

Criminal Careers and Drug Abuse Among Adolescents in Indonesia

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Abstract: *The engagement of adolescents in drug abuse cases is a complex process that requires explanation and reflection. This study aims to explain the criminal careers of adolescents engaged in drug abuse. Such inclinations are often overlooked in studies concerning adolescent involvement in drug abuse cases in Indonesia. In addition to addressing the inadequacies of prior research, this study aims to expound the criminal careers of adolescents involved in drug abuse cases in Indonesia. This is a descriptive qualitative study that utilizes primary and secondary data. The study's findings highlight three important situations of adolescents' criminal careers in drug abuse cases. Firstly, the initial phase of adolescent drug abuse is precipitated by experimentation, peer influence, and a curiosity about drugs. Secondly, active drug abuse among adolescents manifests in various forms such as users, abusers, and addicts. Lastly, active participation in drug abuse among adolescents leads to a progression in behavior from users to dealers, users to sellers, and addicts to dealers. This study also emphasizes the need to explain the perceptions and motivations of adolescents who engage in drug abuse cases to acquire a better understanding of their conduct.*

Introduction

The active involvement of adolescents in drug abuse has had long-term consequences for their psychological and biological states, as well as shaping the specialization of other criminal activities. According to Bachman et al. (2016), drug users frequently go through a process that can shape their criminal careers. This environment is reflected in the high involvement of adolescents who become drug sellers, with 2.29 million people, or 28%, in Indonesia over the last five years (Badan Narkotika Nasional, 2019). Adolescent engagement in drug dealing does not occur by chance; rather, it is the result of a complex and contextual process that has shaped their criminal careers. It is crucial to investigate the criminal careers of adolescents involved in drug abuse cases in order to clarify the processes and attitudes acquired by adolescents who are actively involved in drug abuse in Indonesia.

Adolescence is a developmental stage characterized by the use and abuse of numerous narcotic substances. Most studies undertaken in Western countries suggest that by the age of nineteen, 90% of young people have tried alcohol, 60% have smoked cigarettes, 50% have used cannabis, and 20% have tried other drugs such as inhalants, stimulants, hallucinogens, or opiates

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(Sandic & Alispahic, 2018). Beginner adolescents typically use legal substances (tobacco and alcohol), followed by marijuana, and finally, illegal substances such as narcotics (Delaney-black et al., 2011). Cahyani (2015) stated that drug usage among adolescents is frequently affected by numerous modes and motives, such as escape from personal issues, societal pressure, academic pressure, and interpersonal conflicts experienced by adolescents. Furthermore, Fathurokhman (2013) stated that drug addiction leading to criminal behavior in adolescents is affected by curiosity (experimental) and peer pressure. All of these modes and motivations are interconnected, establishing a complex network that supports drug addiction behavior among adolescents (Pardo & Reuter, 2018).

In the past five years, research on adolescent drug abuse has focused on three specific scenarios. Firstly, research has examined teenagers' engagement in drug use within the context of consequences (Aber-Odonga et al., 2024; Arnaud et al., 2024; Single et al., 2024). Secondly, studies have looked at adolescents' involvement in drug addiction situations in relation to law enforcement (Durand et al., 2024; Nawi et al., 2021; Nelson et al., 2023). Lastly, research has explored adolescents' engagement in drug abuse situations with a focus on prevention (Gilmore et al., 2023; Steeger et al., 2023; Taghipour et al., 2023). Overall, there has been a lack of comprehensive research on the involvement of adolescents in drug abuse cases, particularly regarding the criminal behaviors of adolescents involved in drug abuse in Indonesia.

The criminal career in criminology refers to the progression of a person's criminal activity throughout his or her life, describing how a person becomes involved in the world of crime, develops patterns of criminal conduct, and engages in crimes over time (DeLisi, 2016). In the context of drug-related criminal activity, a criminal career frequently begins with an individual experimenting with narcotics (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 2016). Adolescents' experimentation with drugs is often triggered by factors such as their social surroundings, peer pressure, and a lack of awareness of the implications of such activities (Saladino et al., 2021). As individuals become more actively involved in drug use, they often establish connections with dealer networks, which can lead to engagement in other criminal activities. During this time, adolescent behavior begins to undergo significant changes (Widari et al., 2023; Windle et al., 2020). They begin to exhibit symptoms of greater risk, such as impulsive conduct and increasingly bold decisions, which are frequently influenced by mental problems that emerge as a result of drug use (Green et al., 2017). Drug addiction can develop a habit of illegal conduct over time, increasing the chance of adolescents engaging in more serious criminal behaviors in the future.

Engagement of adolescents in drug abuse is a complex process that requires explanation and reflection. This study aims to address three key questions regarding this phenomenon. Firstly, what is the initial stage of an adolescent's involvement in drug abuse? Secondly, to what extent are they actively participating in these activities? And thirdly, how is the specialization

of adolescent behavior formed in relation to drug abuse? In light of these inquiries, this study posits that adolescents' active engagement in drug abuse not only impacts their psychological and biological well-being but also contributes to a specialization in criminal activities. In essence, the potential dangers of adolescents' active involvement in drug abuse extend beyond psychological and biological ramifications and can pave the way for a significant criminal career.

In terms of criminology, adolescents' active involvement in drug abuse cases has increased over time, potentially leading to the specialization of criminal activities other than drug abuse. Goings et al. (2023) also suggested that understanding adolescents' active involvement in drug use is crucial to reflect on the long-term effects of drug use on their attitudes and actions. However, studies on adolescent involvement in drug addiction cases have so far concentrated solely on implications, law enforcement, and prevention rather than being undertaken thoroughly. In addition to addressing the inadequacies of earlier studies, this study seeks to explain the criminal careers of adolescents involved in drug abuse cases in Indonesia.

Method

This study was conducted amidst the widespread involvement of adolescents in drug abuse cases in Indonesia, as reported in the news via Google. However, this study primarily focuses on elucidating the processes, involvement, and attitudes of adolescents engaged in drug abuse cases, as depicted in online news reports. Therefore, this study centers on three key factors. First, the involvement of adolescents in drug abuse cases is a crucial topic that has not been adequately addressed in previous studies. Second, the engagement of adolescents in drug abuse cases is characterized by highly contextualized motives and patterns, which are vital to comprehend. Third, adolescents' involvement in drug abuse cases has given rise to complex perspectives that require reflection. These three factors serve as the foundation for this study on adolescents' involvement in drug abuse.

This is a descriptive qualitative study that utilizes both primary and secondary data. The primary data consist of excerpts from descriptions of online news texts, which were collected through an intensive reading procedure of 1,500 online news texts using the search keyword "Adolescents involvement in drug abuse cases" on the Google search engine. The process of seeking and reviewing online news texts commenced on February 27 and continued until March 8, 2024. The selection and reading of internet news was conducted rapidly, focusing on the headlines. The reading process yielded 560 online news articles discussing the initiation or early stages of adolescents' involvement in drug abuse, 253 online news articles discussing adolescents' active participation in drug abuse cases, and 687 online news articles discussing adolescents' specialization or attitude formed after becoming involved in drug abuse cases. Secondary data were gathered by reviewing books, websites, and journal articles relevant to the research topic.

The data analysis in this work is based on the process proposed by Fernando et al. (2023), which focuses on three processes. First, data reduction is a procedure that organizes data into a more systematic form based on data classification according to the forms, factors, and implications provided by the data. Second, data verification is the process of conceptually summarizing a reduced dataset. Third, data description is the act of exhibiting data that has been thematically defined and then displayed in the form of a table, including verified quotes from online news texts that are relevant to the discussion. The next step after completing these three steps is to conduct inductive data analysis as a foundation for interpreting the acquired data. The data is interpreted by thinking about and restating it in relation to the concepts, patterns, and socio-cultural background portrayed in the online news narratives. The procedure and stages of the analysis allowed us to form a conclusion.

Results and Discussion

Adolescent criminal careers in drug use in Indonesia develop through a complex path of initiation, participation, and behavior change. This context can be seen through three key findings in this study.

Adolescent Initiation of Drug Abuse

Several complicated factors influence the initiation or early phases of adolescent drug use. According to Rich et al. (2023), environmental factors such as a sense of curiosity and social solidarity have a significant impact on adolescents' initial drug use. Table 1 illustrates this context.

Table 1. Adolescents' Initial Process of Drug Abuse

Motive	Narration
Trying to use drugs	Factors influencing adolescent drug abuse in Indonesia include their desire for new sensational experiences, as well as failure in their lives, which makes them appear insecure (Imran et al., 2020).
Trying to use drugs	Many factors influence adolescents' drug use. However, the primary motivator for them to use drugs is the desire to experiment (Maula & Yuniastuti, 2017).
Solidarity	Their friendships influence adolescents' drug abuse. In reality, friendship and solidarity have a significant influence on adolescents' drug abuse (Pranoto, 2023).
Solidarity	Friendships frequently impact adolescents involved in drug abuse cases. They are more likely to be exposed to drug use when they have strong bonds with their friends (Bachtiar, 2021).

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Curious about drugs	Adolescents are more likely to consume drugs due to their high level of curiosity. Because they have a new role in their environment, they frequently wander into negative behaviors such as drug usage (BNN, 2020).
Curious about drugs	The National Narcotics Agency categorizes the most crucial reasons why adolescents take drugs. Curiosity about drugs is one of the most powerful motivators for them to use drugs (Ripaldi, 2022).

Source: Online news via Google.

Table 1 illustrates the initial stages of adolescent engagement in drug use in Indonesia, as well as the three fundamental circumstances that lead to adolescent drug abuse. The first step in adolescent involvement with drug abuse is experimentation with drug use (Maula & Yuniastuti, 2017). Secondly, adolescent drug abuse originates from a sense of solidarity among peers (Bachtiar, 2021). Thirdly, the initial stage of adolescent drug abuse is driven by curiosity about drugs (Ripaldi, 2022). These three contexts indicate that the onset of adolescent drug abuse is influenced by various complex contextual elements, including experimentation, solidarity among peers, and curiosity.

The initiation of adolescent drug use marks a critical period during which adolescents begin to be influenced and directly involved in drug use within their social environment. According to Pardo & Reuter (2018), social and environmental factors such as peer influence, family dynamics, and social pressures experienced during communication and interaction within their social environment all influence their initiation into drug use. Mota et al. (2018) further emphasize that these environmental factors play a dominant role in the early involvement of adolescents in drug use, suggesting that the conditions of their social environment heavily influence their initiation into drug usage. In addition to the social environment, adolescents' early involvement in drug use is influenced by the social system, which may be less perceptive of their problems in terms of values and norms (Fernando et al., 2023; Munjiah, 2023).

The initiation and early stages of adolescent drug abuse are often influenced by complex and contextual factors. Dierker et al. (2023) suggest that adolescents' involvement in drug abuse is typically preceded by a complex process of social interaction involving individual, societal, and environmental elements that impact their behavior. Furthermore, Saputra and Widiensyah (2023) argue that adolescents' access to drugs plays a critical role in the initiation of drug use, in addition to being influenced by the conditions and situations in their social environment. Therefore, it is evident that the onset and early phases of drug abuse among adolescents are influenced not only by individual characteristics but also by the circumstances of their social environment (Airlangga PH et al., 2024; Meldrum et al., 2023). This context has emerged as the primary motivator driving the initial stages of widespread drug use among Indonesian adolescents.

Active Participation of Adolescents in Drug Abuse

Adolescents' active participation in drug abuse has positioned them as a susceptible demographic. Temane et al. (2023) stated that adolescents' active participation in drug abuse has positioned them as a group that cannot avoid the impacts of active drug consumption-induced addiction. Table 2 illustrates this context.

Table 2. Active Involvement of Adolescents in Drug Abuse

Involvement	Types of Drugs	Age	Cases
User	Ecstasy, marijuana, and methamphetamine	Adolescents (15)	A fifteen-year-old student became a drug addict. According to an investigation, the suspect had been using drugs since elementary school (Kompas, 2022).
User	Synthetic tobacco	Adolescents (17) and (16)	Police detained two adolescents, aged 17 and 16, after discovering synthetic tobacco drugs in the trunk of their motorcycle (Nurcahyo, 2023).
User	Methamphetamine	Adolescents (19)	Police in Gowa apprehended 12 drug users. Two of them were 19-year-old crystal methamphetamine users (Maryadi, 2019).
User	Synthetic tobacco	Adolescents (12)	A 12-year-old teenager started using drugs. He used synthetic New Psychoactive Substances (Kumparan, 2020).
Addict	Methamphetamine	Adolescents (18)	AS got addicted to methamphetamines at an early age and went to the National Narcotics Agency with his family (Kurniawan, 2021).
Addict	Marijuana	Adolescents (16), (17), and (20)	Police in Bukittinggi captured five adolescents. The arrest began with a community report of drug

abuse by a group of adolescents (Alfaridho, 2024).

Source: Online news via Google.

Table 2 illustrates the active involvement of adolescents in drug abuse. The table presents three significant contexts for the active participation of adolescents in drug abuse cases. Firstly, instances of adolescents using ecstasy, marijuana, and crystal methamphetamine demonstrate their active involvement in drug addiction (Kompas, 2022). Secondly, cases involving adolescents as active methamphetamine users also illustrate their active engagement in drug abuse (Maryadi, 2019). Thirdly, cases of adolescents using marijuana actively showcase their engagement in drug abuse (Kurniawan, 2021). These three contexts clearly indicate that many adolescents are actively involved in drug abuse as users, abusers, and addicts.

The active engagement in drug use by adolescents is not uncommon, as there is a significant experimental process that leads to a progressive dependence on drugs (Eryani dan Anwar, 2023). Consequently, adolescents who become drug addicts are aware of the potential dangers of drug abuse. However, Dahl et al. (2024) argue that drug dependence is influenced not only by biological factors but also by the psychological and sociological conditions of unstable adolescents. This environment often leads to detrimental changes in behavior and lifestyle among adolescent drug addicts. The changes in behavior and lifestyles of drug addicts must be viewed as a complex problem that requires intensive community and governmental intervention to identify and actively restore the conditions of adolescents who have become addicted to drugs (Latif et al., 2022).

Adolescents' active involvement in drug addiction will have long-term detrimental consequences for the quality and well-being of their lives. Adolescent drug use not only has biological consequences, but it also can lead to social pathology that underlies the development of interpersonal problems with family, peers, and society (Das et al., 2016). This point is further emphasized by Lukman et al. (2022), who state that the involvement of adolescents in drug addiction leads to a decline in both social and cultural performance, highlighting the need for a more targeted approach to prevention and recovery. Consequently, the process of preventing and rehabilitating adolescents who become drug addicts must involve all spheres of their social environment, as their active participation in drug use is heavily influenced by the situation and conditions in their social surroundings (Fernando et al., 2023).

Behavioral Specialization of Adolescents in Drug Abuse Cases

The active involvement of adolescents in drug abuse cases has resulted in a specialization of their behavior toward heavier criminality. According to Sedibe and Hendricks (2020), adolescents' engagement in drug abuse does not

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usually end with cases and their position as users; in fact, many of them become dealers. Table 3 illustrates this context.

Table 3. Behavioral Changes of Adolescents in Drug Abuse Cases

From	Into	Age	Cases
User	Dealer	Adolescent (15)	The chief of the Central Sulawesi National Narcotics Agency highlighted a case of adolescent drug users and sellers (Arshandi, 2022).
User	Dealer	Adolescent (17)	A girl with the initials Ms got into a case of methamphetamine possession. Ms also stated that, in addition to being a user, she was part of a dealer network (Maulana, 2019).
User	Seller	Adolescent (15)	Adolescents in North Kalimantan started selling drugs. Aside from receiving drugs for free, they were also enticed by sales profits (Dzulviqor, 2021).
User	Seller	Adolescent (17)	Teenagers in Cilegon City began selling drugs through online transactions. They not only sold drugs but also used them (Wisnu, 2022).
Addict	Seller	Adolescent (17)	Jakarta police apprehended an adolescent who was preparing to distribute 112 kg of marijuana. He was both a dealer and an addict (Sutrisna, 2022).
Addict	Seller	Adolescent (17)	Police apprehended adolescents for their involvement in a gorilla tobacco narcotics distribution investigation. They are both dealers and addicts (Tahudin, 2022).

Source: Online news via Google.

Table 3 illustrates the changes in adolescents' behavior in drug abuse cases. The table also identifies three significant contexts in which their active participation in drug abuse cases has led to a specialization of behavior. First, adolescents' behavior in drug abuse cases evolves, notably from being users to becoming dealers (Maulana, 2019). Second, changes in behavior in drug abuse

cases do not occur when adolescents transition from being users to sellers (Dzulviqor, 2021). Third, shifts in adolescent behavior in drug addiction cases are observed from being addicts to becoming dealers (Tahudin, 2022). From these three contexts, it is evident that adolescents' active involvement in drug abuse cases has resulted in a specialization of behavior towards greater criminal activity, transitioning from being users to becoming dealers, users to sellers, and addicts to dealers.

The involvement of adolescents in drug abuse not only leads to their active participation as users but also drives them to engage in other criminal activities. According to Amanda et al. (2017), adolescents' active involvement in drug use can lead them to become dealers and develop specialized roles within a broader drug trafficking network. This specialization is evident in examples of theft, drug trafficking, and violence committed by adolescents under the influence of drugs (Windle & Briggs, 2015). Consequently, active drug use by adolescents has the potential to alter their perceptions of risks and consequences, thereby increasing their likelihood of taking risks and engaging in illegal behavior (Fagan, 2017).

The active involvement of adolescents in drug use may not only harm their health but also lead to their involvement in other criminal activities. Aston (2015) confirms that adolescent drug users often specialize in criminal behavior, which can manifest as conflict or active participation in minor and significant criminal acts to meet their demands for using and distributing drugs. In other words, adolescents' active involvement in drug use has the potential to lead to criminal behavior specialization, increasing the likelihood of engaging in more serious unlawful activities (Duck, 2016), such as becoming drug dealers. Adolescents who are actively involved in drug addiction cases develop behavioral specializations that have the potential to undermine society's security and welfare, in addition to individual implications.

Conclusion

Adolescent criminal careers in drug use in Indonesia develop through a complex path of initiation, participation, and behavior change. This study highlights three key findings about the criminal careers of adolescents involved in drug abuse cases. Firstly, the variables of experimentation, solidarity, and curiosity all impact the starting point or initial stages of adolescent drug use. Secondly, active drug abusers transition through stages of experimentation, abuse, and addiction. Thirdly, adolescents' active participation in drug abuse cases has resulted in a specialization of behavior from users to dealers, users to sellers, and addicts to dealers. These three findings demonstrate that the latent danger of adolescents' active involvement in drug abuse cases not only manifests in psychological and biological contexts but also holds the potential to lead to a significant criminal career.

The outcomes of this study differ from those of previous studies on adolescents' involvement in drug abuse contexts. Until now, research on adolescent involvement in drug abuse cases has focused solely on the

consequences, law enforcement, and preventive elements. However, the findings of this study reveal that adolescents' active participation in drug abuse cases not only has implications for their psychological and biological states but also has resulted in a specialization of criminal activity. The findings of this study are expected to provide a foundational basis for dialogues in criminology and criminal law studies and to serve as a reference for policymakers in reducing the increasingly widespread involvement of adolescents in drug abuse cases.

The study also has limitations in its data collection process, which was conducted only through a search of internet media coverage circulated via Google. As a result, the data presented and exhibited in this study are simply archives of internet news texts. However, the study's limitations are likely to serve as a foundation or reference for future research, particularly for studies aiming to explain the perspectives and motivations of adolescents who choose to become involved in drug abuse cases. The findings are intended to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the criminal career process of adolescents involved in drug abuse cases in Indonesia.

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