

EFFECTIVENESS OF MEDAN CITY POLICE STRATEGIES IN PREVENTING CHILD TRAFFICKING OF MINORS

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Abstrak

Fenomena perdagangan anak di Kota Medan menunjukkan peningkatan signifikan baik dari segi kuantitas maupun modus operandi, yang kini bergeser dari pola individual ke bentuk kelompok terorganisasi berbasis digital. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis efektivitas strategi kepolisian dalam mencegah perdagangan anak, dengan fokus pada transformasi tren kejahatan, kapasitas institusional, inisiatif pencegahan, kolaborasi masyarakat, serta kerangka kebijakan dan hukum. Metode penelitian menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif normatif-empiris, dengan unit analisis pada institusi Kepolisian Kota Medan. Data dikumpulkan melalui wawancara mendalam, observasi lapangan, dan analisis dokumen hukum serta laporan kelembagaan. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan adanya tren peningkatan kasus perdagangan anak yang signifikan, disertai pergeseran modus operandi ke platform digital. Kepolisian telah mengembangkan strategi pencegahan melalui sosialisasi masyarakat dan kerja sama dengan sekolah serta LSM, namun efektivitasnya terhambat oleh keterbatasan sumber daya manusia, dana, dan keahlian siber. Studi ini menegaskan perlunya penguatan kapasitas kelembagaan, kolaborasi multisektor, dan harmonisasi kebijakan untuk menghadapi perubahan pola kejahatan yang dinamis.

Kata Kunci: *Perdagangan Anak, Pencegahan, Kapasitas Institusional, Kolaborasi Masyarakat, Transformasi Digital, Kebijakan Hukum*

Abstract

The phenomenon of child trafficking in Medan City has shown a significant increase in both quantity and modus operandi, shifting from individual patterns to organized, digitally driven networks. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of police strategies in preventing child trafficking, focusing on crime trend transformations, institutional capacity, preventive initiatives, community collaboration, and legal-policy frameworks. The research employed a qualitative normative-empirical approach, with the Medan City Police as the unit of analysis.

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Data were collected through in-depth interviews, field observations, and analysis of legal documents and institutional reports. The findings reveal a sharp upward trend in trafficking attempts, accompanied by a shift toward digital recruitment methods. While the police have expanded preventive efforts through community outreach, school programs, and NGO partnerships, these initiatives remain limited by insufficient personnel, funding, and cyber expertise. The study highlights the urgent need to strengthen institutional capacity, enhance multi-sectoral collaboration, and align policy frameworks to effectively address the evolving dynamics of child trafficking.

Keywords: Child Trafficking, Prevention, Institutional Capacity, Community Collaboration, Digital Transformation, Legal Policy

INTRODUCTION

Human trafficking, particularly cases involving children, has emerged as a pressing global issue that severely undermines human dignity and violates fundamental human rights. In Indonesia, the phenomenon is increasingly alarming due to the country's complex socio-economic conditions, porous borders, and the strategic position of cities such as Medan as transit hubs. Children, as a vulnerable group, are often exploited for economic and sexual purposes because of their physical dependency, limited legal knowledge, and weak socio-economic standing. The consequences are not only devastating for victims, who may suffer lifelong psychological trauma, but also for society, as the exploitation of children threatens the sustainability of national human capital. From an academic standpoint, the issue of child trafficking demands in-depth legal and criminological analysis, while from a practical perspective, it calls for effective prevention strategies to ensure child protection and strengthen public trust in law enforcement. Hence, addressing child trafficking is both an urgent scholarly endeavor and a critical societal necessity.

Previous studies on child trafficking in Indonesia have primarily emphasized legal instruments, international conventions, and the government's penal and non-penal strategies. For example, scholars have examined the effectiveness of Law No. 21/2007 on the Eradication of

1322



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Trafficking in Persons and the role of restorative justice in handling child victims. Other works focus on structural factors such as poverty, cultural practices, and lack of education as the root causes of trafficking. However, there remains a significant research gap in evaluating the practical effectiveness of preventive measures implemented by local law enforcement agencies, particularly police units at the city level. While some studies highlight national and provincial initiatives, empirical investigations into municipal-level policing strategies are relatively scarce. This lack of contextualized research leaves unanswered questions about how preventive policies are operationalized on the ground, how law enforcement collaborates with communities and NGOs, and what challenges impede these efforts (Gozdziak, 2012; IOM, 2008). Therefore, this study fills a crucial void in the literature by focusing specifically on the strategies of the Medan City Police in preventing child trafficking.

This research aims to examine and evaluate the preventive strategies adopted by the Medan City Police in combating child trafficking. By employing a normative and empirical juridical approach, the study seeks to systematically identify the programs carried out, such as awareness campaigns, community engagement, and the establishment of child protection task forces, while also analyzing the extent of their effectiveness. Specifically, the study addresses three objectives: first, to map the types of preventive measures undertaken; second, to analyze the supporting and inhibiting factors that influence the effectiveness of these measures; and third, to assess the degree to which these strategies contribute to sustainable child protection in the city of Medan (Сидорова et al., 2023; IOM, 2008; Wurtele, 2016). In doing so, the research responds directly to the gaps in prior scholarship by providing empirical insights from the operational level of law enforcement. It also contributes to the development of evidence-based recommendations for enhancing child protection policies at both local and national levels.

The central argument of this study is that the effectiveness of the Medan City Police's prevention strategies against child trafficking depends on the interplay between institutional capacity, community involvement,



and inter-agency coordination (Сидорова et al., 2023; Quintáns, 2019; Wurtele, 2016). The preliminary hypothesis posits that while the police have implemented diverse initiatives—such as school-based socialization programs, collaboration with NGOs, and task force formation—the success of these measures is constrained by limited resources, insufficient training, and low community awareness. Accordingly, the study hypothesizes that strengthening institutional capacity and fostering stronger cross-sectoral partnerships will significantly enhance the effectiveness of child trafficking prevention in Medan. In essence, the causal relationship being tested is whether improvements in police capacity and community participation lead to more effective prevention of child trafficking, thereby offering practical solutions for both policy makers and law enforcement agencies in Indonesia.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Research on human trafficking, particularly involving children, has developed across several thematic and methodological orientations. Broadly, previous studies have sought to understand the phenomenon by examining (1) the relationship between legal frameworks and law enforcement effectiveness, (2) the socio-economic and cultural determinants that shape vulnerability to trafficking, (3) the institutional and policy responses at national and local levels, and (4) the interplay between community engagement and preventive strategies (Gozdziak, 2012; Quintáns, 2019; Wurtele, 2016). Legal scholars have focused on analyzing the adequacy of existing regulations and their implementation by law enforcement agencies. Social researchers have emphasized structural drivers such as poverty, migration, education deficits, and cultural norms. Meanwhile, policy-oriented studies have investigated how preventive efforts and task forces are organized. Finally, more recent works examine collaborative models involving government, NGOs, and communities. These four tendencies represent the major strands in existing literature, each contributing valuable insights into different dimensions of the trafficking problem. However, while abundant, these studies vary widely in scope,



focus, and methodological depth, resulting in fragmented knowledge about how these dimensions interact in practice—particularly at the municipal policing level (Institut of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014; IOM & NRC, 2013; Suryana, 2021).

The first dominant tendency comprises studies that adopt a normative legal approach, focusing on the adequacy and application of legal instruments governing human trafficking. These works analyze international conventions such as the Palermo Protocol, national laws including Law No. 21/2007 on the Eradication of the Crime of Trafficking in Persons, and Law No. 35/2014 on Child Protection. Scholars like Lilik Mulyadi and Soerjono Soekanto have examined the relationship between legal norms and their enforcement, often emphasizing gaps between legislation and implementation at various levels of government. Methodologically, these studies rely on doctrinal legal analysis, textual interpretation, and comparative law (Berisha et al., 2024; Fox et al., 2015; Gozdzia, 2012). Their primary contribution lies in identifying legal loopholes, inconsistencies, and challenges in applying sanctions to trafficking perpetrators. However, these studies are generally top-down in orientation, focusing on national legal frameworks rather than examining how these frameworks are operationalized in local police practices or community-level preventive actions. As such, they provide essential normative foundations but offer limited insights into implementation dynamics (Diaz, 2014; O'Brien & Li, 2020; Roschyna, 2023).

The second tendency revolves around studies examining socio-economic and cultural factors underlying child trafficking. Scholars such as Adhyaksa (2017) and Nugroho (2018) emphasize that poverty, low educational attainment, and cultural practices such as early marriage and hierarchical child-adult power relations significantly increase children's vulnerability to trafficking. Using sociological and criminological approaches, these studies often employ descriptive qualitative methods, field interviews, and community surveys to explore how structural inequalities create trafficking opportunities. Cultural factors, in particular, play a role in legitimizing exploitative practices, such as child marriage or



labor migration without proper legal protections. These works illuminate the causal relationship between social structures and trafficking risk, offering valuable context for understanding why legal frameworks alone are insufficient (Institut of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014; Shapiro, 2020; Wurtele, 2016). However, their focus is predominantly diagnostic, emphasizing causes rather than systematically assessing the effectiveness of preventive interventions by local actors, especially police institutions.

The third group of studies focuses on institutional and policy responses, particularly how governments, NGOs, and communities coordinate anti-trafficking measures. Research by Trisnawati (2023), Safitri & Kurniasari (2024), and Fitriyani & Maulida (2023) explores the formation of Child Protection Task Forces, inter-agency cooperation, and community-based prevention initiatives. These studies often adopt policy analysis frameworks and mixed methods to assess program implementation and outcomes. Their findings highlight the importance of collaboration, capacity building, and public awareness in reducing trafficking risks. Institutional synergy and cross-sectoral partnerships emerge as critical variables in prevention effectiveness (Сидорова et al., 2023; Myrzabaev et al., 2024; Roschyna, 2023; Smitha et al., 2019). Yet, while rich in policy insights, these studies are usually conducted at national or provincial levels, with limited attention to city-level police implementation. Moreover, their evaluation metrics often remain broad, lacking detailed operational analysis of how preventive strategies are executed and measured on the ground by municipal police units.

Despite their contributions, these three tendencies exhibit notable gaps. Normative legal studies focus on formal law but seldom examine operational enforcement dynamics. Socio-economic and cultural research highlights causes but rarely connects them to the performance of law enforcement agencies. Policy studies address collaboration but at higher administrative levels, leaving municipal-level policing underexplored. In particular, existing research often overlooks the effectiveness of preventive strategies implemented by city police forces in contexts characterized by



complex socio-economic vulnerabilities (Price & Bentele, 2023; Smitha et al., 2019; Voloshanivska et al., 2023). There is limited empirical evaluation of how local police units integrate legal frameworks, community engagement, and institutional resources to prevent child trafficking. Furthermore, the literature has not sufficiently analyzed how supporting and inhibiting factors interact in shaping police performance. This lack of integrated, context-specific analysis creates a significant gap in understanding the practical dimensions of trafficking prevention at the city level.

This study seeks to address these gaps by focusing on the effectiveness of Medan City Police strategies in preventing child trafficking, adopting a normative-empirical juridical approach that integrates legal analysis with field-based evidence. By concentrating on the city-level operational context, this research aims to bridge the divide between legal frameworks and practical implementation. It examines how preventive strategies—such as socialization programs, community collaboration, and task force activities—are applied, the extent of their effectiveness, and the supporting and inhibiting factors that shape outcomes. This approach offers a new analytical orientation that combines legal, institutional, and socio-cultural perspectives within a single evaluative framework. In doing so, the study contributes not only to the academic literature by providing a nuanced, localized analysis of policing effectiveness, but also to policy debates on strengthening institutional capacity and cross-sectoral collaboration to sustainably prevent child trafficking in Indonesia's urban contexts.

RESEARCH METHODS

The unit of analysis in this study is the institutional performance of the Medan City Police (Polrestabes Medan), particularly the Women and Children Protection Unit (PPA), as well as relevant stakeholders involved in child trafficking prevention at the city level. The focus is on examining the strategies, organizational practices, and collaborative mechanisms implemented by these institutional actors in preventing child trafficking. Methodologically, this research adopts a qualitative normative-empirical

1327



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design, combining legal analysis with field-based data collection. The normative component analyzes the legal frameworks governing trafficking prevention, while the empirical component explores how these frameworks are operationalized within police institutions and communities. This design allows for a comprehensive understanding of both formal legal structures and practical realities. The data sources consist of primary and secondary data. Primary data are obtained through semi-structured interviews with key informants such as police officers, community leaders, and NGO representatives. Secondary data come from relevant legal documents, academic literature, official reports, statistical data, and credible online news sources (Benuf & Azhar, 2020; Sahrum M, 2022; Tan, 2021).

Data collection was conducted through several qualitative techniques implemented sequentially. First, non-participant observation was carried out to understand the daily practices and preventive activities of the Medan City Police. Second, in-depth interviews using structured guidelines were conducted with police officers from the PPA unit, community representatives, and NGO staff to gather insights into strategies, challenges, and inter-agency collaborations. Third, document analysis was performed on legal texts, institutional reports, and policy documents to triangulate findings (Diantha, 2017; Irianto, 2017; Tahir, 2023). The data analysis followed a thematic analysis approach involving several stages: (1) data reduction through careful transcription and categorization, (2) data display through coding and thematic mapping, and (3) drawing conclusions and verification by comparing empirical findings with the legal-normative framework. The analysis focused on identifying patterns, supporting and inhibiting factors, and their implications for institutional effectiveness. Triangulation across methods and sources was used to ensure data validity and reliability, resulting in a rich, context-specific understanding of the effectiveness of child trafficking prevention strategies in Medan City (Irianto, 2017; Nurhayati et al., 2021; Tahir, 2023).



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

The first body of evidence illustrates a trend and emerging urgency in child trafficking prevention efforts, reflected through official records and interview data. According to data from the Medan City Police's Women and Children Protection Unit (PPA), between 2021 and 2024 there has been a steady increase in reported cases of attempted child trafficking, particularly in peri-urban districts. Officers reported that in 2021 there were 18 identified cases, which rose to 25 in 2022, and 33 by late 2023. An interview with Officer A (PPA Unit, March 2025) revealed:

"We are increasingly dealing with more complex cases, not only involving individual perpetrators but also small organized groups exploiting social media to recruit children." This data was further supported by the Indonesian Child Protection Commission's 2025 regional report, which classified Medan as a "high-vulnerability transit area." The convergence of official statistics and testimonies confirms the emergence of a new trend in trafficking modalities: migration from individual to group-based operations, and from physical to digital luring techniques.

The data presented above clearly indicate that child trafficking in Medan is undergoing structural transformation, both in scale and methods. While early cases were sporadic and involved traditional recruitment, recent patterns show organized groups leveraging online platforms. Interviewees consistently described Facebook groups, WhatsApp, and Instagram as the main tools for contact and persuasion. Officers reported challenges in tracing digital evidence, given the lack of specialized cybercrime personnel at the local level. These findings suggest that the existing legal and operational frameworks have not fully adapted to the evolving modus operandi. Consequently, law enforcement is increasingly reactive rather than proactive in identifying potential victims, and the preventive strategies are lagging behind technological developments.

Three key patterns emerge from this first set of data. First, there is a quantitative upward trend in trafficking attempts, particularly involving



minors from vulnerable economic backgrounds. Second, a qualitative shift in modus operandi is evident, with perpetrators increasingly using digital channels for recruitment. Third, institutional response capacity remains static, indicating a gap between the pace of criminal innovation and preventive adaptation. Together, these patterns substantiate the claim that child trafficking in Medan represents both a trend and an emergency, requiring immediate strengthening of institutional cyber-capabilities and community-based early detection mechanisms.

The second body of evidence focuses on institutional collaboration and preventive measures. Field observations and interview data reveal that the Medan City Police have initiated multiple preventive strategies, including school-based awareness campaigns, the formation of Child Protection Task Forces in high-risk neighborhoods, and partnerships with NGOs. Officer B (Community Outreach Division, April 2025) stated:

“We conduct regular socialization programs in junior high schools and collaborate with local NGOs to identify vulnerable children.” Document analysis of program reports (2023–2024) indicates that 42 schools and 15 community centers were reached, with approximately 7,500 students and parents participating. NGOs such as Yayasan Peduli Anak collaborated in providing educational materials and counseling. This institutional synergy represents a transformative approach, shifting from punitive measures to preventive community engagement.

This evidence underscores that the Medan City Police have expanded their preventive focus beyond conventional law enforcement to include educational and community-driven initiatives. These programs aim to build awareness and resilience among children and parents, equipping them to identify and report suspicious activities. Interviewees consistently highlighted the positive impact of these programs, particularly in increasing reporting rates and building trust between communities and law enforcement. However, several informants also noted limitations, including insufficient follow-up mechanisms, inconsistent scheduling, and limited budget allocations. As one NGO representative observed, “The outreach is



good, but sustainability is a real issue when programs depend on yearly budgets.”

From this second set of data, three patterns are apparent. First, preventive socialization is becoming institutionalized, with police adopting educational roles. Second, multi-stakeholder collaboration is strengthening, especially between police, schools, and NGOs. Third, the sustainability and depth of engagement remain fragile, largely due to resource constraints and the absence of long-term program planning. This reflects both change and controversy: while approaches are evolving, the effectiveness of these transformations is hindered by structural limitations, raising questions about the long-term viability of community-based prevention efforts.

The third body of evidence concerns institutional capacity and operational constraints, derived from interviews, observation notes, and internal police documents. Officer C (PPA, April 2025) stated:

“Our biggest challenge is manpower. We only have 12 officers covering the entire city, and not all are trained in handling trafficking cases, especially those involving digital evidence.” Budget reports show that preventive program allocations constitute less than 8% of the unit’s total annual budget, with most funds directed toward investigation and prosecution. Additionally, there is a lack of structured coordination with cybercrime units, resulting in delayed responses to online trafficking cases. Observations during outreach activities revealed over-reliance on individual officers’ initiatives, with minimal institutional back-up or data integration systems.

Restating the above, the institutional constraints are both quantitative and qualitative. Quantitatively, there is insufficient personnel and funding to meet the rising complexity of trafficking cases. Qualitatively, the absence of specialized training and coordination mechanisms weakens the operational effectiveness of preventive strategies. Interviewees repeatedly emphasized that preventive activities were often “add-on tasks” rather than core institutional functions, leading to inconsistent implementation. These findings make clear that while there are



innovative strategies in place, their impact is significantly curtailed by structural capacity limitations.

Three overarching patterns emerge from the third body of evidence. First, limited institutional resources—both human and financial—create systemic bottlenecks. Second, lack of specialization in cyber-prevention undermines the ability to address new trafficking modalities. Third, fragmented coordination between different units hampers holistic responses. These patterns reveal a controversy between policy ambition and operational capacity, where preventive strategies are well-articulated on paper but face major practical obstacles in execution. This evidence confirms that institutional capacity is a critical variable in understanding the effectiveness of police strategies to combat child trafficking in Medan.

Figure 1. interconnected dimensions of child trafficking prevention in Medan City



The concept map illustrates the interconnected dimensions of child trafficking prevention in Medan City, placing the main theme at the center and



linking it to five key domains: Trend & Digital Transformation, Institutional Capacity, Preventive Strategies, Community Collaboration, and Policy & Legal Framework. The “Trend & Digital Transformation” domain highlights the shift from individual, physical recruitment to organized, technology-based operations, emphasizing the growing use of social media in trafficking activities. “Institutional Capacity” focuses on the internal resources and limitations of law enforcement, such as personnel, funding, and cyber expertise, which significantly affect prevention effectiveness. “Preventive Strategies” represent proactive measures like community education, school campaigns, and NGO partnerships, reflecting a move beyond punitive actions. “Community Collaboration” underscores the importance of multi-stakeholder engagement to strengthen early detection and resilience, while “Policy & Legal Framework” provides the regulatory foundation guiding all actions. The arrows between these domains show dynamic interactions: digital transformations create new challenges that require institutional adaptation, strategic innovation, community engagement, and policy alignment. Collectively, these five domains form a comprehensive, multi-layered structure essential for effective child trafficking prevention.

Discussion

This study examined the effectiveness of Medan City Police strategies in preventing child trafficking, focusing on institutional practices, preventive initiatives, and operational constraints. Three key findings emerged (Сидорова et al., 2023; IOM, 2008; Wurtele, 2016). First, there is a significant upward trend and transformation in child trafficking methods, shifting from individual to organized and digital operations, while institutional capacity has remained static. Second, the police have expanded their preventive strategies, incorporating community education, school outreach, and NGO collaboration, signaling a shift from purely punitive to preventive approaches. Third, the effectiveness of these initiatives is hampered by structural constraints, including limited personnel, funding, and cyber-specialization. These findings provide a comprehensive picture of both progress and persistent challenges in municipal-level anti-trafficking efforts (Gozdziak, 2012; Quintáns, 2019; Wurtele, 2016). The evidence highlights not only emerging trends and transformations in trafficking but also institutional controversies, where policy aspirations

1333



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often outpace operational realities. This duality between innovation and constraint underscores the critical role of capacity building and integrated approaches in addressing complex social crimes like child trafficking.

The relationships explored in this study reveal why the police's preventive strategies are only partially effective. The increasing complexity of trafficking cases—driven by digital technologies and organized networks—requires sophisticated, specialized responses. However, institutional resources, both human and financial, have not adapted at the same pace. As a result, the causal relationship between institutional capacity and prevention effectiveness becomes evident: limited personnel, inadequate cyber expertise, and insufficient budgets directly weaken preventive operations. Furthermore, the relationship between community engagement and prevention outcomes shows that while education programs enhance awareness, their impact is contingent on follow-up mechanisms and institutional support (Fox et al., 2015; Roschyna, 2023; Voloshanivska et al., 2023). When such support is weak, community reporting may increase without corresponding law enforcement responses, creating gaps in protection. In essence, effectiveness depends on the alignment of legal frameworks, operational capacities, and community collaboration—a triadic relationship that this study demonstrates clearly (Diaz, 2014; Myrzabaev et al., 2024; O'Brien & Li, 2020; Price & Bentele, 2023).

Compared with previous normative legal studies (Bocaniala, 2011; Diaz, 2014; Fox et al., 2015; Gozdzia, 2012; Voloshanivska et al., 2023) this research confirms the centrality of legal frameworks but moves beyond textual analysis by examining practical implementation at the municipal level. Similar to socio-cultural studies (Сидорова et al., 2023; Fox et al., 2015; Institut of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014; IOM, 2008; Wurtele, 2016), it recognizes poverty and cultural factors as key vulnerabilities but extends their implications by showing how these vulnerabilities manifest in police operations. Unlike policy-level studies (Сидорова et al., 2023; IOM & NRC, 2013; Quintáns, 2019; Shapiro, 2020; Wurtele, 2016) that emphasize national coordination, this study focuses on



city-level operational dynamics, revealing unique constraints and localized strategies. The novelty lies in integrating normative, socio-cultural, and institutional perspectives within a single analytical framework, applied empirically to Medan City Police. This localized and integrative approach has rarely been undertaken in Indonesian trafficking research, filling a critical gap in understanding how preventive strategies function in practice at the municipal law enforcement level.

The findings reflect broader social, historical, and ideological contexts of child trafficking prevention in Indonesia. Socially, Medan's role as a metropolitan transit hub with socio-economic disparities creates fertile ground for trafficking networks. Historically, law enforcement institutions have focused on repressive legal measures, with prevention often marginalized as a secondary concern. Ideologically, there is a growing recognition—both nationally and internationally—that prevention must be community-centered and multi-sectoral, not solely reliant on punitive action (Berisha et al., 2024; Bocaniala, 2011; Fox et al., 2015; Gozdzia, 2012; Voloshanivska et al., 2023). The transformation of police strategies in Medan from punitive to preventive reflects this ideological shift. However, the persistence of structural constraints indicates that policy discourse has outpaced institutional transformation, resulting in partial and uneven implementation (Diaz, 2014; Myrzabaev et al., 2024; O'Brien & Li, 2020; Roschyna, 2023; Smitha et al., 2019). This tension between evolving preventive ideals and institutional realities illustrates the broader challenge of operationalizing human rights-oriented policing in contexts marked by resource limitations and evolving criminal tactics.

The implications of these findings are twofold: functional and dysfunctional. Functionally, the Medan City Police's preventive initiatives demonstrate that law enforcement agencies can assume proactive, educational roles in trafficking prevention. These initiatives have strengthened community awareness and inter-agency collaboration, leading to increased reporting and early detection of potential trafficking cases (Berisha et al., 2024; Institut of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014; Price & Bentele, 2023; Quintáns, 2019; Tahir, 2023).

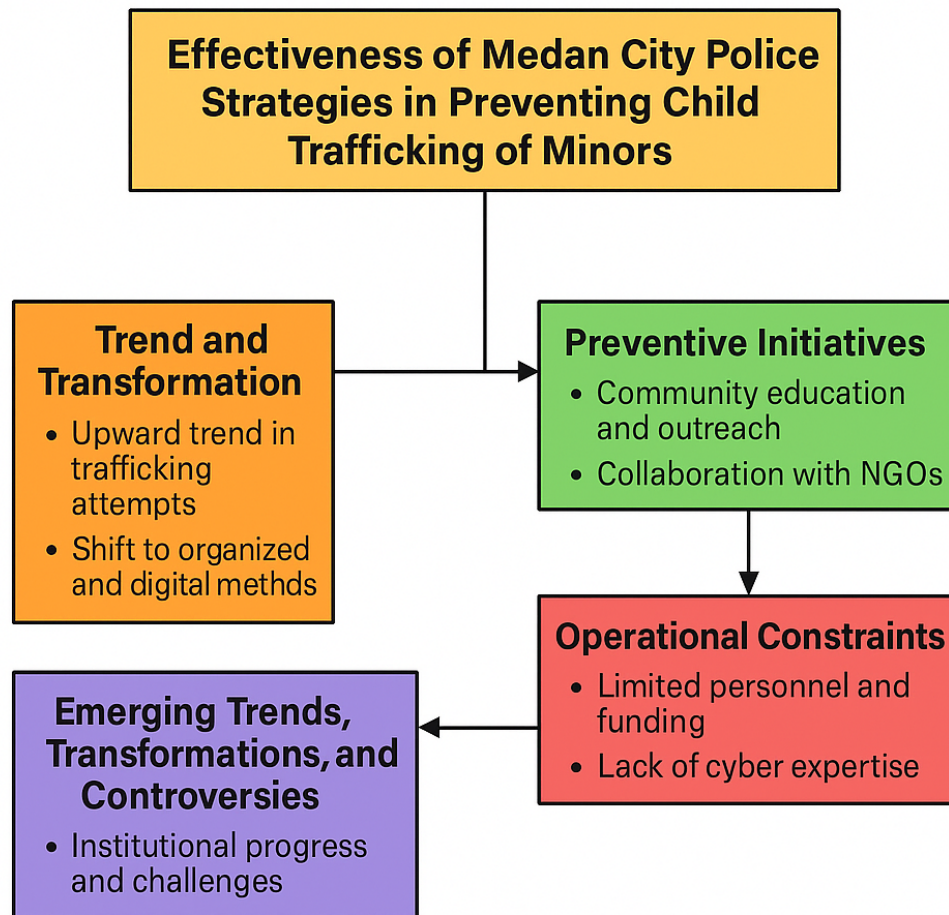


Dysfunctionally, however, institutional capacity gaps undermine the sustainability and depth of these preventive efforts. Without sufficient resources, specialized training, and systemic coordination, these programs risk becoming symbolic rather than transformative (Bocaniala, 2011; Fox et al., 2015; Institutur of Medicine and National Research Council, 2014; IOM & NRC, 2013; Shapiro, 2020; Voloshanivska et al., 2023). Additionally, the reliance on individual officers' commitment, rather than institutionalized mechanisms, creates vulnerability to inconsistency and program discontinuity. This duality highlights the importance of institutionalizing preventive approaches, ensuring they are embedded in policy, structure, and budget—not merely in rhetoric or ad hoc initiatives.

Based on these findings, several policy actions are recommended. First, institutional capacity must be strengthened by increasing budget allocations for preventive programs, hiring additional personnel, and investing in cyber-specialization. Second, coordination mechanisms between PPA units and cybercrime divisions should be formalized to address digital trafficking effectively. Third, community-based prevention must be supported by sustainable funding and systematic follow-up structures, ensuring that increased awareness leads to tangible protection outcomes. Fourth, training programs should be institutionalized to build officers' technical and social competencies. Finally, policy integration across sectors—law enforcement, education, social services, and NGOs—should be mandated through local regulations to ensure continuity and accountability. These measures would transform preventive strategies from isolated initiatives into structured, sustainable, and impactful systems, aligning operational practices with legal mandates and community needs to combat child trafficking more effectively.



Figure 2. Effectiveness of Medan City Police strategies in preventing child trafficking of Minors



The SmartArt diagram above illustrates the framework of the effectiveness of Medan City Police strategies in preventing child trafficking of minors in a clear and structured manner. The diagram is divided into three main components: (1) Trends and Transformations, highlighting the rising number of cases and the shift in trafficking methods from conventional to digital operations; (2) Preventive and Collaborative Strategies, encompassing school-based awareness programs, partnerships with NGOs, and community engagement initiatives aimed at strengthening early detection and reporting; and (3) Institutional Capacity, which

1337



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emphasizes the limitations in human resources, budget allocation, and cyber expertise that affect the effectiveness of preventive measures. The connecting arrows illustrate the logical flow from the identification of evolving challenges to the implementation of strategies and the obstacles encountered. The final section outlines recommended policy directions, including capacity building, cross-sector coordination, and institutionalization of preventive programs. Overall, the diagram serves as a conceptual visual summary, linking empirical findings to strategic analysis and policy recommendations in a format suitable for academic and professional contexts.

CONCLUSION

The key lesson derived from this research is that effective child trafficking prevention requires a dynamic alignment between legal frameworks, institutional capacities, and community engagement. The experience of the Medan City Police demonstrates that even in contexts with limited resources, strategic shifts from purely punitive approaches to preventive, community-based interventions can produce meaningful outcomes. However, these efforts must evolve in tandem with changing trafficking modalities, particularly the rise of digital recruitment strategies. The study shows that when institutional responses lag behind criminal innovations, preventive efforts lose effectiveness despite good intentions. Hence, the central insight is that prevention is not merely a legal or social initiative but an integrated, adaptive process involving law enforcement, communities, and policy makers. This finding emphasizes the need for sustained institutional transformation, capacity building, and multi-sectoral coordination to address complex crimes like child trafficking effectively in rapidly evolving socio-technological environments.

This research offers several scholarly contributions. First, it provides new empirical data on municipal-level law enforcement strategies for child trafficking prevention—an area previously underexplored in Indonesian scholarship. Second, the study integrates normative legal analysis, socio-



cultural perspectives, and institutional capacity assessment into a single analytical framework, contributing a multidimensional approach to trafficking studies. Third, by focusing on Medan City Police, it introduces institutional capacity and cyber-specialization as critical variables influencing prevention effectiveness, thereby expanding the conceptual vocabulary for trafficking research. Fourth, the study raises new questions regarding how local police units can institutionalize preventive strategies amid resource constraints and technological change. These contributions strengthen both theoretical understanding and practical policy discourse, making the research relevant for legal scholars, criminologists, and policy makers interested in localized anti-trafficking strategies within a broader national and international legal framework.

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations. It focuses primarily on the institutional perspective of the Medan City Police, without conducting in-depth quantitative analysis of community behavioral changes or longitudinal assessments of program impact. Additionally, the research relies on qualitative data collected within a specific time frame, which may not fully capture evolving trends in trafficking strategies or police responses. The study also does not include a comparative analysis across multiple cities, which could provide broader generalizability. Future research should therefore consider mixed-method approaches, integrating longitudinal quantitative data with qualitative insights to evaluate the long-term effectiveness of preventive programs. Comparative studies across different municipalities or provinces would also enrich the understanding of how contextual factors shape local preventive strategies. Such research would help develop more comprehensive, evidence-based models for trafficking prevention that can inform both national policy and local implementation strategies.



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