



Complaint-Based Offenses In Sexual Offenses Under The National Criminal Code: Implications For Victim Protection

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Article Info

Article history:

Received 12 Feb, 2026

Revised 29 Mar, 2026

Accepted 20 Apr, 2026

Keywords:

Complaint-Based Offense,
Morality Crimes, National
Criminal Code, Victim
Protection, Criminal Law

ABSTRACT

The reform of Indonesia's national criminal law through the enactment of Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code (KUHP) introduces significant changes in the regulation of criminal offenses, particularly within the domain of morality-related crimes. One of the most notable developments is the reclassification of certain offenses into complaint-based crimes, which were previously treated as ordinary offenses. This policy shift is grounded in the intention to better respect individual privacy, human dignity, and the autonomy of victims in deciding whether a case should proceed through legal channels. At the same time, it reflects the state's effort to limit excessive intervention in the private sphere of citizens. Nevertheless, the implementation of complaint-based offenses in morality-related crimes presents a number of challenges. In practice, this mechanism may hinder victims' access to justice due to various factors, including social pressure, stigma, unequal power relations, and economic dependence on the perpetrator. This study aims to comprehensively examine the concept of complaint-based offenses in morality crimes under the new Criminal Code and to analyze its implications for victim protection. This research employs a normative legal method using both statutory and conceptual approaches, supported by primary and secondary legal materials. The findings indicate that while complaint-based offenses provide victims with greater control over legal proceedings, they also pose risks of injustice, particularly for vulnerable groups such as women. Therefore, strengthening legal policies, improving victim assistance mechanisms, and adopting a more victim-oriented approach are essential to achieving substantive justice.

INTRODUCTION

The reform of criminal law in Indonesia represents a broader effort to align the national legal system with evolving social dynamics, cultural values, and the expectations of modern society. This transformation reached a significant milestone with the enactment of Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the new Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP), which replaces the legacy of the Dutch colonial penal code. The new KUHP is not merely a recodification of existing provisions; rather, it reflects the living values within Indonesian society, encompassing moral, religious, and cultural principles that continue to develop over time (Ali & Kholiq, 2023).

One of the areas undergoing substantial revision is the regulation of morality-related offenses. Such offenses are inherently linked to societal norms, ethics, and standards of decency, making their regulation not purely legal in nature but also deeply rooted in social values. In this regard, the state faces a fundamental dilemma: on the one hand, it must maintain public order and social morality; on the other hand, it must respect individual rights, including personal freedom and privacy (Afda'u et al., 2026).

A notable development in the new KUHP is the introduction of complaint-based offenses (*delik aduan*) for certain acts, including adultery and cohabitation. Complaint-based offenses are those that can only be prosecuted upon a formal complaint by the injured party or another legally authorized individual. In the absence of such a complaint, law enforcement authorities are not permitted to initiate legal proceedings. This concept signifies a deliberate limitation on state intervention, particularly in matters considered part of the private sphere (Anjani et al., 2026).

The adoption of complaint-based mechanisms in morality-related crimes is grounded in a strong philosophical rationale, namely the protection of individual privacy and human dignity. Cases involving morality often touch upon highly sensitive personal matters, and direct state intervention without the victim's consent may result in adverse consequences, such as social stigma, psychological distress, and violations of privacy rights. Therefore, by classifying certain offenses as complaint-based, the law grants victims the authority to decide whether their case should proceed through legal channels (Sueni, 2025).

Despite its underlying rationale, this policy has generated considerable debate and criticism. Some scholars argue that complaint-based offenses may hinder effective law enforcement and weaken victim protection. Victims may be reluctant to file complaints due to various factors, including social pressure, unequal power relations, economic dependency on the perpetrator, and limited access to legal assistance. As a result, many cases remain unreported, allowing perpetrators to evade accountability (Ritonga, 2025).

In the context of Indonesian society, which still exhibits strong patriarchal characteristics, victims of morality-related crimes particularly women are often placed in vulnerable positions. They not only endure the direct impact of the offense but also face societal stigma that may exacerbate their psychological burden. Under such conditions, the complaint-based mechanism may reinforce existing structural barriers, thereby reducing the effectiveness of legal protection for victims (Pane, 2022).

Conversely, there are perspectives that support the implementation of complaint-based offenses as a means of respecting individual autonomy. From this viewpoint, victims are recognized as legal subjects who possess the right to determine the course of legal action. The state should not impose legal proceedings against the wishes of the victim, especially in cases involving private matters. This approach aligns with human rights principles that place the individual at the center of legal protection (Kila et al., 2023).

The ongoing debate surrounding complaint-based offenses in morality crimes reflects a tension between two fundamental interests: the protection of victims and the state's responsibility to enforce the law. While the state has an obligation to safeguard its citizens from criminal acts, it must also uphold individual rights, including the right to privacy and personal autonomy. Achieving a balance between these competing interests is therefore essential to ensure a fair and effective legal system (Adinda et al., 2024).

From a practical standpoint, the implementation of complaint-based offenses also encounters technical and legal challenges. One key issue concerns the determination of who is entitled to file a complaint. The new KUHP provides specific limitations, such as spouses, parents, or children in certain cases. However, these restrictions may create difficulties when victims lack support from these parties. Additionally, issues related to the time limits for filing complaints and the possibility of withdrawing them may further complicate the law enforcement process (Anggraini et al., 2025).

Moreover, the effectiveness of this mechanism depends heavily on the preparedness and professionalism of law enforcement officials in handling morality-related cases with sensitivity. An approach that fails to consider the victim's perspective may lead to secondary victimization. Therefore, enhancing the capacity of law enforcement personnel and establishing clear procedural guidelines are crucial steps in addressing such cases (Amir, 2024).

Beyond legal considerations, social and cultural factors also play a significant role in determining the success of complaint-based offenses. In societies where stigma against victims of morality crimes remains strong, this mechanism may prove ineffective. Consequently, public education and shifts in societal attitudes are necessary to create a more supportive environment for victims seeking justice (Amrullah, 2020).

In light of the above discussion, the regulation of complaint-based offenses in morality-related crimes can be understood as a complex and multidimensional policy. It involves not only legal aspects but also social, cultural, and psychological dimensions. Accordingly, a comprehensive analysis is required to fully understand its implications, particularly in relation to victim protection.

This study aims to analyze the concept of complaint-based offenses in morality-related crimes under the new Indonesian Criminal Code and to examine their implications for victim protection. By employing normative and conceptual approaches, this research is expected to contribute to the development of criminal law in Indonesia, particularly in fostering a legal system that is more just, responsive, and oriented toward the protection of victims.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study adopts a normative legal research approach, which focuses on examining legal norms as embodied in statutory regulations, judicial decisions, and relevant legal doctrines. This method is selected because the research object centers on the concept of complaint-based offenses in morality-related crimes as regulated under the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP), as well as their implications for victim protection. Accordingly, the study does not rely on empirical field data but instead emphasizes the analysis of applicable legal norms (Soekanto, 2007). The research employs both statutory and conceptual approaches. The statutory approach involves a thorough review of legal provisions governing morality-related offenses and complaint-based crimes within the KUHP, along with other relevant regulations. Meanwhile, the conceptual approach is used to explore and understand legal doctrines and theoretical frameworks, particularly those related to complaint-based offenses, victim protection, and human rights within the context of criminal law.

The sources of legal materials in this research are categorized into primary, secondary, and tertiary materials. Primary legal materials consist of statutory regulations, especially Law Number 1 of 2023 concerning the Criminal Code. Secondary materials include academic books, national legal journals, previous research findings, and scholarly opinions relevant to the topic. Tertiary materials comprise legal dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference sources that assist in clarifying legal terminology used in the study.

The collection of legal materials is conducted through a literature review, involving the identification, classification, and organization of relevant sources related to complaint-based offenses and morality-related crimes. In addition to conventional literature, digital resources such as electronic journals and legal databases are utilized to obtain up-to-date and reliable information.

The analysis of legal materials is carried out qualitatively through legal interpretation methods. The study applies grammatical, systematic, and teleological interpretations to understand the meaning and purpose of legal norms within the KUHP. Grammatical interpretation is used to analyze the linguistic meaning of legal provisions, systematic interpretation examines the relationship between different legal norms, and teleological interpretation seeks to uncover the objectives underlying the formation of those norms. The findings are then presented in a descriptive-analytical manner to provide a comprehensive understanding of the implications of complaint-based offenses for victim protection.

Finally, this research employs a deductive method in drawing conclusions, moving from general principles to more specific findings. Through this approach, the study aims to formulate logical and structured conclusions based on the analysis of legal norms and concepts, thereby contributing to the development of legal scholarship, particularly in the fields of criminal law and victim protection.

DISCUSSION

The Concept of Complaint-Based Offenses in the Indonesian Criminal Code

Complaint-based offenses under the Indonesian Criminal Code (KUHP) represent a legal mechanism that limits the authority of the state in initiating criminal prosecution. Unlike ordinary offenses, which may be processed without the victim's consent, complaint-based offenses require a prior report from the injured party or another legally authorized individual. This requirement reflects a recognition of individual interests, particularly in cases involving private and sensitive matters.

From the standpoint of modern criminal law, complaint-based offenses are no longer viewed merely as procedural requirements but also as instruments for safeguarding human rights. The role of the state is no longer absolute in determining whether a criminal process should proceed; instead, the preferences and interests of the victim must be taken into account. This development indicates a shift in legal paradigm from a state-centered approach toward a victim-oriented approach where victims are granted greater autonomy in deciding whether legal action should be pursued (Sutran & Anggraeny, 2025).

The new KUHP expands the scope of complaint-based offenses, particularly in relation to morality-related crimes such as adultery and cohabitation. Under the previous Criminal Code inherited from the Dutch colonial system, the regulation of such offenses was relatively limited and did not fully reflect the evolving social values of Indonesian society. The current reform can therefore be understood as an effort by legislators to align criminal law with contemporary social realities and moral standards (Anggara, 2024).

This expansion also illustrates the state's cautious approach in regulating conduct within the private sphere. In cases such as adultery and cohabitation, legal proceedings cannot be initiated without a complaint from an affected party, such as a spouse or certain family members. This demonstrates the intention to avoid excessive intrusion into personal life while still allowing legal recourse when a party experiences direct harm.

However, broadening the scope of complaint-based offenses also raises several legal and practical challenges. One of the primary concerns is the potential ambiguity regarding who is entitled to file a complaint. Although the KUHP specifies certain parties typically those with familial or legal ties to the victim these limitations may lead to uncertainty in practice, especially in cases involving complex or non-traditional social relationships (Saputra, 2026).

Another issue relates to the circumstances under which a complaint may be considered valid. Questions arise, for instance, when a victim is under pressure or lacks the freedom to make independent decisions. In such situations, the effectiveness of complaint-based mechanisms may be undermined if adequate safeguards are not in place to protect victims from external influence that could affect their willingness to report the offense.

In addition, there is a risk of misuse of the complaint mechanism, either by victims or by other interested parties. Complaints may be employed as a tool to exert control or pressure, particularly in personal relationships such as marriage or intimate partnerships. This suggests that, despite its intention to protect individual interests, the absence of clear regulation and proper oversight could lead to new forms of injustice.

The concept of complaint-based offenses is also closely linked to the principle of *ultimum remedium* in criminal law, which holds that criminal sanctions should serve as a last resort. By classifying certain acts as complaint-based offenses, the state implicitly encourages the resolution of disputes through non-penal means, such as mediation or familial settlement. This approach is often considered more appropriate for matters that are primarily private and do not significantly affect public interests.

Nevertheless, applying the principle of *ultimum remedium* in the context of morality-related crimes requires careful consideration. Not all such cases are suitable for non-penal resolution, particularly those involving elements of violence, coercion, or unequal power relations. Therefore, clear boundaries are necessary to ensure that complaint-based offenses are not used as a justification to evade criminal liability in cases that warrant formal legal proceedings.

Complaint-Based Offenses in Morality-Related Crimes

Morality-related crimes constitute a category of criminal offenses that are closely tied to ethical standards, social norms, and notions of decency within a given society. A defining feature of these offenses is their strong dependence on social and cultural contexts, making their regulation inherently dynamic rather than fixed. In the Indonesian legal framework, the provisions on morality-related crimes in the new Criminal Code (KUHP) reflect an effort to strike a balance between safeguarding societal moral values and respecting individual rights.

Under the KUHP, certain morality-related acts such as adultery and cohabitation are classified as complaint-based offenses. This classification is based on the consideration that such conduct primarily falls within the private sphere, particularly in relation to personal relationships, family life, and domestic affairs. Consequently, the state does not automatically intervene unless a complaint is submitted by a directly affected party, such as a spouse, parent, or another individual with a legally recognized relationship to the parties involved (Kusuma et al., 2023).

This approach illustrates a shift in criminal law policy, where the state is no longer positioned as the sole authority in initiating legal proceedings. Instead, victims or aggrieved parties are given an active role in determining whether a case should proceed. This aligns with the broader principles of individual autonomy and the protection of privacy, both of which are fundamental elements in contemporary legal systems.

Furthermore, the designation of certain morality-related offenses as complaint-based aims to minimize the potential negative consequences of public legal proceedings. In societies where moral values are strongly upheld, the exposure of such cases may lead to social stigma and psychological distress for victims and their families. By requiring a complaint before legal action is taken, the law seeks to provide a layer of protection, ensuring that victims are not further harmed by the legal process itself (Pratama et al., 2018).

However, not all morality-related crimes fall under the category of complaint-based offenses. The KUHP continues to treat certain acts such as rape and sexual assault as ordinary offenses. This distinction is grounded in the severity of the conduct and its broader impact. Crimes like rape represent serious violations of bodily integrity, human dignity, and fundamental human rights. Therefore, the state retains the authority to prosecute such offenses without requiring a prior complaint.

The differentiation between complaint-based and ordinary offenses within morality-related crimes reflects a hierarchy of protected interests in criminal law. Complaint-based offenses generally concern personal and individual interests, whereas ordinary offenses involve broader societal concerns, including public order and the protection of fundamental values. This distinction demonstrates that criminal law functions not only as a punitive mechanism but also as a system that seeks proportionality in its application.

Despite these considerations, the implementation of complaint-based offenses in morality-related crimes presents several challenges. One significant issue is the possibility that victims may choose not to file a complaint, even when they have suffered harm or rights violations. This reluctance may stem from feelings of shame, family pressure, economic dependence, or fear of social repercussions. In such circumstances, the complaint-based mechanism may hinder law enforcement and reduce the effectiveness of victim protection.

In addition, the boundary between complaint-based and ordinary offenses can become blurred in certain situations, particularly when an act involves both private elements and broader social implications. For example, openly practiced cohabitation may generate public concern or social unrest, raising questions as to whether it should remain classified as a complaint-based offense or be treated as an ordinary offense. This highlights the need for careful and consistent legal interpretation to avoid uncertainty in the application of the law.

Ultimately, the effectiveness of complaint-based regulations in morality-related crimes depends heavily on the readiness of the legal system to provide comprehensive protection for victims. This includes access to legal assistance, psychological support, and safe, accessible reporting mechanisms. Without such support systems in place, victims may be discouraged from filing complaints, thereby undermining the intended purpose of complaint-based offenses within the criminal justice framework.

The Implications of Complaint-Based Offenses for Victim Protection

From a conceptual standpoint, the application of complaint-based offenses in morality-related crimes is often viewed as a mechanism that enhances victim protection, particularly by granting victims control over the initiation of legal proceedings. Within this framework, victims are no longer treated merely as passive participants in the criminal justice system but are recognized as legal subjects with the autonomy to decide whether a case should be pursued. This enables them to weigh various considerations such as psychological readiness, social consequences, and personal interests before filing a complaint. Such an approach is consistent with human rights principles that emphasize respect for individual dignity and privacy (Kurniawatie, 2026).

In addition, complaint-based mechanisms may help reduce the adverse effects associated with public criminal proceedings. Cases involving morality-related offenses often attract public attention, which can exacerbate the victim's psychological distress and social vulnerability. By requiring a formal complaint as a prerequisite for prosecution, victims are given the opportunity to avoid unwanted exposure, thereby protecting their reputation and that of their families. This is particularly relevant in societies where strong stigma is attached to victims of such offenses.

However, in practice, the implementation of complaint-based offenses can also give rise to significant challenges that may undermine victim protection. One of the primary concerns is the low rate of reporting. Many victims choose not to file complaints despite having experienced harm or violations of their rights. This reluctance is often influenced by factors such as social pressure, feelings of shame, negative societal stigma, and fear of potential repercussions. In this context, the complaint-based requirement may actually act as a barrier to accessing justice.

The situation becomes even more complex when victims are involved in unequal power relationships with perpetrators. In many morality-related cases, offenders hold dominant positions economically, socially, or psychologically. For instance, within domestic relationships or workplace environments, victims may be dependent on the perpetrator, making it difficult for them to act independently. This dependency can discourage victims from pursuing legal action, even in cases involving serious violations. It highlights that the assumption of full victim autonomy does not always reflect real-life circumstances.

Moreover, the application of complaint-based offenses may lead to revictimization, where victims experience further harm as a result of the legal process itself. This can manifest in various ways, including insensitive questioning during investigations, lack of empathy from law enforcement officials, and complex or unfriendly legal procedures. In morality-related cases, victims are often required to repeatedly recount their traumatic experiences, which can intensify their psychological suffering (Suryaningrat, 2025).

The complaint mechanism also opens the possibility of external interference or pressure aimed at persuading victims to withdraw or refrain from filing complaints. In certain situations, victims may be compelled to settle disputes informally or retract their reports in order to preserve family reputation or avoid social conflict. Such conditions indicate that the existence of complaint-based offenses does not automatically ensure victim protection, particularly in the absence of strong and effective support systems.

On the other hand, there is also a risk that complaint-based provisions may be misused for personal or strategic purposes, such as in domestic disputes or interpersonal conflicts. Complaints may be employed as tools of coercion or intimidation, potentially leading to abuse of the legal system. This demonstrates that the mechanism carries both protective and problematic dimensions that must be carefully managed to prevent new forms of injustice.

Therefore, the effectiveness of complaint-based offenses in safeguarding victims largely depends on the availability of a comprehensive legal support system. This includes access to legal assistance, psychological support, and protective services that enable victims to make decisions freely and without coercion. Furthermore, law enforcement officials must adopt a victim-oriented approach, ensuring that morality-related cases are handled with sensitivity, professionalism, and respect for the rights and well-being of victims.

Challenges and Future Prospects of Regulating Complaint-Based Offenses

The regulation of complaint-based offenses in Indonesia's National Criminal Code faces a range of challenges, both at the normative and practical levels. From a normative perspective, one of the primary issues lies in the lack of clarity and the potential for multiple interpretations within certain provisions governing complaint-based offenses. This is particularly evident in aspects such as determining who is legally entitled to file a complaint, the time limits for submitting such complaints, and the procedures for withdrawing them. Ambiguities in these areas can create legal uncertainty and may hinder effective law enforcement. In practice, differing interpretations among law enforcement officials can lead to inconsistent application of the law, ultimately disadvantaging victims as well as other parties involved.

From an implementation standpoint, the challenges are equally significant. Indonesia's criminal justice system continues to face limitations in terms of human resources, infrastructure, and case-handling approaches. In cases involving morality-related offenses, law enforcement personnel often lack a sufficiently victim-sensitive perspective. This can be observed in practices such as insensitive questioning during investigations, complicated procedural requirements, and inadequate attention to the psychological well-being of victims. As a result, victims may become reluctant to file complaints, thereby reducing the effectiveness of the complaint-based mechanism (Rahmathoni et al., 2025).

Social and cultural factors also contribute to the complexity of implementing complaint-based offenses. In communities where values of modesty and family honor are strongly upheld, victims of morality-related crimes frequently face negative stigma. Reporting such incidents may be perceived as bringing shame upon the family, placing victims in a difficult position between seeking justice and preserving social reputation. Under these circumstances, the existence of complaint-based offenses may reinforce victims' reluctance to report the crimes they have experienced.

Another issue arises from the tension between protecting individual privacy and safeguarding broader public interests in maintaining social morality. In certain cases, actions categorized as complaint-based offenses may not only affect specific individuals but also generate public concern. However, due to their classification, authorities are unable to take action without a formal complaint from an eligible party. This raises important questions regarding the extent to which the state should intervene in matters that contain both private and public dimensions.

Furthermore, limiting the right to file complaints to specific parties can create concerns related to fairness and justice. In situations where victims lack the ability, access, or support to submit a complaint, perpetrators may evade legal accountability. This reveals a potential gap within the legal framework that can be exploited to avoid prosecution. Consequently, there is a need to consider alternative mechanisms or exceptions in certain circumstances, particularly when victims are under pressure or are unable to make independent decisions.

Despite these challenges, the regulation of complaint-based offenses also offers promising prospects if implemented effectively. One key advantage is the potential development of a more humane criminal justice system that respects individual rights. By allowing victims to determine whether legal proceedings should be initiated, the system becomes more responsive to their needs and interests, rather than focusing solely on punishing offenders. To realize this potential, it is essential to strengthen the regulatory framework through the development of clear and comprehensive technical guidelines. These guidelines should outline procedures for filing complaints, mechanisms for victim protection, and standards for handling cases from a victim-centered perspective. Additionally, harmonization between the National Criminal Code and other relevant legislation such as laws on witness and victim protection is necessary to ensure consistency and effectiveness.

Improving the capacity of law enforcement officials is another crucial step. Training programs should emphasize a victim-oriented approach, enabling officers to understand victims' circumstances holistically, including their legal, psychological, and social dimensions. This would ensure that the justice process is not only focused on evidentiary matters but also on victim recovery and well-being.

Moreover, strengthening support systems for victims is essential. This can be achieved through both government institutions and civil society organizations that provide legal assistance, psychological counseling, and access to relevant information. Such support is vital in empowering victims to make informed decisions regarding the filing of complaints. Without these mechanisms, the benefits of complaint-based offenses may not be fully realized.

Finally, increasing public awareness through legal education and shifting social attitudes is equally important. Society must be encouraged to develop a better understanding of victims' rights and the importance of reporting criminal acts. By reducing stigma and fostering a more supportive social environment, these efforts can contribute to a more effective and just implementation of complaint-based offenses in the future.

CONCLUSION

The incorporation of complaint-based offenses within morality-related crimes under Indonesia's National Criminal Code represents a significant step in criminal law reform, aimed at balancing individual rights with the state's authority to enforce the law. By classifying certain offenses as complaint-based, the legal system allows victims to decide whether a case should proceed, thereby reflecting a more progressive approach that prioritizes personal privacy, dignity, and individual autonomy.

Nevertheless, in practice, this mechanism does not guarantee effective protection for victims. A range of factors such as social pressure, stigma, unequal power dynamics, and limited access to legal assistance often hinder victims from filing complaints. These barriers can weaken law enforcement efforts and create opportunities for offenders to evade criminal responsibility. Additionally, the risk of revictimization during legal proceedings remains a serious concern that must be addressed.

From both normative and practical perspectives, the regulation of complaint-based offenses also encounters notable challenges. These include ambiguities within legal provisions that may lead to multiple interpretations, as well as the insufficient preparedness of law enforcement institutions to handle morality-related cases using a victim-centered approach. Furthermore, the tension between protecting private interests and addressing broader public concerns continues to raise complex legal questions that require careful and proportional resolution.

For these reasons, it is essential to strengthen the regulatory framework through clearer legal provisions, enhance the capacity and sensitivity of law enforcement officials, and develop a comprehensive victim protection system grounded in a victim-oriented approach. With these improvements, the regulation of complaint-based offenses in the National Criminal Code is expected to function more effectively not only in safeguarding individual rights but also in ensuring fair and meaningful legal protection for victims of morality-related crimes.

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