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Personal Factors that Influence Criminal Recidivism among Recidivists in Munzenze Prison, North Kivu Province, Democratic Republic of the Congo

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Abstract

Many countries around the world are confronted with the challenge of recidivism. Recidivism has become a global phenomenon that challenges the efficiency of both criminal justice systems and security systems. One of the most important measures of the efficiency of prison programs is the reduction of recidivism rate. Meant to rehabilitate convicts, prisons play an important role within the criminal justice. By exploring personal factors that influence criminal recidivism in Munzenze prison. This study adopted Exploratory Sequential design using mixed method approach. The target population consisted of 1089 recidivists in Munzenze Prison, Goma, Democratic Republic of the Congo. The target population also included prison officers, religious leaders and civil actors. A sample of 100 recidivists was drawn for questionnaires and focus group discussions, while prison officers, religious leaders and civil actors participated as key informants. Questionnaires, focus group discussions guides, and key informant interviews schedules were used as data collection instruments. Qualitative data was thematically analyzed using content

analysis and presented as quoted verbatim. While quantitative data was analyzed using descriptive statistics and presented using percentages, tables, average and mean, and pie charts. The study found that personal factors such as marital status influence criminal recidivism among recidivists in Munzenze Prison. For example, 86% were single, 8% were separated, 1% were widowed, and none were divorced. But among those who were single, around half of them had children. The study concluded that, the overwhelming responsibilities of a family when an individual is not in an employment, predisposes one to engage in crime to get proceeds to utilize on the family. The study recommended that, there should be a creation and implementation of a comprehensive rehabilitation programs within the Munzenze prison system that address the personal factors contributing to recidivism. These programs should focus vocational training, and education to equip inmates with skills and coping mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

Keywords: Criminal, Criminal Justice, Convict, Dynamics, Felonies, Inmate, Incarceration, Prison, Recidivism, Recidivist, Security, Violent Crimes

1. Introduction

Criminal recidivism is a problem that is posing a serious challenge to many states around the world. The tendency of individuals getting back to crime after serving their sentences is causing a significant challenge to criminal justice systems in terms of funding allocation, rehabilitation effectiveness and public safety issues among others. For that reason, various studies have been conducted that support the assertion that criminal recidivism poses a pervasive global challenge. For instance, a study conducted by Smith *et al.* (2023) ^[15] revealed the widespread prevalence of criminal recidivism across multiple countries, underscoring its global nature. Similarly, findings from a study by Johnson and Garcia (2022) ^[8] further emphasize the ubiquity of criminal recidivism, indicating its significant impact on criminal justice and security systems worldwide. Thus, the relationship between personal, institutional and societal factors and criminal recidivism is not a fundamentally new conceptual issue.

O'Donnell (2020) ^[13] explained that recidivism is measured in several ways, including data captured by the police and self-report, courts, prosecutors, and bodies concerned with the administration of justice. It becomes relevant to measure how a criminal justice system performs when interpreted with the appropriate degree of caution. It is also known as reoffending, and

it relates to whether a person who is dealt with by the criminal justice system goes on to reoffend again. At the individual level, reoffending is prevented when an offender refrains from committing a crime, as defined by the UNODC (2018) ^[18]. In an ideal situation, criminal justice institutions particularly correction institutions such as prisons should reform and rehabilitate convicted offenders who have been sent to them. However, this is sometimes not the case, given that reoffending also referred to recidivism has long been a global problem.

From an etymological point of view, Payne (2007) ^[14] noted that recidivism comes from the Latin word *recidere*, which means to go back. It means a return to crime after an offender has had a first term of imprisonment. In the case of former prisoners, it is defined as the act of being sent back to prison for reoffending after release (Steven Briggs, 2021) ^[5]. Recidivism is one of the biggest criminal justice concerns as it challenges not only criminal justice systems but also social norms.

The UNODC 2012 report clearly states that the effectiveness of a prevention strategy is complete when it is able to address the problem of recidivism. It is clear that a comprehensive strategy must recognize that public safety is at risk due to high levels of crimes committed by sanctioned persons but have not yet desisted from crime. The report shows that offenders do not succeed in reintegrating themselves into the community as a law-abiding citizen, even after a period of incarceration. Recidivism remains likely without effective interventions. There is therefore an urgent need for effective social integration or reintegration programs. The mentioned elements are an essential tool in the prevention of re-offending and in the enhancement of public security - two very essential objectives of social policy in every country.

Recidivism is also a pressing issue in the United States. Nearly 44% of released offenders return before their first year out of prison, according to the National Institute of Justice (2023) ^[12]. In the USA, within nine years of their release, five out of every six state convicts were rearrested, according to 2018 research by OJP's Bureau of Justice Statistics (Morgan, 2018) ^[10]. Many of these convicts had mental health or substance addiction issues when they entered jail, which may have gone untreated while they were there. But such a high rate of recidivism could be an indicator of failed rehabilitation system or that rehabilitation is not part of the prison responsibility. They left still dealing with those problems and facing challenges like employment, housing and gaining access to education, and caring for their children. More than 600,000 people are released annually from state and federal prisons, while an additional nine million people are released from municipal jails, according to Benecchi (2021) ^[3]. It is expected that a majority will have transformed and fit into the community as progressive citizens. But it is not the case, because, within three years of their release, two out of three former prisoners are rearrested and more than 50% are incarcerated again (Benecchi, 2021) ^[3]. It is concerning that so many of the same inmates return to prison if prisons have been successful in rehabilitating inmates, as claimed by prison officials. A new approach to the criminal justice system is necessary, as the country's high recidivism rate alone shows that its prisons are as inefficient as they are useless. This raises the question as to the influence of personal factors on criminal recidivism among recidivists in the USA.

Recidivism is also a serious social problem in Africa. For instance, in South Africa, in the year 2020 recidivism rate is estimated to range from 50-70%, with offenders re-offending in a period of three years after release from prison (Africa International Advisors, 2020) ^[1]. There are several reasons for South Africa's high recidivism rate. Chikadzi (2017) ^[7] states that reintegrating ex-offenders into regular society has a number of problems. These difficulties include stigma and rejection from society and family, difficulty reintegrating into the workforce after a lengthy prison sentence, inferiority complex that impairs mental health, and insufficient or nonexistent after-care services. This raises the likelihood of recidivism among former criminals and significantly impairs the efficacy of offender reintegration. As a result, programming is still subpar even in South Africa, where there is good legislation on offender rehabilitation and reintegration, such as the White Paper on Corrections. By definition, policies are just ideas until they are implemented well through programming. Aside from this, the many convicts for whom the system is failing will continue to receive great policy documents for nothing. Even though the South Africa study is relevant, it is however limited due to the fact that it only looks at societal factors responsible for recidivism but ignored individual factors which the current study seeks to include.

In Democratic Republic of the Congo, the presence of more experienced criminals, a majority of whom are ex-combatants, and their involvement in serious crimes, including violent crimes jeopardizes the efficiency of the rule of law which threatens local and national security mechanisms (Caparini, 2022) ^[6]. The aim of this study was therefore to establish the dynamics of criminal recidivism in Munzenze prison, North Kivu province, which is one of the 80 penal institutions in Democratic Republic of the Congo. Despite all these efforts put in place by the prisons to correct the behavior of the inmates, there are still higher rates of recidivism whereby people who have already been to prison end up committing crimes again. DRC is grappling with a serious problem of recidivism as shown by the number of prisoners in Munzenze prison. This prison was designed to accommodate 250 inmates but as at the time of this study had 3,629 a significant number of them being recidivists. This reality raises the question of whether prisons are really serving their intended purpose, because so many people who have left prison are still coming back and even committing more serious crimes. It is with this in mind that the study sought to investigate the personal factors that influence criminal recidivism among recidivists in Munzenze prison, North Kivu province, Democratic Republic of the Congo.

2. Materials and methods

Exploratory sequential design was used for the purpose of this study. The exploratory sequential design is flexible and adaptable, as noted by Snyder and Cardona (2019) ^[16]. This facilitates researchers to begin with qualitative data gathering and analysis to thoroughly examine a phenomenon before proceeding to quantitative data collection and analysis.

The research was conducted at Munzenze Prison. Munzenze is a maximum-security prison located in the Eastern part of Democratic Republic of the Congo in North Kivu province, 5 Kilometers from the Central Business District. Munzenze prison was built to accommodate around 250 detainees,

currently houses about 3 629 male prisoners including 150 females.

Munzenze maximum prison was selected as a suitable site for this study because of it houses considerable number of both male and female hard-core convicts mainly from North Kivu province, a province with one of the highest rates of criminality in the DRC and it is a province most affected by conflicts in the country. The prison was established in 1953 for a total capacity of 100 inmates then expanded in 2010 to 250 inmates but is currently overflowing with convicts more than ten time its capacity. It is believed as per the prison records that about 1 088 out of a total of 3629 of these inmates are recidivists.

All recidivists in Munzenze prison were the target population for this study. However, prison officers, counselors, religious leaders and civil actors who are normally engaged in rehabilitation programs participated in the study as Key Informants in order to assist in understanding and factors responsible for criminal recidivism in the prison. In this study, to select subjects who took part in the study, the researcher first of all purposively selected recidivists, after which a simple random technique was employed. Only the recidivists confirmed by prison authorities were included in the study as respondents, and in focus group discussions. Focus group discussion panel comprised of recidivists who were in Munzenze prison at the time of the study. Both male and female recidivists were engaged in the study.

Similarly, the selection of key informants followed purposive sampling method. The key informants were prison officers from the same prison, counselors, religious leaders and civil actors to participate in the study. The prison officers have been selected on the basis of their length of service - the number of years they have worked at Munzenze maximum security prison.

The study used the formulae of Yamane (1967) ^[19] to determine the sample size. Stratified random sampling technique was used to select inmates to interview.

$$n = \frac{N}{1 + N(e)^2}$$

Meaning:

- n= sample size
- N= population size
- e= error level
- 1= constant

For this study, the formula considers 90% as our confidence level and 10% the margin error.

$$\begin{aligned} n &= 1088 / 1+ 1008 (0.1)^2 \\ &= 1088 / 10.89 \\ &= 99.9 \sim \mathbf{100} \text{ criminal recidivists.} \end{aligned}$$

Table 1: Key Informants Size

Title	Size
Prison Officers	6
Civil Actors	4
Religious Leaders	4
Total	14

The study used questionnaires, key informant interviews guides and focus group discussion guides. The

questionnaires were used as the primary tool to collect data from repeat offenders in Munzenze prison. The structured questionnaire had open and closed questions. Key informant interviews are in-depth qualitative interviews with people who have in depth information on a subject matter. Gathering information from a variety of people, including community leaders, professionals or residents with direct knowledge of the community, is the purpose of key informant interviews. The study also used Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) as a pivotal tool in qualitative data collection. FGDs are invaluable in qualitative research for their ability to unearth deep insights, illuminate the interplay of complex factors, and foster a nuanced understanding of issues like criminal recidivism.

3. Results and discussion

The respondents were asked about the personal factors that affect criminal recidivism. They were found to be age, gender, substance abuse, education level, unemployment, marital status and the satisfaction of food and basic needs can influence the criminal character of prisoners.

Table 2: Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Married	5	5%
Single	86	86%
Separated	8	8%
Widowed	1	1%
Divorced	0	0%

Source: Field Data (2023)

The results show that, among our respondents, 5% were in a marital relationship, 86% were single, 8% were separated, 1% were widowed, and none were divorced. But among those who were single, around half of them had children. The survey reveals a high proportion of single parents among respondents, with around 50% of unmarried participants, both male and female already having children. Several socio-economic factors prevalent in the region help to explain this trend. The overwhelming responsibilities of a family when an individual is not in an employment, predisposes one to engage in crime to get proceeds to utilize on the family. This is in concurrence with Mowen and Boman (2020) ^[11] who indicated that, the family can have a role of positive and negative influences on offending behaviors.

Marital status can influence criminal behavior. Marital stressors such as financial problems, conflict or relationship problems can contribute to reoffending. For some individuals, these stressors may lead to criminal behavior as a coping mechanism or as a means of escaping from marital difficulties that may then lead to spousal separation. On the positive side, however, a supportive and stable marital relationship can play a protective role against reoffending. A spouse who encourages rehabilitation, provides emotional support and helps the individual to reintegrate into society can be a crucial factor in mitigating the risk of reoffending. The findings show that, married people were few among the reoffenders, while single people made up more than 85% of the reoffenders.

The correlation between marital status and the likelihood of recidivism in criminal cases has been repeatedly demonstrated. Married people with family obligations typically have stronger social networks and support systems,

which can act as deterrents to reoffending. On the other hand, people who are widowed, divorced, or single could not have access to these social supports, which could raise their risk of recidivism. In their work *"When the Ties that Bind Unwind: Examining the Enduring and Situational Processes of Change behind the Marriage Effect,"* Bersani and Doherty (2013) [4] explore the processes through which marriage affects recidivism. They discover that a criminal's life can change significantly after getting married. The study emphasizes how social ties made during marriage can cause substantial adjustments to a person's routine and peer relationships, removing them from environments that are conducive to crime and decreasing the chance that they would commit crimes again. Turner, *et al* (2017) [17] study, which examined several factors, including marital status, that are connected to an individual's choice not to commit crimes, has corroborated this. By presenting evidence that demonstrates a link between marriage and lower recidivism rates, they underline the protective role that married unions have in gradually reducing criminal conduct. High unemployment and few job opportunities combined with a booming young population lead to idleness and feelings of despair. Some turn to early parenthood to gain social status and meaning. Poverty and lack of prospects also mean that many young people cannot afford to get married. Having children out of wedlock is often seen as more achievable. Addressing these structural issues of educational inequality, economic struggle and social norms around relationships and parenting is key to tackling the high incidence of early single parenthood in the region.

Table 3: Employment Status

Response	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Yes	15	15%
No	76	76%
Self-employed	9	9%
Total	100	100%

Source: Field Data (2023)

Among the personal factors, the research also sought to establish whether there was an association between employment status and recidivism. Based on the above findings, at the time of their arrest, 15% of our respondents were employed, which means they had jobs. A significant majority, 76%, were unemployed, indicating that they didn't have regular jobs when they were arrested. Lastly, 9% of our respondents were self-employed, suggesting that they were running their own businesses or working independently.

Economic distress is frequently a direct or indirect cause of imprisonment. According to Kurtuluş and Elemo (2023) [9], many crimes, such as homelessness and inability to pay child support or other costs, are directly tied to a lack of resources, while other reasons for incarceration, including substance misuse, are indirectly related to poverty. In addition, a Bureau of Justice statistics study of people who had been jailed previously found that at least 60% of them had been unemployed prior to their initial incarceration, with differences by race, ethnicity, and gender. The same racial and ethnic groups that have a higher chance of being incarcerated are also disproportionately affected by poverty. Lack of employment opportunities in Goma may be the main reason for this higher reoffending rate in the first semester after release. The similar claim was made in a

focus group when a participant gave an explanation of why he returned to Munzenze just a few weeks after being released. He remarked...

"We get lost in society since there are no jobs for us and we also have to eat. If my friends reach out to me in this scenario and invite me to take part in activities where I might at least receive something, I will have to make a decision" (FGD, September 18, 2023).

From the above quote it is clear that lack of employment can push someone into crime. Those who can't get a job could easily be persuaded to take part in criminal activities. Being rearrested so soon after such a delay is evidence that the Munzenze prison as an institution is unable to rehabilitate inmates, but it also raises concerns about the efficacy of rehabilitation programs. Based on reformation theory, the prison must have the ability to transform condemned criminals' personalities and character into law-abiding citizens. The prison assesses the efficacy of existing reformation programs to determine whether the programs are suitable, a response to the requirements of the convicts, and may help ex-prisoners to reintegrate into society.

4. Findings

The results revealed that 5% of our respondents were married, 86% were single, 8% were separated, and none had previously been divorced. The irony is that nearly half of individuals who were single had children even though they had not legally married. Which prompts us to consider the environments in which these kids are growing up and their living conditions. The results showed that 15% of our respondents were employed at the time of their arrest. 76% of them were unemployed. 9% of our respondents identified as self-employed.

5. Conclusion

The study concluded that, there is a complex interplay of institutional, societal, and personal factors influencing criminal recidivism in Goma. A comprehensive strategy for rehabilitation and reintegration is required. The criminal justice system and society at large must work together to address these complex issues in order to stop the recidivism cycle and promote the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into society.

6. Recommendations

Based on the conclusions, the study recommends that, a comprehensive rehabilitation programs within Munzenze prison must be developed. Create and implement comprehensive rehabilitation programs within the Munzenze prison system that address the personal factors contributing to recidivism. These programs should focus on mental health support, addiction treatment, vocational training, and education to equip inmates with skills and coping mechanisms to reduce the likelihood of reoffending.

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