

Research Article

The Urgency of Reforming Law Enforcement Institutions in Handling Children Who Commit Crimes in Indonesia

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Abstract: This study examines the urgency of reforming law enforcement institutions in Indonesia to handle child offenders. The enactment of Law No. 11 of 2012 on the Criminal Justice System for Children (SPPA) marked a paradigm shift from retributive to restorative justice. However, its implementation has not been optimal because law enforcement institutions are still sectoral and not fully integrated. This study uses a normative juridical approach with empirical juridical support to analyze the conformity of legal norms with institutional practices. Data were obtained from legislation, scientific literature, and interviews with law enforcement officials and child-protection practitioners. The results show that the implementation of diversion is still low due to weak coordination between institutions, limited human resources, and the absence of an integrated institutional mechanism in the area. Institutional reform is needed to strengthen synergy between institutions, foster a humanistic mindset among officials, and ensure child protection, in accordance with the principles of restorative justice. This study recommends establishing a permanent coordination body between child law enforcement agencies and ongoing training for officials. Institutional reform is seen as a strategic step towards realizing a juvenile justice system that is not only normative but also substantively fair and restorative.

Keywords: Child Protection; Diversion; Institutional Reform; Juvenile Justice System; Restorative Justice

1. Introduction

The increasing involvement of children in criminal acts in Indonesia highlights a serious problem in the national criminal justice system. Children who commit criminal acts are in a vulnerable position because, on the one hand, they are perpetrators of unlawful acts, but on the other hand, they are still subjects who, by law, must receive special protection. (Fernando et al., 2024). The tension between law enforcement and child protection is a classic problem, but one that remains unresolved to this day (Muhammad Riduan & Syaiful Asmi Hasibuan, 2023). In practice, Indonesia's criminal justice system is still oriented towards a retributive paradigm, whereby punishment is seen as a form of retribution against perpetrators of crime. This orientation tends to neglect the rehabilitative and restorative dimensions that should be central to the treatment of children who commit crimes.

Law No. 11 of 2012 on the Criminal Justice System for Children (SPPA) introduced fundamental changes to the paradigm of law enforcement against children. (FAHLAVI et al., 2023). This law affirms that the juvenile criminal justice system must be based on restorative justice, which emphasizes restoration rather than retribution in the resolution of criminal cases. Through the mechanism of diversion, the SPPA Act requires that children not be immediately placed in the formal justice system but rather be directed to resolve cases outside of court by involving victims, families, and the community. Normatively, the SPPA is a progressive and humanistic instrument. (Rustam & Wibawa, 2025). However, at the implementation level, this spirit is often not realized.

Facts on the ground show that law enforcement agencies such as the police, prosecutors, courts, and the Special Child Guidance Center (LPKA) are not yet fully prepared to

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implement restorative justice principles. (Marluki et al., 2023). Many law enforcement officials still use a formalistic and repressive approach to children who commit crimes. This unpreparedness is caused by several factors, including limited human resources, a lack of specialized training on the juvenile justice system, weak inter-agency coordination, and a lack of supporting infrastructure such as correctional facilities (Bapas) and child welfare institutions (LPKSA). Consequently, legal proceedings against children often end in detention and punishment rather than educational and restorative resolutions. (Anggarini et al., 2024; Syahroni et al., 2025).

Another notable weakness is the institutional aspect. The institutional structure of law enforcement in Indonesia remains sectoral and fragmented. Each law enforcement agency has its own authority, work culture, and coordination mechanisms that are not integrated into other agencies. In the context of law enforcement against children, this condition causes inconsistencies in the implementation of the SPPA. For example, the police, who are supposed to facilitate diversion at the investigation stage, often do not involve Bapas or social institutions, while the prosecutor's office and the courts also face limitations in implementing child rehabilitation programmes. (Anggarini et al., 2024). The absence of a coordinating body to liaise with law enforcement agencies exacerbates this situation. Consequently, many cases involving children that could have been resolved through diversion end up in court.

This situation highlights the gap between normative ideals and empirical reality in Indonesia's juvenile criminal justice system. At the normative level, regulations mandate child protection paradigms. However, at the institutional and implementation levels, law enforcement practices remain dominated by punitive logic. This gap underscores the need for institutional reform in law enforcement that is not only administrative but also paradigmatic. Institutional reform is understood here as an effort to reform the structure, functions, and patterns of relationships between law enforcement agencies to make them more synchronized, responsive, and child protection-oriented.

Institutional reform of law enforcement agencies is becoming increasingly important because the problems faced are no longer simply a matter of weak enforcement of regulations but also concern institutional foundations that are not suited to the nature of juvenile crime. (Pratama, 2022). Children who commit crimes have different psychological, social, and economic backgrounds than adults. Most commit crimes due to environmental factors, family neglect, or social pressure. Therefore, the approach to children who commit crimes cannot be the same as that for adults. In this context, law enforcement agencies must be sensitive to the psychological and social aspects of children. Unfortunately, many officials do not yet have the capacity and paradigm to do so, and the legal process worsens the children's condition.

Based on this reality, this study highlights the importance of institutional reform of law enforcement agencies in dealing with child offenders in Indonesia. This reform involves not only changes to the structure of institutions but also the establishment of a coordination system, the formation of special units for handling children, capacity building for officials, and the affirmation of inter-agency diversion mechanisms. Thus, it is hoped that the juvenile justice system will no longer operate in a fragmented manner but will be integrated into a single policy that guarantees the best interests of the child.

Based on this background, this study addresses three main questions. First, what are the actual conditions of law enforcement institutions in handling child offenders in Indonesia? Second, why is the reform of law enforcement institutions important in the context of juvenile justice? Third, what is the ideal direction for law enforcement institutional reform in line with restorative justice principles? These three questions reflect the desire to assess the effectiveness of legal institutions from the perspective of child protection and propose a more systematic direction for reform.

The objectives of this study are, first, to analyze the factual conditions and weaknesses of the law enforcement institutional system in dealing with children who commit crimes, and second, to formulate the urgency and direction of law enforcement institutional reform in line with the principles of restorative justice and child protection. This objective is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the institutional root causes that have prevented the optimal implementation of the SPPA, as well as offer practical solutions for reforming the national legal system.

This study has both theoretical and practical value. Theoretically, this contributes to the development of juvenile criminal and institutional law. Institutional reform of law enforcement is an important aspect that is often overlooked in studies of juvenile criminal law, which usually only highlight normative and legal policy aspects. By expanding the focus to include the institutional dimension, this study is expected to enrich academic discourse on

the relationship between institutional structures and the effectiveness of legal protection for children. In practical terms, the results of this study are expected to provide constructive recommendations for policymakers and law enforcement officials to strengthen inter-agency synergy, improve human resource capacity, and develop coordination mechanisms based on the principles of restorative justice.

2. Literature Review

In legal research, theoretical foundations are not merely academic attributes but rather epistemological foundations that determine the direction of analysis and the legitimacy of legal arguments. (Taekema, 2018). In the context of institutional reform of law enforcement agencies dealing with child offenders, there are three main theories that form the conceptual framework: Institutional Reform Theory, Restorative Justice Theory, dan Child-Friendly Justice Principles (Lubis, 2025). The three complement each other: institutional reform theory emphasizes the importance of restructuring legal institutions; restorative justice theory highlights the values of humanity and social rehabilitation; and the principle of child-friendly justice affirms the moral responsibility of the state to protect the best interests of children.

Institutional Reform Theory is based on Douglass North's thinking, which views institutions as the "rules of the game" that shape the behavior of social actors, including law enforcement officials. (Widowati, 2024). According to this theory, the effectiveness of law depends not only on the content of the norms but also on the capacity, integrity, and orientation of the institutions that implement them. Legal reform that is not followed by institutional reform will only give rise to dead norms, norms that exist on paper but are not implemented. In the context of juvenile justice in Indonesia, this theory explains why Law No. 11 of 2002 (Aljanni & Muhammad, 2025). Normatively, law enforcement officials understand the concepts of diversion and restorative justice, but institutionally, they still work within the old punishment-oriented paradigm. Therefore, institutional reform is a key prerequisite for ensuring that the spirit of restorative justice in the SPPA is reflected in law enforcement practices.

Furthermore, Restorative Justice Theory places justice not as a means of retribution but rather as a means of restoring social relationships that have been damaged as a result of criminal acts. Howard Zehr, one of the pioneers of this theory, changed the fundamental question of criminal law from "who is guilty" to "who is hurt and how can it be repaired". (Kashyap, 2024) This theory emphasises that criminal acts are violations of social relations, not merely violations of state law. Children who commit criminal acts should not be positioned as objects of punishment but as individuals who need to restore their moral and social responsibility. In the context of law enforcement institutions, this theory calls for changes in the structure, mechanisms, and culture of organizations so that they can facilitate a process of rehabilitation rather than simply imprisonment. Restorative justice requires coordination between law enforcement agencies, community involvement, and respect for children's rights at every stage of the legal process.

Meanwhile, the Child-Friendly Justice Principles emphasize the ethical and legal dimensions of the two previous theories. These principles originate from the 1989 Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), which Indonesia ratified through the Presidential Decree No. 36 of 1990. The four main principles of non-discrimination, the best interests of the child, the right to life and development, and respect for the views of the child, are the benchmarks for all legal policies relating to children. (Kilkelly & Pleysier, 2023). These principles are internalized in the SPPA and Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, which emphasizes that children must be treated humanely and receive special treatment during legal proceedings. From this perspective, law enforcement agencies are not only required to be administratively effective but must also be sensitive to the psychological needs and dignity of children.

These three theories form an intertwined analytical frameworks. Institutional Reform Theory provides the rationale for why institutional change is absolutely necessary; Restorative Justice Theory shows the direction of expected change; and Child-Friendly Justice Principles ensure that the change remains in the best interests of the child. Thus, the institutional reform of law enforcement agencies is not merely a matter of structural or procedural improvements but rather a paradigm shift towards a humane, adaptive, and socially just legal system.

Previous studies have reinforced this conclusion. Marlina (2018) states that the implementation of diversion in Indonesia is still administrative in nature, while UNICEF (2021) finds low synergy between law enforcement agencies. Muladi (2019) emphasizes the

need to reform the institutional system so that all stages of juvenile justice have a consistent orientation towards restorative justice. However, most of these studies remain at the normative level and do not offer an integrated model for institutional reform..

3. Materials and Method

This study adopts a normative juridical approach supported by empirical juridical evidence. (Kestemont, 2018). A normative legal approach is used to examine and interpret positive legal norms governing the juvenile criminal justice system, particularly regarding the position and role of law enforcement agencies in implementing the principle of restorative justice. This approach aims to examine the compatibility between ideal norms enshrined in legislation and their implementation in law enforcement practice. Through normative analysis, this study identifies the extent to which existing legal instruments have provided an adequate basis for the establishment of effective law enforcement institutions, as well as whether there are gaps, overlaps, or inconsistencies in the norms that pose obstacles to law enforcement against juvenile offenders.

An empirical legal approach is used to supplement normative studies with data sourced from the social reality of law. (Watkins & Burton, 2018). This approach is necessary because the institutional reform of law enforcement is not only a textual issue but also a structural and cultural one. Many policies appear ideal in theory, but fail to be implemented due to institutional factors, such as limited human resources, a lack of understanding among officials of the principles of restorative justice, and weak coordination between law enforcement agencies. Therefore, an empirical approach is used to capture the dynamics of these practices through field data obtained from interviews and observations of law enforcement institutions that handle child cases in the region. Thus, the combination of these two approaches provides a balance between theoretical studies and empirical findings, resulting in a comprehensive and realistic analyses.

The data used in this study consisted of primary legal materials, secondary legal materials, and empirical data. Primary legal materials include laws and regulations that form the legal basis for law enforcement against child offenders, including Law No. 11 of 2012 on the Criminal Justice System for Children (SPPA), Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, the Criminal Code (Undang Hukum Pidana (KUHP)), and implementing regulations such as Government Regulation No. 65 of 2015 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Diversion and the Handling of Children under 12 Years of Age and Supreme Court Regulation No. 4 of 2014 concerning Guidelines for the Implementation of Diversion in the Juvenile Criminal Justice System. All these primary legal materials form the basis for assessing the normative framework of child law enforcement institutions and the relationships between the institutions involved.

Furthermore, secondary legal materials were used to enrich the conceptual and theoretical analyses. These materials included academic research findings, scientific journal articles, criminal law and institutional law textbooks, and reports from national and international institutions such as UNICEF, the Correctional Institution (Bapas), and the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection. These sources not only provide an empirical picture of the implementation of the juvenile justice system but also offer various theoretical perspectives that strengthen the research argument, such as institutional reform theory and restorative justice theory, which form the conceptual basis of this research.

The empirical data were obtained through in-depth interviews with law enforcement officials, including investigators from the police, prosecutors from the district attorney's office, juvenile judges from the district court, and social workers from the Correctional Institution (Bapas). In addition, interviews were conducted with child protection practitioners from social institutions and managers of the Special Child Guidance Center (LPKA). This data was used to explore their views and experiences regarding the implementation of restorative justice and the institutional obstacles they encountered in practice. This empirical data plays an important role in testing the extent to which legal norms have been internalized in law enforcement policies and institutional practices, as well as in identifying non-normative factors that influence the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system in Indonesia's juvenile justice system.

Data collection techniques were carried out through literature reviews and in-depth interviews. Literature studies were used to collect and analyze primary and secondary legal materials, and interviews were used to obtain qualitative empirical data. Informants were selected purposively, considering their experience and the relevance of their positions to the

research issue. The data obtained were analyzed using a normative qualitative analysis method, which focused on legal interpretation and social meaning in relation to the application of norms.

Data analysis was conducted in three stages. First, the normative interpretation stage, which involves interpreting the legal norms in legislation relating to the juvenile justice system and law enforcement institutions. This stage served to assess the clarity of the legal substance, the relationship between norms, and the compatibility of legal objectives and existing institutional structures. Second, the empirical evaluation stage assesses the effectiveness of norm implementation based on interview results and field observations. In this stage, researchers identify institutional barriers, such as limited institutional capacity, inter-agency coordination, and obstacles to implementing restorative justice principles. Third, the reformulatory synthesis stage, which combines the results of normative and empirical analyses to formulate an ideal model for reforming law enforcement institutions. This stage aims to produce ideas that are not only descriptive but also prescriptive, providing recommendations for policies that can be implemented in the future.

The deductive–inductive method of thinking was used. Deductively, the research begins with general theories and principles, such as Institutional Reform Theory and Restorative Justice Theory, which are then applied to analyze the factual conditions of child law enforcement institutions in Indonesia. Inductively, empirical findings are processed to formulate recommendations for institutional reform relevant to the Indonesian social and legal contexts. This pattern of thinking enables the research to produce synthetic conclusions that connect *das sollen* (what should be according to the law) and *das sein* (what happens in practice) so that the recommendations are constructive and implementable.

4. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the research on the current state of law enforcement against child offenders in Indonesia, including the structure and function of the law enforcement agencies involved and various factors that hinder the implementation of institutional reform. The presentation is based on an analysis of primary and secondary legal materials and is reinforced by empirical data from interviews with law enforcement officials, community counsellors, and child protection practitioners. All of these results are presented descriptively to illustrate the factual situation without providing an in-depth normative assessment to serve as a basis for further discussion.

4.1. Current Conditions of Law Enforcement against Children Who Commit Crimes

The results of this study indicate that the juvenile criminal justice system in Indonesia has not yet demonstrated optimal institutional integration in practice. Although Law No. 11 of 2012 on the Juvenile Criminal Justice System (SPPA) clearly regulates the coordination mechanism between law enforcement agencies, namely the police, prosecutor's office, courts, and the institutions that implement it in the field, it is still sectoral in nature. Each institution tends to exercise its authority independently in accordance with its institutional functions without strong synergy with other institutions. The absence of an integrated coordination system has resulted in many legal processes involving children being overlapping and inefficient.

Interviews with police officers in several regions show that coordination between law enforcement agencies often occurs only at the administrative level, rather than substantively. For example, communication between investigators and prosecutors regarding the implementation of diversion is often limited to notification letters without an in-depth discussion of the substance of the case resolution. As a result, the diversion efforts mandated by Article 7 of the SPPA Law are often not carried out or are carried out merely to fulfil legal formalities. In some cases, children are still subjected to formal court proceedings despite their eligibility for diversion.

The rate of diversion implementation at various stages of the legal process also remains low. Based on data from interviews with officials at the Correctional Facility (Bapas), there is a tendency for diversion to be applied only in minor cases and when the victim's family is willing to reconcile. However, in cases of theft, abuse, or indecency, officials often reject diversion to maintain public order. This shows that the implementation of diversion is still influenced by the subjective perceptions of officials, rather than being based on the spirit of restorative justice as stipulated in the law.

Other findings indicate that children who commit crimes are often treated in the same manner as adult offenders. In some police stations, special examination rooms for children are still unavailable, resulting in children undergoing legal proceedings in the same rooms as adult suspects. This is contrary to the provisions of Article 23(1) of the SPPA, which requires child-friendly examination rooms. Furthermore, legal assistance for children is often not optimally provided. Based on observations, the role of legal advisers and social workers is often limited to administrative formalities without providing substantial assistance during the examination process.

From the perspective of correctional institutions, the Special Correctional Institution for Children (LPKA) faces various challenges. Interviews with LPKA officers revealed that the number of social workers is still far from adequate compared to the number of children in their care. In some areas, one social worker may be responsible for more than 20 children, rendering the correctional process ineffective. In addition, educational and vocational training facilities at LPKA are limited. The rehabilitation programs implemented are more administrative in nature, focusing on discipline and order rather than rehabilitation. One of the main objectives of the LPKA is to help children reintegrate into society through education and vocational training.

Limitations in facilities are also evident in the lack of psychosocial support for children during their rehabilitation. In many cases, children who have experienced trauma as a result of legal proceedings or violence do not receive psychological counselling. Only a few LPKAs in large cities offer professional counselling services. This situation highlights the gap between the principle of restorative justice, which emphasizes rehabilitation, and institutional practices that remain oriented towards punishment. In general, the findings of this study indicate that the juvenile justice system in Indonesia still faces structural and cultural obstacles in providing comprehensive protection for children who commit crimes.

4.2. Structure and Function of Law Enforcement Institutions

The study's results also show that the structure and function of law enforcement institutions in the juvenile justice system have not been developed in an integrated manner. Each law enforcement agency carries out its role based on separate legal authorities; therefore, coordination and division of functions often do not work effectively.

At the investigation level, police agencies play an important role as the first point of contact in handling children in conflict with the law. However, the interviews revealed that many investigators still treat children using a conventional legal approach. Children are often arrested and detained, even in minor cases. Some investigators admitted that they had not received special training on the juvenile justice system and the principles of restorative justice. As a result, the implementation of diversion at the investigation stage often does not work because officials do not yet understand the concept of restorative justice substantively.

At the prosecution level, coordination between the prosecutor's office and social guidance institutions is not yet optimal. Based on information from prosecutors in several regions, social research reports (litmas) from Bapas often arrive late or do not provide sufficient information to be used as a basis for consideration in diversion decisions. Prosecutors tend to formally process juvenile cases in court to avoid procedural risk. In fact, the SPPA provides ample scope for public prosecutors to initiate diversion before cases are transferred to court.

At the judicial level, juvenile judges in several district courts admitted that they still face obstacles in implementing diversion due to a lack of coordination support. In some cases, the diversion process failed because the victim did not appear or was unwilling to settle. Judges also often face difficulties in assessing the results of mediation between the child and the victim, as there are no uniform operational standards across all the district courts. In addition, supporting facilities, such as special courtrooms for children, are not yet available in all regions, so the judicial process still takes place in an environment that is not child-friendly.

Meanwhile, the Special Child Guidance Institution (LPKA), as the implementing agency for juvenile justice, plays an important role in the post-trial stage. Based on observations and interviews with LPKA officers, it was found that the institutional structure within the LPKA does not support the implementation of rehabilitation programmes oriented towards social reintegration. Child rehabilitation programmes in many LPKAs place more emphasis on discipline and compliance with institutional rules than on education, counselling, and skills development. The limited number of educators and facilitators is a significant obstacle. In some regions, only one type of skills training facility is available, such as carpentry or agriculture, which may not necessarily suit the interests of the children. In addition,

cooperation between LPKA and community social institutions for child reintegration programmes is still very limited.

In terms of coordination between institutions, there is no permanent and binding mechanism between law enforcement agencies. Communication forums or cross-sector teams are usually only formed on an ad hoc basis when specific cases arise and do not continue as a permanent system. Consequently, the implementation of restorative justice principles, which require inter-agency synergy, often fails. This finding reinforces the indication that child law enforcement agencies in Indonesia operate independently, without a strong and focused coordination framework.

4.3. Factors Hindering Institutional Reform

This study also found several factors that hinder efforts to reform law enforcement institutions in dealing with children who commit crimes. These obstacles are normative, structural, and cultural in nature.

From a normative perspective, regulatory overlap is a major obstacle. Several provisions in the SPPA Law are not in line with the Criminal Code or Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection. For example, differences in the age of criminal responsibility for children cause confusion in practice. In some cases, law enforcement officials still use the old provisions in the Criminal Code that are not in line with the SPPA's spirit. In addition, SPPA implementing regulations, such as Government Regulation No. 65 of 2015, do not provide clear guidelines on the mechanism for coordination between law enforcement agencies.

From a structural perspective, weak coordination among law enforcement agencies is the most obvious obstacle. Based on the interview results, there is no single agency that acts as a coordinator in the implementation of the juvenile justice system. Consequently, the implementation of the SPPA depends on the initiative of individual agencies and officials. In many cases, coordination between the police, prosecutors, courts, and Bapas is not synchronized. Diversion efforts often fail because of the absence of a binding, cross-sector forum. This weakness in the coordination structure also affects the low effectiveness of child guidance programmes in LPKA, due to the absence of an integrated monitoring and evaluation system between the judiciary and correctional institutions.

From a cultural perspective, obstacles arise from the mindset of law enforcement officials, who still favor a retributive approach. Based on interviews with several police officers and prosecutors, most officials still view juvenile offenders as criminals who must be punished rather than as children who need guidance. This paradigm causes resistance to the application of restorative justice principles. Officials often view diversion as a form of leniency that is not educational and has the potential to reduce deterrent effects. This situation shows that institutional reform requires not only changes to organizational structures but also a transformation of the legal culture among law enforcement officials.

In addition, limited human resources and budgets are obstacles. Many law enforcement agencies do not have adequate experts or child counsellors. Training programs for law enforcement officials on the juvenile justice system are still sporadic and not yet mandatory. Operational budgets for diversion and rehabilitation activities are often not specifically available, making it difficult for officials to implement the principle of restorative justice in practice.

The combination of overlapping regulations, weak coordination between institutions, an unchanged legal paradigm, and limited resources has slowed down institutional reform in law enforcement in the field of juvenile justice. These obstacles show that the challenges of reform are not only a matter of updating regulations but also concern the readiness of institutions and changing the mindset of officials at all levels.

4.4 Discussion

This section describes the interpretation of the research results by linking them to the legal theories and norms that form the basis of the analysis. The main objective is to understand how law enforcement institutions in Indonesia implement the principles of restorative justice as stipulated in Law No. 11 of 2012 on the Juvenile Criminal Justice System (SPPA) and how institutional reform can be realized to create a humane, coordinated, and fair juvenile justice system. (Nugroho et al., 2020). This discussion is divided into three main subsections: legal analysis of child law enforcement institutions, urgency of institutional reform, and ideal direction of institutional reform in law enforcement.

4.4.1 Legal Analysis of Child Law Enforcement Institutions

Normatively, the SPPA provides a strong legal framework for the protection of children in conflict with the law. Article 5, paragraph (1) of the SPPA emphasizes that the juvenile criminal justice system is implemented based on restorative justice and diversion, which is the transfer of case resolution from formal judicial proceedings to outside the court. This principle is in line with Howard Zehr's view in Restorative Justice Theory, which emphasizes that true justice lies in the restoration of social relationships and not merely punishment. (Rofrofil Akmal & Erik Wibowo, 2025). Within this framework, perpetrators of crime (including children) are not enemies of the state but rather members of the community whose moral and social responsibilities need to be restored.

However, research findings indicate that the implementation of the SPPA in Indonesia is still far from ideal. (Herianto et al., 2025). Legal proceedings against children are often retributive, treating them as perpetrators of crime rather than subjects of protection. This is due to the institutional structure of law enforcement, which has not undergone any fundamental changes. Each institution—the police, prosecutor's office, courts, and correctional institutions—still operates sectorally with weak coordination. This finding is in line with the Institutional Reform Theory, which states that changes in legal norms without changes in institutional structures will lead to an "implementation gap." However, legal norms, however ideal, will not be effective without institutions that are ready to implement them consistently.

Empirically, police investigators still tend to use a formal approach to handle cases involving children. Diversion is often ignored because officials do not yet understand the principles of restorative justice substantively. Similarly, at the prosecutor and court levels, coordination with the Correctional Center (Bapas) is often ineffective, so community research reports (litmas) do not function optimally in decision-making. This condition illustrates that the institutional system for enforcing juvenile law in Indonesia is still stuck in an old paradigm that emphasizes formal legal certainty over substantive social justice.

From the perspective of the Child-Friendly Justice Principles, derived from the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC 1989), the legal system should guarantee the best interests of the child at every stage of the legal process. (Parkhomenko, 2024) However, field findings indicate that this principle has not yet become a primary consideration for law enforcement officials. Children in conflict with the law are still often processed without adequate psychological assistance, and in some cases, they even experience discriminatory treatment. Thus, although the SPPA normatively guarantees the protection of children, law enforcement agencies have not been able to translate these values into practice. Institutional reform is urgently needed to restore the spirit of restorative justice within the juvenile justice system.

4.4.2 The Urgency of Institutional Reform

Institutional reform of law enforcement agencies is a strategic step towards addressing the gap between legal norms and their implementation in practice. From the perspective of Institutional Reform Theory, law enforcement institutions serve as the primary instruments for determining the effectiveness of the law. If institutional structures, cultures, and coordination do not support the implementation of norms, the law loses its effectiveness. Therefore, institutional change is not merely an administrative option but a theoretical and moral necessity for the legal system to function as intended. (Johnson, 2024).

The results indicate that the institutional system for enforcing children's rights in Indonesia remains weak in three key areas: structure, procedure, and culture. In terms of structure, there is still no coordinating body that integrates all stages of the legal process in the country.

From a cultural perspective, most law enforcement officials employ a retributive mindset. The legal paradigm that emphasizes punishment is more dominant than that oriented towards restoration. Therefore, institutional reform must address not only organizational structures but also the mindset and legal culture of officials. Training, continuing education, and socialization of restorative justice values are needed so that all officials understand that law enforcement against children is not merely a process of punishment but part of a process of education and social rehabilitation.

In this context, institutional reform must be considered an integral part of child protection efforts. The Child-Friendly Justice Principles affirm that states have an obligation to ensure a child-friendly justice system in terms of policy, institutions, and legal culture. (Rooh Ullah et al., 2025) Therefore, reforming law enforcement agencies is a concrete

manifestation of the state's responsibility to protect children as vulnerable citizens. Without comprehensive institutional reform, restorative justice will remain nothing more than legal jargon without substantive meaning.

4.4.3 The Ideal Direction of Law Enforcement Institutional Reform

The ideal direction for institutional reform of law enforcement agencies in dealing with children who commit crimes is to build an integrated and adaptive system based on human values. The proposed reform model must address three main needs: strengthening the coordination structure, improving working mechanisms, and increasing human resource capacities.

First, it is necessary to strengthen the role of correctional institutions (Bapas) as central institutions in the restorative justice system. Currently, Bapas often play only an administrative role in compiling legal reports. In fact, Bapas have great potential to mediate between perpetrators, victims, and the community. This strengthening can be achieved by increasing the number of community counsellors, expanding their functions at each stage of the legal process, and granting them greater authority to facilitate diversion.

Second, establishing a Restorative Justice Center (RJC) at the regional level should be a priority. The RJC serves as a coordination hub between the police, prosecutors, judges, community counsellors, and social institutions. Through this permanent forum, diversion and mediation can be conducted in a planned and measured manner. This model has been implemented in several countries, such as New Zealand and Canada, where inter-agency coordination is a key factor in the success of restorative-justice-based juvenile justice systems.

Third, institutional reform must include ongoing training for law enforcement officials. Regular training on child psychology, mediation techniques, and restorative justice principles should be mandatory for all officials involved in the juvenile justice system. Such training not only improves professional capacity but also fosters empathy and sensitivity among officials towards children's psychological conditions.

In addition, it is necessary to reform the legal education curriculum in legal education and professional training institutions (police, prosecutors, and the judiciary) by including material on restorative justice and child protection. Thus, a new paradigm in law enforcement against children can be instilled from the basic legal education stage.

Fourth, a sustainable evaluation and monitoring mechanism is needed to ensure the consistent implementation of restorative justice principles. Evaluation can be carried out through a periodic cross-agency reporting system with measurable performance indicators, such as the rate of diversion, the success rate of children's social reintegration, and the number of training courses attended by law enforcement officials. This monitoring mechanism can also involve independent institutions, such as the Indonesian Child Protection Commission (KPAI) and community social institutions.

With this direction of reform, the law enforcement institutional system is expected to transform from a retributive, sectoral, and administrative system to a restorative, integrative, and humanistic one. Institutional reform is not merely a restructuring of organizations but a reconstruction of the legal paradigm that recognizes children as human beings with dignity and the right to a future. As affirmed in Pancasila and the 1945 Constitution, the purpose of the law is to uphold social justice and humanity, including for children in conflict with the law.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that the institutional system for law enforcement in dealing with child offenders in Indonesia is still fragmented and not yet functionally integrated. Each institution—the police, prosecutor's office, courts, and child guidance institutions—performs its role in a sectoral manner without effective coordination. This situation hinders the application of the principle of restorative justice, which is the spirit of Law No. 11 of 2012 on the Juvenile Criminal Justice System (SPPA). Progressive legal norms have not been accompanied by adequate institutional readiness, so their implementation does not yet reflect optimal protection for children.

Institutional reform of law enforcement agencies is essential if the juvenile justice system is to strike a balance between law enforcement and child protection. This reform must be multidimensional, covering structural, procedural, and cultural aspects. Structurally, a permanent mechanism for coordination between agencies needs to be established. Procedurally, common guidelines are needed for the implementation of diversion and

resolution of child cases across agencies. Culturally, law enforcement officials must develop a new paradigm that treats children as subjects who must be rehabilitated, not punished.

The government should establish a permanent coordination body between child law enforcement agencies to ensure inter-agency synergy. Law enforcement officials must receive ongoing training on restorative justice approaches and child psychology, and the SPPA Law and Child Protection Law must be synchronized to eliminate overlapping norms. Institutional reform of law enforcement is not merely a technical measure but a manifestation of the state's responsibility to protect the future of Indonesian children so that the law truly serves as a means of rehabilitation, not merely punishment.

Author Contributions: A short paragraph specifying their individual contributions must be provided for research articles with several authors (**mandatory for more than 1 author**). The following statements should be used “Conceptualization: A.B. and A.T.; Methodology: A.B.; Software: A.T.; Validation: A.T.; Formal analysis: A.B.; Investigation: A.T.; Resources: A.T.; Data curation: A.T.; Writing—original draft preparation: A.T.; Writing—review and editing: A.T.; Visualization: A.B.; Supervision: A.T.; Project administration: A.T.; Funding acquisition: A.B.”

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