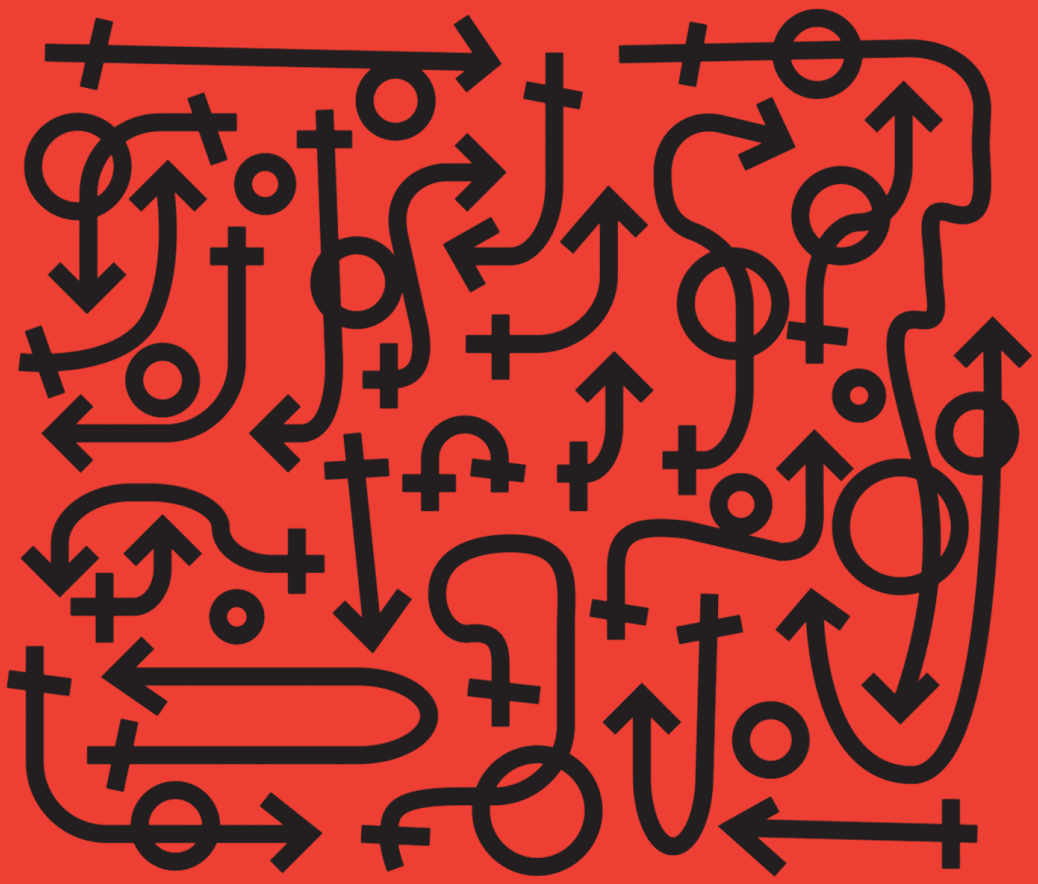
GLOBAL INFORMATION SOCIETY WATCH 2015

Sexual rights and the internet



Association for Progressive Communications (APC)
and Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)

Global Information Society Watch 2015
Sexual rights and the internet

Steering committee
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Editor
Alan Finlay

Assistant editor, publication production
Lori Nordstrom (APC)

Proofreading
Valerie Dee
Stephanie Wildes

Graphic design
Monocromo
info@monocromo.com.uy
Phone: +598 2400 1685

Cover illustration
Matías Bervejillo

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Humanist Institute for Cooperation with Developing Countries (Hivos)

Hivos

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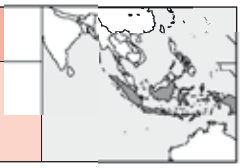
INDONESIA

SEXUALITY ONLINE: ADDRESSING THE INFORMATION NEEDS OF TEENAGERS IN INDONESIA



Center for Civic Engagement Studies
Ranggoaini Jahja
cces.or.id

Introduction

Children and adolescents between the ages of 10 and 19 make up 18% of the total population of 43 million people in Indonesia. In this age range, adolescents undergo crucial transitions, both physically and psychologically, and their need for information and knowledge about sexuality becomes very significant. Sex is a taboo theme in Indonesian society. The role of parents in guiding and educating their children on life issues is a strong part of traditional culture in Indonesia, but beyond traditional sexual roles, an exploration of sexuality is generally not a part of this conversation. Sex education is also not sufficiently available in schools, and is often considered a topic that is unhealthy and even dangerous.[1] For example, the sex education curriculum in high school is focused more on moral and religious discussions that are used as a way to control an exploration of sexuality. To understand themselves, young people need to turn elsewhere. A study conducted by UNICEF in 2014[2] stated that 80% of adolescents in the 15-19 age range access the internet. This means that the internet has become an important medium for young people accessing information and knowledge about sexuality.

A 2007 study of high school teenagers revealed that they mostly access the internet to understand the physical changes they are experiencing, rather than for information on sexuality and identity. A preference for young people to access visual information rather than text when looking for information on these changes was also observed.[3] Although these findings should be reviewed, especially after the growth in internet access, improved infrastructure and the availability of more online content generally, the study is at least a starting point in understanding how the internet addresses the information and knowledge needs of adolescents when it comes to the physical and psychological changes they are experiencing.

Given the limited exposure to information about teen sexuality, the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) movement in Indonesia offers a model for attending to this information and knowledge gap, both in print and online media. Besides HIV/AIDS prevention, they focus on content dealing with the diversity of sexual orientation and gender identity. The success of LGBTIQ organisations in Indonesia rests on the skilled use of social media, as well as on privacy and anonymity. This is how they increase their support base and offer encouragement for LGBTIQs who need it. Public campaigns combine online and offline media. These campaigns help to build alliances between like-minded groups. They also show the importance of the internet when it comes to the human rights of LGBTIQs.[4]

Policy and political background

Internet access is regarded as the "ringleader" of risky sexual behaviour amongst teenagers in Indonesia today. Since 2008 the Indonesian government has used the excuse of ease of access to sexual content online to justify blocking a number of sites that are considered "negative content". There are at least two important issues related to the regulation of internet content that surfaced in 2008, where the actions by the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology were considered an excessive use of power,[5] and remain controversial to this day. Firstly, the ministry decided that all internet content must go through filtering and could be restricted,[6]

1 Pakasi, D. T., & Kartikawati, R. (2013). *Between need and taboo: Sexuality education and reproductive health for teenagers in senior high school*. Gender and Sexuality Research Center, Faculty of Social and Political Studies, University of Indonesia. Health Series, 17(2), 79-87.

2 www.unicef.org/indonesia/id/media_22169.html

3 Nasution, N. (2007). Interpersonal communication relationships and the usage of internet for teenager sex education. Case study: Students of Bina Bangsa Sejahtera (BBS) High School Plus, Bogor Barat Regency, Kota Bogor. Study Programme of Community Development Communication, Faculty of Agriculture, Fakultas Pertanian, Institut Pertanian Bogor.

4 Alicias-Garen, M. D., & Jahja, R. (2015). *LGBT Programme Final Evaluation Report*. External Evaluation of LGBT Programme, Hivos Rosea, March 2015.

5 Djafar, W., & Abidin, Z. (2014). *Fetter expression: Case study on the filtering of internet content and the criminalisation of internet users in Indonesia*. Lembaga Studi dan Advokasi Masyarakat.

6 The regulations stipulate the blocking and filtering of specific content only, such as pornography, anti-religious content and hate speech. However, the scope of these regulations and mechanisms of appeal are not clear.

and secondly, that legal sanctions should be applied against users for the distribution of content, such as pornography, that is considered unlawful. Both issues use two legal instruments that were produced in the same year, namely Law No. 44 of 2008 on pornography and Law No. 11 of 2008 on information and electronic transactions (ITE).[7] The existence of both these instruments seemly overrides previous legislation, which was in line with the spirit of human rights, allowing, for example, freedom of expression and access to information, which is also found in the country's constitution.[8]

The practice of blocking and filtering internet content in Indonesia now works according to a blacklist of websites, as well as through reviewing public complaints.[9] The most intense period of blocking and filtering sexually explicit content by the authorities occurred in 2010, after a slew of pornographic videos of Indonesian celebrities appeared online. As a result, a number of sites that use search keywords related to sex or sexuality were blocked, including websites that fight for LGBT sexual rights in Indonesia.[10]

At the same time, the Indonesian government has made some effort to improve the quality of reproductive health education. Last year, the president issued Government Regulation No. 61 of 2014 on reproductive health. An article in the regulations makes it the government's responsibility to provide reproductive health services to young people through the provision of communication technologies and educational information. Unfortunately, the educational material produced does not explore issues such as sexual diversity and identity, or make an effort to address the issue of neglected sexual rights.

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) is an organisation that has members in 184 countries, including Indonesia. It became one of the pioneers in attending to the gaps at the policy level, and to the needs of youth in acquiring knowledge about sexual rights. An organisation that is known as the Indonesian Planned Parenthood Association (IPPA)[11] has been working in 26 provinces, covering 249 districts in Indonesia. Drawing on the spirit instilled by an IPPF declaration on sexual rights,[12] it offers information and support on reproductive health issues, including family planning and risk behaviour, but also on issues such as stigma and sexuality. Given these kinds of initiatives – and despite the restrictions on online content from the state – there is a sense that a positive space for young people to explore their sexuality online is slowly being created.

Gaps in the school syllabus: Leaving out what is important to teens

A consensus reached by the international community at the International Conference on Population and Development in Cairo in 1994[13] was that women's reproductive health is a right, and that the goals of population control should be integrated with the goal of broader social development and the reproductive health needs of women. The conference also agreed that reproductive health meant the physical, mental and social well-being of mothers, and that pregnancy should not merely be a condition monitored for the absence of diseases or disorders.[14]

Sexual and reproductive health education in schools in Indonesia is generally not taught as a subject on its own, but forms part of other subjects such as biology, physical education, health, and religious education. Research shows that the sexual and reproductive health syllabus is also not comprehensive, with learning materials focusing on the biological aspects of reproductive health (e.g. physical changes experienced and issues to do with our reproductive organs). Research also shows that a number of themes – such as the use of contraception – tend to be avoided in the discussion of reproductive health, because it is feared that discussing them would encourage teens to have sex. Other themes that are avoided included violence in relationships and in dating.[15]

The unavailability of more relevant sexual and reproductive health information that is actually needed by adolescents – such as a discussion on sex and violence – coincides with a high rate of sexual violence against children and adolescents in Indonesia. The National Commission for Child Protection received 342 reports of violence against children in the period January to April 2014 alone.[16]

7 Djafar, W., & Abidin, Z. (2014). Op. cit.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Manaf, K., et al. (2014). *Queering Internet Governance in Indonesia*. Institut Pelangi Perempuan with Association for Progressive Communications and Ford Foundation. www.genderit.org/resources/queering-internet-governance-indonesia

11 pkbi.or.id/tentang-kami/profile-pkbi

12 www.ippf.org/resource/Sexual-Rights-IPPF-declaration

13 www.unfpa.org/icpd

14 Wang, G., & Pillai, V. K. (2001). Women's Reproductive Health: A Gender-Sensitive Human Rights Approach. *Acta Sociologica*, 44(3), 231-242.

15 Pakasi, D. T., & Kartikawati. R. (2013). Op. cit.

16 https://komnaspa.wordpress.com/2013/11/20/hari-anak-universal-2013-kasus-kekerasan-anak-indonesia-melonjak

Ironically, given the lack of information on sex and violence in the syllabus, the school environment is one of the places where sexual violence against children and adolescents most frequently occurs.

As a new, interactive media, the internet becomes a space for teens to explore self-identity. A great curiosity about sexuality and the urge to explore the changes occurring in their bodies drives them into the virtual world, which they sometimes explore with a naive sense of confidence. Ross has observed that the internet offers young people the opportunity to create their own spaces, which are interactive and intimate, and allows them to explore their romantic and sexual fantasies.[17] Furthermore, Ross believes the internet is an arena where profound social experiences can occur: for instance, the internet offers an opportunity for gay teens to "come out", an opportunity previously not available to many young people. The internet allows people to explore sexual identity, by interacting with diverse kinds of content on sexuality – it contributes significantly to how teens learn about sexuality.

However, although it can be a medium that allows anonymity, many young people in Indonesia do not understand that the internet confronts them with real risks. For example, teenagers' lack of knowledge about the need for safety in surfing the web is presumed to be one of the factors that facilitates cyber bullying, frequently reported by the national media in Indonesia.[18] The problem is that online learning and exploration by young people sometimes involve openly interacting with people they may never have met before. In this way they may share personal information and images without being aware that this could make them the target of sexual violence.

Within a period of two months in 2013, for example, the National Commission for Child Protection found there were 31 cases out of a total of 83 cases of sexual violence in Jakarta and surrounding areas where the victim first interacted with the perpetrator on social networks such as Facebook.[19] Facebook was reported as being most frequently used to lure potential victims into situations where sexual violations will occur. In 2013 there were several reports in the national media of adolescent girls that had been raped by gangs who approached them on Facebook.

The phenomenon where sexual violence offenders use the internet to find their victims shows the two sides of the coin when considering the value of information and communications technologies (ICTs). For instance, there is a view that the internet offers more diverse ways for bullies to harm their victims.[20] Facebook is a relatively open network, for example, despite the fact that users have to approve friend requests. Teenagers are often tempted to add strangers – some of whom might have made-up profiles – to their list of "friends" in an attempt to demonstrate their popularity among their peers.[21]

Nevertheless, the internet is positive in that it allows a space for teens for self-representation. Various studies on the benefits of the internet concluded that online communities help individuals to build social capital. Valkenburg and Peter[22] found that many socially anxious adolescents felt the internet was valuable because it allowed them to disclose intimate details about their lives. The possibility to get advice, information or social support – through a network of relationships – is the social capital derived from the internet.

The presence of LGBT groups and those who support the diversity of sexual orientation is seen as a new wave of social movements in Indonesia. The LGBT movement is often considered among the new social movements because of its emphasis on building, asserting and carving spaces for identities to be explored, as opposed to the political and economic struggles of older social movements, such as those pushing for labour rights, or the rights of the poor.[23]

An evaluation of 12 NGOs supporting LGBT rights found that there are two orientations in the LGBT movement in Indonesia. Firstly, there are the organisations that can be described as "inward-looking/on the defensive": this is typical of LGBT communities that emphasise "coming out" in a safe context, and focus on exploring gender identity and building support groups among friends. Secondly, there are those organisations that are "outward-looking/offensive" or "strategic": this includes the few groups that would publicly define themselves as activists or human rights defenders. This second

17 Ross, M. W. (2005). Typing, Doing, and Being: Sexuality and the Internet. *The Journal of Sex Research,* 42(4), 342-352.

18 www.beritasatu.com/iptek/275905-58-anak-di-indonesia-tidak-memahami-cyber-bullying.html

19 metro.tempo.co/read/news/2013/03/19/064468019/Pelecehan-Seksual-Via-Facebook-Meningkat-Tajam

20 Miller, D. (2014). *A Study of restrospective and current cyberbullying experiences and their relationship with internet safety practices*. Doctoral dissertation, University of Hartford.

21 Ahn, J. (2011). The Effect of Social Network Sites on Adolescents' Social and Academic Development: Current Theories and Controversies. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 62(8),1435-1445.

22 Valkenburg, P. M., & Peter, J. (2007). Preadolescents' and adolescents' online communication and their closeness to friends. *Developmental Psychology*, 43(2), 267-277.

23 Alicias-Garen, M. D., & Jahja, R. (2015). Op. cit.

category also includes groups that deal with sexual and reproductive health and rights and address the practical, everyday interests of LGBTs (such as the need for work, housing and food). Although it is not the focus in this evaluation, from the interviews with the activists it is clear that the internet and social media are effective tools to campaign for change, mobilising alliances online and offline, organising action and recruiting members. The effectiveness of the internet, in particular social media, to do this did not lessen even when the government began blocking content, an action which was thought to have had a negative impact on the LGBT movement. However, the positive contribution of the internet in fighting for sexual diversity and sexual rights cannot be seen in isolation. The threats of violence against women and LGBTs occurring online and offline – and both from criminals and religious fundamentalists – plus the lack of protection from the government and police guaranteeing sexual rights, must be part of our understanding.[24]

Conclusions

The internet is a medium that offers comfort for teens exploring sexuality, especially given its capacity to answer the questions that are difficult to answer from the information sources available offline. This is also confirmed by Proudfoot,[25] who found that the internet is a key way that teenagers explore their sexuality, whether through offering answers to difficult questions or serving as a place to flirt and try out new sexual identities – something that is particularly important for gay and lesbian youth.

The LGBT movement in Indonesia responds properly to the information needs of adolescents. The stigmatisation experienced by this group has influenced the way they use the internet and social networks. They emphasise online privacy, but in a way that does not negatively impact on the space for self-expression and representation. For example, Facebook privacy settings are used effectively by LGBT activists. From this reality, the assumptions about the effectiveness of the internet and social media to build a social movement can be proved.

By supporting the LGBT movement in its demand for the right to freely and openly express itself online, adolescents will also have their information needs met when it comes to sexuality and sexual rights. The internet can be a positive medium in attending to the gaps in the educational system, which does not currently attend to the real-life needs of adolescents when it comes to sexual exploration. Fundamental to this is the struggle for freedom of expression online.

Action steps

The following advocacy steps are suggested for Indonesia:

- A discussion, involving all stakeholders, including LGBT groups, is needed on the education curriculum, and how the sex education syllabus can be revised. There is a need for a more in-depth assessment of online content on sex and sexuality, and how this is used by young people in Indonesia.
- There is also a need to assess the educational content available in the traditional media, such as newspapers and broadcast media, to understand the extent to which it supports diversity in sexual orientation. Recommendations could be made for developing content on sex and sexuality for both online and offline media.
- An educational syllabus should be developed focusing on online safety for adolescents, which explains the dangers of sexual violence and which includes technical advice on how to use the internet safely, such as the use of privacy controls.

24 UNDP. (2014). *Being LGBT in Asia: Indonesia Country Report*. Bangkok: UNDP. www.id.undp.org/content/dam/indonesia/docs/LGBT/Indonesia%20report%252c%20Final%252c%2019%20May.pdf

25 Proudfoot, S. (2011). Kids learn social skills online: Internet interaction among teens boosts self-esteem, study shows. *Edmonton Journal*.

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Sexual rights and the internet

The theme for this edition of Global Information Society Watch (GISWatch) is sexual rights and the online world. The eight thematic reports introduce the theme from different perspectives, including the global policy landscape for sexual rights and the internet, the privatisation of spaces for free expression and engagement, the need to create a feminist internet, how to think about children and their vulnerabilities online, and consent and pornography online.

These thematic reports frame the 57 country reports that follow. The topics of the country reports are diverse, ranging from the challenges and possibilities that the internet offers lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LBGTQ) communities, to the active role of religious, cultural and patriarchal establishments in suppressing sexual rights, such as same-sex marriage and the right to legal abortion, to the rights of sex workers, violence against women online, and sex education in schools. Each country report includes a list of action steps for future advocacy.

The timing of this publication is critical: many across the globe are denied their sexual rights, some facing direct persecution for their sexuality (in several countries, homosexuality is a crime). While these reports seem to indicate that the internet does help in the expression and defence of sexual rights, they also show that in some contexts this potential is under threat – whether through the active use of the internet by conservative and reactionary groups, or through threats of harassment and violence.

The reports suggest that a radical revisiting of policy, legislation and practice is needed in many contexts to protect and promote the possibilities of the internet for ensuring that sexual rights are realised all over the world.

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