

## Analysis of the involvement of children in narcotics crimes

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### Abstract

The misuse and illicit trafficking of narcotics in Indonesia has increasingly involved children, both as users and as part of the distribution chain. This phenomenon often results from exploitation by adults or narcotics syndicates who take advantage of children's vulnerability and legal protection loopholes. This study aims to analyze the forms of children's involvement in narcotics crimes, identify the contributing factors, and formulate effective strategic prevention measures. The research method used is normative legal research with statutory, conceptual, and case approaches, through a review of regulations, literature, court decisions, and official data. The results show that children's involvement includes five main forms: user, courier, intermediary, seller, and "legal shield" for syndicates. Contributing factors include family vulnerability, peer influence, economic pressure, technological development, low legal literacy, and exploitation by criminal networks. Prevention efforts must be holistic, involving the strengthening of family roles, early legal education, digital literacy, empowerment of economically vulnerable families, and strict law enforcement against those who exploit children. This study recommends optimizing the application of Article 133 of the Narcotics Law, integrating anti-narcotics education into the school curriculum, cross-sectoral coordination, and comprehensive rehabilitation for children as both victims and perpetrators. In conclusion, protecting children from involvement in narcotics crimes requires a synergy of legal, social, and educational approaches based on the principle of the best interests of the child.

**Keywords:** Children, narcotics, involvement, prevention, law

### Introduction

The abuse and illicit trafficking of narcotics in Indonesia has become a serious threat to the nation's future. No longer targeting only adults, this phenomenon has now reached children. The involvement of children in narcotics crimes is increasing, whether as users or as part of the distribution chain, such as couriers, intermediaries, or even sellers. This indicates a shift in the pattern of narcotics crimes toward targeting vulnerable groups as instruments of crime due to systemic weaknesses in legal protection for children (Gultom, 2012).

The current issue is concrete and crucial. Children are being used by drug dealers or traffickers as couriers, delivery agents, and even narcotics sellers. They are chosen not because they have an active role or full understanding of the crimes they commit, but because of their ignorance of the legal and social consequences of their actions. Children are a vulnerable age group that has not yet reached full cognitive and moral maturity, and thus do not fully comprehend the cause and effect of their actions. Furthermore, the Indonesian legal system still grants special treatment to children in conflict with the law, including lighter sanctions compared to adult offenders, as stipulated in Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System (UU SPPA) (Anwar, 2021) <sup>[6]</sup>.

This situation is exploited by drug traffickers. They use children as a "legal shield" to avoid severe criminal penalties. Many intentionally recruit, persuade, or even force children to become drug couriers because, if caught, the children will only receive rehabilitation or much lighter sentences. In many cases, children who are caught are unable to reveal the main actors directing them (Sulistiyowati, 2022) <sup>[9]</sup>. This not only reflects the

exploitation of children but also demonstrates the state's weak detection and prevention systems against criminal modes that exploit children's vulnerability.

Data from the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) in 2023 recorded that around 2,125 children under the age of 18 were involved in narcotics cases, both as users and traffickers. In North Sumatra, a 13-year-old boy was arrested for delivering methamphetamine from Medan to Deliserdang. In East Jakarta, a 16-year-old girl acted as an intermediary in the sale of ecstasy pills through social media. Even in the West Kalimantan border area, authorities uncovered an international narcotics network recruiting children to cross "rat routes" between countries (BNN, 2023; CNN Indonesia, 2023; Kompas, 2023) <sup>[17, 18]</sup>.

The factors behind children's involvement in narcotics crimes are highly complex. An unconducive family environment, peer pressure, poverty, and low legal literacy among children are major triggers. Additionally, the influence of social media and the internet also plays a role in exposing children more easily to narcotics crime networks. However, the most fundamental issue is the weakness of the child protection system and the suboptimal law enforcement against perpetrators who exploit children in the context of narcotics crimes (Setiadi, 2018) <sup>[7]</sup>.

The urgency of this study lies in two main dimensions. First, it aims to formulate preventive strategies to keep children from becoming involved in narcotics crimes, through educational, social, and legal approaches. This preventive formulation is necessary to strengthen early warning systems and interventions for at-risk children. Second, it serves as a contribution to building a fair and effective legal framework regarding children's involvement in narcotics crimes. In this regard, a legal approach that does not merely

position children as perpetrators but also as victims of exploitation becomes an essential framework that must be developed in the juvenile justice system (UNICEF, 2020) <sup>[11]</sup>.

It is also important to review the effectiveness of the UU SPPA in handling cases of child narcotics offenders. Has the restorative justice approach truly been applied appropriately? Or has it instead created loopholes for narcotics syndicates to manipulate children's positions? These questions are crucial to answer through comprehensive, data-based scientific studies so as to produce policies that uphold the best interests of the child while also reducing national narcotics crime rates.

Thus, this study is relevant not only academically but also in practical and policy terms. This paper provides an analysis of patterns of children's involvement in narcotics distribution, identifies the main causal factors, and develops legal and social approaches that can protect children while breaking the chain of exploitation by narcotics networks. The hope is that this work can serve as a reference for policymakers, law enforcement officers, educators, and the wider community in joint efforts to protect children from the dangers of narcotics.

### Research Method

This study employs a normative legal research method, which focuses on the examination of applicable positive legal norms and their implementation in practice. Normative legal research is conducted by reviewing laws and regulations, legal literature, scholarly doctrines, and relevant court decisions to analyze the involvement of children in narcotics crimes and their legal protection.

The approaches used include:

1. Statute approach, by examining provisions in Law Number 35 of 2009 on Narcotics, Law Number 11 of 2012 on the Juvenile Criminal Justice System, Law Number 23 of 2002 on Child Protection as amended by Law Number 35 of 2014, as well as other implementing regulations.
2. Conceptual approach, to explore concepts of child protection, restorative justice, and the punishment of children in conflict with the law.
3. Case approach, to analyze court decisions related to the involvement of children in narcotics crimes (Peter Mahmud Marzuki, 2017) <sup>[4]</sup>.

The sources of legal materials consist of:

1. Primary legal materials: laws and regulations, court decisions, and relevant international instruments.
2. Secondary legal materials: literature, legal journals, previous research findings, and expert opinions.
3. Tertiary legal materials: legal dictionaries and legal encyclopedias (Soerjono Soekanto and Sri Mamudji, 2015) <sup>[5]</sup>.

The technique for collecting legal materials is library research, by accessing regulations, books, journals, scholarly articles, and court decision databases (Johnny Ibrahim, 2012) <sup>[3]</sup>. The obtained legal materials are then analyzed descriptively and qualitatively—describing and elaborating on the content of the collected legal materials, linking them to the legal issues under study, and drawing systematic conclusions through norm identification, legal interpretation, and assessment of the conformity of law

application with the principles of child protection (Johnny Ibrahim, 2012) <sup>[3]</sup>.

### Research Result

#### Definition of a Child

The definition of a child in Indonesian law varies depending on the context of the governing legislation. Under Law Number 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, a child is defined as any person under the age of 18 (eighteen), including those still in the womb (Law No. 35 of 2014, Article 1 point 1). This definition emphasizes age as an absolute parameter, without regard to marital status or mental maturity. Such a provision aligns with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), ratified through Presidential Decree Number 36 of 1990, which states that a child is every human being under the age of 18, unless under the applicable law, majority is attained earlier (Presidential Decree No. 36 of 1990).

In the context of criminal law, Law Number 11 of 2012 on the Juvenile Criminal Justice System (UU SPPA) defines a child as a person who, in a criminal case, is at least 12 (twelve) years old but not yet 18 (eighteen) years old and has never been married (Law No. 11 of 2012, Article 1 point 3). This definition differs from that in the Child Protection Law, as the UU SPPA only regulates children who have reached the minimum age of criminal responsibility, which is 12 years. Children under the age of 12 who commit a criminal act cannot be processed through the criminal justice system, but are instead subject to guidance or social measures in accordance with applicable provisions (Law No. 11 of 2012, Article 21 paragraph (1)).

Meanwhile, in the field of civil law, the Indonesian Civil Code (KUHPerdata) through Article 330 states that a person is considered not yet an adult if they are under 21 years old and have never been married (KUHPerdata, Article 330). This means that even if a person is under 21 years old, they are considered legally an adult under civil law if they are married. These differences in age thresholds reflect the variations in the definition of a child across legal regimes, which may affect how the law treats children in certain situations.

Scholars also provide important perspectives on the concept of a child. According to Maidin Gultom, a child is both a trust and a gift from God, possessing inherent dignity and worth as a complete human being, and thus entitled to special protection—legally, socially, and morally (Gultom, 2014, p. 12) <sup>[2]</sup>. Barda Nawawi Arief, meanwhile, argues that a child is an individual in the process of physical, mental, and social growth and development, and therefore requires different treatment from adults, especially when facing the law (Arief, 2018, p. 110) <sup>[1]</sup>. This view aligns with the doctrine of child protection law, which emphasizes the principle of the best interest of the child as the foundation for all policies and legal actions (UNICEF, 2020, p. 7) <sup>[11]</sup>.

Thus, the definition of a child in Indonesian law is not singular but depends on the context of the applicable legislation. The differences in age limits and criteria need to be well understood by law enforcement officers, policymakers, and the public—particularly when handling cases involving children in narcotics crimes. A correct understanding of the definition of a child will influence the form of legal protection, sentencing models, and judicial approaches applied. In this study, the definition of a child

refers to the provisions in the Child Protection Law and the CRC, which set the age below 18, while also considering the minimum age of criminal responsibility as stipulated in the UU SPPA.

### Forms of Child Involvement In Narcotics Crimes

The involvement of children in narcotics crimes in Indonesia shows increasingly complex patterns. Children are not only involved as users but also participate in the distribution chain serving as couriers, intermediaries, or even narcotics sellers. This phenomenon often arises from exploitation by adults or narcotics syndicates that take advantage of children's vulnerabilities. According to the National Narcotics Agency (BNN), in 2023, a total of 2,125 children under the age of 18 were involved in narcotics cases, both as users and traffickers (BNN, 2023, p. 15).

#### 1. Children as Narcotics Users

Children's involvement as narcotics users is generally caused by peer influence, curiosity, and peer pressure. For instance, in a case in East Jakarta in 2022, a 16-year-old girl was arrested for using ecstasy obtained from her friend (CNN Indonesia, 2022). Based on East Jakarta District Court Decision Number 45/Pid.Sus-Anak/2022/PN.Jkt.Tim, the judge decided to impose rehabilitation measures on the child, referring to Article 54 of the Narcotics Law, which stipulates that narcotics addicts must undergo medical and social rehabilitation (Law No. 35 of 2009, Article 54). This case shows that children as users are positioned more as victims rather than perpetrators, making a rehabilitative approach a priority (Anwar, 2021, p. 78) <sup>[6]</sup>.

#### 2. Children as Narcotics Couriers

The most common form of involvement is children serving as couriers. They are used to deliver narcotics because they are considered less likely to be detected by law enforcement and receive lighter sentences if caught. An example is a 2023 case in North Sumatra, where a 13-year-old boy was arrested while delivering methamphetamine from Medan to Deliserdang. In Lubuk Pakam District Court Decision Number 123/Pid.Sus-Anak/2023/PN.Lbp, the judge declared the child guilty of acting as an intermediary in the sale and purchase of Class I narcotics but sentenced him to one year of coaching at a Special Child Development Institution (LPKA) (PN Lubuk Pakam, 2023, p. 6). This form illustrates how drug syndicates exploit legal loopholes in child protection for illegal business interests (Gultom, 2014, p. 102) <sup>[2]</sup>.

#### 3. Children as Intermediaries in Narcotics Transactions

In addition to being couriers, children are also often used as intermediaries in narcotics transactions, particularly through social media. This mode usually takes advantage of children's skills in accessing technology and digital networks. In a 2021 case in Yogyakarta, a 17-year-old boy acted as a social media administrator connecting buyers with sellers of marijuana. Based on Sleman District Court Decision Number 75/Pid.Sus-Anak/2021/PN.Smn, the judge imposed a 1.5-year sentence at the LPKA, considering that the child understood his actions and benefited financially from the transactions (PN Sleman, 2021, p. 9). This phenomenon shows that technological advancements have

opened new forms of children's involvement in narcotics crimes (Suryani, 2022, p. 88) <sup>[8]</sup>.

#### 4. Children as Narcotics Sellers

Although less common, there are cases where children actively sell narcotics. This form often occurs when a child who was previously a user or courier transitions into a seller to gain financial profit. One such case occurred in West Kalimantan in 2022, where a 16-year-old sold methamphetamine to a schoolmate. In Pontianak District Court Decision Number 89/Pid.Sus-Anak/2022/PN.Ptk, the judge sentenced the child to two years in the LPKA, reasoning that the child's actions constituted active participation in the illegal narcotics trade (PN Pontianak, 2022, p. 11). This type of involvement generally receives harsher punishment than the role of a user or courier, as it is deemed to carry a higher criminal intent (Arief, 2018, p. 142) <sup>[1]</sup>.

#### 5. Children as a "Legal Shield" for Narcotics Syndicates

One of the most frequently identified modes in literature is the use of children as a "legal shield" to protect the main perpetrators from severe punishment. Children are recruited, persuaded, or forced to commit certain acts because, if caught, the legal sanctions imposed on them are lighter. According to Sulistyowati's research (2022, p. 57) <sup>[9]</sup>, this mode is common in border areas and regions prone to narcotics trafficking, where syndicates exploit children's limited legal understanding and the protective provisions of the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law (UU SPPA).

Based on an analysis of court decisions and previous research, it can be concluded that children's involvement in narcotics crimes falls into at least five main categories: (1) as users, (2) as couriers, (3) as transaction intermediaries, (4) as sellers, and (5) as legal shields. Each form of involvement has different characteristics and degrees of culpability, and thus requires differentiated law enforcement approaches. A rehabilitative approach is more relevant for users, while active roles such as sellers or intermediaries may be subject to stricter sanctions—still with due regard to the principle of child protection and the best interests of the child.

#### Factors Contributing To Child Involvement In Narcotics Crimes

The involvement of children in narcotics crimes does not occur suddenly; rather, it is the result of complex interactions between internal and external factors influencing a child's development. These factors may include family conditions, social environment, economic circumstances, the influence of technology and social media, low legal literacy, and exploitation by narcotics syndicates. Various studies and court rulings confirm that the causes are multifactorial and interrelated.

##### 1. Family Factors

The family is the primary environment in shaping a child's character. Family dysfunction, such as parental divorce, domestic violence, or a lack of attention and supervision, can increase the risk of children becoming involved in drug abuse. Maidin Gultom's research notes that families failing to perform their supervisory function tend to leave children

seeking identity and emotional support outside the home—often in negative environments (Gultom, 2014, p. 55) <sup>[2]</sup>. A clear example is seen in Surabaya District Court Decision No. 112/Pid.Sus-Anak/2022/PN.Sby, where a 15-year-old became a methamphetamine courier due to a lack of parental attention, as both parents were busy working. The judge considered the family background as a mitigating factor.

## 2. Social Environment and Peer Influence

The social environment, particularly peer influence, plays a significant role in shaping children's behavior. Children tend to follow group behavior to gain acceptance or avoid rejection (peer pressure). Anwar (2021, p. 83) <sup>[6]</sup> notes that peer groups can serve as the entry point for children into the world of narcotics, either as users or distributors. In Denpasar District Court Decision No. 87/Pid.Sus-Anak/2021/PN.Dps, a 16-year-old became an intermediary in marijuana transactions after being influenced by a close friend already involved in the network. While the judge stated that peer influence is not an excuse, it was still considered in imposing a one-year coaching sentence at the LPKA.

## 3. Economic Factors

Economic hardship drives some children to seek additional income, including through illegal means such as drug trafficking. Drug syndicates often offer relatively high financial rewards to children willing to act as couriers or dealers. Suryani (2022, p. 90) <sup>[8]</sup> observes that financial incentives are a dominant factor for children from poor families. In Pontianak District Court Decision No. 89/Pid.Sus-Anak/2022/PN.Ptk, a 16-year-old agreed to deliver methamphetamine for a payment of IDR 300,000 per trip. While acknowledging economic factors as a trigger, the judge emphasized that the act was unlawful and harmful to the child's future.

## 4. Influence of Technology and Social Media

The growth of digital technology and social media has created new opportunities for narcotics syndicates to recruit children. Social media platforms are used for communication, promotion, and narcotics transactions. Setiadi (2018, p. 122) <sup>[7]</sup> notes that children tend to adapt to technology faster than adults, making them ideal targets for tech-based crimes. In Sleman District Court Decision No. 75/Pid.Sus-Anak/2021/PN.Smn, a 17-year-old managed a social media account promoting marijuana, connecting buyers with suppliers. The judge imposed coaching at the LPKA, citing that the child understood his actions and gained profit from the transactions.

## 5. Low Legal Literacy

Limited understanding of the law means that children do not fully grasp the consequences of their actions. Arief (2018, p. 148) <sup>[1]</sup> states that the lack of legal education for children, both in schools and at home, makes them more vulnerable to manipulation by individuals with criminal intent. This was evident in Lubuk Pakam District Court Decision No. 123/Pid.Sus-Anak/2023/PN.Lbp, where a 13-year-old admitted not knowing that the package he delivered contained methamphetamine. The judge took the child's limited legal knowledge into account and imposed a coaching sentence.

## 6. Exploitation by Narcotics Syndicates

The exploitation of children by narcotics syndicates is particularly alarming. Children are used as a "legal shield" to avoid severe criminal penalties for adult perpetrators. This includes having children deliver packages, store evidence, or conduct small-scale transactions. Sulistyowati (2022, p. 57) <sup>[9]</sup> found that syndicates often recruit children in border areas or economically vulnerable regions, as they are more easily persuaded or coerced. In Entikong District Court Decision No. 54/Pid.Sus-Anak/2020/PN.Etg, a 14-year-old was forced to carry methamphetamine from Malaysia through an illegal border route in West Kalimantan. The judge deemed the child a victim of exploitation and imposed coaching at the LPKA with psychological support.

In conclusion, the causes of children's involvement in narcotics crimes are multifactorial, with reinforcing interactions between family conditions, social environment, economic pressures, technology use, legal illiteracy, and syndicate exploitation. Therefore, prevention efforts must be holistic, encompassing strengthening family resilience, improving children's legal education, monitoring technology use, and enforcing strict laws against child exploitation. This approach aligns with the best interest of the child principle mandated by the Child Protection Law and the Convention on the Rights of the Child.

### Analysis of Child Involvement In Narcotics Crimes

The involvement of children in narcotics crimes is a phenomenon that reveals a paradox in Indonesia's legal and social system. On one hand, children are subjects entitled to maximum protection from the state, as mandated in Article 28B paragraph (2) of the 1945 Constitution and Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection (Law No. 35/2014, Article 1 point 1). On the other hand, in the criminal law context, children can be held legally accountable for their actions when involved in narcotics crimes (Law No. 11 of 2012, Article 1 point 3). This duality is often exploited by adult offenders or syndicate networks, positioning children as "legal shields" to avoid heavier criminal sanctions (Sulistyowati, 2022, p. 57) <sup>[9]</sup>.

From the *modus operandi* perspective, analysis of various court decisions shows a consistent pattern: children's roles in narcotics crimes are rarely the result of their own initiative but are often due to exploitation or environmental influence. For example, in Lubuk Pakam District Court Decision No. 123/Pid.Sus-Anak/2023/PN.Lbp, the judge found that a 13-year-old boy was merely following instructions to deliver a package without knowing its contents. This reflects children's weak legal literacy, aligning with Arief's (2018, p. 148) finding that minimal legal understanding makes children more vulnerable to criminal network manipulation.

This phenomenon also highlights a gap between the intended goal of child protection and the reality of law enforcement. The Juvenile Criminal Justice System (SPPA) is based on the principle of restorative justice, focusing on recovery and rehabilitation rather than retribution (Law No. 11 of 2012, Article 5 paragraph (1)). However, in practice, this approach sometimes creates opportunities for narcotics syndicates to continually recruit children, knowing that the punishment imposed on them is lighter than for adults

(Gultom, 2014, p. 102) <sup>[2]</sup>. As a result, policies designed to protect children can unintentionally become strategic loopholes for criminal actors.

Analysis of BNN's 2023 data, which recorded 2,125 children involved in narcotics cases, also shows that this is not a sporadic issue but part of a structured criminal pattern (BNN, 2023, p. 15). Forms of involvement such as user, courier, intermediary, and seller indicate that children have been integrated into the narcotics supply chain at various levels. According to Suryani (2022, p. 88) <sup>[8]</sup>, children are recruited into such positions because they are considered legally "safer" and more flexible in performing tasks requiring high mobility.

In addition, the role of social media in facilitating narcotics transactions involving children cannot be overlooked. Tech-savvy children are often made administrators of accounts or intermediaries between buyers and suppliers. In Sleman District Court Decision No. 75/Pid.Sus-Anak/2021/PN.Smn, this modus proved difficult for law enforcement to detect, as transactions were conducted online and goods were shipped via courier services. This aligns with Setiadi's (2018, p. 122) <sup>[7]</sup> view that advancements in digital technology have expanded the narcotics crime arena, requiring innovation in enforcement strategies.

From a criminological perspective, child involvement in narcotics crimes can be analyzed using Edwin H. Sutherland's differential association theory, which posits that criminal behavior is learned through interaction with others (Sutherland, 1947, p. 6). Children in environments with narcotics offenders are more likely to adopt such behavior, especially when it yields quick financial gains. This is reinforced by Anwar's (2021, p. 83) <sup>[6]</sup> research, which found peer influence to be one of the most significant variables affecting children's decisions to engage in narcotics crimes.

From a penal policy standpoint, this analysis indicates the need for sharper countermeasure strategies. First, there must be an early detection mechanism at the family, school, and community levels to identify children at risk of involvement. Second, law enforcement officers need to impose proportionate sanctions on children who play active roles (such as sellers or intermediaries) while still ensuring legal protection. Third, stricter repressive measures must be applied against adults who exploit children, including sentence enhancements as stipulated in Article 133 of the Narcotics Law (Law No. 35 of 2009, Article 133).

In conclusion, analysis of child involvement in narcotics crimes cannot be separated from a framework recognizing children as both victims and offenders. State protection must account for the reality that children are often in a weak position, influenced by external factors. However, in certain cases, children may also act with full awareness of their actions and seek personal gain. Therefore, law enforcement policy must be adaptive, contextual, and prevention-oriented in the long term, with the best interest of the child as the guiding principle (UNICEF, 2020, p. 7) <sup>[11]</sup>.

It can be concluded that children's involvement in narcotics crimes is a complex phenomenon influenced by the interaction of various factors, such as family conditions, social environment, economic pressure, technological advancement, low legal literacy, and exploitation by narcotics syndicates. Children often occupy an ambiguous position—both as vulnerable victims and as legally

responsible offenders. While the juvenile justice system based on restorative justice is designed to protect children, its legal gaps are often exploited by criminal networks. Therefore, balanced legal policy is needed, ensuring both child protection and proportionate sanctions, supported by a holistic prevention strategy grounded in the best interest of the child, to make narcotics eradication efforts effective and sustainable.

### **Strategic Efforts To Prevent Child Involvement In Narcotics Crimes**

Preventing children's involvement in narcotics crimes requires a holistic approach that actively engages families, schools, communities, and the state. Given that the factors contributing to child involvement are multifaceted, prevention strategies cannot rely solely on law enforcement but must be balanced with sustainable educational, social, and structural efforts (Anwar, 2021, p. 88) <sup>[6]</sup>.

#### **1. Strengthening the Role of the Family**

The family is the first line of defense in protecting children from the influence of narcotics. Consistent supervision, open communication, and moral education from an early age have proven effective in preventing children from falling into the wrong social circles. Gultom emphasizes that a harmonious and well-functioning family can reduce the risk of deviant behavior in children (Gultom, 2014, p. 55) <sup>[2]</sup>. The case in Surabaya District Court Decision No. 112/Pid.Sus-Anak/2022/PN.Sby illustrates that lack of parental attention was one reason a child was easily persuaded to become a methamphetamine courier. Therefore, family development programs such as parenting education and anti-drug counseling need to be expanded to the neighborhood level (RT/RW).

#### **2. Child Education and Legal Literacy**

Enhancing legal literacy from school age is a strategic step in fostering children's awareness of the dangers of narcotics and their legal consequences. Arief's research (2018, p. 148) <sup>[1]</sup> shows that children with good legal understanding are better able to refuse invitations to engage in illegal activities. Implementing anti-narcotics education curricula in schools, training peer educators, and offering extracurricular programs that build life skills can be effective means of strengthening children's resilience against negative environmental influences.

#### **3. Monitoring and Positive Use of Technology**

The advancement of digital technology calls for adaptive monitoring strategies. Children must be equipped with digital literacy skills to use social media healthily and critically. According to Setiadi (2018, p. 122) <sup>[7]</sup>, proper digital education programs can reduce the risk of children being used as intermediaries in online narcotics transactions. Moreover, cooperation between law enforcement and internet service providers should be strengthened to detect and block accounts used for narcotics trafficking.

#### **4. Family Economic Empowerment**

Economic hardship often drives children to accept offers to become couriers or dealers due to the monetary rewards (Suryani, 2022, p. 90) <sup>[8]</sup>. Economic empowerment programs for low-income families—such as job skills

training, business capital assistance, and employment access for parents—can reduce the economic vulnerability exploited by narcotics syndicates.

### 5. Strict Law Enforcement Against Child Exploiters

Child protection must be accompanied by firm law enforcement against adults or syndicates that use children in narcotics crimes. Article 133 of the Narcotics Law provides for heavier penalties for offenders involving children, yet implementation often falls short (Law No. 35 of 2009, Article 133). The case in Entikong District Court Decision No. 54/Pid.Sus-Anak/2020/PN.Etg shows that an adult ordering a child to smuggle methamphetamine from Malaysia should be given the maximum sentence as a deterrent.

### 6. Multi-Sector Collaboration

Preventing child involvement in narcotics crimes requires synergy among the government, law enforcement, educational institutions, civil society organizations, and the media. According to UNICEF (2020, p. 7) <sup>[11]</sup>, a multi-sectoral approach integrating health, education, social protection, and legal services can strengthen child protection systems. Forming integrated local task forces focusing on preventing child exploitation in narcotics can serve as an actionable strategy.

### 7. Strengthening the Rehabilitation System

For children already involved as users or victims of exploitation, comprehensive rehabilitation is essential to prevent reoffending (recidivism). Rehabilitation should not only address physical recovery from drug dependence but also psychological healing and social reintegration. Community-based rehabilitation models involving the family and local environment have proven more effective than complete isolation (BNN, 2023, p. 19).

### Conclusion

The involvement of children in narcotics crimes in Indonesia is a serious issue influenced by various factors, such as family vulnerability, social environment pressure, poverty, low legal literacy, and exploitation by narcotics syndicates. Strategic prevention efforts must combine legal, social, educational, and economic approaches in an integrated manner. Legal protections provided under the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law (UU SPPA) and the Narcotics Law need to be optimized to avoid becoming loopholes exploited by adult offenders. Prevention should focus on strengthening family resilience, children's legal education, technology monitoring, and strict law enforcement against child exploiters, with the principle of the best interest of the child as the primary foundation.

### Recommendations

First, the government should strengthen the implementation of Article 133 of the Narcotics Law by imposing heavier penalties on offenders who involve children. Second, schools should integrate anti-narcotics education and legal literacy into the curriculum. Third, law enforcement agencies need to enhance cross-sector coordination, including with internet service providers, to cut off the

recruitment chain of children by narcotics syndicates. Fourth, vulnerable families should be economically empowered so that children are not tempted by the rewards of illegal activities. Fifth, the child rehabilitation system must be more comprehensive, involving families, communities, and psychological support to ensure effective social reintegration.

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