Desistance and Recidivism Among Former Prisoners in Malaysia: A Proposed Model According to the Age-Graded Theory

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ABSTRACT

The Age-Graded Theory suggests that the causes of premature delinquency and adult deviant behaviour are not the exclusive outcomes of individual characteristics since a particular incident in life can affect individuals, perpetuating their persistency in committing offences. This paper demonstrates that constructive events in life can successfully prevent former prisoners from being reinvolved in crime, whilst adverse life happenings can derail former prisoners from staying on the right path—a phenomenon known as recidivism. Adopting the phenomenology research paradigm, the findings of this paper are based on the empirical data from a Malaysian case study involving 19 former prisoners with criminal records of various offences. The findings of this study reveal that Age-Graded life-course events are essential predictors of former prisoner criminal behaviour, rendering the theory valuable, especially when it comes to modelling social reintegration strategies and interventions for former prisoners.

Keywords: Age-Graded Theory, desistance, former prisoners, Malaysia, recidivism

INTRODUCTION

The number of individuals released from imprisonment in Malaysia was recorded to be 210 251 persons in the year 2020, while in the previous five years, the numbers were recorded to be 143 636 persons in 2019, 134 690 persons in 2018, 124 567 persons in 2017, 110 683 persons in 2016, and 102 214 persons in 2015 (Malaysian Prison Department, 2021). These statistics demonstrate that releases exceed 100 000 prisoners annually, charting a steady increase. This situation raises the concern about the extent of successfully reintegrated ex-prisoners into the community. Records demonstrate that recidivism cases were 15 410 (10.88%) in 2019, 13 896 (10.32%) in 2018, 11 520 (9.25%) in 2017, 9 875 (8.92) % in 2016, and 8 997 (8.70%) in 2015 (Malaysian Prison Department, 2021).

In Malaysia, the Malaysian Prisons Department targets achieving an annual crime repetition rate that does not exceed 10% each year. However, a crime repetition rate of more than 10% was recorded in the recent two consecutive years (2018 and 2019), indicating that recidivism is steadily becoming an issue that needs to be swiftly tackled. The reintegration process can be difficult for former prisoners as multiple risk factors can affect the life events of these former prisoners upon their release. Researchers view both risk and protective factors as major factors in determining the life events of a former prisoner based on the Age-Graded theory (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Maruna, 2001). This theory discusses life events as contributing factors that inform the behavioural choices of former prisoners, specifically focusing on the desistance pathway of former prisoners.

This paper aims to establish Age-Graded life courses on individual criminal behaviours among former convicts by employing the theory as a framework. No particular risk factor is solely responsible for recidivism among former prisoners (Rimke, 2011) since recidivism is often triggered by several risk factors and existing protective factors (Berghuis, 2018; Chikadzi, 2017). However, risk factors are identified as factors that are most likely to increase recidivism among former prisoners and need to be addressed to prevent crime recurrence and re-imprisonment (Andrews & Bonta, 2006). Therefore, a full elaboration of a former prisoner's criminal behaviour upon release from prison would include identifying the risk and protective factors in a former prisoner's life events when they return to the community (Doherty & Bersani, 2016; Maruna, 2015). A former prisoner's behaviour can show a gradual positive or negative change upon their release, depending on the factors that affect their lives (de Vries Robbé et al., 2015; Doherty & Bersani, 2016; Gålnander, 2019).

The works on recidivism and desistance have garnered much attention among Malaysian researchers where an earlier systematic review by Sivabalan and Ibrahim (2018) outlined four underlying factors that contribute towards the successful reintegration of prisoners, namely, (i) motivation to change, (ii) social support, (iii) religious beliefs, and (iv) employment.

Subsequently, Cheah et al. (2019) recorded the experiences of drug offenders who participated in a rehabilitation program by investigating the factors leading to recidivism and the need for rehabilitation, while Jasni et al. (2020) focused on three major interrelated factors that contribute to homelessness and recidivism among former prisoners, i.e. (i) family denial, (ii) addiction and (iii) unemployment. Additionally, in a more recent study, Sivabalan et al. (2020, 2021) discuss the influence of self-concept, sense of community and social support on social integration among young offenders in Malaysia. Similarly, Sathoo et al. (2021) expounded on the importance of social support for prisoners in a parole program that facilitates reintegration. These studies highlight the need to explore reintegration by considering the context of crime repetition, especially since the cessation of crime is highly significant in recidivism. However, to date, only four studies (Sathoo et al., 2021; Sivabalan & Ibrahim, 2018; Sivabalan et al., 2020, 2021) were found to be focused on protective factors in the local context.

In the context of the current research, former prisoners in Malaysia are reported to experience difficulties in reintegrating due to negative life events (Jasni et al., 2020). A society with more dominant risk factors than protective factors is most likely to influence former prisoners' decisions to commit crimes. Thus, this situation prompts the researchers to discuss and understand the risk factors in the former prisoners' current social environment. Understanding these risk and protective factors can contribute to

creating a successful reintegration model for former prisoners in Malaysia. Thus, the next part of this article will discuss the Age-Graded Theory and the relevance of the Age-Graded Theory of informal social control in recidivism and desistance. The proposed model construction is based on the understanding and adaptation of the existing discussions highlighted by this Age-Graded theory as a baseline. Understanding more about the Age-Graded theory enables designing a model of risk-protective and live events of former prisoners.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Age-Graded Theory

The Age-Graded theory is also known as informal social control and the theory of turning points. Sampson and Laub introduced this theory in 1993 where they contend that a person's criminal behaviour is not constant and can evolve where Sampson and Laub (2003) refer to the prevention of former prisoners from recommitting crime as desistance. The notion of desistance has been discussed in terms of social controls, structured routine activities, purposeful human agency (Sampson & Laub, 2005) and, especially, to explain desistance in an individual's lifetime (Rocque, 2014; Sampson & Laub, 1990, 1993). Sampson and Laub (2005) categorised former prisoners into three groups: those who persist in becoming criminals, those who desist and stop being criminals, and those who commit crime from time to time. They focus on turning

points such as marriage, military service, and employment, influencing their social bond. Each individual's criminal behaviour experience often changes according to the age cycle, where the situation is usually better before adulthood and can worsen when they are adults (Rocque & Welsh, 2015; Sampson & Laub, 1993).

According to this theory, individuals experience life transition processes from child to teenager, teenager to adult, single to being married, and being unemployed to having a career. Each life transition process influences an individual's criminal behaviour. This study proves that these risk factors contribute to negative life events while protective factors create positive ones. These life events subsequently encourage individuals to avoid crime or get involved in criminal activities (Maruna, 2017; Rocque, 2014). Therefore, the Age-Graded Theory systematically explains how an individual of a specific age cycle is prompted to be involved or desist from committing a crime based on life stages or turning points that influence his/her decision to either get back into (recidivism) or avoid (desistance) a crime (Maruna, 2017).

The Relevance of Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control in the Context of Recidivism and Desistance

Criminologists are now interested in studying life courses or developmental criminology (Rocque, 2014), where they explore why some former prisoners continue to be involved in crime while some desist from doing so. Numerous studies in this area have been conducted by Laub and Sampson (2001), Maruna (2001), Sampson and Laub (1993), and Sweeten et al. (2013). Despite imprisonment, former prisoners experience positive turning points in marriage, parenting, employment, or any event determining their desistance from crime (Doherty & Ensminger, 2013). However, a main challenge in the field is that the explanation of protective factors remains inconsistent. Several studies view protective factors as a spectrum of "weak" risk items (Henry et al., 2012).

Zagar et al. (2009) refer to protective factors as an absence of risk factors. Most researchers agree that protective factors serve as a predictor that prevents the recurrence of crime, reducing the effects of risk factors (Loeber & Farrington, 2012). However, Yoon et al. (2016) argue that the interaction between risk factors and protective factors has not been empirically investigated. Thus, this study focuses on the Age Graded Theory to explain both risk factors that can lead to the recurrence of crime and the protective factors that can lead to the cessation of crime. This theory justifies the social controls through institutions involved in these individuals' life events, determining the trajectory of their tendency to commit criminal activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS
Research Design

This qualitative study adopts an inductive and interpretive approach involving the systematic study of human experiences and behaviour. Furthermore, this study

adopts the phenomenology paradigm to comprehensively explore the life experiences of former prisoners when it comes to their reintegration process. According to Creswell (2007), this paradigm offers insights into the life experiences of a particular group and an understanding of significant happenings. Furthermore, phenomenology provides an in-depth understanding of complex social issues based on the respondents' life experiences. Thus, the researchers would explain the former prisoners' life experiences via their respective reintegration journeys by adopting this research paradigm.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consist of two groups of former prisoners, namely, recidivists and desisters. These two groups of samples allow researchers to investigate two reintegration situations: the repetition of crime among former prisoners and vice versa. Nineteen former prisoners (seventeen men and two women) were selected to participate in this study, where the data is considered saturated.

Sampling Technique

The researchers employed the purposive snowball sampling technique, considering the difficulty in accessing respondents. A small network of respondents introduced the researchers to respondents who fulfilled the selection criteria of this study. This agreement facilitated the process of identifying the appropriate respondents. The selection criteria of the recidivist sample

group include having a repeat criminal record regardless of the offence and must be a Malaysian above 21. On the other hand, those who desist must be free of criminal records for at least three years from their last release period and must be Malaysian above 21. Langan and Levin (2002) mentioned that the decision to select three-year is an important determinant in demonstrating the desistance or the ability to control oneself from committing a crime.

Data Collection Technique and Procedure

The researchers used the semi-structured interview as a data collection instrument. The interview protocol includes related key questions and allows the researcher to obtain more in-depth responses from the respondents. The entire interview sessions with former prisoners were recorded using an audiotape recorder with the respondents' consent. Prior to conducting the interviews, the respondents were briefed on the study and their participation rights. Upon agreeing with the terms and conditions of the study, the respondents were then required to complete the consent form.

Research Instrument

This study developed separate interview protocols for former prisoners who repeat crimes (recidivists) and those who avoid criminal behaviour (desisters). Both interview protocols were developed based on previous studies (Andrews et al., 2011; Doherty & Bersani, 2016; Hanson, 2003; Maruna, 2017; Petersilia, 2003; Sampson

& Laub, 1993, 2003, 2005) and reviewed by two expert academicians from the field of criminology. As a result, both experts can ensure that the questions posed in the interview protocol account for participants' rights and the research objectives.

Data Analysis

The interview recordings were transcribed and then fed into Atlas.ti for the coding process required for the interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The Atlas.ti software identifies concepts by searching for code, concepts, and categories. In the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, the aim is to explore and understand the insights of the former prisoners' life experiences throughout the reintegration process. Therefore, the raw data from the interviews were carefully transcribed, and all the important verbatims were highlighted in the transcripts, creating codes and different categories and themes.

RESULTS

The findings of this study are presented in Table 1, involving the perspective of respondents who persisted in criminal activities (recidivist), while Table 2 includes findings from those who avoided crime (desisters). Both tables outline the life events of each interviewee and the significant turning points in their lives after being released from prison. The names of the participants are replaced with pseudonyms to protect their confidentiality.

The positive turning points in the life event of the former prisoners are possible determinants of the success of former prisoners in the community, as observed in Table 2, where the three respondents had positive turning points which led them to refrain from criminal activities. For certain individuals, turning points are due to one or more dramatic occurrences that prompt drastic changes, while for some, these changes can be gradual. These life events either enable these former prisoners to pursue a future or fall behind. These turning points may involve positive or negative decisions as well as events where they have less/no social control in avoiding crimes. The life events of the former prisoners depended on whether they encountered risk factors or protective factors. The findings of this study focus on the life events experienced by these former prisoners upon release. Based on the interviews, former prisoners are more prone to recounting their first experience finding a job, followed by family acceptance, marriage, employment, community, friends, addiction, and health. These eight life events were identified through the coding process.

Thus, the researchers developed a model combining the risk factors and protective factors that were influential in determining the life trajectory of a former prisoner upon release (Figure 1). This model suggests that the higher the risk factors, the higher the possibility of prisoners repeating a crime. Conversely, higher protective factors indicate that his/her life is most likely to be more stable and crime-free. The eight domains of risk-protective factors are illustrated in the model, as seen in Figure 1.

Table 1

Profile of recidivists former prisoners based on the eight turning point mechanisms of life events

Respondent	Place of residence	Family relationship	Employment status	Peer relationship	Society relationship	Drug addiction	Health problems
Lufti	Lives under a bridge	Accepted by parents but not siblings	Unemployed	Comfortable with friends of own kind	Rejected by neighbour	Stopped	HIV
Siva	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Good relationship with friends of similar experience	Neighbour has a negative perception	Still using	HIV
Hafiz	Homeless	Partially accepted by family	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Neighbour has a negative perception	Stopped	Hepatitis B and C
Suhaimi	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Neighbours do not judge	Still using	HIV
Suhaila	Homeless	Rejected by family	Employed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Neighbours are unaware	Stopped	Hepatitis B
Rahimah	Homeless	Well accepted	Hard to find a job	Mixes with friends of similar background	Always labelled by neighbours	Still using	Psychological issues

Table 1 *(Continue)*

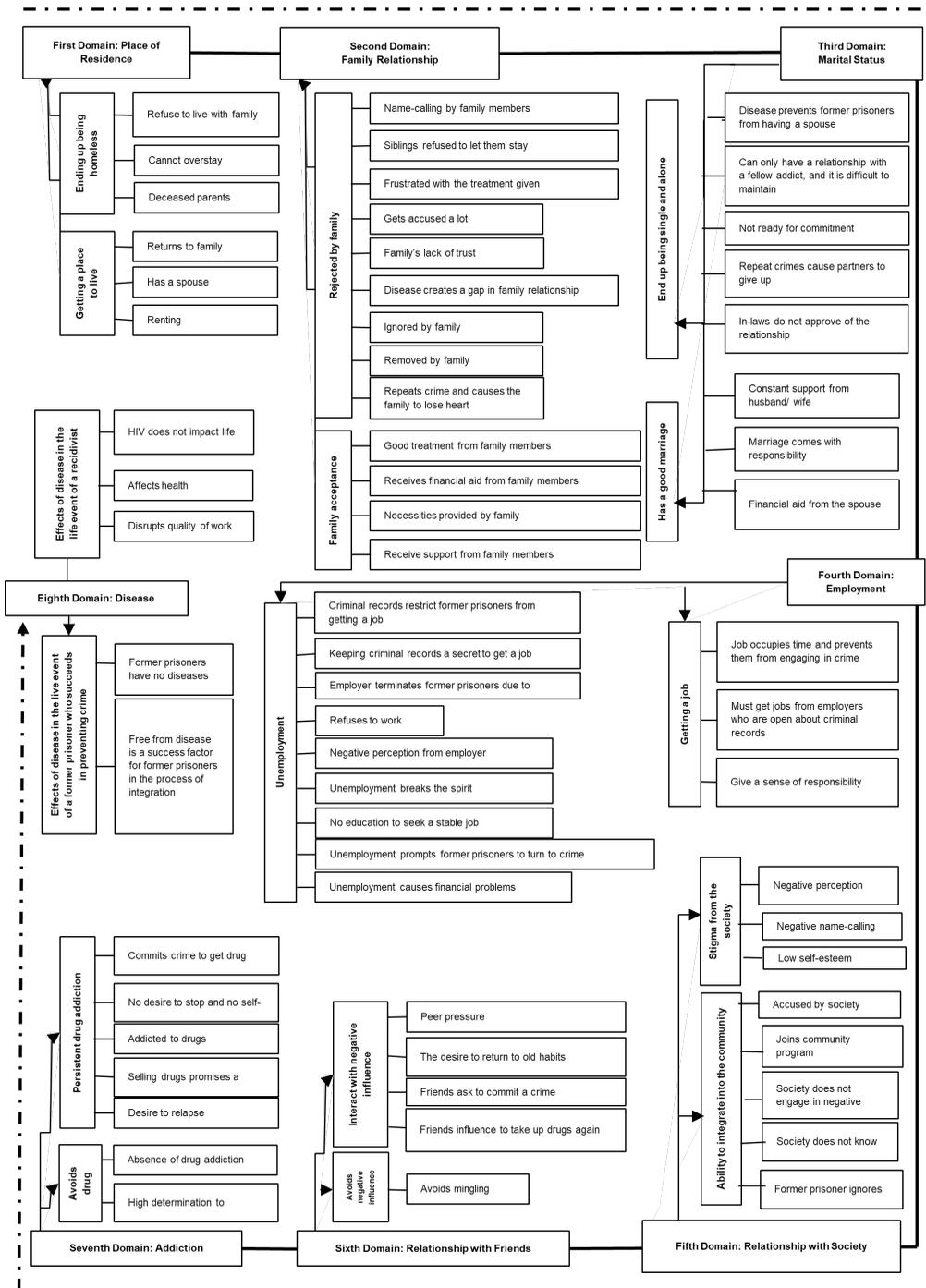| Respondent	Place of residence	Family relationship	Employment status	Peer relationship	Society relationship	Drug addiction	Health problems
Latif	Refuse to live with family	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Discriminated by neighbours	Still using	HIV
Nabil	Returns to family	Rejected by family after repeating a crime	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Neighbours are unaware	Still using	HIV
Amir	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Discriminated by neighbours	Still using	Hepatitis C
Ramli	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed-refuses to work	Mixes with friends of similar background	Discriminated by neighbours	Still using	HIV
Razak	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Discriminated	Still using	Asthma and Hepatitis C

Table 1 *(Continue)*

Respondent	Place of residence	Family relationship	Employment status	Peer relationship	Society relationship	Drug addiction	Health problems
Zahid	Homeless	Accepted by parents but not siblings	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Negative perception, although there is no apparent name-calling	Still using	HIV & tuberculosis
Naim	Lives far from family	Well accepted	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Discriminated	Still using	Hepatitis C
Zarul	Refuses to stay long with his sister	Accepted by parents but not siblings	Employed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Neighbours are unaware	Still using	HIV, Hepatitis B and C
Fikri	Lives with family	Well accepted	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Discriminated	Stopped	None
Syamsul	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Mixes with friends of similar background	Discriminated	Still using	HIV and Hepatitis C

Table 2

Profile of desisting former prisoners based on the eight turning point mechanisms of life events

Respondent	Place of residence	Family relationship	Employment status	Peer relationship	Society relationship	Drug addiction	Health problems
Muiz	Lives with family	Well accepted	Employed	Prevents self from mingling with problematic friends	Neighbour has a negative perception	Stopped	None
Syafiq	Lives with family	Well accepted	Employed	Prevents self from mingling with problematic friends	Neighbours do not judge despite knowing	Never	None
Rizal	Lives with family	Well accepted	Employed	Avoids mingling with people	Sometimes discriminated, especially when a crime happens	Never	None

First Domain: Place of Residence

Ending up being homeless
- Refuse to live with family
- Cannot overstay
- Deceased parents

Getting a place to live
- Returns to family
- Has a spouse
- Renting

Second Domain: Family Relationship

Rejected by family
- Name-calling by family members
- Siblings refused to let them stay
- Frustrated with the treatment given
- Gets accused a lot
- Family's lack of trust
- Disease creates a gap in family relationship
- Ignored by family
- Removed by family
- Repeats crime and causes the family to lose heart

Family acceptance
- Good treatment from family members
- Receives financial aid from family members
- Necessities provided by family
- Receive support from family members

Third Domain: Marital Status

End up being single and alone
- Disease prevents former prisoners from having a spouse
- Can only have a relationship with a fellow addict, and it is difficult to maintain
- Not ready for commitment
- Repeat crimes cause partners to give up
- In-laws do not approve of the relationship

Has a good marriage
- Constant support from husband/ wife
- Marriage comes with responsibility
- Financial aid from the spouse

Effects of disease in the life event of a recidivist
- HIV does not impact life
- Affects health
- Disrupts quality of work

Eighth Domain: Disease

Effects of disease in the live event of a former prisoner who succeeds in preventing crime
- Former prisoners have no diseases
- Free from disease is a success factor for former prisoners in the process of integration

Fourth Domain: Employment

Unemployment
- Criminal records restrict former prisoners from getting a job
- Keeping criminal records a secret to get a job
- Employer terminates former prisoners due to
- Refuses to work
- Negative perception from employer
- Unemployment breaks the spirit
- No education to seek a stable job
- Unemployment prompts former prisoners to turn to crime
- Unemployment causes financial problems

Getting a job
- Job occupies time and prevents them from engaging in crime
- Must get jobs from employers who are open about criminal records
- Give a sense of responsibility

Persistent drug addiction
- Commits crime to get drug
- No desire to stop and no self-
- Addicted to drugs
- Selling drugs promises a
- Desire to relapse

Avoids drug
- Absence of drug addiction
- High determination to

Interact with negative influence
- Peer pressure
- The desire to return to old habits
- Friends ask to commit a crime
- Friends influence to take up drugs again

Avoids negative influence
- Avoids mingling

Stigma from the society
- Negative perception
- Negative name-calling
- Low self-esteem

Ability to integrate into the community
- Accused by society
- Joins community program
- Society does not engage in negative
- Society does not know
- Former prisoner ignores

Seventh Domain: Addiction

Sixth Domain: Relationship with Friends

Fifth Domain: Relationship with Society

In an applicable manner

Figure 1. Proposed model of risk-protective and live events of former prisoners

First Life Event Domain: Housing and Residential

Upon their release, housing is essential for former prisoners since it provides a safe space for them. However, their criminal record makes it difficult for them to find shelter most of the time. Without proper accommodation, most of them will end up homeless and living on the streets. The possibility for a former prisoner to lose proper housing is when their parents pass away. Most respondents reported that they feel awkward and uncomfortable living in their parents' homes after their death, most likely occupied by their married siblings. Being homeless increases the risk of former prisoners re-engaging in criminal behaviours (Bantchevska et al., 2008; Mabhala et al., 2017). Findings show that all the respondents who were homeless were involved in crime. Those with a steady income can rent a place daily, whereas only two individuals can afford to rent monthly.

The three respondents who maintained a crime-free life had proper shelter upon release as they were married and returned to their wives and children. Additionally, former prisoners surrounded by family members also possess high social control to stop engaging in criminal behaviour (Braman, 2004; Seiter & Kadela, 2003; Visher et al., 2004). This finding aligns with the Age-Graded Theory, postulating that social control is formed through family and marriage relationships (Sampson & Laub, 1993). Therefore, strong family institutions can contribute to informal social control that prevents former prisoners from dabbling in criminal activities (Maruna, 2001).

Second Life Event Domain: Family Relationship

Undoubtedly, the family relationship is crucial in encouraging former prisoners to adhere to the rules and become responsible community members. Family support is also important in assisting former prisoners through reintegration (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017; Butorac et al., 2017; Hochstetler et al., 2010; Travis & Petersilia, 2001). In this study, 13 former prisoners have weak ties with their families, and only three of them are well-received by their families. Upon release from prison, most of the respondents were either rejected or turned away by their family members. Family rejection leads to their relapse into the vicious cycle of criminal activity and imprisonment (Maruna, 2001). More specifically, siblings would often be upset and grudge against former prisoners. The respondents also expressed their hurt when their family members insulted them and chose not to trust them.

Past criminal records of drug addiction and repeated imprisonment can exacerbate the lack of trust from family members (Green & Winik, 2010; Scott et al., 2014). Findings show that respondents are often the first to be accused when there is missing jewellery or valuables at home. This situation fosters unhealthy tension among family members, inevitably forcing former inmates to leave the house rather than face unjust accusations voluntarily. Most family members also no longer care for the respondents where their illnesses such as HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and tuberculosis fuel their rejection.

Therefore, former prisoners often choose to stay away from their family members. Family rejection is a negative turning point in the life of former prisoners that can be considered a risk factor.

Findings show that family relationships influence informal social control, especially among those who live with their family members. The acceptance of former prisoners in their families makes them feel valued and encourages them to stay with them (Barnes & Beaver, 2012; Bersani & Doherty, 2013). It aligns with Sathoo et al. (2021) findings highlighting the importance of good social support from family members in the reintegration process. Those who enjoy familial bonds also have proper financial assistance from their family. Since these former prisoners do not lack financial security and necessities such as food, clothing, and shelter, they have no reason to make a living illegally. The researchers found that an individual would try to avoid committing a crime when he/she understands the consequences of their family losing a loved one to a crime. The family would have to deal with the crime's repercussions, especially if they are breadwinners. These are positive turning points that lead to a high formal social control over themselves (Maruna, 2015).

Third Life Event Domain: Marriage and Responsibility

Out of the 16 recidivist respondents, 11 were single; two were married, two were widowed, and one was reported to be in a relationship. Being single does not necessarily prompt them to commit the crime; however, having a partner strongly motivate former prisoners to avoid committing crimes. Married individuals tried their best to avoid crime due to the informal social control created by marital relationships (Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 1993). When marriage is a turning point, the couple directly takes charge of the social control structure and finds meaning in life (Christian et al., 2006). Spouses can also provide social and emotional support, deterring former prisoners from crime. The researchers also discovered that the existing relationship between former prisoners and their spouses could affect the ability to obey legal rules.

However, falling back into crime can lead to divorce as the spouse lose trust. Some respondents also state that disease such as HIV is a prominent issue. In terms of romantic relationships, former prisoners often choose to date among friends. Two respondents mentioned that they would only have sexual relations with a partner who has similar addiction to drugs or a former prisoner. However, romantic relationships usually do not last due to poor finances, lack of plans and fear of commitment. Most of them view romantic relationships as a replacement for the love they lack, where their partner is seen as a social support system sharing the same problem.

Fourth Life Event Domain: Employment

Permanent crime records are seen as one of the largest obstacles for former

prisoners to obtaining a job (Levenson, 2009; Ramakers et al., 2014; Wang et al., 2010). All the respondents in this are currently unemployed. This scenario illustrates that being unemployed can trigger a state of homelessness. Thirteen respondents mentioned that past criminal records prevented them from getting jobs. Employers often view former prisoners as liabilities to the company, making it difficult for former prisoners to be transparent (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Denver et al., 2017). Most former prisoners also have low educational levels, limited work skills and no stable employment history. The lack of education and skills makes full-time employment impossible for former prisoners (McGrath et al., 2011) since employers prefer to hire individuals without criminal records, indirectly marginalising former prisoners (Aaltonen et al., 2017). Almost all respondents expressed that they desperately want a job.

The current unemployment trend also perpetuates criminal engagement that eventually forces them to be stuck in continuous criminal activity (Mears & Mestre, 2012). Thus, job instability is a negative turning point and is considered the most significant factor after being released since former prisoners are likely to be unemployed or have stable jobs (McGrath et al., 2011). Sivabalan and Ibrahim (2018) highlight employment as a significant protective factor in ensuring that former prisoners avoid crime, preventing them from reoffending. Therefore, employment provides financial stability and serves as a medium for former prisoners to productively utilise their time and foster personal responsibilities (Sathoo et al., 2021).

Fifth Life Event Domain: Societal Relationship

The following three situations are common societal relationships for respondents (recidivists) in the community; (1) they are excluded or not accepted by their neighbours, (2) their neighbours are not interested in their presence, and (3) they are being negatively labelled. When a crime occurs in the community, the respondents would often be the first suspects. The attitude of community members has led to inferiority among former prisoners and exacerbated the stigma among them (Hipp et al., 2010; Sampson et al., 2002).

However, the situation is different for former prisoners who had refrained from crime. All three respondents stated that they could integrate well because of their frequent involvement in community programs or community activities. Relationships between individuals and society can encourage emotional attachment to meet community expectations. A positive outcome can be achieved when the neighbourhood community provides a conducive, supportive, and respectful community for former prisoners (McNeill & Whyte, 2007). The researchers also discovered that former prisoners are more likely to reintegrate into the community if they are unaware of their records. In this sense, living in a neighbourhood that provides an environment of societal

solidarity can further encourage cooperative social bonding. It is in line with Sivabalan et al. (2020), who found that individuals who receive ongoing social support from their environment and community have positive self-images.

Sixth Life Event Domain: Peer Influence

Relationships with anti-social peers are important predictors in the re-involvement of criminal activity among former prisoners (Hanson, 2003; Tenibiaje, 2013). Some former prisoners consciously avoid friends who previously contributed to their crime, while others maintain a risky friendships. Peers contribute to social control among the former prisoners (McGrath et al., 2011). Therefore, peers who have criminal records can become risk factors. However, the absence of a sense of belonging prompts many former prisoners to resort to these unhealthy friendships. Reconnecting with these friends often leads to re-involvement in old activities such as drug addiction, theft, and robbery. For former prisoners who are addicts, re-involvement with negative friends is a strong impetus for their return to prison (Tenibiaje, 2013).

As such, avoiding peers of negative influence is one of the protective factors since the interaction between former prisoners, and their friends can lead them back to crime (Andrews et al., 2011; Taylor & Becker, 2015). Findings show that negative relationships diminished with life changes and maturity. In this study, all three respondents who quit crime demonstrated a high degree of maturity when expressing their opinions and remorse for their previous criminal activities.

Seventh Life Event Domain: Addiction

Most former prisoners fail to manage their addiction upon being released, where they face the challenges of drug and alcohol abuse (Green & Winik, 2010; Malik-Kane & Visher, 2008; Scott et al., 2014). Twelve respondents are still actively using drugs, with only four respondents quitting their addiction. Drug dependency is common among incarcerated prisoners as an effective drug abuse treatment is absent, leaving them at high risk of relapse. Often, they commit crimes to gain money for drugs. Their friends serve as a network for drug or theft activities, supplying former prisoners with drugs. Chronic dependence on drugs and alcohol makes it difficult for former prisoners to fully recover, making them more vulnerable to repeating their offences (Scott et al., 2014). Almost all respondents reported that they repeated their criminal behaviour and failed to integrate because of their inability to handle their addictions. Findings also show that six respondents agreed that they would continue to sell drugs to provide them with a decent income. The difficulty of obtaining a stable job fuels their involvement in drug dealing. Unfortunately, being a drug dealer often led them to personally use available drug stock, eventually forcing them to steal/rob to replace what they have used. The researchers discovered that the problem of addiction or the tendency to reuse drugs did not occur among respondents who quit crime.

Eighth Life Event Domain: Diseases

Most former prisoners have poor health due to their lifestyles, such as causal unprotected sex, syringe sharing, alcohol, and drug abuse (Khan et al., 2011). While in prison, prisoners have access to health care and can receive medical examinations for chronic diseases such as diabetes and infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B and HIV. It was found that 15 respondents were either infected with HIV, hepatitis B or C, tuberculosis, or a combination of the mentioned diseases, whilst one respondent is suffering from a mental health illness. Upon release, former prisoners no longer receive any form of healthcare. They avoid seeking treatment at public health institutions due to stigma, keeping them silent about their illness. These challenges also put their health on the back burner as they have other unmet needs (Abracen et al., 2013, 2015). Locally, a high proportion of homeless individuals, including former prisoners, drug addicts, and those with mental illness, are reported to neglect their health (Yani et al., 2016). A bigger concern is when most homeless people are demotivated and avoid taking medication or seeking treatment, leading to more serious health effects (Yani et al., 2016).

The researchers also discovered that a former prisoner's view on the disease is important. Some feel that their disease does not interfere with their life. However, findings discovered that contagious diseases such as HIV are frowned upon by family members. Recidivists who suffer from diseases have a much more difficult time finding family acceptance and jobs due to the strong stigma.

Physical health and well-being greatly affect the success of the social integration of former prisoners. All three respondents who desisted had good health status and were free from contagious or chronic illnesses. Family acceptance is much stronger for them, preventing them from being reinvolved with crime or drugs. They also enjoy higher employability since the stigma is lesser among employers.

DISCUSSION

The Age-Graded Theory of Informal Social Control emphasizes the importance of certain events and changes experienced by former prisoners in influencing their criminal behaviour. Individual criminal behaviour will change in each age cycle (Martinez & Abrams, 2013; Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2003). This study focuses on the life events of former prisoners upon their release from prison. The Age-Graded Theory discusses how an individual's life is determined through certain life events. This theory looks at life events in life stages, turning points and individual pathways. Life trajectories involve stable long-term patterns and changes in one's life, involving various transitions (Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2003).

This study proves that the social events faced by former prisoners can prevent criminal behaviour in some individuals while others will continue to offend. Out of the 19 respondents, 16 categorized as recidivists faced various risk factors that

challenged them to integrate. The average recidivist was homeless and forced to live as a homeless person. Finding a home is not an easy task for them, and most of them end up homeless due to their own choices or family rejection. This scenario confirms placement as one of the life events that determine the success of reintegration in the lives of former prisoners. Various studies have proven that family is one factor determining the success of reintegration, where former prisoners' weak relationship with their family members encourages recidivism (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2017). The risk of relapsing and returning to prison is high when former prisoners are not accepted or treated badly by their families (Sanei & Mir-Khalili, 2015).

In addition, marriage is also seen as a protective factor that can prevent former prisoners from repeating the crime. Strong marital relationships enable individuals to comply and reduce their chances of engaging in criminal activity (Laub & Sampson, 2003). However, recidivists are unmarried due to various factors like HIV.

The cessation of crime is also closely related to job search because stable employment encourages the cessation of crime (Kazemian & Maruna, 2009). In addition, having a job reinforces social compliance (Sampson & Laub, 1993) as job stability, job commitment and interdependence between employers and employees are significant factors in influencing former criminals to stop committing crimes. However, this study identified that 16 respondents are

unemployed and recidivists. This condition has been proven based on various studies claiming that unemployment can lead to the recurrence of crime (Berg & Huebner, 2011; Denver et al., 2017; McGrath et al., 2011).

Besides that, peers also play an important role in influencing the behaviour of repeat offenders. For example, positive and prosocial peers may reduce recurrent offences among former prisoners (McGrath et al., 2011). On the other hand, negative and anti-social peer influence can reinforce the criminal behaviour of former prisoners (Hanson, 2003). It aligns with the current study where recidivists prefer to approach negative friends to replace family rejection. As for those who desist, all three stay away from friends because they know the effects of negative peer influences.

Criminal behaviour is influenced by the characteristics of the neighbourhood in which the individual lives (Inzlicht et al., 2012; Moore et al., 2016). Community acceptance and support are important in helping former prisoners reintegrate into community life. The society that discriminates causes them to choose to live away from society. Poor and conflicting relationships between former prisoners and community members increase the risk of former prisoners becoming repeat offenders (Hipp et al., 2010). It is evident in this study as most persistent respondents face discrimination from the community, contrary to the recidivists, who are accepted by society.

In addition, the researchers also view addiction as one of the life events that

influence former prisoners upon release. Some former prisoners successfully quit their drug addiction upon their release, but most recidivists cannot stop abusing drugs. Heavy drug abuse is a critical criminogenic risk factor for recidivism among former prisoners (Scott et al., 2014). Furthermore, former prisoners who do not have access to rehabilitation care are at risk of returning to drug abuse and alcohol addiction (Rowe et al., 2007), where drug abuse is a major contributing factor to high recidivism rates (Castillo & Alarid, 2011). Often, former prisoners commit criminal acts to fuel their addiction (Hiday & Wales, 2009).

Finally, researchers also found that health is a determinant of recidivism in the lives of former prisoners. On average, recidivists have various infectious diseases compared to desisters, who have good health. Those who are ill settle for a very low standard of living, live on the streets and are constantly addicted to drugs. Most former prisoners have poor health due to their lifestyles, such as free sex practices, needle sharing, and alcohol and drug abuse (Khan et al., 2011). While in prison, inmates have access to health care provided by the prison. In prison, prisoners can receive health screening treatment for chronic diseases such as diabetes and infectious diseases such as Hepatitis C, Hepatitis B and HIV. Unfortunately, they no longer have any form of health care after their release.

Most of them do not follow any health treatment in government hospitals. The mentality that has been engraved in their minds will be the stigma that they will go through if they are in a public area such as a hospital, as well as the hardships of life that make them more willing to remain silent about their illness. The challenges of life are also caused by their health is not something that matters. Problems related to this disease become more critical when former prisoners come out of prison unconscious and know that they have diseases such as Tuberculosis, Hepatitis C and HIV. As a result, their health condition is becoming more critical, as well as the worrying thing is that they have the potential to spread infectious diseases such as tuberculosis, hepatitis, and HIV to the community (Petersilia, 2003). Researchers interviewed the respondents about the effects of their illness on well-being, and most of them claimed that the disease did not cause any problems to them.

CONCLUSION

The discussion on the Age-Graded Theory involves the discussion of turning point that occurs throughout the life events of individuals alongside the risk and protective factors at each event. The same theory can also explain the recurrence of anti-social and criminal behaviour among former prisoners upon their release. More specifically, this theory postulates that criminal behaviours during the reintegration of former prisoners result from the life events they experienced. However, this study only accounts for adulthood and not the experiences of former prisoners when they were younger.

The model explored the interaction between life events to explain the criminal behaviour of the former prisoners. This

study confirms that recidivism among former prisoners is often the result of a lack of protective factors. On the other hand, strong protective factors can influence them to stay on the right path. However, it is not necessarily applicable to every former prisoner, as those who experienced positive life events can still be involved in crime. The risk-protective factors and life events of the former prisoners' model presented in Figure 1 attempted to represent the occurring factors in the reintegration process. Therefore, agencies involved in managing former prisoners, particularly the Malaysian Prison Department, can adopt the proposed model into their existing reintegration program to decrease recidivism and increase desistance behaviour among former prisoners.

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