

Child Sexual Crimes in Bali: A Criminological Review of Prevention and Policy

Original Article

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Abstract

As one of Indonesia's leading international tourism destinations, Bali faces increased interaction between visitors and vulnerable local communities, creating situational opportunities for exploitation. This research examines the persistence and dynamics of child sexual violence in Bali, with a particular focus on Child Sex Tourism (CST). Likewise, this study analyzes structural and situational factors contributing to child sexual crimes and evaluates institutional responses. Using a qualitative descriptive and documentary research design, the study integrates data from the Bali Regional Commission for Women and Child Protection (KPPAD), the Bali Office for Women and Child Empowerment (Dinas P3A), and the national SIMFONI PPA database for 2022–2024. The analysis follows the Miles and Huberman model of data reduction, display, and conclusion drawing. Findings show sexual violence accounts for about 40–45% of reported child violence cases, indicating a structural rather than incidental problem. Most victims are adolescent girls from low-income families working in tourism-related sectors, while offenders are typically adult males within the victims' social environment. Although institutional mechanisms such as SAPA 129 and Village Protection Units exist, implementation remains fragmented, marked by low reporting rates and weak inter-agency coordination. By integrating Criminal Policy Theory and Routine Activity Theory, the study concludes that prevention requires both legal reform and community-based guardianship, including education, digital literacy, and tourism-sector monitoring. However, a gap persists between regulatory frameworks and enforcement, especially in informal tourism and online spaces, making current protection strategies largely reactive rather than preventive.

Keywords: Bali, Child Sex Tourism, Child Sexual Violence, Criminal Policy, Routine Activity Theory.

1. Introduction

Sexual violence against children represents one of the most complex forms of crime and leaves long-term consequences on the victims' future as well as on the social order of the society. This phenomenon goes beyond moral and legal boundaries since it involves the violation of human rights and the failure of social systems to protect the most vulnerable individuals (Gaggioli, 2014). In Indonesia, the number of child sexual violence cases keeps increasing year by year (Rumble et al., 2020). Based on the report from the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection through the SIMFONI PPA online system, there were more than 9,000 cases of child violence nationwide during 2023, of which more than 50 percent were classified as sexual violence. This data shows that the problem of sexual violence is not a sporadic incident, but a structural phenomenon that requires stronger legal and social interventions (Solehati et al., 2023).

Bali Province has become one of the regions with high vulnerability toward child sexual violence. According to the Bali Regional Commission for the Protection of Women and Children (KPPAD), there were 377 cases of child violence in 2022, increasing to 396 in 2023,



and slightly decreasing to 361 in 2024 (KPPAD Bali, 2024; NusaBali, 2024). Around 40 percent of all those reports were categorized as sexual violence, making it the highest type of child case during the last three years (Detik, 2023). In Jembrana Police Resort, for instance, ten cases of child sexual violence were recorded in 2023, consisting of eight rapes and two molestations. These data indicate that although the reporting and protection mechanisms have been strengthened through the SAPA 129 system and special service units at the village level, the number of sexual violence cases among children remains at an alarming level.

The situation becomes more complex due to the socio-economic character of Bali which is based on tourism. On one side, tourism acts as the main economic driver, but on the other side, the interaction between local residents and foreign visitors creates opportunities for child exploitation. The phenomenon of Child Sex Tourism (CST) becomes one of the most hidden and difficult crimes to detect. CST refers to the involvement of tourists—both domestic and foreign—in sexual activities with minors, usually disguised as philanthropists, volunteers, or tourism business actors (Hulsbergen & Nootboom, 2023). Research by ECPAT International confirmed that Bali, together with Thailand and the Philippines, belongs to the highest-risk regions for CST in Southeast Asia. Common modus includes recruiting children to work in informal sectors such as services, accommodation, and nightlife industries that later are used for sexual exploitation.

From a criminological perspective, CST cannot be simply seen as individual deviant behavior but rather as an organized crime operating within specific social and economic contexts. The routine activity theory explains that a crime occurs when three key elements converge: a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of effective guardianship (Hayes & Maher, 2024). In the Bali case, these three conditions are present. Tourists as motivated offenders meet children from low-income families who are vulnerable to material temptation, while social and legal supervision often remains weak because of the limited capacity of law enforcement and the culture of silence within society (Hulsbergen & Nootboom, 2023; Sadnyini & Rama, 2022). Hoque et al. (2020) even showed that the development of digital technology has expanded the forms of exploitation through social media, where offenders can perform online grooming before making physical contact with victims.

Empirical studies indicate that law enforcement efforts regarding child sexual violence cases in Bali still face many challenges. Sadnyini and Rama (2022) noted that even though the Women and Children Protection Unit (PPA) of Bali Police has provided legal and psychological assistance to victims, the prevention mechanism remains reactive and does not touch the root causes. In contrast, the study of Hamzah and Irfan (2021) in Lombok emphasized the importance of a local-value-based approach in preventing child exploitation. Community norms such as *awig-awig* in Bali could become effective social instruments in preventing CST if integrated with formal legal systems. However, Laga (2024) found that the role of local community supervision is still weak due to social taboos and economic dependency on the tourism industry.

In the social and cultural context of Bali, *awig-awig* holds a central position as a form of customary law that regulates, supervises, and maintains the social order of traditional communities. According to Yoga (2023) *awig-awig* is a set of written rules established through community deliberation (*musyawarah krama desa*) and ratified in traditional assemblies (*pesamuan adat*) to govern three main relationships: between humans and God (*parahyangan*), among fellow community members (*pawongan*), and between humans and the natural environment (*palemahan*). Its function is not only as a normative guideline but

also as an effective mechanism of social control, using moral and social sanctions, including temporary exclusion (*kesepekan*) for those who violate community norms.

In modern customary law, *awig-awig* represents a living legal system that adapts to local needs and reflects the Balinese philosophy of Tri Hita Karana, the harmony among divinity, humanity, and nature (S. H. Praditha et al., 2024). Because it is binding, community-based, and built on consensus, *awig-awig* plays a strategic role in strengthening child protection at the community level. Integrating *awig-awig* into formal child protection systems can enhance prevention of sexual crimes, especially in cases of Child Sex Tourism (CST), by reinforcing collective responsibility among customary villages (*desa adat*) to protect moral integrity and social safety within Bali's tourism areas.

From the legal aspect, Indonesia already has strong normative instruments. Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection and Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes provide a legal foundation for victim protection and offender prosecution. Nevertheless, the implementation of those policies in tourism-based regions like Bali often faces coordination problems among agencies and human-resource limitations. Siregar et al. (2023), highlighted that most officers have not yet received specific training on handling CST cases, while rehabilitation institutions remain scarce. Meanwhile, Rani et al. (2021) found that despite government cooperation with organizations such as ECPAT, many cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children in Indonesia, including in major tourism destinations such as Bali, remain underreported due to social stigma and the social or economic superiority of offenders. The study also revealed that collaboration between the government and ECPAT has focused mainly on awareness campaigns and policy advocacy but has not yet fully addressed systemic barriers in law enforcement and community-based reporting mechanisms.

The gap between regulation and field practice shows a structural weakness within the child protection system. Bah (2022) emphasized that Indonesia still struggles to enforce laws against cross-border child exploitation offenders due to limited international cooperation and the low effectiveness of sanctions. Recent empirical research by Koning and Van Wilsem (2023) revealed that countries with weak governance, high poverty, and strong dependence on tourism tend to become destination countries for the sexual exploitation of children in the context of travel and tourism. Their cross-national analysis demonstrated that poor economic development and geographical proximity to the equator significantly increase the risk of such crimes. The study also emphasized that child sexual exploitation by tourists often occurs in regions where social inequality and limited institutional oversight coexist, creating hidden opportunities for offenders to operate without deterrence. In Bali, the combination of local poverty, dependence on tourism, and fragile child protection mechanisms create an ideal condition for the development of CST (Nirmalasari, 2024).

The phenomenon of child sexual violence in Bali with its CST dimension shows that this crime does not only have legal aspects but also social, economic, and cultural dimensions. From a criminological point of view, the required approach is a systemic analysis of the causal factors, interaction patterns between offenders and victims, and the effectiveness of social control mechanisms. Countermeasures should not rely only on repressive legal actions but also need preventive strategies based on community involvement, education, and digital literacy. Family education, the participation of customary institutions, and cross-sectoral collaboration are essential elements to build a child protection system adaptive to the dynamics of Bali tourism (Hamzah & Irfan, 2020; Solehati et al., 2023).

Based on the above discussion, a research gap can be identified in the study of child sexual crimes in Bali. Most previous studies focused mainly on normative legal aspects, while criminological analyses examining the structure of crime opportunities and the social-

economic characteristics of offenders remain limited. Therefore, this research aims to analyze the phenomenon of child sexual violence in Bali by focusing on Child Sex Tourism as an organized crime rooted in the social dynamics of tourism. Therefore, this research aims to conduct a criminological analysis of Child Sex Tourism in Bali. Specifically, it seeks to: (1) map the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and absent guardianship within Bali's tourism ecosystem; (2) evaluate the effectiveness of existing formal and customary (*awig-awig*) control mechanisms; and (3) propose an integrated prevention model that leverages community-based surveillance and strengthens the guardianship element.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Criminological Paradigm in Combating Child Sexual Crimes

Child sexual crime is considered one of the extraordinary crimes that threaten the moral, psychological, and social integrity of a society. In modern criminology, this problem is no longer seen merely as an individual deviation, but rather as the result of complex interactions between structural factors, social environments, and situational opportunities (Child Protection, 2019). Children, as the most vulnerable group, often become the target because they have limited ability to protect themselves and depend highly on adults. When the social system fails to provide protection, sexual crimes against children reflect not only individual deviance but also collective social and legal failure (Sadnyini & Rama, 2022).

Empirical data at the national level shows that sexual violence against children continues to increase. In Bali, the issue is more complicated because of its open tourism sector and high mobility of visitors. Hulsbergen and Nootboom (2023) found that child sex tourism (CST) in Bali often operates in ambiguous spaces such as private houses, spas, and orphanages, where the interaction between tourists and locals becomes the medium of exploitation. Laga (2024) confirmed that economic and symbolic exploitation also occur when offenders take advantage of poor families to gain access to children.

This condition shows that solving child sexual crimes cannot depend on law enforcement only, but needs a criminological analysis that looks at the causes and opportunities of the crime. Criminology aims to understand *why* and *how* crimes occur, not only *what* law is broken. The approach also sees crime prevention as a social process that must consider economic, cultural, and governance factors. In Bali, the combination of global tourism, social inequality, and weak social supervision gives space for child sexual crime to emerge (Hoque et al., 2020).

In the global context, child sexual crimes are seen as part of transnational organized crime. Bah (2022) explained that child exploitation in Indonesia grows due to weak law enforcement, patriarchal culture, and economic inequality that provide impunity for offenders. Therefore, the study of child sexual crimes in Bali is not only locally important but also relevant for global criminology studies that focus on child protection in digital and cross-border settings.

2.2. Criminal Policy Theory

Ancel's classic idea of criminal policy as "the rational organization of the control of crime by society" has been reinterpreted in modern scholarship. As noted by Widyawati (2020), contemporary criminal policy in Indonesia not only aims to prevent and control crime but also integrates ethical, religious, and customary dimensions as part of social welfare protection. This modern approach situates criminal law as a living instrument that harmonizes with societal values, emphasizing justice, balance, and humanity in line with the moral principles

of Pancasila. In this perspective, criminal law functions not only as a repressive tool but also as a preventive mechanism that strengthens community awareness and moral responsibility. The integration of social norms, local wisdom, and formal legal structures reflects the need for a policy model that is both humanistic and adaptive to Indonesia's pluralistic society. Therefore, criminal policy becomes the state's strategic foundation in realizing social defense through harmony between law, ethics, and culture.

This theory rejects the old retributive approach which focused on punishment and instead promotes a balance between social protection and social welfare. Sudarmaji and Sebyar (2023) later adapted this concept to Indonesia, arguing that criminal law should be an *ultimum remedium* or a last resort, while non-penal policies such as education, social welfare, and cultural reform should play the main preventive roles. From this view, child sexual crime prevention is the responsibility of the state through preventive, monitoring, and repressive actions.

In Indonesia, this policy is implemented through legal instruments such as Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection and Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes. These laws aim to strengthen protection and introduce mechanisms for restitution, rehabilitation, and psychological recovery for victims. However, research by Nirmalasari (2024) and Sadnyini & Rama (2022) found that the implementation is still weak due to coordination issues between agencies and social stigma toward victims.

Ancel also emphasized that criminal policy cannot succeed without public participation and healthy social values. In Bali, this ideal balance between law, society, and individual is often disrupted by local economic and cultural conditions. Many families, for example, choose not to report sexual offenders because they depend economically on tourism actors (Subarkah, 2018). Therefore, the effectiveness of criminal policy must be adjusted to the real social and economic context of local communities.

2.3. Routine Activity Theory

Routine Activity Theory (RAT) explains crime from a situational and opportunity-based perspective. Hayes and Maher (2024) emphasize that sexual violence, particularly direct-contact victimization, occurs when exposure, proximity, target suitability, and guardianship interact within specific social contexts. They found that crimes of sexual violence often emerge not because of an increase in the number of offenders, but due to routine social and environmental activities that expand opportunities for offenders to act. Similarly, Saefudin et al. (2025) explain that child sexual violence in Indonesia often arises within domestic or familiar settings where motivated offenders have emotional access to victims, suitable targets exist due to age and vulnerability, and guardianship is weak or absent. This perspective highlights that the interaction between social structure and daily activities plays a central role in shaping the situational opportunities for crime. Therefore, strengthening social supervision, education, and institutional guardianship is essential to minimize conditions that enable sexual violence against children.

In the case of Bali, these three elements often come together. Tourists with deviant motives act as offenders, poor children from informal sector families become suitable targets, and weak law enforcement or community surveillance leads to unguarded spaces (Hulsbergen & Nooteboom, 2023). Spatial studies by Culatta et al. (2020) also found that tourist areas with high social interaction such as beaches and entertainment centers are strongly related to child sexual exploitation incidents.

RAT also helps explain why new technologies expand child sexual crimes into the online sphere. Offenders can approach children through social media, online games, or digital platforms without proper supervision (Hoque et al., 2020). The lack of digital guardianship

makes online grooming and child pornography easier to happen. Therefore, prevention based on RAT should involve not only physical monitoring but also digital protection, education, and cyber policy development.

The practical strength of this theory is in its ability to show where social systems are weak. By understanding routine activities in a community, law enforcement can identify high-risk areas and design preventive interventions based on evidence. This approach fits the Indonesian National Police's concept of community policing and early detection systems. In Bali, RAT can be applied by increasing supervision in tourism zones, building cooperation with tourism agencies, and empowering local people as active community guardians.

2.4. Integration of Theories

Integrating Criminal Policy Theory and Routine Activity Theory provides a comprehensive analytical framework for understanding and preventing child sexual crimes within the social and economic context of Bali. Criminal Policy Theory, as reinterpreted by Widyawati (2020), emphasizes that law must function not only as a repressive instrument but as a rational and humane mechanism to promote social welfare and moral balance. Meanwhile, Routine Activity Theory, as discussed by Hayes and Maher (2024) and Saefudin et al. (2025), highlights that sexual violence emerges through the convergence of a motivated offender, a suitable target, and the absence of capable guardianship, which is often shaped by social routines and environmental opportunities.

The integration of these two perspectives connects macro-level policy with micro-level criminological dynamics. Criminal Policy provides the institutional foundation for prevention and rehabilitation, while Routine Activity Theory identifies the specific situational conditions where crime occurs, particularly within the tourism-driven economy of Bali. This synthesis allows a balanced understanding between legal structure and everyday behavior, showing that preventing child sexual crimes requires both regulatory strength and situational awareness.

In Bali, such integration must also include local wisdom, particularly the traditional *awig-awig* system that governs community behavior and moral conduct. As shown in recent legal-anthropological studies (Agus et al., 2023; Praditha & Artajaya, 2024), *awig-awig* functions as a form of social control and customary guardianship that can strengthen the preventive aspects of modern criminal policy. When harmonized with formal mechanisms such as Law No. 35 of 2014 and Law No. 12 of 2022, these customary norms can reinforce early detection, social vigilance, and communal participation in protecting children from sexual exploitation in tourism areas.

Therefore, the integration of Criminal Policy, Routine Activity Theory, and local customary systems such as *awig-awig* creates a contextual and multi-layered model for combating child sexual crimes in Bali. This framework encourages collaboration between state institutions, local communities, and the tourism sector, ensuring that legal enforcement operates within the cultural and social realities of the island. The success of prevention efforts ultimately depends on harmonizing law, community values, and collective guardianship as complementary forces in safeguarding children's rights and social welfare.

2.5. Previous Research

Research on child sexual crimes shows that this phenomenon is a complex social and legal problem. Studies in Indonesia highlight the weakness of the child protection system, the ineffectiveness of law enforcement, and social inequality that increases the vulnerability of victims. Sadnyini and Rama (2022) found that many cases of child sexual violence were not reported due to social stigma, economic pressure, and lack of trust in the police and justice institutions. Meanwhile, Nirmalasari (2024) revealed a significant gap between the legal

norms and the implementation of the Sexual Violence Law, where law enforcement officers often still do not fully understand the principle of victim recovery. Similarly, Hamzah and Irfan (2020) argued that Indonesia's criminal policy is still dominated by retributive justice rather than restorative justice, so it has not yet been effective in protecting children as legal subjects.

Several criminal law scholars, such as Megayati (2021) and Bah (2022), proposed a humanistic and contextual approach to criminal policy. They argue that addressing child sexual crimes should not rely solely on punishment but must incorporate preventive and restorative measures that strengthen social protection and welfare. This approach aligns with Widyawati's (2020) reinterpretation of Ancel's classical concept of criminal policy, emphasizing that criminal law must operate as a humane and rational mechanism that harmonizes legal norms with ethical and cultural values in society. Similarly, Muladi (2008) stressed that an effective criminal policy should adapt to the local social structure to ensure both justice and moral balance.

At the international level, Hulsbergen and Nooteboom (2023) identified that child sexual exploitation in tourist destinations such as Bali and Thailand often develops in "grey zones" between tourism and informal social networks. This condition supports the argument of Hayes and Maher (2023) that sexual victimization tends to emerge within everyday settings where opportunity structures and weak guardianship intersect. Furthermore, Saefudin et al. (2025) expanded the understanding of Routine Activity Theory by showing that in Indonesia, child sexual violence increasingly involves digital environments, where online grooming and social media interactions provide new avenues for exploitation. These findings indicate that modern criminological approaches to child protection must consider both physical and virtual settings as interconnected risk spaces that require coordinated prevention and regulation.

Recent interdisciplinary studies also emphasize the growing role of economic conditions and digital literacy in shaping child vulnerability (Helsper & Smahel, 2020). Children from economically disadvantaged families working in informal tourism or service sectors tend to experience higher exposure to strangers and authority imbalance, increasing susceptibility to exploitation (Mekinc & Music, 2015). At the same time, low digital literacy limits children's ability to recognize grooming patterns, coercion, and deceptive online interactions (Gupta, 2025). Emerging research on social media governance further indicates that inadequate platform safeguards, weak age-verification systems, and inconsistent reporting mechanisms enable offenders to approach minors through private messaging features. Consequently, child protection policies increasingly require not only criminal sanctions but also preventive regulation of online environments, digital education, and coordinated monitoring between government institutions and platform providers.

Overall, previous studies indicate a dual tendency between national research focusing on normative legal aspects and international research emphasizing spatial and situational factors. There are still few studies that integrate Criminal Policy Theory and Routine Activity Theory to explain child sexual crimes comprehensively. Moreover, the Bali context as an international tourism destination with unique social and economic complexity has not yet been studied deeply. Therefore, this study aims to fill the research gap by integrating legal policy analysis with social dynamics, in order to formulate a model of prevention, monitoring, and intervention for child sexual crimes that is relevant to the criminological context of Bali.

3. Methods

3.1. Research Approach and Design

This research applies a qualitative descriptive approach with a documentary research design. The approach was chosen because the study focuses on analyzing the phenomenon of child sexual violence and the dimension of Child Sex Tourism (CST) in Bali Province by examining secondary data from official institutions and credible sources. The research design is contextual and interpretative, aiming to understand the connection between social, legal, and structural aspects that influence sexual crimes against children in tourism areas.

The theoretical framework of this study is based on two interrelated theories. The first is the modern reinterpretation of Criminal Policy Theory, originally developed by Marc Ancel and later expanded by Widyawati (2020), which emphasizes that criminal law must serve as a rational and humane mechanism to achieve a balance between social protection and public welfare. The second is the updated Routine Activity Theory as discussed by Hayes and Maher (2024) and Saefudin et al. (2025), which explains that sexual crimes emerge from the convergence of motivated offenders, suitable targets, and the absence of capable guardianship, both in physical and digital environments. The integration of these two theoretical perspectives provides a dual analytical foundation: at the macro level, Criminal Policy Theory offers the normative and institutional framework for crime prevention, while at the micro level, Routine Activity Theory clarifies the situational and behavioral dynamics that create opportunities for child sexual crimes in Bali's socio-touristic context.

3.2. Data Sources and Scope of Analysis

All data used in this research are secondary, collected from official documents, government publications, and reports from relevant civil society organizations. The main sources include: (1) reports from the Bali Regional Commission for Women and Child Protection (KPPAD) for the period 2022–2024, (2) national data from the Online Information System for Women and Child Protection (SIMFONI PPA) of the Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection, (3) reports from the Bali Police (Polda Bali) and the Provincial Office of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (Dinas P3A) regarding cases of sexual violence, (4) reports from ECPAT International and ECPAT Indonesia about child sexual exploitation in the tourism industry, and (5) legal regulations including Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection, Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes, and Bali Provincial Regulation No. 3 of 2023 on Child Protection.

The scope of analysis is limited to the administrative area of Bali Province, especially high-tourism areas such as Kuta, Legian, and Jembrana, which are identified as vulnerable to CST practices. This study focuses exclusively on documentary and secondary data from public and official sources; this approach is considered appropriate for achieving the research objective of conducting a systemic, macro-level analysis of trends, legal frameworks, and institutional responses, thereby providing a foundation for policy-oriented recommendations. The observation period is set from 2022 to 2024, according to the availability of official data and the increasing trend of reported cases within that period.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Data were collected through documentation and literature review methods using official and verified sources, including institutional reports, legal documents, academic journals, and credible online media. The collected materials were identified and classified to extract key themes related to case patterns, modus operandi, institutional responses, and child protection policies. Secondary data were organized into tables and chronological narratives describing

child sexual violence trends in Bali (2022–2024). Using content mapping, information was categorized into legal, social, and economic dimensions to interpret the criminal context within the tourism environment.

Data analysis followed the qualitative descriptive approach of Miles and Huberman’s (1994) interactive model, data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing—to identify relationships among social, legal, and environmental factors influencing CST. Research validity was ensured through source triangulation among KPPAD, SIMFONI PPA, Bali Police, and ECPAT reports, supported by verified data for credibility and systematic documentation for dependability. This study focuses exclusively on Bali Province (2022–2024) and relies on secondary data from public and official sources without field interviews or surveys.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Research Results

4.1.1. Trends and Patterns of Child Sexual Violence Cases

Results The documentation from KPPAD Bali and the Bali Office for Women and Child Protection shows that cases of child violence remained persistently high during the last three years. In 2022, there were 377 total cases, rising to 396 in 2023, before slightly falling to 361 in 2024. Among these, sexual violence consistently represented around 40–45 percent of all reports. This means that nearly one out of every two recorded child violence cases in Bali involves sexual abuse or exploitation, showing that the phenomenon is structural rather than incidental.

The increase in 2023 corresponds closely with the strong recovery of Bali’s tourism sector after the pandemic. Areas such as Denpasar, Badung, and Jembrana recorded the highest proportions of sexual violence cases, and local police data show that Polres Jembrana handled ten cases in 2023, consisting of eight rapes and two molestations. These cases, though modest in number, highlight the intersection between poverty, tourism, and vulnerability.

Table 1. Reported child violence and sexual violence cases in Bali, 2022–2024

Year	Total Child Violence Cases	Sexual Violence Cases	Percentage of Sexual Violence (%)
2022	377	155	41.1
2023	396	172	43.4
2024	361	146	40.4

Source: KPPAD Bali (2023); Dinas Pemberdayaan Perempuan dan Perlindungan Anak Provinsi Bali (2024); SIMFONI PPA Online System, Ministry of Women Empowerment and Child Protection (2024)

The data in Table 1 demonstrate that the trend of sexual violence follows the same trajectory as the total number of child violence cases, suggesting a consistent underlying risk pattern. The proportion of sexual violence did not decline even when overall violence slightly decreased in 2024, indicating that sexual offenses remain the dominant form of child victimization in Bali. This stability implies that the structural conditions enabling such crimes economic inequality, weak family oversight, and social stigma have not yet been effectively addressed.

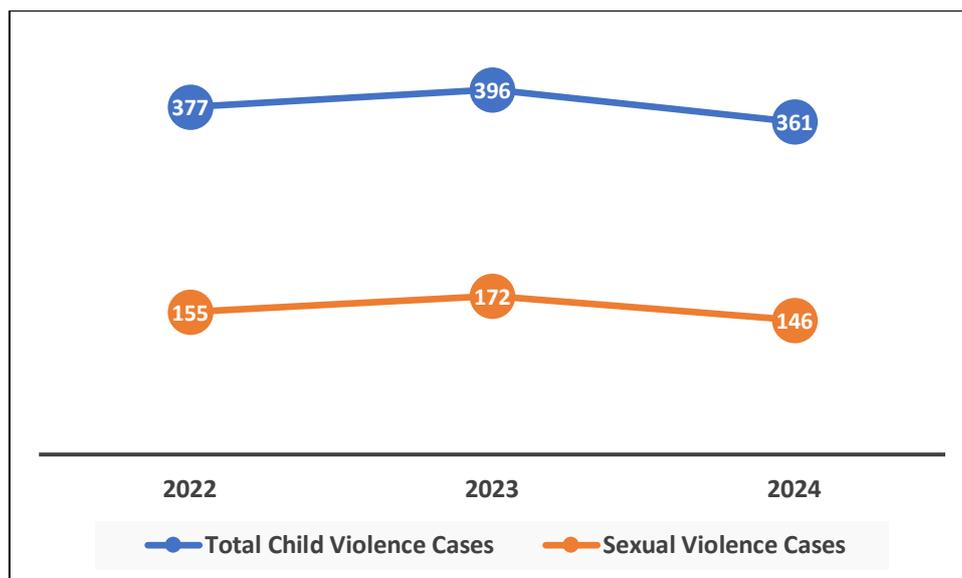


Figure 1. Trend of child sexual violence cases in Bali (2022–2024)

The line chart in Figure 1 visually confirms these fluctuations. It shows a clear increase in 2023, followed by a mild drop in 2024, but with overall numbers remaining high compared to pre-pandemic records. This visual trend supports the argument that as tourism activity resumes, so do the social interactions that create new opportunities for child exploitation, both direct and mediated through the informal sector.

Reports from ECPAT Indonesia (2023) and local NGOs confirm that Bali remains one of the three provinces in Indonesia most exposed to *child sex tourism*. Common methods include emotional manipulation, material inducement, and online grooming through social media platforms like Facebook, WhatsApp, and Instagram. The growing digital connectivity in rural and coastal areas has widened both awareness and exposure to potential predators.

While the official trend appears stable, advocacy organizations highlight a hidden prevalence of unreported cases due to fear, shame, and the social pressure faced by families. Consequently, the “plateau” in official figures may conceal an ongoing escalation in actual victimization, especially in communities economically dependent on tourism.

4.1.2. Violence Cases Characteristics of Victims and Offenders

Across the three-year dataset, victims are mostly girls between 12 and 16 years old, followed by younger children aged 6 to 11. The pattern is consistent across districts and years. Most of them come from low-income families working in tourism-related sectors such as small accommodation services, spas, and informal trading. The combination of low parental supervision and frequent interaction with strangers creates a highly exposed environment for exploitation.

In terms of offenders, the data consistently shows that the majority are adult males aged 25–45 years who personally know the victims. Around two-thirds of cases involve offenders who are neighbors, friends, or relatives. Foreign tourists account for a small but notable minority (around 10–12 percent), though such cases are often under-documented because of jurisdictional issues and weak inter-agency coordination. Investigations that involve non-Indonesian offenders tend to face delays or remain unresolved, often due to lack of mutual legal assistance or insufficient evidence collected before the perpetrator leaves the country.

A recurring pattern across the reports is the use of trust-based manipulation. Offenders often act as benefactors, mentors, or employers who offer material assistance to the child’s family. Over time, this relationship evolves into dependency, making it difficult for victims to

resist or disclose the abuse. Online grooming has also become a worrying extension of this pattern. Cases reported since 2023 increasingly show perpetrators contacting children through social media, pretending to offer gifts, scholarships, or part-time jobs, which later turn into coercive encounters.

These findings show that the risk is not only physical but also social and psychological. Children are targeted not because of where they are, but because of how accessible and unguarded they have become in the digital and tourism-based economy.

4.1.3. Institutional Response and Policy Gaps

Bali has made visible efforts to strengthen institutional responses to child sexual crimes. Several initiatives have been developed under national and regional policies: the SAPA 129 hotline, the creation of Village Protection Units, the training of village officials to identify early signs of abuse, and the issuance of Regional Regulation No. 3/2023 on Child Protection. Formal institutions such as the PPA Unit (Women and Children Protection Unit) within the Bali Police, and social organizations like ECPAT Indonesia, have provided both legal aid and psychosocial assistance for victims.

However, despite these institutional frameworks, there are still considerable implementation gaps. The number of trained investigators specialized in child cases remains limited, and many local officers have not received standardized training in handling child-sensitive interviews. Based on 2023 data, only 58 percent of reported sexual violence cases successfully proceeded to the prosecutor's office, and fewer reached final conviction. Many cases were settled informally or withdrawn by families under social or economic pressure. This pattern reflects the persistence of social stigma and victim-blaming attitudes that still influence local justice processes.

Community-based mechanisms such as *awig-awig* or *banjar* mediation sometimes provide rapid social resolution but also risk undermining formal legal accountability. These mechanisms can unintentionally normalize impunity for serious sexual crimes, especially when offenders are economically influential within their communities. The delicate balance between cultural values and legal enforcement remains an unresolved issue in Bali's child protection system.

Evaluation from the Bali Office for Women and Child Empowerment (Dinas P3A) in 2024 found that only 48 percent of villages have functioning child protection units or reporting channels. This indicates that more than half of local communities still rely on spontaneous, ad hoc reporting, which weakens the overall monitoring chain. The fragmentation between law enforcement, local government, and NGOs also causes data inconsistency and duplication of reports.

Currently, Bali's child protection system does not have a fully standardized timeline for processing and resolving child sexual violence cases, although national regulations stipulate that reports must be responded to within 1×24 hours to ensure the child's immediate safety. Observations from 2023 show that only 58% of reported cases reached the prosecutor's office, and fewer resulted in conviction, reflecting delays and variability in case progression. Informal community mechanisms such as *awig-awig* or *banjar* mediation may provide faster responses but are not bound by formal timelines and can undermine accountability. This situation highlights the need for clear operating procedures that ensure not only rapid initial response within 24 hours but also timely investigation, escalation, and inter-agency coordination. Establishing such standards would strengthen victim protection, improve data management, and enhance the effectiveness of Bali's overall child protection system.

Taken together, these observations suggest that while Bali has a strong legal foundation for child protection, the practical coordination, training, and data management systems

remain fragile. Effective prevention requires not only legal reforms but also social and cultural transformation that encourages victims and families to report crimes safely and confidently.

4.2. Discussion

The findings from Bali confirm that child sexual crimes represent not only moral and legal violations but also structural and situational failures of social protection. The persistent share of sexual violence, which accounts for nearly half of all reported child violence cases, shows that the phenomenon is deeply embedded in the island's social and economic structure. This aligns with Solehati et al. (2023), who emphasize that sexual violence against children in Indonesia must be addressed through a systemic approach involving family education, institutional reform, and social empowerment. In Bali, the tourism-based economy and the high mobility of visitors create conditions that facilitate exploitation, while social institutions struggle to maintain effective control. As Sadnyini and Rama (2022) observed, the persistence of stigma and fear among victims continues to obstruct legal enforcement and sustain a culture of impunity.

From the perspective of Criminal Policy Theory, the results show that existing legal instruments have not yet evolved into an effective system of social defence. Law No. 35 of 2014 on Child Protection and Law No. 12 of 2022 on Sexual Violence Crimes provide a strong normative basis but remain reactive rather than preventive in their application. This finding aligns with Widyawati's (2020) reinterpretation of Ancel's concept, emphasizing that criminal law must serve as a humane mechanism of social protection rather than a retributive instrument. In the Balinese context, the system is still dominated by punitive actions instead of community-based and restorative mechanisms, consistent with the findings of Dhina (2021) and Bah (2022). A humanistic criminal policy should therefore focus on prevention through education, welfare, and participatory involvement of local communities, yet this dimension has not been fully realized in practice.

Empirical data from KPPAD Bali and Dinas P3A show that institutional programs such as SAPA 129 and village-level protection units face significant operational challenges. Only around half of all villages have functioning reporting mechanisms for child sexual crimes. This reflects Widyawati's (2020) assertion that criminal policy cannot be effective without strong social participation and the internalization of moral values. In many cases, families still prefer informal settlements due to economic dependence on the perpetrators, especially those working in tourism-related sectors (Nirmalasari, 2024). This pattern undermines the principles of social defence and demonstrates the importance of aligning formal law with socio-economic realities. The traditional *awig-awig* system in Bali could, in this regard, be revitalized as a form of community guardianship. As Yoga (2023) and Praditha (2024) note, *awig-awig* functions as a moral and customary mechanism of social control that reinforces community supervision, especially when integrated with modern child protection frameworks.

The analysis can also be interpreted through Routine Activity Theory, as updated by Hayes and Maher (2023) and Saefudin et al. (2025), which provides insight into the situational conditions that enable crime. In Bali, motivated offenders often include tourists or locals with deviant intentions, while children from low-income families serve as suitable targets due to economic vulnerability and limited supervision. The absence of capable guardianship is evident in the weak enforcement capacity and fragmented social monitoring systems. This corresponds with Hulsbergen and Nooteboom's (2023) observation that high-tourism areas such as beaches, nightlife venues, and entertainment spaces create dense social interactions that heighten the risk of exploitation. Saefudin et al. (2025) further demonstrate that these risks have expanded into digital environments, where offenders use online grooming and social media to approach victims with minimal detection.

Integrating Criminal Policy Theory and Routine Activity Theory therefore allows for a dual-level understanding of child sexual crimes. Criminal Policy provides a macro-level foundation through legal, institutional, and welfare design, while Routine Activity Theory identifies micro-level situational mechanisms within everyday environments. In Bali, this integration implies that prevention must extend beyond legal reform to address the social practices and tourism dynamics that expose children to exploitation. Initiatives such as training tourism employees to identify signs of abuse, enhancing digital literacy for parents and children, and improving coordination between law enforcement and organizations like ECPAT Indonesia (Sari et al., 2024), illustrate how theory can be translated into practice.

Overall, the integration of these frameworks offers a holistic understanding of child sexual crimes as both a legal and social issue. Criminal Policy explains why the state must transition from punitive control to preventive governance, while Routine Activity Theory clarifies how social and digital environments shape crime opportunities. The inclusion of *awig-awig* as a local guardianship system adds a cultural layer that strengthens communal vigilance and moral accountability. As Bah (2022) noted, Indonesia's challenge lies not in the absence of laws but in the weakness of their implementation and societal engagement. Therefore, the findings from Bali underline the urgent need for institutional coordination, cultural revitalization, and participatory prevention to transform child protection from a legal framework into a living social system.

5. Conclusion

The findings of this study demonstrate that child sexual violence in Bali remains a persistent and systemic problem that transcends individual criminal acts. The data from 2022 to 2024 reveal that sexual offenses consistently constitute the largest proportion of all child violence cases, indicating that the underlying social and economic conditions fostering these crimes have not been adequately addressed. The intersection between poverty, tourism dependence, and limited community supervision continues to create an environment that allows exploitation to occur both in physical and digital spaces.

Institutional responses, while showing improvement through various legal and administrative initiatives, remain fragmented and uneven. The existence of formal programs such as SAPA 129 and village protection units has not yet guaranteed comprehensive coverage or effective coordination among law enforcement, social agencies, and community structures. The persistence of stigma, economic dependency, and weak inter-agency communication continues to hinder reporting and enforcement. These findings underline that child protection requires not only strong legislation but also consistent social participation and institutional capacity at every level of implementation.

In conclusion, the study highlights the need for a more integrated and preventive approach to combating child sexual violence in Bali. Strengthening law enforcement must go hand in hand with community empowerment, digital literacy, and sustained monitoring within tourism zones. This approach is closely related to the local economy, as many victims come from low-income families working in tourism or informal service sectors, making them economically vulnerable. Protecting children not only safeguards their rights but also ensures the long-term sustainability of Bali's tourism economy by promoting a safe and ethical environment for both residents and visitors. The protection of children cannot rely solely on punitive measures but must become part of a broader social movement that prioritizes safety, awareness, and cultural transformation. Only through this comprehensive approach can Bali build an effective and sustainable system to prevent and eliminate child sexual exploitation.

6. References

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