

DOI: https://doi.org/10.38035/jgsp.v3i4 https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/

Legislative Reform Efforts to Ensure Child Protection and Comprehensive Handling of Sexual Violence

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Abstract: This study looks at legal and legislative reform initiatives aimed at protecting Indonesian children from sexual assault. Despite having a solid legal foundation thanks to laws like Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, the Criminal Code, the Pornography Law, and the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law, the field still faces a number of challenges, such as protracted and traumatic court proceedings for victims, a lack of child-friendly procedures, a lack of agency coordination, and social, cultural, and financial barriers. Sexual abuse has a multifaceted effect on children, including psychological trauma, societal stigma, and the difficulty of the legal system. This research examines laws and regulations using a normative juridical perspective, court decisions, and related scientific literature. The results indicate that revising the Child Protection Law, developing operational implementing regulations, strengthening criminal sanctions, integrating prevention and rehabilitation mechanisms for victims, and implementing child-friendly judicial procedures are important steps to increase the effectiveness of child protection. This study concludes that legislative reform must be supported by increased capacity of law enforcement officials, cross-sectoral coordination, and public awareness so that children's rights can be fully fulfilled and children are protected from sexual violence.

Keyword: Child Protection, Sexual Violence, Legal Reform.

INTRODUCTION

Child protection in Indonesia has a strong legal basis, both from a national and international perspective. Anybody under the age of eighteen, including unborn children, is considered a child by Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection (UU PA) (Article 1 paragraph 1). This concept is in line with the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which was recognized by Law Number 36 of 1990 and emphasizes that all children have the right to develop and grow to their full potential while being shielded from exploitation, violence, and discrimination. (Erdianti, 2020) As part of upholding human rights, this legal foundation highlights that protecting children is not just the duty of the family but also of the state, society, and government. (Candra, 2018)

The importance of child protection in national development cannot be underestimated. Children are an asset to the next generation who will determine the country's future social, economic, and political progress. Each and every kid has the right to health care, education, and protection from all types of violence, according to Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning kid Protection (Article 4). (Junaidi, 2021) Without adequate protection, children's potential as agents of development will be compromised, and cases of violence or exploitation can have long-term impacts on the quality of Indonesia's human resources. (Sidauruk, 2023)

Furthermore, public awareness of children's rights has shown significant progress in recent decades. Children's rights education programs in schools, anti-violence campaigns, and the role of the mass media have increased public understanding of the importance of child protection. (Harahap, 2025) However, a gap remains between formal legal awareness and everyday practice, particularly in areas with low educational and socio-economic levels. It poses a serious challenge for the government in enforcing comprehensive and equitable child protection throughout Indonesia.

In Indonesia, sexual violence against minors is a significant social and legal issue. According to data from the National Commission for Child Protection (Komnas PA), the number of sexual violence cases is on the rise year, and most of the offenders are members of the victim's immediate social circle, such as family, neighbors, or teachers. (Simatupang, 2022) These cases include sexual harassment, rape, and commercial sexual exploitation. According to Law Number 35 of 2014, acts of sexual violence against children fall under the category of sexual exploitation and are crimes punishable by imprisonment, as stipulated in Articles 76C to 76I. (Suryandi, 2020)

Common forms of sexual violence against children vary widely, ranging from verbal abuse and indecent touching to sexual coercion to child pornography. Sexual violence can also occur through digital media, for example, through the sending of pornographic content or the forced production of intimate recordings. Government regulations and the Child Protection Law emphasize that these acts violate children's rights to grow and develop safely, healthily, and protected, and must be firmly prosecuted by law enforcement (Article 76C paragraph 1, Article 81 of the Child Protection Law). (Loim, 2023)

The impact of sexual violence on children is multidimensional, encompassing psychological, social, and legal consequences. Psychologically, victims often experience long-term trauma, fear, depression, and behavioral disorders. Socially, children can experience stigma, isolation, and reduced interaction with their environment. From a legal perspective, victims often face lengthy and complex legal processes, where protection during the trial process is a particular challenge. (Supriatna, 2024)

Although Indonesia has various regulations aimed at protecting children, there remains a significant gap between existing legal norms and the needs of child protection in the field. Children's rights and criminal consequences for sexual abuse perpetrators are established by a number of laws, including Law Number 35 of 2014 about Child Protection and Law Number 23 of 2002 concerning Child Protection (Articles 76C–76I of the Child Protection Law). However, these regulations do not yet detail inter-institutional coordination mechanisms, effective prevention procedures, or additional sanctions for those who fail to protect children. (Dwilestari, 2024) This gap causes child protection to sometimes only be a formality, without guaranteeing comprehensive protection for victims, so that children remain vulnerable to violence, exploitation, and sexual harassment.

In addition to regulatory gaps, legal implementation is a major challenge. Law enforcement in cases of sexual violence against children often faces obstacles, ranging from delayed reporting to a lack of valid evidence to a lack of awareness among law enforcement officials regarding the sensitivity of child cases. Many victims face lengthy and traumatic judicial procedures, including having to recount their experiences before investigators,

prosecutors, and judges. (Panggabean, 2024) This phenomenon demonstrates that, in addition to clear laws, there is also a need for increased capacity among officials, child-friendly procedures, and a coordination system between the police, prosecutors, courts, and child protection agencies for effective law enforcement.

Cultural, social, and economic barriers also complicate optimal child protection. In some communities, sexual violence is considered a shameful issue that should not be discussed, making victims and families reluctant to report it to the authorities. Economic factors also play a role, as low-income families often struggle to access legal aid or psychological services for child victims. Furthermore, social stigma against victims of sexual violence can lead to children being isolated, marginalized, and losing access to education and social protection. (Nurfazryana, 2022) These obstacles emphasize that child protection requires an approach that is not solely based on law, but also involves community education, family empowerment programs, and comprehensive social interventions.

As public awareness and the need to protect children from sexual violence grow, Indonesia's legal system has undergone a number of revisions. Law Number 4 of 1979 concerning Child Welfare marked the beginning of the history of child protection laws. It was subsequently amended into Law Number 23 of 2002 and further improved by Law Number 35 of 2014. The Child Protection Law's Articles 76C–76I guarantee children's rights to a safe upbringing and criminal penalties for those who commit sexual assault. In addition, Law Number 36 of 1990's ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child reinforced the international legal framework that Indonesia refers to while defending the rights of children. (Rizqian, 2021) However, social dynamics and the development of sexual violence cases demonstrate the need for further reforms to close regulatory gaps, clarify case handling procedures, and improve coordination between agencies related to child protection.

The legal reform plan currently under development includes revising the Child Protection Law and strengthening its implementing regulations, including a more child-friendly mechanism for handling sexual violence cases, imposing additional sanctions for negligent parties, and integrating community-based prevention and education systems. The goal of this reform is to create a legal system that is not merely reactive to violence but also proactive In order to shield kids from the dangers of sexual assault, including in the family, school, and digital media environments. The hope is that this reform will create comprehensive child protection, firm and fair law enforcement, and raise public awareness of children's rights and collective obligations to ensure their safety.

The urgency of this research arises from the fact that cases of sexual violence against children continue to increase despite strengthened regulations. This research is relevant for policymakers as a basis for evaluating the effectiveness of legislation and for considering further legal reforms, for law enforcement as a reference for improving law enforcement capacity, and for the public to understand children's rights and their role in protection. Furthermore, this research aims to fill a gap in the existing literature, as most previous research has focused on the social or psychological aspects of victims, while comprehensive studies on the effectiveness of legal and regulatory reforms are still limited. Thus, this research is expected to provide a real contribution to efforts to protect children and prevent sexual violence in Indonesia.

METHOD

This study employs a normative juridical methodology that combines a conceptual and statutory approach. Since the examination of positive legal norms governing child protection and the treatment of sexual abuse in Indonesia is the main subject of this research, the normative juridical technique is employed. Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, Law Number 44 of 2008 concerning Pornography, Law Number 19 of 2016

concerning Information and Electronic Transactions, and provisions in the Criminal Code (KUHP) that govern criminal acts of indecency are just a few of the pertinent legal regulations that are analyzed in order to implement the statutory approach. This analysis aims to assess the suitability and effectiveness of these regulations in providing comprehensive protection for child victims of sexual violence. Meanwhile, the conceptual approach is used to understand and examine legal concepts related to child protection, restorative justice, and child-friendly judicial procedures, to formulate new ideas in legislative reform. Through a combination of these two approaches, this research seeks to produce an analysis that is not only descriptive of the applicable legal norms but also evaluative and constructive in providing recommendations for relevant and applicable legal reforms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Problems of Protecting Children from Sexual Violence from a Legal and Social Perspective

Protection of children from sexual violence in Indonesia is regulated through various national regulations, but the applicable legal framework remains incomplete and unclear. Anyone under the age of eighteen, including unborn children, is considered a child by Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection (UU PA) (Article 1 paragraph 1). Along with establishing children's rights to be shielded from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse, this law also punishes sexual assaulters criminally (Articles 76C to 76I). For instance, sexual coercion against children is prohibited by Article 81 of the UU PA and is punishable by up to 15 years in prison and/or a fine of up to IDR 5 billion. Articles 82 and 83 provide additional forms of protection for victims, including social and psychological rehabilitation. (Ahmad, 2025)

However, the UU PA does not yet detail inter-agency coordination procedures, prevention mechanisms, or standard investigative procedures specifically for child cases, resulting in this gap often being exploited or leading to differing interpretations in the field. In addition to the Child Protection Law, other regulations are also relevant but have different focuses and approaches, leading to differences in implementation. For example, the Criminal Code (KUHP) generally regulates the crimes of rape and sexual violence but does not specifically differentiate between child and adult victims (Articles 285–289 of the KUHP). Law Number 44 of 2008 concerning Pornography prohibits the production, distribution, and use of pornographic material, including that involving children, but its sanctions and enforcement procedures often overlap with those of the Child Protection Law. Law Number 1 of 2024 concerning Electronic Information and Transactions (UU ITE) also regulates child pornography in the context of digital media (Article 27 paragraph 1, Article 28 paragraphs 1 and 2, and Article 45 paragraph 1 of the ITE Law). However, electronic-based law enforcement still faces technical challenges and a lack of capacity, so the regulations are not always effective in protecting children from digital exploitation. (Handoko, 2022) These differences in focus and scope of rules make legal implementation complex, often leading to overlaps and even legal loopholes that complicate criminal enforcement. These legal loopholes impact the effectiveness of child protection in practice. For example, law enforcement officials often experience confusion in determining the primary legal basis for investigating cases of sexual violence involving children, whether to use the Child Protection Law (UU PA), the Criminal Code (KUHP), the Pornography Law, or the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law. (Rizkiani, 2023) As a result, the legal process can be slow, or victims may not receive adequate protection during investigations. This ambiguity also raises the risk of minimal sanctions for perpetrators, as differences in articles and criminal penalties between regulations can be exploited to reduce sentences.

Although the Indonesian legal framework already regulates the protection of children from sexual violence through various regulations, its implementation still faces numerous obstacles. One major problem is the lengthy and often traumatic judicial procedures for child victims. Child victims of sexual violence are required to recount their traumatic experiences before investigators, prosecutors, and judges, which can deepen their psychological trauma. Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection stipulates that child victims have the right to legal protection, including assistance during the legal process (Article 14, paragraph 1 and Article 15). However, field practice shows that this assistance is still suboptimal and uneven across Indonesia. (Badrudduja, 2023)

The lack of child-friendly judicial procedures is another obstacle. Many law enforcement officers are not yet accustomed to handling cases involving children with a sensitive and safe approach. For example, the police often lack specialized child-friendly officers, and existing examination rooms do not meet child-friendly standards as stipulated in National Police Chief Regulation Number 8 of 2009 concerning Child Protection in Criminal Justice Processes. The lack of coordination between the police, prosecutors, courts, and child protection agencies further prolongs the legal process, thus preventing child victims' rights to swift and safe protection from being fully fulfilled. (Capah, 2023)

Furthermore, the capacity of law enforcement agencies regarding sexual violence against children still needs to be improved. Many investigators, prosecutors, and judges do not yet understand the psychological characteristics of child victims, so the examination and trial processes often create additional stress for children. Article 76H of the Child Protection Law mandates the protection of child victims through psychological and social support, but its implementation remains limited due to a lack of officer training, resources, and cross-sector coordination. It leads to ineffective law enforcement and the potential for cases of sexual violence against children to go unaddressed.

In addition to legal obstacles, social and cultural barriers also impact the protection of children from sexual violence. The stigma and shame attached to victims often serve as reasons for families or children not to report incidents to law enforcement. In many cases, society views sexual violence as an internal family matter that must be resolved privately, thus depriving victims of access to legal and psychological protection. Yet, Articles 76C to 76I of the Child Protection Law emphasize that sexual violence against children is a criminal act that must be prosecuted, regardless of the perpetrator's relationship with the victim. (Syahri, 2022)

Family economic factors also pose a significant barrier to child protection. Families with limited financial resources often struggle to access legal services, psychological support, or social rehabilitation for child victims. It puts child victims at risk of long-term trauma, difficulty continuing their education, and even possible re-exploitation. Law Number 16 of 2011 concerning Legal Aid provides children with the right to free legal assistance, but its implementation remains limited, particularly in remote and rural areas, preventing all children in need from receiving legal protection.

Cultural and social norms that still frame sexual violence as an internal family matter add to the complexity of child protection. Many families tend to suppress cases to preserve their "good name," resulting in perpetrators often escaping legal proceedings. Furthermore, social pressures create fears of marginalization or blame, preventing victims from reporting their experiences. (KM, 2024) This phenomenon underscores the importance of a multidimensional approach to child protection, relying not only on the law but also on education, public awareness, and comprehensive social interventions to ensure children's rights to safety and development are fully protected.

The psychological impact of sexual violence on children is severe and can be long-term. Child victims often experience severe trauma, fear, depression, and behavioral

disorders that affect their daily lives. Some victims exhibit symptoms of excessive anxiety, difficulty sleeping, or even experience developmental regression, such as refusing to attend school or withdrawing from social interactions. Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection (Article 14 paragraph 1, and Article 15) affirms children's right to receive psychological, social, and rehabilitation protection. However, limited resources and professional support in many regions mean that victims' psychological recovery is often suboptimal. These psychological impacts not only damage children's quality of life but also potentially impact their academic achievement, family relationships, and ability to interact healthily with their surroundings. (Priyambudi, 2023)

The social impact of sexual violence is also significant. Child victims often experience social isolation due to the stigma attached to them by society or the school environment. This stigma can lead to feelings of shame, fear of being judged, or being labeled "problematic," making children reluctant to interact with their peers and other social groups. These social impacts also affect families, who may face pressure from society or internal conflict as a result of the incident. It demonstrates that sexual violence against children is not simply an individual issue but rather a social phenomenon that requires community attention, education, and a collective approach (Nahar, 2022).

Besides the psychological and social impacts, sexual violence against children has complex legal implications. Victims often face lengthy, complicated, and traumatic legal processes, in which their rights are not always fully protected. For example, during investigations and trials, children must relive their traumatic experiences before investigators, prosecutors, and judges, potentially deepening psychological wounds. The Child Protection Law (Articles 81 to 84) regulates victims' rights to legal protection and assistance, but unpreparedness of authorities, a lack of child-friendly procedures, and suboptimal coordination remain obstacles. (Novrianza, 2022) These legal implications demonstrate that the justice system is not fully responsive to the needs of child victims. Therefore, legal protection, rehabilitation, and restoration of children's rights need to be strengthened through regulatory reform and increased capacity of law enforcement.

Legislative Update and Legal Reform Efforts to Ensure Child Protection from Sexual Violence

The history of child protection legislation in Indonesia shows significant developments along with increasing awareness of children's rights and the increasing number of cases of sexual violence. Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection (UU PA) defines a child as any individual under the age of eighteen, including unborn children (Article 1 paragraph 1). This law not only protects children from discrimination, exploitation, and abuse, but it also criminalizes sexual assaulters (Articles 76C to 76I). For example, Article 81 of the UU PA forbids sexual coercion against minors, which has a maximum penalty of 15 years in prison and/or a fine of up to IDR 5 billion., also regulate criminal acts related to violence and sexual exploitation of children, both in physical and digital contexts. This legal adaptation was undertaken to align regulations with new phenomena, including the increase in cases of child sexual violence and the use of digital media as a means of exploitation.

Despite rapid legislative development, legal gaps and weaknesses remain the focus of reform. One such area is the lack of coordination between law enforcement agencies, resulting in inefficient and child-unfriendly investigations, prosecutions, and trials. The lack of sensitive judicial procedures for child victims leaves them facing traumatic experiences when reporting cases or testifying in court. Furthermore, the lack of clarity regarding additional sanctions and specific protection mechanisms for victims, such as psychological and social rehabilitation, means that children's rights are not always fully fulfilled (Articles 14, 15, and 81 of the Child Protection Law). These weaknesses demonstrate that, despite the

existing legal framework, legislative reform is still needed to create a comprehensive, effective, and responsive child protection system that addresses social developments and new challenges in addressing child sexual violence.

Legislative reform efforts in Indonesia are focused on revising Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection (UU PA) and developing new, more operational implementing regulations. This revision aims to close remaining legal loopholes, including unclear law enforcement procedures and inter-agency coordination. The drafting of implementing regulations is also aimed at providing technical guidance for law enforcement officials, child protection agencies, and related institutions in handling sexual violence cases in an integrated manner that is responsive to victims' needs. With more detailed regulations, it is hoped that the child protection process will be more effective, expeditious, and child-friendly, in accordance with Articles 14 and 15 of the Child Protection Law, which regulate children's rights to protection, rehabilitation, and legal assistance.

One important strategy in legislative reform is to strengthen punitive penalties for those who commit sexual assault. 76C through 76I of the Child Protection Law already stipulate penalties ranging from imprisonment to a maximum fine of IDR 5 billion. However, field practice demonstrates the need to strengthen the implementation of sanctions and adjust penalties for complex cases, including digital-based sexual violence. By enforcing stricter criminal sanctions, it is hoped that the deterrent effect on perpetrators will increase while providing legal certainty for victims. Furthermore, connection with Law Number 19 of 2016 about Electronic Information and Transactions (Article 27 paragraph 1 and Article 45 paragraph 1) and Law Number 44 of 2008 about Pornography is crucial for addressing child sexual exploitation in the digital age.

The next strategy is the integration of prevention and victim rehabilitation mechanisms into the legal system. This approach emphasizes not only the prosecution of perpetrators but also holistic protection for victims, including psychological, social, and educational rehabilitation. Articles 14 and 15 of the Child Protection Law emphasize that children have the right to social and psychological rehabilitation services, but implementation remains limited in some regions. With legislative updates that emphasize the obligation of relevant agencies to provide these services, it is hoped that child victims will receive optimal recovery, allowing them to grow and develop without obstacles due to the trauma of sexual violence.

Strengthening child-friendly procedures in the investigation and judicial process is also a key focus of legal reform. It includes providing safe examination rooms, assistance by psychologists or legal counsel, and interview methods that do not cause psychological distress to children. National Police Regulation No. 8 of 2009 concerning Child Protection in Criminal Justice Processes can be used as a reference, but it needs to be clarified in the revised Child Protection Law so that all law enforcement agencies apply uniform procedural standards. With child-friendly procedures, it is hoped that victims will not experience additional trauma when reporting or testifying, thus ensuring their rights are fully protected.

The goal of this legal reform is to create a comprehensive and effective child protection system, encompassing prevention, prosecution, and rehabilitation. With clearer regulations, effective inter-agency coordination, and child-friendly procedures, it is expected that child victims of sexual violence will receive maximum protection in accordance with their rights. This reform is desired to ensure that the law is not merely repressive against perpetrators but also proactive in preventing sexual violence and guaranteeing children's rights to grow, develop, and feel safe in their environment.

Furthermore, legal reform aims to raise awareness among law enforcement and the public about children's rights. Consistent law enforcement and transparent procedures will provide best practices in child protection, while encouraging the public to be more responsive

to cases of sexual violence. This awareness is crucial for reducing stigma against victims and encouraging reporting of cases, so that children can receive appropriate legal protection, social support, and rehabilitation. Thus, legislative reform not only strengthens the legal aspects but also builds a sustainable culture of child protection at the social and community levels.

The expected impact of the revision or update of the Child Protection Law (Law No. 35 of 2014) is the creation of a more comprehensive, effective, and responsive child protection system for cases of sexual violence. This revision is expected to close legal loopholes that have hampered law enforcement, clarify criminal sanctions for perpetrators (Articles 76C–76I of the Child Protection Law), and affirm the rights of child victims to legal assistance, psychological rehabilitation, and social protection (Articles 14 and 15 of the Child Protection Law). With clearer mechanisms and child-friendly judicial procedures, victims can receive maximum protection without experiencing additional trauma, while also providing legal certainty for the community and law enforcement officials. Furthermore, the integration of the Child Protection Law, the Criminal Code, the Pornography Law, and the Electronic Information and Transactions Law is expected to comprehensively address the challenges of sexual violence in both digital and physical contexts.

However, the implementation of legal reforms on the ground faces various challenges. Limited capacity of law enforcement officials, minimal coordination between law enforcement agencies, and a lack of resources for child-friendly procedures are key obstacles. Cross-sectoral oversight and coordination efforts, for example, through the establishment of task forces or coordination forums between the police, prosecutors, courts, and child protection agencies, are crucial to ensure the regulations are consistently implemented. Furthermore, low public awareness of children's rights and stigma against victims of sexual violence also impact the effectiveness of the law. Therefore, legal evaluations should encompass not only the formal aspects of legislation but also the effectiveness of implementation at the practical level, with a focus on child protection, violence prevention, and comprehensive victim recovery.

CONCLUSION

Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection, the Criminal Code (KUHP), the Pornography Law, the Electronic Information and Transactions (ITE) Law, and the ratification of the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) through Law Number 36 of 1990 provide a solid legal foundation for protecting children from sexual violence in Indonesia, according to the analysis done. However, the implementation of the law still faces various obstacles, including lengthy and traumatic judicial procedures for victims, a lack of child-friendly procedures, a lack of coordination between agencies, and social, cultural, and economic barriers that hinder reporting and recovery for victims. The impact of sexual violence on children is extensive, including psychological trauma, social isolation, stigma, and complex legal processes. An evaluation of legislative reforms indicates that revising the Child Protection Law and developing more operational implementing regulations, strengthening criminal sanctions, integrating prevention and rehabilitation mechanisms, and implementing child-friendly judicial procedures are important steps to create more comprehensive and effective protection.

Based on these findings, recommendations include the need to increase the capacity of law enforcement officers through specialized training on sexual violence against children and child-friendly procedures, as well as strengthening cross-sectoral coordination between the police, prosecutors, courts, and child protection agencies. Furthermore, legislative reform must be accompanied by extensive public outreach to raise awareness of children's rights and encourage the reporting of sexual violence cases without stigma. The government also needs

to provide victims with broader access to legal, psychological, and social rehabilitation services, including in remote areas. By implementing this strategy, it is hoped that Indonesia's child protection system will not only be based on formal law but will also provide real protection for children so They can live, grow, and thrive without fear of sexual violence.

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