

Three Major Interrelated Factors Contributing to Homelessness Issue among Former Prisoners in Malaysia

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Abstract: Homelessness issue among former prisoners in Malaysia upon their release is of great concern. Hence, this study aimed to identify the predominant factors influencing homelessness issue among former prisoners in Malaysia. Imprisonment is usually assumed to be a negative life event and can act as a hindrance for the former prisoner to successfully integrate after being freed from prison. Imprisonment and past criminal records are the biggest contributors to becoming homeless. This is a fact because imprisonment causes the former prisoners to lose his source of income, personal belongings, ability to seek shelter and personal relationships due to family rejection, addiction and unemployment. This study was based on the Ecological Model of Homeless by Nooe and Patterson. The selection of this model was considered appropriate and aligned with the objectives of the study which aimed to identify the factors that lead to the life of the homeless among former prisoners. In this study, nineteen former prisoners, regardless of the type of offence committed, were selected using the snowball sampling method and were interviewed. The findings revealed that family denial, unemployment, and drug addiction were the three major interrelated factors that contribute to the homelessness issue among the former prisoners during their reintegration process. Housing security is a risk factor of homelessness.

Keywords: Homelessness, former prisoners, family rejection, addiction and unemployment.

INTRODUCTION

The topic of homelessness and the intersection with criminal justice is a critical issue to explore. Considering the mentioned limited research available in Malaysia, this further compounds the need to identify persons with lived experience to improve their living situations and conditions upon re-entry. This article is an important contribution to the literature. The absence of proper national statistics on homelessness issue among former prisoners in Malaysia, coupled with limited knowledge and lack of support system on the real situation, have resulted in the failure of former prisoners reintegration process. Reintegration has been proved to be difficult for former prisoners, as they face numerous challenges simultaneously (Davis, Bahr, & Ward, 2012). Three main factors that contribute to this problem were identified by Rodriguez & Brown (2003), which include: i) former prisoners face social stigma and economic hardships, which cause them to become homeless upon their release; ii) former prisoners who return to society face barriers in obtaining shelter due to their status, inability to pay rent, and landlord's refusal to allow them to rent; iii) there is a lack of support from the government agencies and non-governmental organisations in assisting these former prisoners to integrate successfully into society. Each year, former prisoners are released without any support system, which consequently places them at a greater risk to recommit

crime. Being homeless also makes them feel more vulnerable against unhealthy lifestyles and other social-related activities which cause them to commit the offence again.

Previous studies also described the involvement rate of serious offences mostly associated with former prisoners homeless (Kushel, Hans, Evans, Bangsberg, & Moss, 2005). In addition, lack of skills, sense of inferiority, suffering from infectious diseases, and drug abuse are among the common traits of these former prisoners. Moreover, their release commonly accord fewer opportunities to secure livelihood as most of them are still stuck in their old lifestyles, hence, creating a destructive environment. An adequate amount of evidence shows that former prisoners face huge economic challenges when released from the prison. Petersilia (2001) documented that most of the former prisoners leave prison without any savings. Hence, the inability to obtain and retain employment and/or income support has a direct impact on the individual's ability to obtain residency. The former prisoners homeless also encounter challenges in the competitive labour market, problems of residential inadequacy, poor health as well as insufficient food security (Denver, Siwach & Bushway, 2017). Apart from that, they are also frequently associated with serious health problems, including alcohol and drug abuse which increase the morbidity rates among them (Sanei & Mir-Khalili, 2015). The drug abuse problem essentially disrupts relationships and leads to unemployment (Denver *et al.*, 2017). It has also been purported that the issue of homelessness and

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residency instability among former prisoners can be a significant obstacle and barrier for their successful reintegration.

From the local context, there appears to be a concentration of former prisoners living as homeless people in big cities like Kuala Lumpur (Alhabshi & Manan, 2012; Idris & Ramli, 2017; Jasni, Ah, Yusoff, Shahid, Omar & Azman, 2018; Mustafar, Yusof, Mustafa & Mokhtar 2018); as such, there is a need to focus on the issue of homelessness among the former prisoners by other government parties such as the Department of Prison, DBKL and JKM. Generally, there are no actual statistics of former prisoners who end up as homeless people. However, past studies showed that the former prisoners had the tendency to become aimless or to put it simply, they would end up as homeless persons (Jasni *et al.*, 2018). They usually can be found in big cities such as Kuala Lumpur, Johor Bahru, George Town and Kuching. In Kuala Lumpur, for example, they can be found around the Menara Maybank, Plaza Kota raya, Pasar Seni, Chow Kit, Bank Negara, Dataran Merdeka, Masjid Negara, Jalan Tun Abdul Rahman and Jalan Pudu (Alhabshi & Manan, 2012; Idris & Ramli, 2017; Mustafar *et al.*, 2018). The concentration of the former prisoners in one area can cause worry among the public. It adds to the number of existing homeless people in that particular area.

In Malaysia, homeless people are categorised as destitute persons under the Destitute Persons Act 1977 (Department of Social Welfare, 2020). There is a lack of correct and concrete terms in defining the homeless. Furthermore there is no exact number of homeless people according to the existing categories. As such, it is not known how many homeless persons are grouped under the category of former prisoners or other groups of people with criminal records. Based on Table 1,

Department of Social Welfare Malaysia had produced statistics which showed that there were 1,934 homeless people (destitute persons/beggars) in 2009, 1,434 homeless people in 2010, 1,446 homeless people in 2011, 1223 homeless people in 2012, 1048 homeless people in 2013, 1469 homeless people in 2014, 1527 people in 2015 and this increased to 2278 homeless people in 2016.

This situation makes this study new and exclusive as it provides a specific lens by focusing on former prisoners who end up as homeless persons. The homeless former prisoners are a marginalised population and we don't know a lot about them: their demographic profiles, life experience, life routines, the coping strategy needed, the basic needs required, the challenges faced and other issues. This group is marginalised in terms of assistance and the stigma surrounding their status force them to live without any motivation and aim in a long period of time (LeBel 2011; Tica & Roth 2012). Re-integration appears to be a rocky path for them as they face all sorts of challenges. The homeless issue among the former prisoners is not new in Malaysia because it has existed since the establishment of the prison institutions. In fact, there is a group of aged former prisoners living as homeless people in the city.

Therefore, in this study, factors contributing to the homelessness issues among former prisoners in Malaysia were identified. In addition, literature related to failure in the reintegration of former prisoners, family rejection, unemployment, and drug addiction issues among them that lead to homelessness problems were discussed. The research limitations or areas not included in this study such as: clarifying if they experienced homelessness prior to incarceration, their low education attainment and poverty as contributing

Table 1: The Number of Destitute Persons from 2009-2016

Year	Kuala Lumpur	Citizens	Non-citizens	Total
2009	193	1,687	247	1,934
2010	314	1,181	253	1,434
2011	437	1,140	306	1,446
2012	239	937	286	1,223
2013	210	854	194	1,048
2014	424	1088	381	1,469
2015	215	1115	412	1,527
2016	348	1610	668	2278

Source: Department of Social Welfare Malaysia (2017) in Ramli & Dawood (2017) and Idris & Ramli (2017).

factors to their unemployment before being incarcerated, the family's socio-economic status may contribute to their inability to sustain an additional family member (despite the incarceration), and health co-morbidity prior to incarceration that limits employment opportunities.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Former Prisoners' Failure to Reintegrate into Society and Homelessness Issue

Collectively, every former prisoner experiences various difficulties and different life incidences throughout their reintegration process within community life (Koschmann & Peterson, 2013). In reality, the reintegration process is not as easy since their status bears a great deal of negative stigma which often causes them to be excluded from the society (Solomon, Visser, La Vigne & Osborne, 2006) and subsequently committing criminal behaviour again. Various factors which cause the former prisoners to re-engage in criminal activities during their reintegration process were identified (Clark, 2014) and can be characterised by the perspectives of the individual, family, acquaintances, and communities (Derzon, 2005). For an individual, among the reasons are their failure in obtaining lawful employment (Berg & Huebner, 2011), lack of earning to finance their living, re-socialising with old criminal acquaintances, re-engagement with drug abuse, and deterioration of health conditions due to diseases (Andrews & Dowden, 2006).

The Link between Family Rejection and Homelessness Among Former Prisoners

Family acts as an important institution in providing shelter to newly released former prisoners. In this manner, failure to accept such prisoners into an important institution will eventually destroy their reintegration process (Taylor, 2016). The main reason former prisoners failed to be accepted by their family is due to shame and disappointment from their former conduct. Home is indeed an essential requirement for them during their release and often, the focus which they have in mind is "where can I stay today?" (Ramirez, 2016). Without home or residency, they subsequently end up being homeless on the street. The unforgivable attitude shown by their family members often causes the former prisoners to feel isolated. Hence, the family should serve as a 'house provider' for them once they complete their imprisonment term.

In addition, the risk of repeating crimes among former prisoners is considerably high when they are not accepted or badly treated by their families (Sanei & Mir-Khalili, 2015). Numerous empirical evidences described family as the main cause of former prisoners to be involved again with criminal activities (Hochstetler, DeLisi & Pratt, 2010). A problematic and broken family could give a significant impact on the behaviour of the family members, particularly parents and siblings who commonly act as providers for appropriate sustenance to former prisoners. As a consequence of this failure, former prisoners who lose support from their own family will encounter numerous complications as they have to rely on their acquaintances (La Vigne, Brooks & Shollenberger, 2007).

The Link Between Unemployment and Homelessness Among Former Prisoners

Unemployment leads people to the absence of livelihood. This can be due to the importance of money, especially in purchasing or renting houses. Hence, the absence of money forbids the former prisoners to have a shelter and along with the rejection of family, as discussed, the struggle to obtaining a shelter further deepens. Unemployment is often associated with repeating crimes among the former prisoners (Bellair & Kowalski, 2011; Winterfield, Coggeshall, Burke-Storer, Correa & Tidd, 2009). Former prisoners are generally considered to be unsuitable for job prospects and tend to be unemployed or have unstable work experience (Denver, Siwach & Bushway, 2017; Ramakers, Apel, Nieuwbeerta, Dirkzwager & Wilsen, 2014).

Even the absence of one slight source makes it difficult for former prisoners to reintegrate and change into productive individuals (Petersilia, 2001). This causes them to be contributors to various social and economic problems for both community and former formers, including raising the recidivism rates within three years of their release (Langan & Levin, 2002). They may recommit the crime and get themselves arrested again (Baharom, & Habibullah, 2008, 2009). Considering all of these dynamic risk factors, it is understood former prisoners constantly face great challenges and competition in searching for employment (Aaltonen, Skardhamar, Nilsson, Andersen & Backman, 2017). Findings from various previous studies have initiated current research to evaluate the relationship between the unemployment issue and the difficulty of having a home, particularly among former prisoners (Nilsson *et al.*, 2017;

Petersilia, 2001). As such, to assist in decreasing or preventing the occurrence of crime and becoming homeless among former prisoners, intervention in the form of job opportunities is needed in helping their reintegration process. Some of the programmes for these former prisoners are the job readiness, job transition and job placement programmes.

The Link between Homelessness and Drug Abuse Among Former Prisoners

The most common stereotype towards former prisoners is that the majority of them are drug abusers. Reality has portrayed that a high percentage of former prisoners have no shelter and often suffer from drug abuse problems. Drug abuse and homelessness issues are intensely linked but there are different opinions on the direction of the relationship (Johnson & Chamberlain, 2008). Several studies have shown that drug abuse serves as a risk factor for homelessness problems while others suggested that homelessness triggers the misuse of drugs. Once an individual becomes too dependent on drugs, the person will end up with financial trouble due to the need to maintain their expensive addiction (Castillo & Alarid, 2011; Wood, 2011). Henceforth, they will either fail to pay the rent which leads to the removal of residency or poor family relationship which leads them to be homeless (Coomans & Spreen, 2003).

The homelessness problem is largely due to drug and alcohol addiction problems (Aloweimer, 2018; Yani *et al.*, 2016). Studies have repeatedly found that drug use is more prevalent among homeless people than others (Salomonsen-Sautel, Van Leeuwen, Gilroy, Boyle, Malberg & Hopfer, 2008). Despite the various studies, research consistently shows that approximately one-third of homeless individuals experience alcohol and drug problems (Gillis, Dickerson, & Hanson, 2010) and that up to two-thirds have a history of alcohol or drug abuse. The accessibility to drugs while out of the house makes the individual more willing to stay outside of home and to continue to access these drugs on the street (Rafiey, Alipour, Moghanibashi-Mansourieh & Mardani, 2019). Evidence from Rafiey *et al.*'s study (2019) shows that homeless people with addiction problems face three major challenges: instability, social distrust, and economic weakness. Most former prisoners face relapse problems, eventually leading to drug abuse. Most former prisoners released from prison fail to handle their drug addiction problems. In other words, drug and alcohol addiction recovery therapy is one of

the important health services for former prisoners with a track record and history of drug abuse.

Undoubtedly, living a life as a homeless person is very depressing and therefore the former prisoners are prone to drug abuse to relieve their stress. According to Palepu, Gadermann, Hubley, Farrell, Gogosis & Aubry (2013), homeless people are normally exposed to chronic physical disease, mental illnesses, drug abuse, and even death. The use of drugs is known to be a significant barrier for the homeless and this situation has continued to worsen their social outreach (Palepu, Marshall, Lai, Wood & Kerr, 2010). The two-way relationship between homelessness and drug abuse do exist and need further research.

The Ecological Model of Homeless by Nooe and Patterson

This model was conceived based on an ecological perspective. Nooe and Patterson (2010) stated that homelessness can be understood as a result of interactions between risk factors ranging from individual conditions to socio-economic structure and environmental conditions. The authors used the ecological perspective to identify and explain known biopsychosocial risk factors in the system / domain hierarchy. The goal was to address the issues that caused homelessness as a result of individual or structural factors.

Nooe & Paterson examined the biopsychosocial risk factors associated with homelessness in relation to the housing status, and individual and social impacts. It discussed the problem of homelessness as a result of existing individual or structural factors. In this model, the four main components were biopsychosocial risk factors, individual and social outcome, temporal dimension, and housing outcome. This model aimed to illustrate the dynamic relationship between domains and model elements (Nooe & Patterson, 2010). Biopsychosocial risk factors include a variety of factors including biology and individual development and conditions such as poverty and other aspects such as housing availability and stability. The biopsychosocial factors are divided into two elements, namely individual factors and structural factors. The structural factors include poverty, education and minimum wage, loss of public assistance, cost and level of housing availability, family home instability, deinstitutionalization, health care costs, low wages and discrimination. The individual factors would include age, marital status, social support, care center, conflict and family

concerns, sexual harassment, mental and physical abuse, imprisonment, mental problems, domestic violence, health status, education, drug abuse, minority status and veteran status (Nooe & Patterson, 2010).

As stated by the two authors, this problem of homelessness generally leads to great effects. This can be seen from the individual and social outcomes. According to the authors, individual effects include health impairment, drug abuse, mental problems, social isolation, educational problems, sexual abuse, lack of health care, criminal activity, crime victims, unemployment, self-injury, and death. On the other hand, social outcomes would include poverty, public safety, property crime, prostitution, street ideas, 'public inebriation', begging, difficulty getting health services, community philanthropy, community disputes (Nooe & Patterson, 2010). The study by Nooe and Patterson focused on the homelessness factor in general. Homelessness is a time-changing phenomenon. Individuals and families may experience homelessness for a period of one day or it may last for several years. As for the current study, its advantage was that it aimed to identify the factors of homelessness among the ex-prisoners specifically.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Study Setting & Design

Qualitative research involving former prisoners consisted of recidivists and desisters was conducted. A phenomenology research design that focuses on the life experience of a particular group was used to understand the needs of former prisoners after being released. This research design helps researchers to understand the social world of former prisoners, especially their social life, experiences, and perspectives on certain matters of life. Moreover, respondent's perceptions and interpretations from their life experience can be analysed. The interview focused on two main questions, which were: What do you experience from this phenomenon? What is the context or situation that usually affects your experience of this phenomenon (Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The study was carried out in 2016 at the office of Ikhlas Community Welfare Association of Malaysia, Chow Kit Road, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. The organisation operates a drop-in centre for newly released former prisoners, drug addicts, and sex workers. All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Malaya Research

Committee (UMREC). The UMREC has conducted an ethics review prior to the beginning of this study. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents included in this study. There was no specific funding provided for this study.

Sampling & Data Collection

This study employed a semi-structured interview that enables the researcher to use a pre-planned interview guide for a proper direction whilst providing respondents with the opportunity to convey their thoughts through a range of senses. The interview protocol was constructed based on literature reviews, research questions, and the theoretical framework. The flexibility of open-ended questions was considered useful as in-depth conversations gradually unfold and further generate additional insights on the subject. This allows the researcher to get the exact idea or deep answers from research respondents. A good interview would consist of open-ended questions and it will provide more than yes or no answers, which are neutral, non-sensitive and understandable responses. Generally, the questions in the interview protocol would begin with simple questions and the respondents can answer it easily and eventually to difficult or more sensitive questions.

A pilot test was carried out by interviewing two former prisoners before the performance of full-scale research. The result led to the improvement of the subsequent interview protocol. Creswell (1998) suggested a range of 5 to 25 respondents for phenomenology research design. In this study, 19 respondents were selected via snowball sampling technique. Snowball sampling is a non-probability sampling technique in which the subjects of the study lead to the identification of other subjects from their acquaintances as well. Therefore, the respondents of the study can be said to be more like a moving snowball. This sampling technique was utilised due to the population of respondents that is hidden and difficult for the researcher to access. Through snowball sampling, a small group of respondents with a preliminary information network had introduced the researcher with respondents who met the selected criteria and potentially contributed to the overall study. In this study, the researcher was able to identify the first group of respondents who were clients at IKHLAS. This group was approached at around Chow Kit Road and asked if they were interested in participating in this study. The first respondent agreed to be interviewed knowing the research objectives to be derived from this

interview. This snowball sampling method was continuously carried out until 19 respondents were acquired. This snowball sampling is best used when a list of subject names is not available, especially in cases involving sensitive matters or unauthorised by certain parties. Each respondent's name was kept as a secret and replaced with a numbering (label) to keep their identity private. This is important as it is a

sensitive study involving high-risk respondents to be labelled negatively by society (refer Table 2).

The respondent selection process was primarily based on the saturation point achieved during the data sampling process. Interview session with one respondent had led to the introduction of their friends, who possessed the criteria needed for this study. Every person met face to face would lead to other friends.

Table 2: List of Study Respondents with Relevant Demographic Information

Label	Age	Number of repeat offence	Highest Level of Education	Place of residence	Family relationship	Employment status	Drug addiction
R01	36 Years	2 Times	Secondary	Lives under a bridge	Parents accept – however, siblings rejects	Unemployed	Stopped
R02	54 Years	8 Times	Primary	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Still in practice
R03	48 Years	7 Times	Mid Secondary	Homeless	Part of the family accept	Unemployed	Stopped
R04	42 Years	More than 3-4 Time Respondent doesnt remember	Secondary	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Still in practice
R05	63 Years	5 Times	Lower Primary	Homeless	Rejected by family	Employed	Stopped
R06	46 Years	4 Times	Secondary	Homeless	Well accepted	Hard to find a job	Still in practice
R07	43 Years	5 Times	Mid Secondary	Refuse to live with family	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Still in practice
R08	40 Years	2 Times	Mid Secondary	Returns to family	Rejected by family due to repeat of crime	Unemployed	Still in practice
R09	53 Years	4 Times	Secondary	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Still in practice
R10	38 Years	2 Times	Secondary	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed-refuses to work	Still in practice
R11	41 Years	3 Times	Secondary	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Still in practice
R12	33 Years	11 Times	Mid Secondary	Homeless	Parents accept-however, siblings rejects	Unemployed	Still in practice
R13	46 Years	2 Times	Low Secondary	Lives far from family	Well accepted	Unemployed	Still in practice
R14	36 Years	5 Times	Primary	Refuses to stay long with his sister	Rejected by parents but accepted by siblings	Employed	Still in practice
R15	36 Years	3 Times	Mid Secondary	Lives with family	Well accepted	Unemployed	Stopped
R16	40 Years	4 Times	Secondary	Homeless	Rejected by family	Unemployed	Still in practice
R017	50 Years	1 Times	Secondary	Lives with family	Well accepted	Employed	Stopped
R018	40 Years	1 Times	Mid Secondary	Lives with family	Well accepted	Employed	Never
R019	58 Years	1 Times	Diploma	Lives with family	Well accepted	Employed	Never

Each respondent was interviewed for 45 minutes to one-hour duration, a suitable period for a good interview session. Few respondents were interviewed for the second time to obtain accurate feedback. Before the commencement of the interview session, consent forms were given to each respondent and they were also informed on the interview questions as well as their role in this research. Besides, each respondent could decline from being questioned or refuse to answer any questions from the interviewers without prejudice. Personal information such as respondent's background, location and contact were kept confidential.

An interview protocols were developed. The construction and development of the interview protocol were based on literature reviews, research questions and theoretical framework of this study. The interview protocol consists of two parts. The first section contains questions to gather demographic information such as age, educational attainment and criminal history of the respondents. The second part contains questions designed based on the research questions and organised on the following topics: challenges of criminal re-release, family relationship, work experience, life and relationship with friends and the reasons why they act to reiterate crime. The order of the questions was modified throughout the interview

process as a "probe". Intuition was also used throughout the interview process. For example: (a) When you were released from prison, where did you stay? (b) Is having a place to stay a major challenge when you were released? (c) Can you share your experience after being released from prison? (d) How do you see the relationship between your failure to get a job and becoming homeless? (e) Does having a drug addiction problem led to difficulty in finding a job? (f) Could drug addiction be assumed as a factor in your failure to get a home (g) Does your family did not accept you because you are addicted to drugs? Examples of probes used in the interview were: (a) Why does your family did not allow you to live with them? (b) Why does your employer refused to hire you? (c) Why do you continue to take drugs?

Data Coding & Analysis

The interview was done using an audio recorder. The audio recording was then transcribed into words, typed and saved using Microsoft Office Word software and inserted into Atlas.ti software (insert version number) for coding purposes. During the transcription process, the researcher should conduct the encoding process to interpret the copied data into a form of writing in terms of theme, concept or idea. The process of data analysis also involved coding, classifying and

Table 3: Superordinate and Subthemes Extracted From Analysis of Respondents' Life Events

<p>Superordinate Theme 1: Factors contributing to homelessness issue among former prisoners</p>	<p>Subtheme 1a Influence of Family Rejection on Former Prisoners' Lack of Direction and Support System</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. refusal to live with family, 2. inability to have lodging for a long period, and 3. absence of parents to live with <p>Subtheme 1b Impact of Unemployment on Homelessness Among Former Prisoners</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Criminal records restricts respondent from getting a job 2. Keeping record a secret to get a job 3. Employer terminates respondent due to bad records 4. Unemployment makes the respondent turn to crime 5. No education to seek for stable job 6. Unemployment breaks the spirit 7. Refuses to work 8. Negative perception from employer 9. Unemployment causes financial problems <p>Subtheme 1c Repeated Use of Drugs and Homelessness Among Former Prisoners</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Commits crime in order to get drug supplies 2. No desire to stop and no self control 3. Addicted to drugs 4. Selling of drugs promises huge income 5. Desire to retake
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categorising data to understand the data collected and highlight the important messages and discovery features. This study used thematic analysis as it is the most flexible method of data analysis (Braun & Clarke 2014). Thematic analysis is the process of identifying patterns or themes in qualitative data. The goal of thematic analysis is to identify themes or patterns in important or meaningful data to be used as those that can explain the issues to be studied. In the process of thematic analysis, this study applied Braun & Clarke's (2014) view of six steps in performing thematic analysis; i. Step 1: familiarise yourself with the data; ii. Step 2: Create a startup code; iii. Step 3: Find the theme; iv. Step 4: Review the theme; v. Step 5: Define the theme; and lastly vi. Step 6: Writing.

The first code identified was about a placement where exiled prisoners refused to return home. Subsequent concepts were identified and named using the Atlas.ti software. Some of the themes found were placement, family relationships, marriage, work, community, peers, drug and alcohol addiction and health. The codes discovered were combined in a family called '*Families*' in Atlas.ti software for further analysis. The analysis produced 1 superordinate themes: (a) factors contributing to homelessness issues among former prisoners. Under the superordinate theme, four subthemes emerged as shown in Table 3.

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Based on the findings, of the 16 respondents interviewed, 11 of them are single, two were married, two were widowed and one is in a relationship. All of the respondents were former prisoners and currently unemployed. Hence, the scenario illustrates that the status of being unemployed is of great concern and affects them to be homeless. It was found that 15 respondents were either infected with HIV, hepatitis B or C, tuberculosis or a combination of the mentioned diseases. Only one respondent is suffering from a psychological disease. With regard to drug addiction, 12 respondents are actively using drugs while the other four respondents managed to quit from drug abuse. In terms of family relationship, 13 of them have weak connections with their families and only three of them are well received. This data may reflect on the relationship between family refusal and homelessness issues among the former prisoners.

Moreover, eight of the 16 respondents (R02, R04, R07, R09 R10, R11, R12, and R16) possessed the

following four features that will be further discussed: (i) having no home, (ii) denied and rejected by family, (iii) being unemployed and (iv) suffering from drug-related issues. R06 and R013 on the other hand, while having been accepted by family members, still decide to live in vain, be unemployed, and take drugs. Only two of 16 respondents, R08 and R15, have homes. From the information obtained, it was noted that although R08 lives with his family, he was still on drugs and unemployed. Contrastingly, R15 managed to quit drugs and was staying with his family but has been unsuccessful in securing a proper job while R01 has succeeded in avoiding drugs but lives under the bridge as he was not accepted by his family and was unemployed.

Most of the responses focused on family refusal, unemployment, and drug addiction that lead to homelessness issues among former prisoners. Rejection by family members causes difficulty in the reintegration of the former prisoners' followed by unemployment issues that cause homelessness which results in drug addiction issues. Eight interviewed respondents conformed to researcher's assessment of volatile residency among the former prisoners which then led them to be homeless. The discussion is based on the following themes:

Theme 1: Subtheme 1a

Influence of Family Rejection on Former Prisoners' Lack of Direction and Support System

This research covers three sub-themes leading to the causes of why respondents have no shelter, which includes: (i) refusal to live with family, (ii) inability to have lodging for a long period, and (iii) absence of parents to live with. Most of the respondents refused to return to their families as stated by R01, R07, R10, R11, R14, and R16. They mentioned that they feel comfortable living away from their families, even though they have to go through hardships. R01, for example, has been living under a bridge for nearly 20 years, on his own free will whereas R07 decided to live in Kuala Lumpur because he could not handle the way his family treated him. Meanwhile, R10 has not gone back to his hometown for nearly 2 years and R14, very much like R07 shifted to Kuala Lumpur and refused to live with his siblings.

Following are the statements by the respondents on the reasons for not living with their family members upon their release after committing an offence.

I don't want to live with my family. This has caused me to suffer for 20 years living under the bridge.

(R01)

I have been living alone for a long time. I still do return to my hometown and it is not that I do not have a home; actually, I do. I am originally from Terengganu. I have a house and my dad lives there but honestly, I can't live with my family. I did stay with them once but it felt awkward and I was unhappy. I felt uncomfortable so I decided to go back to Kuala Lumpur.

(R07)

The inability to stay with their siblings was also noted as one of the reasons for being excluded from having a permanent residency. R04, R10, R13, and R15 mentioned that if they were to return to their families, they could only live for a temporary period. Hence, this situation has opted for them to shift to Kuala Lumpur, looking for employment and acquaintances.

As my siblings knew of my past, I could only live with them for one or two days. Eventually, I figured out that it will never work out and therefore I moved out willingly.

(R04)

Moreover, the former prisoners' failure to live with their family was mostly due to poor family relationship. The respondents informed that they felt offended by their family members' behaviour who often labelled them negatively and further associated them with unfavourable connotations. For instance, R01 and R10 admitted that they could no longer deal with harsh comments directed towards them.

I heard them talking behind my back. They said that I took drugs again and I have no better things to do. So I could not take it anymore.

(R01)

I caught them belittling me when I was at my family's home.

(R10)

Besides that, this study revealed that being infected with diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B, Hepatitis C, and tuberculosis further deteriorates the relationship with their family members. R02, R07, and R10 expressed that their family had disowned them once they found out that they are currently suffering from HIV. However, they did not put the entire blame on their family as they understood the negative perceptions and myths surrounding HIV that had caused transmission-related fears in families. Few statements extracted in verbatim from the respondents are as follows:

For example, my younger brothers. They did not want to accept me as I have HIV. They were scared that they may contract the disease from me.

(R02)

Likewise, every respondent reported that they were ill-treated by their family members when they found out that the respondents had contracted harmful diseases. All respondents confessed that they felt reclusive and out-casted, even though they are part of the family. For example, R07 said that his family separated the dishes because of the fear that HIV that he contracted will eventually be transmitted to the other family members. Due to this, R07 washed his dishes right after every usage.

The findings also indicated the decreased potential of acquiring shelter among former prisoners especially when both or either parent had passed away. Losing a loved one can trigger intense feelings of grief and a huge impact on the former prisoners in terms of shelter and reliance. R04 and R10 mentioned that the absence of their parents had made it impossible to stay at their parents' house, which is currently occupied by their siblings. Parents are indeed a great support system to these former prisoners in starting anew after their release. Nonetheless, their parents' death may steer them from not having any place to go. Most of the respondents also noted the awkwardness of living at their parents' house with their married siblings.

Furthermore, having no place to live becomes more difficult, especially when they have no family, like R05. She was raised by a foster family and subsequently, imprisonment had caused her foster family to sever contact with her. After her release, she had nowhere to go and had to take shelter at her friend's house that also houses sex workers and drug addicts which influenced her to take drugs again.

In short, having no shelter caused these former prisoners to live on the streets and consequently, they become prone to re-engaging in criminal activities. Almost all of the homeless respondents returned to their old ways. Hence, living away from their families leads them to their old behaviours.

Well, since my parents are gone, and I lived with my siblings just temporarily, I had to move out when the time came.

(R04)

I wanted to go back to my hometown but no one is there anyway. So I had to stay alone in Kuala Lumpur.

(R05)

In summary, imprisonment and recidivism have truthfully weakened the bond between former prisoners and their families, which in turn, led to the rejection by their families. Families that refused these former prisoners had left a negative impact on their re-entry into society. Weak family relationship also directed the former prisoners to think that they have no solid reason to live with their families.

Theme 1: Subtheme 1b

Impact of Unemployment on Homelessness Among Former Prisoners

Employment is an important necessity for former prisoners to ensure that they will be successful during their reintegration process into the community. However, many had failed to secure a job upon release. Success or failure in obtaining work strives to affect the trajectory of former prisoners' lives throughout the integration process. Out of 16 respondents, only two of them (R05 and R14) managed to secure a job while the others remained unemployed. Although R05 and R14 were working, they still failed to acquire homes and thus lived in vain. Only two respondents (R08 and R15) out of 14 unemployed respondents have proper shelters. This situation demonstrated that unemployment among former prisoners is essentially related to being homeless.

In reality, most of the former prisoners tend to be unemployed or had experienced with unstable employment. which instigated the unemployed former prisoners to recommit crime and leads to imprisonment. The findings are further categorised into

two main forms, namely personal (within former prisoners themselves) and employers. The study ascertained that three factors are arising from the first element which are: (i) criminal record, (ii) poor educational background and limited vocational skills, and (iii) low self-reliance.

Furthermore, the imprisonment had caused former prisoners to deal with hardships and difficulties in obtaining employment opportunities (Malott & Fromader, 2010). Their release is not the end of their hardships but the difficulties entailed them throughout their lives as their past criminal records I appear with their background profile. Criminal records are one of the reasons for former prisoners to get employed (Bales & Mears, 2008). A total of 10 respondents mentioned that their past criminal records had prevented them from obtaining jobs. Most employers have negative perspectives on these former prisoners and are reluctant to employ them once they know of their criminal records. Among the statements that had been identified in verbatim are illustrated as follows:

As for former prisoners who want to work, they will usually face a troublesome situation. For instance, I have been working for a month and during criminal record screening time, I would fail the process. The employer knew that I had an imprisonment record from the Serenti Center.

(R17)

When we apply for work, for example, jobs involving shops, the owner of the shop will ask for our identity card and will check our record, whether we have a record of being imprisoned or not.

(R18)

Apart from that, low education levels and a lack of skills influence former prisoners' chances to obtain a fixed earning. With the tough competition with other individuals who do not possess criminal records along with higher education levels, the chances of securing a job are very low. Among the statements that had been interpreted are as follows:

I have once had the thought of seeking a job, but then I realised; what kind of work could I get? Even if I work in a shop, the

employer will surely check my education level and when he knows that I had been involved with drugs, who will ever believe me again?

(R05)

The negative perception of employers is one of the obstacles for these former prisoners to obtain employment (La Vigne, Visher & Castro, 2004) as the prevailing stigma has created boundaries or barriers for them to seek a job. Most of the employers refused to hire former prisoners as they fear that these group of people will threaten the company's security, and as a consequence, the company will have to bear the liability and the company's image will be tarnished. Employers are also afraid of being victims of theft and other forms of crime if they hire former prisoners. R01 related his experience with this regard:

The employer is worried to employ former prisoners as workers. For drug addiction problems, the employer is afraid that the former prisoners will return to commit the offense again because when he/she does it again, it will surely give problems to the employer.

(R01)

I do have the intention to work but the employer did not want to employ a person like me. The employer saw the criminal record and already set in his mind that he can't trust a person like me. The discriminating attitude increased when he knew that I have a disease. Thus, he was afraid to give me a job.

(R07)

Therefore, unemployment has fundamentally caused former prisoners to be homeless as they could not afford to pay rent for a house or room to stay. Being homeless for more than a year, the former prisoners started to use drugs again. Being unemployed, they collect and sell recycled items to generate income to purchase drugs.

Theme 1: Subtheme 1c

Repeated Use of Drugs and Homelessness Among Former Prisoners

Twelve of the interviewed respondents stated that they were still on drugs while the remaining four have

successfully quit. From four respondents who quit from drug usage, only one (R15) owns a home. Meanwhile, from a total of 16 respondents, 14 of them are homeless. The other two respondents own a residence but only one (R08) continues to take drugs. Most of the former prisoners were trapped in criminal life again due to drug influence and addiction. The possibility of former prisoners to re-engage with drug abuse is high if they return to their old acquaintances. If drugs are not available, the addicts will start to feel restless, agitated, and become very ill. They can also start to act violently and lose control of their emotions. In addition, some of them are even willing to commit crimes as they need money to finance their addiction needs. All of the respondents stated that overcoming addiction towards drugs is not a quick and easy process. During the process, their continuous desire for the substance had caused a huge impact on their physical and psychological problems. This scenario explained why many individuals who are addicts, failed in the recovery process and rapidly return to drugs, despite the persistent knowledge on the harm of drugs. Hence, drug addiction is indeed one of the factors that caused these former prisoners to fail in their recovery process.

R01, for example, has explicitly said that he took drugs again as soon as he was out of prison. He decided to consume drugs to satisfy his urge, similar to R04's case. He further mentioned that he did not work after being released, not because of the absence of employment but because of his drug addiction. Meanwhile, for R07, his return to drugs was due to his lack of control over his addiction. According to him, he never regretted being arrested for drug abuse. Subsequently, R14 also said that the usage of drugs was due to his uncontrolled addiction while R16 noted that due to the addiction, many former prisoners (including himself) are unable to think rationally. He continued to state that they will continue to take drugs even though they know that it is wrong. The following statements are among those given verbatim by the respondents concerning this issue:

I took drugs just to satisfy my addiction. I did not think of anything else.

(R01)

It is not because of being unemployed that I commit this crime. I have been on drugs for a long time and the drugs have suited my body. So I am very addicted to it.

(R04)

I keep repeating using drugs and I personally confess that I'm not strong enough to stop. That is why I will always commit this offense even though I have been caught before and I don't regret.

(R07)

The uncontrolled urge from addiction caused many former prisoners to be unsuccessful in quitting drugs. A former addict who wants to change his or her habit must have a strong desire to overcome the urge. Although former prisoners have undergone drug abuse programs while in prison, having no motivation and eagerness and self-control would lead them to re-engage with drugs again. R01 himself said he has no desire to quit and had the intention to use drugs again even upon his release. He stated that:

My desire to quit drug addiction never exists. So I will continue to take it even after being released.

(R01)

R04 also mentioned that the difficulty in controlling himself from drugs was his biggest obstacle for him. According to him:

The problem is that if a person does not want to take it anymore, and he or she wants to control themselves, then they do not want to get involved with drugs again. But it is very hard for me to control myself.

(R04)

Besides, former prisoners who are in the social connection with old acquaintances who have access to drugs will influence their involvement with drugs again by sharing their supplies and eventually forcing or prompting them to sell drugs to bear their addiction needs. In addition, full-fledged old acquaintances will also offer emotional support for former prisoners to be accepted and at the same time, the former prisoners do not perceive the behaviour as negative. The former will then make promises of lucrative profits that can be earned by selling drugs which will eventually tempt the latter. Moreover, selling drugs is considered the former prisoners' 'last resort' or their only option to earn money.

DISCUSSION

The findings of the current were in line with the ecological model of homeless by Nooe & Patterson.

However, researchers also found that three factors, namely family rejection, unemployment and drug addiction were the biggest factors in making these released ex-prisoners more likely to be homeless. Nooe and Patterson attributed the biopsychosocial factors as homeless from the perspective of a more general homeless population. On the other hand, this particular study had a smaller lens to look at the homelessness factor among the former prisoners. This homeless experience can depend on a variety of complex interactions between individuals, interpersonal and socioeconomic factors (Fowler, Hovmand, Marcal & Das, 2019). Certain studies have long identified addiction as risk factors for homelessness (Gaetz, Dej, Richter & Redman 2016; Henry, Wiatt, Rosenthal & Shivji 2017). Challenging life experiences caused ex-prisoners to continue living as homeless. Failure to get a job and being rejected by the family has had a huge impact throughout the process of reintegration. The current study proved that family rejection, unemployment and drug addiction were all factors leading to homelessness among these former prisoners. The former prisoners have to contend with their bitter life experiences as well as the current life challenges as a homeless person in acquiring these basic needs and support systems.

The first challenge faced by any former prisoners is to find a residence immediately after being released. The first thing that comes across their minds is "Where can I sleep tonight?" (Ramirez, 2016). Since the majority of the former prisoners are not well-accepted by their families, shelter is often a critical factor in their reentry into society. Hence, the absence of a proper home has allowed the former prisoners to become homeless, which further leads them to continue with their old behaviour. Therefore, acquiring a shelter becomes one of the turning points for them to avoid being involved with crime again.

In addition, being employed is another important key to create and maintain residential stability. Unemployment and low wages among the former prisoners expose them to the risk of becoming homeless. Moreover, homeless individuals faced barriers to seek and maintain their jobs. Most of the former prisoners faced difficulties in finding shelter and jobs due to various reasons. This includes discrimination from employers and co-workers, unable to bathe, lack of clothing to go to work and loss of identity card. Furthermore, the challenge of seeking a job or being in an unstable work environment also leads to their inability of securing a home and

subsequently, ending up being homeless. Although many would have thought that all homeless people are unemployed, remarkably; this is not always the truth. However, it is emphasised that there is a strong relationship between the two elements as having a steady income is generally important to acquire residence but having a job is not a guarantee.

A person who has been imprisoned will usually have no access to employment which then steers to the scarcity of financial resources in renting a house or room, especially in urban areas. Moreover, former prisoners living on the street do not have a fixed address or contact number where the employers can investigate or contact them (Rodriguez & Brown, 2003). This situation further causes stigma to the employers on how the former prisoners' lives were. It is not a surprise that they are unable to maintain personal hygiene and may not have clean clothes, which are needed for interviews or to work every day (Rodriguez & Brown, 2003).

Lack of efforts focused on the recovery of former prisoners by government and non-governmental agencies has continuously resulted in poverty issues among former prisoners due to the inability to secure a job. Employers are reluctant to hire former prisoners although they are ready to work with underlying reasons such as loss of trust, query on working skills and other possible risks to the company by the former prisoners.

Lack of education further increases the likelihood of low incomes. Due to this, it is essentially hard for those with low education levels to find a proper career. Former prisoners also do not have the opportunity to make a reasonable income since basic education and skills are required in obtaining work. Unrefutably, the unemployment problem among former prisoners is a reality that occurs throughout the world and is considered one of the most common and serious problems for these prisoners.

In addition, drug abuse is also believed to be an important factor in contributing to poor health and increased risk of death that has been widely observed among homeless people (Department for National Drug Control, 2015). Drug abuse can increase the risk of homelessness by affecting their social relationship and economic stability. A former prisoner who had drug issues often suffered from a variety of adverse health effects, including overdose, psychiatric conditions, and infectious diseases. Research on drug abuse and

psychiatric disorders among the homeless is inconsistent and still the subject of debate as to the inability to identify whether addictive disorders can cause them to become homeless or the effect of being homeless influences them to take drugs (Department for National Drug Control, 2015).

However, in most situations, drug abuse is a result of homelessness and not a cause of it. People who are homeless usually turn to drugs in dealing with their situation, to release their emotions or escape from their problems. Nonetheless, drug dependence only exacerbates their dilemma by reducing their ability to perform well at work and seek family stability from being homeless. In addition, several people described the usage of drugs as a means to be accepted among homeless people (Didenko & Pankratz, 2007). Homeless people are often associated with increased risk of engaging in crime. High rate of former prisoners being homeless upon their release (Polcin, 2016). Once they lose their homes, these individuals are at a high risk of returning to illegal activities which will then result in re-imprisonment (Greenberg & Rosenheck, 2008). The lack of stable housing also relates to increased crime-related behaviours, such as physical and sexual assault (Gaetz, 2006). Hence, this study highlights that former prisoners who are dealing with drug problems should not be punished, and instead be treated. Without a proper solution to this issue, former prisoners will remain in a repeating vicious cycle of being unemployed, refused by family, re-engagement in drug abuse, and being homeless.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this study showed a strong relationship between family denial, unemployment, and drug addiction with homelessness issues experienced by the released prisoners. The problem of trying to escape from life's hardship causes the homeless ex-convicts to beg for assistance and sympathy from the community, especially from the NGOs which help them by providing clothes and food. Family members play a critical role in combating the homelessness issue as they are deemed to be the best support system for the former prisoners, especially during their reintegration process. With better understanding and motivation by their families, the former prisoners will lead a healthy lifestyle, resulting in the ability of them seeking jobs and avoiding substance abuse. By having a normal life after prison, these vulnerable people will have a meaningful perspective in life which not only will impact them but also society

The researcher found that one-off assistance was usually given to the homeless such as the provision of food, clothes and treatment. There was no specific effort or programme introduced in order to help them to overcome this problem. There was no full re-integration programme in Malaysia which could help the former prisoners out of the prison or to help them re-integrate and enable them to change their luck. This caused the homeless former prisoners to remain in poverty and not able to get out of the life on the streets. There is a need for a re-integration programme in Malaysia which can help in handling the three risk factors identified. Such programmes can be in the form of providing jobs to the former prisoners by identifying the employers who are suitable and willing to employ them. Additionally, there are programmes which strive to improve the relationship between the former prisoners and their families through counselling and family therapy. The Malaysian Prisons Department should also be aware of the programme on how to treat drug addiction. This is because drug addiction is the biggest risk factor which caused the former prisoners to fail in their integration and end up as homeless persons. These three programmes should be able to provide good output as well as prevent the former prisoners from ending up as homeless persons.

COMPLIANCE WITH ETHICAL STANDARDS

All procedures performed in studies involving human respondents were in accordance with the ethical standards of the University of Malaya Research committee (UMREC). The UMREC conducts an ethics review prior to the beginning of this research. Informed consent was obtained from all individual respondents included in the study. There is no specific funding has been provided for this research.

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