Exploring the Factors of Recidivism From the Perspectives of Homeless Former Prisoners, Government Agency Officers, and Volunteers

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Abstract

The ongoing involvement of homeless former prisoners in crime raises questions about involvement factors. Failure to reintegrate into society frequently results in homeless former prisoners becoming re-involved in crime. The situation is particularly worrying when the recurring criminal involvement involves other overlapping factors, which should be identified for a sound understanding of this homeless group. In this research, 30 homeless former prisoners, nine Malaysian government agency officers, and nine volunteers were interviewed in this study. Several sub-themes, namely peer influence, self-confidence conferred by drugs, and drug addiction, were derived from interviews with homeless former prisoners. The officers' interviews revealed the sub-themes of mental disorders, addiction problems, survival, friends' influence, environmental influence, personal choice, and unrepentant. The volunteers' interviews revealed the sub-themes of friends' influence, unemployment, drug activity-filled environments, and drugs as a necessity. The findings provide an insight into the influence of drugs, which were among the leading contributing factors to the involvement of homeless former prisoners in crime. This comprehensive study involved three population groups and filled knowledge gaps on homeless former prisoners. Efforts to reduce recidivism require a diverse approach, which includes policies, agencies, and action plans.

Keywords

Introduction

Studies on recidivism have reached the assertion that many prisoners often find it hard to be assimilated back into the community and easily get back into the world of crime after release from correctional facilities (Ganapathy, 2018). This notion has made offender reintegration a topical issue in academia. Typically, the term 'recidivism' refers to a repetitive criminal relapse or response to criminal behavior, thus leading to re-arrest, re-prosecution, and re-imprisonment (Butorac et al., 2017). In the Malaysian context, a high number of released prisoners return to crime repeatedly annually. The Malaysian Prisons Department (2021) disclosed the statistics of repeat offenders in Malaysia based on the number of releases over three years to 102,214 in 2015, which increased to 110,683 in 2016 and 2017, 2018, and 2019 to 124,567, 134,690, and 141,636, respectively. The highest number of prisoners released was 210,251 people over three years, recorded in 2020. The number of recidivism cases among former prisoners released within these past three years was also recorded, and the numbers showed that the national recidivism rate consistently increased every year. In 2017, 11,520 repeat offenders were recorded from 124,567 people released within three years. In 2018, there was a relatively high increase of 13,896 repeat offenders from among 134,690 people released within three years. In that year, the total percentage of repeat crimes exceeded 10%. In 2019, there were 15,410 repeat offenders from among 143,635 people released within three years. Furthermore, the highest number of repeat offenders was recorded in 2020: 30,902 repeat offenders from 210,251 people released within three years.

Prisoner release raises questions regarding the success rate of reintegration into community life, which is a challenging and uncertain experience for most former prisoners (Brallier et al., 2019). Former prisoners have basic needs when returning to live in a societal system, but such challenges are frequently exacerbated by barrier structures, which include discrimination and marginalization (Bunn, 2019; Zara & Farrington, 2016). The difficulty of former prisoners' in returning to the social system involves several factors, such as re-involvement in criminal activity, lack of continued support, and aimlessness (Butorac et al., 2017; Ojha et al., 2018). This results in desperation and failure to reintegrate into society by former prisoners, forcing them into poverty and homelessness (Chikadzi, 2017; Johnson & Moschion, 2019). Likewise, Adler (2021) reiterated the existence of a link between homelessness and incarceration among homeless men in Trenton, New Jersey.

According to Adler (2021), the cycle of homelessness and imprisonment is caused by structural conditions such as poverty, unemployment, and discrimination that exist in an area (Bunn, 2019). In that regard, Berghuis (2018) and Duwe (2012) viewed the issue of offender recidivism as an aspect that should focus on the number of prisoners released, the high recidivism rates, the economic burden on prison, and homelessness. Many prisoners have a myriad of social, financial, employment, and personal problems (Durnescu, 2019). According to Barrenger et al. (2017), prisoners also face issues of drug misuse, mental health, and poor social relationships. Upon release, former prisoners face the same problems, which become cumbersome due to additional burdens such as losing their homes, employment, and social relationships (Berghuis, 2018). Davis et al. (2012) and Shinkfield and Graffam (2009) indicated that reintegration should not be considered an event; instead, it is a time-consuming and complicated process. Reintegration is an ongoing process for former prisoners to meet basic life and social support and is a notion that is misunderstood holistically.

Various government efforts to prepare prisoners for reintegration into law-abiding society were unsuccessful when many former prisoners failed to integrate and recidivism rates remained high (Dadashazar, 2017; Durose et al., 2014; Glaze & Kaeble, 2014; Miller & Miller, 2015). Reintegration can be highly complicated, where the lack of aid and support for former prisoners results in reintegration failure. Numerous former prisoners became homeless and were unable to obtain necessities during reintegration (Jasni et al., 2021; Jasni, Abu Bakar Ah, & Nasir, 2022; Jasni, Abu Bakar Ah, Omar, et al., 2022). The causes of homelessness include social and economic factors, which indicate the need for ongoing investigations of the issues related to homeless former prisoners (Alowaimer, 2018). Prisoner reintegration studies consistently demonstrate that the mandatory post-release services have few or limited resources, which in turn adversely affects recidivism rates (Ojha et al., 2018). The failure of former prisoners to community reintegration also affects the Malaysian criminal justice system, which is meant to function as an institution to rehabilitate prisoners. This function is less effective when former prisoners become homeless when released from prison.

The Malaysian criminal justice system does not feature an effective reintegration program. Malaysian post-release programs, such as halfway homes and parole programs, are considered highly selective and limited, where accommodating a large number of newly released prisoners is almost impossible. Therefore, most former prisoners do not have the opportunity to be absorbed into such post-release programs. Furthermore, the function of halfway homes intending to assist homeless former prisoners perceivably changed when housing former prisoners were on parole (Jasni, Abu Bakar Ah, Mohd Yusoff, & Azman, 2019; Jasni, Abu Bakar Ah, Mohd Yusoff, Md Shahid, et al., 2019).

This study was prompted by the failure of former prisoners to integrate in most countries (Taxman & Pattavina, 2013) and the lack of comprehensive Malaysian research resources on homeless former prisoners. The annual release statistics of the Malaysian Prisons Department (2021) did not disclose the number of prisoners who have reintegrated successfully. The Malaysian Prisons Department uses the assumption of recidivism in the 10% range of the total release numbers to measure reintegration success. The 2020 statistics revealed that the total percentage of recidivism increased by over 10%. The statistics are even more concerning as they do not detail the number of prisoners who managed to obtain a place to live, be accepted by their families, and get a job. The issue of many former prisoners experiencing failure and homelessness is not reported in detail and has not received much attention; hence, it should be examined when discussing recidivism behavior. Some former prisoners continued to commit crimes but were not apprehended and imprisoned, thus not reflected in the statistics. This is highly concerning when recidivism increases by the day, but the actual number is not recorded.

Furthermore, the statistics on people experiencing homelessness released by the Malaysian Social Welfare Department (JKM) do not indicate the number of homeless former prisoners or the composition of homeless people in the country (Jasni et al., 2021). Not much is known about the actual number of homeless former prisoners that exist today. Similarly, the issue of repeating crimes they commit throughout their life on the streets is still less academically recorded locally. Thus, this study aims to explore recidivism among homeless former prisoners throughout their life on the streets. This study uses three different study samples to obtain information and understand this issue more deeply. Using three samples, including homeless former prisoners, government agency officers, and volunteers, allows the researcher to triangulate the feedback gathered from the study sample. Therefore, this study explores recidivism factors based on the perspective of homeless former prisoners, government agency officers, and volunteers.

Literature review

Factors of involvement in recurrent crime (Recidivism)

Prisoner release frequently leads to questions and dilemmas for prison department personnel worldwide. The average person might wonder, "What can we do about all the prisoners coming out of this prison?" (Travis, 2005). For former prisoners, existing societal rejection frequently leads to problems, and they are likely to continue to experience life failures throughout reintegration (Schlager, 2018). Reintegration failures are often associated with high recidivism risk and are a potential factor that decreases well-being. In that regard, reintegration requires a wholesome transition from prison to mainstream society, where prisoners begin to adjust to the world outside prison after their release and hopefully live a crime-free life (Davis et al., 2012). The reintegration prospects of former prisoners typically rely on general public attitudes and internalized responses to prisoners and former prisoners. Still, former prisoners face difficulties in negotiating and also fail to gain social acceptance (Brown, 2016).

The proportion of reentry into prison by former prisoners to the number of prisoners released by prisons is not proportional, and this results in the burdening of the prison system, thus drawing researchers' attention to the reentry process (Berghuis, 2018; Duwe, 2012). Many inmates entered prison with social and personal problems, which ranged from financial instability, unemployment, substance misuse, mental health issues, health issues (Keene et al., 2018; Pendyal et al., 2020), and poor social relationships (Berghuis, 2018; Houser et al., 2018). The prisoners not only encountered the same challenges upon release from correctional institutions but were also confronted with new problems, such as loss of homes, employment, and broken relations each time they were released (Chikadzi, 2017). This notion raised concerns that led to efforts to understand reintegration in criminology research and intervention. Homeless former prisoners are a highly marginalized group, and information on their life experiences is scarce. The exclusion of former prisoners from receiving aid and the subjection to societal stigma causes them to live an aimless life without purpose. Reporting on the same note, Rowlands (2011) alluded that other contributing factors to the homelessness of former prisoners are family rejection, drug addiction (Lautieri, 2023), and lack of support.

The plight of homeless former prisoners was researched and was seen to exhibit characteristics such as the lack of a secure place (Durose et al., 2014; Herbert et al., 2015; McKernan, 2017) and unsupportive family members (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017) A tendency to be unemployed was another profile shown by homeless former prisoners (Denver et al., 2017), Other researchers viewed mental problems and drug misuse as another characteristic of homeless former inmates (Brown, 2016). Reporting on the same issue, Chikadzi (2017) underpinned the same problem to difficulty obtaining and maintaining public assistance, while other researchers pointed to the challenges emanating from returning to poor neighborhoods and discrimination from others (Morenoff & Harding, 2014; Taylor & Becker, 2015). Being surrounded by negative peers, physical illness, HIV infection, diabetes wounds and sores, failure to integrate, and very low emotional intelligence (Stephens & Nel, 2014) were also other factors that caused former prisoners to have a high tendency to fail to reintegrate.

Recidivism studies have become a topical issue of interest to criminologists and the correctional system, and these studies point out that it is necessary to understand the risk

factors that contribute to the failure or success of former prisoners. The risk factors that affected the success of former prisoners in reducing recidivism included antisocial behavior, negative peer influence, drug misuse, mental illness, financial instability, barriers to obtaining legal employment, and hazardous family issues. Basic knowledge of the risk factors for returning to prison by repeat offenders will aid in identifying individuals likely to repeat offenses (Andrews & Dowden, 2006). Assessors should look broadly into the risk factors leading to reintegration demise rather than focus on a single risk factor alone. Failure to integrate has caused many former prisoners to tend to re-engage in crime. Several researchers attempted to identify the factors influencing global recurrent crime rates in different contexts. Still, they were hampered by problems such as sample selection, the definition chosen for recidivism, and the follow-up duration (follow-up) selected.

This situation created a knowledge gap on homelessness among former prisoners. Typically, a former prisoner becomes homeless as they do not have secure spaces and are rejected by their family. Homelessness re-exposes former prisoners to drug misuse and other criminal behavior, such as stealing, snatch theft, robbery, and drug dealing. Unsurprisingly, a large number of former prisoners become homeless (Jasni et al., 2018; Jasni, Abu Bakar Ah, Mohd Yusoff, Md Shahid, et al., 2019), and most of the crimes they commit are influenced by the former prisoner's circumstances or environment. Because of all these factors, it is therefore clear to highlight that there is a strong connection between rehabilitation and recidivism in the criminal justice system. Effective rehabilitation programs that address criminogenic factors, provide skill development, support behavioral change, and offer reintegration support can significantly reduce the likelihood of individuals returning to criminal activity after release. The current study's focus was homeless former prisoners who had only repeated incarceration records regardless of the number of arrests. The findings constitute a crucial empirical report that focuses on recidivism factors among homeless former prisoners in Malaysia.

Research methodology

In examining the factors affecting the recidivism of homeless former prisoners around Chow Kit Road, interpretivism was applied as the study philosophy to derive the perspectives of homeless former prisoners, government agency officer informants, and volunteers regarding prisoners' recidivism on Chow Kit Road. This philosophical stance reveals the issues to be explored and strives to answer the study objectives. The objective of this study is to explore recidivism factors from the perspective of homeless former prisoners, government agency officers, and volunteers. A qualitative exploratory framework was incorporated into this research to address the research questions.

Location, population, and sampling

Chow Kit Road was selected as the study context given the high number of homeless former prisoners in this area who were released from jail. Several local studies have classified Kuala Lumpur, particularly Jalan Chow Kit, as a hotspot for homeless people (Ramli & Sheikh Dawood, 2017; Yani et al., 2016). Hence, efforts were undertaken in this study to make Jalan Chow Kit the study location. Three sample groups involving homeless former prisoners, government agency officer informants, and volunteers were chosen to thoroughly explore the study phenomenon and data triangulation on the derived study outcome. A total of 30

homeless former prisoners were identified through purposive sampling with the following criteria: (i) 21 years old and above; (ii) has a prison record; (iii) lives on the streets; (iv) has no permanent residence. Snowball sampling was also utilized to seek the study informants, where one individual would refer the researcher to another counterpart with similar criteria. This process ended on the 30th informant upon data saturation. The research also involved government agency officer informants entailing authorities from the following government agencies: the Social Welfare Department, the National Anti-Drug Agency, the Malaysian Prisons Department, The Royal Malaysia Police, Kuala Lumpur City Hall, and the National Welfare Foundation. Approval was requested and obtained from the government organizations mentioned above through an official letter.

Nevertheless, the approval only led to the voluntary participation of nine government agency officer informants. This study also involved a sample of volunteers who were interviewed to examine their perspectives on the factors causing the homelessness of former prisoners who frequently migrated to Chow Kit Road. The study informants' insights rendered the interview pivotal and significantly expanded the current body of literature. The multitude of NGOs in the study location facilitated the identification of volunteer informants to engage in this study. A sample of volunteer informants was selected using purposive and snowball techniques. Necessary criteria were established by the reviewer for government agency officer informant selection. Such voluntary informants introduced the researcher to other colleagues with similar attributes. In this vein, nine informants who agreed to be interviewed were identified for this study. This study has ensured that each informant's name has been kept confidential and replaced with a pseudonym. This is to ensure confidentiality since this type of research is sensitive and can affect the informant. By assuring the confidentiality of names, informants feel more comfortable sharing their views about their experiences and situations.

Data collection technique

The current study interviews were conducted to obtain the research outcomes. Each informant was interviewed separately. Following the time constraints due to the COVID-19 pandemic, an online interview session proved an effective data-gathering strategy for government agency officers and volunteers. This study was undertaken during the Movement Control Order (MCO) period. For the homeless former prisoner sample, the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews. The need to conduct face-to-face interviews arises from the researcher's requirement to meet the informant in person. This approach allows the researcher to understand the situation and explore every narrated experience.

The researcher obtained permission from the police to conduct the study at a center known as Pusat Pembelajaran Komuniti (PPK). The researcher chose the Ar-Riqab Welfare Organization as the key informant in helping to identify homeless former prisoners as informants per the criteria required. Interviewed informants introduced the researcher to their friends with similar criteria. Specifically, the interview process enabled the exploration of informants' viewpoints without restrictions or interruptions. The researcher first ensured the presence of a robust interview protocol for both groups before performing the interview process. This interview protocol was a semi-structured form built based on previous studies related to recidivism. The selection of a semi-structured form allows for efforts to explore more deeply, change questions according to suitability, and do probing throughout the interview. The interview protocol was sent to experts in the field to examine its structure and ensure it addresses the research objectives. The researcher conducted a pilot test on three informants and improved the questions as necessary. Interview questions involving informant

demographics and their perceptions of recidivism factors among homeless former prisoners were developed following past research and subjected to expert reviews.

Ethical approval

This study was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the University of Kebangsaan Malaysia (National University of Malaysia) (COA No: JEP-2021-316).

Data analysis technique

The researcher was required to convert informants' recorded insights into written form pre-coding. Relevant content reflecting the study objectives was duly highlighted. The researcher named the identified codes based on the researcher's knowledge of past literature. The coding of each sample was carried out separately using the Atlas.ti qualitative data analysis tool, where 30 homeless former prisoners were transcribed in one document, ten informant officers in another document, and nine informant volunteers in another document. The purpose of separating into three documents allowed the researcher to identify the similarities and differences of the resulting codes from each sample group. Next, the researcher coded based on the sequence of codes that appeared. Once the coding process was completed, the researcher will determine the code group for each code obtained. Such codes were subsequently grouped to develop a main (superordinate) theme. The codes related to the influence of friends will be placed together, as well as the codes pertaining to drug addiction in the same main (superordinate) theme and so on, such as mental health problems. The researcher then identified similarities and differences between the resulting main (superordinate) themes as soon as they successfully created groups according to these sample groups. The researcher wrote and explained the derived outcome after developing the superordinate themes and sub-themes.

Findings

This study included 30 homeless former prisoners, nine Malaysian government agency officers, and nine volunteers.

Social demography of homeless former prisoners

There were 20 Malay male informants, five Chinese male informants, and five Malay female informants. The origins of the informants are listed as follows: Perak (6), Kuala Lumpur (4), Negeri Sembilan, Pahang, and Johor (3 each), Selangor, Kedah, Penang, and Kelantan (2 each), Melaka, Pahang, and Sabah (1 each). Regarding the education levels of the informants, nine completed the Sijil Pelajaran Malaysia (SPM, equivalent to Form Five), nine completed the Penilaian Menengah Rendah (PMR, equivalent to Form Three), six completed the Ujian Pencapaian Sekolah Rendah (UPSR, equivalent to Grade Six), two possess certificates from the Malaysian Skills Institute, two have no formal education, and one each has reached Form One and Grade Three. The findings demonstrated that informants had low education levels, which could have affected their chances of obtaining stable jobs. The number of prison sentences served is as follows: three informants, one to two sentences; seven informants, at least three to five sentences; 12 informants, at least six to 10 sentences; five informants, > 10

sentences; three informants, > 20 sentences. The majority of them were found to have repeated crimes in a very high amount. This situation causes some of those who fail to recall the offenses made. However, the results show that all of these have a very high drug abuse problem. All of them tend to get involved in drug abuse activities. This study includes social demographic information on homeless former prisoners in Table 1.

Table 1: Social Demographic Profile of Homeless Former Prisoners

Informant	Sex	Race	Year	State of Origin	Qualifications	Times Imprisoned	Drug Addiction	Health Problem
1. Sofian	Male	Malay	47	Selangor	Primary school, Standard 6 (UPSR)	7	Heroin	Having Broken leg
2. Lim	Male	Chinese	51	Kuala Lumpur	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	18	Methamphetamine	Tuberculosis and Hepatitis C
3. Khairil	Male	Malay	37	Sabah	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	7	Methamphetamine	None
4. Nizam	Male	Malay	59	Pahang	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	8	Methamphetamine	None
5. Aiman	Male	Malay	47	Perak	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	6	Heroin	High Blood Pressure
6. Daniel	Male	Malay	60	Perak	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	8	Ice	High Blood Pressure, Diabetes, Kidney Failure and Hepatitis C.
7. Amin	Male	Malay	45	Perak	Secondary school, Form 2	9	Cannabis	High Blood Pressure
8. Sabri	Male	Malay	44	Kedah	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	5	Heroin	None
9. Lee	Male	Chinese	57	Pulau Pinang	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	7	Heroin and Ice	High Blood Pressure
10. Ramizah	Female	Malay	36	Negeri Sembilan	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	3	Methamphetamine	None
11. Hilmi	Male	Malay	39	Johor	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	8	Cannabis	Hepatitis C
12. Luqman	Male	Malay	38	Pahang	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	5	Heroin	Leg problem and still under treatment
13. Chow	Male	Chinese	38	Johor	Primary school, Standard 6 (UPSR)	4	Morphine and Ice	Jaundice
14. Halim	Male	Malay	61	Negeri Sembilan	Certificate (Institut Kemahiran Malaysia IKM)	3	Heroin	None
15. Ooi	Male	Chinese	51	Perak	Secondary school, Form 2	2	Heroin and Methamphetamine	Hepatitis C and Scabies

Informant	Sex	Race	Year	State of Origin	Qualifications	Times Imprisoned	Drug Addiction	Health Problem
16. Solleh	Male	Malay	44	Kuala Lumpur	No Education	20	Heroin and methamphetamine	High Blood Pressure, Asthma and Tuberculosis
17. Liyana	Female	Malay	43	Kuala Lumpur	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	15	Heroin	None
18. Firdaus	Male	Malay	59	Kelantan	Certificate (Institut Kemahiran Malaysia IKM)	22	Heroin and Ice	Hepatitis B
19. Rafidah	Female	Malay	45	Selangor	Secondary school Form 5 (SPM)	6	Heroin and Methamphetamine	Asthma and Hepatitis C
20. Amirah	Female	Malay	37	Negeri Sembilan	Primary school, Standard 6 (UPSR)	4	Heroin and Methamphetamine	None
21. Fikri	Male	Malay	68	Perak	Primary school, Standard 3	3	Heroin	High Blood Pressure
22. Cheng	Male	Chinese	41	Johor	Secondary school, Form 1	6	Heroin and Benzo	Schizophrenia
23. Mahmood	Male	Malay	43	Pahang	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	6	Heroin	None
24. Ikram	Male	Malay	52	Pahang	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	15	Cannabis and Ice	None
25. Fariq	Male	Malay	53	Pulau Pinang	No education	14	Cannabis and heroin	None
26. Zainudin	Male	Malay	48	Melaka	Secondary school, Form 2	7	Cannabis	Stroke
27. Yusuf	Male	Malay	65	Perak	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	1	Cannabis	Leg problem and still under treatment
28. Anuar	Male	Malay	37	Kelantan	Secondary school, Form 3 (PMR)	20	Heroin and Cannabis	None
29. Liza	Female	Malay	40	Kuala Lumpur	Secondary school, Form 3	16	Heroin and Cannabis	Hepatitis C
30. Laila	Female	Malay	31	Kedah	Secondary school, Form 5 (SPM)	1	Heroin and Methamphetamine	None

Note: Ice = crystal methamphetamine

In this study, the criterion needed was to have a prison record. Nonetheless, after collecting the data, the researcher found that the majority of the former prisoners had drug addiction and drug-related offenses. In this study, recidivism is more often related to retaking drugs, selling drugs, or dealing drugs. There are also among them who are found to be involved in stealing activities. However, the results of the research show that involvement in stealing activities is aimed at buying and using drugs. Most informants had repeated and chronic incarceration records and would return to Chow Kit Road upon their release. The homeless former prisoner interview results are presented in the section on superordinate Theme 1.

Social demography of government agency officers

The informants in this study were officers from various departments: two from the Malaysian Prisons Department, two from the Social Welfare Department, one from the Royal Malaysia Police, one from the National Welfare Department, one from the National Anti-Drug Agency, and two from the Kuala Lumpur City Hall. The findings from these interviews are discussed in the section dedicated to superordinate Theme 2.

Social demography of volunteers

Five volunteer informants were female, three were male, and one was a trans-woman. Three informants were students, one was a lecturer, two worked in the private sector, one worked part-time, and two were unemployed. All informants had more than three years of volunteer experience, and one informant had 20 years of volunteer experience. The volunteers' strengths were based on their tertiary education backgrounds: five held a Bachelor's Degree, one had a Doctor of Philosophy, one held a Diploma, and two held a Master's Degree. The informants' education level was essential to provide insights during the study. This study includes the social demographic information of volunteer informants in Table 2. The volunteer interview results are presented under superordinate Theme 3.

Superordinate theme 1: Perspective of the factors of involvement in the recurrent crime of homeless former prisoners

All homeless former prisoner informants had drug addictions, such as ice (crystal methamphetamine), heroin, syabu (methamphetamine), and cannabis. Furthermore, they were involved in robbery, theft, and drug dealing. Nevertheless, most of their crimes tended toward drug misuse and drug dealing, which indicated that most of them were involved in drug crimes. Exploration of their involvement in recidivism identified four factors as the reason for their drug involvement, which are discussed under the following sub-themes:

Sub-Theme 1a: Peer Influence

Peer influence was a factor in the involvement in recidivism of homeless former prisoners. Pressure from childhood friends led to the participation in drug use and distribution and petty crimes of homeless former prisoners, such as stealing and robbery. The interview excerpts supporting this sub-theme are presented as follows:

> *"My friend told me to use drugs. I was also influenced by inviting friends."*
>
> (Sabri, homeless former prisoner informant 8)

> *"I started using it when a friend asked me to sell drugs. Eventually, I was affected."*
>
> *(Zainudin, homeless former prisoner informant 26)*

Table 2: Social Demographic Profile of Volunteer Informants

Volunteer Informant	Sex	Age in Years	Marital Status	State	Occupation	Qualification	Years of Volunteering
1. Athirah	Female	27	Single	Sabah	Student	Bachelor of Economics	3
2. Faisal	Male	40	Single	Kuala Lumpur	Part-Time Translator	Bachelor of Multimedia	3
3. Lily	Female	27	Single	Kuala Lumpur	Student	Bachelor of Maritime Operation	6
4. Rafeah	Female	47	Married	Johor	Lecturer	Ph.D. in Gerontology	20
5. Melissa	Transgender	48	Single	Kuala Lumpur	Unemployed	Diploma of Business	
6. Hayati	Female	33	Single	Terengganu	Student	Master of Anthropology and Sociology	5
7. Muna	Female	33	Single	Terengganu	Executive digital media	Bachelor of Administrative Science	12
8. Iskandar	Male	28	Single	Terengganu	Barista	Bachelor of International Affairs	5
9. Burhanudin	Male	45	Single	Sarawak	Unemployed	Bachelor of Management	6

Peers may influence individuals to engage in criminal activities, thereby perpetuating the cycle of criminal activities. Socialization into criminal rings and networks provides individuals with the opportunities and means to commit crimes due to exposure to criminal peers.

Sub-Theme 1b: Drugs Confer Self-confidence

A factor in the informants' drug use was the belief that drugs could build self-confidence. The informants frequently felt that drugs triggered self-confidence, which led to them continuing to use drugs to build their self-confidence. The interview excerpts that supported this sub-theme are presented as follows:

> *"I feel uncertain if I do not use drugs."*
>
> (Khairil, homeless former prisoner informant 3)

> *"We become more confident after using drugs. If you do not use drugs, it will be different."*
>
> (Chow, homeless former prisoner informant 13)

A feeling of euphoria and escalated confidence in the short term can be brought about by drugs and substances like alcohol and certain stimulants that can affect the central nervous system. Inhibitions can be lowered by drugs as well as the increasing risky behavior, thereby leading individuals to feel confident in some social situations. This confidence that is conferred by drugs and substances usually comes with impaired judgment, which leads individuals to engage in risky behaviors and poor decision-making.

Sub-Theme 1c: Drug addiction

The informants' continual drug use was also due to drug addiction. The failure to control their addiction made them repeatedly use drugs when they were homeless. The relevant interview excerpts that supported this sub-theme are presented as follows:

> *"Indeed, people say that the effects of drugs are hard to stop. This addiction can be like being carried away into a dream."*
>
> (Daniel, homeless former prisoner informant 6)

> *"I am still addicted to drugs. I spent all the income that I earned to buy drugs."*
>
> (Hilmi/ Homeless former prisoner Informant 11)

The cessation of drug use among the informants was only temporary, and they would subsequently choose to use drugs again. The informants were constantly tempted by drugs, which could give rise to addiction stemming from persistent drug misuse.

Superordinate Theme 2: Government agency officers' perspective of the factors of involvement in crime

The officers believed that homelessness led to various recurrent crimes, which could have been due to factors that existed during homelessness. Such a situation led to the homeless former prisoners being more likely to become involved in criminal activities. Undeniably, the findings of government agency officers generally focus on why homeless former prisoners repeat crimes rather than on drug addiction. The study's limitations will note the need for research specifically addressing the factor of drug addiction, as the findings show that the most common crimes are related to drug offenses. The sub-themes that indicated the factors for involvement in crime are presented as follows:

Sub-Theme 2a: Mental illness

Mental disorders frequently affect a person's involvement in crime. Offenders with mental health problems tended to commit more types of deviant criminal acts than those without such issues. The interview excerpt that supported this subtheme is presented as follows:

> *"The factor of involvement in crime is due to mental disorders. They are frequently involved in violent crime."*
>
> (Syakira, Malaysian Prisons Department informant 3)

> *"I am facing this criminal behavior problem also because of my mental
> health problems. Sometimes, I can't discern between right and wrong."*
>
> (Linda, Kuala Lumpur City Hall 6)

Challenges of re-offending by persons with mental health disorders, if they go unsolved, can increase their chances of re-offending. A vast number of persons with mental health disorders go through the criminal justice system, however, without proper diagnosis and or treatment, thereby exacerbating their chances of recidivism.

Sub-Theme 2b: Drug addiction

Drug addiction was a factor of involvement in crime, which was closely linked to drug misuse. People who misuse drugs frequently commit crimes to buy drugs, which can affect society. Many homeless former prisoners were under the influence of drugs while committing crimes. This could be due to drug misuse leading to criminal behavior, and it is also considered a coping strategy for those with a history of this crime. Moreover, drug possession charges are common among drug addicts. A person caught possessing drugs can receive substantial fines and jail terms depending on the drugs and amount possessed. The interview excerpts that supported this sub-theme are presented as follows:

> *"To me, there is a very close link between addiction and crime, especially
> when they use drugs. Even the use of these prohibited items leads to
> harsher and abusive behavior. All these are among the reasons for
> involvement in crime."*
>
> (Hilman, YKN informant 1)

> *"This person is just an antique collector, not a seller, who sells goods and
> will not stay near the hotel as it will be a mess. Drug use and possession
> can lead to frequent arrests."*
>
> (Syamir, Royal Malaysia Police informant 8)

Sub-Theme 2c: Survival

Ensuring survival was also a factor of involvement in crime. The homeless former prisoners performed any income-generating activity, such as drug trafficking. The interview excerpt that supported this sub-theme is presented as follows:

> *"They are involved in drugs to ensure their survival. For example,
> engaging in drug-dealing activities. Some female former prisoners return
> to being prostitutes or selling drugs on a small scale. Some former
> prisoners work as contract laborers, security guards, and shop assistants
> for survival. Nonetheless, the work is temporary as they face problems
> with self-management discipline."*
>
> (Syakira, Malaysian Prisons Department informant 3)

> *"These people are forced by dire circumstances to commit crimes to
> generate income. The lack of job opportunities makes them turn to crime."*
>
> (Karim, Department of Social Welfare Malaysia 7)

Sub-Theme 2d: Peer influence

Peer influence could also be a factor of involvement in crime as it can stimulate both positive and negative behavior. Criminology research reported much evidence of peer influence concerning crime. The interview excerpt that supported this sub-theme is presented as follows:

> *"When they go out without a family, they will look for old friends to get addicted. The influence of these friends will also lead to involvement in other crimes."*
> (Pusparatna, Malaysian Prisons Department informant 5)

Sub-Theme: 2e Environmental influence

Environmental influence was another factor in involvement in crime. This influence could be observed in the Chow Kit Road environment, which tended to cause homeless former prisoners to be involved in criminal behavior or engage in criminal activities. In this study, the Chow Kit Road environment influenced the determinants as a factor of participation in crime. The interview excerpt that supported this sub-theme is presented as follows:

> *"The environment that attracts them may be the source of addiction overall. Regardless, whatever they get, they will obtain drugs."*
> (Pusparatna, Malaysian Prisons Department informant 5)

Persons who live in impoverished situations and environments can be faced with increased stress and few resources, which contribute to high risks of criminal behavior as a means of living. Staying in areas with a high crime rate can save persons from exposure to criminal influences and enhance the likelihood of engaging in illegal activities.

Sub-Theme 2f: Personal choice

Personal choice was a factor in the re-involvement in the crime of homeless former prisoners. The interview excerpt that supported this sub-theme is presented as follows:

> *"This poor person chooses that way of life. To me, it is their own choice. I do not want to blame other people, either. I do not want to blame my parents either."*
> (Pusparatna, Malaysian Prisons Department informant 5)

> *"Mostly because of their personal choices. This is because there is no opportunity to do legitimate work. But due to their ability to generate income, it makes them personally choose to continue with unconventional ways survival."*
> (Karim, Department of Social Welfare Malaysia 7)

Personal choices can enhance recidivism. While external stimuli can contribute to criminal behavior, a person can also have internal drives to engage in crime. Individuals, even when faced with difficult circumstances, should make choices.

Sub-Theme 2g: Unrepentant

Some homeless former prisoners were re-involved in criminal activities as they were unrepentant, where a lack of remorse caused them to continue to engage in crime. The interview excerpt that supported this sub-theme is presented as follows:

> *"Former prisoners became homeless. They were unrepentant. They came out of prison and returned. There are sometimes unrepentant people looking for their own money."*
>
> <div align="right">(Syamir, Royal Malaysia Police informant 8)</div>

> *"For me, these people are still unrepentant. They feel nothing in committing crimes. This is because the effect of being arrested or entering prison repeatedly does not give any feeling of fear. Then they will continue to commit crimes."*
>
> <div align="right">(Wildan, AADK Informant 9)</div>

Unconverted persons are more likely to go on with criminal activities as they may feel that there is no need for them to change their behavior or actions. The absence of true remorselessness may show a lack of intrinsic motivation for change. Without the inherent desire to transform, persons are less likely to be engaged in rehabilitation efforts.

Superordinate Theme 3: Volunteers' perspectives on the factors of involvement in repetitive crime

The sub-themes identified for superordinate Theme 3 are presented as follows:

Sub-Theme 3a: Peer influence

Peer influence was a reason for the continued involvement in drug use and criminal (drug-dealing) activities of homeless former prisoners. The homeless former prisoners were influenced by their friends' pressure and presence. The interview excerpts that supported this sub-theme are presented as follows:

> *"Looking at this, when a former homeless person returns to Chow Kit, it is quite difficult for them to change. They see old friends and old friends use things (referring to drugs). The presence of these friends influenced them to re-engage in crime over and over."*
>
> <div align="right">(Athirah, volunteer informant 1)</div>

> *"When they meet friends again, chances are the percentage of returning to drugs is very high and very risky. They will start using drugs or selling drugs to earn easy money."*
>
> <div align="right">(Melissa, volunteer informant 5)</div>

Sub-Theme 3b: Unemployment

Unemployment, which caused stress and tension, was a factor of re-involvement in crime by homeless former prisoners. Furthermore, the lack of income and difficulties generating income could lead to this group being forced into crime. The interview excerpts that supported this sub-theme are presented as follows:

> *"If they do not have a job, how can they earn money? If they do not have money, how can they change people's lives? Worse, they will commit another crime and commit the same offense."*
>
> (Lily, volunteer informant 3)

> *"Living without a job or legitimate income can make them continue to commit crimes. They became forced eventually."*
>
> (Hayati, Volunteer Informant 6)

Being without employment is an essential factor that enhances the chances of recidivism. Unstable employment opportunities for persons with some criminal records can bring about many challenges that make them vulnerable to reverting to criminal activities.

Sub-Theme 3c: A drug activity-filled environment

The Chow Kit Road environment is prone to drug activity and was a factor in the involvement in the crime of homeless former prisoners. The ease of drug access allowed the homeless former prisoners to engage in drug dealing. Moreover, the presence of drugs also caused the persistent homelessness of former prisoners, accompanied by drug addiction, where they tended to misuse drugs persistently and sell drugs on a small scale. The interview excerpt that supported this sub-theme is presented as follows:

> *"Seriously, from my observation of Chow Kit Road, it is drug dealer territory where supply is very easy to get there. When this group looks back at the drugs when triggered, they can come back, their revenue, they can buy drugs, the costs are RM10 or RM5."*
>
> (Rafeah, volunteer informant 4)

Sub-Theme 3d: Drugs as a Necessity

Drugs were a necessity for the homeless former prisoners, and their extreme addictions caused them to frequently prioritize drug use over meeting other necessities. The interview excerpt that supported this sub-theme is presented as follows:

> *"Drugs among these homeless people, these drugs become a basic need for them more than rice. When they have money, they would prefer to buy drugs over rice, so it is their main purpose."*
>
> (Hayati, volunteer informant 6)

Because of psychological and physical dependence, drugs may be viewed as a necessity for persons who are struggling with addiction. Drugs can be used to divert or override other vital matters in life, thereby using drugs as a deviating tool from stress, emotional difficulties, and trauma.

Discussion

In-depth knowledge of the risk factors of recurrent crime obtained via integrated homeless former prisoners can be an essential indicator for more efficient crime repetition prevention initiatives (Andrews & Bonta, 2006; Chikadzi, 2017; Dadashazar, 2017; Travis, 2005). Many

criminologists, sociologists, psychologists, and social workers have sought to understand the factors that can be linked to recidivism, as these factors could lead to the implementation of appropriate interventions within the country. Furthermore, previous studies extensively demonstrated that the probability of recidivism by homeless former prisoners decreased when their criminogenic needs were met (Brallier et al., 2019; Butorac et al., 2017).

The factors leading to recidivism are known as recidivism risk factors or predictors. Recidivism factors also refer to the characteristics and life experiences of former prisoners that are closely related to criminal behavior (Bunn, 2019; Ojha et al., 2019). Many researchers examined how the experiences and challenges faced by homeless former prisoners led to recidivism (Travis et al., 2005). Typically, no single risk factor influenced recidivism among homeless former prisoners. The risk factors with a high potential to increase recidivism among homeless former prisoners should be addressed to prevent recidivism and re-incarceration. As we have seen, the factors contributing to recidivism among homeless former prisoners are complex and interrelated. These individuals often grapple with limited access to stable housing (Álvarez-Pérez et al., 2021), healthcare (Keene et al., 2018; Pendyal et al., 2020), education, and employment opportunities. Substance abuse and mental health issues (Barrenger et al., 2017; Bjørlykhaug et al., 2021) further compound their vulnerability. Moreover, the stigma associated with a criminal record and homelessness can create insurmountable barriers to reintegration into society (Berghuis, 2018).

As mentioned above, this situation led to the researcher being confident of the relevance of this study in the local context. Efforts to identify the factors that lead to recidivism will yield substantial benefits to the body of knowledge in Malaysia, as the continuing recidivism rate is of great public concern and should not be underestimated by the Malaysian police and criminal justice system agencies. The authorities are frequently queried about the ability of prisons to rehabilitate prisoners and why high numbers of former prisoners continue to be re-involved in crime even though they have undergone prison rehabilitation programs. In the Malaysian context, prisoners must follow institutional-based punishment and social rehabilitation programs known as the Human Development Plan (HDP). The high number of repeat offenders yearly also generates the impression that various inherent factors in reintegration cause the re-involvement and re-engagement in criminal activities of homeless former prisoners.

Every homeless former prisoner experiences difficulties and different life experiences while reintegrating into community life (Chikadzi, 2017). Reintegration is challenging as a homeless former prisoner status carries a negative stigma that typically causes the exclusion of former prisoners from community life. This ongoing pressure causes former prisoners to revert to criminal behavior. The findings from these three sample groups have found two similar findings about recidivism factors, namely in terms of peer influence (Taylor & Becker, 2015) and drug addiction (Lautieri, 2023). This is shown when, on average, those who experience rejection from family and the surrounding community have gone to friends for support. Their status as former prisoners makes most of the friends they get from those with criminal records (Durnescu, 2019)—likewise, the situation when Chow Kit Road has become a concentration of former prisoners in the area. The addiction problem they face is also one of the factors of recidivism among them. The lack of advanced drug treatment, as well as the addiction problem that still exists, can make them return to drugs.

The results proved that drugs exerted a substantial influence on the re-involvement in the crime of homeless former prisoners. Former prisoners with persistent addictions frequently returned to criminal activity following their release, and most not only chose to use drugs but

also sold them to earn an income easily, which they used to finance their addiction. Furthermore, the lack of social support, especially from the community and family, spurred homeless former prisoners to turn to their friends who were also homeless (Comassetto et al., 2020; Houser et al., 2018). Their friends' influence and persuasion led to their involvement in the same drug-dealing activities to earn an income. Moreover, the unemployment of homeless former prisoners limited their options, such that drug activity became more appealing.

In this study, the officer informants stated that homeless people needed to survive and that their criminal activity stemmed from personal choice and unrepentant. Moreover, the officer and volunteer informants presented similar opinions on the Chow Kit Road environment influencing recurring criminal behavior. A drug hot spot, the Chow Kit Road conditions facilitated the homeless former prisoners' access to drug sales and use. The findings proved that various factors cause re-engagement with criminal activities or activities among homeless former prisoners during reintegration (Folk et al., 2017). Such factors include personal, family, peer, and community factors (Sleet & Francescutti, 2021). Among the individual factors, the self-risk factors that caused former prisoners to re-engage in crime were failure to obtain a legitimate job, lack of money to finance daily living, re-associating with old criminal partners, re-engaging in drug misuse, and deteriorating health conditions due to certain diseases (Andrews & Dowden, 2006).

Considerable empirical evidence indicated that family is the leading cause of re-engagement in criminal activities of former prisoners. A troubled family influences the behavior of its members significantly. The failure of family members, particularly parents and immediate siblings, to provide appropriate support caused the former prisoners to lose an avenue of support, which had broad ramifications. Among the ramifications were that such former prisoners were forced to rely on hope or seek peer support, which then placed them at sufficiently dangerous potential to re-engage in criminal activity to afford daily necessities.

Much empirical evidence suggested that former prisoners who grew up in challenging and low-income family socioeconomic environments frequently turned to their peers to substitute fragile family relationships (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017; Taylor & Becker, 2015). The criminal partner's influence was the motive that most frequently persuaded former prisoners to re-engage in criminal behavior (Berghuis, 2018). When the former prisoners spent time with an old criminal partner, their potential to re-engage in criminal activity was relatively high. Homeless former prisoners who inhabited residential communities with high crime rates had a high tendency to re-engage in crime, as did those who returned to the same environment and were exposed to the same risk factors. The attitudes of community members who symbolically supported criminal behavior with no concern for community well-being typically rekindled the desire of former prisoners to re-engage in criminal activity. All of the aforementioned empirical evidence was obtained from studies abroad. In the local context, there is a need for a more rigorous systematic study of recidivism. The empirical data can aid the government through Malaysian Prisons Department agencies to perform follow-up action to address recidivism among homeless former prisoners.

Limitation and future recommendation

Initially, this study aimed to include a sample of homeless former prisoners, regardless of their criminal record. The only criterion for each homeless former prisoner informant was a prison record. Nevertheless, after the study was conducted, the researcher found that the

majority of them were involved in addictive activities and drug-related offenses. This situation leads to findings that reveal that, on average, they are involved in drug abuse. There is a need to carry out research specifically on drug addiction among them to identify the factors that contribute to their involvement in drug relapse.

Conclusion

In this study, the factors leading to recidivism among homeless former prisoners were identified. These risk factors resulted in homeless former prisoners being prone to engage in criminal activities. Identifying these factors could contribute to initiatives that aid the successful societal reintegration of homeless former prisoners. In conclusion, the study on recidivism among homeless former prisoners sheds light on a critical intersection of criminal justice and homelessness. The findings underscore the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals who experience both homelessness and involvement in the criminal justice system. These challenges, coupled with the cycle of re-incarceration, demand a comprehensive and compassionate response.

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