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The Level of Family Social Support Among Parolees in Malaysia

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Abstract

Family harmonious and willingness to accept after-released prisoners affect positively on their rehabilitation and well-being. Considering that, this study aims to measure the social support level of parolees received from their families in Malaysia. Hence, quantitative survey was conducted using cross-sectional design for sampling. A total of 280 parolees were under supervision program by Prison Department in Peninsular Malaysia had been selected as respondents. The data obtained and analyzed using descriptive analysis. The study found that parolees received social support as follows: 54.6 per cent moderate, 37.5 per cent high level, and 7.9 per cent low level. The parolees found rehabilitation process as encouraging as well as motivational to re-integrate them in a society. This paper also discuss some suggestions for optimizing family social support for ex-prisoners towards becoming someone who are more independent and valuable to their family and society in the future.

Keywords: Parolee, Prisoners, Family Social Support, Prisons Department of Malaysia

Introduction

Parole is the provisional release of a prisoner who makes certain agreement prior to the completion of the maximum sentence period; under the supervision of parole officer [the Prison Act 1995 (Amendment 2008)]. In Malaysia, parolee called *Orang yang diparol* (ODP). Henceforth, this article will use the abbreviation 'ODP' to refer to parolee. The parole system in Malaysia is as an extension of the custodial period, as the parolees will be back to the community under the correctional authority and supervision (Hamin & Hassan, 2012; Hamin et al., 2017). The duration of parole depends on the remaining length and before expiry of a sentence with the agreement that they will behave well (Kabala & Yusuph, 2020). Parole is a gradual process to transfer a prisoner from prison to community as an-integration to reduce recidivism. It also introduced with the aim to reduce congestion in prison, operating costs and lead as a correctional institute (Wan Sharazad et al., 2016).

In parole, a prisoner leave the structured environment (in-prison) to unstructured world, this situation allow them to make a decisions, find a way to survive and support themselves independently (Bahr et al., 2005). On the other hand, their criminal records often be a stigma and an obstacle for ODP to reintegrate in the society (Pager, 2003). The stigma of being labelled released parolee limits the opportunities such as securing a job, finding stable accommodation and establishing supportive social networks (Uggen et al.,2014). Cherney & Fitzgerald (2016) highlight how overcoming the consequences of stigma for finding work requires forms of identity management, and assistance by family and friends that send signals to employers that a former inmate has changed and is a capable worker. According to Ostermann (2015) about 20% of those who were released to parole supervision did not successfully complete and were revoked for a technical parole violation during the follow-up time. However, research by Rafizah et al., (2017) indicated successful rehabilitating parolees is demanding on the parole officers and they faced operational difficulties such as lack of sharing of information on the parolees' rehabilitation assessment and report from the prisons, the officers' lack of expertise and heavy workloads hamper their work. Hence family is expected to play a vital role when required and the importance of family ties in reducing reoffending and improving life chances for the prisoner without depend too much on the parole officer.

Based on high rate of recidivism among prisoners, social support from their family is seen as crucial factor to help them to resettle in the society (Siti Jamiaah et al., 2020). The family play the main role in order to help to reduce pressure among ex-prisoners (Mills, 2005) and give interactional, instrumental and emotion support (Mowen, Stansfield, JBoman, 2018) to increase their self-efficacy (Bahr et al., 2010) and will enable to regain themselves in order to avoid re-incarceration (Alif et al., 2019). The support and guidance from family are needed to establish self-esteem towards a better life (Tharshini et.al., 2020). It is due to the reason that a family that having good relationship less often to judge the others but also they will provide high social support where needed. Bahr et al. (2005) found in their study that the family ties helped prisoners to adopt in life. The usual support received from family members such as: financial assistance (57 %) , shelter (55 %) , emotional support (53 %) and transportation (34 %) . Social support received from family is expected to prevent prisoners from getting involved in negative activities, and to repeat the mistakes, that violate the laws of the country. Further, their study also noted that the former prisoners who often socialise with friends minimum four times a week compared to their family members have a tendency to repeat the same mistake.

A study conducted by Fauziah et al. (2012) among 200 Malaysians drug users in drug rehabilitation institute organised by the National Drug Agency (NADA). About 85 percent of drug users admitted they are highly dependent on their families for emotional support and encouragement. Moreover, 75 per cent of them agreed and strongly agreed with the statement that the family is right place to share distress and grief. Accordingly, high social support from family is essential throughout the recovery and treatment process which finally lead ODP to adopt a better life. According to Mills (2005), strong social support from family enable ex-prisoners to recover from grief and trauma. Strong social support from family assist to reduce the risk of ex-prisoners to involle in negative activities, such as, to attempt suicide. Indeed, each member of a family play a vital role to maintain harmonious, moral support, and diligence in order to obtain better life (Siti Marziah et al.,2020). For ex-prisoners,

support and help received from immediate family and relatives would enable them to be a productive member in a society (Mills, 2005)

There are three important theoretical perspectives on social support research: (1) the stress and coping perspective, (2) the social constructionist perspective, and (3) the relationship perspective (Cohen et al., 2000). The stress and coping perspective proposes that support contributes to health by protecting people from the adverse effects of stress. The social constructionist perspective proposes that support directly influences health by promoting self-esteem and self-regulation, regardless of the presence of stress. The relationship perspective predicts that the health effects of social support cannot be separated from relationship processes that often co-occur with support, such as companionship, intimacy, and low social conflict (Cohen et al., 2000). Crandell et al (2009) also argues that social relationships that exists between individuals is involved with a set of stable expectation with two types of social relationships; binding expression (hearty) and instrumental relationship. The binding expression refers to the social relationships that is built when a person is willingly to give and committed to other individuals. A person will feel safe, bond of love, acceptance, friendship and a value of virtue through the relationship with significant individuals. Whereas, instrumental relationship is refers to the relationships that built to achieve certain goals. Such relationship is normally seen as an employment relationship with other individual that established through disagreement. This relationship is also known as a second relationship. It means a relationship that happens every day with different individual or with a stranger.

It is noted that family support is seen as crucial to ensure the well-being of prisoners after imprisonment. Hence this research is an effort to measure the level of family support in parolee in Malaysia. The findings of the study could be beneficial to improve the parole in Malaysia. The study also aims to give positive implication towards integration rehabilitation for parolee and as a medium for the best second chance to re-integrate in the society through family support sustainability. An effective rehabilitation is capable to reduce the rate of recidivism among ex-prisoners.

Methodology

This quantitative study uses cross-sectional-survey design for sampling. Descriptive analysis used to analyse the data. Chua (2006) provides a supporting argument in terms of using descriptive analysis: He states that it is a statistic that used to describe variables characteristics. Whilst supporting argument in context of using cross-sectional design by Lavrakas et al (2008) .stated that it involves one data collection on a sample of the population studied based on the attributes of existing subjects.

Research Instrument

The data was collected by a questionnaire; the Inventory of Socially Support Behaviours (ISSB). It consists of 12 questions relating to the aspects of family social support. The questionnaire was built by Berrera (1984). Later on, the questionnaire was back-translated to Malays by Tee (1990) and the reliability score was .94. The questionnaire used four likert scales; (1) strongly disagree , (2) disagree , (3) agree and (4) strongly agree. The reliability obtained for the study was high;.921. Level of family social support was measured according to the based on the interpretation of score mean as in Table 1 as follows :

Table 1 : Scores mean of family social support among ODP in Malaysia

Score mean	Interpretation of score mean
<.20	Low level
2.01-3.00	moderate level
3.01-4.00	High level

Population and Sampling

The population of study refers to the parolees under the supervision of the Prisons Department. The respondents were randomly selected among parolees throughout the Peninsular of Malaysia. A total number of 280 ODP with various multi-ethnic background were selected to participate as respondents.

Procedures

The process of data collection was carried out immediately after the reliability and validity of questionnaire had been verified. The permission from the Director General of the Prisons Department was obtained prior of data collection in the selected parole offices in the Peninsular of Malaysia. The researchers contacted the head of the parole offices in the catchment areas and made an appointment with to confirm the date of data collection. The questionnaire was distributed to the respondents randomly.

During the data collection, the researchers had been aided by the parole officers to distribute the questionnaire. The briefing of the data collection were explained earlier to the parole officers and counsellors. Later, the parole officers had gathered the required number of ODP and separate them into two groups:-

- a) Literate ODP, and
- b) Illiterate ODP

The separation of the respondents was done to facilitate them to complete the questionnaire. The literate ODP answered the questionnaire by themselves and being monitored by the parole officer and the researchers. While the illiterate ODP had been placed in a group assisted by the parole officer to read the questions one by one. The researchers remained available throughout the sessions to assist.

During the data collection, every questionnaire was checked by the researchers in order to achieve the targeted number of respondents as well as to ensure the questionnaires were completed. Any incomplete questionnaire shall be return to the ODP to complete it with the help from the parole officer. By this way, the researcher managed to get the required number of respondents; 280 ODP.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed by using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences for Windows (SPSS for Windows). Descriptive analysis was used to determine the frequency, percentage and average scores.

Results and Discussion

Family support is seen as the crucial social aspect for parolee. It is believed that good social support would prevent parolee to involve with negative activities as well as recidivism that violate the laws of the country.

Based on the analysis of 280 respondents participated in the study, a total of 54.6 percent ODP (153 respondents) shows that they received moderate social support from their families. 105 respondents (37.5 per cent) showed that they received high social support from families. This situation reflects the existence of positive relationship and good family interaction between ODP and their families. The positive relations is also expected to be able to help them to improve their well-being and self-development. The results are in line with the study by Naser and Visher (2016). Their study found that most of the family of ex-prisoners normally give social support during imprisonment. In addition, the family also willing to give support in term of emotional and financial assistance.

There were about 8 percent (22 respondents) of ODP showed that they received low social support from their families (Table 2). Although the number is rather small, however the Prison Department especially Parole Officers are advised to take seriously on this matter to ensure that all ODP under their top supervision get proper help to achieve the objectives of the programme. According to Mills (2005), an active family support is believed will enable ex-prisoners to improve the painful situation as a result of imprisonment. Strong family bonding is also likely will help to reduce the risk of ex-prisoners from doing negative activities such as suicide.

Table 2: The levels of family social support towards ODP

Level	N=280	Percent (%)
Low	22	7.9
Intermediate	153	54.6
High	105	37.5
Total	280	100

Almost all 12 statements in the questionnaire showed that ODP received positive family support (Table 3). A majority (76.5 percent) of ODP received helps from their families to relief their feelings during disturbed /distress (item1). Most of ODP (79.6 percent) also admit that their families willing to listen to them (item 2). Most of the respondents also noted that their families showed understanding when they are under stress (item 3; 76.4 percent). Hence it can be concluded that the families of ODP helps them to opted active coping in their lives. Active coping by seeking social support not only effect positively to their emotion, but also helps ODP during rehabilitation by providing motivation and guidance.

Table 3: Percentage of each statement of family social support on ODP

No	Statements	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	Mean
		P(%)	P(%)	P(%)	P(%)	
1	My family helped to relieve my feelings when I feel disturbed	2.9	20.7	53.6	22.9	2.96
2	My family willing listen to me	2.9	17.5	52.1	27.5	3.04
3	My family understand my feelings when I am under pressure	2.1	21.4	54.6	21.8	2.96
4	My family often provide guidance and advice on how to do something	2.5	17.9	51.8	27.9	3.05
5	My family often provide a feedback / comments to whatever I did	2.5	20.4	54.6	22.5	2.97
6	My family often lend or give anything I need except money	5.4	29.3	45.0	20.4	2.80
7	My family will offer a place to stay when needed	7.1	16.8	52.5	23.6	2.94
8	The family will lend me money when needed	7.9	25.7	50.0	16.4	2.75
9	My family will be with me if I am having stress	3.2	25.0	50.0	21.8	2.90
10	My family often spend time to talk or having chit chat with me	2.6	21.8	52.1	23.6	2.97
11	My family often call me to know about my progress	3.6	20.7	44.3	31.4	3.04

12	My family will explain the situation and it make me easier to understand it	2.1	21.4	54.6	21.8	2.96
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The study also found that about 80 percent ODP agreed and strongly agreed that their families care about them and often giving them advice and guidance on how to do something (item 4). Their families also showed their concern and give feedback/opinion on whatever done by them (item 5). This situation shows that the ODPs have chances to have positive well-being and develop themselves to be a productive and law-abiding citizen.

The acceptance and support from families towards ODP can also be seen from other aspects such as in item 7: most of the families invited ODP to stay with them (76.1 percent); item 8: the families willing to lend them money when needed (66.4 percent); and item 6: the families are ready to give anything they need other than financial matter (65.4 percent). A majority of the families were willing to spend time with ODP when they are in trouble (item 9) showed a positive relationship between ODP and their families. A total of 75.6 per cent ODP admit that their families always willing to spend time for having conversation. (item 10) as well as to contact them frequently to know about their progress during imprisonment (item 11).

The research findings indicate that the family members play an important role in determining harmonious family relationships by providing emotional support, courage and continuous guidance towards ex-prisoners to have a new life. Support and helps from immediate family as well as relatives are matters for ex-prisoners enable to help them to play their role in the society after being released (Mills, 2005). Below are some suggestions for optimizing family support;

Engage the family in making case plan for ODP

The research findings found that overall, many ODP have received highly average family support. This shows that family provides good social support and is able to accept the ODP to be back in the family. Thus, in order to make plan for the ODP, the family members and significantly related people can be involved in the planning and implementation of the intervention. The parole officer can include the ODP's family when making plan by having discussions to take into considerations the ODP's varied life aspects including the issues of working experience, finance, mental health, emotion, addiction and such. At the same time, this can allow the parole officer to know the progress of the ODP and the family. The effectiveness of the submitted Case Plan will be evaluated and if there is any problem then the parole officer can refer to the family members instead of the ODP. This scenario creates the opportunity of cooperation and responsibility for the family members to help the ODP in various aspects in addition to let the ODP feel more responsible in controlling oneself and make change because all the ODP's family members are involved in helping the full recovery.

Identify the ability/strength of the family members as a valuable source for the ODP

Furthermore, in keeping and increasing the family support towards the ODP, the family can become a valuable source through the skills or potentials possessed by the family. Commonly,

since in the prison, the rehabilitation officer will identify the interests and skills possessed by the ODP especially their potentials or interests that can be used to generate income after being released from the prison. All the same, after they go for the parole system, the family is the significant individuals who don't only support their recovery, but also as the source for the ODP in many ways such as to express their feelings, to get advice, to receive help 24 hours in case something happens. Nevertheless, the parole officer can intensify the depth of the assessment by finding out the available source owned by the family. For an example, if any of the family member is working at the batik factory, then the ODP can be linked with the specific family member to guide and be responsible for the skills needed by the ODP to make batik a source of side income. Another example is, there might be a family member of the ODP who always participate actively in the religious activities thus the ODP can join the family member to partake in the religious activities. The access to this source can be enriched through a deeper assessment within the family through the use of genogram or personal network diagram.

Create the support group for the family of ODP

There are times when to some extent, the ODP's family is no longer capable of giving help optimally due to the feeling of disappointment with what has happened and tired with the ODP's attitudes. Therefore, the family can be connected with other ODP's families living within the same radar. It allows the family members to motivate one another in sharing their experiences and exchanging their feelings comfortably. The parole officer plays a major role to create the family support group. However, the parole officer needs proper trainings in order to handle the support group before it can be implemented. The parole officer's competency in carrying out the responsibility helps the ODP to fully comply with the sentence and helps to provide social support thus really benefits in decreasing recidivism among the ODP (Chamberlain et al., 2018; Vidal et al., 2015). If there are any counsellors or social workers, the parole officer can get their assistance in making this support group a success.

Develop programs to help the financial aspect of ODP

Based on the research findings, there are several items with low mean score (less than 2.90) which are the 6th and 8th items. Both of the items are related to the family's confidence to lend their money and other things to the respondents. This shows that in many things, the family always give supports to the ODP but still unable to give full trust to the ODP if they want to borrow their money or other things. This is probably because of the respondents' history related to crimes. What is more worrying, a research conducted by Che Mohd Nasir et al. (2020) has discovered that one of the main factors of recidivism among the ODP is the failure to get a job even though this aspect is important, which is in line with the research finding by Kasauliya et al. (2017) that has proven the importance of the social support from the employer is significantly related to the reintegration of the parole in the community ($r = .676, p < .01$).

Therefore, the programs that can nurture the motivation of the OPD towards the financial management is really necessary and should be emphasized in order to not giving pressure to the family. The parole officer can organize the motivational programs related with financial management as the monthly agenda for the OPD in order to help them becoming more confident in managing their money regardless the small income. The Corporate Smart Internship (CSI) program organised by the government can be improved by highlighting the

financial management skill to the ODP. With the correct financial management, the ODP can possess the skill to make saving from their income or plan their future without totally relying on the family.

Apart from that, the trust fund for the ODP can be created to help any ODP who wishes to borrow some money and may help them to save money in order to generate income. The ODP can make full use of this fund when they need money and they do not have to solely rely on their family. This fund can also become the incentive to the ODP to start a business under the surveillance and guidance in business. This trust fund can collaborate with any aid providers such as the zakat centre and social welfare department in optimizing the financial assistance to the ODP.

Conclusion

As a conclusion; study confirmed that the ODP received support from their families. The study indicate that the ODP expected their families as a fundamental agent for positive changes, driving force for quality well-being as well as to lead them for better life-style. These findings showed that the program / family management and skills module for parolee organized by the Prison Department, successfully built a bridge to re-unite the relations between parolees and their families. A strong family support helps for effective parolee rehabilitation process. Overall, the study indicates a positive impact of rehabilitation process among parolees in order to function effectively in the society and to reduce recidivism among prisoners in Malaysia.

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