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Victim-Centered Law Enforcement in Child Sexual Abuse Cases at Makassar Police

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Abstract

Purpose: This article examines how the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police implements victim-centered law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases and identifies barriers to its effectiveness. It also considers whether police handling protects children's dignity, safety, and best interests.

Research Design and Methodology: Using an empirical socio-legal approach, the study draws on interviews, observation, and documentation involving five police officers directly involved in case handling. The data were analyzed qualitatively through the frameworks of legal effectiveness, law enforcement, and legal protection.

Findings and Discussion: Makassar Police handles cases through report reception, inquiry, investigation, inter-agency coordination, and case-file submission. Implementation remains uneven because of evidentiary complexity, limited personnel and child-friendly facilities, delayed reporting, weak family cooperation, stigma, and informal settlement practices. The principal challenge is the gap between formal legal authority and the institutional and social conditions needed to protect child victims.

Implications: The study contributes a victim-centered framework linking criminal accountability with child protection. It recommends strengthening investigator capacity, improving child-friendly facilities, coordinating victim-support services, and promoting public education to reduce stigma and encourage timely reporting. Future research should include prosecutors, psychologists, social workers, families, and child-protection agencies.

Introduction

Child sexual abuse remains one of the most serious forms of criminal victimization because it injures not only the physical integrity of the child, but also the child's dignity, psychological security,

and future development (Ngo 2021). In the Indonesian constitutional framework, the protection of children is not merely a moral obligation, but a legal duty derived from the guarantee that every child has the right to survival, growth, development, and protection from violence and discrimination (Kobko et al. 2024). This constitutional mandate is reinforced by human rights norms and child protection legislation that position children as legal subjects entitled to special protection when they become victims of sexual violence (Rahmi, Hadita, and Salamah 2023). The urgency of this issue becomes sharper when sexual abuse occurs in spaces that should provide safety, trust, and care, including families, educational environments, religious settings, and local communities.

The Indonesian legal system has formally responded to sexual abuse against children through several statutory instruments, including the Child Protection Law, its subsequent amendments, and the Law on Sexual Violence Crimes (Philipo and Lubowa 2023), (Riyanto and Barung 2025). These legal instruments provide a normative basis for punishing offenders, protecting victims, and ensuring that the criminal justice process recognizes the special vulnerability of children. However, the presence of strong legal norms does not automatically produce effective and victim-centered law enforcement, especially when the handling of cases requires sensitivity to trauma, evidentiary complexity, and the social position of the child victim (Halim and Firmansyah 2024). This tension between the adequacy of written law and the difficulty of legal implementation forms the central problem examined in this article.

Makassar City provides an important empirical setting for examining this problem because the number of reported child sexual abuse cases has remained concerning despite the availability of criminal law instruments. Police and institutional data cited in the research show that cases increased from 54 in 2021 to 154 in 2022 and 195 in 2023, while 68 cases had already been recorded between January and June 2024. Data from the Makassar Office of Women Empowerment and Child Protection in 2025 also recorded 762 child victims, including 260 cases of molestation and sexual violence, followed by physical violence, psychological violence, neglect, bullying, kidnapping, and trafficking. These figures indicate that child sexual abuse in Makassar is not an isolated legal incident, but a continuing criminal justice problem that requires institutional evaluation and victim-oriented legal analysis (Rumble et al. 2020).

The problem becomes more complex because child sexual abuse cases often involve unequal relations of power, emotional dependency, fear, secrecy, and pressure from the surrounding environment (Alaggia, Collin-Vézina, and Lateef 2019)(Kanya Eka Santi 2024). One reported case in Makassar involved a religious teacher and civil servant suspected of abusing approximately sixteen child students, showing that offenders may exploit positions of authority and trust to access victims. Such cases demonstrate that child sexual abuse is not limited to public spaces or unknown offenders but may occur in settings socially perceived as safe and morally protective. Therefore, the issue is not only whether the police can process criminal reports, but whether law enforcement can operate in a manner that protects the child from repeated harm throughout the legal process.

Recent legal studies on child sexual abuse in Indonesia have generally focused on the effectiveness of statutory provisions, the legal protection of child victims, the criminal liability of offenders, and the role of law enforcement institutions (Philipo and Lubowa 2023)(Halim and Firmansyah 2024)(Krismawati et al. 2023). Studies cited in the research include discussions on the effectiveness of the Child Protection Law, legal protection for child victims of molestation, criminal law responses to sexual violence, and preventive legal protection against sexual crimes involving children. These studies reflect a broader trend in Indonesian legal scholarship that still places considerable emphasis on normative regulation and institutional responsibility. While this scholarship is important, it often remains framed around the general question of effectiveness rather than the more specific question of how victim-centered principles are operationalized in police practice.

Earlier studies used as comparisons in the research further illustrate the existing direction of scholarship. Kevin Reza Sukatendel examined legal protection for child victims of molestation in Langkat, with attention to positive legal arrangements and the application of victim protection after the crime occurred. Litia Pratidina Sembiring studied children as offenders in molestation cases through a court decision, thereby placing the child in the position of perpetrator rather than victim. Rini Leoni Fransisca examined molestation by educators against students through a criminological lens, but her study was limited to educational settings and to a specific offender category (Jonathan Immanuel Panjaitan, Jonathan Edward Siahaan, and Frans Max Valentino Sianturi 2026).

These studies show that the literature has developed important analyses of child protection, criminal responsibility, judicial handling, and the causes of sexual crimes. However, they do not sufficiently explain how the police, as the first institutional gatekeeper in the criminal justice process, should balance evidentiary demands with the best interests of the child victim (Sumampouw, Otgaar, and de Ruiter 2020). The present study therefore shifts the analytical focus from general legal protection to victim-centered law enforcement in police handling, particularly within the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police. This shift is necessary because the quality of child sexual abuse case handling is determined not only by the final status of the case, but also by how the report is received, how the child is examined, how evidence is collected, and how the victim is protected from secondary victimization (Dinah Faizah Syahbur, Aroma Elmina Martha, and Galuh Praharafi Rizqia 2024).

The theoretical framework also supports this shift in focus. Soerjono Soekanto's theory of legal effectiveness explains that law enforcement is influenced by five interrelated factors, namely legal substance, law enforcement officers, facilities, society, and legal culture. In the context of child sexual abuse, these factors are not abstract variables, but practical conditions that determine whether the law can protect the child in concrete situations (Halim and Firmansyah 2024). The research uses this framework to examine barriers and supporting factors in the enforcement of criminal law by Makassar Police, including the role of legal norms, police professionalism, infrastructure, public awareness, and socio-cultural values.

The theory of legal protection further clarifies why law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases should not be offender-centered alone. Philipus M. Hadjon's distinction between preventive and repressive legal protection is relevant because child victims need protection before, during, and after criminal proceedings (Tarmizi et al. 2026). Repressive protection includes investigation, prosecution, and adjudication, but it should not stop at punishing the offender because victims may also require physical, psychological, and social recovery (Hamamah et al. 2025)(Shelly and Rahaditya 2026). In this sense, victim-centered law enforcement requires police institutions to treat case handling as both a criminal justice function and a child protection function.

The empirical gap becomes clearer when the quantitative data from the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police are examined. Between 2023 and July 2026, the unit handled 236 child sexual abuse cases, consisting of 58 cases in 2023, 42 cases in 2024, 78 cases in 2025, and 58 cases from January to July 2026. Of these cases, only 27 reached the P21 stage, while 9 were terminated at the preliminary inquiry stage, 28 were terminated at the investigation stage, 23 were resolved through restorative justice, and 149 remained pending. These figures reveal a substantial gap between the number of cases handled and the number of cases that proceeded to complete prosecution files, thereby raising questions about institutional capacity, evidentiary barriers, and the continuity of victim protection (Sumampouw et al. 2020).

The same data also challenges the assumption that the availability of legal rules is sufficient to ensure effective criminal justice outcomes. The research findings indicate that the legal framework itself is relatively not the main obstacle, because the relevant laws already provide a basis for police authority and victim protection. The more pressing problems emerge at the level of implementation, including the ability to apply norms consistently to diverse factual circumstances, the need to interpret evidence

carefully, and the obligation to consider the best interests of child victims (Hamamah et al. 2025). Thus, this article extends previous studies by arguing that the main issue lies in the enforcement gap between formal legal adequacy and victim-centered institutional practice.

Institutional barriers are also evident in the limited number of investigators available to handle sensitive and complex child sexual abuse cases. The Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police has 21 personnel, consisting of 14 male police officers and 7 policewomen. Each investigator must receive reports, examine victims and witnesses, collect evidence, coordinate with related institutions, examine alleged offenders, and complete investigative administration. When the number of personnel is not proportional to the volume and complexity of cases, the ability to provide careful, timely, and trauma-sensitive handling becomes structurally constrained (Halim and Firmansyah 2024)(Lathan et al. 2019).

Facilities and infrastructure create another gap between legal ideals and actual victim services. Child victims require examination rooms that provide safety, privacy, and psychological comfort because the investigative process itself may become a source of additional pressure (Green, Kosaraju, and Soutar 2026). The research found that facilities specifically supporting the examination and handling of child victims remain limited, although investigators continue to adapt by using available resources. This finding demonstrates that victim-centered enforcement requires more than legal authority, because physical space, operational equipment, and child-friendly service conditions shape the victim's experience with the criminal justice system.

Societal and cultural barriers further complicate the enforcement process. Delayed reporting may affect the investigation, particularly the ability of investigators to obtain information and evidence connected to the criminal event (Alaggia et al. 2019). Family hesitation, lack of cooperation, fear, and uncertainty may weaken the construction of the case, even when the police have the legal authority to proceed. At the same time, cultural tendencies to resolve cases informally, preserve family reputation, avoid shame, or maintain social harmony may obstruct the continuation of criminal proceedings and reduce attention to the child's rights as a victim (Jeumpa et al. 2026).

Based on these legal, empirical, and theoretical gaps, this article addresses two research questions: how the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police implements victim-centered law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases, and what institutional and socio-cultural barriers affect its implementation. The purpose of this article is to analyze police handling of child sexual abuse cases not merely through the conventional lens of law enforcement effectiveness, but through a victim-centered framework that places the child's safety, dignity, psychological condition, and access to justice at the center of analysis. By using empirical findings from Makassar Police, the article aims to explain why child sexual abuse enforcement cannot be evaluated only by the existence of legal norms or the number of processed cases. The originality of this study lies in its effort to connect legal effectiveness, police institutional practice, and child victim protection into a single analytical framework that contributes to Indonesian criminal law scholarship and offers a more specific model for evaluating victim-centered policing in child sexual abuse cases.

Literature Review

Victim-Centered Law Enforcement and Trauma-Informed Justice in Child Sexual Abuse Cases

The literature on child sexual abuse has increasingly shifted from a purely punitive model of criminal justice to a victim-centered model that places the child's safety, dignity, voice, and recovery at the core of law enforcement. Earlier legal approaches tended to measure effectiveness through the identification of offenders, the collection of evidence, and the successful continuation of cases to prosecution, while more recent scholarship argues that these indicators are incomplete if the process itself reproduces trauma. Studies on victim-centered approaches in law enforcement show that child victims require access to services, coordinated institutional responses, and investigative methods that

minimize revictimization while still preserving the objectives of criminal accountability (Mitchell et al. 2025). This literature is relevant to the present study because the article examines whether the handling of child sexual abuse cases at Makassar Police operates merely as case processing or as a victim-centered form of legal protection.

Recent trauma-informed policing literature strengthens this victim-centered turn by arguing that the way police interact with children can determine whether victims remain engaged in the justice process. Trauma-informed practice does not mean weakening law enforcement, but requires investigators to recognize that fear, shame, fragmented memory, silence, or hesitation may be consequences of trauma rather than signs of unreliable testimony (Green et al. 2026)(Lathan et al. 2019). McElvaney's study on young people's engagement with the criminal justice system shows that supportive and empathetic police interactions can reduce secondary victimization, while dismissive or victim-blaming responses may deepen harm and discourage participation (McElvaney et al. 2024). This debate is directly relevant to this research because child sexual abuse cases at Makassar Police must be assessed not only through procedural compliance, but also through the quality of interaction between investigators and child victims.

The theoretical urgency of this approach can be explained through the doctrine of legal protection, particularly the distinction between preventive and repressive legal protection. In the Indonesian legal context, legal protection for child victims cannot stop at punishing perpetrators because victims are entitled to handling, protection, and recovery from the moment sexual violence occurs under Law Number 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes (Riyanto and Barung 2025)(Shelly and Rahaditya 2026). This statutory orientation is consistent with legal protection theory, which understands law as an instrument that must protect vulnerable persons in concrete social relations, not only as a written rule applied after harm has occurred (Tarmizi et al. 2026). This theoretical framework is relevant to the present study because victim-centered law enforcement at Makassar Police must be analyzed as a combination of investigation, protection, and recovery-oriented handling.

A point of debate in the literature concerns whether victim-centered policing may conflict with the evidentiary demands of criminal procedure. One view emphasizes strict evidence collection and procedural certainty, while another argues that child-sensitive methods actually improve case quality because victims are more likely to provide meaningful information when they feel safe, respected, and protected (Green et al. 2026). Trauma-informed policing scholarship suggests that victim-centered practice may strengthen rather than weaken prosecution by increasing trust, improving disclosure, and reducing attrition caused by fear or disengagement (Lathan et al. 2019)(McElvaney et al. 2024). This debate provides the analytical basis for this study because the research evaluates how Makassar Police balances evidentiary demands with the best interests and psychological condition of child victims.

Institutional Capacity, Evidentiary Challenges, and Police Gatekeeping

The police occupy a decisive position in child sexual abuse cases because they serve as the first institutional gatekeeper in the criminal justice process. Literature on prosecution outcomes in Indonesian child sexual abuse cases shows that legal prosecution is complex, and that attrition often occurs at the police investigation stage, where evidence, victim statements, medical reports, and suspect responses become critical (Sumampouw et al. 2020). This finding indicates that the effectiveness of child sexual abuse law enforcement cannot be measured only at the court level because many cases are shaped, strengthened, delayed, or discontinued before they reach prosecution. This literature is relevant to the present study because the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police determines the early legal trajectory of child sexual abuse cases through reporting, inquiry, investigation, and case-file submission.

Recent studies on victim-centered law enforcement emphasize that institutional capacity is not limited to the number of officers, but also includes specialized training, multidisciplinary coordination,

access to victim services, and the ability to conduct child-sensitive interviews. Research on law enforcement agencies handling child sexual exploitation shows that access to multidisciplinary teams, specialized task forces, and victim service agencies is associated with stronger victim-centered investigative practice (Mitchell et al. 2025). This confirms a wider trend in the literature that complex sexual violence cases involving children require inter-agency cooperation rather than isolated police action (Hamamah et al. 2025). This perspective is relevant to the present study because Makassar Police must be examined in relation to its coordination with prosecutors, medical personnel, psychologists, child protection institutions, and social support agencies.

The empirical findings from Makassar demonstrate the importance of this institutional-capacity framework. Between 2023 and July 2026, the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police handled 236 child sexual abuse cases, but only 27 reached the P21 stage, while 149 remained pending and other cases were terminated or resolved through different mechanisms. These figures suggest that the institutional challenge lies not merely in receiving reports, but in transforming reports into legally sustainable cases without ignoring the vulnerability of child victims. This data is relevant to the present study because it provides the quantitative foundation for analyzing the enforcement gap between formal legal authority and actual case completion.

Institutional capacity is also shaped by the availability of investigators and child-friendly facilities. The Makassar research shows that the Women and Children Protection Unit has 21 personnel, consisting of 14 male police officers and 7 policewomen, while each investigator must handle reporting, victim and witness examination, evidence collection, coordination, suspect examination, and investigative administration. The literature on trauma-informed and child-centered policing stresses that specialized personnel and appropriate environments are necessary because the investigative process itself may become harmful when children are examined in intimidating or non-private settings (Jempa et al. 2026). This institutional literature is relevant to the present study because the quality of victim-centered law enforcement at Makassar Police depends on whether personnel, facilities, and investigative conditions are sufficient to protect children during the legal process.

Socio-Cultural Barriers, Legal Culture, and Child Victim Protection

The literature on child sexual abuse increasingly recognizes that legal enforcement is shaped by social and cultural factors beyond statutory design. Studies on victim protection in Asia identify stigma, victim-blaming, underreporting, case withdrawal, procedural inadequacy, weak rehabilitation, and limited inter-agency cooperation as recurring barriers to child-centered justice (Utari et al. 2026). These findings show that victims may be harmed not only by offenders, but also by social reactions and institutional responses that fail to recognize the vulnerability of children. This literature is relevant to the present study because the Makassar case demonstrates that child sexual abuse enforcement must be read through both legal and socio-cultural lenses.

Indonesian socio-legal studies also show that informal settlement practices may create tension between community values and criminal justice accountability. A recent study on child sexual abuse settlements in Aceh found that overlapping legal orders, customary institutions, and restorative justice practices may create uncertainty, delay, fragmented victim protection, and secondary victimization when child-centered safeguards are weak (Jeumpa et al. 2026). This does not mean that community participation is always harmful, but it shows that informal mechanisms can become problematic when they subordinate the child's rights to family reputation, social harmony, or institutional convenience. This literature is relevant to the present study because the Makassar findings also identify family-based settlement tendencies and social stigma as barriers to sustained criminal proceedings.

The theoretical framework of legal culture explains why written criminal law may fail to operate effectively in cases involving shame, family pressure, and social dependency. Soerjono Soekanto's theory of legal effectiveness identifies legal substance, law enforcement officers, facilities, society, and

culture as interconnected factors that influence the operation of law in society. In child sexual abuse cases, legal culture may determine whether families report promptly, cooperate with investigators, protect the victim, or attempt to settle the case informally (Alaggia et al. 2019)(Wismayanti et al. 2019). This theory is relevant to the present study because the analysis of Makassar Police must connect police performance with the broader social environment in which victims and families make legal decisions.

The empirical findings from Makassar confirm that socio-cultural barriers are not peripheral, but central to victim-centered enforcement. The research shows that delayed reporting affects the ability of investigators to obtain information and evidence, while family hesitation and lack of cooperation may weaken the construction of criminal cases. It also shows that some cases are influenced by efforts to resolve matters through family-based settlement, concerns about shame, and the desire to preserve family reputation or social relations (Rumble et al. 2020). This literature and empirical context are relevant to the present study because they support the argument that victim-centered law enforcement requires not only competent police institutions, but also a legal culture that prioritizes the child's safety, dignity, and access to justice over silence and informal compromise. Taken together, these themes provide an analytical basis for examining how institutional capacity, evidentiary demands, and socio-cultural conditions shape victim-centered law enforcement at Makassar Police and affect the protection of child victims.

Research Design and Methodology

This study employs empirical legal research with a socio-legal orientation to examine how law operates in institutional practice (Noor 2023). This design is appropriate because the article does not merely analyze statutory provisions on child protection and sexual violence, but also investigates how those provisions are implemented by the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police in handling child sexual abuse cases. The empirical approach enables the research to observe law as actual behavior, particularly in reporting, inquiry, investigation, evidence collection, victim handling, and case-file submission. Therefore, this research design is used to answer the research questions concerning the implementation of victim-centered law enforcement and the institutional and socio-cultural barriers affecting its application.

The research was conducted at the Makassar Metropolitan Police Department, specifically at the Women and Children Protection Unit located at Jalan Ahmad Yani No. 9, Pattunuang, Wajo District, Makassar City, South Sulawesi. This location was selected because Makassar Police has institutional authority to handle child sexual abuse cases within the jurisdiction of Makassar City. The object of the research is the implementation of law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases, while the research subjects are police officers who are directly involved in handling such cases. This selection is relevant because the study seeks to understand victim-centered enforcement from the perspective of the institution that serves as the first gatekeeper in the criminal justice process.

The population of this research consists of law enforcement officers and institutional actors connected to the handling of child sexual abuse cases at the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police. The sample was determined purposively based on the respondents' position, experience, and direct involvement in the process of receiving reports, conducting inquiry, performing investigation, and preparing case administration. The research involved five key informants, consisting of the Head of the Women and Children Protection Unit, the Sub-Unit Head, and three investigators from the same unit. This purposive sampling technique was used to ensure that the data were obtained from actors with relevant authority, practical knowledge, and direct experience in the enforcement process.

Data were collected through three sequential techniques, namely observation, interviews, and documentation. Observation was used to understand the institutional setting and the practical implementation of child sexual abuse case handling by Makassar Police. Interviews were conducted

directly with selected informants to obtain information on investigative practices, victim handling, evidentiary challenges, personnel limitations, facilities, reporting delays, and socio-cultural barriers affecting enforcement. Documentation was used to collect and examine legal materials, case statistics, institutional records, reports, archives, and other official documents relevant to child sexual abuse cases in Makassar.

The data were analyzed using a descriptive qualitative method, which allowed the researcher to organize, describe, and interpret empirical findings in relation to the applicable legal framework. The analysis began by reducing the collected data into relevant categories, including victim-centered handling, legal basis, institutional capacity, facilities, community participation, and legal culture. These categories were then interpreted through the theories of legal effectiveness, law enforcement, and legal protection to assess whether the enforcement process had adequately protected child victims while maintaining criminal accountability. The conclusion was drawn deductively by connecting general legal principles and theoretical frameworks with specific empirical findings from the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police.

Findings and Discussion

Implementation of Victim-Centered Law Enforcement in Child Sexual Abuse Cases at Makassar Police

The implementation of victim-centered law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases at Makassar Police must be understood through the institutional role of the Women and Children Protection Unit. This unit functions as the first formal entry point for reports, inquiry, investigation, coordination, and submission of case files to the prosecution authority. Its position is therefore not merely administrative, because the quality of its early response shapes the victim's access to justice and the legal sustainability of the case. In this study, victim-centered law enforcement refers to police handling that combines criminal accountability with protection of the child's dignity, safety, psychological condition, and best interests throughout the legal process (Mitchell et al. 2025).

The processed case data indicate that the Women and Children Protection Unit handled a substantial number of child sexual abuse cases between 2023 and July 2026. During this period, 236 cases were recorded, but only 27 cases reached the P21 stage, while 149 cases remained pending. Other cases were terminated at the preliminary inquiry or investigation stage, and some were resolved through restorative justice mechanisms. These figures show that implementation cannot be assessed only from the existence of reports but must be evaluated through the capacity of the institution to transform reports into legally accountable and child-protective outcomes.

Table 1.
Processed Status of Child Sexual Abuse Cases Handled by Makassar Police, 2023 to July 2026

Year	Total Cases	P21	Terminated at Inquiry or Investigation	Restorative Justice	Pending Cases
2023	58	9	12	14	23
2024	42	4	13	2	23
2025	78	13	10	5	50
2026, Jan to July	58	1	2	2	53

Source: Processed by the author from the case data of Ditreskrimum Polrestabes Makassar, 2026.

The table shows that the highest number of cases occurred in 2025, with 78 cases, while 2026 had already reached 58 cases within only seven months. The number of P21 cases remained comparatively low when measured against the total number of cases handled, representing 27 of 236 cases. The number of pending cases was also dominant, representing 149 of 236 cases, or approximately 63.1 percent of the total recorded cases. This pattern suggests that the implementation of victim-centered

law enforcement is shaped by a gap between case intake and case completion, although pending cases in 2026 must be read carefully because the year had not yet fully ended.

The implementation process begins with the receipt of reports or complaints concerning alleged child sexual abuse. Reports may be submitted by the victim, parents, family members, or other persons who know about the incident. At this stage, police officers record the identity of the complainant and victim, identify the time and place of the incident, and collect an initial chronology. In a victim-centered framework, this stage is decisive because the first police response can either strengthen the victim's trust or deepen fear, shame, and reluctance to continue the process (McElvaney et al. 2024).

After the report is received, the case proceeds to inquiry to determine whether the reported event indicates a criminal offense. This stage is important because child sexual abuse often occurs in closed spaces and is sometimes known only by the victim and the perpetrator. Investigators must therefore obtain preliminary information from the victim, witnesses, and other sources while avoiding pressure that may affect the child's psychological condition. The victim-centered character of this stage lies in the ability of investigators to treat the child not merely as a source of evidence, but as a vulnerable legal subject whose testimony must be obtained through careful and protective procedures (Green et al. 2026).

The investigation stage requires the police to collect evidence, clarify the criminal event, and identify the suspect. In child sexual abuse cases, this task is legally complex because investigators must connect victim statements, witness testimony, medical information, and other evidentiary elements to the elements of the offense. The research shows that investigators may coordinate with medical personnel, psychologists, child companions, and other relevant parties when such support is needed (Hamamah et al. 2025)(Sumampouw et al. 2020). This coordination reflects an important element of victim-centered enforcement because the legal process must be supported by professional assistance that protects the child from secondary victimization.

The final police stage is the submission of case files to the public prosecutor for formal and material review. If the file is incomplete, investigators must revise it based on prosecutorial instructions, while a complete file allows the process to continue to the handover of the suspect and evidence. This stage shows that police work in child sexual abuse cases is connected to the broader criminal justice system and cannot be evaluated in isolation. For victim-centered law enforcement, the continuity between police and prosecution is essential because weak coordination may prolong uncertainty and affect the child victim's sense of legal protection.

The findings also show that Makassar Police applies the legal provisions that are in force at the time the offense occurs. According to the interview with the Head of the Women and Children Protection Unit, previous cases were handled under the Child Protection Law, while legal adjustments are made following developments in national criminal law. This indicates that the legal framework provides a sufficient normative basis for police action and that the main problem is not legal vacuum. The more pressing issue is how legal norms are translated into consistent investigative decisions while still preserving the best interests of the child victim.

From the perspective of legal effectiveness theory, this finding confirms that law enforcement is not determined solely by the existence of statutory rules. Written norms may authorize punishment and victim protection, but their effectiveness depends on officers, facilities, community response, and legal culture (Halim and Firmansyah 2024). In this case, the normative framework has enabled the police to receive reports, conduct inquiries, investigate, collect evidence, and submit case files. However, the relatively low number of P21 cases compared to the number of pending cases shows that the movement from legal authority to legal outcome is constrained by practical and institutional conditions.

The victim-centered dimension becomes more visible when the position of children as vulnerable victims is considered. The research emphasizes that children have limited capacity to understand,

decide, express their will, and defend their rights when facing adults or social pressure (Krismawati et al. 2023). This condition becomes more serious in sexual abuse cases because the relationship between victim and perpetrator may involve fear, dependence, trust, or unequal power. Therefore, the implementation of law enforcement at Makassar Police must be assessed by asking whether each procedural step reduces or reproduces the child's vulnerability.

The data also show that police handling should not be measured only by whether an offender is identified or whether a case is forwarded to prosecution. A victim-centered approach requires attention to how reports are received, how children are examined, how evidence is collected, and how the child is protected from pressure during the legal process. This interpretation supports legal protection theory, especially the view that protection is not limited to repressive action against offenders, but also includes the prevention of additional harm to victims (Tarmizi et al. 2026). In this sense, the Women and Children Protection Unit performs a dual function, as an investigative body and as an institutional mechanism for child protection.

The table further indicates that many cases do not move quickly toward complete prosecution files, which may reflect evidentiary, institutional, and victim-related challenges. In child sexual abuse cases, evidentiary difficulty may arise because the event is often hidden, delayed reporting may weaken available proof, and the victim's psychological condition may affect disclosure (Alaggia et al. 2019)(Sumampouw et al. 2020). These conditions explain why victim-centered enforcement cannot be separated from careful interviewing, coordination with support institutions, and a safe reporting environment. The finding therefore challenges a narrow punitive view of enforcement and shows that child-sensitive procedures are necessary for both protection and proof.

The presence of restorative justice in the data requires careful legal interpretation. The data record 23 cases resolved through restorative justice, but the research document does not explain the factual basis, legal qualification, or safeguards used in each case. In child sexual abuse cases, any non-prosecutorial resolution must be assessed with caution because the child's safety, dignity, and freedom from coercion must prevail over family pressure or social compromise (Riyanto and Barung 2025). This point is important for the discussion because victim-centered law enforcement cannot be reduced to procedural settlement, but must ensure that the chosen legal path does not silence the victim or weaken accountability (Jeumpa et al. 2026).

Overall, the implementation of victim-centered law enforcement at Makassar Police has a clear institutional and legal foundation, but its effectiveness remains uneven. The Women and Children Protection Unit has performed the main stages of law enforcement, from receiving reports to submitting case files, and has operated within the applicable statutory framework. Nevertheless, the processed data reveal a significant enforcement gap between the number of cases handled and the number of cases reaching complete prosecution files. This gap provides the basis for the next discussion on institutional and socio-cultural barriers, because victim-centered law enforcement depends not only on formal authority, but also on personnel capacity, facilities, reporting behavior, family cooperation, and the surrounding legal culture.

Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Victim-Centered Law Enforcement in Child Sexual Abuse Cases

The implementation of victim-centered law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases at Makassar Police is shaped not only by the availability of criminal law norms, but also by institutional and socio-cultural conditions surrounding the enforcement process. The empirical findings show that the legal framework has provided a sufficient basis for police action, yet the actual handling of cases remains constrained by personnel capacity, facilities, reporting behavior, family cooperation, and cultural perceptions of sexual abuse. These barriers are important because child sexual abuse cases require both criminal accountability and protection of the child from further psychological, social, and procedural

harm. Thus, the discussion in this section interprets how institutional and socio-cultural factors affect the ability of Makassar Police to implement law enforcement in a victim-centered manner.

The processed findings can be organized into two broad groups, namely institutional barriers and socio-cultural barriers. Institutional barriers refer to limitations within the law enforcement apparatus, including the number of investigators, workload, child-friendly facilities, and operational support for case handling. Socio-cultural barriers refer to social responses outside the police institution, including delayed reporting, family reluctance, lack of cooperation, stigma, shame, and the tendency to settle cases informally. This classification is used because victim-centered law enforcement requires the convergence of institutional readiness and community support, not merely the existence of legal authority.

Table 2.
Processed Institutional and Socio-Cultural Barriers to Victim-Centered Law Enforcement

Barrier Category	Processed Empirical Indicator	Legal Implication for Victim-Centered Enforcement
Investigator capacity	Unit PPA has 21 personnel, consisting of 14 male police officers and 7 policewomen	The number of personnel affects workload, case attention, timeliness, and sensitivity in handling child victims
Facilities and infrastructure	Specific facilities for child examination and victim handling remain limited	Non-ideal facilities may reduce privacy, comfort, and protection from secondary victimization
Reporting behavior	Delayed reporting affects the ability to obtain information and evidence	Delay may weaken evidentiary construction and prolong uncertainty for the child victim
Family and community cooperation	Families may hesitate, become uncooperative, or avoid formal proceedings	Weak cooperation may obstruct testimony, evidence collection, and case continuity
Legal culture and stigma	Some cases are influenced by family-based settlement, shame, and concern for reputation	Informal settlement and stigma may subordinate the child's rights to family or social interests

Source: Processed by the author from interview findings and institutional data of Unit PPA Polrestabes Makassar, 2026.

The table shows that the main barriers do not arise from the absence of legal norms, but from the conditions that determine how those norms operate in practice. This supports the theory of legal effectiveness, which explains that the operation of law is influenced by legal substance, law enforcement officers, facilities, society, and legal culture (Halim and Firmansyah 2024). In the context of child sexual abuse cases, these factors are interdependent because insufficient institutional support can weaken victim protection, while unsupportive social conditions can make legal procedures more difficult to complete. The findings therefore confirm that victim-centered law enforcement cannot be evaluated only through formal legal compliance but must be assessed through the practical capacity of the system to protect children during the enforcement process.

The institutional barrier most directly connected to police performance is the limited number of personnel in the Women and Children Protection Unit. The unit has 21 personnel, consisting of 14 male police officers and 7 policewomen, while the cases handled involve reporting, examination of victims and witnesses, evidence collection, coordination with related institutions, suspect examination, and investigative administration. This condition creates a structural burden because child sexual abuse cases require more time, attention, and psychological sensitivity than ordinary criminal cases (Hamamah et al. 2025)(Lathan et al. 2019). Therefore, the number of personnel is not a purely administrative issue, but a factor that affects the quality of victim-centered handling and the speed of case completion.

The personnel issue becomes more significant when connected to the nature of child sexual abuse cases. Children as victims often require careful communication, repeated reassurance, and an interview environment that does not intimidate or pressure them. Investigators are expected to obtain legally

relevant information while also preventing secondary victimization, and this dual task requires adequate time and professional concentration (Dinah Faizah Syahbur et al. 2024). When the workload is high and personnel are limited, the risk is not merely procedural delay, but a possible reduction in the quality of protection given to each child victim.

Facilities and infrastructure also appear as institutional barriers that influence the implementation of victim-centered enforcement. The research indicates that facilities specifically supporting the examination and handling of child victims remain limited, even though investigators continue to adjust by using available rooms and resources. In child sexual abuse cases, facilities are not neutral physical objects because examination rooms shape the victim's sense of safety, privacy, and comfort when giving testimony (Green et al. 2026). For this reason, limited facilities may affect not only administrative efficiency, but also the child's ability to provide information without additional psychological pressure.

This finding strengthens the argument that victim-centered law enforcement requires a supportive institutional environment. A child-friendly examination room can help reduce intimidation, protect confidentiality, and support a more humane interaction between investigators and victims. By contrast, inadequate facilities may make the criminal process feel formal, alienating, or threatening to children who have already experienced trauma. Thus, the availability of facilities should be understood as part of legal protection, not merely as an operational complement to investigation.

The socio-cultural barriers begin with the problem of delayed reporting. The interview findings show that delayed reporting may affect the investigation, especially in obtaining information and evidence related to the criminal event. In child sexual abuse cases, delay may occur because the child is unable to disclose the incident, the family needs time to understand what happened, or the relationship between the victim and perpetrator creates fear and hesitation (Alaggia et al. 2019). This condition shows that the success of police investigation depends partly on how quickly families and communities bring the incident into the formal legal mechanism.

Delayed reporting has direct legal consequences for evidentiary construction. Information that might be easier to obtain immediately after the incident may become difficult to verify after time has passed. Witness memory, physical traces, medical evidence, and the victim's emotional readiness can all be affected by delay, making the investigator's task more complex. Therefore, delayed reporting is not only a social problem, but a procedural barrier that can influence whether the case can move toward prosecution in a legally sustainable manner (Sumampouw et al. 2020).

Family and community cooperation also affects the continuity of victim-centered law enforcement. The research indicates that family support may help create better conditions during examination, while reluctance to provide information or continue the process can make it difficult for investigators to construct the case. In sexual abuse cases involving children, family members are often the closest support system for the victim and may determine whether the child feels safe enough to participate in the process (Krismawati et al. 2023). This finding demonstrates that victim-centered law enforcement cannot be carried out by the police alone because the child's access to justice is also shaped by the attitude of the family and social environment.

The cultural barrier is more complex because it operates through shame, family reputation, and the desire to preserve social harmony (Rumble et al. 2020). The research shows that some cases are influenced by efforts to resolve the matter within the family or outside formal legal channels, sometimes without the knowledge of law enforcement officers. Such practices may be seen by some families to avoid conflict, but they can become problematic when they weaken the child's right to protection and accountability. In this context, the value of family harmony becomes legally troubling when it silences the victim or shifts attention away from the harm suffered by the child.

The findings on legal culture support the view that written criminal law may fail to work effectively when social values discourage reporting and formal proceedings. The research does not suggest that cultural values are inherently contrary to law, but it shows that certain cultural responses

can obstruct the enforcement process when they place family reputation above the child's safety (Jempa et al. 2026). This confirms the relevance of legal effectiveness theory because legal culture influences whether people report, cooperate, and accept formal criminal accountability. Therefore, the implementation of victim-centered law enforcement requires a cultural shift that frames child sexual abuse as a violation of rights and dignity, not as a private disgrace to be hidden.

These institutional and socio-cultural barriers also explain why victim-centered law enforcement cannot be measured only by the number of cases received by the police. A high number of reports may indicate public willingness to use legal mechanisms, but it does not automatically mean that the process is effective or protective. The quality of enforcement depends on whether the case can be handled promptly, whether the child is examined safely, whether evidence can be constructed properly, and whether the family and community support the legal process. Accordingly, the barriers identified in this study show that victim-centered enforcement is both a police responsibility and a social-legal project.

The findings also require a careful evaluation of the concept of legal protection. Legal protection for child victims is not fulfilled merely because a report has been accepted or an investigation has been opened. Protection requires that the process itself does not create further harm, pressure, or social isolation for the child (Shelly and Rahaditya 2026). This means that institutional capacity, child-friendly facilities, family cooperation, and anti-stigma education must be integrated into the enforcement model if the police process is to function as meaningful protection.

Overall, institutional, and socio-cultural barriers substantially affect the implementation of victim-centered law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases at Makassar Police. Personnel limitations and facility constraints shape the internal capacity of the Women and Children Protection Unit, while delayed reporting, family reluctance, informal settlement practices, shame, and stigma shape the external environment of enforcement. These findings support the argument that the main challenge is not the absence of legal norms, but the gap between formal legal authority and the social-institutional conditions needed to protect child victims effectively. The discussion therefore confirms that victim-centered law enforcement requires stronger institutional resources, coordinated victim services, timely reporting, family cooperation, and a legal culture that prioritizes the child's safety and dignity over silence, compromise, or reputation.

Conclusion

This study concludes that victim-centered law enforcement in child sexual abuse cases at Makassar Police has been institutionally implemented through the Women and Children Protection Unit, which performs the main stages of report reception, inquiry, investigation, coordination, and case-file submission to the public prosecutor. The findings show that the implementation has a clear legal and institutional foundation, but its effectiveness remains uneven because the movement from case intake to case completion is affected by evidentiary complexity, the vulnerability of child victims, and the need for careful investigative handling. The first research question is therefore answered by showing that Makassar Police has applied victim-centered elements in its handling process, particularly through attention to child vulnerability, investigative caution, and coordination with relevant support actors, although these practices are not yet fully supported by ideal institutional conditions. The second research question is answered by identifying that the main barriers are not the absence of legal norms, but personnel limitations, limited child-friendly facilities, delayed reporting, weak family cooperation, informal settlement tendencies, shame, stigma, and cultural perceptions that may place family reputation above the child's legal protection.

The value of this study lies in its effort to move the discussion of child sexual abuse law enforcement beyond the conventional question of whether the police have acted according to formal legal procedure. Theoretically, this study contributes to Indonesian criminal law scholarship by

integrating legal effectiveness, law enforcement, and legal protection into a victim-centered analytical framework that evaluates not only the authority to investigate, but also the quality of protection provided to the child victim during the process. Practically, the study demonstrates that improving child sexual abuse enforcement requires more than strengthening penal provisions, because the protection of child victims depends on trained investigators, adequate facilities, inter-agency coordination, timely reporting, and social support for victims and families. The originality of this article rests on its argument that victim-centered law enforcement must be understood as a bridge between criminal accountability and child protection, so that police performance is assessed not merely by case processing, but by whether the legal process reduces vulnerability, prevents secondary victimization, and preserves the dignity of the child.

This study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. Its empirical scope is limited to the Women and Children Protection Unit of Makassar Police, so the findings cannot automatically represent the practice of all police institutions in Indonesia or all child sexual abuse cases in different legal, cultural, and institutional settings. The research also relies primarily on institutional data, interviews with police officers, and documentation, while the perspectives of child victims, families, prosecutors, psychologists, social workers, and judges were not examined directly because of ethical and practical constraints surrounding child sexual abuse research. Future studies should therefore expand the institutional scope, compare several police jurisdictions, involve multidisciplinary actors, and develop a victim-sensitive methodology capable of capturing the experiences of victims and families without exposing them to further harm. For policymakers, the findings suggest the need to strengthen the Women and Children Protection Unit through additional trained personnel, child-friendly examination rooms, clearer safeguards against inappropriate informal settlement, better coordination with victim-support institutions, and public legal education that frames child sexual abuse as a violation of rights and dignity rather than a private disgrace.

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Declaration of Generative AI Use

Generative AI served exclusively as an auxiliary tool for structural framing, reference summarization, and copyediting. The author independently audited, updated, and validated all substantive analysis and facts, assuming complete responsibility for the article's originality, precision, and final text.

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