

# The Phenomenon of Illegal Street Racing Among Teenagers: A Criminological Study in the Jurisdiction of Pematangsiantar Police

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## ABSTRACT

*Criminological Review of Illegal Racing by Teenagers in the Pematangsiantar Police Jurisdiction. This study aims to (1) determine the factors that cause illegal racing by teenagers in the Pematangsiantar Police jurisdiction. (2) To determine efforts to overcome illegal racing by teenagers in the Pematangsiantar Police jurisdiction. This study was conducted in the Pematangsiantar Police area, this study is a qualitative descriptive study. The types of data in this study are primary data and secondary data, with direct observation and interview data collection techniques. The results of the study indicate that the factors that cause teenagers to be involved in illegal racing are (1) not having someone as a role model in understanding and absorbing the values or norms that apply in society, (2) Lack of supervision and concern for the community environment where the racing location occurs, (3) the activity is attractive as an alternative entertainment for some people (especially in cities that have a scarcity of alternative positive activities for the younger generation), (4) lack of police personnel so that perpetrators can freely carry out their activities. Pematangsiantar Police make efforts to overcome the problem including preventive efforts and repressive efforts. Preventive efforts or prevention, include socialization or counseling carried out by the Pematangsiantar Police to the community, conducting vehicle operations, and guarding posts prone to illegal racing. While repressive efforts or action, include following up on complaints from the community around the racing location who feel disturbed and police officers who have conducted a survey in advance in the illegal racing area, conducting control operations or raids, the perpetrators who are caught are then secured at the Pematangsiantar Police to seek information to find evidence, given a fine by confiscating those who are not equipped with STNK, SIM, driving safety and standardization eligibility, and for perpetrators who repeat illegal racing will be given guidance from the Pematangsiantar Police.*

**Keywords:** *Illegal Racing, Juvenile Delinquency, Law Enforcement Efforts.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Illegal street racing is a growing social phenomenon in various regions, including within the jurisdiction of the Pematangsiantar Police. This activity often involves teenagers in their productive age group, who should ideally focus on education and personal development. Illegal racing not only endangers the participants but also poses a threat to other road users. Data from the Indonesian National Police indicate that the number of accidents caused by illegal street racing continues to rise annually, with the majority of victims aged between 15 and 25 years (Radzuan et al., 2022). Beyond the thrill and entertainment factor, illegal racing is often associated with social delinquency, drug use, and motorcycle gangs that use it as a means of self-assertion. Therefore, this phenomenon should not only be examined from a traffic law perspective but also within a broader criminological framework.

Literature studies show that illegal street racing shares characteristics with other deviant behaviors influenced by social, economic, and cultural factors. According to Hirschi's (1969) social control theory, deviant behavior occurs when individuals have weak social bonds with institutions such as family, school, and community. In the context of illegal street racing, many involved teenagers come from backgrounds where parental supervision is lacking, and their social environment tends to be permissive of illegal activities (Chriss, 2022; Chatlani et al., 2023). Furthermore, Merton's (1938) strain theory explains that structural pressures due to economic and social disparities can drive individuals to seek alternative means of gaining social recognition, one of which is through illegal street racing. Therefore, understanding this phenomenon requires a criminological theoretical foundation to ensure effective prevention and intervention strategies.

This article aims to analyze the phenomenon of illegal street racing among teenagers from a criminological perspective, focusing on the underlying factors that drive their involvement (Andini & Manulang, 2023; Pratama et al., 2023). Additionally, this study seeks to identify the impacts of illegal racing on individuals, society, and law enforcement. This research intends to provide recommendations to authorities, particularly the Pematangsiantar Police, in formulating more effective preventive policies. By adopting a criminology-based approach, this study aspires to serve as a reference for academics and legal practitioners in comprehensively understanding and addressing illegal street racing.

Based on preliminary analysis, the hypothesis proposed in this study suggests that teenagers' involvement in illegal street racing is influenced by a combination of social, economic, and psychological factors (Aslam et al., 2023; Barnes et al., 2024). Specifically, weak social control from families and schools, coupled with peer pressure and the search for self-identity, are primary drivers behind their engagement in this activity. Additionally, the lack of entertainment facilities and

positive recreational activities for teenagers in Pematangsiantar is suspected to contribute to the prevalence of illegal racing. Therefore, the proposed solution should not be limited to stricter law enforcement but should also incorporate educational and preventive approaches that can effectively reduce teenagers' involvement in illegal street racing.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach aimed at providing a comprehensive legal review of the phenomenon of illegal street racing among teenagers, which frequently occurs within the jurisdiction of the Pematangsiantar Police Resort (Polres), by collecting primary data through in-depth interviews with illegal racers, law enforcement officers, and affected community members (Creswell, 2014), as well as secondary data obtained from a literature review, including books, research reports, scientific journals, legal policy documents, and relevant literature discussing criminological perspectives in addressing juvenile delinquency (Neuman, 2014), using non-participatory observation techniques to understand the behavioral patterns of the racers and the environmental characteristics that support illegal street racing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014) and in-depth interviews conducted directly or via communication media to gather information on the motivations behind teenagers' involvement in street racing, law enforcement responses, and community perspectives on this phenomenon (Patton, 2015), which are then analyzed using a qualitative descriptive analysis approach based on the Miles and Huberman (2014) model, comprising data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, with findings compared against empirical field data and references from various relevant scholarly articles to ensure strong academic validity.

## 3. RESULT AND ANALYSIS

### **The Phenomenon of Illegal Street Racing Among Teenagers**

Adolescence is a transitional period that plays a crucial role in an individual's development, typically occurring between the ages of 13 and 18, characterized by significant physical, psychological, and social changes (Coleman, 2022; Mastorci et al., 2024). However, this stage is also associated with deviant behaviors, including illegal street racing, which has become increasingly prevalent in various cities in Indonesia, including within the jurisdiction of Pematangsiantar Police Resort (Polres). Illegal street racing is not only a form of juvenile delinquency but also poses various negative impacts on both the perpetrators and society at large.

According to data from Indonesia Police Watch (IPW), in 2015 alone, there were 28 recorded accidents caused by illegal street racing, resulting in 41 victims, comprising 31 fatalities and 10 injuries. This figure represents an increase

compared to 2014, when 29 fatalities and 5 injuries were recorded due to illegal street racing incidents (IPW, 2016). These activities are conducted without adequate safety standards, such as helmets, protective jackets, or proper motorcycle equipment, which are essential for road safety (Wumbei, 2021).

Observations and interviews with illegal street racing participants indicate that the primary motivating factors behind their involvement include peer pressure, self-identity exploration, and financial incentives through gambling (Ford et al., 2024; Hesketh, 2024). In an interview conducted on May 4, 2022, a street racing participant revealed that they frequently organize these races in certain locations within Pematangsiantar that are perceived as being safe from police surveillance. The primary locations for illegal street racing include Jalan Merdeka, Jalan Medan, and Jalan Gereja.

Additionally, an interview with a motorcycle workshop owner who frequently modifies vehicles for illegal racing revealed that modifications often involve removing standard components, such as mirrors, headlights, and body covers, while using loud racing exhausts to maximize speed. In practice, most participants do not possess a valid driver's license (SIM) and use non-standard motorcycles that do not meet roadworthiness requirements, as stipulated in Law No. 22 of 2009 on Road Traffic and Transportation.

Furthermore, an interview conducted on May 10, 2022, with a street racing spectator indicated that these races are not merely about speed competition but also involve illegal gambling, with bets ranging from thousands to millions of rupiahs. This highlights that illegal street racing is not only a traffic violation but also contributes to broader social disturbances and security issues (Woods, 2021).

Illegal street racing significantly affects both social stability and law enforcement. Socially, it causes public distress due to frequent traffic accidents, disrupts public order, and increases the risk of criminal activities such as gambling and gang fights (Morgan, 2021). Legally, illegal street racing violates multiple provisions under Law No. 22 of 2009 on Road Traffic and Transportation, including:

1. Driving a motor vehicle without a valid driver's license (SIM) (Article 281), punishable by up to 4 months of imprisonment or a fine of IDR 1 million.
2. Using a vehicle without the necessary safety equipment (Article 285), such as rear-view mirrors, headlights, and horns, with a maximum penalty of 1 month of imprisonment or a fine of IDR 250,000.
3. Engaging in illegal street racing on public roads (Article 115), which carries a maximum penalty of 1 year of imprisonment or a fine of IDR 3 million.
4. Exceeding the speed limit on public roads (Article 287), punishable by up to 2 months of imprisonment or a fine of IDR 500,000.

Interviews with law enforcement officers at Pematangsiantar Police Resort revealed that, despite routine police patrols, illegal racers often "play cat and

mouse" with officers, dispersing when a raid is conducted and regrouping elsewhere to resume racing. When caught, they are generally subjected to disciplinary coaching, after which they are released, which fails to serve as a deterrent to prevent them from reoffending.

Efforts to curb illegal street racing have been undertaken by law enforcement agencies through various strategies, including increased night patrols, vehicle inspections for non-compliant modifications, and traffic safety awareness programs in schools (Gusfan, 2024). However, a purely repressive approach is insufficient to significantly reduce illegal street racing incidents. Therefore, a more comprehensive preventive strategy is necessary, such as:

1. Providing legal racing facilities, so that teenagers with an interest in motorcycle racing can channel their hobby in a safe and regulated environment.
2. Enforcing stricter penalties, beyond just coaching, by implementing community service-based punishments to create a stronger deterrent effect.
3. Collaborating with schools and parents to increase supervision of teenagers' activities outside of school.
4. Promoting alternative activities for teenagers, such as sports and educational motorcycle communities, to divert their interest away from illegal racing.

By adopting a holistic approach, the frequency of illegal street racing among teenagers can be significantly reduced, ultimately creating a safer and more orderly public road environment.

### **Efforts of Law Enforcement in Addressing Illegal Street Racing**

Illegal street racing poses a significant challenge for law enforcement due to its dynamic nature and the tendency of offenders to evade capture. To mitigate the prevalence of this activity, the Pematangsiantar Police Resort (Polres Pematangsiantar) has implemented several strategic measures aimed at prevention, monitoring, and enforcement. These efforts align with broader law enforcement strategies in other regions, emphasizing community engagement, proactive policing, and deterrence-based approaches (Braga & Kennedy, 2021).

#### **1. Public Awareness Campaigns and School Outreach Programs**

The Pematangsiantar Police have conducted awareness campaigns in communities and schools to educate teenagers about the dangers and legal consequences of illegal street racing. These initiatives aim to prevent adolescents from engaging in street racing by providing them with alternative activities and emphasizing the risks associated with reckless driving (King et al., 2021). Studies indicate that early intervention through educational programs significantly reduces the likelihood of youth participation in illegal racing.

#### **2. Routine Police Patrols and Surveillance**

In addition to outreach programs, the police conduct regular patrols and surveillance in areas frequently used for illegal street racing. These patrols aim to monitor high-risk locations, deter potential offenders, and ensure public safety. According to local police reports, patrolling activities have led to a reduction in the frequency of illegal racing in several identified hotspots. However, racers often relocate to avoid detection, which requires police to adapt their monitoring strategies dynamically.

### 3. Intelligence-Gathering and Targeted Arrests

To enhance enforcement efforts, law enforcement officers collect intelligence on the timing and locations of illegal races through community reports and surveillance. This enables targeted operations and arrests to apprehend offenders and discourage future participation in illegal street racing (Hidayat, 2020). When racers are apprehended, authorities impose legal sanctions to deter repeat offenses, which aligns with the deterrence theory in criminology that suggests swift and certain punishment can significantly reduce crime recurrence.

Despite these efforts, illegal street racing remains a persistent issue due to several factors, including peer influence, financial incentives from gambling, and the lack of designated racing facilities (Kerr et al., 2021). Thus, a comprehensive approach combining law enforcement, community engagement, and alternative recreational activities is necessary to effectively address this issue.

### **Challenges in Handling Illegal Street Racing**

The handling of illegal street racing presents significant challenges for law enforcement agencies. Improper intervention may lead to severe resistance from offenders and their supporting groups, potentially escalating tensions between the authorities and the public. As identified through interviews with traffic officers from Pematangsiantar Police Resort (Polres Pematangsiantar), several strategic measures must be undertaken to manage and mitigate illegal street racing effectively.

Key preventive measures include:

1. Assessing community support for law enforcement efforts in addressing illegal street racing.
2. Providing coaching and alternative solutions for offenders, such as engaging them in legal and safer adrenaline-inducing activities, including official racing circuits or community-based sports programs (Hidayat, 2020).
3. Implementing surveillance measures, such as installing CCTV cameras in locations frequently used for street racing.
4. Encouraging active community involvement as a form of social control to prevent illegal racing activities (Sutanto, 2022).

However, despite these measures, several barriers hinder effective law enforcement.

#### 1. Influence of High-Profile Individuals

One of the most significant challenges in law enforcement is the involvement of offenders with political or social influence, such as the children of government officials or influential individuals in the region. As revealed in an interview with the Head of Operational Guidance (Kaur Bin Ops) of Pematangsiantar Traffic Unit (Sat Lantas) on May 12, 2022, at 10:00 AM, certain offenders receive preferential treatment due to intervention from higher authorities. Legal sanctions, such as fines or temporary detainment, are often mitigated or dismissed altogether, thereby weakening deterrence and fostering a culture of impunity (Dolovich, 2024).

This condition aligns with findings from previous studies, which indicate that legal enforcement in Indonesia sometimes encounters obstacles due to bureaucratic intervention and lack of institutional independence (Turner et al., 2022). As a result, offenders with social privilege often evade strict penalties, making it difficult for the police to implement effective deterrence mechanisms.

#### 2. The Mobile and Elusive Nature of Illegal Street Racing

Illegal street racing is highly dynamic, with participants frequently changing locations to avoid police detection. According to an interview with a patrol officer from Pematangsiantar Traffic Unit (Sat Lantas) on May 12, 2022, at 10:30 AM, racers strategically select locations with multiple exit routes, allowing them to easily evade police raids. This challenge is exacerbated by the limited number of officers available to monitor multiple racing locations simultaneously.

The widespread nature of illegal street racing, occurring in various sub-districts under Polsek Siantar Martoba, Polsek Siantar Barat, and Polsek Siantar Timur, significantly complicates law enforcement operations. As acknowledged by the Head of Operational Guidance of Pematangsiantar Traffic Unit in an interview on May 12, 2022, at 10:00 AM, the dispersion of racing locations stretches police resources thin and diminishes the effectiveness of direct interventions.

#### 3. Lack of Public Cooperation and Social Awareness

A crucial aspect of tackling illegal street racing involves public participation. However, findings suggest that community engagement in preventing illegal street racing remains weak. In many cases, members of the public not only fail to report illegal racing activities but actively participate as spectators and even engage in gambling on race outcomes.

The lack of social responsibility among community members further complicates enforcement efforts. Instead of supporting police operations, many individuals view illegal street racing as a source of entertainment,

thereby reinforcing its normalization among teenagers. To address this issue, community-based policing and collaborative social campaigns are necessary to promote public awareness and discourage illegal racing activities.

Given the complexity of the challenges associated with handling illegal street racing, law enforcement agencies must adopt a multi-pronged strategy that integrates law enforcement, social engagement, and systemic reforms. Key recommendations include:

1. Strengthening legal independence by ensuring that political interference does not affect law enforcement decisions and penalties for offenders.
2. Developing predictive policing strategies through the use of data analytics and AI-driven surveillance, allowing authorities to anticipate illegal racing activities and deploy personnel more effectively.
3. Enhancing public engagement by launching awareness campaigns that educate communities about the dangers and legal consequences of illegal street racing.
4. Expanding youth engagement programs, such as official motorsports events, to provide an alternative outlet for teenagers interested in racing.

With a comprehensive, community-based approach, it is possible to curb illegal street racing and minimize its adverse impact on public safety.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

The legal aspects of illegal street racing among teenagers within the jurisdiction of Polres Pematangsiantar are in direct violation of Law No. 22 of 2009 on Road Traffic and Transportation, with various contributing factors leading to their involvement in such activities, including the absence of role models to instill societal norms and values, lack of parental or community supervision in areas where illegal races take place, the perception of street racing as an attractive entertainment alternative, particularly in cities with limited recreational opportunities for youth, its function as a means of self-actualization and socialization among peers, the opportunity to showcase vehicle modifications and driving skills, the thrill and excitement it provides for racers, spectators, and gamblers alike, law enforcement's lack of vigilance in recognizing and preventing both potential and actual disruptions, and the inability of racing enthusiasts to access legal racing facilities due to financial constraints or the lack of designated racing circuits.

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