

## Criminological Review Of Commercial Sex Workers Regarding The Misuse Of Michat And Prevention Efforts In The City Of Gorontalo

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### Abstract

This research aims to examine the criminological aspects of commercial sex workers regarding the misuse of MiChat and prevention efforts in Gorontalo City. The research method used is qualitative with a case study approach. The research was conducted in hotels and lodging areas in Gorontalo City. The study involved 4 Commercial Sex Workers, 1 community leader, 1 representative from the PPA unit of Gorontalo City Police, and 1 representative from the Head of the Integrated Service Unit for Women and Children Empowerment of Gorontalo City as informants. The results of the study show that: (1) Women's motives for becoming commercial sex workers in Gorontalo City are driven by economic reasons, friends, boyfriends, and husbands; (2) Commercial sex workers use the MiChat application due to the availability of a wide range of customers using their services; (3) Public reaction to the presence of commercial sex workers in Gorontalo City causes anxiety among the local community; (4) Prevention efforts by the police and the Integrated Service Unit for Women and Children Empowerment of Gorontalo City in dealing with online prostitution cases still face various obstacles and have not been implemented to their fullest potential. The conclusion of this research is that in the context of criminology, the behavior of commercial sex workers who misuse the MiChat application is driven by economic and social motives.

Keywords: Criminology, Commercial Sex Workers in Gorontalo City, MiChat Application.



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### INTRODUCTION

The prevalence of online prostitution cases through the misuse of the MiChat application in Indonesia, especially in Gorontalo City, has provided factual evidence that there has been a dynamic shift in the prostitution transaction process. Initially, prostitution transactions were conducted face-to-face with clients, but now they have shifted to electronic means. Undeniably, with the rapid advancement of technology nowadays, it has brought significant changes to human actions and behaviors. As a result, the axis of life that always follows the flow of modern times has led some segments of society to think pragmatically, seeking instant gains by engaging in activities that contradict prevailing norms. Consequently, the hope for positive development in the era is often misused by certain individuals who tend to employ technology for negative purposes, even leading to openly criminal actions that violate the law.

One form of criminal activity through the misuse of technology is reflected in a mobile application called MiChat. MiChat has been a trending application from 2020 until now. It is a communication tool released in 2018, designed to connect people with their close ones, including family, friends, and colleagues. According to Prasetyo (2019), MiChat is an online chat application that stands out with its feature to detect the distance between users. MiChat's interface, resembling a tree structure containing messages in the form of text and voice recordings, often contains content that goes against the societal norms. This is evident from deviant behaviors displayed by certain individuals engaged in commercial sex work who openly offer their services within the MiChat application. These offers may include explicit descriptions of their profiles, along with clearly stated prices (rates) for their services.

In this context, the misuse of MiChat for facilitating and promoting prostitution reflects the darker side of technology, where the convenience of communication can be exploited for illegal and harmful activities. Such behavior not only violates the norms of society but also poses serious legal and ethical issues. Authorities and platform providers need to be vigilant in addressing such criminal activities and ensuring the responsible use of technology for positive purposes. The phenomenon of the misuse of the MiChat application by commercial sex workers, particularly in Gorontalo City, reveals that both offline and online prostitution transactions have been observed through the MiChat app. During the past three years (2019, 2020, and 2021), there were no significant cases reported, meaning such cases were not found. However, in contrast, the year 2022 saw the emergence of two online prostitution cases linked to the MiChat app in Gorontalo City. Based on this data, it can be understood that cases of prostitution involving the MiChat application exist empirically.

Regarding this phenomenon, a previous research conducted by Salsabillah (2022) on "Criminological Analysis of Online Prostitution Crimes in Makassar City" showed that several factors act as the main triggers for such criminal activities. These factors include economic issues, materialistic lifestyles, family instability (broken homes), and the negative influence of technology advancements that are misused. Moreover, the suboptimal handling of law enforcement by the authorities exacerbates the situation, leading to ineffective enforcement against online prostitution perpetrators. This data and research findings highlight the importance of addressing the issue comprehensively, not only by focusing on technological misuse but also by understanding the socio-economic factors that drive individuals to engage in illegal activities. It calls for a multi-dimensional approach involving law enforcement, social support systems, and public awareness campaigns to combat online prostitution and ensure the safety and well-being of individuals involved in such activities.

The findings from the research conducted by Farhan & Nurbayan (2023) on "The Phenomenon of Online Prostitution Using the MiChat Application in Nisa Village, Woha District, Bima Regency" reveal that the main driving factor for individuals to engage in the profession is economic hardship. The profession of a sex worker can provide significant income for those in need. However, the use of the MiChat application also serves as a strategy employed by sex workers to avoid the negative stigma often associated with their profession. MiChat offers security and privacy for its users, making it easier to conduct prostitution discreetly. On a related note, another study by Praditya (2023) on "Social Media and Commercial Sex: A Study on the Use of MiChat by Adolescents in Jatibening, Bekasi City, for Ordering Commercial Sex Services" indicates that the misuse of the application is a significant factor leading to sexual crimes and human trafficking. Online prostitution practices allow perpetrators to operate covertly, making it challenging for law enforcement to detect and apprehend them.

These research findings shed light on the complexities of the issue, where economic struggles and the desire to avoid societal stigma drive individuals to use applications like MiChat for illegal activities such as online prostitution. The anonymity and ease of communication provided by technology can contribute to the perpetuation of such criminal activities. To address this, comprehensive efforts are needed to tackle the root causes of prostitution, provide support for vulnerable individuals, and enhance law enforcement's capabilities to combat online sexual exploitation and human trafficking. Public awareness campaigns and educational initiatives are also crucial to inform people about the risks and consequences of engaging in such activities and to promote a safe and responsible use of technology.

### **Definition of Criminology**

Etymologically, criminology originates from the Greek language, where "crime" and "logos". Therefore, criminology is a set of scientific knowledge that studies social phenomena that occur in society. Atmasasmita explains that the emergence of criminology as a field of study was based on the findings of Cesare Lombroso, who attempted to classify types of criminals based on atavism. Additionally, the presence of criminology as a study was also influenced by the findings of Enrico Ferri, who was a prominent figure in environmental and crime theories. As a result, in the 20th century, criminology brought about changes in the perspective of understanding criminal actions (Situmaeng, 2021). Wolfgang Savitz and Johnston stated in their book "The Sociology of Crime and Delinquency" that criminology is a collection of scientific knowledge that delves into the intricacies of criminal actions. The purpose of studying criminology is to analyze and explore the cause and effect of someone committing a crime (Martha, 2020). Furthermore, Edwin H. Sutherland stated that criminology is a compilation of knowledge related to criminal acts caused by social phenomena that occur in society (Susanti & Rahardjo, 2018).

### **Definition of Commercial Sex Worker**

Commercial Sex Worker refers to individuals who provide sexual services and actively offer themselves, either directly or indirectly. According to Munawaroh (2015), Commercial Sex Workers are individuals engaged in casual sex work that can be harmful both to themselves and the clients they serve, and their actions are legally considered to violate societal norms and laws. The term "contrary" here refers to deviant behaviors used for commercial purposes, or simply put, aiming to gain profits based on various economic motives. According to Suradjiman (1996), there are five economic motives: (1) the urge to meet basic needs and improve prosperity; (2) the drive to gain greater profits; (3) the desire to gain recognition; (4) the aspiration for power; and (5) social motivation. In the first, second, and third points, it explicitly describes that Commercial Sex Workers, from an economic motive perspective, tend to focus on gaining profits from their work. On the other hand, Commercial Sex Workers are closely related to the term "prostitution," which, according to Kartono (as cited in Munawaroh, 2015), is a form of sexual deviant activity that involves the use of strategies related to impulsive or unnatural sexual drives, exhibited through promiscuity and accompanied by the impersonal exploitation and commercialization of sex, disregarding affectionate nature either directly or through representation in the formulation, development, and creation of laws.

### **Definition of MiChat & Prostitution**

MiChat is a set of online chat applications that have the advantage of detecting the distance between people around. According to Prasetyo (2019), MiChat is an online chat application that offers unique features not found in other applications like WeChat, and it is known for its "Tender Bi Talk" service, which is closely associated with online prostitution. In the current context of the ongoing cases, it is necessary to conduct a legal study that can impose sanctions because failure to do so could lead to the downfall of a nation. According to Lickona (as cited in Yunus R, 2013), there are ten signs of a nation's downfall, and one of them is the increasing lack of clear moral guidelines among individuals and groups. Morality serves as the fundamental framework for individual behavior, akin to a strong foundation for a building, symbolizing the strength of a nation depending on the mix of values it employs. Conversely, if individuals base their morality on considering legal norms and pondering their actions, their morals will be strengthened.

Moving on to the etymology of the word "prostitution," it comes from the Latin word "prostituere," which means to allow oneself to engage in fornication, promiscuity, debauchery, and lasciviousness. The term "prostitute" refers to the adverb meaning a woman engaged in immoral acts. According to the Indonesian Dictionary (KBBI), WTS refers to a person who engages in selling oneself (promiscuity) or a prostitute. Prostitution can also be understood as an occupation in which individuals offer themselves or sell their services to the public to engage in sexual acts for an agreed-upon reward. Someone who sells sexual services is called a Commercial Sex Worker (CSW), commonly known as a sex worker. The term "prostitution" describes or explains the transaction involved in the exchange of sexual activities for payment, often involving non-married partners, and women are often victimized, becoming objects in this context (Anggraini, 2021).

### **Judicial Review of Article 27 paragraph 1 of Law Number 19 of 2016 Regarding Commercial Sex Workers Through the MiChat Application.**

In the legal provisions of Indonesia, regulations regarding crimes against morality through electronic media are specifically governed by Article 27 paragraph (1) of Law No. 19 of 2016 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions, which also applies to the use of the MiChat application. The article states: "Any person who intentionally and without right distributes and/or transmits and/or makes accessible electronic information and/or electronic documents containing content that violates morality." By systematically interpreting the Criminal Code (as a general provision), it can be understood that Article 27 paragraph (1) of the Law on Electronic Information and Transactions prohibits activities that violate moral norms conducted through electronic media. The provision states: "Any person who intentionally and without right distributes and/or transmits and/or makes accessible electronic information and/or electronic documents containing content that violates morality."

Explicitly, the use of the MiChat application by Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) to disseminate pornographic information is a violation of the Electronic Information and Transactions Law. Referring to the provision in Article 27 paragraph (1) of the Law on Electronic Information and Transactions, any person who distributes and/or transmits and/or makes accessible electronic information and/or electronic documents containing content that violates morality, with intent and without right, is considered to have committed a criminal act and can be held criminally accountable according to the criminal law, including CSWs who disseminate pornographic information.

### **RESEARCH METHODS**

In this research, a qualitative research design with a case study approach was utilized. Case study is a part of qualitative research, which is based on the philosophical foundation of Postpositivism, used to investigate the natural condition of the object (Sugiono, 2016). The research focuses on issues related to cases encountered through the MiChat application. The researcher gathered all the information obtained from several cases that were found and then proceeded to reduce the data. According to Sugiyono, data reduction is the stage in which the researcher selects valid data and eliminates ambiguous data, making it easier to focus on the problem to be addressed. The study involved 4 Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs), 1 community leader, 1 representative from the PPA unit of the Gorontalo City Police, and 1 representative from the Head of the P2TP2A Unit of Gorontalo City as informants.

### **RESULTS OF RESEARCH AND DISCUSSION**

#### **The Motives Behind Women Becoming Commercial Sex Workers**



Regarding a Criminological Review of the Motives Behind Women Becoming Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) Through MiChat and Preventive Efforts in Gorontalo City. Based on the research findings related to the sub-point of the motives behind women becoming Commercial Sex Workers, several factors were influenced: (1) Internal Motives of Commercial Sex Workers. In Gorontalo City, women choose to become Commercial Sex Workers due to dissatisfaction with their current income. This indicates a tendency to seek alternative jobs that can quickly and easily fulfill their economic needs. Women who opt to become CSWs through the MiChat application utilize the platform to promote their prostitution services; (2) External Motives of Commercial Sex Workers. The research findings from interviews on the motives behind women becoming CSWs in Gorontalo City revealed the influence or encouragement from close individuals of the CSWs themselves. The study showed a tendency for pressure from their partners, which leads them to perform their job. The interviews also revealed that some CSWs continue their work even though they are already married. Thus, deviant behaviors performed individually or jointly, such as engaging in illicit activities, fall within the context of criminology and are considered criminal acts.

Wood (in Martha, 2020) argues that motives are impulses influenced by internal and external factors that drive individuals to commit criminal acts. From a criminological perspective, crime is an action that can harm oneself personally and can have adverse effects on the public, such as the loss of comfort and tranquility in a community due to deviant behavior. On one side, criminology views crime from a sociological standpoint, meaning that crime is a psychological manifestation of individual behavior that contradicts the norms of society. Furthermore, Strain (in Widiyawati, W. 2020) states that individuals tend to engage in criminal behavior when they feel dissatisfied or frustrated with their social and economic situation and when they experience pressure from close individuals, taking the form of motivation or coercion, which leads them to think pragmatically about committing criminal acts. Thus, Strain's theory correlates with the research findings, as the motives of Commercial Sex Workers are influenced by internal and external pressures. This is why women in Gorontalo City turn to becoming Commercial Sex Workers. Therefore, when analyzed further, the behavior of women becoming CSWs in Gorontalo City, from a criminological perspective, falls under the category of criminal acts. This is consistent with the assertions in criminology (Dwiyadi, 2016; Risardi, 2020) that a criminal act, from a criminological standpoint, must have three elements: the perpetrator, the motive, and the reaction it elicits.

### **Factors Influencing Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) to Switch to Using the MiChat Application as a Means to Self-Promote for Prostitution.**

Wood (in Martha, 2020) suggests that the tendency of criminal behavior often occurs due to the presence of opportunities that support the criminal activities themselves. In this sub-point, the research findings on the factors influencing Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) to switch to using the MiChat application as a means to self-promote for prostitution will be elaborated. The factors influencing them are as follows; (1) Increased Income: Research findings from interviews with CSWs regarding promotions through the MiChat application showed significantly higher earnings compared to non-conventional promotions; (2) Broader Market Reach: Interviews revealed that CSWs promote their services on MiChat to reach a wider consumer base. This wider market reach allows potential clients to easily find their services; (3) Varied Age Interest: CSWs introduce themselves early in their promotion, sharing information such as their age, location, and status to potential clients.

Based on the discussion of factors influencing CSWs to use the MiChat application, a new understanding emerges that with MiChat, they expect greater earnings compared to non-

conventional methods. This is because the platform allows them to reach a more diverse market, including adults, teenagers, and even children who might show interest in their services. The mindset of some CSWs is "As long as there is money, we'll provide the service," which could lead to spreading explicit content that violates societal norms and exposes inappropriate content to children. Furthermore, the actions of CSWs using MiChat for their promotions not only fall under criminal behavior but also violate the Information and Electronic Transaction Law (ITE) Article 27 Paragraph 1: "Any person who intentionally and without the right distributes or transmits or makes accessible electronic information or electronic documents that violate decency." It is further strengthened by Article 45 Paragraph 1, which imposes a prison sentence of up to 6 (six) years and a fine of IDR 1,000,000,000.00 (one billion rupiahs). According to Mudzakir (in Azizah, 2020), the purpose of this law is to provide legal protection to victims who provide electronic information or documents, to prevent misuse and potential harm to victims who are vulnerable to crimes.

### **Community Response to the Presence of Online Prostitution through the MiChat Application in One of the Hotels in the Gorontalo City Area.**

Wood, (in Martha, 2020) states that reactions are attitudes that arise due to something that does not conform to the norms or rules prevailing in society. Therefore, this point of discussion focuses on classifying the reactions of the community around hotels in Gorontalo City regarding the presence of online prostitution through the MiChat application. Based on the research results, the community's reactions arise due to the behavior of commercial sex workers who promote themselves through the application. As a result, the community reacts because such actions are deemed inconsistent with the prevailing norms. The forms of the community's reactions to the criminal behavior of commercial sex workers in Gorontalo city are as follows: (1) Verbal admonishments and religious advice given to the individuals involved; (2) Some members of the community, including the informants involved in the research, respond by offering alternative job opportunities to the commercial sex workers engaged in prostitution; (3) The third form of reaction involves filing complaints or reports with the police.

Regarding the above reactions, in principle, they already encompass actions that provide social control to the community, especially to the commercial sex workers exhibiting deviant behavior. This aligns with what Durkheim described in (Faizah & Sadewo, 2015), where he introduced the concept of social facts, stating that society can influence individuals, meaning there is social control within the community that affects the interactions between individuals. Social control is defined as the ways used by society to control deviant actors and guide them back to the path deemed correct by society. In this sense, individuals' interactions are controlled by external factors, namely social control. Therefore, in the context of the community's responses around hotels in Gorontalo City, it is evident that they have shown a positive form of social control. In this context, the community has implemented unwritten social control, such as advising and admonishing individuals engaging in deviant behavior.

### **The efforts of the Gorontalo City Police (Polres Kota Gorontalo) and the P2TPA Agency in tackling cases of online prostitution through the MiChat application.**

In this section, the discussion of the research results related to the Criminological Review of Commercial Sex Workers (CSWs) in Misusing the MiChat Application in Gorontalo City will be elaborated. This includes examining the efforts made by the Gorontalo City Police (Polres Kota Gorontalo) and the P2TP2A Agency in addressing the issue. Efforts essentially refer to the actions taken to achieve a target problem that needs to be resolved. The research

findings indicate that the efforts made by the Gorontalo City Police to prevent cases of prostitution through the MiChat application have not been fully effective. Additionally, the prevention efforts carried out by the P2TP2A Agency by forming volunteers tasked with educating and socializing the dangers of misusing the MiChat application have not been fully implemented on the ground. This is due to several factors, including: (1) Lack of Awareness of the Behavior of Commercial Sex Workers. In terms of behavior, commercial sex workers who misuse the MiChat application lack moral awareness of the impacts of their actions. (2) Involvement of Certain Officials and Law Enforcement Authorities.

The Gorontalo City Police and the P2TP2A Agency have implemented pre-emptive, preventive, and repressive efforts. However, the research findings show that commercial sex workers receive protection from the owners of the hotels where the prostitution activities take place. As a result, the intention of the Gorontalo City Police to eradicate the prevalence of online prostitution in Gorontalo city is hindered due to the involvement of their own members in facilitating these prostitution activities. Based on the discussion above concerning the criminological review, it is evident that the approach of criminology is influenced by human behavior itself, as well as the influences from the social environment and the lack of control from law enforcement authorities. In line with these findings, Arief states that certain behaviors fall into the category of criminology: (1) Behavior of CSWs caused by nature (deterministic); (2) Behavior influenced by the working environment; (3) Human and environmental interaction. (Ikawati, 2019).

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research can be summarized as follows; (1) The basis for women becoming commercial sex workers in Gorontalo City is influenced by both internal and external factors. Among these factors, the dominant reasons for women to engage in commercial sex work are economic motives, the influence of their social environment, and the involvement of intimate partners such as boyfriends or husbands; (2) Commercial sex workers (CSWs) choose the MiChat application as a means for engaging in the criminal activity of prostitution due to its ability to reach a wide and varied market. This allows them to easily attract potential customers for their services; (3) Regarding online prostitution activities through the MiChat application in a hotel within the Gorontalo City area, the reactions from the community take various forms, such as verbal warnings and filing complaints or reports to the Gorontalo City Police (Polres Kota Gorontalo); (4) The efforts made by the Gorontalo City Police have not been fully effective. This is attributed to the lack of involvement of hotel and lodging owners in addressing the criminal risks and threats associated with facilitating prostitution activities. In summary, the research highlights the complexity of the issue of prostitution through the MiChat application in Gorontalo City. It involves various factors, including economic motives, social influences, market reach, and community reactions. Furthermore, it emphasizes the need for comprehensive efforts and involvement from various stakeholders, including law enforcement authorities and accommodation providers, to effectively tackle the problem of online prostitution

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