



Juvenile Justice and Sharp Weapon Possession: A Socio-Legal Study in North Lampung

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Article History: Received: August, 5th 2025; Accepted: August, 29st 2025; Published: August, 31th 2025

ABSTRACT

This study examined the dynamics of handling criminal cases involving juveniles carrying sharp weapons in North Lampung, Indonesia, using a qualitative socio-legal case study approach. The research aimed to analyze how formal legal norms are implemented in practice and how social and contextual factors influence law enforcement decisions involving children in conflict with the law. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with judicial actors, probation officers, and juveniles involved in sharp weapon possession cases, complemented by document analysis of relevant laws and court decisions. The findings indicate that although statutory provisions serve as the primary legal basis, their application is significantly shaped by judicial discretion, local social norms, and concerns regarding the long-term impact of punitive sanctions on juveniles. In rural and agrarian contexts, sharp weapons are often perceived as tools for daily use or self-protection, creating ambiguity between lawful and unlawful possession. This condition presents challenges for law enforcement and highlights the limitations of rigid punitive approaches. The study further demonstrates that rehabilitative and restorative justice-oriented responses, supported by inter-agency coordination and community engagement, are more consistent with the objectives of juvenile justice and child protection. This research contributes to socio-legal and juvenile justice scholarship by providing contextualized empirical insights from a rural setting and offers policy-relevant recommendations for developing more adaptive, humane, and sustainable legal responses to juvenile offending.

Keywords: *juvenile justice; sharp weapon possession; socio-legal studies; restorative justice; indonesia*



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INTRODUCTION

Indonesia constitutionally affirms itself as a state governed by the rule of law, as stipulated in Article 1 paragraph (3) of the 1945 Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia. This principle requires not only legal certainty but also the effective function of law as an instrument for the protection of human rights, particularly for vulnerable groups such as children. Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes that the handling of children in conflict with the law constitutes an interdisciplinary issue that extends beyond criminal law, encompassing child protection, developmental psychology, criminology, sociology, and public policy (Clingan, 2021; Dwipayana et al., 2022; Ginting et al., 2024).

Children are individuals in a critical stage of cognitive and emotional development and therefore do not yet possess a full capacity to comprehend legal risks and consequences. A substantial body of international research demonstrates that juvenile involvement in criminal behavior is closely associated with environmental vulnerability, exposure to violence, peer pressure, and the absence of adequate family and community support systems (Wilona et al., 2020; Petittlerc et al., 2012; Sharma et al., 2016). Consequently, punitive approaches that treat children merely as criminal offenders risk generating long-term adverse effects, including stigmatization and increased recidivism, rather than facilitating social reintegration (Clingan, 2021; Wilson et al., 2016).

Within the national legal framework, Indonesia has formally adopted a child protection paradigm through Law No. 23 of 2002 on Child Protection, as amended by Law No. 35 of 2014, and through the Juvenile Criminal Justice System. Nevertheless, empirical studies indicate that the practical implementation of these legal norms remains problematic, particularly when children are involved in offenses perceived as threats to public order, such as the carrying of sharp weapons (Putri et al., 2021; Pratama et al., 2022a). In such cases, law enforcement authorities often face a dilemma between the demand for strict legal enforcement and the obligation to uphold the best interests of the child.

The offense of carrying sharp weapons has distinct legal characteristics, as it is normatively classified as an act that potentially endangers public safety. Criminal law doctrine emphasizes that the unauthorized possession or carrying of sharp weapons constitutes an independent criminal offense, regardless of whether the weapon is actually used (Pabpu & Arief, 2020). However, from a criminological and socio-legal perspective, the social meaning attached to sharp weapons is not always synonymous with criminal intent, particularly in regions where such tools are commonly used in daily agrarian or cultural practices (Akune et al., 2023; Kamarmir & Panjaitan, 2023).

The phenomenon of children carrying sharp weapons in regions such as North Lampung cannot be separated from broader social, economic, and cultural contexts. Research indicates that children in rural areas are often exposed to higher risks of delinquency due to poverty, limited access to education, and the normalization of violence within their social environments (Dwipayana et al., 2022; Wilona et al., 2020). In such settings, sharp weapons may be perceived as instruments of self-protection or symbols of social identity rather than as tools for committing crimes (Akune et al., 2023).

Legal approaches that fail to account for these contextual factors risk producing ineffective and counterproductive criminal justice policies. A growing body of literature emphasizes the



importance of restorative and rehabilitative justice in addressing cases involving children in conflict with the law, including offenses related to violence and weapon possession (Ahzar, 2022; Ginting et al., 2024). Such approaches have been shown to reduce recidivism and to support the social reintegration of juvenile offenders more effectively than conventional punitive measures (Wilson et al., 2016; Putri, 2024).

Against this background, this study aims to analyze the dynamics of handling criminal cases involving children carrying sharp weapons in North Lampung Regency by integrating perspectives from criminal law, child protection, and socio-community contexts. The study not only examines the normative application of legal provisions but also explores the social factors shaping law enforcement practices and the challenges faced by both authorities and the community. Through this interdisciplinary approach, the research seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the development of more just, humane, and sustainable policies for addressing children in conflict with the law.

LITERATUR REVIEW

Criminal Law Policy on Juveniles

Criminal law policy concerning juveniles has evolved alongside a paradigmatic shift from retributive punishment toward rehabilitative and restorative approaches. Within this framework, criminal law is no longer viewed solely as a punitive instrument but as a mechanism for protecting and guiding children toward social reintegration (Clingan, 2021; Ahzar, 2022). This approach emphasizes the necessity of considering children's age, level of maturity, and social background at every stage of the criminal justice process.

A growing body of research indicates that law enforcement policies that fail to account for the specific characteristics of children may produce adverse long-term effects, including stigmatization and increased rates of recidivism (Petitclerc et al., 2012; Wilson et al., 2016). Consequently, juvenile criminal law policies must be designed adaptively and contextually, taking into account local socio-cultural conditions to ensure effective implementation (Mulyaningsih & Kadarusman, 2020).

In the Indonesian context, the implementation of juvenile criminal law policy continues to face substantial challenges, particularly at the enforcement stage. Limitations in institutional authority, divergent interpretations among law enforcement officials, and insufficient inter-agency coordination have been identified as factors undermining the effective handling of juvenile cases (Sari & Budiana, 2020; Jaelani et al., 2023). These conditions highlight the urgent need for a more comprehensive and evidence-based policy approach.

Children as Perpetrators of Criminal Offenses

Criminological and developmental psychology studies consistently demonstrate that children's involvement in criminal behavior cannot be separated from their social environments and life experiences. Children raised in contexts characterized by high levels of violence, dysfunctional family relations, and limited access to education are significantly more likely to engage in delinquent behavior (Wilona et al., 2020; Sharma



et al., 2016). In many instances, juvenile criminal conduct represents a response to adverse social conditions rather than the manifestation of fully developed criminal intent (*mens rea*).

International research further suggests that formal exposure to the criminal justice system during childhood can negatively affect identity formation and behavioral trajectories in adulthood (Petitclerc et al., 2012). Accordingly, juvenile case handling should prioritize secondary and tertiary prevention strategies, including rehabilitation, psychosocial support, and the active involvement of families and communities (Clingan, 2021).

In Indonesia, research on juveniles as offenders remains predominantly focused on urban settings, while rural areas receive comparatively limited scholarly attention. This imbalance is problematic, as rural regions such as North Lampung exhibit distinct social and economic dynamics that may shape patterns of juvenile delinquency differently (Dwipayana et al., 2022). This research gap underscores the importance of locally grounded and context-sensitive studies.

Types of Criminal Offenses Committed by Children

Juvenile criminal offenses encompass a wide range of acts, from minor infractions to offenses involving violence. Several studies indicate that violent offenses committed by children are often linked to prior experiences of victimization, thereby reinforcing cycles of violence across the life course (Wilona et al., 2020). These findings emphasize the importance of early intervention and child-centered protection strategies.

Within the framework of juvenile criminal law, the imposition of sanctions must take into account children's capacity to understand the consequences of their actions and their potential for rehabilitation (Pratama et al., 2022a; Sari & Wahyudi, 2022). Diversion mechanisms and out-of-court settlements are widely regarded as more effective in mitigating the negative psychological and social impacts of formal criminal proceedings on children.

Elements of Criminal Offenses and Juveniles

From a doctrinal legal perspective, criminal offenses consist of objective and subjective elements. Objective elements relate to the external act, while subjective elements concern the perpetrator's intent or culpability (Ramdani & Setiawan, 2023). In cases involving children, the assessment of subjective elements is particularly critical, as juveniles often lack the cognitive and emotional maturity required to fully comprehend the legal implications of their actions.

Empirical research indicates that children frequently engage in criminal conduct not because of deliberate malicious intent, but due to social pressure and environmental influences (Pratama et al., 2021). Accordingly, legal approaches that emphasize educational and rehabilitative objectives are more consistent with the principle of the best interests of the child.

Sharp Weapons from Legal and Social Perspectives

In criminal law, sharp weapons are understood as instruments that pose a serious potential threat to public safety. The unauthorized possession or carrying of sharp



weapons is classified as a distinct criminal offense, irrespective of whether the weapon is actually used (Pabbu & Arief, 2020). Nevertheless, the social meaning attributed to sharp weapons does not always align with criminal intent.

In certain social and cultural contexts particularly agrarian communities sharp weapons are commonly perceived as work tools or means of self-protection. Research demonstrates that local social norms and cultural values significantly influence children's perceptions of sharp weapon possession (Akune et al., 2023; Kamarmir & Panjaitan, 2023). The discrepancy between legal norms and social norms frequently generates practical challenges in law enforcement, especially when the actors involved are children.

Therefore, the handling of cases involving children carrying sharp weapons requires an integrated approach that combines criminal law, socio-legal analysis, and child protection perspectives. Restorative justice approaches are increasingly regarded as effective in reconciling the objectives of law enforcement with the long-term rehabilitation and social reintegration of children (Ginting et al., 2024).

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative socio-legal case study design to examine the dynamics of handling criminal cases involving juveniles carrying sharp weapons. This design was selected to enable an in-depth analysis of both the normative legal framework and its practical implementation within specific social contexts. A socio-legal approach allows for the integration of legal analysis with empirical insights into law enforcement practices and social conditions influencing juvenile offending (Clingan, 2021).

Research Setting and Case Context

The research was conducted in North Lampung Regency, Indonesia, a predominantly rural area where sharp weapons are commonly used for daily agricultural activities. The case context focused on criminal proceedings involving juveniles charged with carrying sharp weapons, providing a relevant setting to examine the interaction between legal norms and local socio-cultural practices.

Data Sources and Participants

Data were derived from primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through in-depth interviews with key informants selected using purposive sampling based on their direct involvement in the handling of juvenile criminal cases. The informants consisted of:

1. a judge who adjudicated juvenile criminal cases,
2. the head of the Probation Office (*Balai Pemasyarakatan*),
3. and juveniles who were directly involved in cases concerning sharp weapon possession.



Secondary data comprised legal documents and written materials, including statutory regulations, court decisions, and peer-reviewed academic publications relevant to juvenile justice, criminal law, restorative justice, and socio-legal studies.

Data Collection Procedures

Primary data collection was conducted using semi-structured interview guidelines, allowing for consistency across interviews while providing flexibility to explore participants' experiences and perspectives in greater depth. Interviews were conducted face-to-face and focused on procedures, decision-making processes, and challenges encountered in handling juvenile cases.

Secondary data were obtained through systematic document review to contextualize empirical findings within the prevailing legal and policy framework.

Data Analysis Strategy

Data analysis followed a thematic qualitative analysis approach. The process involved several stages:

1. Data familiarization, through repeated reading of interview transcripts and documents;
2. Initial coding, to identify meaningful units related to legal handling, institutional practices, and social factors;
3. Theme development, by clustering codes into broader analytical categories;
4. Interpretation, by linking empirical themes with relevant legal doctrines and theoretical perspectives;
5. Conclusion drawing, conducted inductively based on recurring patterns and relationships.

This analytical strategy is consistent with qualitative standards commonly applied in socio-legal and criminological research (Wilson et al., 2016; Ginting et al., 2024).

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, source triangulation was applied by comparing data obtained from interviews, legal documents, and academic literature. This process enhanced the credibility and consistency of the analysis and reduced the risk of interpretative bias.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical considerations were strictly observed throughout the research process. All participants were informed of the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. The identities of juvenile participants were anonymized to protect confidentiality and to comply with ethical standards in research involving minors.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Implementation of Legal Handling in Juvenile Sharp Weapon Cases

The findings indicate that the handling of criminal cases involving juveniles carrying sharp weapons in North Lampung is primarily conducted through formal criminal justice procedures. Law enforcement officers and judicial authorities rely on the provisions of



Emergency Law No. 12 of 1951 as the main legal basis in determining whether an act constitutes a criminal offense. From a normative perspective, the elements of the offense are generally considered fulfilled when a juvenile is found carrying a sharp weapon without lawful authorization.

However, empirical findings reveal that legal handling is not limited to normative assessment alone. Judicial actors demonstrate a degree of discretion in considering the age of the offender, the circumstances under which the weapon was carried, and the absence or presence of criminal intent. This practice reflects an implicit acknowledgment of juvenile justice principles, even when formal legal procedures are applied. Similar patterns have been identified in previous socio-legal studies, which emphasize the role of discretion in balancing legal certainty with the best interests of the child (Clingan, 2021).

The case examined in this study illustrates that judicial decision-making tends to prioritize proportionality and rehabilitation over punitive sanctions. Judges and probation officers reported that custodial measures are viewed as a last resort, given their potential negative impact on children's psychological development and future social integration. This finding aligns with international research indicating that excessive reliance on punitive measures may increase the likelihood of reoffending among juveniles (Wilson et al., 2016; Petitclerc et al., 2012).

Factors Influencing Juvenile Sharp Weapon Offenses

The results further indicate that juvenile involvement in sharp weapon offenses is influenced by a combination of social, environmental, and cultural factors. Informants consistently highlighted that sharp weapons are commonly perceived in the local context as tools for self-protection or daily use, particularly in rural and agrarian settings. This perception blurs the boundary between lawful and unlawful possession, especially for juveniles who lack a clear understanding of legal restrictions.

These findings support prior research demonstrating that local social norms significantly shape children's perceptions of risk and legality (Akune et al., 2023; Kamarmir & Panjaitan, 2023). From a criminological perspective, such normalization of weapon carrying may increase children's exposure to legal sanctions, despite the absence of malicious intent. This underscores the importance of contextual interpretation in juvenile justice processes.

Additionally, the findings reveal that family supervision and community engagement play a crucial role in preventing juvenile delinquency. Weak parental oversight and limited community awareness were identified as contributing factors to children's involvement in risky behavior. This observation is consistent with studies highlighting the relationship between adverse childhood environments and juvenile offending (Wilona et al., 2020; Sharma et al., 2016).

Challenges in Law Enforcement and Prevention

Law enforcement agencies in North Lampung face several challenges in addressing juvenile sharp weapon offenses. One major challenge is the limited level of public participation in crime prevention initiatives. Community members are often



reluctant or unable to engage in legal education programs due to occupational demands and limited awareness of legal risks associated with sharp weapon possession.

Moreover, investigators reported difficulties in obtaining early evidence, as juveniles and community members may resist cooperation during inspections or patrols. This challenge reflects broader structural issues in community-based policing, where trust between law enforcement and society remains fragile. Similar challenges have been documented in socio-legal research on juvenile crime prevention in rural settings (Dwipayana et al., 2022).

The findings suggest that preventive strategies relying solely on repressive measures are insufficient. While patrols and raids may reduce immediate risks, they do not address the underlying social factors contributing to juvenile offending. This reinforces arguments in the literature advocating for integrated prevention strategies that combine legal enforcement with education and community engagement (Ginting et al., 2024).

Implications for Juvenile Justice Policy

From a policy perspective, the findings indicate that the effective handling of juvenile sharp weapon cases requires an integrated approach that aligns legal norms with social realities. Restorative justice mechanisms and diversion programs offer a viable alternative to conventional punitive approaches, particularly in cases where no direct harm has occurred.

The application of restorative justice principles may facilitate dialogue among juveniles, families, law enforcement officers, and community representatives, thereby reducing stigma and promoting accountability. Previous studies have demonstrated that such approaches are more effective in supporting long-term behavioral change among juveniles (Ahzar, 2022; Putri, 2024).

In this regard, the findings contribute to the broader discourse on juvenile justice by highlighting the importance of contextualized legal responses. The North Lampung case illustrates how rigid application of criminal law without social consideration may undermine the rehabilitative goals of juvenile justice systems. Consequently, policy reforms should emphasize flexibility, proportionality, and inter-agency collaboration to ensure sustainable outcomes.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the dynamics of handling criminal cases involving juveniles carrying sharp weapons in North Lampung through a socio-legal perspective. The findings demonstrate that while formal legal provisions serve as the primary basis for law enforcement, their implementation is significantly shaped by social, cultural, and institutional contexts. Legal actors do not rely solely on normative elements of criminal law but also exercise discretion by considering the age of the offender, situational factors, and the potential long-term impact of punitive measures on juvenile development.

The study further reveals that juvenile involvement in sharp weapon offenses is closely linked to environmental conditions, including local social norms, family supervision, and community



awareness. In rural and agrarian settings such as North Lampung, sharp weapons are often perceived as tools for daily use or self-protection, creating ambiguity between lawful and unlawful possession. This contextual ambiguity poses a challenge for law enforcement and underscores the limitations of rigid, punitive approaches in addressing juvenile offending.

From a policy perspective, the findings highlight the importance of integrating restorative and rehabilitative principles into the handling of juvenile cases involving sharp weapons. Approaches that prioritize proportionality, diversion, and community engagement are more consistent with the objectives of juvenile justice and child protection than conventional punitive sanctions. Strengthening coordination among law enforcement agencies, probation services, local governments, and community institutions is therefore essential to ensure effective and sustainable outcomes.

The contribution of this study lies in its contextualized analysis of juvenile sharp weapon cases within a rural socio-legal setting, offering empirical insights that enrich the broader literature on juvenile justice and socio-legal studies. By demonstrating how local social realities interact with formal legal frameworks, this research provides a basis for developing more adaptive and humane legal responses to juvenile offending.

Nevertheless, this study is subject to limitations, particularly with regard to its focus on a single regional context and a limited number of cases. Future research is encouraged to adopt comparative designs across different regions or to incorporate longitudinal approaches in order to assess the long-term impact of rehabilitative and restorative interventions on juvenile behavior.

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