

| Research Article |

Closing the Pre-Exploitation Gap: *Ḥifẓ al-Nasl* as a Preventive Framework for Protecting Children from Digital Grooming in Indonesia

Riska Wulandari^{1*}, Habib Al Rahman², Muhammad Fauzan Aziman³

^{1,2,3}Faculty of Islamic Studies, Universitas Darunnajah, Jakarta, Indonesia

*Correspondence: wulandaririska525@gmail.com

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Abstract: The expansion of digital communication has reshaped how children build relationships, and it has also opened a channel through which adults approach them for sexual purposes. This article examines child grooming as an injury to the preservation of progeny (*ḥifẓ al-nasl*) and asks why Indonesian law struggles to intervene before exploitation has already occurred. The study applies a qualitative normative-philosophical design based on library research. It draws on statutes, classical *uṣūl al-fiqh* literature and recent scholarship, and it evaluates that material through three analytical instruments, namely *ḥifẓ al-nasl*, *sadd al-dharī'ah* and the maxim *dar' al-mafāsid muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*. The analysis shows that grooming injures *ḥifẓ al-nasl* across six connected phases, which are manipulation, accessibility, rapport building, sexual context, risk assessment and deception. The injury begins well before any physical act takes place, yet Indonesian statutes reach only the later phases of that sequence. A pre-exploitation zone therefore remains outside the practical scope of criminal intervention. The study concludes that *ḥifẓ al-nasl* carries a twofold relevance for child protection in Indonesia. It supplies a philosophical basis for strengthening the preventive dimension of national law, and it supplies a methodological instrument through which a pre-exploitation offence can be justified. Protection consequently requires coordinated action by families, educational institutions and the state, and it should begin at the earliest manipulative approach rather than at the point where harm has become irreversible.

Keywords: child grooming, *ḥifẓ al-nasl*, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah*, preventive regulation, *sadd al-dharī'ah*



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Introduction

Digital technology has changed the way children and adolescents build social relationships in Indonesia. Access to messaging applications, social platforms and online games has become ordinary for school-age users across most regions. The

connectivity that supports learning and friendship also dissolves the spatial limits that once shielded children from unfamiliar adults (Hasan, 2021). An adult who wishes to approach a child no longer requires physical proximity or the consent of a caregiver. This shift has produced a form of harm that develops quietly inside exchanges which look entirely ordinary to parents.

Child grooming describes the process through which an adult builds emotional closeness with a child in order to lower the child's resistance to sexual contact or exploitation (Holivia & Suratman, 2021). Scholarship in criminology treats grooming as a relational process rather than a single incident, and it observes that the process may unfold within families, trusted institutions or online environments (McAlinden, 2012). A systematic review of competing definitions identified four elements that recur across the literature, namely intentionality on the part of the adult, gradual progression, an unequal power relation and the eventual reduction of the child's capacity to refuse (Winters et al., 2022). Because the harm accumulates slowly, protection often arrives only after the damage has become severe. The pattern therefore poses a distinctive problem for legal systems that are built around discrete criminal acts.

The scale of the problem in Indonesia has grown alongside the expansion of household internet access. The ministry's online information system for the protection of women and children (SIMFONI-PPA) recorded 15,396 cases of violence against children during 2024, of which 11,049 involved sexual violence (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Republik Indonesia, 2025). The National Survey on the Life Experiences of Children and Adolescents (SNPHAR) 2024 found that 50.78 per cent of children aged 13 to 17, or roughly one in two, had experienced at least one form of violence during their lifetime, and that between 8 and 9 per cent had experienced sexual violence (Kementerian Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Republik Indonesia, 2024). The CyberTipline of the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children further recorded 1,450,403 reports of suspected online child sexual exploitation linked to Indonesia in 2024, which places the country among the highest totals worldwide (National Center for Missing & Exploited Children, 2025). These reports count detected material and incidents rather than individual victims, yet their volume shows how widely the digital channel is used. The distance between survey prevalence and service records indicates that reported figures describe a minimum rather than an accurate measure of the phenomenon. Studies of Indonesian cases have further shown that offenders frequently belong to the child's immediate social circle, which weakens the protective role that relatives are expected to perform (Harefa & Dewanto, 2026).

The consequences for children who are targeted extend well beyond the moment of discovery. Psychological research on victim responses reports patterns of confrontation, avoidance, and emotional shutdown that are characteristic of coercive relationships (Ayu, 2024). Legal scholarship documents a longer trajectory in which the capacity to trust ordinary relationships is damaged, and in which difficulty

forming healthy attachments persists into later life (Ramadhani & Ramadani, 2024). Work on grooming as an emerging form of sexual violence describes layered victimisation, since the effects reach the child's social standing and the family as a whole rather than the individual alone (Raziah & Jaman, 2024). Harm of this character is not adequately captured by an offence definition that focuses on a single physical act. It accumulates across an extended period, and the accumulation itself is what makes early interruption valuable.

Indonesian law addresses harm to children through several instruments that were designed for different purposes. Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection establishes the state obligation to secure the growth and development of every child. The Electronic Information and Transactions Law regulates the transmission of prohibited content through electronic systems, and Law Number 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Offences extends criminal coverage to electronically mediated sexual violence. Analyses of these instruments have nevertheless concluded that they remain reactive, because enforcement is possible only after conduct satisfies the elements of a completed offense (Septiarahmadani & Nur, 2026). The manipulative sequence that precedes exploitation is not itself defined as a punishable act. Victimological research on Indonesian criminal procedure reaches a similar conclusion, noting that the system focuses on recovery after the event rather than on interrupting it beforehand (Putri & Sugama, 2025).

Islamic legal theory offers a different starting point for the same problem. The doctrine of *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* holds that every ruling pursues an underlying purpose, and that the purpose of the law is the realization of human welfare (Al-Shatibi, 1996). Scholars have organized these purposes around five essential interests: religion, life, intellect, progeny, and property (Iqbal et al., 2023). Contemporary work has treated the framework as a philosophy of Islamic law rather than as a fixed catalog of prohibitions, and it has emphasized the capacity of the framework to respond to conditions that classical jurists never encountered (Auda, 2008). Applied research in Indonesia has drawn on the same framework to address social questions ranging from public health measures to family resilience (Dahlan et al., 2021; Pahutar et al., 2024).

Among the five essential interests, preserving progeny most closely relates to protecting children. Classical scholarship approached *hifz al-nasl* mainly through the regulation of marriage and the prohibition of unlawful sexual conduct, both of which secure the clarity of lineage. Contemporary readings have substantially widened that scope. A reinterpretation of the principle through the work of Ibn 'Āshūr concluded that the preservation of progeny now extends to the education, welfare, and psychological security of the child (Subaki & Abadi, 2025). Related scholarship has argued that *hifz al-nasl* and the preservation of personal honor work together to form a stable family (Harun et al., 2025). Another study proposes reconstructing the principle as a legal basis for protecting the rights of future generations within Indonesian Islamic family law (Fatimah & Permatasari, 2026). Grooming therefore falls squarely within the concerns that this principle is meant to address.

Existing research on grooming in Indonesia has developed along two separate tracks. The first track examines the phenomenon through positive law and victimology, documenting the absence of a specific offense and the difficulties law enforcement faces (Al Aziz et al., 2025; Maulida et al., 2025; Rufaidah, 2026). The second track draws on the purposes of Islamic law. Some studies apply *hifz al-nasl* to other contemporary questions, such as voluntary childlessness (Azzahra & Maisyaroh, 2026), while others connect Islamic legal purposes to online sexual exploitation in general terms and argue that Islamic principles can complement, rather than replace, positive law (Masrurah & Mahmutarom, 2024). The study closest to the present one is Asman (2025), which integrates *maqāṣid al-sharīʿah* into family resilience to prevent child grooming in Indonesia. That study approaches prevention mainly through the household. It does not trace the injury through the *hifz al-nasl* phase by phase, nor does it use *sadd al-dharīʿah* to determine where Indonesian criminal law begins to operate. These two omissions define the gap this article addresses, and the gap matters because grooming's distinctive feature lies in its graduated structure rather than its final act.

This article responds to that gap through two questions. The first question asks how each phase of grooming injures *hifz al-nasl*, and how those injuries relate to the levels of necessity recognized in Islamic legal theory. The second question asks what the principle contributes to prevention and to legal protection, particularly at the stage that precedes exploitation. The article argues that grooming should be understood as a graduated *mafsadah* whose earliest phases already violate the interests that *hifz al-nasl* protects. It further argues that two established juristic instruments, *sadd al-dharīʿah* and the maxim on the priority of preventing harm, provide a defensible basis for a pre-exploitation offense. The contribution is therefore both diagnostic and prescriptive, and it addresses legal scholars and policy drafters working on child protection.

Method

This study applies a qualitative design with a normative-philosophical approach. Normative legal research examines legal norms as a system of prescriptions rather than observable social behavior, and evaluates those norms against the principles that justify them (Charistiawan & Widyaningrum, 2024). The approach's philosophical dimension directs attention to the underlying values of justice, responsibility, and human dignity that a protective regime is expected to realize (Mansari, 2026). This orientation suits the research questions because the central problem concerns the purposes Indonesian child protection law ought to serve rather than the frequency of particular offenses. The design also allows classical juristic reasoning to be placed alongside modern statutory analysis within a single argument.

Data were collected through library research, which remains the standard technique for doctrinal work of this kind (Rosidi et al., 2026). Three categories of material were consulted throughout the analysis. Primary material included Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, the Electronic Information and Transactions Law, Law Number 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Offenses, and foundational works of Islamic legal theory by al-Shāṭibī and Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām. Secondary material consisted of peer-reviewed articles and scholarly books on grooming, Islamic legal purposes, and child protection policy. Tertiary material included legal dictionaries and encyclopedic references used to stabilize terminology across the two legal traditions. Documentation served as the recording technique throughout, and it allowed each source to be verified against its original publication (Sutikno & Hadisaputra, 2020).

The analytical procedure followed five stages, which are set out in Figure 1. The first stage identified the legal problem and framed grooming as a child-protection issue rather than a general cybercrime. The second stage assembled the legal materials described above. The third stage classified and coded those materials by theme, and it excluded sources whose relevance or scholarly authority could not be established. The fourth stage developed the analytical criteria used for evaluation. The fifth stage evaluated each phase of grooming against those criteria and against the reach of existing statutes (Kristiawanto, 2022).

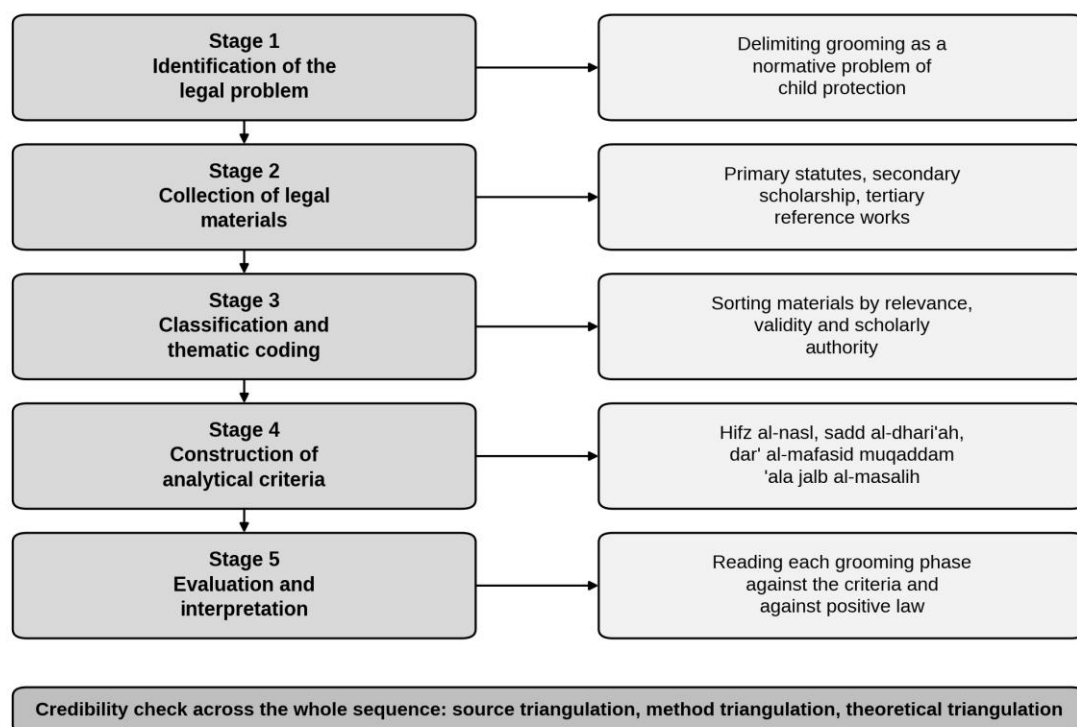


Figure 1: Stages of the normative-philosophical analytical procedure

Three juristic instruments together formed this study's analytical criteria. The first instrument was *hifz al-nasl* itself, understood in its expanded contemporary sense as

the protection of lineage together with the safety, honor and psychological welfare of the child (Subaki & Abadi, 2025). The second instrument was *sadd al-dharī'ah*, which permits prohibiting otherwise permissible conduct when it reliably leads to harm. Uṣūl scholarship classifies the objects of this doctrine by the certainty with which harm follows, distinguishing conduct that certainly produces harm from conduct that produces harm only rarely, from conduct whose harmful outcome is strongly presumed, and from conduct whose harmful potential remains weakly supported (Zulfikri & Faizah, 2023). The third instrument was the maxim *dar' al-mafāsīd muqaddam 'alā jalb al-maṣāliḥ*, which requires prioritizing harm prevention when harm and benefit are combined in a single act (Ibn 'Abd al-Salām, 1997). Indonesian scholarship has applied the same maxim to issues such as online gaming and milk bank regulation, demonstrating its operational value beyond purely theoretical discussion (Nasution et al., 2021; Rouf, 2022).

Operationalizing *ḥifẓ al-nasl* required the principle to be broken into observable dimensions before coding could begin. We derived four dimensions from the contemporary literature and applied them consistently across each phase of grooming. The first dimension covers the integrity of the trust relationship between an adult and a child. The second covers the clarity of the social and kinship boundaries that surround the child. The third covers the child's honor and bodily safety as an individual. The fourth covers the child's psychological and moral welfare as a member of a continuing generation (Fatimah & Permatasari, 2026; Subaki & Abadi, 2025). Each phase of grooming was then examined for its effect on these dimensions, and the classification recorded in the results section follows from that examination.

Rigor in doctrinal research rests on the transparency of source selection and interpretation rather than on the criteria used in field-based qualitative inquiry. Three measures were applied in this study. First, sources were selected according to explicit criteria, namely statutes in force at the time of writing, classical works recognized as authoritative within *uṣūl al-fiqh*, and peer-reviewed scholarship on grooming, *maqāṣid al-sharī'ah* and child protection, with priority given to recent publications while foundational works were retained regardless of date. Second, the statutory materials were read through a statutory approach and a conceptual approach, first breaking each provision into its elements of offense and then testing it against the concepts of *ḥifẓ al-nasl* and *sadd al-dharī'ah* (Marzuki, 2017). Third, coding was carried out manually in an analysis matrix with four categories: the grooming phase, the dimension of *ḥifẓ al-nasl* affected, the statutory provision that reaches the conduct, and the juristic instrument that justifies intervention. Where classical and contemporary scholars disagreed, the matrix recorded the disagreement and retained it in the analysis rather than resolving it by preference. This practice reduces the risk that a doctrinal argument will rest on a single interpretive line (Kamal & Djanggih, 2025).

Two limitations follow from the design and should be stated at the outset. The study does not generate primary empirical data on prevalence and therefore relies on

figures published by government agencies and other researchers. It also analyses grooming at the level of legal and ethical structures rather than individual psychological mechanisms. Descriptions of the six phases in the following section remain deliberately general, and they are framed around indicators that caregivers and institutions can recognize rather than around operational detail. This choice reflects an ethical obligation that applies to all research on the sexual exploitation of children.

Result and Discussion

Grooming as a Graduated Injury to *Hifz al-Nasl*

Analysis of the literature indicates that grooming proceeds through six connected phases, which are manipulation, accessibility, rapport building, sexual context, risk assessment, and deception (Yuniartiningtiyas & Widodo, 2022). This sequence synthesizes stage models from the international literature, notably O'Connell's (2003) typology of online grooming practices and Winters and Jeglic's (2017) Sexual Grooming Model, which describes victim selection, gaining access, trust development, desensitization to sexual content, and post-abuse maintenance. The models differ in the number and order of their stages. O'Connell, for example, places risk assessment before the sexual stage, whereas this sequence places it after. This study adopts an analytical rather than strictly chronological order, because risk assessment and deception usually run alongside the earlier phases and intensify once the interaction takes on a sexual purpose. The argument relies on a point on which all of these models agree. Namely that manipulation, access, and rapport building precede any explicit sexual content. Reading these phases against *hifz al-nasl* produced a consistent finding. Each phase corresponds to a specific interest that the principle is designed to protect, and the injury deepens as the sequence advances. Figure 2 presents this progression together with the point at which Indonesian criminal law becomes operative.

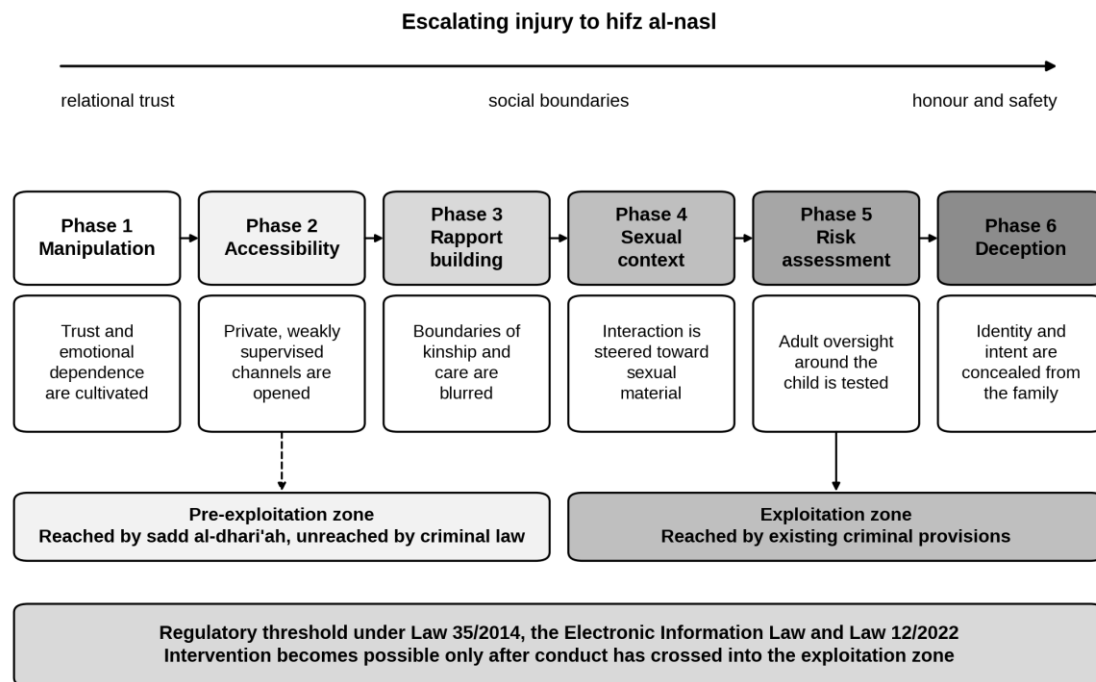


Figure 2: Escalation of injury to ḥifẓ al-nasl across the six grooming phases and the threshold of statutory intervention

The manipulation phase concerns the cultivation of emotional dependence. Evaluation of a participatory prevention program conducted with an urban youth forum in Jambi found that children who had been targeted often described a sense of obligation toward the adult and a fear of losing that adult's attention (Nur et al., 2026). Viewed through *ḥifẓ al-nasl*, the relationship between an adult and a child is a trust that protects, not a resource to be spent. Qur'anic interpretation of verses on caring for children treats that trust as encompassing upbringing, education, and protection from harm (Sajida, 2024). The violation therefore begins when the trust is redirected toward the adult's own purposes, even without physical contact.

The accessibility phase involves opening a communication channel that adults around the child cannot observe. Research on cyber grooming in Indonesian social media environments identifies platform anonymity, the ease of obtaining a child's personal information, and limited supervision of children's digital activity as the conditions that make such access possible (Anggraeny et al., 2023). Studies of online gaming environments report a similar pattern, because informal interaction and weak identity verification lower the threshold for initial contact (Wiguna et al., 2025). Evidence mapping on children's understanding of personal data indicates that children generally have a limited grasp of how others can collect or reuse their information (Stoilova et al., 2021). The protective boundary a family is expected to maintain around a child is therefore crossed silently, and that crossing itself departs from the structure that *ḥifẓ al-nasl* presupposes (Irfan, 2016).

The rapport-building phase involves blurring social boundaries. Case research in Indonesia has found that children who become victims frequently sought recognition and affection that they did not receive within their own households (Nuryah & Warsono, 2023). Studies of trust-based sexual violence further observe that adults in this phase often imitate the position of an older sibling or a caring relative, which suppresses the child's ordinary caution (Harefa & Dewanto, 2026). Imitating a kinship role directly injures *ḥifẓ al-nasl*, because the confidence that properly belongs to lawful family relations is transferred to someone who holds no such standing. The principle protects the clarity of relational structure, which is compromised well before any sexual dimension appears.

The sexual context phase marks the point at which the injury becomes explicit. Indonesian scholarship treats this phase as the transition from relational manipulation to sexual purpose (Amilda et al., 2025). Islamic legal reasoning is unusually direct on this question because the prohibition in *Sūrah al-Isrā'* addresses approach rather than commission alone (Shihab, 2002)—classical jurists derived a general rule from that formulation against preliminaries that lead toward unlawful sexual conduct. Contemporary work on *ḥifẓ al-nasl* and personal honor applies the same reasoning to modern contexts (Harun et al., 2025). The phase therefore violates both the statutory prohibition on indecency and the textual basis for preserving progeny.

The risk assessment and deception phases involve neutralizing adult oversight. Hermeneutic research on power and deception in Indonesian sexual violence cases documents how offenders work to keep the relationship concealed from the child's family (Susilowati & Frans, 2024). Media analysis of a case in Gorontalo shows how a fabricated identity was used to sustain a romantic pretext while a different purpose was pursued (Putri et al., 2025). When the household's supervisory function is disabled, the mechanism that ordinarily protects the family's continuity and honor ceases to operate. Table 1 summarises the relationship between each phase, the affected interest, and the classification under *sadd al-dharī'ah*.

Table 1: Grooming phases mapped against the dimensions of *ḥifẓ al-nasl*

Phase	Dimension of <i>ḥifẓ al-nasl</i> affected	Character of the injury	Classification under <i>sadd al-dharī'ah</i>
1. Manipulation	Integrity of the relationship of trust	A protective trust is redirected toward the adult's own purpose	Harm strongly presumed; prohibition justified
2. Accessibility	Boundary maintained by the	A channel is opened that adults responsible	Harm strongly presumed; prohibition justified

Phase	Dimension of <i>hifz al-nasl</i> affected	Character of the injury	Classification under <i>sadd al-dharī'ah</i>
	family around the child	for the child cannot observe	
3. Rapport building	Clarity of social and kinship boundaries	A kinship role is imitated by a person holding no such standing	Harm strongly presumed; prohibition justified
4. Sexual context	Honor and bodily safety of the child	Interaction acquires an explicit sexual purpose	Harm certain; conduct already prohibited
5. Risk assessment	Supervisory function of the household	Adult oversight is tested and progressively neutralized	Harm certain; conduct already prohibited
6. Deception	Psychological and moral welfare of the child	Identity and intent are concealed to sustain the relationship	Harm certain; conduct already prohibited

Two features of this mapping deserve particular emphasis here. The phases operate cumulatively rather than independently, because success at one phase creates the conditions for the next. Intervention at the earliest phase therefore removes the foundation on which the whole sequence depends. Research applying *sadd al-dharī'ah* to preventing child marriage reached an analogous conclusion, showing that the doctrine works best when harm is predictable rather than immediate (Nugroho et al., 2025).

Another observation concerns when harm becomes irreversible for the child. The cumulative injury described in the psychological literature does not begin at the sexual context phase, because dependence and secrecy have already reshaped the child's judgment by that stage (Ayu, 2024). Legal analysis of victim recovery notes that cases are frequently discovered only after exploitation has continued for a considerable period, by which time the psychological effects have compounded (Rufaidah, 2026). The interval between the first manipulative approach and the eventual discovery of the case therefore represents both the period of greatest damage and the period in which the law is least active. This observation gives the pre-exploitation gap practical significance, since it identifies the window in which intervention would yield the greatest protective return.

The Reach of Indonesian Statutes and the Pre-Exploitation Gap

An examination of the statutory framework confirmed that no Indonesian instrument defines grooming as an offense in its own right. Law Number 35 of 2014 establishes a broad protective mandate and provides penalties for sexual conduct against children. The Electronic Information and Transactions Law addresses the transmission of prohibited content through electronic systems, and its operation depends on the existence of such content. Law Number 12 of 2022 represents a substantial advance, because it recognizes electronically mediated forms of sexual violence and improves the position of victims within the process (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2022). Its provisions nevertheless attach to conduct that has already acquired an exploitative character. Table 2 sets out the reach of each instrument, together with the new Criminal Code, against the six phases identified above.

Table 2: Reach of Indonesian statutory instruments across the grooming sequence

Instrument	Protective scope	Earliest phase reached	Preventive gap
Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection	General state duty of protection together with penalties for sexual conduct against children	Phase 4	Phases 1 to 3 fall outside the operative provisions
Law No. 11 of 2008 in conjunction with Law No. 19 of 2016 on Electronic Information and Transactions	Transmission of prohibited content through electronic systems	Phase 4	Non-explicit manipulative communication is not covered
Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Offenses	Electronically mediated sexual violence together with victim protection measures	Phase 4	Preparatory manipulation is not defined as an offense
Law No. 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code (in force 2 January 2026)	General doctrines of preparation (Article 15) and attempt (Article 17)	Phase 4	Preparation is punishable only where expressly provided; no grooming provision exists.

Two provisions may reach further and therefore require closer examination. Article 76E of Law Number 35 of 2014 prohibits any person from using deception, a series of lies, or persuasion (*membujuk*) to induce a child to commit or permit an indecent act (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2014). The provision explicitly names persuasion, yet its object is the indecent act itself, so liability arises only once that act has been committed or permitted. Persuasion that has not yet produced an indecent act, which describes the manipulation, accessibility, and rapport-building phases, therefore remains outside its scope. The new Criminal Code, Law Number 1 of 2023, which entered into force on 2 January 2026, also requires attention (Pemerintah Republik Indonesia, 2023). The Code defines preparation for an offense but punishes it only where a statute expressly provides (Article 15), and it limits attempt to cases in which the execution of a specific offense has already begun (Article 17). Neither doctrine supplies a basis for prosecuting a course of manipulative communication whose sexual purpose has not yet been acted upon. The new Code therefore leaves the pre-exploitation gap in place, and it confirms that closing the gap requires an express statutory provision rather than reliance on general doctrines of preparation or attempt.

A second finding concerns evidence rather than definition. Grooming leaves traces in private conversation, and those traces acquire legal significance only when a later act provides the context that makes them intelligible. Research on trust-based digital offending indicates that conventional evidentiary frameworks respond poorly to psychological, incremental harm (Susilowati & Frans, 2024). Investigators therefore struggle to build a sufficient case at the stage when intervention would be most valuable. Scholarship on the legal gaps surrounding grooming in Indonesia reports the same obstacle and treats it as a structural feature of the current framework (Lubis et al., 2026).

A third finding concerns institutional capacity. Cases that originate in digital environments require forensic skill that is unevenly distributed across Indonesian jurisdictions. Reviews of enforcement practice indicate that specialized capability concentrates in larger urban police units, leaving other regions dependent on general investigative resources (Ramadhani & Ramadani, 2024). Normative reform alone would therefore not resolve the problem, because a well-drafted provision still requires the technical means to be applied. The legal gap and the capacity gap reinforce each other.

Scale and Channels of Grooming in the Indonesian Context

The literature reviewed for this study describes a phenomenon that is expanding, not stable. If the 11,049 recorded cases of sexual violence against children during 2024 are distributed across the year, the figure corresponds to roughly thirty children each day. Because grooming is concealed by design and usually discovered only after exploitation, the recorded total almost certainly understates the problem's true extent. The scale suggests a structural condition rather than isolated incidents.

Analysis of the channels involved identified two dominant environments. Online gaming platforms feature prominently, and a public information review by the Cirebon municipal communication agency described how private in-game chat functions allow personal relationships to develop away from adult view (Dinas Komunikasi, Informatika dan Statistik Kota Cirebon, 2026). A legal study of a case involving a widely used gaming platform reached a comparable conclusion, attributing the vulnerability to limited parental supervision and low household digital literacy (Pratiwi, 2026). Social media remains the more common environment overall, and Indonesian case research connects victimization to an unmet need for attention within the family (Nuryah & Warsono, 2023). Additional work confirms that fabricated accounts sustain a plausible relational pretext (Putri et al., 2025).

Regional variation also emerged as a pattern. Areas with wide internet access but limited parental familiarity with platform safety features showed higher exposure, and case research in a peri-urban village illustrated how a relationship could continue undetected for an extended period (Nuryah & Warsono, 2023). Media framing contributes to the same problem, because coverage that presents grooming as an individual scandal discourages systematic policy responses (Putri et al., 2025). Literacy in this field therefore concerns institutions and public communication as much as it concerns individual families.

Prevention Already Operating in Families and Communities

The review also identified prevention practices that operate below the national policy level. The Jambi program mentioned above improved participating adolescents' ability to recognize manipulative approaches early on, using participatory psychoeducation rather than instruction alone (Nur et al., 2026). Scholarship on prevention within an Islamic framework emphasizes open communication between parents and children and warns that rigid parenting can push a child toward attention outside the household (Ro'fah, 2023). Public education materials on recognizing grooming stress age-appropriate teaching about bodily boundaries as an early protective measure (S, 2025). These practices already express the substance of *hifz al-nasl*, although their organizers rarely describe them in those terms. Their weakness lies in coverage rather than in design, because they depend on local initiative and lack a durable policy framework.

The Child as an Object of *Ḍarūriyyāt*

The findings support reading the child as a direct object of essential interests rather than a secondary beneficiary of family law. Islamic legal theory arranges human interests into three levels, essential, complementary, and enhancing, and holds that the essential level takes precedence when interests conflict (Helim, 2019; Shidiq, 2017). Classical treatments of *hifz al-nasl* focused on lawful marriage and clear lineage. The evidence assembled here indicates that this reading is too narrow for contemporary conditions. A child who is drawn into a grooming relationship suffers damage to

psychological security, to honor, and to the prospect of a stable adult life, and all of these belong to the continuity that the principle is meant to secure (Ilhami, 2025).

This classification has practical consequences for policy design. If grooming threatens an essential interest, it cannot be treated as a matter of digital etiquette or as a topic for character education alone. It requires a structural response that engages the household, the school and the state together. The classification also widens the circle of responsibility. Where classical formulations placed the duty of protection principally on the family, the conditions described in this study distribute it across educational institutions, platform operators and public authorities (Harun et al., 2025).

Grooming Within the Typology of *Sadd al-Dharī‘ah*

The typology of *sadd al-dharī‘ah* provides a more precise account of why early intervention is justified. The doctrine distinguishes conduct by the certainty with which harm follows and authorizes prohibition where a harmful outcome is either certain or strongly presumed (Zulfikri & Faizah, 2023). Applied to grooming, the manipulation and accessibility phases fall within the category of conduct whose harmful outcome is strongly presumed rather than certain in every case. Not every adult who cultivates an inappropriate closeness with a child proceeds to exploitation. The empirical pattern documented in the literature nevertheless shows a reliable progression once the sequence has begun.

This is precisely the situation the doctrine was formulated to address. A rule that waits for certainty forfeits the opportunity to prevent, whereas a rule that acts on strong presumption preserves the interest at stake. Contemporary Indonesian scholarship has defended the same reasoning as an anticipatory method suited to new social problems (Siregar, 2023). The application proposed here extends the doctrine into a field where it has seen little use, since previous Indonesian work has concentrated on child marriage and on financial transactions (Nugroho et al., 2025).

The maxim on the priority of preventing harm supplies the second half of the argument. Where an activity combines benefit with harm, and the harm is at least as weighty, prevention takes precedence over pursuing benefit (Ibn ‘Abd al-Salām, 1997). Digital access carries genuine educational value for children, and that value is often invoked as a reason to postpone restrictive measures. The maxim does not require the value to be denied. It requires striking the balance in favor of protection when the threatened interest is essential, and the potential harm is severe. Indonesian applications of the maxim to online gaming follow the same logic (Nasution et al., 2021). Scholarship on priority-setting within legal maxims confirms that the instrument is designed for exactly this kind of weighing (Lisnawati et al., 2025).

Proportionality Across the Phases

Treating grooming as an essential-level threat does not require an identical response at every phase. The analysis indicates that harm intensity varies across the sequence, even though the process as a whole constitutes a *mafsadah*. The manipulation and

accessibility phases sit at the threshold of the essential level, because the harm they produce remains potential. The sexual context phase has entered that level fully, because the harm has become actual. A proportionate policy would therefore distinguish between measures aimed at early detection and measures aimed at punishment.

This distinction also addresses a predictable objection. Critics of early intervention argue that criminalizing preliminary conduct risks capturing innocent interaction between adults and children. The graduated reading offered here allows the objection to be met without abandoning prevention. Early phases can be addressed through mandatory reporting duties, platform design obligations, and educational programs, while criminal liability attaches at the point where a demonstrable sexual purpose emerges. The proposal aligns more closely with the established doctrine of criminal attempt than with a general offense of suspicious conduct. However, it extends further into psychological preparation than the attempt doctrine ordinarily allows.

Convergence Between *Ḥifẓ al-Nasl* and Positive Law

The findings also reveal substantial agreement between the two frameworks. Both aim to protect children's development, and both treat the child's interest as the governing consideration. Law Number 35 of 2014 adopts the best interests of the child as a foundational principle, and *maqāṣid* reasoning reaches a comparable conclusion by pursuing benefit and preventing harm (Helim, 2019). Research on integrating *maqāṣid* into Indonesian religious court practice supports the view that differences in the source of authority do not prevent convergence in substance (Suhaili, 2025). Table 3 sets out the points of agreement identified in this study.

Table 3: Points of convergence between *ḥifẓ al-nasl* and Indonesian child protection law

Element	Position under Indonesian positive law	Position under <i>ḥifẓ al-nasl</i>
Governing principle	The best interests of the child under Law No. 35 of 2014	Securing benefit and preventing harm for the coming generation
Protected interest	Physical, mental and social growth of the child	Safety, honor and continuity of the child as heir to the family
Source of authority	Legislative enactment and constitutional mandate	Revealed text as interpreted through juristic reasoning
Mode of operation	Binding obligation supported by sanction	Ethical orientation that guides drafting and interpretation
Temporal focus	Predominantly responsive to completed conduct	Anticipatory through <i>sadd al-dharī'ah</i> and the priority of preventing harm

The two frameworks are complementary rather than hierarchical. Positive law provides binding force and enforcement mechanisms that Islamic ethical reasoning cannot provide on its own. *Hifz al-nasl* supplies the orientation that shapes how protective provisions are drafted and interpreted (Ilhami, 2025). Neither framework needs to be subordinated for the relation to function. Practically, *hifz al-nasl* is most useful in the preparatory stage of legislation, where the academic justification for implementing regulations under the Sexual Violence Offenses Law is drafted.

A Three-Pillar Preventive Architecture

Bringing these strands together produces the framework shown in Figure 3. The framework places *hifz al-nasl* as the governing objective, derives two operational instruments from it, and distributes implementation across three institutional pillars.

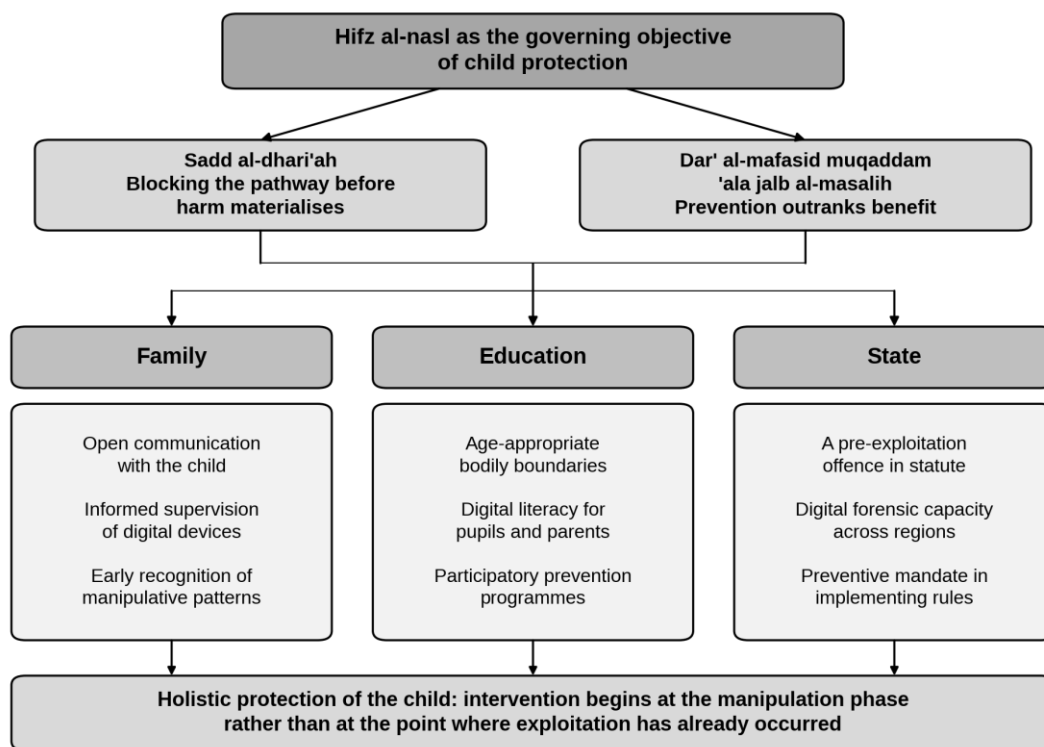


Figure 3: Three-pillar preventive architecture derived from *hifz al-nasl*

At the household level, the priority is supervision that remains informed rather than merely restrictive. The findings show that offenders deliberately work to turn off parental oversight, making the quality of that oversight decisive (Susilowati & Frans, 2024). Prevention scholarship within an Islamic framework recommends listening to children with affection and without hierarchy, on the ground that a household which closes off dialogue pushes the child toward attention elsewhere (Ro'fah, 2023). At the educational level, the priority is sustained instruction covering bodily boundaries and digital literacy for pupils and parents alike (S, 2025). Participatory models trialed in

Jambi indicate that children can be positioned as active participants in their own protection rather than passive recipients (Nur et al., 2026).

At the state level, three measures follow from the analysis. The first is the recognition of a pre-exploitation offense that captures a demonstrable course of manipulative conduct directed toward sexual purpose. The second is investment in digital forensic capacity beyond the major metropolitan police units, without which any new provision would remain unenforceable in much of the country. The third is incorporating preventive obligations into the implementing regulations of the Sexual Violence Offenses Law, so prevention receives attention comparable to prosecution.

Drafting such an offense would need to meet the ordinary requirements of legal certainty. Three elements can be derived from the analysis above and would give the provision workable boundaries. The first element is a course of conduct rather than an isolated exchange, which excludes ambiguous single interactions from the scope of liability. The second element is a demonstrable purpose directed toward sexual contact or the production of sexual material, established through the content and trajectory of the communication itself. The third element is conduct designed to conceal the relationship from the child's responsible adults, which distinguishes grooming from ordinary mentoring or friendship. Requiring all three elements would keep the provision narrow enough to withstand constitutional scrutiny while still reaching conduct current law cannot address. A duty on platform operators to preserve and disclose relevant records would give the provision the evidentiary support it requires.

Implementation Challenges and the Limits of the Argument

Two obstacles deserve candid treatment. The first obstacle facing this proposal is conceptual. Some observers will object that importing Islamic legal purposes into public policy sits uneasily with a plural constitutional order. Here, *hifz al-nasl* enters the argument as a philosophical justification rather than a directly applicable norm. Indonesian family law already accommodates religious values within a plural legal system, and the integration proposed here follows that established pattern (Suhaili, 2025). The substantive recommendations are also not distinctively religious, and comparable offenses already operate on secular grounds elsewhere. In England and Wales, section 15 of the Sexual Offenses Act 2003 criminalizes meeting or traveling to meet a child following earlier communication with that child, and section 15A, inserted in 2015, criminalizes sexual communication with a child (Sexual Offenses Act 2003). In Australia, section 474.27 of the Commonwealth Criminal Code criminalizes the use of a carriage service to groom a person under sixteen for sexual activity (Criminal Code Act 1995). These provisions show that preparatory conduct can be defined precisely enough to be prosecuted, supporting the feasibility of the offense proposed in this article.

The second obstacle is practical rather than conceptual. Programs like those evaluated in Jambi require funding, trained facilitators, and ongoing institutional support (Nur et al., 2026). Replicating across a country as large and diverse as Indonesia is a demanding undertaking. Integration into the formal curriculum offers a more durable route than reliance on project-based initiatives, although it introduces its own difficulties regarding teacher preparation.

A limitation of the argument should also be acknowledged. This study reasons from published literature and from statutory text, and it does not test whether a pre-exploitation offense would in fact reduce victimization. Jurisdictions that have adopted similar provisions offer a natural comparison, and evaluating their experience would strengthen or qualify the case here. This contribution is normative, establishing why such an offense can be justified rather than how effective it would prove.

Positioning Against Prior Research

The findings agree with prior Indonesian scholarship on the seriousness of grooming and on the inadequacy of the current regulatory position (Rufaidah, 2026; Septiarahmadani & Nur, 2026). They also agree with work connecting Islamic legal purposes to online sexual exploitation, which argues that Islamic principles complement the positive framework (Masrurroh & Mahmutarom, 2024). This article differs in its analytical strategy. Previous studies that engaged *hifz al-nasl* either applied it to different subject matter (Azzahra & Maisyaroh, 2026) or, as Asman (2025) did, embedded it within a broader framework of family resilience. This article treats the principle as the single organizing framework and traces its implications through every phase of the grooming sequence.

A second departure from earlier work is methodological. Earlier research on grooming in Indonesia has rarely used *sadd al-dharī'ah* as an explicit analytical instrument. Its application here extends a doctrine previously reserved for questions of marriage and commerce into the field of digital child protection. A third departure concerns the argument's institutional scope. Where a comparable study framed the problem largely through family responsibility, this analysis distributes obligation across the household, the school, and the state. It treats the state's preventive duty as the element most in need of reform.

Conclusion

This article set out to determine how child grooming injures the preservation of progeny and what that principle contributes to prevention and legal protection in Indonesia. The analysis establishes that grooming progressively injures *hifz al-nasl* across six connected phases, and that the injury begins when an adult redirects a relationship of trust toward a private purpose. Damage to relational trust, social boundaries, and the child's honor accumulates well before any conduct becomes

criminally cognizable. Indonesian statutes intervene only after that threshold is crossed, leaving a pre-exploitation zone where harm develops without legal response.

The principle contributes to child protection in two distinct ways. It functions diagnostically by describing grooming as a graduated process rather than a single act, allowing the earliest manipulative approach to be recognized as an injury in itself. It functions prescriptively by supplying two operational instruments. *Sadd al-dhari'ah* justifies intervention against conduct whose harmful outcome is strongly presumed, and the maxim on the priority of preventing harm establishes that protection outweighs the convenience of unrestricted digital access. Together these instruments provide a defensible basis for a pre-exploitation offense and for preventive duties directed at families, schools and public authorities.

Three implications follow directly for policy in Indonesia. Preventive obligations should be written into the implementing regulations of the Sexual Violence Offenses Law rather than left to local initiative. Digital forensic capability should be developed beyond the major metropolitan units, because enforcement capacity determines whether any new provision has practical effect. Education on bodily boundaries and digital literacy should enter the formal curriculum so protection does not depend on individual households' resources.

Further research would benefit from two extensions of this work. Comparative evaluation of jurisdictions that already criminalize preparatory conduct would test whether the normative case advanced here translates into measurable protection. An analysis through the remaining essential interests, particularly the preservation of life and intellect, would also provide a fuller account of the harm grooming inflicts. The argument presented here is one component of that larger inquiry, not its conclusion.

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