application of Article 65 of the Penal Code is more effective in transmitting a strict message that the body of every child is sacred, and every violation against it is calculated as one complete crime. The choice of the Rokan Hilir District Court Judge to utilize Article 64 of the Penal Code, although supported by jurisprudence regarding the time lapse, can be viewed as a form of judicial restraint that lacks progressiveness in responding to the escalation of child sexual offenses. The repetition of acts within a two-month timeframe and in different locations (residence and inn) should logically be constructed as a renewed intent, rather than a continuous intent. Consequently, this opens the room for the application of heavier penalties.

Ultimately, the evaluation of this decision affirms the necessity for reformulating sentencing guidelines in child sexual violence cases. Judges must be bolder in exploring the dogmatic boundaries of *voortgezette handeling* so that it does not become a sentence discount for sexual predator perpetrators. Justice for victims is measured not only by the proven indictment but also by how the severity of the imposed sanction reflects the experienced suffering. In this case, although the Defendant was found guilty, the utilized legal construction leaves room for critique. This critique points out that our criminal justice system remains too rigid in interpreting the unity of will, and lacks sensitivity towards the reality of the cumulative trauma experienced by the victim due to the repeated acts of the Defendant.

C. The Urgency of Victim Impact Statements and State Obligations in Restitution Prosecution: A Progressive Critique

One of the most glaring fundamental weaknesses in Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl is the absence of restitution imposition upon the Defendant. In their considerations, the Panel of Judges explicitly stated that the victim party did not submit a restitution petition, resulting in no judicial dictum obligating the Defendant to pay compensation to the Child Victim. This passive stance of law enforcement officials, both the Public Prosecutor and the Judge, merits sharp criticism as it contradicts the progressive spirit of child protection. [Silitonga \(2025\)](#) asserts that in the modern legal paradigm, the state possesses a constitutional obligation to restore the rights of the victim (*restitutio in integrum*), rather than merely penalizing the perpetrator. The absence of restitution in this case indicates

that the criminal justice system remains trapped solely in a retributive approach. This approach neglects the real damages and the future of the child who has been seized due to sexual exploitation.

The absence of this restitution claim is increasingly ironic when juxtaposed with recent developments in positive law, specifically Law Number 12 of 2022. Although the Prosecutor utilized Law Number 23 of 2002 as the basis of the indictment, the spirit of Law Number 12 of 2022, which mandates restitution as a right of the victim, should serve as a guideline for law enforcement officials in handling every sexual violence case. [Rosalin and Abdillah \(2024\)](#) highlight that restitution is not merely financial compensation but rather a form of state recognition of the victim's suffering and an instrument to empower the victim in the recovery process. In the Decision, the Child Victim experienced profound psychological trauma due to the manipulation of the promise of marriage and social stigma resulting from the revealed lies. These immaterial damages should be converted into a financial obligation for the Defendant, either at the initiative of the Prosecutor (*ex officio* demand) or by judicial determination, without waiting for a formal petition from the victim's family, which might be legally unversed.

The importance of restitution is also closely correlated with the concept of a victim impact statement. [Silitonga \(2025\)](#) explains that a victim impact statement is a mechanism that allows the victim to directly convey the impact of the crime on their life before the court. In this decision, although the Child Victim's testimony was heard, there is no apparent systematic effort to assess the crime's long-term impact as a basis for calculating restitution. In fact, as noted by [Salsabilla et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Lestari et al. \(2025\)](#), integrating victim impact statements and restitution is key to realizing substantive restorative justice. By neglecting this aspect, the Rokan Hilir District Court's decision fails to provide holistic justice. The Defendant might be imprisoned, but the burden of trauma recovery and the future is entirely borne by the Child Victim and their family.

Furthermore, in the context of child protection from exploitation and human trafficking, [Nasrullah \(2023\)](#) and [Syah et al. \(2024\)](#) emphasize that effective law enforcement must encompass the aspect of impoverishing the perpetrator through maximum fines and restitution. This aims to provide a deterrent effect not only through physical means (imprisonment) but also through economic means. In this case, the Defendant's ability to take the victim to a hotel or inn indicates financial capability that should be targeted for victim recovery. The failure of the state to demand restitution is tantamount to allowing the perpetrator to enjoy the benefits of their crime, while the victim is left in devastation. This constitutes a form of structural injustice that must be corrected.

The critique of law enforcement's passivity in demanding restitution is also relevant to the findings of [Arief and Wicaksono \(2024\)](#) and [Wijayanti et al. \(2024\)](#). These findings indicate that child protection frequently culminates in custodial sentences. The Prosecutor, as the master of the case (*dominus litis*), should play an active role in calculating and demanding victim damages in the indictment, in accordance with Supreme Court Regulation Number 1 of 2022. The Judge, based on *ex officio* authority, should also be able to order the payment of restitution if trial facts indicate the existence of manifest suffering of the victim. This negligence reflects that a victim-oriented perspective has not been fully internalized within criminal justice practices at the regional level.

Consequently, Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN leaves the juvenile criminal justice system in Indonesia with a substantial task. Justice for the Child Victim must not be reduced to merely the penalization of the perpetrator. It must encompass the restoration of the victim's dignity, honor, and psychological condition, at the perpetrator's expense. Moving forward, a paradigm reform is necessitated wherein the demand for restitution becomes a mandatory standard operating procedure in every prosecution of child sexual offense cases. This is as mandated by the principles of universal child protection and progressive national law. Without this, court decisions will merely become ineffective legal instruments that impose imprisonment but fail to facilitate psychological recovery.

D. The Evidentiary Weight of Child Witness Testimonies in the Shadow of Power Relations

The most significant challenge in the evidentiary process for crimes against decency, particularly those occurring in the private sphere, such as residential bedrooms or inns, is the scarcity of eyewitnesses, which frequently leads to reliance on hearsay evidence (*testimonium de auditu*). In Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl, the sole witness directly experiencing the criminal incident was the Child Victim. This raises the classical legal issue regarding the principle of one witness is no witness (*unus testis nullus testis*) as regulated in Article 185 section (2) of Law Number 8 of 1981. However, in their legal considerations, the Judge successfully navigated this formalistic constraint by treating the Child Victim's testimony not as independent evidence, but as that of a crown witness corroborated by other evidentiary instruments. This approach aligns with the analysis of [Darma \(2023\)](#) analysis, asserting that in the modern juvenile criminal justice system, the testimony of a child victim carries a specific evidentiary weight (*sui generis*) that must be assessed through a child protection perspective, rather than merely the quantity of witnesses.

The evidentiary weight of the Child Victim's testimony in this case became highly vital and decisive, as it was supported by documentary evidence, including a medical examination report (*visum et repertum*), and corroborated by circumstantial evidence. The Judge meticulously assembled the evidentiary elements by correlating the testimony of the Child Victim regarding the time and location of the incident (at the residence of the Defendant and the inn in Duri) with the testimony of the parent witnesses confirming the departure of the child and the fabricated lies. Mawarni et al. (2023) note that in sexual violence cases, the consistency of victim testimonies with medical evidence (*hymenal laceration*) is the key to refuting the denial of the Defendant. In this decision, although the Defendant used the dating relationship as a pretext, the medical and chronological facts presented by the Child Victim remained irrefutable. This fulfills the minimum evidentiary threshold (*negatief wettelijk*), requiring at least two valid evidentiary instruments alongside the judge's conviction.

Furthermore, the analysis of the validity of the testimony of the Child Victim must also consider psychological factors and power relations. Doubts frequently emerge that child testimonies are unstable, imaginative, or the result of pressure from specific parties. However, Darma (2023) in their study found that child victims of sexual crimes tend to provide honest testimonies regarding their traumatic experiences, unless there is strong external intervention. In the Rokan Hilir District Court case, the Judge assessed the testimony of the Child Victim acknowledging the grooming through the promise of marriage as spontaneous and genuine. The fact that the child dared to disclose the actual incident to her parents after being pressured precisely adds credibility to her testimony. This proves that despite being under the manipulative influence of the Defendant, the episodic memory of the child regarding the sexual incident remains intact and reliable as an evidentiary instrument.

The legal construction formulated by the Judge in accepting the Child Victim's testimony also reflects the application of the specific law principle (*lex specialis*) in juvenile criminal procedural law. Although Law Number 8 of 1981 imposes strict requirements on witnesses, Law Number 23 of 2002 provides judges with greater flexibility to explore the material truth more comprehensively. The Judge was not constrained by the formality of an oath, which might not be fulfilled by a minor, but rather focused on the chain of evidence between the testimony of the child and other trial facts. As affirmed by Mawarni et al. (2023), legal protection for child victims does not culminate merely in penalizing the perpetrator. This protection also includes the guarantee that their voices are heard and believed before the court, without experiencing revictimization due to law enforcement officials' skepticism.

Ultimately, Decision Number 410/Pid.Sus/2025/PN Rhl affirms that in child sexual offense cases committed through grooming *modi operandi*, the testimony of the Child Victim is the paramount evidence. The courage of the Judge to rely on the sole testimony of the child corroborated by circumstantial evidence is a progressive step that merits appreciation. This closes the loophole for sexual offenders who frequently feel secure by committing their acts in concealed locations without eyewitnesses. Therefore, this decision provides a crucial precedent that, in the evidentiary process for sexual offenses, the quality and consistency of evidence are vastly more valuable than the mere quantity of witnesses. This is for the realization of substantive justice for child victims.

CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS

Based on the conducted analysis, it can be concluded that the judicial interpretation regarding the grooming element in Decision Number 410/Pid. Sus/2025/PN Rhl has provided a progressive perspective within child protection law. The Judge accurately concluded that in unequal power relations, such as those in dating between adults and children, the given consent is not a manifestation of pure free will. Rather, the consent is the product of psychological manipulation (grooming) through false promises of marriage. This finding affirms that the lies of the child to their parents to meet the perpetrator are not evidence of juvenile delinquency or mutual consent. Rather, these lies are a strong indicator of the success of the perpetrator in embedding his negative influence, thereby legitimately and convincingly fulfilling the deceit element in Article 81 section (2) of Law Number 17 of 2016. Furthermore, the application of Article 64 section (1) of the Penal Code concerning *voortgezette handeling* by the Judge is assessed as an accountable juridical step considering the *mens rea* unity of the Defendant. Nevertheless, conversely, this implicates a mitigation of the penal threat that does not fully reflect the cumulative trauma of the victim resulting from the repetition of acts.

The results of this research also indicate a significant gap in efforts to restore victims' rights. The absence of restitution imposed upon the Defendant in the judicial dictum, under the pretext that the victim did not petition, reflects the prevailing weakness of the restorative justice paradigm in first-instance juvenile criminal justice practices. In fact, normatively and constitutionally, the state has an obligation to ensure *restitutio in integrum* without relying on victims' proactiveness, who are frequently legally unversed. The absence of an institutionalized victim impact statement within the trial process further contributes to the minimal exploration of the actual damages suffered by the child. Consequently, the decision solely focuses on the retributive aspect of custodial sentencing and neglects the reparative aspect of compensation. The consistency between the raised issues—namely, the interpretation of delict elements

and sentencing—and the research objective to analyze judicial considerations has been addressed by concluding that, although the Defendant was proven guilty, substantive justice for the victim has not been fully realized due to the neglected recovery aspect.

As a follow-up recommendation, law enforcement officials, specifically Public Prosecutors, are encouraged to be more proactive in demanding restitution *ex officio* in every indictment of child sexual offense cases. This demand must refer to the actual calculation of material and immaterial damages. Judges are also expected to be bolder in exercising *ex officio* authority to impose restitution on the Defendant, even without a petition from the victim. This action constitutes a manifestation of alignment with the best interests of the child. Academically, further in-depth studies are required regarding the formulation of specific sentencing guidelines for child sexual violence cases involving dating relations. These studies are useful for minimizing decision disparities and ensuring that the *voortgezette handeling* construction does not become a loophole for perpetrators to obtain disproportionate sentence reductions. Finally, the integration of a victim impact statement mechanism into juvenile criminal procedural law must be implemented immediately to provide the victim's voice in influencing the severity of the sentence and the amount of restitution.

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