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### Adolescent Drug Abuse in Indonesia: A Criminological Analysis of Legal and Rehabilitative Approaches

*Penyalahgunaan Narkotika pada Remaja di Indonesia: Analisis Kriminologis terhadap Pendekatan Hukum dan Rehabilitasi*

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#### Abstract

This study aims to analyze the forms and characteristics of drug abuse among adolescents in Indonesia and to examine the effectiveness of legal policies and rehabilitative approaches in addressing this issue. The research employs a library research method using secondary data sources, including laws and regulations, scientific journal articles, criminology books, and official reports from relevant institutions. The collected data are analyzed descriptively to understand the relationship between legal norms, social conditions, and adolescent behavior related to drug abuse. The results show that drug abuse among adolescents is influenced by a combination of psychological vulnerability, peer environment, family conditions, and weak social control. The findings also indicate that legal policies which rely heavily on repressive measures are less effective when not accompanied by rehabilitative and restorative approaches. Rehabilitative strategies that involve families, schools, and communities are more effective in supporting behavioral change and social reintegration. Therefore, this study emphasizes the importance of integrating legal, social, and rehabilitative perspectives to create more humane and sustainable policies for preventing and addressing drug abuse among adolescents.

**Keywords:** Adolescents; Criminology; Drug Abuse; Legal Policy; Restorative Justice

#### Abstrak

Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis bentuk dan karakteristik penyalahgunaan narkoba di kalangan remaja di Indonesia serta mengevaluasi efektivitas kebijakan hukum dan pendekatan rehabilitatif dalam menangani masalah ini. Penelitian ini menggunakan metode penelitian perpustakaan dengan memanfaatkan sumber data sekunder, termasuk undang-undang dan peraturan, artikel jurnal ilmiah, buku kriminologi, serta laporan resmi dari lembaga terkait. Data yang dikumpulkan dianalisis secara deskriptif untuk memahami hubungan antara norma hukum, kondisi sosial, dan perilaku remaja terkait penyalahgunaan narkoba. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa penyalahgunaan narkoba di kalangan remaja dipengaruhi oleh kombinasi kerentanan psikologis, lingkungan teman sebaya, kondisi keluarga, dan kontrol sosial yang lemah. Temuan juga menunjukkan bahwa kebijakan hukum yang mengandalkan tindakan represif kurang efektif jika tidak disertai dengan pendekatan rehabilitatif dan restoratif. Strategi rehabilitatif yang melibatkan keluarga, sekolah, dan masyarakat lebih efektif dalam mendukung perubahan perilaku dan reintegrasi sosial. Oleh karena itu, penelitian ini menekankan pentingnya mengintegrasikan perspektif hukum, sosial, dan rehabilitatif untuk menciptakan kebijakan yang lebih manusiawi dan berkelanjutan dalam mencegah dan menangani penyalahgunaan narkoba di kalangan remaja.

**Kata Kunci:** Remaja; Kriminologi; Penyalahgunaan Narkotika; Kebijakan Hukum; Keadilan Restoratif



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## INTRODUCTION

Drug abuse among adolescents is a complex and evolving criminological and social phenomenon in Indonesia.<sup>1</sup> This issue is not only related to criminal law violations but also reflects a moral crisis, weak social control, and the strong influence of the environment on individual behavior formation. Adolescents, as an age group in the transitional phase toward adulthood, have a high vulnerability to deviant behavior due to psychological, social, and environmental factors.<sup>2</sup> In a criminological context, this phenomenon shows symptoms of social disorganization, where societal values and norms experience shifts, making deviant behavior, including drug abuse, increasingly acceptable among the younger generation.<sup>3</sup> This situation demands an in-depth analysis of the forms, characteristics, and underlying factors that contribute to adolescent involvement in drug abuse.

The forms and characteristics of drug abuse among adolescents can be categorized based on intensity, purpose of use, and the level of dependence caused. In the early stages, many adolescents use drugs out of curiosity, peer pressure, or a desire for new sensations. However, over time, this behavior develops into a pattern of psychological and physical dependence that is difficult to control.<sup>4</sup> Teenagers who use drugs often exhibit behavioral changes such as a decline in academic performance, absenteeism from school, drastic emotional changes, and involvement in petty crime. This phenomenon shows that drug abuse is not merely an individual deviation, but rather the result of a complex interaction between social, economic, and psychological factors, as well as weak ties between teenagers and social institutions such as family and school. Edwin H. Sutherland's Differential Association Theory explains that deviant behavior, including drug abuse, is the result of a learning process through social interaction with an environment that is permissive of illegal actions.<sup>5</sup>

In law enforcement, the effectiveness of legal policies and rehabilitative approaches in tackling drug abuse by adolescents is a very important issue to examine. Law No. 35 of 2009 on Narcotics actually regulates two main approaches, namely the repressive and rehabilitative approaches.<sup>6</sup> The repressive approach focuses on cracking down on drug trafficking networks, while the rehabilitative approach focuses on the recovery of users, especially those from the youth age group. However, in practice, the implementation of the rehabilitative approach still faces various obstacles, such as a lack of facilities, a shortage of experts, and social stigma against former narcotics users.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, synergy between legal policies, rehabilitation programs, and the active role of the community and families is needed to form a more effective countermeasure

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- 1 Nurul Huriyah Astuti et al., "Illicit Drug Use Pattern, Health-Risk Behaviors, and Social Contexts Among Indonesian Students," *Journal of Drug Issues* 52, no. 1 (January 19, 2022): 67–82, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220426211045018>.
  - 2 Francesca Mastorci et al., "The Transition from Childhood to Adolescence: Between Health and Vulnerability," *Children* 11, no. 8 (August 14, 2024): 989, <https://doi.org/10.3390/children11080989>.
  - 3 Maria João Lobo Antunes and Michelle Manasse, "Social Disorganization and Strain: Macro and Micro Implications for Youth Violence," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 59, no. 1 (February 15, 2022): 82–127, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00224278211004667>.
  - 4 Richard Alecsander Reichert et al., "Drug Abuse: Classifications, Effects and Risks," in *Behavior Analysis and Substance Dependence* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 3–20, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75961-2\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-75961-2_1).
  - 5 Edwin H Sutherland, "The Theory of Differential Association," in *Readings in Criminology and Penology* (Columbia University Press, 1972), 365–71.
  - 6 Pemerintah Pusat Indonesia, "Undang-Undang (UU) Nomor 35 Tahun 2009 Tentang Narkotika" (2009).
  - 7 Lisa Analisa, Kamarusdiana Kamarusdiana, and Nurul Adhha, "Implementation of Rehabilitation for Narcotics Addicts in Positive Legal Perspective and Islamic Law," *Al-Risalah: Forum Kajian Hukum Dan Sosial Kemasyarakatan* 22, no. 1 (June 30, 2022): 92–124, <https://doi.org/10.30631/alrisalah.v22i1.1122>.

strategy. A criminological approach that emphasizes restorative justice can be a solution to restore the social function of adolescents and prevent the recurrence of abuse in the future.

Despite the growing body of literature addressing drug abuse among adolescents, several limitations can be identified in existing studies. First, studies tend to examine adolescent drug abuse primarily from a normative legal perspective, focusing on the application of criminal sanctions and law enforcement mechanisms without sufficiently analyzing the social and psychological dimensions underlying adolescent behavior.<sup>8</sup> Second, other studies emphasize highlighting causal factors such as family dysfunction, peer influence, or environmental pressures, yet often treat these factors in isolation and fail to integrate them systematically within a broader criminological framework.<sup>9</sup> Third, while some research acknowledges the importance of rehabilitation and restorative justice, such discussions are frequently presented in a fragmented manner and lack a comprehensive analysis of how legal policies, rehabilitative approaches, and social control mechanisms interact in practice.<sup>10</sup> As a result, there remains a research gap in studies that holistically synthesize criminological theory, legal policy analysis, and rehabilitative perspectives to understand adolescent drug abuse as both a legal issue and a manifestation of broader social disorganization.

## Method

This research employs a library research method, which focuses on the systematic examination of written sources relevant to the issue of drug abuse among adolescents in Indonesia. Library research is used to obtain comprehensive theoretical and normative insights without conducting fieldwork.<sup>11</sup> The data sources consist of various documents, including statutory regulations, scientific articles, academic books, and official reports related to narcotics and juvenile justice. Primary legal materials include laws and regulations such as Law Number 35 of 2009 concerning Narcotics and Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System. In addition, secondary sources such as criminology textbooks and peer-reviewed journal articles are utilized to support theoretical analysis, while supporting materials are drawn from reports issued by government institutions and related organizations.

The data collected from these sources are analyzed using a descriptive qualitative analysis technique. This technique aims to describe, interpret, and systematically explain legal norms, criminological concepts, and policy approaches related to adolescent drug abuse. The analysis is conducted by organizing and classifying the collected data according to relevant themes, such as forms of drug abuse, contributing factors, and legal responses.<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, the descriptive approach allows the researcher to link legal provisions with social realities faced by adolescents, thereby providing a clearer understanding of how legal and rehabilitative policies operate in practice. Through this method, the study seeks to present an objective and structured analysis that forms the basis for evaluating existing policies and proposing appropriate recommendations.

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8 Jonathan Jackson, "Norms, Normativity, and the Legitimacy of Justice Institutions: International Perspectives," *Annual Review of Law and Social Science* 14, no. 1 (October 13, 2018): 145–65, <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-lawsocsci-110316-113734>.

9 Valeria Saladino et al., "The Vicious Cycle: Problematic Family Relations, Substance Abuse, and Crime in Adolescence: A Narrative Review," *Frontiers in Psychology* 12 (July 26, 2021), <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.673954>.

10 Adebobola Omowon and Alaba Samson Kunlere, "Restorative Justice Practices: Bridging the Gap between Offenders and Victims Effectively," *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* 24, no. 3 (December 30, 2024): 2768–85, <https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.24.3.3978>.

11 Mestika Zed, *Metode Penelitian Kepustakaan* (Yayasan Pustaka Obor Indonesia, 2008).

12 Sugiyono, *Metode Penelitian Pendidikan Pendekatan Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, Dan R&D*, 19th ed. (Bandung: Alfabeta, 2013).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Forms and Characteristics of Drug Abuse among Adolescents in Indonesia

Drug abuse among adolescents in Indonesia constitutes a complex and multidimensional social phenomenon that reflects shifts in social values, weak mechanisms of social control, and strong environmental influences on individual behavior.<sup>13</sup> In the context of criminal law, adolescent drug abuse is categorized as a specific form of offense because it not only violates legal norms but also produces profound psychological and social consequences for young offenders.<sup>14</sup> As adolescents are still in a critical phase of emotional and identity development, they are particularly vulnerable to peer pressure, media exposure, and permissive social environments.

Based on the analysis of criminological and socio-legal literature, drug abuse among adolescents can generally be classified into three main forms: experimental or recreational use, regular use accompanied by psychological dependence, and use that leads to physical dependence and involvement in illegal distribution networks. Experimental use often begins with curiosity or peer influence, while regular and dependent use gradually develops through repeated exposure and normalization of substance use. These patterns and their associated risks are summarized in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Forms and Characteristics of Drug Abuse among Adolescents in Indonesia

Form of Drug Abuse	Characteristics	Associated Risks
Experimental / Recreational Use	Curiosity, peer pressure, occasional consumption	Early behavioral changes, normalization of deviance
Regular Use with Psychological Dependence	Repeated use, emotional reliance on substances	Academic decline, social withdrawal
Physical Dependence and Distribution Involvement	Loss of control, primary need, criminal involvement	Severe addiction, legal consequences, social marginalization

*Source: by Author*

From a psychological perspective, adolescent drug users commonly exhibit low self-esteem, feelings of alienation, emotional instability, and a tendency to use substances as a coping mechanism for stress and personal problems.<sup>15</sup> Adolescents experiencing identity crises or unresolved emotional conflicts are more likely to perceive drug use as an escape from social and academic pressures. These psychological vulnerabilities are often reinforced by limited access to mental health support and inadequate guidance from adults.

Social factors play an equally significant role in shaping drug abuse behavior among adolescents. Family dysfunction, weak parental supervision, poor communication patterns, and permissive neighborhood environments substantially increase the risk of substance abuse. In addition, the rapid development of digital technology and social media has contributed to the normalization of deviant behavior by facilitating access to information about drugs, methods of consumption,

13 Oktriyanto Oktriyanto, Hilma Amrullah, and Anastasia Septya Titisari, "Family Function and Misuse of Drug in Adolescents in Indonesia," *Jurnal Kesehatan Masyarakat* 16, no. 2 (November 30, 2020): 271–83, <https://doi.org/10.15294/kemas.v16i2.23304>.

14 Marcel Aebi, Cornelia Bessler, and Hans-Christoph Steinhausen, "A Cumulative Substance Use Score as a Novel Measure to Predict Risk of Criminal Recidivism in Forensic Juvenile Male Outpatients," *Child Psychiatry & Human Development* 52, no. 1 (February 3, 2021): 30–40, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10578-020-00986-7>.

15 Sutherland, "The Theory of Differential Association."

and online distribution channels.<sup>16</sup> This condition further weakens traditional forms of social control exercised by families and educational institutions.

From a criminological standpoint, adolescent drug abuse can be explained through Edwin H. Sutherland's Differential Association Theory, which posits that deviant behavior is learned through social interaction with groups that tolerate or promote illegal activities.<sup>17</sup> Adolescents who associate with peers engaged in drug use are more likely to internalize favorable attitudes toward such behavior. Similarly, Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory explains that weak social bonds with family, school, and community institutions increase the likelihood of deviant conduct, including substance abuse.<sup>18</sup>

Empirically, adolescent drug abuse can also be distinguished based on the level of involvement and type of substance used. Casual users consume drugs sporadically, regular users show emerging dependency patterns, while dependent users prioritize substance use and may engage in criminal activities to sustain it.<sup>19</sup> Adolescents tend to begin with substances perceived as "soft," such as marijuana, sedatives, tramadol, and inhalants; however, technological accessibility has expanded their exposure to more dangerous narcotics such as methamphetamine and ecstasy, indicating a progression from experimental behavior toward systematic and high-risk dependence.

Overall, the characteristics of drug abuse among adolescents demonstrate a close relationship between individual vulnerability and broader social disorganization. Drug abuse should therefore not be viewed solely as an individual legal violation, but as a reflection of structural weaknesses in social control, family systems, and moral guidance. From a contemporary criminological perspective, these findings underscore the need for preventive, educational, and rehabilitative strategies that prioritize social reintegration and restorative approaches over purely punitive responses.

### **Effectiveness of Legal Policies and Rehabilitative Approaches in Tackling Drug Abuse among Adolescents**

The effectiveness of legal policies and rehabilitative approaches in addressing drug abuse among adolescents can be assessed through their capacity to reduce recidivism, prevent escalation of substance dependence, and promote sustainable behavioral change. In the Indonesian legal context, Law No. 35 of 2009 on Narcotics adopts a dual-track approach that combines repressive measures against drug trafficking with rehabilitative measures for users, particularly adolescents. This legal framework reflects an awareness that adolescent drug users occupy a distinct position as both offenders under criminal law and individuals in need of protection and recovery.

However, empirical practice indicates that the implementation of this dual-track policy remains inconsistent. Law enforcement agencies frequently prioritize punitive responses, resulting in adolescent drug users being processed through the criminal justice system rather than diverted

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16 Azmawati Mohammed Nawi et al., "Risk and Protective Factors of Drug Abuse among Adolescents: A Systematic Review," *BMC Public Health* 21, no. 1 (December 13, 2021): 2088, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12889-021-11906-2>.

17 Sutherland, "The Theory of Differential Association."

18 Travis Hirschi, "Social Control Theory: A Control Theory of Delinquency," in *Criminology Theory* (Routledge, 2015), 289–305.

19 Nora D. Volkow and Carlos Blanco, "Substance Use Disorders: A Comprehensive Update of Classification, Epidemiology, Neurobiology, Clinical Aspects, Treatment and Prevention," *World Psychiatry* 22, no. 2 (June 9, 2023): 203–29, <https://doi.org/10.1002/wps.21073>.

to rehabilitation programs.<sup>20</sup> This approach often undermines the rehabilitative intent of the law, as criminal labeling and incarceration expose adolescents to stigma, social exclusion, and heightened vulnerability to repeat offending. The contrasting orientations and outcomes of repressive and rehabilitative approaches are summarized in Table 2.

**Table 2.** Comparison of Repressive and Rehabilitative Approaches in Addressing Adolescent Drug Abuse

Aspect	Repressive Legal Approach	Rehabilitative Approach
Primary orientation	Punishment and deterrence	Recovery and social reintegration
Target	Offenders as law violators	Adolescents as users and victims
Main intervention	Arrest, prosecution, imprisonment	Medical treatment, counseling, social support
Short-term impact	Temporary deterrence	Reduction of dependency
Long-term outcome	Risk of stigmatization and recidivism	Sustainable behavioral change

*Source: by Author*

From a criminological perspective, the limited effectiveness of purely repressive legal policies can be explained through social learning mechanisms.<sup>21</sup> Drawing on Albert Bandura’s social learning theory, adolescent deviant behavior emerges through observation and imitation of social environments that normalize substance use.<sup>22</sup> Punitive interventions that fail to address these social contexts do not disrupt the learning processes that sustain drug abuse, and may instead reinforce deviant identities formed during contact with the criminal justice system.

Rehabilitative approaches offer a more development-oriented framework by addressing the psychological, social, and moral dimensions of adolescent drug abuse. Rehabilitation programs that integrate medical treatment with psychological counseling, life-skills development, and value-based guidance are more likely to facilitate long-term behavioral change. Such approaches recognize that adolescent drug abuse often functions as a coping strategy in response to emotional distress, family dysfunction, or social marginalization rather than as a purely rational criminal act.

Despite their conceptual strengths, rehabilitative programs in Indonesia face significant structural constraints. These include limited institutional capacity, shortages of trained professionals, uneven quality of rehabilitation facilities, and weak post-rehabilitation monitoring mechanisms. In addition, minimal family involvement and insufficient community acceptance reduce the sustainability of recovery outcomes, increasing the risk of relapse and re-association with deviant peer groups.<sup>23</sup>

20 Alana Rosenberg et al., “Drug Treatment Accessed through the Criminal Justice System: Participants’ Perspectives and Uses,” *Journal of Urban Health* 96, no. 3 (June 6, 2019): 390–99, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11524-018-0308-9>.

21 Ronald L Akers and Wesley G Jennings, “The Social Learning Theory of Crime and Deviance,” in *Handbook on Crime and Deviance* (Springer, 2019), 113–29, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20779-3\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-20779-3_6).

22 Albert Bandura and Richard H Walters, *Social Learning Theory*, vol. 1 (Prentice hall Englewood Cliffs, NJ, 1977).

23 Lengsi Manurung, “The Impact of Drug Abuse on Families and Society (Literature Review),” *MSJ: Majority Science Journal* 2, no. 2 (May 27, 2024): 239–44, <https://doi.org/10.61942/msj.v2i2.168>.

From a policy criminology perspective, the incorporation of restorative justice principles is essential to enhance the effectiveness of both legal and rehabilitative interventions. Restorative justice prioritizes accountability, social repair, and reintegration rather than punishment alone.<sup>24</sup> By positioning adolescent drug users as subjects in need of guidance and restoration, this approach reduces stigmatization and supports the rebuilding of social bonds with families, schools, and communities.

The effectiveness of legal policies and rehabilitative approaches depends on institutional integration and policy coherence. Coordination among law enforcement agencies, rehabilitation institutions, educational systems, families, and community organizations is critical to ensure continuity of care and prevention. Preventive strategies such as legal education, drug awareness programs, and youth empowerment initiatives further strengthen this framework by addressing risk factors before drug abuse becomes entrenched.

Overall, legal and rehabilitative policies can only achieve meaningful and sustainable outcomes when implemented in a balanced and development-sensitive manner. While repressive measures remain necessary to uphold legal norms, they must be complemented by rehabilitative and restorative strategies that address the root causes of adolescent drug abuse. An integrated policy orientation that prioritizes recovery, prevention, and social reintegration represents the most effective approach to safeguarding adolescents and reducing drug abuse in the long term.

## CONCLUSION

Drug abuse among adolescents in Indonesia constitutes a complex criminological phenomenon shaped by the interaction of psychological vulnerability, social environment, and structural weaknesses in social control mechanisms. As adolescents are in a critical stage of identity formation, they are particularly susceptible to peer influence, family dysfunction, and the normalization of deviant behavior through media and social networks. This study demonstrates that adolescent drug abuse cannot be understood solely as an individual legal violation, but rather as a manifestation of broader social disorganization that requires responses beyond punitive law enforcement. Legal policies that emphasize repression without adequate rehabilitative and restorative components tend to be ineffective, as they risk reinforcing stigma, weakening social reintegration, and increasing the likelihood of recidivism. Conversely, rehabilitative approaches grounded in psychological recovery, social support, and restorative justice principles offer greater potential for sustainable behavioral change and long-term prevention.

Based on these findings, it is recommended that drug abuse prevention and control policies for adolescents be reoriented toward an integrated and humanistic framework. Law enforcement agencies should prioritize diversion mechanisms and rehabilitation over incarceration for adolescent users, in line with restorative justice principles and child protection norms. At the same time, the government must strengthen the capacity and quality of rehabilitation institutions by improving professional resources, post-rehabilitation supervision, and community-based support systems. Preventive strategies should be intensified through legal education, family empowerment, and school-based programs aimed at strengthening adolescents' moral resilience and social bonds. Through coordinated efforts among legal institutions, families, schools, and communities, a more effective, sustainable, and prevention-oriented approach to addressing adolescent drug abuse can be realized.

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24 Zandile Faith Mpofo, Sazelo Michael Mkhize, and James Udoh Akpan, "Empathy, Remorse, and Restoration of Dignity Contributing to Reduced Recidivism: Assessing the Role of Restorative Justice in Promoting Offender Rehabilitation and Reintegration in Durban," *Cogent Social Sciences* 10, no. 1 (December 31, 2024), <https://doi.org/10.1080/23311886.2024.2429018>.

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