Gov't to block teenagers from using certain random chat apps

Random chat applications that don't identify the user and save chat histories will be banned from being installed on teenagers' smartphones in South Korea, the government said Wednesday.

The Ministry of Gender Equality and Family said it is planning to designate applications that provide free online chat services among strangers as "harmful to youths."

Under the plan, underage people can use online chatroom apps only when they have technical functions that identify the user, save conversations and report illegal activities.
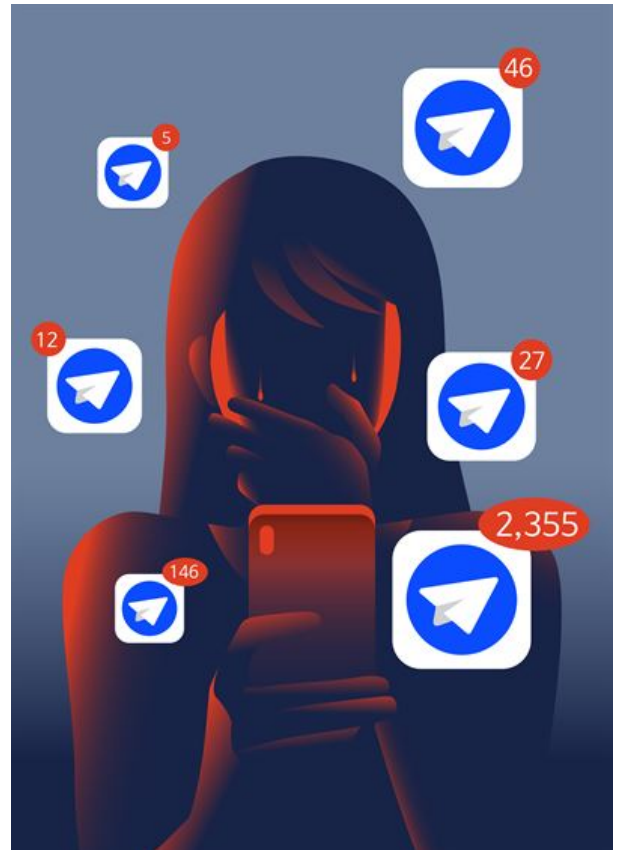
The move is part of the government's follow-up measures after a high-profile online sexual exploitation case rocked the nation.

Dozens of victims, including more than 10 underage girls, were coerced by several perpetrators into performing gruesome sex acts and sharing the videos in pay-to-view chat rooms of the mobile messaging app Telegram.

Gettyimagesbank

According to ministry data, only 13.3 percent of 346 chat apps operating in South Korea require their users to identify themselves. Out of the total, 72.8 percent offer backup services and 55.8 percent reporting services.

"Those random chat apps have been widely used for digital sex crimes involving minors," the ministry said. "We are planning to create a safer online environment for teenagers."

The ministry said the designation is expected to take effect in the second half of the year after gathering opinions. And then, a three-month grace period will be given to app operators. (Yonhap)