



Tough Life after Prison: An Analysis of 19 Former Prisoners in Malaysia

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Abstract

Undeniably, some former prisoners have succeeded in reintegrating themselves back into society and have also ceased any further criminal activities. However, this journey is difficult for former prisoners, particularly when their families do not welcome their return or when they fail to secure a steady job. This study was conducted to understand the challenges and obstacles faced by former prisoners during reintegration process using protective factor as an indicator. A qualitative approach was adopted in this study, whereby 19 former prisoners were interviewed to enhance the understanding of this issue. Based on the findings obtained, it was revealed that only three respondents met the characteristics of a person who had successfully desisted from committing a crime. This finding proved that desistance from crime among former prisoners is challenging. Thus, the criminal justice system in Malaysia towards the reintegration of former prisoners should be improved accordingly to prevent any failure or potential issue for the betterment of former prisoners. The recommendation of this study is to introduce a community-based post-release program as a social intervention in Malaysia criminal justice system. The limitation of this study is in the discussion done only from the perspective of former prisoners. There is a need to conduct studies from the perspective of social workers, counsellors and volunteers in the NGOs involved in helping former prisoners throughout the process of reintegration.

Keywords: Desistance, Recidivism, Former Prisoner, Reintegration, Risk Factor, The Protective Factor

Introduction

Desistance from crime can be defined as restraining oneself from committing or carrying out any wrongdoing and unlawful act (Laub & Sampson, 2003). The act of desistance happens when former prisoners cease from committing any wrongdoing act, whereby they stop any form of unlawful action or activity (Maruna, 2001). Laub & Sampson (2001) also further describe desistance from crime involves former prisoners withdraw from getting involved in any criminal activity or abstain from displaying any form of criminal behaviour. Every former prisoner hopes to reintegrate successfully into the community. However, all former prisoners are set to face various challenges and obstacles once they leave prison to join society again. There are, sadly, only a few who managed to reintegrate successfully into the community (Pager, 2003). One of the most profound challenges facing societies today is the reintegration of so many prisoners (Maruna, 2011; Petersilia, 2003). Former prisoners usually share two or more of demographic profile features such as; no place to go, unemployed, family refusal, drug addiction and living in a discriminatory area.

The Malaysian Prison Department (2019) have documented 13, 896 former prisoners being sentenced again to imprisonment by the end of December 2018 (Table 1). This finding provides substantial argument on the continuous cycle of offenders repeating their unlawful acts during the reintegration process. It can be ascertained that this high number of recidivism proves the incapability among former prisoners to reintegrate into society. Nonetheless, it can also be argued that society itself is unable to accept and acknowledge the presence of former prisoners.

**Table 1** Number of Prisoners with Repeated Crimes, 2014–2019

Year	Free after 3 years	Prisoners of Repeated Crimes	
	Number of Prisoners	Number of Prisoners	Percentage (%)
2014	94,495	7,619	8.06
2015	102,214	8,897	8.70
2016	110,683	9,875	8.92
2017	124,567	11,520	9.25
2018	134,690	13,896	10.32

Source: Malaysian Prison Department (2019)

This study will discuss on factors that contribute to desistance from crime among former prisoners, which lead to reasons for them to reintegrate into society. In Malaysia, there is still limited information concerning repeated criminal activities, which further highlights the efforts of this study to understand the challenges and obstacles faced by former prisoners during the reintegration process. Data obtained from interviews with these former prisoners as respondents in this study were anticipated to be of significance as reference or support for future studies.

Literature Study

Recidivism and desistance of crime are two different social phenomena although both are involved in the process of reintegrating former prisoners into people's lives. The existence of both phenomena is determined by a group of risk and protective factors in the social environment of ex-convicts, which can either be a driving factor or a deterrent factor for them to re-engage in criminal activity or vice versa. Risk factors are factors that influence ex-prisoners to re-engage in risky lives. On the other hand, protective factors are a set of inhibiting factors that protect the ex-prisoners from being influenced to re-engage in criminal activities. The focus of this discussion is on protective factors to explain how former prisoners can be able to avoid crime.

Protective Factors that Assist Former Prisoners in Avoiding Crime

In this study, crime desistance is referred to as the process of avoiding oneself from committing or being involved in criminal activities. Apart from the risk factors that influence former prisoners to recommit crime, crime desistance has become one of the most debated topics amongst researchers in criminology due to the various factors that could protect and prevent former prisoners from repeating criminal activities (Farrall, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Among the many objectives in criminology, desistance is found to be associated with the protective and preventive factors in terms of the methods and reasons by former prisoners in being able to restrain themselves from recommitting a crime.

Two distinct factors that can influence desistance in crime are the external factors, which involve exterior impacts in an individual's life, and internal factors; effects that are from within an individual self (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009). Similar to the risk factors of recidivism which are varied in nature, the desistance factors also have multiple variants in nature, mainly in discussing reasons for a former prisoner to manage oneself from getting involved in criminal activities. This study had identified protective factors as follows:

1. External Factors
2. Internal Factors

External Factors

Several external factors that can prevent former prisoners from getting involved in crime again are: –

1. Lawful Employment, Economic Incentives and Fixed Earning

Stable employment is an essential reason that can impact the desistance of crime among former prisoners (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009). It is considered vital during the reintegration process for former prisoners to secure and sustain a job because it can lower the risk of getting involved with criminal offences again. This argument is further supported by findings that showed unemployment is found to be a significant factor that can increase the risks and tendencies for former prisoners to repeat a crime (Morenoff & Harding, 2011). Three main aspects that link crime desistance and employment are earning from employment; the social contract provided at work, and the limited time to commit the crime (Berg & Huebner, 2011).

2. Family Acceptance, Marriage and Marital Responsibilities

Experts in the correctional field have revealed that family relationships are fundamentally crucial in helping former prisoners, regardless of whether they are in prison or after their release (Bersani & Doherty, 2013). The bond in a family relationship proves to be the core basis that can assist former prisoners; acting as an informal social regulator within a social institution. It is further argued that former prisoners who have deep social ties with their families possess greater tendency to stop committing a crime; in contrast to those who, unfortunately, lack any form of social relations with their family. Davis, Bahr, & Ward (2013) have insisted that support from family and friends, as well as rehabilitation or treatment centres, are crucial for a successful reintegration by any former prisoner. Warr (1998) finds marriage to also be one of the critical aspects of crime desistance because of the changes in terms of routine and lifestyle by married individuals in carrying on life with a partner. Most married individuals will be worried to take any risk when it comes to committing a crime or displaying criminal behaviour.

3. Influence from the Residential Area, Surrounding Community and Peers

Most of the former prisoners who are released into the society after serving their term will find themselves trapped within the destructive nature of their surroundings, which includes poverty, discrimination from the community and negative peer influence. Therefore, former prisoners who return to these types of surroundings will face imminent challenges that could hinder their reintegration process into society (Pager, 2003). As a result, they may succumb to anti-social activities within the community that could be the trigger for former prisoners to recommit crimes as they felt a sense of alienation from the society (Pager, 2003), which can cause them to feel unwelcomed.

Internal Factors

In recent years, the study of crime desistance has focused mainly on the prisoners' background (Sampson & Laub, 2003). This focus has been linked to answering one of the essential elements of crime desistance, which is the individual roles within each former prisoner (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009). Criminologists have sought to explain the process of crime desistance within inner selves of all law offenders, including former prisoners which led to significant findings as follows: – Firstly, it has been proven in various studies that maturity and age can undoubtedly affect the lives of former prisoners. As such, the increase in age of a former prisoner can lead to the extent of maturity and the tendency to restrain themselves from recommitting a crime (Sampson & Laub, 2003; Maruna, 2001). Secondly, having a sense of hope and motivation within the former prisoners are essential in the process of crime desistance. These attitudes are found to be developed in oneself by taking pride in earning a



lawful income, achieving life-goals that match their identity, social acceptance within the society and discovery of a meaningful life. (Serin & Lloyd, 2009)

Methodology

This qualitative study involved former prisoners, which consisted of the recidivists and individuals who were desistance to crime. A non-governmental organisation (NGO) at Chow Kit Road, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, known as IKHLAS was determined in this study, whereby this organisation operated as a drop-in centre for newly released former prisoners, drug addicts and sex workers. IKHLAS is an organisation funded with clean needles from the Ministry of Health. Basically, IKHLAS provides clean needles to its clients (drug users). This situation resulted in IKHLAS having many clients with the inclusion criteria required by this study. In addition, the president of IKHLAS was very open and wanted to help in the completion of this study. This has made this study to select IKHLAS as a collaborator. The study was carried out in 2018 using a phenomenological approach that incorporated the perceptions of the respondents of this study, which was to explore the lives and experiences of these former prisoners. In this study, 19 respondents (16 recidivists and three people who were desistance from crime) were selected via the snowball-sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the subjects of the study lead to the identification of other subjects from their acquaintances as well. Therefore, the respondents of the study can be said to be more like a moving snowball. This sampling technique was utilised due to the population of respondents that is hidden and difficult for the researcher to access. Through snowball sampling, a small group of respondents with a preliminary information network had introduced the researcher with respondents who met the selected criteria and potentially contributed to the overall study. In this study, the researcher was able to identify the first group of respondents who were clients at IKHLAS. This group was approached at around Chow Kit Road and asked if they were interested in participating in this study. The first respondent agreed to be interviewed knowing the research objectives to be derived from this interview. This snowball sampling method was continuously carried out until 19 respondents were acquired. This snowball sampling is best used when a list of subject names is not available, especially in cases involving sensitive matters or unauthorised by certain parties.

The selection process for the respondents was primarily based on the achieved saturation point during the data sampling process. Each respondent's name was kept as a secret and replaced with a pseudonym to keep their identity private. This is important as it is a sensitive study involving high-risk respondents to be labelled negatively by society. The interview was done by using recorder audio. All conversations from the recordings were later transcribed in verbatim by using Microsoft Word software before inserting these transcribed scripts through Atlas.ti software for coding purposes. The Atlas.ti software allowed the researcher to be exposed and to analyse complex phenomena using non-structured data such as the transcripts systematically. Data were analysed using thematic analysis. Through this method of analysis, the data and codes were analysed to identify common themes – topics, ideas and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly.

Findings, Analyses and Discussion

This study involved 19 respondents, consisted of 17 males and two females with a total of 16 respondents who were repeat offenders. The repeat offenders consisted of 15 males and two females. Whereas three of the desisters were males. All interviewed former prisoners came from various states and aged between 36 to 63 years



old. Moreover, with regards to drug addiction, 12 respondents were still on drug addiction, five managed to quit themselves from taking drug again, whereas two respondents have never taken any drugs previously. Majority of respondents have offences related to theft and several numbers of **drug related crimes** including manufacturing, trafficking and selling.

In comparison to the respondents who had abstained from committing a crime, it was discovered that the respondents who were repeat offenders were more willing to participate in the interview. This finding was due to the former group of respondents refusing to reveal their past. All repeat offenders had families who had neglected them, had a poor educational background, lived in a community that was not conducive nor beneficial for their reintegration process, as well as experienced a low social support system. The other three respondents had a family background that was able to accept them, were employed, and had good health. The external factors and internal factors contribute to the findings of this study were discussed thoroughly in two parts. Unemployment among former prisoners, rejection from the family institution, failure in getting married, residential discriminatory as well as negative peer influence were the five external factors found in this study. The internal factors discussed were the maturity level and motivation within the former prisoners.

The presence of external and internal factors is very important during the reintegration process of former prisoners to ensure that they have a good chance of not repeating their crimes. Both have the same relationship where good external factors will produce good internal factors. As well as the internal factor of a person, it will make the external factor to become very good. In addition, the identification of protective factors arising in the life of a former inmate who successfully managed to avoid crime is important. Protective factors are agents that work to reduce or prevent the occurrence of various social behaviour problems among former inmates throughout the process of reintegration with the general community. It was found from this study that the majority of former prisoners (17) were among the recidivist. Non-existent protective factors such as having a job, family acceptance, stigma-free life and a high degree of inner motivation have pressured many former inmates from successfully avoid crime. The idea of this study is in identifying more protective factors that could give ex-prisoners a better chance of reintegration. The reality is that the presence of protective factors is not an easy thing to find. This was evident when only three people (desisters) were able to enjoy the protective factors throughout their life. These factors apply to all former prisoners. Those who are repeated will be referred to as recidivists, whereas those who are able to stop from crime will be referred to as desisters.

External Factors

1. Unemployment and Life Challenges

Most former prisoners were unemployed or had experienced employment, which was irregular, once. This situation had led them to face enormous challenges in seeking other prospective jobs as there was also fierce competition in the employment market among job seekers. As a result, these problems gradually forced the unemployed former inmates to return to commit a crime and be imprisoned after breaking the law, yet again.

The findings from these factors could, therefore, be grouped into two primary forms, which were personal factors within former prisoners themselves and the factors from employers. The study has ascertained three elements arising from the first group of factors which are:

- 1) Criminal record;
- 2) Low education background and limited vocational skills; and



3) Low self-esteem

Imprisonment has indeed made it is complicated for former prisoners to obtain job opportunities. Leaving the prison, unfortunately, would not end their hardships but instead, entailed them throughout their lives, due to their criminal record. Among the statements identified from the verbatim transcripts by the respondents from this study is illustrated as follows:

‘When we applied for work, for example; jobs involving shop, the owner of the shop will ask for our identity card (IC) and will check our record, whether we have a record of being imprisoned or not.’

(Syafiq / Desister)

Apart from that, having a limited educational background and proper skills made it difficult for them to obtain fixed earnings. Employers usually prefer to hire individuals who had a better education and do not possess any criminal records.

‘I once had the thought to seek for a job, but then I realised; what kind of job could I get? Even if I worked in a shop, the employer would surely check my education level and when he knows that I had been involved with drugs, then who will ever believe me again?’

(Suhaila / Recidivist)

However, in some cases, the failure to secure a job among former prisoners may not be the main reason in the unsuccessful reintegration process into society. Muiz, in his statement, mentioned that he was able to reintegrate after being released (acceptance from wife and family), but had experienced failure in getting re-employed and being frustrated in life as found below:

‘The employer wanted someone who has no criminal record, and this kind of employer has never thought whether someone having a bad record would want to turn over a new leaf or not. Hence, such a typical situation usually breaks the motivation of our kind (former prisoners).’

(Muiz / Desister)

The negative perception of employers was found to be one of the most challenging obstacles for former prisoners to be re-employed. The companies may not want to bear such liability which can subsequently tarnish the image of these companies. Interview sessions with the three respondents who managed to avoid repeating their past mistakes participated actively in IKHLAS. One of the respondents, Rizal, had opted to be unemployed but served as a volunteer to assist homeless former prisoners around Kuala Lumpur. His past mistakes had steered him to contribute his services via social work in supporting newly released former convicts, such as attaining access to health treatment and handling drug abuse problems.

2. Rejection by Family and Difficulties in Getting Married

A family unit has a critical role to play in influencing the capabilities for former prisoners to comply with the rules, to restrain themselves from participating in any criminal activities, as well as to be a responsible member of a community. Within this context of family, this study had documented the opposite manner of its function when handling the reintegration process of former prisoners. The researcher learned that most respondents were rejected or not accepted by their family members as soon as they were released from prison. The researcher had further identified five interconnected causes which led to the actual reason for the family institution to be unable to accept their family members who were former prisoners. These five causes are as follows:



1. Family members gave mockery or negative calls towards former prisoners;
2. The accusation of family members towards respondents;
3. Distrust of family members towards the former prisoner;
4. Feeling of discouragement by family members towards the attitude of respondents who often return to committing crimes and getting arrested again; and
5. Diseases suffered by former prisoners as well as their drug dependency, which further deteriorated their relationship ties with their family

Respondents from this study stated that they were offended by the attitude of most of their family members who viewed them negatively. For example, Lufti admitted that he could not accept the insults that his family members had hurled towards him.

'I can hear all the insults from my family members, behind my back, 'He has nothing else to do, and he will keep on taking drugs repeatedly'. I can't accept that.'

(Lufti / Recidivist)

The most hurtful behaviour that led to the frustration by respondents was when family members hid valuables, such as jewellery, bags, and wallets from them, fearful that these former prisoners would steal from them. As a result of this attitude, two respondents, Lufti and Siva revealed that they prefer to stay away from their family members, rather than constantly being accused of theft. The following statements taken from the verbatim transcript are as follows:

'My family will continue to accuse me, while I am free from prison. I don't do the things they often accuse me. For example, my sister's jewellery went missing while the mortgage is there. They didn't look for it yet accused me of stealing it.'

(Lufti / Recidivist)

'Sometimes when I go back to my hometown, they say what I know, like I used to be a bad guy, often steal shoes and bicycles. These kinds of assumptions often come about because of what I used to do. I want to quit. But this kind of thing makes me sad.'

(Siva / Recidivist)

Meanwhile, based on the interview on the marital status among the respondents in this study, it was discovered that not all respondents were able to end their single life. Diseases suffered by the respondents, particularly HIV and AIDS, were the main impediments for them to have a partner and get married. Siva, Suhaimi, Latif, Ramli, and Zahid fear and worry about getting into serious relationships which would result in marriage because of the HIV disease that they were suffering in. Most of them decided to live a single life. According to them:

'We know and realise that we have HIV disease. Hence, who would ever want to be married to us? Even our partner will be scared if they know that we have such a disease.'

(Siva / Recidivist)

'Because I know that I am sick. Therefore, I choose not to find a partner or even to get married.'

(Suhaimi / Recidivist)

It was found in this study that the decision to lead single lives by former prisoners was also associated with their attitude that they were incapable of bearing any marital commitments due to their current conditions. Most of



those involved in this study stated that they had to face difficulties even to support themselves, which made them question their ability to supporting others? part from the inability to support and live with others, the respondents also stated that their dependency on drugs had led them to stay unmarried. For example, Rahimah mentioned that drug addiction had caused her to avoid any acceptance of relationship in her life. Likewise, Razak had similar reasons as well. Due to his severe addiction to drugs, he was forced to avoid marriage. Meanwhile, Naim mentioned that it would be a challenge for him to take on the responsibility as the head of the family because of his unsolved issue in unemployment and drug addiction. These former prisoners wanted to get married, but realised and were aware that they are unsuitable to be married. They would not be able to commit themselves to the marital responsibilities that would naturally emerge from the union. Hence, they were not willing to care for the welfare of other people. Unwilling to give a commitment in marriage and believe that being single is a better way to lead their lives. They have nobody to think or take care of.

Nonetheless, this study only recorded four respondents who were married, with two of them being repeat offenders while the other two managed to abstain from committing a crime. On the other hand, from the three respondents who had stopped themselves from being involved in criminal activities, only one person remained single. This finding may be caused by the context where getting married or maintaining a marital institution would not be easy for former prisoners. Results, as discussed, showed most of the respondents were not married as they had issues in self-commitment, unemployment, drug addiction, as well as having infectious diseases. Under this sub-theme of a marriage relationship, this study would like to highlight the three interconnected reasons to prove that having a significant partner and marriage can guide the former prisoners to cease from crime.

The three (3) reasons are as follows:

1. The constant support of the wife;
2. Marriage can create a feeling of responsibility; and
3. The presence of a partner can ease the burden of life.

Muiz, for instance, believed that the unwavering support from his wife had strengthened his motivation to change and succeed in life. As a husband and a father, he also realised that he needed to think carefully before doing anything that can affect his wife and children. The following excerpt was taken from Muiz's verbatim.

'My wife is always there for me; supporting me. Our kind of people will always need continuous support, particularly moral support. I am one who is easier to be exposed to dangerous and risky activities. Till this day, I have always realised that I am exposed to many dangerous activities, and I know that I am not strong. I am easily stuck with drugs and other criminal activities.'

(Muiz / Desister)

All three respondents in this study who were married had described that they had the advantage of their wives working and having stable financial resources (Bersani, Laub, & Nieuwbeerta, 2009). Syafiq, for instance, said because his wife was working, he would not be overwhelmed with financial problems. His wife would often give him money and assisted him in starting a business to get himself back on the right path, which subsequently, allowed him to reintegrate successfully. Syafiq said:



'My wife has a permanent job, therefore, has fixed earning. As what people will say; the financial burden is not an issue. My wife does give me money to buy things, and for it, I have never felt scarcity. My wife hopes for me to change and to no longer be involved in my past activities (referred to as criminal activities previously done).'

(Syafiq / Desister)

3. Discrimination from the Surrounding Communities and Negative Peer Influence

The success of former prisoners to be reintegrated into the community depended on the acceptance from their neighbourhood. This study had summarised the data into three situations by respondents who were repeat offenders living within the community, which were

1. Being boycotted or getting rejected by neighbours;
2. Neighbours refused to accept the presence of former prisoners as well as support their businesses;
3. Former prisoners were labelled with various embarrassing or insulting names;
4. The negative influence of friends led to a drug relapse; and
5. Selling drugs to get money to buy drugs.

Whenever any crime occurred within the community, the respondents confirmed that they were usually the first suspects. They were often accused of thievery and robbery that occurred within the neighbourhood. Rizal, a respondent who had quit committing a crime mentioned that his neighbours were always accusing him of theft, which he believed such discrimination could occur due to the negative perception of the community members towards former prisoners. Although Rizal has been accepted by his family members and served as a social worker at IKHLAS, he still faced adversity from local communities. Rizal made the following statement on the discrimination within the neighbourhood of former prisoners.

'Discrimination within the neighbourhood indeed happens. Usually, it does. They would think that we who are former prisoners, will steal... that is what they perceive. Even though what they thought is wrong as sometimes the thief is another person, but the one who gets blamed is people like us. Well, that is normal.'

(Rizal / Desister)

Similarly, Ramli would also find himself being accused whenever a break-in happened, or items were missing from households. This situation was quoted in verbatim from Ramli, as shown below:

'For example, let's say that their houses lost somethings, they will say that we (referring to former prisoners) were the thieves even when we did not steal those items.'

(Ramli / Desister)

Additionally, Lufti, Latif, & Amir also expressed their feelings of being ostracised and being labelled negatively by neighbours. Lufti, for example, mentioned that there was a wide gap between him and his neighbours; even though they grew up together. His friends in his neighbourhood shunned him because he was a former prisoner. The neighbours were not only ignoring them, setting them aside, and underestimating them, but they also mistreated the former prisoners. Lufti said that when he returned to the neighbourhood, he was treated poorly. His immediate neighbours hid their valuable items out of fear that he will steal them. His statement tallied with Naim, who further agreed that such perception stemmed from their worry that the former prisoners would steal from their properties.

The attitude by the community members, especially when neighbours were unable to accept these former prisoners had given rise to low self-esteem among them. Rahimah said that she was ashamed and felt humiliated



by the actions in her neighbourhood. Amir also responded that he had low self-esteem upon his release from prison and refused to mingle with his local community. The poor treatment by his neighbours forced him to move to Kuala Lumpur. Razak also described that the ill-treatment that he suffered each day within the community had caused him to feel discouraged.

For former prisoners who were involved in drugs, socialising with fellow drug-addicts were found to be a strong influence for them to retake drugs. These fellow felons served as a network for former prisoners to buy drugs or partake in activities that involved stealing to sustain their addiction. This group of lawbreakers also had the capacity in terms of drugs and financial resources to provide and support the lives of these former prisoners and their addiction needs.

‘Every time I am released from prison, friends would welcome us well. They will entertain us with drugs such as Heroin and Ice (Syabu).’

(Hafiz / Recidivist)

‘I would take drugs again every time I met such friends. I feel comfortable, talking and being with them as they can accept me for who I am.’

(Amir / Recidivist)

‘When I was with these friends, they instigated me to commit the crime. The reason is due to life’s difficulty which then leads them to suggest doing the crime again in coping with life.’

(Siva / Recidivist)

‘With friends, they welcome us very well. They drove us to the old world. I mix with my friends here (Chow Kit). For the coming into here, friends will offer me to do work, without the need to spend money and without any upfront model, which is to sell ‘goods’ (referring to drugs), so we sell drugs.’

(Suhaila / Recidivist)

The three respondents who had quit committing a crime managed to refrain from drug addiction by avoiding old friends who were still involved with drugs. Muiz said that since his release, he had refused to mingle with his friends who were still committing crimes; especially the drug-addicts. According to him, if he were associated with such friends, there would be a possibility for him to return to drugs. Another respondent, Syafiq, had also refused to stay out late at night as he knew that criminal activities were usually more evident after sunset. By avoiding night activities, he believed that he would not meet his friends who were still engaged in drug addictions.

Likewise, all respondents who had quit committing criminal activities reported that they no longer had the time to be associated with their former lawbreaking peers as they had jobs. They also did not want to be related to these peers; aware that the bad influence can cause them to re-engage in unlawful activities.

‘Since I was freed from prison, I knew there were friends who were involved in crime, but I did not mix very much with them. After being released from prison, I no longer mix or hang out with them. I know that if I went into that direction again, it would be contagious to me. Over time, I will tend to repeat the same behaviour.’

(Muiz / Desister)



'As for me, I chose not to mix with my old friends. One that I emphasised is that I must avoid hanging out with my friends at night. This is because these activities usually happen at night. I did not want to go out at night since I'm afraid that I will repeat and be influenced by these friends.'

(Syafiq / Desister)

Internal Factors

This study had revealed Rizal's education level, having a diploma which may have contributed to his conscientious point of view and level of maturity during the interview. Below is the excerpt by Rizal when asked about his volunteerism work:

'I chose to become an activist and getting involved in NGOs. I also do a lot of community services as I see myself owing social responsibility to the community. I make use of my experience to help others; especially friends who had the same problems as I, so I chose to help them by doing this activism work.'

(Rizal / Desister)

Additionally, this study also found that Rizal's age may be another reason that contributed to his maturity and way of thinking. This situation enabled the researcher to understand why Rizal chose to serve in social activities. He mentioned that he was aware of his record as a former prisoner, which would make employment a challenging process. Therefore, he was more comfortable to do social work by assisting other former convicts. The researcher had asked if he had tried to apply for a job, apart from being an activist at the beginning of his release. Unfortunately, his response was similar to the other respondents, whereby he claimed that his criminal record had become a barrier in seeking for a job. Rizal said:

'I chose not to apply for any job since I was released until today as I know I could never be employed. When the employer checks my record, certainly I will not be considered for employment. That is why I got involved in NGOs, and my interest in community service started here. For having the experience, I intended to help other former prisoners.'

(Rizal / Desister)

This study had also found that the maturity level can be one of the factors of desistance of crime among the respondents. The three respondents who had quit criminal activities showed a higher level of maturity when giving opinions and had expressed regrets for their previous illegal activities. They further added that they refused to mingle with their old friends as they feared of being influenced to return to their past criminal activities. However, this situation was highly likely the case for other former prisoners as most of them failed to acquire jobs and lived in an environment surrounded by fellow friends with the same problems.

The findings illustrated that former prisoners who committed a crime again showed low levels of motivation and aspiration. They believed that prolonged failure had weakened their motivation to live. Majority of them were found to be homeless, rejected by families, unemployed, addicted to drugs, and suffered infectious diseases. Furthermore, rejection from their own family had further diminished their hopes after being released. Hence, they chose to be homeless with other fellow members. In contrast to the three respondents who had successfully refrained themselves from committing the crime again, these three respondents showed high motivation to redeem themselves. Based on the interview, it was understood that high motivation could be one of the factors that led to their success in quitting the crime scenes. Thus, they will certainly make every effort to distance themselves from



any criminal activities.

Conclusion

In summary, the reintegration process is indeed challenging. Former prisoners who underwent this process experience tremendous challenges and unfortunate situations during their re-entry into society. Most of them found themselves to be involved with criminal activities which would cause them to be arrested, convicted, and sentenced for imprisonment again. Studies showed that most former prisoners were unable to seek jobs due to their criminal records, limited educational background, and social stigma. Besides, having HIV disease and drug addiction were important factors that affected family relationships as well as profound hardship in entering the institution of marriage, resulting in low self-esteem as well as lack of motivation to be a better person. On the other hand, former prisoners who had successfully integrated into society showed a more progressive lifestyle, especially with the continuous support from their family and spouses. For them, marriage had made their lives more comfortable and they appeared to be more responsible. Furthermore, successful former prisoners had also found ways to avoid interactions with their old friends as they realised that these peers might influence their actions and decision-making. In terms of internal factors, the study also revealed that respondents who were successful in their reintegration process had higher motivation and expectations compared to recidivists. Hence, it was deemed necessary to find a resolution and address these social concerns effectively.

The recommendations of this program is in response to the findings of this study, which have been presented in the finding. Implementation of the program is expected to help the released prisoners in integrating with the general public, preventing them from becoming criminal offenders and most importantly, helping them to become citizens who are in compliance with social and national norms as well as productivity, economically and socially. Therefore, the implementation of a social intervention that can strengthen the dominance of protective factors should be established. Social interventions that are aligned with the main findings of this study are community-based post-release programs. These programs will help former prisoners to reintegrate into the lives of the general public and thus prevent recidivism and strengthen the cessation of crime among them. These social interventions can also help to meet the deficit needs experienced by former inmates who are in the process of re-integration as the failure of former prisoners in reintegration has been seen largely due to the absence of a post-release program.

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