

The Contribution of Psychological Assessment to the Investigation of Perpetrators' Motives in the Indonesian Criminal Justice System

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Abstrak

Artikel ini bertujuan menganalisis kontribusi asesmen psikologis terhadap penelusuran motif pelaku kejahatan dalam peradilan pidana Indonesia. Artikel ini menerapkan metode studi kepustakaan dengan menghimpun dan mengkaji sumber bahan dari buku, artikel jurnal, dan literatur ilmiah yang berkaitan dengan kontribusi asesmen psikologis. Hasil kajian menunjukkan bahwa asesmen psikologis melalui instrumen seperti Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Rorschach Comprehensive System (RCS), Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2), Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-IV (WAIS-IV), Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS), serta alat ukur risiko seperti Historical Clinical Risk Management-20 Version 3 (HCR-20 V3) dan Sexual Violence Risk-20 (SVR-20) mampu mengidentifikasi motif laten, menilai kondisi kognitif, memetakan kecenderungan kepribadian, dan menentukan kapasitas pertanggungjawaban pelaku. Asesmen ini memberikan kontribusi yang krusial dalam memperjelas unsur *mens rea*, menilai imputabilitas, dan memprediksi potensi residivisme. Dengan demikian, integrasi asesmen psikologis dalam proses peradilan pidana dapat memperkuat akurasi pembuktian, menghadirkan pemahaman lebih dalam mengenai perilaku kejahatan, dan mendukung putusan yang lebih proporsional serta berbasis bukti ilmiah.

Kata Kunci: Asesmen Psikologis, Motif Pelaku, Psikologi Forensik

Abstract

This article aims to analyze the contribution of psychological assessment to the investigation of criminal motives in Indonesian criminal courts. This article applies a literature study method by collecting and reviewing sources from books, journal articles, and scientific literature related to the contribution of psychological assessment. The results of the study show that psychological assessment through instruments such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Rorschach Comprehensive System (RCS), Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2), Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-IV (WAIS-IV), Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS), and risk measurement tools such as Historical Clinical Risk Management-20 Version 3 (HCR-20 V3) and Sexual Violence Risk-20 (SVR-20) can identify latent motives, assess cognitive conditions, map personality tendencies, and determine the perpetrator's capacity for accountability. These assessments make a crucial contribution to clarifying the element of *mens rea*, assessing imputability, and predicting the potential for recidivism. Thus, the integration of psychological assessments into the criminal justice process can strengthen the accuracy of evidence, provide a deeper understanding of criminal behavior, and support more proportionate and scientifically based decisions.

Key Words: Psychological Assessment, Perpetrator's Motive, Forensic Psychology

A. Introduction

In recent years, the development of modern criminal justice systems has shown that law enforcement can no longer be separated from a multidisciplinary scientific approach, particularly forensic psychology. In the Indonesian context, the need to understand the motives of criminals has become increasingly relevant as the justice system faces increasingly complex crimes, ranging from interpersonal violence and sexual crimes to organized crime. At this point, psychological assessment becomes an important tool for uncovering the internal dynamics of perpetrators, including their motives, personality traits, emotional vulnerabilities, and risk factors for aggression or other destructive behaviors. A deep understanding of the perpetrator's motives not only serves to determine criminal responsibility but also forms the basis for a more accurate, humane, and evidence-based law enforcement process (Andarek, 2025).

Psychological assessment plays a significant role because motives cannot always be directly observed through the perpetrator's confession or witness testimony. In some cases, perpetrators hide, manipulate, or are even unaware of their own motives due to psychological defense mechanisms, personality disorders, or cognitive distortions. Forensic psychology provides methodological tools such as structured clinical interviews, personality tests, cognitive function measurements, and behavioral analysis that can reveal motives more accurately (Pambudhi, 2024). This type of assessment is important because motive is one of the key elements in proving various criminal acts that require identification of the perpetrator's *mens rea* or mental state.

In Indonesia, the need for psychological assessments is becoming increasingly apparent as cases involving complex psychological factors rise, such as sexual violence, child custody, filicide, child abuse, an individual's cognitive capacity to understand events, perpetrator responsibility, premeditated murder, and intimate partner violence (Arini, 2022). Many studies show that perpetrators of violence do not act impulsively, but are influenced by certain personality structures such as narcissism, antisocial behavior, borderline personality disorder, or paranoia, which shape their mindset and motivation. Without psychological assessment, these internal dimensions are often overlooked and can potentially lead to inaccurate legal conclusions. In other words, psychological assessment helps the judicial system understand perpetrators as human beings with complex motivations, rather than simply as subjects who have committed unlawful acts.

In addition to identifying motives, psychological assessments serve to determine whether the perpetrator has the mental capacity to be held responsible for the crime committed. Many international studies confirm that certain mental disorders can affect the perpetrator's ability to control their behavior or understand the consequences of their actions. In this context, psychological assessments not only reveal why the perpetrator acted, but also whether they did

so in a state of full mental capacity. This is important in determining criminal responsibility and intervention recommendations, such as psychological rehabilitation for perpetrators with certain disorders (Prasetyo et al., 2024).

In Indonesian judicial practice, psychological assessments have begun to be used, although not as universally as medical examinations in cases of physical violence. Psychological assessments are most often used in cases of sexual violence, cases involving children in conflict with the law, and murder cases that require clarification of the perpetrator's mental state (Arini, 2022). However, its use still needs to be expanded. This is because various studies show that psychological assessments can increase the validity of investigations, clarify the construction of criminal acts, and help judges understand the motives and risk of recidivism of perpetrators. Thus, the existence of psychological assessments supports a more comprehensive and objective judicial process.

In the modern era, a science-based evidentiary approach has become the standard of justice in various countries. Indonesia cannot ignore this need. Reliance on conventional evidence alone is often insufficient to reveal the psychological dimensions that determine the perpetrator's motives. Therefore, integrating psychological assessments into the investigation, prosecution, and sentencing processes is a crucial step toward a more accurate, accountable, and responsive criminal justice system that keeps pace with scientific developments. By combining legal and psychological perspectives, law enforcement can achieve a more comprehensive understanding of criminal behavior, while providing proportional justice for perpetrators and victims (Darma & Nikijuluw, 2019).

B. Methodology

This article applies a literature study method by compiling and reviewing sources from books, journal articles, and scientific literature related to the contribution of psychological assessment. The approach applied in this article focuses on literature analysis to provide answers regarding the contribution of psychological assessment to the investigation of criminal motives in the Indonesian criminal justice system.

C. Results and Discussion

Psychological assessments in the field of forensic psychology can make a fundamental, multidimensional, and transformative contribution to the investigation of the motives of perpetrators of criminal acts in court. This approach systematically transforms the internal motivations of perpetrators, which are often vague, subjective, and undetectable by conventional methods, into empirical data that can be tested, is reliable, and can be verified legally. This means that psychological assessments not only enrich the evidence of *mens rea* (intent or *dolus*), but also provide a holistic basis for judges to determine proportional, restorative, and substantively just punishments (Sumampouw & Nuqul, 2024).

The Concept of Motive in Criminal Law Doctrine

The motive of a perpetrator of a criminal act is precisely defined as an inner drive, psychological impulse, and internal factor that triggers the commission of a criminal act, which is clearly distinguished from the purpose (the result that is consciously and deliberately desired by the perpetrator). According to Black's Law Dictionary, motive can be defined as the reason or impulse that causes a person to act—that is, an idea, belief, or emotion that directs a person's mind to act in accordance with their inner state and emotions. It can be understood that motive is a term used to explain the reason behind a person's actions when committing a crime. In criminal law, motive is related to the internal drive in the perpetrator's inner attitude that gives rise to a crime. Thus, when assessing a criminal act, the aspects that need to be explored first are the perpetrator's intent and motive. Intent allows for the determination of whether the perpetrator acted intentionally or not, while motive explains the underlying reasons behind the act (Anzhalna, 2023).

In Indonesian criminal law doctrine, motive is not categorized as a material element of a crime that must be proven absolutely, as explained in Article 184 of the Criminal Procedure Code (KUHP). Instead, motive serves as crucial supporting evidence or an aid in proving the elements of intent (*dolus eventualis*, *dolus directus*, and *dolus indirectus*), negligence (*culpa lata* and *culpa levis*), and assessing the level of criminal responsibility or imputability of the

perpetrator. Theoretically and categorically, the perpetrator's motive can be classified into four main overlapping groups, namely:

- a) *Rational economic motives*—motives that stem from the desire to obtain material gain, greed, or financial interests. These motives are often found in crimes such as corruption, fraud, and theft.
- b) *Affective emotional motive*—a motive that arises from unstable emotional conditions, such as pathological jealousy, personal grudges, ego-related resentment, or outbursts of anger. This motive is often found in cases of domestic violence.
- c) *Pathological motives*—these are motives that stem from disturbed psychological conditions, including delusions, high impulsivity, or mental disorders such as psychosis, severe mood disorders, and antisocial personality disorders. These motives indicate clinical aspects that influence the perpetrator's behavior.
- d) *Socio-cultural motives*—these are motives influenced by social norms and pressures, such as group cultures that support deviant behavior, peer pressure, and patriarchal cultural constructs that normalize violent practices. These motives emphasize the importance of social context in understanding the perpetrator's actions.

From a criminological perspective, the perpetrator's motive is a crucial component that is often overlooked in dogmatic criminal law analysis. Although the perpetrator's motive does not determine whether or not a person can be convicted because the aspect of fault is determined through the elements of intent or negligence as subjective elements, the motive still plays an important role in revealing the psychological state of the perpetrator, explaining the background of the crime, and becoming one of the considerations for judges in imposing criminal sanctions. This is emphasized by criminologists who stress that understanding motive is an essential step in assessing criminal responsibility—especially when the crime is related to sexual urges, revenge, jealousy, or other psychopathological factors (Chandra & Rahaditya, 2025).

Then, from a criminological perspective, there are also various motives that drive perpetrators to commit crimes. Some criminologists even categorize crimes based on the motives behind the perpetrator's behavior, as stated by Bonger, who divides crimes into four main categories, namely:

- a) *Economic crimes*—such as theft, robbery, and fraud.
- b) *Sexual crimes*—such as rape and deviant sexual behavior.
- c) *Violent crimes*—such as abuse, assault, and murder.
- d) *Political crimes*—such as treason.

Furthermore, from a criminological perspective, every criminal act is always based on a motive, because there is always a specific reason that drives the perpetrator to commit a crime. However, if we look at the articles in the Criminal Code or the elements of offenses in criminal law, not all provisions include motive as part of the elements of an offense. Only a few articles explicitly include motive as an element to be proven (Bolon, 2019).

The Contribution of Forensic Psychological Assessment to Investigating the Motives of Criminals

In the practice of criminal law enforcement, the investigation and examination process depends not only on the accuracy of finding physical evidence, but also on an adequate understanding of the psychological aspects of the perpetrator (Asa, 2023). This is even more relevant in cases of sexual violence, where the psychological impact on victims is far more serious than physical damage (Putri et al., 2024). Forensic psychology is a discipline that connects legal science and human behavior. Forensic psychological assessment is an interdisciplinary application of clinical psychology, criminology, and criminal law specifically designed for the judicial system (Novilla & Yusuf, 2025). This field examines psychological aspects in a legal context—including the mental state of perpetrators, victims, and witnesses and its relation to criminal liability. The role of forensic psychology becomes increasingly crucial when the process of proving a case requires scientific explanations regarding the perpetrator's motives, intentions, and moral responsibility that cannot be explained through a normative legal approach alone (Kafi, 2025).

In practice, forensic psychology plays a role in four main stages of the law enforcement process. *First*, at the prevention stage, psychologists contribute by educating and socializing law enforcement officials on strategies for preventing criminal behavior. *Second*, at the investigation stage, psychologists assist officials in investigating and understanding the motives behind the perpetrator's actions. *Third*, at the sentencing stage, psychologists provide analysis of the

perpetrator's psychological condition so that law enforcement officials can determine a form of punishment that is proportional to the characteristics of the crime. *Fourth*, at the imprisonment stage, psychologists play a role in providing assistance and psychological intervention to prisoners while they are serving their sentences in correctional institutions (Sopyani & Edwina, 2021).

Forensic psychology plays an important role in assessing the mental condition of perpetrators of criminal acts, because psychological aspects are often an important element in proving the intent and motive of the perpetrator. For example, in premeditated murder, the perpetrator has generally thought carefully and thoroughly about the steps to be taken before committing the crime. In this case, the psychological assessment conducted by a forensic psychologist aims to determine whether the perpetrator of the crime has a mental disorder or is capable of taking responsibility for their actions. This evaluation is significant because it helps law enforcement officials determine whether the perpetrator was sane or insane when committing the crime, which in turn influences the assessment and legal decision in court (Sudrajat & Yusuf, 2024).

Then, forensic psychologists conduct a series of assessments to evaluate the mental state of the perpetrator, including in-depth interviews, the use of psychological instruments, and behavioral observation. One of the main focuses of this assessment is to analyze whether the perpetrator has a psychological disorder—such as a personality or psychotic disorder—that could affect their capacity to consciously plan and commit a crime. For example, individuals with antisocial personality disorder may show a tendency to plan murders without empathy or adequate moral consideration, which could be part of their motive for the act. Through comprehensive psychological analysis, forensic psychologists are able to objectively describe and explain the perpetrator's mental condition and assess whether the crime was premeditated or influenced by a mental disorder that could potentially reduce their level of criminal responsibility (Sudrajat & Yusuf, 2024).

The most transformative contribution of psychological assessment is its ability to uncover latent (hidden) motives behind manifest (surface) motives. For example, what perpetrators claim to be “simple revenge” is often a projection of childhood trauma (trauma reenactment), a defense mechanism of displacing aggression, or compensation for an inferiority complex. Projective tests such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT) can elicit ambiguous narratives that project unconscious conflicts and produce recurring themes such as “weak victims who must be controlled” or “revenge against childhood authority figures.” In cases of child sexual abuse, assessments consistently identify complex predatory motives—a combination of hypersexual tendencies with antisocial personality disorder or diagnostic pedophilia. TAT results often show dominant stories of domination over weak children, while MMPI-2 elevations on scale 4 (psychopathic deviate/Pd) and scale 6 (paranoia/Pa) are then confirmed by Rorschach with high sexuality indices and distorted perceptions.

Table 1. Contribution of Psychological Assessment

Primary Function	Psychometric Instruments	Parameters Assessed	Theoretical Applications	Judicial Implications
Revelation of Latent Motives	Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Rorschach Comprehensive System (RCS), Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2)	Hidden intrapsychic dynamics, psychological defense mechanisms, distortions of reality perception	Detection of predatory motives, analysis of manipulation patterns, reconstruction of trauma causality	Strengthening evidence of intent (<i>dolus directus</i>), Article 184 paragraph (1) letter f of the Criminal Procedure Code
Accountability Assessment	Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-IV (WAIS-IV), Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS), Structured Interview of Reported	Cognitive and executive capacity, reality testing integrity, detection of simulated mental disorders	Assessment of legal capacity, verification of awareness of actions, differentiation between primary and secondary delusions	Rejection of insanity defense, determination of full imputability, Article 44 of Criminal Code No. 1 of 2023

Risk Assessment of Recidivism	Symptoms-2nd Edition (SIRS-2) Historical Clinical Risk Management-20 Version 3 (HCR-20), Sexual Violence Risk-20 (SVR-20), Static-99 Revised	Static and dynamic risk factors, public protection, predictions, multidimensional scoring	Repetitive behavior profiling, assessment of protective factors, evaluation of the post-criminal environment	Determination of proportional punishment, isolation vs rehabilitation, Article 12 of Criminal Code No. 1 of 2023
Victim-Perpetrator Analysis	Clinician Administered PTSD Scale for DSM-5 (CAPS-5), Impact of Event Scale-Revised (IES-R), Victim-Offender Mediation (VOM)	Psychological impact on victims, causality of motive-action, victim-perpetrator linkage	Quantification of complex trauma, evaluation of aggravating factors, restorative justice assessment	Aggravated punishment based on psychological impact, psychological restitution for victims, Article 6 of Law No. 12 of 2022

Source: Data processed by the author (2026)

Looking at the table above, it shows the important role of psychological assessment in the criminal justice system, including the disclosure of latent motives, evaluation of imputability, assessment of the risk of recidivism, and victim-perpetrator analysis. In the disclosure of latent motives, instruments such as TAT, Rorschach, and MMPI-2 are used to explore the intrapsychic dynamics, defense mechanisms, and distortions of the perpetrator's perception of reality. This enables the detection of hidden motives, patterns of manipulation, and the reconstruction of the causality of criminal acts, thereby strengthening the evidence of the perpetrator's intent in accordance with Article 184 paragraph (1) letter f of the Criminal Procedure Code. Imputability assessment evaluates the perpetrator's legal capacity using the WAIS-IV, PANSS, and SIRS-2, which emphasize cognitive ability, reality integrity, and detection of simulated mental disorders. The results form the basis for determining the perpetrator's awareness and legal responsibility, influencing the determination of full imputability or rejection of insanity defense in accordance with Article 44 of Criminal Code No. 1 of 2023.

Risk assessment for recidivism using HCR-20, SVR-20, and Static-99 Revised to identify static and dynamic risk factors and repeat behavior profiles. This information helps determine proportional punishment, as well as decisions on isolation or rehabilitation, as stipulated in Article 12 of Criminal Code No. 1 of 2023. Furthermore, victim-offender analysis using CAPS-5, IES-R, and VOM enables the evaluation of the psychological impact on victims, the connection between the offender's motives and actions, and the assessment of restorative justice programs. The results can be used as a basis for aggravated punishment, psychological restitution for victims, and considerations in legal proceedings in accordance with Article 6 of Law No. 12 of 2022. Overall, the table above shows that psychological assessment functions as a scientific instrument that strengthens the judicial process, not only explaining the facts of criminal acts but also understanding motives, legal capacity, recidivism risk, and psychological impact. The integration of psychometric instruments with the legal framework enables law enforcement officials to make more accurate, fair, and evidence-based decisions.

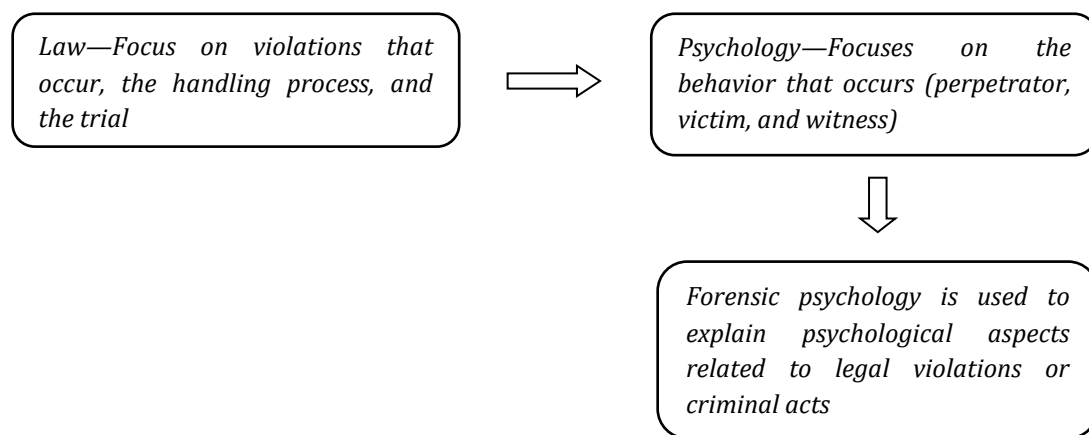
However, the scope of forensic psychology is limited by four fundamental constructs that serve as conceptual indicators in establishing the parameters and analytical domains of this discipline. The following is its scope (Pertwi et al., 2023):

- a) Identify various possibilities that encourage someone to think about or intend to commit a crime.
- b) Providing support in the investigation process to obtain clarity regarding the motive or profile of the perpetrator of the crime.
- c) Providing guidance to individuals who are serving sentences or facing legal proceedings.
- d) Assisting in the rehabilitation of parties who have experienced trauma as a result of their involvement in legal proceedings.

Forensic psychology plays a role in exploring in-depth answers to various issues that may lead a person to consider committing a crime. Professionals in this field are divided into two groups, namely forensic psychology scientists and forensic psychology practitioners. In this case, forensic psychology scientists are responsible for conducting research on human behavior in the legal process, while forensic practitioners provide professional services related to legal

issues. The implementation of clinical psychology tasks in a forensic context is generally based on requests from law enforcement officials in compiling criminal profiles of the motives of perpetrators of crime (Pertiwi et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Integration of Law, Psychology, and Forensics



Source: Pertiwi et al. (2023)

In conducting assessments, psychological evaluations, diagnosis, consultations, therapy, and various forms of intervention in a legal context—such as evaluations of perpetrators or victims of crime, providing expert witness testimony, assessing child custody competency, assessment programs, consulting services and therapy in correctional institutions—only psychologists are permitted to perform these tasks. In performing these duties, a psychologist must adhere to applicable psychological examination standards and follow the provisions of the professional code of ethics, particularly those related to psychological assessment and intervention (Himpunan Psikologi Indonesia, 2010).

When reviewing certain cases, forensic psychology plays an important role in determining whether the perpetrator had the intention to commit the crime from the outset or whether their actions were influenced by external pressures or certain mental disorders. It is not uncommon for perpetrators of premeditated crimes to be in a psychological state that makes them feel threatened or consider the act to be the only solution to the situation they are facing. For example, individuals with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) may be driven to commit premeditated murder due to constant fear or anxiety. In such contexts, psychological assessments play an important role in explaining the connection between the perpetrator's mental state and their actions (Sudrajat & Yusuf, 2024).

Furthermore, forensic psychology also plays a role in assessing the extent to which the perpetrator has the mental capacity to file a defense based on mental disorder or inability to understand the consequences of their actions. In this case, forensic psychologists assist law enforcement officials in determining whether the perpetrator should be held criminally responsible or meets the criteria for using defenses such as mental incapacity in the judicial process. This assessment plays an important role because it directly influences the direction of legal decisions, including whether the perpetrator should be treated as a fully responsible individual or requires more intensive psychiatric intervention and treatment (Sudrajat & Yusuf, 2024).

Thus, the involvement of forensic psychological assessment in examining the mental state of perpetrators of premeditated crimes is of great significance. The evaluation conducted by forensic psychologists provides an additional layer of evidence that can influence the direction of the trial, both in the context of defense strategy and in the process of proving the perpetrator's intent and planning. Therefore, a comprehensive psychological analysis of the perpetrator's mental state has the potential to strengthen the achievement of justice in criminal trials, provide a deeper understanding of the perpetrator's motives and behavior patterns, and ensure that the resulting legal decisions are accurate and based on valid evidence (Sudrajat & Yusuf, 2024).

D. Conclusion

Psychological assessment plays an important role in investigating the motives of criminals in Indonesian criminal courts because it can reveal internal dynamics that cannot be explained

by conventional evidence. Instruments such as the Thematic Apperception Test (TAT), Rorschach Comprehensive System (RCS), Minnesota Multiphasic Personality Inventory-2 (MMPI-2), Wechsler Adult Intelligence Scale-IV (WAIS-IV), Positive and Negative Syndrome Scale (PANSS), and risk assessment tools such as the Historical Clinical Risk Management-20 Version 3 (HCR-20 V3) and Sexual Violence Risk-20 (SVR-20) can identify latent motives, assess cognitive conditions, map personality tendencies, and determine the perpetrator's capacity for accountability. These assessments make a crucial contribution to clarifying the element of *mens rea*, assessing imputability, and predicting the potential for recidivism. Thus, the integration of psychological assessments into the criminal justice process can strengthen the accuracy of evidence, provide a deeper understanding of criminal behavior, and support more proportionate and scientifically based decisions.

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