

A Criminological Analysis of Drug-Related Crimes Among Adolescents

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to review and analyze the factors that cause narcotics crime among teenagers through a criminological approach. Furthermore, the article underscores the necessity for preventive measures in combating substance abuse among adolescents. The present article employs qualitative data analysis, deriving its data from a comprehensive review of extant literature. The results of the study demonstrate that adolescence constitutes a vulnerable period with regard to the circulation and abuse of narcotics. Adolescents frequently find themselves susceptible to exploitation due to their innate curiosity and the absence of a fully developed understanding of their actions. This phenomenon places the Indonesian nation in a critical state, as adolescents are the foundation of the nation's future. A comprehensive strategy is imperative to address the plight of adolescents grappling with substance use disorders, encompassing both those who use drugs and those who engage in the illicit transportation of such substances.

Keywords: Crime, Narcotics, Teenagers

INTRODUCTION

Currently, Indonesia is facing a rather complex social phenomenon related to drug abuse among teenagers. This phenomenon has serious consequences not only for the individuals involved but also for social stability, public health, and the legal system (Ramadhan & Darwis, 2023). As a social group in a transitional phase of life, adolescents are highly vulnerable both psychologically and socially and are targeted by drug trafficking (Fikri & Purwanti, 2025). Many teenagers, due to environmental pressures or a lack of parental supervision, find themselves caught in the cycle of drug trafficking and abuse (Dando et al., 2023; Shafie et al., 2024). This phenomenon is not merely a legal issue but also a social phenomenon that must be analyzed from a multidisciplinary perspective, including through a criminological approach.

In 2022, a significant number of 15-year-olds were acting as drug couriers in Central Sulawesi Province (Arshandi, 2022). According to data from the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) of Central Sulawesi, in collaboration with the Indonesian Institute of Sciences, as of 2022 there were at least 52,341 people aged 14–64 using drugs in Central Sulawesi Province (Arshandi, 2022). Most child offenders are lured by the promise of money and do not fully understand the legal consequences of their actions (Capp, 2024). The case in South Sulawesi illustrates how drug networks have exploited the vulnerability of adolescents as a means of distribution, using economic incentives and a lack of legal awareness as a pretext (Ahmad, 2024; Mursyid et al., 2025).

More broadly, data from the *Badan Narkotika Nasional* (BNN) (2023) indicates that approximately 21% of all drug users are school and college students. Although various regulations and policies have been implemented to combat drug trafficking and abuse, the rate of adolescent involvement in drug-related cases shows an alarming trend. This indicates the need for a more in-depth approach to identifying the root causes of the problem. Criminological studies are essential for uncovering the internal and external dynamics that drive adolescents to engage in this criminal activity, thereby enabling the development of more effective and sustainable preventive strategies (Ezeji, 2025; Gupta, 2024).

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Criminology, as the study of the causes of crime, societal responses, and policies to address them, provides a crucial foundation for understanding the root causes of drug abuse (Bansal et al., 2023). Various factors—such as a dysfunctional family environment, the influence of promiscuous social circles, social pressure, economic conditions, and weak social control-

contribute to adolescents' tendency to engage in drug-related criminal activity. On the other hand, modernization and globalization have also made it easier for adolescents to access drugs (Dar & Kannan, 2023; Harmadi et al., 2022).

From a legal standpoint, the criminal offense of drug abuse is strictly regulated under Law No. 35 of 2009 on Narcotics (Law No. 35/2009). Articles 111 through 127 of Law No. 35/2009 outline the criminal penalties for drug users, dealers, and manufacturers. However, a purely repressive approach has not proven sufficiently effective. Specifically, this ineffectiveness arises when such measures are not accompanied by preventive and rehabilitative approaches that take into account the psychosocial aspects of adolescents (Rahayu et al., 2024). A collective commitment is needed to prevent and eradicate the circulation of narcotics among adolescents (Danil et al., 2022; Haryono et al., 2026).

This article aims to review and analyze the factors contributing to drug-related crimes among adolescents through a criminological approach. Furthermore, this article also seeks to emphasize that preventive measures are essential in the effort to combat drug abuse among adolescents. By understanding the realities on the ground, it is hoped that this study can make a tangible contribution to the formulation of policies that prioritize the protection and guidance of adolescents as the nation's future assets.

METHODS

This article uses data obtained through a literature review to analyze the causes and effects of drug abuse among adolescents. Data were collected from relevant written sources, such as books, scientific journals, articles, research reports, and laws and regulations related to drug abuse, as well as relevant criminological theories (Soekanto & Mamuji, 2003: 33-37). The data obtained was analyzed qualitatively to understand the phenomenon of drug abuse among adolescents from legal and criminological perspectives. This analysis aims to explore the causal factors, the resulting social and psychological impacts, and policies that can be implemented to reduce cases of drug abuse among adolescents.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Criminological Theories in Explaining Drug Abuse Among Adolescents

To understand the factors driving adolescent involvement in drug-related crimes, several criminological theories can serve as a basis for analysis. These theories help shed light on the psychological, social, and structural factors underlying deviant behavior during adolescence. Some of the theories used as a basis for analysis include strain/anomie theory, social learning theory, and social control theory.

First, the Strain Theory proposed by the American sociologist Robert K. Merton (1968). This theory explains that crime can arise when there is an imbalance between socially recognized cultural goals and the means available to achieve them legally. Adolescents who are unable to meet social standards such as academic or economic success through legal means may experience psychological pressure and ultimately choose illegal paths, such as drug abuse, as a form of escape.

Second, the social learning theory developed by Albert Bandura and later adapted for criminological studies by Ronald Akers (1977). This theory emphasizes that deviant behavior is the result of a learning process acquired through social interaction. In this context, adolescents who frequently associate with peers involved in drug use are at greater risk of imitating such behavior. Deviant behavior is shaped through the processes of observation, imitation, and reinforcement of such actions (Akers, 1977).

Third, the social control theory proposed by Travis Hirschi (1969) states that individuals are less likely to engage in criminal behavior if they have strong social ties to their community. These ties include involvement in school activities, good relationships with family, or participation in community activities. Conversely, adolescents who lack social ties or feel excluded from their environment are more vulnerable to deviant behavior such as drug abuse. In other words, weak external control from social institutions is one of the factors that trigger crime among adolescents.

2. Factors Contributing to Drug Abuse Among Adolescents

Drug abuse occurs when a person uses illicit substances not for medical purposes, but to experience their effects excessively and continuously (Charuni, 2024; Olsen, 2022). This behavior carries the risk of causing adverse effects on the user's physical and mental health, as well as their social life (Ciucă Anghel et al., 2023). Especially among adolescents, drug abuse is a critical issue because it can ruin their future (Deep et al., 2024). Factors that may lead someone to abuse drugs include personal factors, family, peers, and the social environment (Alhammad et al., 2022; Belfiore et al., 2024).

First, personal factors stemming from within the individual include difficulty adapting to the surrounding environment, a fragile personality, low self-esteem, and a lack of ability to control curiosity or the desire to try new things (Abbasi, 2025). The desire to imitate others or the urge to seek adventure without considering the risks often serves as a trigger. In addition, psychological stress that is not properly managed can lead a person to take the easy way out through drugs (Departemen Kesehatan RI, 2010).

Second, family environment plays a crucial role. Children who grow up in families with drug-addicted parents, a lack of affection, or a dysfunctional family environment are at high risk of becoming users (Shubho et al., 2026). A lack of open communication and minimal parental supervision—due to work commitments or the pursuit of material wealth—can make children feel neglected and lead them to seek escape through drugs (Sarwono, 2002).

Third, peer influence, such as associating with unhealthy peer groups. By “unhealthy,” we specifically mean situations where friends are drug users or dealers, which can influence a person's decisions (Abdalla et al., 2023). Peer pressure to use drugs is often linked to group loyalty or solidarity, forcing individuals to go along even if they were initially reluctant (Badan Narkotika Nasional, 2021).

Fourth, a social environment characterized by apathy or a lack of concern for others creates an opening for drug trafficking. If this situation is allowed to continue, drug dealers will feel free to operate without fear of weak law enforcement. This social indifference increases the risk of drug proliferation in society (Kamarudin et al., 2020).

3. Data on Drug Use Among Adolescents

According to data from the Ministry of Communication and Information Technology (Kominfo) in 2021, 82.4% of drug users in Indonesia are from the productive age group, namely those aged 15 to 35. Of this number, 47.1% are involved as dealers, while the remaining 31.4% act as couriers (Kementerian Komunikasi dan Informatika, 2021). One concrete example occurred in the city of Bandung in 2022, when five teenagers aged 15–18 were arrested for acting as couriers of methamphetamine packaged as snacks (Kompas.com, 2022). They admitted to being lured by the monetary reward without realizing the legal risks involved. This case reflects how drug syndicates exploit economic conditions and teenagers' lack of legal awareness to use them as distribution tools.

In 2023, the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) reported that approximately 3.3 million Indonesians—or 1.73% of the population aged 15–64—were known to be abusing drugs. Of that number, approximately 312,000 were adolescents aged 15 to 24. Furthermore, based on the 2023 national prevalence survey, approximately 1.36% of drug users were adolescents. The main causes of first-time use include peer influence and curiosity (Zuliansyah, 2024).

In 2024, Lampung Province became one of the regions with high case numbers, with more than 100,000 drug users, the majority of whom were students. A similar situation occurred in Palu City, Central Sulawesi, where approximately 35% of drug users in early 2024 were aged 15 and older, with many still attending junior high school (Media Suara Palu, 2024). In January 2025, data from the National Information and Crime Center (Pusiknas) of the Indonesian National Police's Criminal Investigation Agency revealed that 821 students were suspects in drug cases, indicating a significant increase compared to the previous month (Poerwanti, 2025).

4. Drug Abuse Among Teenagers

Drug abuse in Indonesia is a serious issue that is strictly regulated under Law No. 35/2009. This law states that all forms of drug abuse are strictly prohibited, and offenders may face criminal penalties depending on the extent of their involvement and the type of drug used. For individuals proven to have abused, possessed, distributed, or produced narcotics, there are severe criminal penalties as part of efforts to eradicate the illicit drug trade.

Specifically, Articles 111, 112, and 114 of Law No. 35/2009 prohibit the possession, control, and illicit distribution of Schedule I narcotics. For example, Article 112 states that any person who, without authorization or in violation of the law, possesses, stores, controls, or supplies Schedule I narcotics may be subject to imprisonment for a minimum of 4 years and a maximum of 12 years. Meanwhile, if the perpetrator of a narcotics-related crime is a child or minor, special legal provisions providing specific protection apply. Articles 81 and 82 of this law affirm that the state has an obligation to provide rehabilitation and guidance to children who are victims of abuse or even perpetrators within drug networks. The approach taken prioritizes child protection and recovery over mere criminal punishment.

This is in line with the principles of restorative justice, which are beginning to be implemented in Indonesia's juvenile justice system. These principles are enshrined in Law No. 11 of 2012 on the Juvenile Justice System (SPPA). This approach aims to protect children from overly punitive legal proceedings and provide them with opportunities for rehabilitation through social and medical programs.

Drugs are often described as two sides of the same coin. On one hand, these substances have specific medical uses, such as sedatives or pain relievers used in the medical field. On the other hand, if used outside of medical supervision or in excessive doses, their effects can be extremely harmful to both physical and mental health (Badan Narkotika Nasional, 2023a). Many users are initially drawn to the pleasurable sensations or sense of calm they produce, but eventually become trapped in a cycle of addiction that is difficult to break. The desire to continue using drugs stems from the hallucinatory experiences or fleeting euphoria felt by users (Costa, 2026). This condition drives them to constantly seek similar sensations, without realizing that the effects are highly damaging to both body and mind. Although the dangers of drugs are widely known, rates of misuse remain high, particularly among young people (Nath et al., 2022).

Drug abuse among Indonesia's youth is showing a steadily rising trend and warrants serious concern (Urbaningrum et al., 2025). This can jeopardize individuals' futures and even potentially undermine the quality of the nation's next generation. Drug dependence leads to serious health issues, including withdrawal symptoms (withdrawal), characterized by severe physical pain, anxiety, and discomfort (Komisi Nasional Perlindungan Anak, 2024). While rehabilitation and

treatment can help overcome addiction, prevention remains the best way to ward off the dangers of drugs (Day et al., 2025). Early education, a healthy environment, and parental and community supervision are key to protecting the younger generation from the trap of drugs (Shafie et al., 2024).

CONCLUSION

The Indonesian people currently face serious challenges in their efforts to eradicate drug abuse among adolescents. Adolescents are a vulnerable group because this transitional stage of life is heavily influenced by their social environment, peer pressure, and a lack of self-control. Drug abuse is also often triggered by a desire to experience pleasurable sensations or as an escape from stress. Unwittingly, adolescents can become trapped in a cycle of drug trafficking or abuse that destroys their future. The fight against drug-related crimes must be approached holistically, not only through law enforcement but also through educational initiatives, rehabilitation, and the application of restorative justice. This is to provide a better future for adolescents trapped in the drug cycle and prevent them from repeating their actions.

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