

Protection of Children's Rights During Homicide Investigations at Padang Panjang Police Resort, Indonesia

Fitri Yanti^{1*}, Yenny Fitri Z.²

¹ Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat, Indonesia. E-mail: fitrizifi86@gmail.com

² Universitas Muhammadiyah Sumatera Barat, Indonesia. E-mail: yennyfitriz@umsb.ac.id

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Abstract: This study was motivated by the practice of investigating child homicide offenders at the Women and Children Protection Unit (PPA Unit) of Padang Panjang Police Resort, where investigations were conducted by general investigators rather than specialized child investigators. This condition raises concerns regarding the conformity of investigative practices with child rights protection principles as regulated under Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System and Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection. Therefore, this study aims to analyze the investigation process involving child homicide offenders and examine whether children's rights have been substantively fulfilled during such investigations. This study employed an empirical juridical method with a descriptive-analytical approach. Data were collected through interviews, case document studies, and analyses of relevant statutory regulations. Data validity was ensured through source triangulation and cross-checking procedures using official legal documents, including Notification of Commencement of Investigation (SPDP) and case completion reports (P21). The findings indicate that, formally, the rights of children during the investigation process had generally been fulfilled in accordance with existing legal provisions. Children received legal assistance, parental accompaniment, and procedural safeguards during investigations. However, substantively, potential gaps remain, particularly concerning the competence of general investigators in handling child-related cases and the implementation of the *best interests of the child* principle. The novelty of this research lies in its analysis of the tension between handling serious criminal offenses and implementing child protection principles during investigation practices within the juvenile criminal justice system in Indonesia.

Keywords: Child Offenders, Child Rights, Criminal Investigation, Juvenile Justice, Legal Protection

1. Introduction

Child involvement in criminal activities has become a significant issue within contemporary criminal justice systems because children occupy a unique legal and social position as individuals who require special protection despite their involvement in unlawful conduct. Cases involving children as perpetrators of serious criminal offenses,¹ particularly homicide, present a complex challenge for legal institutions because they involve two equally important dimensions, namely criminal accountability and child protection. The increasing attention toward child rights protection reflects the recognition that children possess developmental,² psychological, and social characteristics different from those of adults. Consequently, children in conflict with the law require special treatment throughout legal proceedings to ensure that their rights and future development remain protected. Within the Indonesian legal framework, child protection principles have been institutionalized through Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System and Law Number 35 of 2014 concerning Child Protection. However, implementing these principles becomes more complex when children are involved in serious criminal offenses such as homicide, where the need for strict legal enforcement often intersects with broader objectives of child welfare and rehabilitation.

¹ Crosby A. Modrowski and Patricia K. Kerig, "Investigating the Association Between Posttraumatic Risky Behavior and Offending in Adolescents Involved in the Juvenile Justice System," *Journal of Youth and Adolescence* 48, no. 10 (October 4, 2019): 1952–66, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10964-019-01120-0>.

² Laura Beckman and Nancy Rodriguez, "Race, Ethnicity, and Official Perceptions in the Juvenile Justice System: Extending the Role of Negative Attributional Stereotypes," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 48, no. 11 (November 5, 2021): 1536–56, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00938548211004672>.

Existing studies concerning juvenile justice have generally focused on the implementation of diversion mechanisms, restorative justice approaches, and legal protection of children involved in less serious criminal offenses. Previous literature commonly argues that child-centered justice can be effectively achieved through alternative dispute resolution mechanisms emphasizing rehabilitation and social reintegration. Several studies have highlighted the importance of diversion as an approach capable of minimizing the negative effects of formal legal proceedings on children.³ Other studies have examined the role of legal institutions in ensuring procedural safeguards for children during criminal investigations and judicial processes.⁴ Nevertheless, these studies tend to concentrate on ordinary criminal cases and frequently overlook the complexity of serious criminal offenses committed by children.⁵ Consequently, limited attention has been directed toward understanding how child protection principles are implemented in cases where legal provisions restrict the application of restorative approaches, particularly in homicide investigations involving child offenders.

The limitations of previous studies indicate the existence of an important research gap concerning the relationship between child protection principles and criminal accountability in serious offenses. Existing research has generally emphasized procedural compliance and legal mechanisms without critically examining whether such protection has been substantively implemented in practice.⁶ Furthermore, previous studies often discuss juvenile justice from a normative perspective by focusing primarily on statutory regulations and legal concepts while giving less attention to field-based realities experienced during criminal investigations.⁷ This condition creates a limited understanding of how legal institutions apply child protection principles in practical settings where investigators encounter complex legal and institutional challenges. Therefore, evaluating the implementation of child protection in actual investigative practices becomes necessary to identify whether procedural compliance automatically guarantees substantive fulfillment of children's rights. Such evaluation also provides opportunities to examine the tensions emerging between punitive legal frameworks and child-centered justice principles. Based on these considerations, this study seeks to examine the investigation process involving child homicide offenders and evaluate whether children's rights have been substantively fulfilled during such legal proceedings. The study specifically addresses how investigative mechanisms are implemented within serious criminal cases involving children and how child protection principles are applied in balancing legal accountability with the best interests of the child. This study argues that although legal procedures may formally comply with existing statutory provisions, such compliance does not necessarily ensure comprehensive child protection in substantive terms. The study further assumes that serious criminal offenses create unique circumstances in which procedural legal requirements may dominate over rehabilitative considerations. Through an empirical juridical approach, this study aims to provide a broader understanding of the dynamics of child legal protection and contribute to the development of more balanced juvenile justice mechanisms within the Indonesian legal system.

2. Method

This study employed an empirical juridical method with a descriptive-analytical approach to examine the implementation of legal protection for child homicide offenders during the investigation process at the Women and Children Protection Unit (PPA Unit) of Padang Panjang Police Resort. The empirical juridical approach was selected because the study not only examined legal norms and statutory provisions but

³ Sean E. Snyder and Jennifer E. Duchscher, "Revisiting Ecological Systems Theory: Practice Implications for Juvenile Justice Youth," *Translational Issues in Psychological Science* 8, no. 2 (June 2022): 234–45, <https://doi.org/10.1037/tps0000324>.

⁴ Lisa Rapp, "Delinquent-Victim Youth—Adapting a Trauma-Informed Approach for the Juvenile Justice System," *Journal of Evidence-Informed Social Work* 13, no. 5 (September 2, 2016): 492–97, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23761407.2016.1166844>.

⁵ Kareem L. Jordan and Rimonda Maroun, "Minority Threat and Criminal Sentencing: Examining Juveniles in the Adult Criminal Justice System," *Journal of Crime and Justice* 39, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 41–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2015.1133397>.

⁶ Gerald P. Mallon and Jazmine Perez, "The Experiences of Transgender and Gender Expansive Youth in Juvenile Justice Systems," *Journal of Criminological Research, Policy and Practice* 6, no. 3 (April 6, 2020): 217–29, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JCRPP-01-2020-0017>.

⁷ Laura S. Abrams, Sid P. Jordan, and Laura A. Montero, "What Is a Juvenile? A Cross-National Comparison of Youth Justice Systems," *Youth Justice* 18, no. 2 (August 12, 2018): 111–30, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1473225418779850>.

also analyzed their practical implementation within law enforcement practices. The research was conducted at the PPA Unit of Padang Panjang Police Resort, West Sumatra, Indonesia. Primary data were obtained through direct interviews with individuals involved in the case-handling process, particularly assistant investigators at the PPA Unit of Padang Panjang Police Resort. Secondary data were collected through document studies involving statutory regulations, case records, investigative reports, and relevant academic literature. The research instruments consisted of semi-structured interview guidelines, documentation sheets, and field notes designed to obtain comprehensive information regarding child investigation procedures and the implementation of child rights protection within the juvenile criminal justice system.

Data collection techniques included interviews, document studies, and reviews of primary and secondary legal materials. Interviews were conducted directly to obtain information concerning investigation procedures, the implementation of children's rights protection, and challenges encountered in handling child homicide cases. Document studies involved examining official documents such as the Notification of Commencement of Investigation (SPDP), investigation reports, case completion records (P21), and regulations concerning child protection and juvenile criminal justice systems. Data analysis was conducted qualitatively through the stages of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing using an interactive analytical framework. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and cross-checking procedures between interview findings and official documents. This approach was employed to ensure data consistency, accuracy, and credibility, thereby strengthening the reliability and scientific validity of the research findings.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Handling of Child Homicide Offenders at the PPA Unit of Padang Panjang Police Resort

The handling of child homicide cases at the PPA Unit of Padang Panjang Police Resort demonstrates specific characteristics that distinguish it from the handling of ordinary criminal cases involving adult offenders. Child-related criminal cases require a legal approach that not only emphasizes law enforcement but also prioritizes the protection of children's rights and interests throughout legal proceedings. The findings of this study indicate that the child offender involved in the homicide case was aged 17 years and 9 months at the time of committing the offense, placing the child within the legal category of a minor under Indonesian law. Although the offender was approaching adulthood, the legal process remained subject to the Juvenile Criminal Justice System because the age criterion is determined at the time the offense is committed rather than when the offense is discovered. This situation demonstrates the importance of age determination in identifying legal responsibility and procedural treatment within the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, homicide cases involving children possess unique complexities because they involve serious criminal conduct while simultaneously requiring special legal protection measures.⁸

The implementation of investigative procedures for children at the PPA Unit followed the provisions stipulated in the Criminal Procedure Code, the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law, and relevant police regulations concerning criminal investigations. The investigation process began with receiving police reports and continued through case classification, preliminary investigations, witness examinations, and the collection of evidence. The findings indicate that investigators attempted to implement child-sensitive procedures throughout the investigation process. Investigators were also required to consider restorative principles and diversion mechanisms as mandated by the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law.⁹ However, due to the nature of homicide as a serious criminal offense carrying a penalty exceeding seven

⁸ Ellen A. Donnelly, "Do Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) Mandate Reforms Change Decision-Making? Decomposing Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 17, no. 3 (July 29, 2019): 288–308, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204018790667>.

⁹ Emily L. Robertson et al., "Do Callous–Unemotional Traits Moderate the Effects of the Juvenile Justice System on Later Offending Behavior?," *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry* 62, no. 2 (February 25, 2021): 212–22, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jcpp.13266>.

years of imprisonment, diversion procedures could not be applied in this case. Consequently, investigators were required to continue formal legal procedures while maintaining legal safeguards for the child.¹⁰ This demonstrates that investigative procedures involving children must balance legal accountability with child protection principles.

The implementation of arrest, detention, and evidentiary measures against child offenders constitutes a crucial aspect of legal proceedings involving children. The findings reveal that the child offender was arrested with a formal arrest warrant and was subsequently subjected to detention procedures in accordance with applicable legal provisions. Under the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law, detention of children may only be conducted under specific conditions, including a minimum age requirement and the seriousness of the offense involved.¹¹ Investigators also carried out evidence seizure procedures involving objects associated with the offense, including physical evidence used during the criminal act. Witness examinations and forensic investigations were further conducted to establish factual circumstances and strengthen evidentiary findings.¹² These measures indicate that investigative activities were conducted through legally prescribed procedures while ensuring procedural safeguards for children. The implementation of such procedures demonstrates efforts to maintain legal certainty and fairness throughout the criminal process.

The implementation of child rights protection mechanisms during investigations reflects the commitment of law enforcement institutions to ensure humane treatment of children involved in criminal proceedings. The findings indicate that children received legal assistance and parental support during examinations and were examined in specialized rooms designed for child-related investigations. In addition, investigators maintained confidentiality regarding the identity of the child and avoided exposing the child to unnecessary public attention.¹³ The use of child-friendly approaches during investigations demonstrates efforts to prevent physical and psychological harm to children. Nevertheless, the findings also indicate that several rights had not been optimally fulfilled, including recreational rights and specific rehabilitation services. Although procedural protection was generally implemented effectively, substantive child protection involving broader social and psychological support remained limited. This suggests that legal protection mechanisms should be strengthened beyond procedural requirements.

The application of legal provisions in determining juvenile criminal responsibility requires consideration of both criminal conduct and the special legal status of children. In this case, investigators applied legal provisions under the Criminal Code and Child Protection Law in conjunction with the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law. Although the offense involved serious criminal conduct, the child offender remained subject to special legal treatment applicable to minors. The Juvenile Criminal Justice System limits the severity of criminal sanctions imposed upon children and emphasizes imprisonment as a measure of last resort. This principle reflects the objective of juvenile justice systems to prioritize rehabilitation and reintegration rather than purely punitive measures.¹⁴ Therefore, determining criminal responsibility for child offenders involves balancing legal accountability and child welfare considerations. Such an approach seeks to maintain legal justice while preserving opportunities for children's future development.

¹⁰ Dexter R. Voisin et al., "Involvement in the Juvenile Justice System for African American Adolescents: Examining Associations with Behavioral Health Problems," *Journal of Social Service Research* 43, no. 1 (January 27, 2017): 129–40, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01488376.2016.1239596>.

¹¹ Sherri Y. Simmons-Horton, "A Bad Combination: Lived Experiences of Youth Involved in the Foster Care and Juvenile Justice Systems," *Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal* 38, no. 6 (December 25, 2021): 583–97, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10560-020-00693-1>.

¹² Nordia A. Campbell et al., "Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System: An Investigation of Ethnic Disparity in Program Referral at Disposition," *Journal of Ethnicity in Criminal Justice* 16, no. 2 (April 3, 2018): 77–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15377938.2017.1347544>.

¹³ Sonya Goshe, "How Contemporary Rehabilitation Fails Youth and Sabotages the American Juvenile Justice System: A Critique and Call for Change," *Critical Criminology* 27, no. 4 (December 25, 2019): 559–73, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10612-019-09473-5>.

¹⁴ Karen M. Kolivoski, Sara Goodkind, and Jeffrey J. Shook, "Social Justice for Crossover Youth: The Intersection of the Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Systems," *Social Work* 62, no. 4 (October 2017): 313–21, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swx034>.

The handling of homicide cases involving child offenders creates several implications for the development of juvenile justice systems.¹⁵ The findings indicate that although procedural legal requirements were generally fulfilled, there remain significant challenges concerning the implementation of comprehensive child protection measures. The limitations of diversion mechanisms in serious criminal cases demonstrate the need for alternative approaches capable of integrating legal accountability with rehabilitation objectives. Moreover, the findings suggest the necessity of strengthening multidisciplinary cooperation among investigators, psychologists,¹⁶ social workers, and correctional institutions in handling child-related cases. The existence of such cooperation may contribute to more comprehensive and child-centered justice mechanisms.¹⁷ Furthermore, strengthening institutional capacity and developing rehabilitation-based legal approaches are necessary to ensure that juvenile justice systems remain consistent with the principle of the best interests of the child. These implications highlight the importance of improving child justice policies to create more sustainable and effective legal protection systems.

3.2. Implementation of Legal Protection for Children within the Juvenile Criminal Justice System

The implementation of legal protection for children within the juvenile criminal justice system represents an essential component in ensuring that children in conflict with the law receive fair treatment throughout legal proceedings. The findings of this study indicate that the protection of children's rights during the investigation stage has been formally implemented in accordance with the provisions of Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System. Several legal rights of children were fulfilled during the investigative process, including legal assistance, parental accompaniment, protection of identity, and child-friendly treatment during examinations.¹⁸ The implementation of these measures demonstrates the state's effort to ensure that children remain protected despite their status as offenders in criminal cases. The existence of child-specific investigation procedures reflects an attempt to distinguish the treatment of child offenders from that of adult offenders. This distinction is important because children possess different psychological, emotional, and social characteristics that require a more protective approach. Therefore, the implementation of children's rights during criminal proceedings becomes a fundamental requirement in maintaining the principles of justice and human dignity.

The application of investigative procedures toward children differs significantly from ordinary criminal investigation procedures involving adult offenders. Child investigations require a more sensitive approach that prioritizes the child's psychological condition and developmental needs. In the present study, investigative procedures were conducted in child-specific rooms and involved the participation of parents and legal advisors throughout the process.¹⁹ This approach demonstrates the implementation of child-centered justice principles within legal procedures. Nevertheless, the implementation of such procedures cannot be separated from practical challenges that arise in the field.²⁰ Child investigations often involve emotional complexities because investigators must balance legal responsibilities and the need to protect children's welfare simultaneously. In serious criminal cases, including homicide, investigators encounter additional challenges because they are required to implement legal procedures while ensuring that

¹⁵ Steven N. Zane et al., "Pathways Through Juvenile Justice: A System-Level Assessment of Cumulative Disadvantage in the Processing of Juvenile Offenders," *Journal of Quantitative Criminology* 38, no. 2 (June 19, 2022): 483–514, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10940-021-09505-w>.

¹⁶ Susan Yoon et al., "The Effects of Child Protective Services and Juvenile Justice System Involvement on Academic Outcomes: Gender and Racial Differences," *Youth & Society* 53, no. 1 (January 26, 2021): 131–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0044118X19844392>.

¹⁷ Crosby A. Modrowski et al., "Victimization Profiles in Girls Involved in the Juvenile Justice System: A Latent Class Analysis," *Child Abuse & Neglect* 111 (January 2021): 104774, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2020.104774>.

¹⁸ Jordan Beardslee et al., "Under the Radar or Under Arrest: How Is Adolescent Boys' First Contact With the Juvenile Justice System Related to Future Offending and Arrests?," *Law and Human Behavior* 43, no. 4 (August 2019): 342–57, <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000340>.

¹⁹ Katie Massey Combs et al., "Evidence-Based Sexual Health Programs for Youth Involved With Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems: Outcomes Across Settings," *Children and Youth Services Review* 100 (May 2019): 64–69, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2019.02.032>.

²⁰ Wikan Sinatrio Aji, "The Implementation of Diversion and Restorative Justice in the Juvenile Criminal Justice System in Indonesia," *Journal of Indonesian Legal Studies* 4, no. 1 (April 23, 2019): 73–88, <https://doi.org/10.15294/jils.v4i01.23339>.

children are not subjected to harmful treatment.²¹ Therefore, investigation procedures for children require continuous development to maintain consistency with the objectives of juvenile justice.

The effectiveness of legal protection for children is also closely associated with the availability of institutional resources and the competence of child investigators.²² The implementation of child-friendly justice requires not only legal frameworks but also professional personnel capable of handling children appropriately. Investigators dealing with children should possess specialized knowledge concerning child psychology, communication methods with children, and rehabilitative approaches within juvenile justice systems. The findings of this study suggest that although investigative procedures have generally complied with legal provisions, there remains uncertainty regarding the existence of specialized certification and training for investigators handling child cases. This condition may affect the quality of legal protection provided to children during legal proceedings. Inadequate competence among investigators may increase the possibility of procedural shortcomings and limit the effectiveness of child protection mechanisms. Therefore, strengthening investigator competence remains an important aspect of improving the overall quality of child legal protection.

The implementation of child protection principles becomes increasingly complex when children are involved in serious criminal offenses. Unlike minor offenses where restorative justice mechanisms and diversion approaches can often be applied,²³ serious crimes such as homicide involve legal limitations that reduce opportunities for alternative settlement mechanisms. The findings indicate that serious criminal offenses create procedural circumstances where formal legal approaches become dominant. This situation may create difficulties in achieving the rehabilitative objectives of juvenile justice systems because the focus shifts toward legal accountability. Furthermore, serious criminal cases may create additional pressure on law enforcement institutions due to public expectations for strict law enforcement. Consequently, investigators often face challenges in balancing the need for punishment and the obligation to ensure child protection. These circumstances demonstrate that implementing child protection principles in serious criminal cases involves significant legal and institutional complexities.

The findings also reveal the existence of tension between the principle of the best interests of the child and criminal law enforcement objectives. The best interests of the child principle emphasizes the necessity of prioritizing children's welfare, development, and future opportunities during legal proceedings.²⁴ Conversely, criminal law enforcement requires accountability for unlawful actions committed by offenders regardless of age. In cases involving serious crimes, these two objectives may appear contradictory because legal sanctions may affect children's psychological conditions and future development. However, juvenile justice systems are expected to integrate these objectives rather than treat them as competing interests. Achieving balance between child protection and legal accountability is necessary to ensure that justice is implemented fairly without neglecting children's rights. Consequently, legal protection should be viewed not as an obstacle to law enforcement but as a mechanism that supports fair and sustainable justice.

Based on these findings, strengthening rehabilitation-based legal protection systems for children is necessary in both practical and policy dimensions. Such strengthening should involve enhancing the capacity of investigators through specialized training concerning child psychology, child-sensitive investigative methods, and rehabilitation-oriented legal practices. Furthermore, the establishment of sustainable psychological rehabilitation programs should become an integral component of child justice systems, particularly for children involved in serious criminal offenses. Greater institutional cooperation

²¹ Danielle E Parrish, "Achieving Justice for Girls in the Juvenile Justice System," *Social Work* 65, no. 2 (April 1, 2020): 149–58, <https://doi.org/10.1093/sw/swaa005>.

²² Clair White, "Treatment Services in the Juvenile Justice System: Examining the Use and Funding of Services by Youth on Probation," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 17, no. 1 (January 8, 2019): 62–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204017728997>.

²³ Lauren A. Reed, Jill D. Sharkey, and Althea Wroblewski, "Elevating the Voices of Girls in Custody for Improved Treatment and Systemic Change in the Juvenile Justice System," *American Journal of Community Psychology* 67, no. 1–2 (March 4, 2021): 50–63, <https://doi.org/10.1002/ajcp.12484>.

²⁴ Sara Goodkind et al., "From Child Welfare to Jail: Mediating Effects of Juvenile Justice Placement and Other System Involvement," *Child Maltreatment* 25, no. 4 (November 5, 2020): 410–21, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1077559520904144>.

among investigators,²⁵ correctional institutions, psychologists, social workers, and child protection agencies is also required to ensure more comprehensive protection mechanisms. In addition, policy reforms should encourage the development of multidisciplinary approaches capable of integrating legal accountability with social rehabilitation. Through these measures, juvenile justice systems can move beyond procedural compliance and become more responsive to children's long-term welfare and development needs.

3.3. Dynamics of Legal Protection for Child Homicide Offenders within the Juvenile Criminal Justice System

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of legal protection for child homicide offenders at the PPA Unit of Padang Panjang Police Resort has been carried out in accordance with the provisions stipulated in the Criminal Procedure Code, Law Number 11 of 2012 concerning the Juvenile Criminal Justice System, and the Chief of Police Regulation concerning criminal investigations. The investigation process included the receipt of police reports, case classification, arrest, detention, seizure of evidence, witness examination,²⁶ forensic examination, and submission of case files to the public prosecutor. During the implementation of the investigation process, children received several forms of legal protection, including legal assistance, parental accompaniment, examination in a child-specific room, humane treatment, and protection of the child's identity.²⁷ In addition, the investigation process also involved coordination with the Correctional Center to obtain social recommendations regarding the child's condition. Nevertheless, the findings also revealed that several child rights had not been optimally fulfilled, particularly regarding psychological rehabilitation services, recreational rights, and social recovery mechanisms. These findings demonstrate that legal protection has been formally implemented but has not fully fulfilled children's substantive protection needs.

The emergence of these conditions cannot be separated from the characteristics of homicide as a serious criminal offense carrying severe criminal sanctions.²⁸ Within Indonesia's juvenile justice system, diversion mechanisms can only be applied to offenses carrying a maximum sentence of less than seven years and not involving repeat offenses.²⁹ Consequently, homicide cases require investigators to prioritize formal legal procedures rather than restorative approaches.³⁰ This condition indirectly limits opportunities for case resolution mechanisms that focus on the recovery and rehabilitation of children. Furthermore, the implementation of legal protection is also influenced by institutional capacity,³¹ resource availability, investigator competence, and support from other institutions involved in handling juvenile cases. Although legal provisions formally require comprehensive child protection, practical implementation demonstrates limitations in adopting multidisciplinary approaches involving psychologists, social

²⁵ Vera Lopez and Lidia Nuño, "Latina and African-American Girls in the Juvenile Justice System: Needs, Problems, and Solutions," *Sociology Compass* 10, no. 1 (January 6, 2016): 24–37, <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12338>.

²⁶ Kareem L. Jordan and Brittani A. McNeal, "Juvenile Penalty or Leniency: Sentencing of Juveniles in the Criminal Justice System," *Law and Human Behavior* 40, no. 4 (August 2016): 387–400, <https://doi.org/10.1037/lhb0000186>.

²⁷ Wendy Haight et al., "An Evaluation of the Crossover Youth Practice Model (CYPM): Recidivism Outcomes for Maltreated Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System," *Children and Youth Services Review* 65 (June 2016): 78–85, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chidyouth.2016.03.025>.

²⁸ Tammy Hughes, Tara Raines, and Celeste Malone, "School Pathways to the Juvenile Justice System," *Policy Insights from the Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 7, no. 1 (March 11, 2020): 72–79, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2372732219897093>.

²⁹ Bitu Amani et al., "Families and the Juvenile Justice System," *Family & Community Health* 41, no. 1 (January 2018): 55–63, <https://doi.org/10.1097/FCH.0000000000000172>.

³⁰ Matthew C. Aalsma et al., "Implementing Risk Stratification to the Treatment of Adolescent Substance Use Among Youth Involved in the Juvenile Justice System: Protocol of a Hybrid Type I Trial," *Addiction Science & Clinical Practice* 14, no. 1 (December 6, 2019): 36, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s13722-019-0161-5>.

³¹ Erin M. Espinosa, Jonathan R. Sorensen, and Scott Walfield, "Youth Pathways: Evaluating the Influence of Gender, Involvement With the Public Mental Health System, Perceived Mental Health Need, and Traumatic Experiences on Juvenile Justice System Processing," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 18, no. 3 (July 27, 2020): 215–34, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1541204019889664>.

workers, and child rehabilitation professionals.³² Therefore, the implementation of child protection remains more focused on procedural compliance than on broader rehabilitation objectives.

These conditions illustrate the existence of a dynamic relationship between child protection principles and the need for law enforcement in serious criminal cases.³³ On one hand, the state has an obligation to enforce the law firmly against criminal acts,³⁴ particularly offenses involving the deprivation of human life. On the other hand, children as offenders continue to possess rights that must be protected and guaranteed throughout legal proceedings.³⁵ This dynamic situation demonstrates that the juvenile criminal justice system does not merely function as a mechanism for punishment but also serves as an instrument for safeguarding the future of children. If legal protection is interpreted solely as the fulfillment of administrative and procedural requirements,³⁶ the objectives of rehabilitation and social reintegration cannot be achieved effectively.³⁷ Consequently, legal protection for children should be interpreted more broadly as an effort to maintain balance among legal certainty, justice, and the principle of the best interests of the child.

The consequences arising from legal protection that primarily emphasizes procedural aspects may create significant psychological and social effects on children. Children involved in legal proceedings, particularly those facing serious criminal charges, may experience emotional pressure, anxiety, fear, and social stigma from their surrounding environment.³⁸ Such conditions may affect personality development, social relationships,³⁹ and children's adaptation processes following the completion of legal proceedings. In this context, legal protection focused only on administrative legal fulfillment is insufficient to ensure comprehensive protection for children.⁴⁰ A more rehabilitative approach is necessary to prevent legal proceedings from creating long-term consequences that may negatively affect children's future development.⁴¹ Therefore, legal protection for children should not merely be understood as procedural protection during investigations but should also be considered an essential component of social and psychological recovery processes.

The findings of this study differ from several previous studies that generally examined child protection within the context of diversion mechanisms, penal mediation,⁴² or restorative justice approaches in less

³² Jacqueline M. Chen et al., "Out of the Picture: Latinx and White Male Youths' Facial Features Predict Their Juvenile Justice System Processing Outcomes," *Crime & Delinquency* 67, no. 6–7 (June 3, 2021): 787–807, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128721999347>.

³³ Jerry Flores et al., "Crossover Youth and Gender: What Are the Challenges of Girls Involved in Both the Foster Care and Juvenile Justice Systems?," *Children and Youth Services Review* 91 (August 2018): 149–55, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2018.05.031>.

³⁴ Bo-Kyung Elizabeth Kim et al., "Statewide Trends of Trauma History, Suicidality, and Mental Health Among Youth Entering the Juvenile Justice System," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 68, no. 2 (February 2021): 300–307, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2020.05.044>.

³⁵ Renne Rodriguez Dragomir and Eman Tadros, "Exploring the Impacts of Racial Disparity Within the American Juvenile Justice System," *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* 71, no. 2 (June 11, 2020): 61–73, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jfcj.12165>.

³⁶ Abigail Novak and Vitoria De Francisco Lopes, "Child Delinquency, ACEs, and the Juvenile Justice System: Does Exposure to ACEs Affect Justice System Experiences for Children?," *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 20, no. 2 (April 2022): 113–38, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15412040211063129>.

³⁷ Jacquelyn F. Duron et al., "Trauma Exposure and Mental Health Needs Among Adolescents Involved With the Juvenile Justice System," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 37, no. 17–18 (September 26, 2022): NP15700–725, <https://doi.org/10.1177/08862605211016358>.

³⁸ Steven N. Zane and Jhon A. Pupo, "Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis," *Justice Quarterly* 38, no. 7 (November 10, 2021): 1293–1318, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07418825.2021.1915364>.

³⁹ Kristi Holsinger and Jessica P. Hodge, "The Experiences of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Girls in Juvenile Justice Systems," *Feminist Criminology* 11, no. 1 (January 23, 2016): 23–47, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1557085114557071>.

⁴⁰ Christy K. Scott et al., "Juvenile Justice Systems of Care: Results of a National Survey of Community Supervision Agencies and Behavioral Health Providers on Services Provision and Cross-System Interactions," *Health & Justice* 7, no. 1 (December 14, 2019): 11, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40352-019-0093-x>.

⁴¹ Namita Tanya Padgaonkar et al., "Exploring Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System Over the Year Following First Arrest," *Journal of Research on Adolescence* 31, no. 2 (June 5, 2021): 317–34, <https://doi.org/10.1111/jora.12599>.

⁴² Jerel M. Ezell et al., "Implementing Trauma-Informed Practice in Juvenile Justice Systems: What Can Courts Learn from Child Welfare Interventions?," *Journal of Child & Adolescent Trauma* 11, no. 4 (December 28, 2018): 507–19, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40653-018-0223-y>.

serious criminal cases.⁴³ Previous studies generally suggested that legal protection for children can be more effectively achieved through alternative mechanisms outside formal judicial proceedings by prioritizing social restoration and the best interests of children.⁴⁴ However, this study presents a different context because homicide cases have legal characteristics that do not permit the application of diversion mechanisms under existing legal provisions.⁴⁵ Therefore, legal protection for children involved in serious criminal offenses demonstrates greater complexity than legal protection in ordinary criminal cases.⁴⁶ This study further indicates that the effectiveness of child protection is not determined solely by the existence of legal regulations but also by the ability of the justice system to implement substantive and sustainable protection measures.

Based on these findings, strengthening measures are necessary to improve the legal protection system for child homicide offenders from both conceptual and policy perspectives. Such improvements may be achieved through enhancing the competence of child investigators by providing specialized training in child psychology,⁴⁷ child-friendly investigative techniques, and rehabilitative approaches during investigations.⁴⁸ In addition, sustainable psychological rehabilitation mechanisms should be developed for children undergoing legal processes to minimize psychological consequences from the earliest stages of legal proceedings. Strengthening coordination among investigators, correctional institutions, psychologists, social workers, and child protection agencies is also essential to establish a more comprehensive protection framework. Therefore, legal protection for children should not only focus on criminal case resolution but should also emphasize recovery, rehabilitation, and the strengthening of children's future development as fundamental objectives of the juvenile criminal justice system.

4. Conclusion

This study finds that the investigation process involving child homicide offenders at the Women and Children Protection Unit (PPA Unit) of Padang Panjang Police Resort has been formally implemented in accordance with the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law, the Child Protection Law, and relevant criminal procedural regulations. The investigative process demonstrates that child offenders received procedural legal protection, including legal assistance, parental accompaniment, confidentiality of identity, and child-friendly examination settings. These procedural safeguards indicate that law enforcement institutions have complied with normative legal requirements in handling child-related criminal cases. However, the findings also show that substantive protection remains partially limited, particularly in relation to psychological recovery, rehabilitation services, and long-term social reintegration measures for child offenders. In addition, the application of the *best interests of the child* principle encounters practical constraints in serious criminal offenses such as homicide, where diversion mechanisms are legally inapplicable. As a result, the juvenile justice process in such cases tends to emphasize procedural legality and formal criminal accountability rather than restorative and rehabilitative justice approaches. This condition highlights a gap between normative legal protection and its substantive implementation in practice.

⁴³ Nina Papalia et al., "Disparities in Criminal Justice System Responses to First-Time Juvenile Offenders According to Indigenous Status," *Criminal Justice and Behavior* 46, no. 8 (August 26, 2019): 1067–87, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0093854819851830>.

⁴⁴ Jeffrey Sharlein, "Beyond Recidivism: Investigating Comparative Educational and Employment Outcomes for Adolescents in the Juvenile and Criminal Justice Systems," *Crime & Delinquency* 64, no. 1 (January 15, 2018): 26–52, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0011128716678193>.

⁴⁵ Elizabeth Spinney et al., "Racial Disparities in Referrals to Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services From the Juvenile Justice System: A Review of the Literature," *Journal of Crime and Justice* 39, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 153–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2015.1133492>.

⁴⁶ Elizabeth Spinney et al., "Disproportionate Minority Contact in the U.S. Juvenile Justice System: A Review of the DMC Literature, 2001–2014, Part I," *Journal of Crime and Justice* 41, no. 5 (October 20, 2018): 573–95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0735648X.2018.1516155>.

⁴⁷ David C. May et al., "Do School Resource Officers Really Refer Juveniles to the Juvenile Justice System for Less Serious Offenses?," *Criminal Justice Policy Review* 29, no. 1 (February 13, 2018): 89–105, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0887403415610167>.

⁴⁸ Valerie R. Anderson, Kara England, and William S. Davidson, "Juvenile Court Practitioners' Construction of and Response to Sex Trafficking of Justice System Involved Girls," *Victims & Offenders* 12, no. 5 (September 3, 2017): 663–81, <https://doi.org/10.1080/15564886.2016.1185753>.

The significance of this study lies in its contribution to the development of juvenile justice scholarship by emphasizing the gap between procedural compliance and substantive child protection in serious criminal cases. Conceptually, the study strengthens the argument that juvenile justice should not only focus on legal accountability but must also integrate rehabilitative and child-centered justice principles, especially in cases involving severe offenses. Methodologically, the use of an empirical juridical approach demonstrates the importance of combining normative legal analysis with field-based investigation to capture the realities of law enforcement practices. Theoretically, the findings contribute to the discourse on the tension between punitive criminal law enforcement and child protection principles, highlighting the need for a more balanced juvenile justice framework. Nevertheless, this study is limited by its focus on a single institutional setting and reliance on qualitative data obtained from interviews and document analysis. Therefore, future research is recommended to expand comparative analysis across multiple jurisdictions and integrate interdisciplinary perspectives, particularly from psychology and social work, to strengthen the development of a more comprehensive rehabilitation-based juvenile justice system.

Declarations

Author Contribution Statement

Fitri Yanti contributed to conceptualization, data collection, analysis, and manuscript drafting. Yenny Fitri Z. contributed to research supervision, methodology development, manuscript review, and final approval of the manuscript.

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The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have influenced the work reported in this paper.

Additional Information

Correspondence and requests for materials should be addressed to fitrizifi86@gmail.com

ORCID

Fery Ardiansyah  <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-3348-156X>

Yenny Fitri Z.  <https://orcid.org/0009-0008-8817-8415>

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