



## Juvenile Justice Implementation in Handling Knife-Carrying Offenses within Indonesian Criminal Law

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the implementation of criminal law in handling juvenile knife-carrying offenses within the Indonesian juvenile justice system, using North Lampung Regency as an empirical case. Adopting a qualitative socio-legal research design, the study analyzes how statutory criminal norms are applied in practice and how their implementation is shaped by institutional, social, and cultural contexts. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews with law enforcement officials, probation officers, and juveniles in conflict with the law, while secondary data consisted of statutory regulations, judicial decisions, and relevant scholarly literature. The findings indicate that juvenile knife-carrying cases are formally processed in accordance with Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951 and juvenile justice regulations, with procedural safeguards for children generally observed. However, the effectiveness of law enforcement is influenced by limited community participation, low legal awareness, and persistent cultural perceptions that normalize the carrying of sharp weapons. These factors contribute to a predominantly reactive enforcement model that emphasizes post-offense handling rather than preventive intervention. The study further reveals a structural tension between the deterrent function of criminal law and the rehabilitative objectives of juvenile justice. This research concludes that juvenile knife-carrying offenses represent an interdisciplinary legal issue that cannot be effectively addressed through doctrinal criminal law alone. A more integrated approach, combining criminal law enforcement, juvenile justice principles, and socio-cultural considerations, is required to achieve sustainable crime prevention and child-centered justice.

**Keywords:** *juvenile justice, knife-carrying offenses, criminal law enforcement, socio-legal research, child protection*



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## INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is constitutionally defined as a state governed by law, as affirmed in Article 1(3) of the 1945 Constitution. This principle implies that all aspects of social life, including criminal law enforcement, must be grounded in legal certainty while simultaneously promoting justice and social order. Within this framework, criminal law is not merely a repressive instrument but also a regulatory and protective mechanism designed to safeguard vulnerable groups, particularly children, who require differentiated legal treatment due to their developmental characteristics.

Children involved in criminal conduct represent a complex legal and social phenomenon. From a developmental psychology perspective, juveniles have not yet attained full cognitive and emotional maturity, which limits their ability to foresee the legal consequences of their actions (Steinberg, 2014). Consequently, contemporary juvenile justice systems emphasize rehabilitation, proportionality, and the protection of children's rights rather than punitive deterrence alone (Cipriani, 2019). This orientation is reflected in international legal instruments, including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which underscores the obligation of states to ensure that the best interests of the child are a primary consideration in all judicial proceedings involving minors (UNICEF, 2018).

One form of juvenile delinquency that has raised growing concern is the act of carrying sharp weapons without lawful authorization. From a criminal law standpoint, such conduct poses a tangible threat to public safety and social order, as weapon possession significantly increases the risk of violent escalation (Cook & Goss, 2014). In Indonesia, the prohibition of unauthorized weapon carrying is regulated under Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951, which aims to prevent violence and maintain public security. However, when this offense is committed by a child, strict enforcement of criminal sanctions intersects with the state's duty to provide special protection and rehabilitation for juvenile offenders.

Empirical and comparative studies indicate that juvenile weapon-carrying behavior is rarely driven by a single factor. Instead, it is shaped by an interaction of individual, social, and environmental influences, including peer pressure, perceptions of insecurity, exposure to violence, and cultural norms that normalize weapon possession (Decker et al., 2015; McVie, 2014). In certain socio-cultural contexts, carrying sharp weapons may be perceived as a customary practice or a means of self-protection, thereby complicating the uniform application of criminal law. Such conditions highlight the importance of socio-legal analysis in assessing how legal norms operate within specific community settings.

From a criminal policy perspective, the challenge lies in balancing deterrence and child protection. Overly punitive responses risk exacerbating social exclusion and increasing recidivism among juveniles, while excessively lenient approaches may undermine the preventive function of criminal law and weaken public trust in legal institutions (Muncie, 2015). Modern criminal policy therefore advocates an integrated approach that combines legal enforcement with social intervention, restorative justice mechanisms, and community-based prevention strategies (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2018).



In the Indonesian context, the implementation of juvenile justice policies remains uneven across regions, particularly at the local level. Law enforcement agencies frequently encounter practical obstacles, including limited community cooperation, low legal awareness, and difficulties in reconciling statutory norms with entrenched social practices. These challenges are especially evident in cases involving juvenile possession of sharp weapons, where cultural justification, institutional constraints, and public safety concerns converge.

Against this background, this study provides an interdisciplinary analysis of the implementation of criminal law in handling juvenile knife-carrying offenses in North Lampung, Indonesia. Integrating perspectives from criminal law, child protection, and socio-legal studies, the research examines how legal norms are applied in practice, identifies key obstacles faced by law enforcement authorities, and evaluates the compatibility of existing enforcement mechanisms with the principles of juvenile justice and child rights protection. By situating legal analysis within its broader social and policy context, this study seeks to contribute to the development of a more balanced, effective, and child-sensitive criminal justice framework.

## **METHODS**

This study employs a qualitative socio-legal research design with an empirical orientation to examine how criminal law is implemented in handling juvenile knife-carrying offenses. The socio-legal approach is used to analyze the interaction between legal norms as formally regulated (*law in the books*) and their application in practice (*law in action*), particularly within the juvenile criminal justice system. This approach is considered appropriate because the research focuses not only on statutory provisions but also on institutional behavior, decision-making processes, and contextual constraints that shape law enforcement practices in real social settings.

The research was conducted in North Lampung Regency, Indonesia, which was purposively selected due to the documented occurrence of juvenile cases involving the unlawful carrying of sharp weapons under Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951. The study adopts a case-based analytical perspective, with the unit of analysis encompassing legal processes in juvenile criminal cases, institutional responses by law enforcement agencies, and judicial reasoning reflected in court decisions. This contextual focus allows for an in-depth understanding of how legal rules are interpreted and enforced at the local level.

Research participants were selected using purposive expert sampling, based on their direct involvement and professional relevance to the handling of juvenile criminal cases. The participants included judges adjudicating juvenile cases, police investigators responsible for case processing, officers from the Probation Office (Bapas), and juveniles in conflict with the law involved in knife-carrying offenses. This sampling strategy ensures that the data are derived from informants with authoritative knowledge and experiential insight relevant to the research objectives.



The study utilized both primary and secondary data sources. Primary data were obtained through semi-structured interviews guided by an interview protocol designed to explore legal procedures, institutional constraints, and perspectives on juvenile justice implementation. Semi-structured interviews were chosen to balance flexibility and consistency, allowing respondents to elaborate on their experiences while maintaining alignment with the research questions. Secondary data consisted of statutory regulations governing juvenile justice and weapon-related offenses, judicial decisions, and scholarly literature addressing criminal policy, juvenile justice, and socio-legal studies.

Data collection was carried out in sequential stages, beginning with a systematic review of legal documents and case files, followed by limited field observation of institutional practices where access was permitted, and in-depth interviews with selected participants. All data collection activities were conducted in accordance with ethical considerations relevant to qualitative legal research, particularly with regard to confidentiality and the protection of juvenile participants.

Data analysis was performed using thematic qualitative analysis. The analytical process involved repeated reading of interview transcripts and documentary materials to achieve data familiarization, followed by open coding to identify salient legal and institutional themes. These themes were then categorized and examined through pattern matching between empirical findings and the applicable normative legal framework. The final stage of analysis integrated the empirical results with theories of criminal policy and juvenile justice to generate analytically grounded conclusions that address the research questions.

To ensure methodological rigor, the study applied established criteria of qualitative trustworthiness. Credibility was enhanced through source triangulation between interview data and legal documents, dependability was maintained by applying consistent data collection and analysis procedures, and confirmability was ensured by grounding interpretations in verifiable empirical evidence and authoritative legal texts. These measures strengthen the reliability and transparency of the findings and align the study with international standards for qualitative socio-legal research.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Results**

The findings of this study present empirical evidence on how criminal law is implemented in handling juvenile cases involving the unlawful carrying of sharp weapons in North Lampung Regency. The results are organized to reflect the actual sequence of legal processes, institutional practices, and case-based outcomes observed during the research.

The empirical data indicate that juvenile knife-carrying cases in North Lampung are predominantly processed under Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951, in conjunction with the Juvenile Criminal Justice System framework. Law enforcement officers generally initiate case handling through routine patrols or targeted operations, during which juveniles are apprehended in possession of sharp weapons without lawful authorization. These initial



enforcement actions are followed by formal investigation procedures in accordance with juvenile justice regulations.

Findings from interviews with law enforcement officials reveal that the classification of sharp weapons is determined by reference to statutory provisions, particularly the distinction between prohibited weapons and tools permitted for occupational or cultural purposes. In practice, investigators assess the context of possession, the location, and the absence of legitimate occupational justification when determining whether the act constitutes a criminal offense. This assessment forms the basis for further legal processing.

Judicial practice in the examined cases demonstrates that courts consistently verify the legal status of the offender as a child under the applicable juvenile justice legislation. Age verification is conducted as a preliminary requirement, and the procedural safeguards mandated for juvenile defendants are applied throughout the adjudication process. Court decisions examined in this study confirm that judges explicitly consider the offender's age, personal background, and the circumstances surrounding the offense when rendering verdicts.

The analysis of the selected court decision from the Kotabumi District Court illustrates that the elements of the offense under Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951 were deemed legally fulfilled. The court established that the juvenile defendant possessed and carried a sharp weapon without lawful authorization and outside any recognized exception. This factual determination was supported by witness testimony and physical evidence obtained during the arrest.

Despite the formal fulfillment of statutory elements, the results indicate that law enforcement agencies encounter several operational constraints in handling such cases. Interviews with police officers and probation officials highlight limited community participation in reporting weapon-related offenses, low public awareness of legal restrictions on weapon possession, and practical difficulties in conducting preventive legal education. These constraints affect both the preventive and enforcement dimensions of juvenile crime control.

The findings further show that cultural perceptions and habitual practices related to carrying sharp weapons remain influential within the local community. In some cases, juveniles claimed that weapon possession was motivated by self-protection or customary practices, although such claims were not legally recognized as justifications. This discrepancy between social perceptions and legal norms presents ongoing challenges for consistent law enforcement.

Overall, the results demonstrate that while the formal legal framework for handling juvenile knife-carrying offenses is applied in accordance with statutory requirements, its practical implementation is shaped by institutional capacity, community attitudes, and contextual social factors. These findings provide an empirical basis for evaluating the effectiveness and limitations of current enforcement practices within the juvenile criminal justice system.



## Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of criminal law in handling juvenile knife-carrying offenses in North Lampung operates within a formally compliant legal framework, yet remains substantively conditioned by social, institutional, and cultural factors. This pattern reflects a broader socio-legal reality in which legal norms do not function autonomously but are mediated by institutional capacity and community context (Banakar & Travers, 2019; Halliday & Schmidt, 2016).

From the perspective of criminal law enforcement, the consistent application of Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951 alongside the juvenile justice system demonstrates the state's continued reliance on penal instruments to maintain public order. Similar approaches have been observed in other jurisdictions, where weapon-related offenses are treated as serious threats to social security regardless of the offender's age (McVie, 2014; Cook & Goss, 2014). However, when such offenses are committed by children, the enforcement of criminal law inevitably intersects with juvenile justice principles that prioritize proportionality, rehabilitation, and the best interests of the child (Cipriani, 2019; Steinberg, 2014).

The empirical evidence shows that procedural safeguards mandated under the juvenile justice framework are generally observed, particularly with regard to age verification and judicial consideration of the child's background. This practice is consistent with international standards on juvenile justice, which emphasize differentiated treatment and procedural protection for children in conflict with the law (United Nations, 1989; UNICEF, 2018). In the Indonesian context, this alignment also reflects the normative objectives of the juvenile criminal justice system as articulated in national legislation and legal doctrine (Marlina, 2012; Muladi & Priyatno, 2010).

Despite procedural compliance, the findings suggest that the substantive goals of juvenile justice especially rehabilitation and social reintegration are constrained by external factors. Limited community participation, low levels of legal awareness, and insufficient preventive outreach reduce the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts. Previous studies in criminology and juvenile justice similarly highlight that punitive responses alone are insufficient to address youth involvement in weapon-related behavior, particularly when such behavior is embedded in broader social and environmental conditions (Muncie, 2015; World Health Organization, 2015).

The persistence of cultural justifications for carrying sharp weapons, as identified in this study, further illustrates the tension between formal legal norms and informal social practices. From a socio-legal perspective, this condition can be understood through the lens of legal pluralism, where state law coexists with local norms that may dilute compliance and enforcement effectiveness (Banakar, 2015; Soekanto, 2014). In such settings, criminal law enforcement functions not merely as a mechanism of control but also as a process of negotiating normative authority between the state and society.

In terms of criminal policy, the findings reinforce scholarly arguments that an imbalance between repression and protection may undermine the objectives of juvenile justice. Excessive reliance on punitive measures risks reinforcing stigma and increasing



recidivism among young offenders, while overly lenient enforcement may weaken deterrence and public trust in the legal system (Bazemore & Umbreit, 2018; Tonry, 2016). The situation observed in North Lampung reflects this dilemma, where law enforcement agencies attempt to balance legal certainty with child protection under significant institutional and social constraints.

Institutionally, the challenges identified in this study particularly the reactive orientation of enforcement and limited inter-agency coordination are consistent with findings from previous research on juvenile justice implementation in developing legal systems (Goldson & Muncie, 2015; Dellyana, 2017). These conditions restrict the capacity of the criminal justice system to engage in early intervention and prevention, resulting in legal responses that occur primarily after offenses have already taken place.

Overall, this discussion underscores that the effectiveness of criminal law in addressing juvenile knife-carrying offenses depends on the integration of legal norms, criminal policy, and socio-cultural context. The findings support the view that juvenile justice should be approached as an interdisciplinary domain, where criminal law enforcement must be complemented by child protection strategies and community-based prevention. Without such integration, the application of criminal law risks remaining formally valid yet substantively limited in achieving sustainable crime prevention and child-centered justice.

## **CONCLUSION**

This study demonstrates that the handling of juvenile knife-carrying offenses in North Lampung is formally conducted in accordance with the applicable criminal law framework and the juvenile justice system. Law enforcement agencies and courts consistently apply Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951 alongside juvenile justice regulations, ensuring procedural safeguards such as age verification and differentiated treatment for children in conflict with the law. These practices reflect compliance with both national legal standards and international principles of juvenile justice.

However, the findings also reveal that the effectiveness of criminal law enforcement in such cases is substantively shaped by social, cultural, and institutional conditions. Community perceptions that normalize the carrying of sharp weapons, limited public legal awareness, and constraints in preventive outreach significantly influence enforcement outcomes. As a result, the implementation of criminal law tends to be reactive, focusing on post-offense handling rather than early-stage prevention and risk reduction.

From a criminal policy perspective, this study highlights the persistent tension between deterrence and child protection in juvenile weapon-related offenses. While penal enforcement remains necessary to maintain public order and legal certainty, reliance on punitive measures alone is insufficient to address the underlying factors driving juvenile involvement in knife-carrying behavior. The findings underscore the importance of aligning criminal law enforcement with the rehabilitative and reintegrative objectives of the juvenile justice system.



Overall, this research affirms that juvenile knife-carrying offenses constitute an interdisciplinary legal issue that cannot be effectively addressed through doctrinal criminal law alone. Sustainable enforcement requires the integration of criminal law, juvenile justice principles, and socio-cultural considerations. Without such integration, the application of criminal law risks remaining procedurally correct yet substantively limited in achieving long-term crime prevention and child-centered justice.

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