

The Dangers of Narcotics Crime and Transnational Network Threats: Child Empowerment and Protection Strategies in the Kupang–Semau Cluster

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This study examines a community engagement initiative conducted by the Graduate School of the Indonesian Christian University in collaboration with the Child Development Center (PPA) of the Kupang–Semau Cluster, aimed at addressing the growing risks of narcotics abuse and the threats posed by transnational narcotics networks. The program sought to enhance community awareness, with a particular focus on children and adolescents, regarding the physical, psychological, social, and legal consequences of narcotics use. Employing a participatory and educational approach, the initiative incorporated awareness-raising sessions, narcotics abuse prevention training, interactive discussion forums involving families and educators, and educational socialization on strategies for recognizing transnational criminal networks. The findings indicate a significant improvement in participants' understanding of the dangers of narcotics and the mechanisms through which transnational networks operate within local contexts. Furthermore, the program highlights the critical role of multi-stakeholder collaboration particularly among educational institutions, religious organizations, and law enforcement agencies in strengthening child protection and community resilience against narcotics-related crimes. This study underscores the importance of community-based empowerment strategies as a preventive framework for safeguarding children and adolescents from the influence of narcotics and transnational criminal networks.

Keywords: Narcotics, Transnational Networks, Child Protection, Prevention, Community Empowerment.

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1. Introduction

Narcotics-related crime has emerged as a serious threat that extends beyond public health concerns to undermine social stability and national security. Owing to its strategic geographical position, Indonesia has become a significant target for transnational narcotics trafficking networks. These networks employ increasingly sophisticated modus operandi, including cross-border distribution, concealment within legitimate trade activities, and the use of digital communication technologies to expand market reach. Data from the National Narcotics Agency (Badan Narkotika Nasional/BNN, 2024) reveal the magnitude of this threat, with 618 narcotics crime cases and two clandestine laboratories uncovered in a single year, involving hundreds of suspects and the seizure of large quantities of illicit substances, ranging from methamphetamine and marijuana to heroin, cocaine, and synthetic drugs.

The scope of narcotics-related crime continues to expand, particularly among young people. Based on a national prevalence rate of 1.73 percent in 2023, approximately 3.33 million individuals were exposed to narcotics, including an estimated 312,000 adolescents aged 15–25 (Tempo, 2023). Further findings reported by *Berita Satu* (2025) indicate that BNN, in cooperation with law enforcement agencies, dismantled 42 organized trafficking networks both national and

international and arrested over a thousand suspects. Meanwhile, the Indonesian National Police recorded nearly 39,000 drug trafficking cases between January and October 2025, with more than 51,000 suspects apprehended, including a concerning number of minors. These developments highlight the increasing capacity of transnational networks to penetrate local communities and influence youth behavior, particularly in transit regions such as Kupang City in East Nusa Tenggara (Haluan NTT, 2023).

The consequences of narcotics abuse among children and adolescents are severe and multidimensional. From a developmental perspective, substance abuse during adolescence disrupts brain development, impairs cognitive functioning, emotional regulation, and self-control (Ega, 2024). Socially, children and adolescents exposed to narcotics environments face heightened risks of school dropout, social marginalization, and recruitment into criminal networks (BNN, 2011). These individual harms are compounded by broader societal impacts, including the erosion of social trust, weakening of social capital, and increased economic burdens on families and communities. In the Kupang–Semau Cluster, these risks are particularly acute due to the accessibility of narcotics through both local markets and distribution channels linked to transnational trafficking networks.

Indonesia's legal framework recognizes narcotics as a serious crime requiring strict prevention and enforcement, as reflected in Law Number 35 of 2009 on Narcotics, which imposes severe penalties for large-scale and cross-border trafficking. However, law enforcement efforts alone face significant challenges when confronting transnational networks that exploit technological advancements and jurisdictional gaps. This limitation underscores the necessity of integrated prevention strategies involving collaboration among law enforcement agencies, educational institutions, and civil society. In response, the present community service initiative in the Kupang–Semau Cluster focuses on empowering children, adolescents, families, educators, and community leaders through education, capacity-building, and early detection strategies (Kumalasari et al., 2023). By strengthening community resilience, promoting anti-narcotics social norms, and fostering multi-stakeholder collaboration, this program seeks not only to prevent narcotics abuse but also to reinforce the rule of law and create a safer and healthier environment for future generations (Binda et al., 2024; Muslim, 2025).

2. Literature Review and Problem Statement

Narcotics trafficking in Indonesia represents a complex legal and social challenge, increasingly exacerbated by the involvement of transnational criminal networks. At the national level, this issue is regulated by Law Number 35 of 2009 on Narcotics, which strictly prohibits the production, distribution, and abuse of narcotics and imposes severe criminal sanctions, including the death penalty for large-scale and cross-border offenses. Internationally, Indonesia has ratified the 1988 United Nations Convention against Illicit Traffic in Narcotic Drugs and Psychotropic Substances and the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime (UNTOC), both of which obligate States Parties to cooperate in preventing and combating transnational narcotics crimes (Badan Nasional Pengelola Perbatasan Republik Indonesia, 2024). Nevertheless, empirical studies demonstrate that transnational narcotics networks continue to exploit gaps in inter-state legal regimes such as divergent narcotics definitions, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, and uneven law enforcement capacities highlighting the limitations of legal mechanisms when operating in isolation and emphasizing the urgent need for legal harmonization and effective international cooperation (Info Hukum, 2025).

In this context, preventive efforts against narcotics trafficking and abuse cannot rely solely on law enforcement measures but require the active involvement of broader social institutions. Educational institutions play a strategic role by integrating anti-narcotics education, child rights awareness, and legal consequences into school and university curricula (Universitas Negeri Surabaya, 2024). Religious institutions, particularly churches, function as moral and social agents by providing spiritual guidance, psychosocial support, and advocacy for families affected by narcotics-related issues (Muallif, 2024). At the community level, civic organizations and non-governmental groups contribute through social monitoring mechanisms, public discussion forums, and positive youth engagement activities aimed at reducing vulnerability to narcotics networks (Rahman et al., 2023). These community-based interventions are essential in reinforcing social resilience and preventing the normalization of narcotics abuse among children and adolescents.

Alongside social prevention strategies, effective risk reduction also requires systematic legal and institutional responses to transnational narcotics networks. This includes mapping and identifying trafficking networks, analyzing syndicate modus operandi across maritime, air, and digital routes, and utilizing digital forensic technologies to trace online transactions (Benke, 2025). Strengthening law enforcement capacity and enhancing inter-state cooperation through mutual legal assistance treaties (MLATs) are critical legal measures to address the cross-border nature of narcotics crimes (Kementerian Koordinator Bidang Politik dan Keamanan Republik Indonesia, 2024). Overall, this integrated approach underscores the importance of aligning national and international legal frameworks with community-based prevention strategies to protect children and adolescents, reduce narcotics demand, and prevent the penetration of transnational criminal networks, in accordance with child protection principles under the Convention on the Rights of the Child and transnational crime prevention strategies articulated by UNTOC (Irwan et al., 2024; United Nations Children's Fund, 2018). Accordingly, this study examines how the integration of national and international legal frameworks interacts with the roles of educational institutions, religious organizations, and local communities in strengthening preventive strategies against transnational narcotics trafficking and narcotics abuse among children and adolescents in Indonesia.

3. Method

The implementation of the community service program at the Child Development Center (Pusat Pengembangan Anak/PPA) of the Kupang–Semau Cluster was designed to achieve the objectives of empowerment, education, and the prevention of narcotics abuse among children, adolescents, and educators. The activity location was strategically selected in the Kupang–Semau Cluster, with a target of 120 participants consisting of children of primary school age through adolescents, as well as educators and facilitators from educational institutions. The selection of this location was based on the high risk of children's and adolescents' exposure to social environments vulnerable to narcotics trafficking, while also aiming to maximize the reach of legal and social education initiatives (Octarra, n.d.). The participants were ensured to represent diverse age groups, social backgrounds, and levels of understanding regarding narcotics, allowing the approach adopted to be inclusive and context-sensitive.

The community service program was implemented through interactive educational sessions, utilizing presentation materials tailored to the characteristics and needs of the participants (see Figure 1).



Figure. 1. Presentation of Program Materials to Participants

To assess the effectiveness of the community service program, we employed a mixed evaluation approach encompassing participatory observation, questionnaires, and group discussions. Participatory observation enabled the service team to document participants' levels of engagement, active participation, and emotional responses to the materials presented (Tampubolon, 2023). Questionnaires were administered before and after the activities to measure changes in knowledge, attitudes, and legal awareness related to narcotics, as well as understanding of how transnational networks operate. Group discussions were used to explore participants' perceptions of the risks of narcotics abuse, the effectiveness of prevention strategies, and to obtain constructive feedback on the materials delivered (Figure 2). The combination of these evaluation techniques provided comprehensive data on the immediate impact of the community service program while also offering valuable insights for improving methods in future activities.



Figure. 2. Interactive Discussion with Program Participants

This approach is considered highly effective because it is grounded in the principles of participatory and contextual learning, which have been proven to enhance information retention, critical decision-making, and the application of knowledge in everyday life (Gafur, 2003). By employing interactive methods such as case simulations and group discussions, participants are able to concretely understand the legal and social implications of narcotics abuse, rather than viewing them solely from a theoretical perspective. This is consistent with critical education theory, which emphasizes the importance of direct experience in internalizing values and knowledge (Fikri et al., 2024). Evaluation through observation, questionnaires, and discussions further strengthens the validity of the findings, ensuring that the community service program is not merely informative but also generates practical impacts on participants' behavior.

Overall, this community service methodology integrates legal, educational, and social approaches, with a focus on empowering participants to recognize narcotics-related risks, understand both national and international legal frameworks, and design effective prevention strategies. By actively involving children, adolescents, and educators, the program has the potential to enhance legal and social awareness, reduce children's involvement in narcotics trafficking, and strengthen community capacity to address the risks posed by transnational criminal networks (Husba et al., 2018).

4. Results and Discussion

The discussion on the community service program at the Child Development Center (PPA) of the Kupang–Semau Cluster indicates a significant increase in participants' awareness of the dangers of narcotics and their impacts on children, adolescents, and society at large. The outreach materials presented highlighted not only legal aspects but also the social, psychological, and health consequences that may arise from narcotics abuse (Rohman, 2025). One participant, a 16-year-old adolescent, asked, "Are narcotics only dangerous if they are consumed in large amounts?" The facilitator

explained that all types of narcotics, whether used in small or large quantities, can impair physical and mental development and increase the risk of long-term dependency. This discussion emphasized the importance of early prevention and the empowerment of children and adolescents so that they understand the real consequences of narcotics distribution and use.

In addition, participants gained a deeper understanding of the existence and operational methods of transnational networks involved in narcotics distribution. The facilitator explained that narcotics are not only produced and distributed locally but often involve global networks that exploit communication technologies and cross-border transportation routes. During the question-and-answer session, an educator asked, "How can we tell if children in the school environment are being influenced by transnational networks?" The facilitator responded that there are several early warning signs to observe, such as behavioral changes, declining academic performance, the use of certain terms or symbols associated with narcotics, and contact with suspicious new individuals. The facilitator also emphasized the importance of cooperation among schools, families, and government institutions to monitor risk indicators and implement appropriate legal and social interventions.

Addressing the challenges and obstacles in preventing narcotics abuse in the Kupang–Semau Cluster is crucial. One of the main constraints identified was the lack of resources and coordination among institutions. Educational institutions often face limited funding, minimal access to educational materials, and insufficient personnel capacity to conduct sustained outreach programs (Sandra, 2025). A supervising teacher asked, "What if we do not have enough time or materials to educate all students intensively?" In response, the facilitator recommended several community-based strategies, such as utilizing digital materials, training teachers to become local facilitators, and strengthening volunteer networks so that education can reach a wider audience. Through these measures, the program can be sustained while remaining aligned with existing institutional capacities.

The discussion also highlighted various legal and regulatory aspects related to narcotics from both national and international perspectives. The facilitator explained national regulations, such as Law No. 35 of 2009 on Narcotics, as well as international instruments such as the 1961 and 1988 United Nations Conventions on Narcotic Drugs, which regulate the production, distribution, and prevention of narcotics abuse. One participant asked, "What happens if someone is involved with a transnational network but only as a local courier?" The facilitator explained that national law regulates the liability of all parties within the narcotics distribution chain, including local distributors, and that involvement with transnational networks may result in harsher sanctions in accordance with criminal law principles and community protection.

Furthermore, the discussion underscored the critical role of educational institutions, churches, and communities in reducing narcotics-related risks. The facilitator explained that character education, religious activities, and community-based programs can significantly strengthen the resilience of children and adolescents against social pressure and opportunities to engage in narcotics use (Surachman, 2019). For example, organizing classes on law and health, mentoring programs, and reinforcing moral values through activities in local churches can enhance legal awareness while strengthening social control. One participant, a church member, asked, "How can we contribute without frightening children?" The facilitator responded that the most effective approach is to provide fact-based and experience-oriented education through interactive discussions and case simulations, enabling children to understand risks and consequences critically without causing psychological trauma.

Finally, the discussion emphasized the importance of continuous evaluation and follow-up after the

community service program. Through observations, questionnaires, and group discussions, participants' levels of understanding, attitudinal changes, and effective prevention strategies can be identified. The facilitator also stressed that the involvement of all stakeholders is essential to ensure that children and adolescents in the Kupang–Semau Cluster remain protected from the dangers of narcotics and the influence of transnational networks. The discussion concluded with a shared commitment among the PPA, educational institutions, and churches to continue educational programs, strengthen legal awareness, and build community resilience against narcotics abuse.

5. Conclusion

Based on the outreach activities conducted at the Child Development Center (PPA) of the Kupang–Semau Cluster, it can be concluded that the threat of narcotics and the involvement of transnational networks constitute a highly complex phenomenon that requires serious attention from multiple stakeholders. The main findings indicate that children and adolescents are particularly vulnerable to the psychological, social, and legal impacts of narcotics abuse, both directly and indirectly through environmental influences and cross-border distribution networks. Discussions with participants confirmed that legal knowledge and awareness of narcotics-related risks remain limited, making systematic and structured interventions critically important. Awareness of the modus operandi of transnational networks also increased, including how these networks exploit communication technologies, logistics systems, and social vulnerabilities within local communities. These findings reinforce the argument that the protection of children and adolescents cannot be addressed in a partial manner, but rather must be pursued through cross-institutional collaboration involving educational institutions, churches, law enforcement agencies, and local communities, so that narcotics prevention efforts can be comprehensive, sustainable, and legally grounded. Based on these findings, several recommendations can be proposed for future programs. First, it is essential to develop continuous, interactive, and contextual educational programs that include legal education, case simulations, and character-building activities in schools and local communities. Second, strengthening the role of law enforcement agencies, both preventively and repressively, is crucial. This includes monitoring narcotics distribution networks and enhancing cooperation with international institutions to dismantle transnational networks. Third, churches and religious institutions can utilize moral approaches and spiritual values to increase children's and adolescents' awareness of the dangers of narcotics. Preventive strategies at the community level may include the establishment of peer support groups, mentoring programs, and participatory community monitoring, which collectively help build environments that are resilient to narcotics distribution. It is expected that the implementation of these strategies will not only enhance participants' awareness and knowledge, but also create effective synergy among educational institutions, churches, law enforcement agencies, and communities in protecting the younger generation from the threats of narcotics and transnational criminal networks.

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