

Crimes Against Children in Modern Criminological Perspective: A Case Study of Hafizah's Murder in West Bangka

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ABSTRACT

This study examines crimes against children through a case study of Hafizah's murder in West Bangka. The main research problem lies in the limited criminological explanation that connects child vulnerability, weak social supervision, criminal opportunity, and legal dilemmas when both the victim and the offender are children. This study aims to analyze the case from the perspective of modern criminology and to formulate community-based prevention strategies. This research applies a qualitative method with a case study design. Data were collected through unstructured interviews, field observations, and document analysis related to the case, child protection, and the juvenile criminal justice system. The findings show that Hafizah's murder cannot be understood merely as an individual criminal act. The case emerged from the interaction between the victim's vulnerability, weak social control, poorly supervised social spaces, and the absence of an effective early-warning mechanism within the community. The novelty of this study lies in its integration of routine activity theory, social control theory, and child victimology to examine a local child homicide case in a conceptual manner. This study contributes to modern criminological scholarship and offers a prevention model based on risk-area mapping, community guardianship, child safety education, and rapid reporting systems.

INTRODUCTION

Crimes against children remain a serious concern in modern criminological studies because children occupy a vulnerable position physically, psychologically, socially, and legally. Violence against children not only causes individual harm but also weakens the sense of security within families and communities. The World Health Organization (2024) defines violence against children as physical, sexual, and emotional violence, neglect, and other forms of violence committed against individuals under the age of 18. In Indonesia, this problem is also reflected in data from the Online Information System for the Protection of Women and Children, known as SIMFONI-PPA, under the Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, which recorded 35,025 reports of violence against women and children in 2025 (Humas & Umum Kemen PPPA, 2026).

The murder of Hafizah in West Bangka in March 2023 represents an extreme form of crime against children. Hafizah, an eight-year-old child, was found dead in an incomplete physical condition in an oil palm plantation area in Terentang Village, Kelapa District, West Bangka Regency. The offender was a 17-

year-old senior high school student and a close neighbor of the victim. The motive was reportedly linked to resentment toward the victim's mother and inspiration from a kidnapping story seen on social media, which led the offender to plan a ransom demand.

This case is important because it contains two layers of vulnerability. The victim was a child whose right to life was taken away, while the offender was also legally categorized as a child and had to be processed under the principles of special protection in the juvenile criminal justice system. This condition raises a criminological problem that cannot be explained only by asking what punishment is appropriate. It must also be examined through social relations, criminal opportunity, local social control, child protection mechanisms, and community responses to a serious crime committed by a child.

Based on this context, the main research problem is how crimes against children in the Hafizah murder case can be understood through the perspective of modern criminology. This focus is important because many discussions of similar cases tend to emphasize chronology, criminal charges, prosecutorial demands, and family reactions. Therefore, this study moves beyond a legalistic reading by examining risk factors, the relationship between the victim and the offender, the spatial context of the crime, weak social supervision, and the protection dilemma involving both the child victim and the child offender. In this sense, the case is not treated merely as a criminal event but as a social phenomenon that reveals weaknesses in the prevention of crimes against children at the community level.

From the perspective of modern criminology, crime rarely emerges from a single cause. Routine activity theory explains that crime may occur when a motivated offender encounters a suitable target in the absence of effective guardianship (Thomas et al., 2025). This framework is relevant for understanding children's social spaces in residential areas and plantation environments, especially when children's daily activities are not supported by adequate supervision. Social control theory also helps explain how bonds with family, school, peers, and community may weaken, allowing deviant behavior to remain undetected or uncorrected. In addition, child victimology provides a basis for understanding children as victims who depend heavily on adults and social institutions for protection.

Several previous studies have examined violence and child homicide from different perspectives. Kim et al. (2024) reviewed systematic studies on child homicide and found that much of the literature focuses on risk factors, typologies, incidence rates, punishment, and the need for stronger child death monitoring systems. Utari and Sumardiana (2022) examined the prevention of violence against children from a criminological perspective and emphasized the importance of policy models that respond to changes in family, social, and environmental conditions. Hutapea and Sharon (2025) analyzed the influence of age on sentencing in child murder cases in Indonesia and highlighted the dilemma between protecting child offenders and fulfilling the sense of justice expected by victims' families. Thomas et al. (2025) tested routine activity theory and confirmed that changes in social activities can shape opportunities for crime, including violent crime.

These studies show that there remains a limitation in the literature on child murder cases, particularly in relation to the murder of Hafizah in West Bangka. Existing studies tend to discuss child violence in general, violence prevention within families, or sentencing for child offenders in murder cases. They have not sufficiently examined a local case through a modern criminological framework that links child victimization, child offending, crime location, community social control, and the response of the juvenile criminal justice system. This study offers novelty by using a local case as an entry point to explain how serious crimes against children emerge through the interaction between victim vulnerability, criminal

opportunity, social supervision, and child protection policy. Another contribution lies in the integration of routine activity theory, social control theory, and child victimology within a single case study analysis.

This study aims to analyze the murder of Hafizah in West Bangka from the perspective of modern criminology. More specifically, it seeks to identify criminogenic factors related to the occurrence of the crime, explain the position of both the child victim and the child offender within the framework of legal protection, and formulate a prevention model based on family, school, community, and the juvenile criminal justice system. This objective is important because resolving the case through punishment alone is insufficient to prevent similar incidents. Prevention must address the social environment in which children live and interact, the capacity of families to supervise children, community sensitivity to risk, and coordination among child protection institutions.

The proposed problem-solving direction in this study is the development of a community-level risk map for crimes against children. The study uses a qualitative case study approach through the analysis of media reports, regulations, case documents when available, and interviews with law enforcement officers, family members, community leaders, and child protection institutions. The analysis is directed at identifying vulnerable points that may expose children to victimization, including poorly supervised spaces, social relationships that are not recognized as potential threats, and the limited effectiveness of early warning mechanisms within residential environments. The findings can be used to develop more practical prevention recommendations, such as strengthening community supervision, improving child safety education, involving schools, mapping risky locations, and increasing psychosocial services for victims' families.

This study is expected to provide a more comprehensive understanding of crimes against children in the local Indonesian context. Theoretically, it contributes to modern criminological studies by integrating routine activity theory, social control theory, and child victimology. Practically, it may provide input for local governments, police, prosecutors, juvenile courts, schools, and child protection institutions in strengthening the prevention of crimes against children. Socially, this study encourages communities not only to respond after a crime has occurred but also to build child protection systems that are earlier, closer to everyday life, and more measurable.

METHOD

This study employed a qualitative method with a case study design. This design was chosen because the study sought to understand the murder of Hafizah in depth, contextually, and within a specific social setting. The case study approach was considered appropriate because this research did not aim to measure relationships between variables. Instead, it aimed to explain how a crime against a child occurred, how the victim and the offender were positioned within social and legal systems, and how the family, community, and law enforcement institutions responded after the incident. A case study design is suitable when a researcher examines a single event intensively by considering case boundaries, units of analysis, social context, and multiple sources of data (Mtisi, 2022).

The qualitative approach used in this study followed the logic of field research, in which the researcher served as the main research instrument. Qualitative research allows the researcher to explore the meanings, experiences, perceptions, and social actions of informants who are directly related to the case. In this sense, the study applied a descriptive qualitative approach through observation, interviews, data

presentation, and conclusion drawing (Al Kodri et al., 2025). This approach also emphasizes the importance of collecting data directly in the field through interaction with informants and observation of the social context under investigation.

The research was conducted in West Bangka Regency, Bangka Belitung Islands Province, Indonesia. The main research site was directed toward areas related to the murder of Hafizah, especially Terentang Village and the social environment in which the victim and the offender interacted before the incident. Supporting research sites included law enforcement institutions, child protection institutions, and community settings that held relevant information about the case. The research location was determined purposively because these sites were directly connected to the crime, social processes, community responses, and case handling.

The researcher was present directly in the field to obtain data that were close to the social reality of the case. The researcher acted as an observer, interviewer, and field note taker. This presence was important because the issue of child murder does not only involve legal facts. It also involves the emotional experiences of the victim's family, community perceptions, and institutional views on child protection and juvenile sentencing. In this position, the researcher maintained ethical distance, did not interfere with legal processes, and avoided exposing children's identities in excessive detail. Research involving children must prioritize caution, the protection of dignity, and the prevention of secondary trauma.

The population in this qualitative study was not understood as a statistical population to be generalized. Instead, it referred to social targets who possessed knowledge, experience, and involvement in the murder case of Hafizah. The research targets included the victim's family, local residents, community leaders, law enforcement officers, village officials, child protection institutions, including the Provincial Task Force for the Protection of Women and Children, and other parties who understood the social context of the incident. The sample was selected using purposive sampling because informants were chosen based on the relevance of their information, their involvement in the case, and their ability to explain the phenomenon under study (Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025).

The number of informants was not determined rigidly at the beginning of the research. The researcher initially identified five to ten informants and adjusted this number according to the needs of the data in the field. The main informants consisted of parties who directly understood the context of the case, such as the victim's family, residents around the crime location, and village officials. Key informants included social workers, child companions, and child protection institutions. Additional informants could include religious leaders, community leaders, youth leaders, or local journalists who understood the social dynamics of the case. Sampling in qualitative interviews must be explained transparently so that readers can understand the reasons for selecting informants, the scope of the data, and the limits of the findings (Czernek-Marszałek & McCabe, 2024).

Data were collected through unstructured interviews and observation. Unstructured interviews were used because this study required broad and open narratives that were not limited by a rigid list of questions. Through this technique, the researcher explored informants' experiences regarding social conditions before the incident, patterns of child supervision, the relationship between the victim and the offender, community responses after the case, and informants' views on the prevention of crimes against children. The interviews were conducted face to face while considering informed consent, confidentiality, and the psychological comfort of the informants.

Observation was conducted to understand the social context and spatial setting of the crime. The

researcher observed the environment in which children carried out daily activities, the distance between the victim's home and relevant locations, patterns of social interaction, forms of informal supervision, and the community situation after the incident. Observation was not intended to reconstruct the crime in a sensational manner. Rather, it aimed to understand environmental factors related to child vulnerability and criminal opportunity. Observation was also used to examine the consistency between informants' statements, media reports, and field conditions.

In addition to interviews and observation, documentation was used as supporting data. The documents analyzed included media reports, child protection regulations, the Juvenile Criminal Justice System Law, records from child protection institutions when available, and court decisions when they could be accessed legally. Documentary data helped strengthen the chronology, understand how the media constructed the case, and place the field findings within legal and modern criminological frameworks.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis. This analysis was carried out by reading the entire data set, identifying important information, developing initial codes, grouping codes into themes, examining relationships among themes, and drawing conclusions. The initial themes included child vulnerability, the relationship between the victim and the offender, weak social supervision, risky spaces, the victim family's response, community response, treatment of the child offender, and the need for community-based prevention. Thematic analysis was appropriate for processing interview and observation data because it allows researchers to identify patterns of meaning in informants' narratives (Kogen, 2024).

The analysis process was conducted in several stages. First, the researcher transcribed the interview results and organized field observation notes. Second, the researcher reduced the data by selecting information relevant to the research focus. Third, the researcher presented the data in the form of narratives, thematic matrices, and anonymized informant quotations. Fourth, the researcher drew conclusions through repeated reading of field data, documents, and modern criminological theory. Qualitative analysis requires a clear connection between verbal data, social context, and researcher interpretation so that the findings are not only descriptive but also analytical (Naeem et al., 2023).

Data validity was maintained through source triangulation and technique triangulation. Source triangulation was carried out by comparing information from the victim's family, local residents, law enforcement officers, community leaders, and official documents. Technique triangulation was conducted by comparing interview results, observation findings, and documentation. This strategy was important because a case study requires careful interpretation of a single event so that the findings do not depend on one source only. In qualitative case studies, triangulation helps strengthen credibility, dependability, and consistency of findings (Mtisi, 2022).

Ethical considerations formed an essential part of this study. The researcher did not disclose children's identities in detail, did not ask questions that could corner the victim's family, and did not explore information that could trigger repeated trauma. Interviews with the victim's family were conducted with informed consent, at an agreed time, and in a safe setting. When the study involved information about the child offender, the researcher used initials, concealed identifying details, and avoided narratives that could violate child protection principles. Through these ethical principles, this study sought to produce a strong criminological analysis without neglecting the dignity of the victim, the family, and the child in conflict with the law.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings show that the murder of Hafizah in West Bangka cannot be understood merely as an individual criminal act. The case reflects the relationship between child vulnerability, ineffective social supervision, a crime setting with limited control, and the legal response to an offender who was also legally categorized as a child. Based on unstructured interviews, environmental observation, and the review of media reports and relevant legal documents, four main themes were identified: the vulnerability of the child victim, weak guardianship, the position of the child offender within the juvenile criminal justice system, and the need for community-based prevention.

Field Findings

Field data were collected through unstructured interviews with the victim's family, local residents, village officials, community leaders, law enforcement officers, and parties with knowledge of child protection. Observations were conducted in the social environment related to the victim's activities, including residential areas, children's play spaces, community activity routes, and locations considered vulnerable because of limited supervision. The documents analyzed included media reports, child protection regulations, and legally accessible case-handling documents.

Tabel 1. Filed Findings

Data Source	Main Finding	Criminological Meaning
Interview with the victim's family	The child carried out daily activities in a social space perceived as ordinary and safe	Crime risk may emerge when a space perceived as safe is not supported by adequate supervision
Interview with local residents	Residents knew both the victim and the offender as members of the same social environment	Social familiarity does not always guarantee child safety
Environmental observation	Several spaces used by children lacked strong visual control from adults	Open spaces may become vulnerable locations when guardianship is weak
Interview with community leaders	Child supervision still relied mainly on the nuclear family	Community-based social control had not been institutionally developed
Legal and media documents	The offender was processed as a child in conflict with the law	The legal system faced a dilemma between protecting the child offender and delivering justice for the child victim

Based on Table 1, the first finding indicates that the victim was in a vulnerable position due to age, dependence on adults, and limited ability to recognize threats. Interviews with the victim's family revealed that children's daily activities were often understood as normal activities within the village environment. This pattern made families and residents less likely to view the surrounding space as a potential site of

danger. This condition shows that child vulnerability is not only rooted in physical condition and age but also in the way the social environment interprets risk.

The second finding shows that social supervision of children had not operated as a shared system. Residents knew both the victim and the offender, but this social familiarity did not automatically create a protective mechanism. Several informants stated that child supervision was still regarded as the responsibility of each family. In this context, the community did not yet have a collective awareness system to monitor children's activities in open social spaces.

The third finding relates to the crime setting and children's daily activity patterns. Field observation showed that the rural environment contained several points that were relatively quiet, open, and not consistently monitored by adults. Such spaces are not necessarily dangerous in physical terms, but they can become vulnerable when children are present without adequate accompaniment. From the perspective of routine activity theory, crime may occur when a motivated offender encounters a vulnerable target in a situation where supervision is weak.

The fourth finding highlights a dilemma in legal handling because both the victim and the offender were legally categorized as children. The victim's family emphasized the need for justice and recovery. Law enforcement institutions, on the other hand, had to process the offender according to the principles of the juvenile criminal justice system. This situation shows that a child murder case committed by a child offender requires an approach that does not merely calculate punishment. It also needs to consider victim recovery, offender accountability, and community protection.

Vulnerability of Children as Victims from a Victimology Perspective

From a victimological perspective, children occupy a special position as victims because they do not yet have the same capacity for self-protection as adults. Children depend on families, schools, social environments, and the state to obtain safety and protection. The Hafizah case shows that child protection cannot rely solely on family relationships. Protection must also be embedded in the social spaces where children carry out their daily activities. In this case, the victim's vulnerability can be identified through three main aspects. First, the victim was at an age that required adult supervision. Second, the victim conducted daily activities in a social environment that residents perceived as familiar and safe. Third, the surrounding community did not yet have an early detection mechanism to identify potential violence against children.



Figure 1. Reconstruction of Hafizah's Murder

Graham et al. found that child deaths caused by violence are often difficult to predict, yet they can be prevented when early intervention and professional vigilance function more effectively (Graham et al., 2025). This finding strengthens the argument that children must be positioned as subjects of protection, not merely as members of a family unit. In the Hafizah case, child protection should be understood as a shared social responsibility involving families, neighbors, schools, village authorities, and law enforcement institutions. When protection is placed solely on the family, the wider social environment around children continues to contain risk gaps.

Weak Guardianship and the Expansion of Criminal Opportunity

Routine activity theory explains that crime may occur when three elements converge: a motivated offender, a vulnerable target, and the absence of capable guardianship. In the Hafizah case, field findings indicate that guardianship was a central issue. Guardianship does not only refer to the presence of law enforcement officers. It also includes the active presence of parents, neighbors, teachers, community leaders, and social systems that can prevent children from entering risky situations.

Environmental observation showed that several spaces used by children did not have consistent visual supervision. This condition may increase criminal opportunity because children can easily move beyond adult control. In a village context, such situations are often not perceived as dangerous because residents feel that they know one another. However, this case shows that social familiarity alone is not sufficient to prevent violence.

This finding is consistent with Ayano et al. (2024), who show that weak parental supervision, adverse childhood experiences, low social attachment, and an unsupportive school environment can become risk factors for youth crime and delinquency. In the Hafizah case, these factors cannot be applied directly without caution. However, they provide a useful framework for understanding the importance of family and community control. Therefore, the prevention of crimes against children must address daily activity patterns, vulnerable locations, and systems of social supervision.

Community Social Control and the Failure of Early Detection

Social control theory emphasizes the importance of individual bonds with family, school, norms, and community. Stronger social bonds can increase the likelihood that deviant behavior will be prevented or corrected. In this case, interview data indicate that the community had social ties, but these ties had not yet developed into an early detection mechanism. Residents knew one another, yet they did not have a shared procedure for supervising children, reporting suspicious behavior, or limiting children's access to vulnerable spaces.

The failure of early detection can be seen in the absence of a community system specifically designed to monitor children's activities. Village officials, community leaders, and residents can play important roles in prevention, but these roles need to be organized clearly. Without a clear division of responsibility, social supervision remains spontaneous. Such spontaneous supervision is weak when dealing with crimes that can occur quickly and remain hidden.

Marshall (2024) argues that victim status in the justice system is not shaped only by the violent event itself, but also by how adults, institutions, and social environments recognize children's experiences. In the

Hafizah case, this argument is important because child victims often receive full public attention only after a fatal event occurs. For this reason, the child protection system must operate before violence takes place.

Child Offender and the Dilemma of the Juvenile Criminal Justice System

This case also presents a complex issue because the offender was still legally a child. In the legal system, a child in conflict with the law has the right to protection, assistance, guidance, and rehabilitation. However, the victim's family and the wider community also have a strong demand for justice because the incident resulted in the death of a child. This dilemma forms an important part of the discussion in modern criminology.

The juvenile criminal justice system should not be understood merely as a mechanism for reducing punishment. It must ensure that the child offender undergoes a process of accountability that is consistent with age, psychological development, and rehabilitation needs. At the same time, the state must ensure that the victim's family receives recovery support, clear information, and protection from further trauma. Restorative justice policy in the juvenile criminal justice system must consider the balance between the interests of the offender, the victim, and the wider social impact of the case (Maswandi et al., 2023).



Figure 2. The Perpetrator is Accompanied by the Provincial Task Force for the Protection of Women and Children

Suzuki (2023) explains that victim recovery after violence is not a short-term process. It is a continuous process of rebuilding safety, meaning, and social support. In the Hafizah case, recovery should not be directed only at the nuclear family. The wider community also needs recovery because the murder of a child can create collective fear. Residents need spaces for dialogue, child protection education, and shared supervision mechanisms. Without community recovery, similar cases may leave fear without producing meaningful change in the child protection system.

A Community-Based Prevention Model

Based on the field findings, the prevention of crimes against children in West Bangka requires a community-based approach. Prevention cannot rely only on general appeals. It must be translated into concrete programs that can be implemented by families, schools, village authorities, and law enforcement institutions.

Table 2. Community-Based Prevention Model for Crimes Against Children

Prevention Stage	Main Actors	Forms of Action
Risk identification	Village authorities, families, schools	Mapping vulnerable locations, risky times, and children's daily activities
Strengthening guardianship	Parents, neighbors, community leaders	Establishing a child-friendly neighborhood supervision system
Child safety education	Schools, families, child protection institutions	Teaching children to recognize risks and seek help
Rapid response	Neighborhood units, village authorities, police, social workers	Creating a rapid reporting flow when a child is missing or in danger
Recovery	Psychologists, social workers, child protection institutions	Providing assistance to the victim's family and the community

The model in Table 2 positions prevention as a shared responsibility. Families remain central actors, but they should not be left to work alone. Schools can provide child safety education. Village authorities can organize neighborhood supervision systems. The police can develop rapid reporting channels. Child protection institutions can provide assistance and rights-based education.

Studies on risk factors for youth crime show that effective prevention must address individual, family, school, peer, and broader social environmental factors (Ayano et al., 2024). In the Hafizah case, this approach is relevant because the case did not stand alone as an individual act. It was connected to social space, supervision patterns, and the community's capacity to protect children.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the murder of Hafizah in West Bangka represents a crime against a child that cannot be understood merely as an individual criminal act. The case shows the interaction between victim vulnerability, weak social supervision, criminal opportunity, and the limited strength of community-based child protection. The main findings indicate that children require protection not only from their families, but also from schools, social environments, village authorities, law enforcement agencies, and child protection institutions.

Theoretically, this study contributes to modern criminological scholarship by integrating routine activity theory, social control theory, and child victimology. These three perspectives help explain how crimes against children emerge through the interaction between a vulnerable victim, weak guardianship, and unsafe social spaces. This study also emphasizes that child victims must be positioned as subjects of protection and recovery, not merely as part of a criminal case.

The implications of this study point to the need to strengthen community-based child protection systems. Local governments, schools, families, police institutions, and communities need to develop more operational prevention mechanisms through the mapping of vulnerable locations, child safety education,

neighborhood supervision, and rapid reporting procedures. Therefore, the response to crimes against children should not stop at punishment. It must also move toward prevention and social recovery.

The limitation of this study lies in its focus on a single case in West Bangka. The findings are not intended to represent all crimes against children in Indonesia. Access to informants, case documents, and the sensitivity of child victimization also limited the depth of certain data. Future research may develop comparative studies across cases, examine the role of schools and communities in early detection, and test prevention models based on child-friendly villages. For the wider public, this study contributes by affirming that child safety is a shared responsibility that must be built through care, supervision, and a concrete protection system.

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