

Borobudur Law and Society Journal
ISSN: 2809-9664
Vol. 5 No. 3 (2026)
pp: 40-48
DOI: https://doi.org/10.31603/16063

Uncovering Narcotics Trafficking in the Sleman Police Jurisdiction: Investigative Strategy and Its Legal Limits

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Abstract

Narcotics trafficking networks in Indonesia increasingly operate through closed and technology-based channels, which makes the investigative strategy of district police units decisive for whether cases are uncovered at all. This study examines how the Sleman Police (Polresta Sleman) uncover narcotics trafficking, which factors support or hinder that work, and what legal limits apply to the techniques used. It is normative-empirical legal research that combines analysis of the Narcotics Law, the Police Law, the 2023 Criminal Code and the 2025 Code of Criminal Procedure with interviews with officers of the Sleman Police Narcotics Unit. Cases are uncovered mainly through repressive measures: intelligence gathering, undercover buying, network development, arrest and investigation, supported by information from the community. Outreach and patrols are preventive and do not themselves uncover offences. Read through Soekanto's factors of law enforcement, success rests on officers' competence, coordination and community participation, while limited facilities, a wide jurisdiction and increasingly closed methods of offenders hinder it. Because the study reports no case data, effectiveness cannot be measured. The thin regulation of undercover buying, which requires a written order from a superior, and the duty to channel addicts to rehabilitation set the main legal limits. The study recommends documented authorisation of undercover operations, outcome indicators and a structured channel for community information.

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Keywords

Police; Narcotics; Investigation; Undercover; Rehabilitation; Sleman

Introduction

Narcotics trafficking is an organised crime that keeps changing its methods and threatens security and public order. Networks increasingly use technology and closed distribution systems, so that a case is seldom uncovered by chance; it is uncovered because investigators gather information, enter the network and follow it upward. The police are the first institution to deal with such offences: the Police Law charges them with maintaining security and public order, enforcing the law and protecting and serving the community,[1] and the Narcotics Law gives police and National Narcotics Agency investigators special powers for narcotics cases.[2]

Sleman is a useful setting in which to examine those powers. It is a regency with a large population of students from outside the region. The Sleman office of the National Narcotics Agency reported that its clinic rehabilitated sixty people in 2023, about forty per cent of them university students, that the drugs most often misused by students were pills, crystal methamphetamine, cannabis and synthetic tobacco, and that most of these cases had been uncovered in cooperation with the Sleman Police and the Yogyakarta Regional Police.[3] Those figures concern rehabilitation, not trafficking, but they show that the cases reaching the system in Sleman depend heavily on police disclosure.

The legal framework is as follows. The Narcotics Law authorises investigators, among other things, to intercept communications after there is sufficient preliminary evidence and to use the techniques of undercover buying and controlled delivery,[4] and it requires that those two techniques be carried out on the written order of a superior.[5] Since 2 January 2026 the substantive offences have changed: several offence provisions of the Narcotics Law have been replaced by the narcotics offences of the 2023 Criminal Code,[6] as adjusted by the law on the adjustment of criminal penalties,[7] while the investigative powers in the Narcotics Law remain. The 2025 Code of Criminal Procedure, in force on the same date, also recognises undercover buying and controlled delivery as investigative methods and governs arrest, detention and the role of counsel.[8] A strategy for uncovering

[1] Law No 2 of 2002 on the Indonesian National Police (Indonesia), art 13.
[2] Law No 35 of 2009 on Narcotics (Indonesia), art 75.
[3] "Klinik Sembada Bersinar merehabilitasi puluhan mahasiswa pecandu narkoba", *ANTARA News Yogyakarta* (17 December 2023), online: <https://jogja.antaranews.com/berita/652245/klinik-sembada-bersinar-merehabilitasi-puluhan-mahasiswa-pecandu-narkoba>.
[4] Law No 35 of 2009, *supra* note 2, arts 75(i)–(j).
[5] *Ibid*, art 79.
[6] Law No 1 of 2023 on the Criminal Code (Indonesia), arts 609–611.
[7] Law No 1 of 2026 on Penyesuaian Pidana [Adjustment of Criminal Penalties] (Indonesia).
[8] Law No 20 of 2025 on the Code of Criminal Procedure (Indonesia).

trafficking must therefore be judged both by what it achieves and by whether it stays within these rules.

Earlier studies have described police strategy against narcotics at the level of individual units. A study of the Tapung Hilir Police Sector in Riau found that the unit used pre-emptive, preventive and repressive strategies,[9] and a juridical-sociological study of the North Bolaang Mongondow Police assessed how effectively the investigation of narcotics offenders was carried out under the Narcotics Law.[10] Normative studies, for their part, have found that the rules on undercover buying are thin and leave investigators exposed when the evidence is tested,[11] and that controlled delivery is legitimate but needs strict supervision and complete records.[12] The two lines of work have seldom been joined. Unit-level studies list strategies without testing them against the legal limits of the techniques; normative studies examine the limits without asking how a district unit actually works. This article joins the two for the Sleman Police and asks three questions: (1) how do the Sleman Police uncover narcotics trafficking cases; (2) which factors support and hinder that work; and (3) what legal limits, including human-rights safeguards, apply to the techniques used? Its purpose is to identify what the unit's strategy needs in order to be both effective and lawful.

Research Method

This is normative-empirical legal research, combining the study of legal norms with empirical material from the field.[13] The normative part uses a statutory approach: the Narcotics Law and the Police Law, read with the 2023 Criminal Code, the 2025 Code of Criminal Procedure and the regulations of the Chief of Police on human rights and the use of force. The empirical part consists of interviews with officers of the Sleman Police Narcotics Unit who are directly involved in handling trafficking cases. Secondary materials are textbooks, journal articles and published reports. The material was analysed qualitatively: the practices described by the officers were grouped into types of strategy, the supporting and inhibiting factors were arranged according to Soekanto's factors of law enforcement, and each technique was tested

[9] Errik Kurnia & Syahrul Akmal Latif, "Strategi Polsek Tapung Hilir dalam Penyelidikan Kasus Pengedaran Narkotika" *Jurnal Sisi Lain Realita*, online: <https://journal.uir.ac.id/index.php/sisilainrealita/article/view/18518>.

[10] Ismail R Nani, Sri Astutik & Vieta Imelda Cornelis, "Proses Penyidikan terhadap Pelaku Tindak Pidana Narkotika di Kepolisian Resort Bolaang Mongondow Utara" (2025) 6:1 *Lex Journal: Kajian Hukum dan Keadilan* 297, DOI: <10.25139/lex.v6i1.10359>.

[11] Asari Suci Maharani & Supardi, "Reinforcing the Legal Basis of Undercover Buy as an Investigative Method in Criminal Procedure" (2025) 14:1 *Legitimasi: Jurnal Hukum Pidana dan Politik Hukum* 59, DOI: <10.22373/legitimasi.v14i1.30053>.

[12] Ajrina Fradella & Ahmad Syaufi, "Penyerahan Narkotika dalam Pengawasan yang Dilakukan oleh Penyidik BNN" (2025) 9:2 *Jurnal Ilmiah Muqoddimah: Jurnal Ilmu Sosial, Politik, dan Humaniora* 1164, DOI: <10.31604/jim.v9i2.2025.1164-1172>.

[13] Basri, *Meneliti dalam Ilmu Hukum* (Yogyakarta: Eureka Media Aksara, 2025).

against the provisions that authorise and limit it. The interviews describe the unit's practice as its officers see it; no case files or case statistics were analysed, and no confidential operational details are reported. The findings therefore describe strategy and its legal conditions, not measured outcomes.

Results and Discussion

Police Strategy against Narcotics Trafficking at the Sleman Police

The Sleman Police use both preventive and repressive strategies, but only the second uncovers offences. The preventive strategy consists of legal outreach to the community, especially to students and other vulnerable groups, and routine patrols in areas considered prone to trafficking. These measures aim to reduce demand and build legal awareness; they may also generate information, but they do not themselves uncover cases. Cases are uncovered through the repressive strategy carried out by the Narcotics Unit: intelligence information is used to map networks, undercover buying is used to identify sellers, and each arrest is developed further to reach the wider distribution network. Information from the community and cooperation with related agencies support each step. Table 1 summarises the strategies and their function.

Table 1. Police strategy against narcotics trafficking at the Sleman Police

Type of strategy	Form of implementation	Function
Preventive	Legal outreach on the danger of narcotics to the community and students	Reduces demand; does not uncover cases
Preventive	Routine patrols and monitoring of areas prone to trafficking	Deters; may yield information
Repressive	Investigation and collection of intelligence information	Maps networks and patterns of trafficking
Repressive	Undercover buying	Identifies sellers; requires a written order
Repressive	Case (network) development	Reaches the wider network above the first arrest
Repressive	Arrest and investigation of suspects	Brings the case to the prosecutor
Supporting	Cooperation with the community and related agencies	Supplies initial information

Source: interviews with officers of the Sleman Police Narcotics Unit, compiled by the authors.

Whether this strategy is effective cannot be stated on the present evidence. Effectiveness requires an indicator: the number of cases and suspects in a stated period, the share of cases that began with undercover buys, community reports or other leads, the share that reached suppliers above street level, and the share that ended in conviction. The officers described network development as the step that makes the difference, because it uncovers not only the person arrested but also the

distribution chain above him; the claim is plausible, but without case data it is the unit's own assessment, not a finding of this study.

Each repressive technique also has a legal basis and a limit. Undercover buying and controlled delivery are authorised by the Narcotics Law,[14] but only on the written order of a superior,[15] and the Law says little more. Normative research concludes that the rules are thin and incomplete, which leaves investigators facing difficulties in producing evidence that holds up under criminal procedure.[16] A study of court decisions found that the techniques are often used but that the courts almost never examine whether the superior's written order was complete.[17] The limit that matters most is the line between an undercover buy and entrapment. An undercover officer may offer to buy from a person who is already dealing; he may not induce a person to commit an offence that he would not otherwise have committed. Evidence obtained in the second way is open to challenge, and the written order, recording who was targeted and on what information, is the main safeguard that the operation stayed on the right side of the line.

Controlled delivery, by which a consignment is allowed to move under supervision so that its recipients can be identified, is authorised by the same provision. Research on its use by National Narcotics Agency investigators concludes that it is legitimate but needs strict supervision and complete administrative records.[18] The Sleman officers interviewed did not report using it, and it is therefore not assessed here.

Supporting and Inhibiting Factors

Soekanto identifies five factors that determine law enforcement: the law itself, the law enforcers, the facilities, the community and the culture.[19] Arranged in that frame, the officers' accounts show where the unit is strong and where it is weak. Among the enforcers, the competence and experience of officers and good coordination among units support the work. In the community, participation in giving information is important for obtaining accurate initial leads. Facilities and infrastructure are limited, and the wide jurisdiction of the Sleman Police stretches them further. Offenders' methods keep developing and become more closed, which reduces the value of conventional surveillance. Table 2 sets out the factors.

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[14] Law No 35 of 2009, *supra* note 2, art 75(j).
[15] *Ibid*, art 79.
[16] Maharani & Supardi, *supra* note 11.
[17] Miko Susanto Ginting, *Buah yang Baik dari Pohon yang Baik: Menyoal Beberapa Teknik Investigasi dan Kewenangan Penangkapan dalam Kasus Narkotika* (Jakarta: Institute for Criminal Justice Reform, 2022).
[18] Fradella & Syaufi, *supra* note 12.
[19] Soerjono Soekanto, *Faktor-Faktor yang Mempengaruhi Penegakan Hukum* (Jakarta: Rajawali Press, 1983).

Table 2. Supporting and inhibiting factors at the Sleman Police, by Soekanto's factors

Factor	Finding	Effect
Law	Special techniques authorised, but procedure thinly regulated	Legal risk in evidence
Law enforcers	Officers' competence and experience; coordination among units	Supporting
Facilities	Limited facilities and infrastructure; wide jurisdiction	Inhibiting
Community	Community provides information for initial leads	Supporting
Culture	Offenders' methods increasingly closed	Inhibiting

Source: compiled by the authors from the interviews and the statutory analysis.

Two points follow. First, the factor of the law is usually omitted from unit-level accounts, yet it is the one the unit controls least: the thin regulation of undercover buying means that the legality of a case may depend on internal paperwork. Second, community participation is treated as a supporting factor, but the Narcotics Law treats it as a right and a role of the community,[20] which implies a duty on the police to protect those who report. A structured and protected channel for information would turn an informal strength into a reliable one.

Implementation and Human Rights

The officers describe the strategy as carried out according to law, from investigation to the handover of the case to the prosecutor. Legality matters as much as results, because the repressive techniques touch fundamental rights. The Constitution provides that "the right to life, the right not to be tortured, the right to freedom of thought and conscience, the right to religion, the right not to be enslaved, the right to be recognised as a person before the law and the right not to be prosecuted under a retroactive law are human rights that cannot be reduced under any circumstances".[21] In narcotics policing the right not to be tortured and the right to life are the ones most directly at stake, but the everyday safeguards are more specific.

Four safeguards stand out. First, arrest in narcotics cases may last longer than under the general rules, which makes the limits on arrest and the suspect's access to counsel during that period important; the 2025 Code of Criminal Procedure strengthens counsel's role in examination.[22] Second, the police must apply human-rights standards in all their duties, including the prohibition of torture and coercion in examination,[23] and force in arrest must be necessary and proportionate, with firearms a last resort.[24] Third, addicts and victims of narcotics abuse must undergo

[20] Law No 35 of 2009, *supra* note 2, arts 104–106.
[21] Constitution of the Republic of Indonesia 1945, art 28I(1).
[22] Law No 20 of 2025, *supra* note 8.
[23] Regulation of the Chief of the Indonesian National Police No 8 of 2009 on the Implementation of Human Rights Principles and Standards in the Performance of Police Duties (Indonesia).
[24] Regulation of the Chief of the Indonesian National Police No 1 of 2009 on the Use of Force in Police Action (Indonesia).

medical and social rehabilitation, and a court deciding the case of a user must take that duty into account,[25] so a strategy that counts users as trafficking cases misdirects its effort and their treatment. Fourth, supervision exists inside and outside the police: internal supervision, pretrial review by the court and the National Police Commission. The interviews did not address these safeguards in detail, which is itself a finding: the unit's account of lawful practice rests on procedure, not on documented controls.

Comparison with Earlier Research

The Sleman findings confirm the pattern found in Tapung Hilir, where the police also combined pre-emptive, preventive and repressive measures,[26] and the focus on the investigation process found in North Bolaang Mongondow.[27] They differ in two respects. First, this study separates the measures that uncover cases from those that prevent them; treating outreach and patrols as means of disclosure, as unit-level studies tend to do, overstates what prevention achieves. Second, it tests the repressive techniques against their legal limits. Here the findings agree with normative research: the rules on undercover buying are thin,[28] and the written order of a superior, the main safeguard, is seldom examined in court.[29] A district unit that relies on undercover buying therefore carries a legal risk that unit-level studies have not recorded.

Conclusion

The Sleman Police uncover narcotics trafficking mainly through repressive measures: intelligence gathering, undercover buying, network development, arrest and investigation, supported by information from the community. Outreach and patrols are preventive; they reduce demand and may produce leads, but they do not uncover offences. Read through Soekanto's factors, success rests on officers' competence and coordination and on community participation, while limited facilities, a wide jurisdiction and increasingly closed methods of offenders hinder it; the law itself is a further weakness, because undercover buying is authorised but thinly regulated. The main legal limits are the written order of a superior for undercover techniques, the line between an undercover buy and entrapment, the duty to channel addicts to rehabilitation and the rules on arrest, counsel and the use

[25] Law No 35 of 2009, *supra* note 2, arts 54, 103, 127.
[26] Kurnia & Latif, *supra* note 9.
[27] Nani, Astutik & Cornelis, *supra* note 10.
[28] Maharani & Supardi, *supra* note 11.
[29] Ginting, *supra* note 17.

of force. Three steps are recommended: a documented authorisation and review of every undercover operation, recording its target and basis; outcome indicators reported each year, including the share of cases that reach suppliers and that end in conviction; and a structured, protected channel for community information. The study has clear limits: it rests on interviews with officers of one unit, without the views of suspects, defence counsel, prosecutors or community organisations, and without case data, so it cannot measure effectiveness. Research using case files and annual statistics is needed to do so.

Ethics and Data Availability

The interviews were conducted with police officers in their professional capacity, who took part voluntarily after being told the purpose of the research. They are not named and are referred to by role only, no personal data of suspects or other persons were collected, and no confidential operational information is reported. The statutory and published materials used are publicly available.

Use of Generative AI

Generative AI was used only to improve the language of this article (grammar, clarity and style). The authors reviewed the output and are responsible for the content of the article.

Funding and Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest. This research received no external funding.

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