

Criminalization Policy for Child Sexual Offenses from the Perspective of Child Protection in Indonesia

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Article History:

Received 27 October 2025

1st Revision 29 October 2025

2nd Revision 30 October 2025

3rd Revision 04 November 2025

Accepted on 06 November 2025

Abstract

Purpose: This study aims to analyze the criminal law policy against perpetrators of child sexual intercourse and legal protection efforts for victims based on the best interests of children in the Indonesian criminal system.

Methodology: This research uses a normative legal method with a descriptive-analytical approach, using primary legal materials (Law No. 35 of 2014, Criminal Code, court decisions) and secondary (literature, journals), with analysis through statutory interpretation and content analysis.

Results: Criminal law policies have been implemented in a formulative, applicative, and executive manner with preventive, repressive, and rehabilitative child protection, but their effectiveness is still hampered by structural and cultural constraints and limited child-friendly facilities.

Conclusions: Criminal law policies regarding perpetrators of child sexual intercourse are comprehensive but not yet optimal; synergy between penal and non-penal approaches, regulatory reforms, and increased capacity of officials and public awareness are needed to achieve fair and child-friendly justice.

Limitations: The research is normative in nature, so it does not reflect actual field conditions or the implementation of legal policies in practice, nor does it include comparison with other legal systems. Therefore, the findings are limited to conceptual and doctrinal analysis and require further empirical study.

Contributions: This research strengthens the study of child protection-based criminal law and emphasizes the importance of criminal law reform towards a child-friendly justice system that focuses on the best interests of children.

Keywords: *Best Interest of the Child, Child Sexual Intercourse, Child Protection, Criminal Justice System, Criminal Law Policy*

How to Cite: Togatorop, D. T. (2026). Criminalization Policy for Child Sexual Offenses from the Perspective of Child Protection in Indonesia. *Jurnal Ilmiah Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia*, 6(1), 33-40.

1. Introduction

According to [Saputri, Wahyuni, and Muhsin \(2024\)](#), children not only contribute significantly to a country's wealth and legal system, but as members of the younger generation, they also strategically carry forward the nation's principles. Under national law, a person is considered a child if they have not yet reached the legal age of majority. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that, unless a country's laws specify otherwise, every person under the age of eighteen is considered a child [Fathonah, Kusworo, and Fauzi \(2022\)](#). Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection is one of many Indonesian laws that reflect this provision; the law defines a child as any person under the age of 18, including a fetus in the womb ([Nurmala & Hanapi, 2023](#)). In this era of rapid social change and technological advancement, children are highly vulnerable to various types of crime, including the morally reprehensible practice of sexual relations with minors. In sexual intercourse, the male partner's genitalia penetrate the female partner's genitalia and ejaculate semen, just as in marital relations. This type of interaction is known as sexual intercourse ([Willis & Smith, 2022](#)). According to [Dachi \(2023\)](#),

the term “*setubuh*” can describe various human relationships, including sexual relations between partners, intimate relationships, and physical contact. Engaging in sexual relations is a morally significant act. A legal dictionary defines ‘morality’ as “speech, behavior, or anything related to standards of decency that must be protected by law to maintain social order and morality.” (Laowo & Dakhi, 2022; Pradana, 2022).

Because of its profound impact on the physical health, mental well-being, social networks, and sense of morality of the victims, sexual violence against minors is considered a particularly heinous form of sexual crime. Trauma, developmental difficulties, and a sense of insecurity are some of its long-term effects (Rahayu, Susilowaati, & Andri, 2025). Coercing a child into sexual behavior whether through viewing, touching, pressuring, abuse, or rape is often considered sexual violence against a minor. An adult who coerces a child into engaging in sexual behavior, even if it is merely viewing their private parts, is committing an act of sexual violence according to the definition of rape accepted by society. (Bautista & Libdan Jr, 2025; Fachri, Hidjza, & Abbas, 2023).

Article 81 (2) of Law No. 35 of 2014 Amending Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection sets forth criminal penalties for the crime of sexual intercourse with a child. The article states: “*The criminal provisions referred to in paragraph (1) also apply to any person who intentionally uses deception, a series of lies, or persuasion to induce a child to engage in sexual intercourse with him or her or with another person.*” According to Farida and Natsir (2024), the purpose of this regulation is to ensure that children who are the future of our country are protected and valued (Hakbari, 2024; Hasyimzum, 2021).

From a criminological perspective, the goal of child protection in Indonesia is to raise children who are virtuous, of noble character, and successful by ensuring that every child has the opportunity to live, grow, and participate in society in accordance with their human dignity, free from violence and discrimination. One way to secure the nation’s future is by ensuring that children are protected by law. Guaranteeing legal protection for children encompasses all regulations and provisions related to their rights. Protecting children is of the utmost importance because they are an integral part of society, regardless of their physical or mental limitations (Jehalut & Fallo, 2023).

Criminal law regulations concerning perpetrators of sexual relations with children and victims’ access to legal protection are the focus of this study, which makes a significant contribution to this field. Unlike previous studies, which generally focused solely on normative aspects or criminal sanctions, this study highlights the effectiveness of the implementation of criminal law policies in practice and their integration with the principle of the best interests of the child within the Indonesian criminal justice system. Thus, this study fills a research gap the lack of a comprehensive, applied analysis linking legal, policy, and child victim protection dimensions. In addition to contributing to the strengthening of policies and public awareness, this study is also expected to promote a more child-friendly reform of the criminal justice system. Furthermore, this study introduces an integrative approach between penal policy and the principles of child protection. The following research questions will be examined based on the topics and title outlined:

1. What is the nature and implementation of criminal law policies regarding perpetrators of sexual intercourse with minors in Indonesia?
2. What measures are in place to provide legal protection for children who are victims of sexual intercourse with a minor under the Indonesian criminal justice system?

2. Literature Review

2.1 Definition of a Child and Child Protection

According to Sianipar, Wasliyati, and Prasetyasari (2024), children are a trust from God Almighty that must always be safeguarded. This is because children possess inherent human rights, dignity, and worth. Every individual who has not yet reached adulthood, including those still in the womb, is considered a child under the provisions of Law No. 35 of 2014, which amends Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection (Umar & Basyarudin, 2025). Moreover, children are a gift from God, but they also play a vital role as future leaders of the nation, citizens, and representatives of the people. The future of a

nation's economy, education, politics, and culture is shaped by the quality of its children ([Kabnani, Medan, & Leo, 2025](#); [Sasmito, 2024](#)).

Children are a valuable resource because they have the potential to shape society and lead in the future. Therefore, young people need special attention so that we can develop resilient and outstanding human resources. According to [Sarumaha \(2023\)](#), to anticipate any issues related to child development, a legislative framework is necessary. When it comes to the protection of human rights, children have the same rights as everyone else, including rights that are inherent from birth ([Siregar, Monica, & Susanti, 2024](#)). Children cannot grow and develop into well-rounded individuals if they do not have these rights. According to [Hartono, Hasan, and Virnanda \(2024\)](#), prejudice arises when children's rights are not fulfilled.

The goal of child protection is to ensure that every child has the opportunity to develop physically, psychologically, and socially in an environment that fosters their full potential ([Fithri, 2017](#)). Given that children are the future of the nation its builders and architects child protection has become an issue that will never lose its relevance. [Umar and Basyarudin \(2025\)](#) believes that protecting children involves more than simply guaranteeing their basic rights; child protection also encompasses the development of their full potential as human resources and the promotion of their material and spiritual well-being in accordance with the principles of Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution. Child protection encompasses a wide range of activities, from safeguarding children's physical and mental health to ensuring they have the resources needed to develop socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Its primary goal is to foster a generation of Indonesians who are ready to contribute to the nation's progress toward its development goals ([Fithri, 2017](#)).

2.2 Overview of the Criminal Offense of Sexual Intercourse

Any action that does not conform to prevailing social standards and poses a serious threat to those values is considered criminal in nature. According to [Hamdiyah \(2024\)](#), such deviant behavior represents a social and humanitarian issue as it may affect both individuals and society at large. Simons further explains that a criminal act consists of both objective and subjective elements ([Heni Siswanto & Siswanto, 2022](#)). The objective elements include the actions of a person, the observable consequences of those actions, and the specific circumstances accompanying the act. Meanwhile, the subjective elements refer to the capacity of a person to bear responsibility and the presence of fault or culpability.

The union of the two sexes and the release of ejaculate are among the definitions of sexual intercourse. There are two main categories of sexual intercourse: formal and casual. A woman's consent to engage in sexual intercourse, the absence of a romantic relationship with another man, and the existence of a legally binding marital bond all contribute to the legality of sexual intercourse. According to [Mniber \(2021\)](#), sexual relations can be considered informal and even illegal if these principles are not upheld. Sexual assault, often referred to as rape, occurs when one person forces another to engage in sexual contact through threats, pressure, or other forms of coercion ([Dachi, 2023](#)).

3. Methodology

Both the theory and methodology of this research are based on a normative legal framework. The objective of normative legal research is to identify the legal standards set forth in laws and regulations. The two main categories of legal documents are primary and secondary sources. The primary sources of legislation are the *Kitab Undang-Undang Hukum Pidana* (KUHP) and related laws and regulations, such as Law No. 35 of 2014 amending Law No. 23 of 2002, which governs child protection. The analysis was conducted through systematic interpretation (interrelationships between regulations), comparative analysis (comparison of similar cases), and teleological analysis (the purpose of child protection), and was supported by a content analysis of court decisions to assess the consistency of the application of the principle of the best interests of the child. This analysis of the criteria is supported by secondary legal sources such as scholarly articles, professional journals, and legal experts' perspectives. The data collected for this study will be analyzed using a descriptive-analytical approach. This approach examines the provisions of the law and describes the implementation of these rules and regulations including their strengths and weaknesses from both legal and non-legal perspectives. This study

employs statutory interpretation to interpret the provisions of positive law regarding human trafficking and content analysis to examine court decisions and related legal documents. The combination of these two methods provides a comprehensive understanding of the normative and practical aspects of law enforcement regarding human trafficking in Indonesia.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Forms and Implementation of Criminal Law Policies Against Perpetrators of Sexual Intercourse with Minors in Indonesia

The goal of criminal justice policy is to reform criminal law so that it aligns with society's objectives for effective crime control. The first step in developing an effective criminal justice policy is to assess the current situation and make informed decisions about how to address it ([Al Riyadh, Suseno, & Ramadhani, 2024](#)). The two main components of criminal law policy regarding sexual offenses against children are formulative policy which involves the formulation of regulations and applicative policy which involves law enforcement as well as executive policy which involves the enforcement of criminal judgments. In its formulative policy, the state has established strict provisions in Article 81, paragraphs (1) and (2), of Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection. These provisions stipulate that any person may be sentenced to imprisonment for a minimum of five years and a maximum of fifteen years, as well as a fine of up to IDR 5,000,000,000 (five billion rupiah). By classifying the sexual exploitation of minors in any manner, form, or guise as a criminal offense, these provisions demonstrate a clear focus on child protection. Thus, formal criminal law policy serves as a deterrent to potential offenders by threatening them with severe and punitive penalties, thereby reducing the likelihood of future crimes.

Law enforcement officials, public prosecutors, courts, and correctional institutions work together as part of the criminal justice system to punish perpetrators of sexual relations with children. The chain of command in law enforcement begins with police investigations to gather evidence, continues with prosecution by public prosecutors, and ultimately concludes with a judge's ruling. In practice, judges consider various factors, including legal factors such as whether the crime meets the requirements outlined in Article 81 of the Child Protection Act as well as sociological and criminological factors, such as the perpetrator's motivation, degree of culpability, the victim's age, psychological impact, and the best interests of the child. For example, in several court rulings, perpetrators who engaged in sexual intercourse with a child by luring them through social media were sentenced to severe penalties because they were deemed to have used modern methods that deceived the victim in the digital space, thereby demonstrating the adaptive development of criminal law policies toward new forms of crime involving information technology.

However, in the implementation of these criminal laws, a number of structural and cultural obstacles still exist. From a structural perspective, obstacles often arise due to weak coordination among law enforcement agencies, the limited capacity of investigators to handle technology-based cases, and the lack of specialized examination facilities for child victims. Meanwhile, from a cultural perspective, society often holds biased views toward victims, viewing such acts as a family disgrace, or even blaming the victim for their choice of clothing or social behavior. This situation results in many cases going unreported or being resolved through informal family channels. In this context, criminal law policies have not been fully effective because repressive approaches have not been balanced with preventive and educational measures capable of changing the social paradigm regarding sexual violence against children. Criminal law must be complemented by moral education, digital literacy, and parental supervision of children's social media use.

Furthermore, it is important to consider the protection of children as victims when drafting criminal laws regarding perpetrators of sexual violence against children. As stipulated in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and incorporated into Indonesian law, the concept of the best interests of the child mandates that all law enforcement procedures must prioritize the best interests of child victims. Children have the right to be free from stigma, to receive legal and psychiatric assistance, and to provide information freely without feeling pressured. In practice, the application of this principle is often neglected because not all law enforcement officials have a child protection perspective. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the capacity of law enforcement officials through training based on the child

protection system, as well as the establishment of integrated service units at every level of the judicial system so that legal proceedings do not exacerbate the psychological condition of the victims.

There is a strong and comprehensive legal foundation for Indonesia's criminal justice strategy targeting those who engage in sexual relations with children. However, the effectiveness of its implementation still depends heavily on consistent law enforcement, the professionalism of law enforcement officials, and social support from the community. Therefore, an ideal criminal justice policy in this context should not only emphasize repressive measures such as imposing severe penalties on perpetrators but must also be integrated with preventive and rehabilitative policies that prioritize the interests of child victims. Future legislative changes must prioritize restorative justice strategies that restore the victims' dignity while increasing the deterrent effect on perpetrators, create a juvenile criminal justice system that is truly sensitive to issues of sexual violence, and strengthen penalties for repeat offenders. In this way, criminal law policies can function optimally in upholding justice while ensuring the protection of children as the nation's future generation.

4.2 Legal Protection Measures for Child Victims of Sexual Assault by Minors in the Indonesian Criminal Justice System?

Satijipto Raharjo argues that legal protection is the process of restoring the community's ability to fully exercise its legal rights by ensuring that its members can recover from human rights violations. Meanwhile, CST Kansil states that law enforcement officials have an obligation to ensure the physical and emotional safety of the community by taking a number of steps required by law ([Rahmat, Adhyaksa, & Fathanudien, 2021](#)). Efforts to provide legal protection for child victims of statutory rape within the Indonesian criminal justice system are rooted in the principle of "the best interests of the child," which prioritizes the child's interests at every stage of the legal process. In this context, legal protection is not merely defined as the imposition of sanctions on perpetrators but also encompasses preventive, repressive, and rehabilitative measures. Preventive protection is realized through legal policies establishing prohibitions and criminal penalties for the crime of child sexual abuse, as stipulated in Article 81 of Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection. This policy demonstrates the state's commitment to protecting the dignity and integrity of children from sexual exploitation. Meanwhile, repressive protection is realized through the enforcement of the law against perpetrators via a fair criminal justice process that prioritizes the victim. At this level, the role of law enforcement officials such as investigators, prosecutors, and judges is crucial in ensuring that the judicial process upholds the rights of children as victims.

In practice, Indonesia's criminal justice system has incorporated several legal instruments aimed at protecting child victims. Law No. 11 of 2012 on the *Sistem Peradilan Pidana Anak* (SPPA), in addition to specifically regulating children in conflict with the law, also influences the treatment of child victims by emphasizing the principles of nondiscrimination and respect for the dignity and worth of children. Furthermore, Government Regulation No. 43 of 2017 on the Implementation of Restitution for Child Victims of Criminal Offenses provides a legal basis for child victims to receive compensation for the physical, psychological, and economic suffering caused by the crime of sexual intercourse. This restitution mechanism is a form of restorative justice intended to help restore the victims' well-being not only materially but also morally and socially. At the institutional level, *Lembaga Perlindungan Saksi dan Korban* (LPSK) serves as a crucial mechanism that provides physical protection, medical and psychological assistance, and legal aid to child victims throughout the judicial process.

Furthermore, legal protection is also provided in the form of special treatment for child victims during the criminal justice process. Under Article 64 of Law No. 35 of 2014, child victims are entitled to confidentiality, psychological support, and humane treatment throughout the legal process. Examination procedures must also take the child's mental health into account, involving professional social workers or child psychologists. The goal is to ensure that the judicial process does not cause further trauma to the child victim. In practice, a number of courts have implemented special child-friendly examination rooms, where children are examined without pressure, without direct contact with the perpetrator, and accompanied by a psychologist and a child advocate. This approach reflects a paradigm shift in Indonesian criminal law from retributive justice to restorative justice, which

emphasizes the restoration and protection of victims' rights, rather than merely punishing the perpetrator.

However, the effectiveness of legal protection efforts for child victims of sexual intercourse still faces several obstacles. These obstacles include weak coordination among law enforcement agencies, a limited number of personnel with expertise in child psychology, and a lack of child-friendly facilities and infrastructure within the judicial system. Furthermore, patriarchal culture and social stigma against victims of sexual violence often hinder case reporting, leading many victims to remain silent or withdraw their reports due to social pressure. Public education, training for police officers, and stronger community involvement in child protection are components of a socio-legal strategy that must accompany efforts to strengthen normative and institutional frameworks. Therefore, creating a fair and compassionate legal framework to protect child victims of sexual abuse is everyone's responsibility not just the state's.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

Based on the principles of child protection as stipulated in Law Number 35 of 2014 and related regulations, the study results show that criminal law policy in Indonesia for perpetrators of sexual relations with children is based on these principles. The policy is implemented through three interrelated stages: formulation, application, and implementation. The fundamental premise of preventive, restrictive, and rehabilitative therapy is the best interest of the child. It was found that the effectiveness of policy implementation is still constrained by structural, cultural, and institutional factors, so that increased public awareness, strengthening the capacity of law enforcement officers, and a more child-friendly legal environment are needed. This study confirms the importance of balancing penal and non-penal approaches in criminal law policy in order to realize justice, utility, and legal certainty. The novelty of this study lies in the integrative analysis between the normative and applicative dimensions of criminal law policy with the principle of the best interests of the child, which has not been widely studied in previous studies.

5.2 Research Limitations

Several limitations need to be addressed in this study. First, this study focuses more on legal studies rather than providing an empirical description of how criminal law policy is actually implemented against perpetrators of sexual abuse of children. This is because this study is normative and legal in nature. Second, this study does not compare Indonesian criminal law policy with the legal systems of other countries related to the handling of sexual crimes against minors. Third, limitations of secondary data cause the analysis of the effectiveness of policy implementation at the level of law enforcement officers to be still conceptual and require verification through empirical research.

5.1 Suggestions and Direction for Future Research

This study has important theoretical implications for improving juvenile criminal law by highlighting the need to ground all criminal law policies in the best interests of the child. The study's findings call for a shift in legal thinking from a focus on punishment toward a system that prioritizes the safety, rehabilitation, and well-being of children as victims. This study strengthens the academic discourse on integrating normative and applied features within the juvenile criminal justice system, while also helping to develop a theory of juvenile criminal policy that is more responsive, fair, and compassionate. From a practical standpoint, this study highlights the importance of enforcing stricter laws against those involved in sexual interactions with minors, while continuing to prioritize the best interests of the child. Law enforcement and the government must train officials with a focus on child safety, establish courts that are easily accessible to children, and maximize the role of Lembaga Perlindungan Saksi dan Korban (LPSK) to assist child abuse victims in meeting their legal and emotional needs. Furthermore, to ensure a more effective deterrent effect, legislators need to strengthen criminal penalties and reevaluate laws related to sexual offenses involving technology. To prevent sexual violence against children, the active role of the community in raising awareness of the law and exercising social oversight is crucial.

Further studies are recommended to develop research using a sociological-empirical approach, involving interviews with law enforcement officials, child protection agencies, and victims of sexual crimes to gain a realistic picture of the challenges and practices of law enforcement in the field. Further research could also focus on a comparative legal analysis with other countries that have successfully implemented a child protection system based on a child-friendly justice system. In addition, an in-depth study is needed on the impact of criminal law policies on the psychological rehabilitation of child victims, as well as an evaluation of the effectiveness of non-penal policies such as early sex education, digital literacy, and parental supervision in preventing sexual crimes against children.

Acknowledgment

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to all individuals who have contributed to the completion of this research. Their support, assistance, and cooperation have been highly valuable throughout the research process. The author is particularly grateful to the faculty members and academic staff of the University of Lampung for their continuous scholarly guidance, constructive feedback, and academic support during the study period. The author also extends appreciation to all parties who have provided essential data, information, and relevant references that have supported this study. Furthermore, the author acknowledges colleagues and classmates for their motivation, encouragement, and intellectual discussions during the preparation of this article. The author deeply appreciates all individuals who have contributed, directly or indirectly, to the successful completion of this research.

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