

## THE STRATEGY OF #METOO MOVEMENT TO FIGHT FOR THE RIGHTS OF THE VICTIMS OF SEXUAL HARASSMENT IN SOUTH KOREA

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### ABSTRACT

*This study discusses the adoption of the #MeToo Movement in South Korea in 2018 as one of the movements to reduce the problem of sexual harassment that still occurs in South Korea. The number of cases of sexual harassment in South Korea is still high this is due to the culture they still follow which then hinders any resolution or reduction of the number of cases of sexual harassment. This study uses a qualitative-descriptive research method, with data collection from a literature study. This study then discusses the strategies used by this movement with the aim of fighting for the rights of victims that have been taken for a long time. The results of the study found that the #MeToo Movement used a strategy of visibility and audibility in the concept of global civil society to voice the voices of victims and the aspirations of their supporters so that there would be beneficial changes for victims. The strategy of visibility and audibility is used so that their voices can be seen and heard directly by the community and the government.*

**Keywords:** #MeToo Movement, Global Civil Society, South Korea, Sexual Harassment

### ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini membahas diadopsinya gerakan #MeToo di Korea Selatan pada tahun 2018 sebagai salah satu gerakan untuk mengurangi permasalahan pelecehan seksual yang masih banyak terjadi di Korea Selatan. Angka kasus pelecehan seksual di Korea Selatan masih tinggi hal ini disebabkan oleh budaya yang masih mereka ikuti yang kemudian menghambat adanya penyelesaian atau pengurangan terhadap angka kasus pelecehan seksual. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian kualitatif-deskriptif, dengan pengumpulan data studi kepustakaan. Penelitian ini kemudian mendiskusikan bagaimana strategi yang digunakan oleh gerakan ini dengan tujuan untuk memperjuangkan hak-hak korban. Hasil penelitian menemukan Gerakan #MeToo menggunakan strategi *visibility* dan *audibility* dalam konsep global civil society untuk menyuarakan suara korban dan aspirasi para pendukung agar adanya perubahan yang menguntungkan bagi korban. Strategi *visibility* dan *audibility* digunakan agar suara mereka dapat dilihat dan didengar secara langsung oleh masyarakat maupun pemerintah.

**Kata Kunci:** Gerakan #MeToo, Global Civil Society, Korea Selatan, Pelecehan Seksual

## INTRODUCTION

This study discusses the strategies used by the #MeToo Movement in fighting for the rights of victims of sexual harassment in South Korea. The #MeToo movement was first initiated by a female activist named Tarana Burke in 2006 but this movement has not spread widely throughout the world. This movement then grew into an international movement in 2017, where in 2017 this movement was used by a Hollywood actress Alyssa Milano from the United States to reveal acts of sexual harassment that she had received from film producer Harvey Weinstein.

Milano uses this movement to reveal the acts of sexual harassment that she has received as well as invites victims out there who have experienced similar incidents to dare to voice their voices so that the community and victims can fight this act so that acts of sexual harassment do not occur continuously.

Alyssa Millano used the social media page Twitter to spread the word about this movement, where in the next few days there were 6.8 thousand replies she had received supporting the movement. The #MeToo movement then became a trending topic on various continents such as America, Europe to Asia (Dewi, 2019). The continent of Asia itself is one of the continents where the majority of the countries still adhere to a patriarchal culture, this culture is a hereditary culture that is very much embedded in their daily lives.

The #MeToo movement first entered South Korea, marked by a confession made by a young woman named Seo Ji Hyun in 2018, she told that she had received an act of sexual harassment that she received from a senior prosecutor at her place of work. However, he could not do more because the suspect is a senior prosecutor who has power and his work environment does not support victims of sexual harassment. In 2017 this movement emerged so that the incident that she had been hiding for 8 years he finally revealed to the public in the hope that this action will bring change for the suspect of sexual harassment and his victim (Hasunuma & Shin, 2019).

According to Meilanesia, South Korea is a sexist and misogynist country, because this country still adheres to a patriarchal culture which is the result of the Neo-Confucianism adopted by their ancestors. Patriarchal culture positions men as number one in a social position which then positions women below men in all aspects of life, this is one of the factors in the occurrence of sexual harassment in South Korea. Sexual harassment in South Korea occurs in various aspects of life starting from the work environment, social life, to the world of education (Meilanesia, 2021). The issue of sexual harassment has become an issue that is widely discussed and is not a new issue in South Korea. In 2019 there were 98% of cases which stated that there were cases of sexual

harassment that afflicted women in South Korea, the presentation of this case was calculated from 10,000 cases that have been recorded in the data released by the South Korean Police (Schieber, 2020).

There were as many as 100 reports by workers of being sexually harassed in their work environment, 90% of the victims stated that they were not given proper protection for a victim. As many as 64% of victims stated that the perpetrator of sexual harassment was their supervisor (Kyung-don, 2022). Sexual harassment in South Korea does not only occur in the world of work but also in the world of education. According to data collected by the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education in 2016 there was an increase in cases of 171.9% so that the recorded cases became 2,387 cases of sexual harassment that occurred within the scope of the education world in this case not only students who received acts of sexual harassment but also staff academics starting from teachers to staff (Yonhap, 2018).

Sexual harassment of course has an impact on the victims, from the psychological to the physical aspects of the victim. Psychologically the victim will experience a significant impact from this sexual harassment incident, where the victim will begin to feel ashamed and afraid of the threats given by the suspect not to report the act and ashamed of the views given by their surroundings which do not provide support but try judge the victim based on the victim's clothes to the victim's behavior in their daily lives (Fauzia W & Lestari, 2007).

Suicide cases in South Korea as many as 20% are suicides committed by victims of sexual harassment (Brent & Melhem, 2008), one of the suicide cases of victims of sexual harassment is a suicide committed by a South Korean actress and idol in 2019 named Goo Hara, she allegedly committed suicide due to depression after an intimate video with his boyfriend was shared by his boyfriend friend, and the video was taken without her consent (CNN Indonesia, 2020). In line with the above cases, the emergence of the #MeToo movement brings new hope to victims of sexual harassment in South Korea. The purpose of this research is to understand how the strategy of the #MeToo Movement is as a tool for victims in fighting for their rights that have been taken by the perpetrators of sexual harassment.

Furthermore, there are several previous studies that discuss the #MeToo Movement in South Korea, but there is no research that specifically discusses the strategies used by this movement in fighting for the rights of the victims that have been taken for a long time. As for Choo and Sukla, et.al. discusses how the impact of #Metoo's existence in South Korea in the social and political fields (Choo, 2021). Hosterman, et al. and Lee chose to discuss the existence of #MeToo through social media (Hosterman et al., 2018). Meanwhile, Shin examines #MeToo as a new

generation of feminism (Shin, 2021). Although several previous studies that have been carried out have not specifically examined the strategies used by the #MeToo Movement in South Korea, these studies have contributed to the understanding of the existence and development of the #MeToo Movement in South Korea.

To deepen the understanding related to this research, the writer uses the concept of Global Civil Society. Global Civil Society moves bottom-up as an organization, social groups such as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs), Transnational Advocacy Networks (TAN), Global Social Movement to A New Multilateralism. The Global Civil Society discusses and examines global issues that have a contemporary nature which is more concerned with the interests of mankind or universal public interest, these issues such as environmental issues and climate change, human rights, international peace, global poverty to gender equality issues (Rijal, 2021).

The strategies used by the Global Civil Society are Visibility and Audibility, Lobbying and Networking. Visibility is a strategy used to refer to actions that can be seen and felt directly by the public such as campaigns, demonstrations to content in the form of posters to newspapers, while audibility is a strategy carried out through digital content loading media such as TV, Radio and YouTube platforms. Podcasts are then distributed widely so that the public can hear them. Another strategy is Lobbying, this strategy moves by making efforts to influence the government to change a policy, while Networking is an action that requires connections between groups or other organizations within the country to cross national borders and have connections with civil society (Edelman, 2001). However, in this study the author will use the Visibility and Audibility strategies.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This study uses a qualitative-descriptive method. Descriptive research is a form of research that aims to describe a phenomenon that occurs in both natural and man-made forms which includes several problems, namely, changes, relationships, similarities, characteristics to activities (Sukmadinata & Nana Syaodih, 2017). The technique of collecting data using literature study. Data were collected from journals, books, articles, and other literature sources. The data analysis was carried out in several stages, namely data collection, data reduction, data presentation, and drawing conclusions.

Meanwhile, the object studied in this study is the strategy used by the #MeToo Movement in fighting for the rights of victims of sexual harassment in South Korea. The author uses the concept of global civil society as a framework to describe the strategies used by the #MeToo Movement in fighting for the rights of victims of sexual harassment in South Korea.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **What is #MeToo Movement?**

In 2006 a female activist named Tarana Burke initiated a movement which she later named the #MeToo Movement. He initiated this movement as a form of support for victims of sexual harassment, especially young women of color from low-income communities, so that they can find their way to recover from the incident and then have the courage to voice their voices without threats and regain their rights (*"METOO." GLOBAL MOVEMENT*, n.d.).

This movement then started its activities by providing education about sexual harassment to women so that they could understand how to prevent and how to fight against acts of sexual harassment that could be committed by perpetrators anywhere and regardless of time and environment. Tarana Burke as the initiator of this movement also not only provides support to victims and provides lessons related to sexual harassment but also tries to change the current perception in society which according to them any act of sexual harassment is the victim's fault which leads to how to dress. the victim. This movement also seeks social change with the aim that the surrounding community begins to pay attention to the victims and potential victims around them so that the number of cases of sexual harassment can decrease (Burke, 2017).

This movement was first initiated by Tarana Burke in 2006 to move slowly because at that time there were still many people who were not aware of the limitations of the media to spread this movement, but in 2017 Alyssa Milano appeared, a Hollywood actress who then used her privilege as an actress to use this movement while under the circumstances she was also a victim of the sexual harassment she received from a well-known film producer Harvey Weinstein. This movement then spread in just 24 hours, became a trending topic on the Twitter social media network to have around 40 thousand support comments and spread to other social media networks such as Instagram and Facebook. As of October 2017, approximately 2.3 million links related to this movement were uploaded in 85 countries including South Korea (Borgerding, 2017).

The #MeToo movement then became a topic of conversation that was often discussed by the public to elites and officials in various countries, this movement became a source of solidarity between fellow victims and women in society who supported victims who then had one goal, namely to fight the crime of sexual harassment. which often makes women their targets.

### **Sexual Harassment in South Korea**

The issue of sexual harassment is reported to be one of the biggest issues and a trending topic in South Korea (Widya Kumalasari & Nafiatur Rosyida, 2022). In 2019 the South Korean Prosecutor's Office stated that there were 43.5% digital sex crime cases where this case was the highest case compared to the other 27.7%, namely murder cases and then 19% were robbery cases (Ran, 2020). According to statistical data released by (L, 2022), there were 63.9% cases of sexual harassment in 2017, then in 2018 there were 62.2% and 61.9% in 2019.

According to data on cases of sexual harassment in 2020, there was an increase of 58.1%, of which 98% were attacks by men and 86% were victims of the female gender (Njoku, 2022). There were 205 reports received regarding sexual harassment that occurred between January 2021 and March 2022. A total of 100 victims of whom received acts of sexual harassment from their superiors in their workplaces. Verbal sexual harassment acts as the most frequent form of violation, around 76.1% while another 43.4% received physical sexual harassment and the remaining 6.3% received visual sexual harassment acts (Chau, 2022).

Cases of sexual harassment that occur in South Korea are not only by acts of coercion and rape, but many cases of stalkers who then make women their victims. Data released in 2016 states that if there have been 555 cases of stalking experienced by women which then increased to 297 cases in 2017 (Yonhap News, 2018), as many as 2.2% were able to report this crime (UN Committee on The Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), 2018).

According to a survey conducted by Embrain Public and Commissioned by Workplace Gapjil 119 in June 2021, 30% of 1,000 workers in South Korea stated that they had received acts of sexual harassment. These workers explained that if they were threatened by their bosses to keep their mouths shut, there were also those who stated that they were fired because they had reported sexual harassment acts they received in their work environment to (Jessie & Gawon, 2022).

This can happen because the work environment in South Korea still adheres to a patriarchal culture where the position of women is under men so that the highest position or position in a company will be occupied by men. This situation then creates a gap for the perpetrators to commit acts of sexual harassment to their subordinates, the majority of which are filled by women by threatening their careers. Only 22% of victims dared to make a report regarding this act of sexual harassment, another 78% of victims chose to remain silent for fear of threats given by the perpetrators (Se-Yung, 2019).

The Korean Film Council (KOFIC) conducted a survey in the surroundings of the South Korean entertainment industry to see if there were any acts of sexual harassment taking place within this entertainment industry. This survey then stated that as many as 10% of workers in the

entertainment industry had experienced acts of forced sexual harassment that they did not expect, then 20% of workers claimed to have experienced acts of coercion to have sexual contact they did not want (Sun-Hee, 2018).

The National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK) conducted a survey with student correspondents at the high school level in South Korea with a total of 814 female students. This survey resulted that 40.9% stated that these students believed that there was indeed an act of sexual harassment in the school environment, another 27.7% stated that they were victims of sexual harassment in the school environment (National Human Rights Commission of Korea (NHRCK), 2018).

The perpetrators of sexual harassment have loopholes in the protection of the justice system in South Korea. This protection is based on The South Korea Criminal Code Article 10 Paragraph 2 of South Korea, in this article it is written that the perpetrator can apply for a reduced sentence if it is proven that he has a mental disorder condition so that he cannot distinguish objects, people and the environment so that they commit sexual harassment in unfavorable circumstances. aware. In addition, perpetrators can receive a reduced sentence if they are proven to have sexually harassed under the influence of alcohol (Evelyn & Melody, 2019).

### **Strategy of the #MeToo Movement in South Korea**

The #MeToo movement is a manifestation of the Global Civil Society, where this movement fights for the public interest related to women's issues in this world, one of which is sexual harassment. This movement moves by connecting or interacting with one another across national borders. This movement is free and is not part of the government or the state's political affairs and economic interests of companies or individuals. Actors in this movement are voluntary where this volunteerism is driven by full awareness and public awareness of the issues of sexual harassment that occur (Aart Scholte, 1999).

To achieve their goals, this movement uses one of the strategies in the Global Civil Society, namely Visibility and Audibility, referring to the visible so that they can be seen and the audible can be heard. Visibility strategy can be done by conducting demonstrations, creating campaigns, publishing through print media such as posters, newspapers to brochures, besides that it can be done through social media. While audibility can be done using several audio-visual instruments, one of which is radio, television channels, to videos and so on with the aim of being heard by the general public (Rijal & Anggraheni, 2019).

## 1) Visibility

The visibility strategy is one of the strategies used by the #MeToo movement by gathering people to hold demonstrations or demonstrations together in order to demand justice for victims and voice the voices of victims of sexual harassment. On February 5, 2018, women of solidarity who supported Seo Ji Hyun gathered in front of the Changwon District Prosecutors' Office Tongyeong Branch. This activity was held with the aim of showing their support for victims of sexual harassment that occurred within the scope of the prosecutor's office and providing support to the #MeToo Movement, in addition to this activity as a form of protest against the perpetrators of sexual harassment. This activity was attended by around 100 people from around 15 civic groups, one of which was the Tongyeong YWCA civic group (Sarah et al., 2018).

The South Korean trade union confederation containing hundreds of women staged a demonstration in the name of the #MeToo movement, this demonstration took place on March 4, 2018 which was held at Gwanghwamun Square in Jongno-gu, Seoul City carrying slogans that read #MeToo, #WithYou, to "Feminism Will Save Our Country". This demonstration was held as a form of support for the victims, and as an invitation to the victims out there who still do not have the courage to voice their voices. In line with that, the Minister of Gender Equality and Family (MOGEF) Chung Hyun-Bak stated that the ministry gave their support and appreciation for the #MeToo Movement which has entered the sphere of South Korean society (Soo Hyun, 2018).

Citizen's Action to Support The MeToo Movement is a group that participated in holding a press conference on March 15, 2018, this activity was attended by 337 women from civil society, the Federation of Korean Women's Organizations, the Federation of Korean Trade Unions, the Federation of Environmental Movements, and the Lawyers' Association. for the Democratic Society. This Press Conference seeks to increase the interest and awareness of the public and the government regarding cases of sexual harassment that occurred in South Korea, besides that this activity aims to demand changes to several existing laws related to sexual harassment in which this existing law more or less unfavorable to the victims and likely to benefit the perpetrators.

On March 22 to 23, the #MeToo Movement organized an activity with the aim of being a place for victims to voice their voices and the unpleasant experiences they have been hiding for so long. This event lasted for 2018 minutes, this was done as a symbol of where this movement entered South Korea, namely in 2018. Participants were dominated by women, they then began to tell how they received acts of sexual harassment in turn. This activity not only focuses on being a forum for voicing the voices of the victims, but also focuses on providing support and strength for victims

out there who still don't have the courage to voice their voices and are still afraid of the threats posed by the perpetrators to them.

This activity does not only stop at the activities that take place on March 22 and 23, but there are 5 other activities, namely those held on April 7, followed by April 21, then the next activity was carried out on May 17. The fourth activity was held on August 18 two months later, the difference is that in this activity this demonstration activity was carried out in addition to providing support and demanding changes. This activity was also aimed at overseeing the trial of the case of a ChungCheong Province Governor An Hee Jung. An Hee Jung is one of the officials who has been dragged into sexual harassment cases since the entry of the #MeToo Movement into South Korea. The last demonstration activity was carried out on December 1, 2018, this demonstration was attended by approximately 20,000 people (So-Bum, 2018).

A demonstration attended by as many as 70,000 women held in the middle of Seoul City took place on August 4, 2018. This activity took place as an expression of their protest against the increasing number of sexual harassment in South Korea. Where in this case many women are victims of sexual harassment not only verbally and physically but indirectly by the many hidden cameras located in public facilities such as changing rooms and public toilets. They took part in this protest activity with the aim of demanding harsh penalties for the perpetrators who made, distributed or sold, to the buyers of the video from the hidden camera. The demonstrators came down carrying several slogans that read "My life is not your porn" (Eun-gong & Sullivan, 2018).

## **2) Audibility**

The #MeToo movement utilizes several audio-based media such as television, radio and the YouTube platform. This is intended so that the voices and aspirations of victims and activists of justice for victims of sexual harassment can be heard by the general public and can be accessed easily. The beginning of this movement spread throughout the world also because of the confessional tweets made by Alyssa Milano on her social media Twitter page. This also applies in South Korea where the beginning of the entry of this movement was marked by an interview conducted by female prosecutor Seo Ji Hyun on JTBC television (JTBC News, 2018a). Seo Ji Hyun also did an interview with Time Magazine 3 years ago which was then uploaded to Time magazine's YouTube channel under the title "Seo Ji Hyun, The South Korean Prosecutor Who Spoke Up and Sparked The Country's MeToo Movement" talking about how from the start he enters his work environment as a prosecutor he has received inappropriate actions like a female prosecutor will not

last long or he will only receive praise "you did a good job like a male prosecutor" after successfully completing his work.

Seo Ji Hyun in her interview said that at first she felt that the act of sexual harassment she received was her fault. This thought continued to be present in her head for 8 years, until finally she saw the MeToo campaign that was being discussed in Hollywood because of the confession made by Actress Alyssa. Milano and then he began to feel that even a Hollywood actress also received acts of sexual harassment. So he feels that the act of sexual harassment that he has received so far is not his fault, but it is purely the fault of the perpetrator of the sexual harassment. The existence of this #MeToo movement then raised a sense of confidence in him to be honest and dare to speak out to the community and then invite other victims to start having the courage to voice their voices as a victim whose rights are threatened to the community.

She also stated that even though after 8 months of the interview he conducted with the JTBC TV station in order to reveal the acts of harassment that he had received, the legal and constitutional conditions had not changed much, but with the #MeToo movement he was sure that there would be changes starting with the victims who died. begin to dare to report to the obligatory party and begin to be able to fight the acts of harassment that they will receive and raise awareness for the surrounding community if sexual harassment can occur anywhere and is carried out by anyone where the incident is not the victim's fault (TIME, 2018).

JTBC not only conducted interviews with Seo Ji Hyun, but this South Korean national television channel also conducted interviews with several other victims, namely Governor An Hee Jung's secretary named Kim Ji-eun (JTBC News, 2018b) and Choi Young-mi an artist. who reported the famous poet Ko Un regarding the sexual harassment he had received (JTBC News, 2018c). The #MeToo movement then began to dominate news on several television channels, so many television channels began to make programs related to sexual harassment which then invited several victims to come forward and appear on the program to conduct interviews and voice their aspirations regarding their hopes after the emergence of the movement. this is the case of sexual harassment in South Korea.

This movement then spreads their movement not only through television but also through video uploads on YouTube such as the video with the title "MeToo Movement Accelerating in Koreans Culture Industry" which was uploaded by a YouTube channel under the name Arirang News (Arirang News, 2018a) and then a lot of news related to this movement on YouTube channels such as videos uploaded by KBS News with the title "Korean's MeToo Movement" (KBS News, 2018), "MeToo Movement Reshaping Roots of Korean Society" from the Arirang News

channel (Arirang News, 2018b) to videos with the title “How Feminist in South Korea Paved The Way for The MeToo” uploaded by the Quartz YouTube channel (Quartz, 2018). There were even some interviews conducted with some Korean people related to this movement, such as an interview conducted by the Asian Boss YouTube channel where in the video they asked several male and female netizens regarding their opinions on this movement, most of them supported this movement and hoped that there would be significant change for the victims (ASIAN BOSS, 2018).

In addition, there is a video uploaded on YouTube by someone who works in the field of Psychology. The video he uploaded contains a campaign that emphasizes more on how the impact received by the victims, especially the impact on the psychological condition of the victim, so that victims are strongly encouraged to receive or do counseling. This psychology campaign video was uploaded by The Herald Story account on April 14, 2018 using the title "The Shocking things that brain of Sexual Violence Positively Pick Up Me Too psychology" (The Herald Story, 2018).

## **CONCLUSION**

The existence of gender inequality in South Korea is one of the main factors in cases of sexual harassment in South Korea, so that perpetrators of sexual harassment often make women their victims. Then this act of sexual harassment will be considered as a normal thing because it is often done consciously or unconsciously. This happens because the patriarchal culture is still attached to the daily life of the South Korean people. The victim is forced to accept and allow the sexual harassment act she has received, because if the victim reports the sexual harassment act she has received, they are considered to be able to disrupt the dynamics of their community environment. So that the formation of passive silence in women victims of sexual harassment, they cannot voice their voices to guide justice for their rights as victims. The emergence of this #MeToo movement with the aim of changing or forming a new character in women victims of sexual harassment so that they dare to voice their voices to get their rights back. In addition, this movement aims to change the perspective of men towards women, if women are social beings like men and so have the same rights as social beings in everyday social life.

The strategy used by this movement is in the form of a visibility strategy that can be done through demonstrations because this strategy aims to be seen directly and easily which is then addressed to the general public to the government. Another strategy used by this movement is the audibility strategy, which can be done using audio media such as television, radio, to videos uploaded on the YouTube platform. The use of these two strategies is intended so that this movement can cover the target, namely the victims who are still silent, the general public so that it

can spread widely to the government and elite officials in power so that there are policy changes that are expected to change and support the victims.

The results of this research will then contribute to a global study of civil society related to the strategy of a movement in fighting for the public interest. This research contributes to the study of the problem of sexual harassment, where this problem is a global phenomenon that is contemporary and occurs in many countries. This research provides a new perspective regarding South Korea, which so far has only been discussed in terms of technological developments, economic progress, to the glittering popular culture or Hallyu Wave.

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