



## Exploring the Factors That Promote Recidivism in a Sample of Parolees

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### **Abstract**

Relapsing into criminal behaviour after a previous conviction is a complex issue with significant societal implications. South Africa has one of the world's highest recidivism rates by state. Reports by the South African Department of Correctional Services indicate that over sixty-five per cent of offenders released from the correctional Centre returned to the centre within two years after being released on parole. From a survey of recidivists in the Limpopo Province of South Africa, this article explores the factors contributing to recidivism in South Africa. Findings revealed (amongst others) that poor support systems from family members and public community members contribute to recidivism. The paper makes recommendations for effective management of recidivism in South Africa.

**Keywords:** *Recidivism; Department of Correctional Services; Offender; South Africa*

### **Introduction**

One critical issue at the forefront of most criminal justice discourse and public policy is the growing incidences of offender recidivism. Broadly considered as a repetition of undesired behaviour by an offender after experiencing the negative consequence of that criminal behaviour, recidivism has significant implications for the offender, the offender's family/community, and the entire society (Stout, 2023; Schlimpert, 2023; Hines, 2021; Razali, et al., 2021). Recidivism also queries the rehabilitation programmes offered by correctional managers to ensure offenders receive adequate treatment during their incarceration (Bonta & Andrews, 2010).

Family members, communities, and other relevant stakeholders are expected to take responsibility and play critical roles in effectively rehabilitating offenders and ensuring these offenders are reintegrated back into society as productive citizens. This is because rehabilitation is critical for offenders' successful reintegration into society and for reducing the likelihood of reoffending (Ilic, 2023; Harley et al., 2014; Amasa-Annang & Scutelnicu, 2016).

Recidivism is rife in South Africa, and several attempts by the state to curb this societal malaise have been successful. Theoretically, this imbroglio is a true reflection of a typical South African society, where many citizens are trapped in the vicious cycle of crime and the failure of successive regimes to solve crime problems in the country effectively. The Department of Correctional Services (DSC), with all its rehabilitative mandates as specified in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa and the Correctional Service Act (Act 111 of 1998), has yet to find a lasting solution to this malaise.

Contemporarily, the rate of recidivism in South Africa has continued to rise. For instance, Schoeman (2013) reported that recidivism rates in South Africa range between 55%-95%. There are assertions that the recidivism rate ranges between 80%-94%, and most offenders often recidivate less than six months to a year after their initial release from custody (Padayachee, 2008). Many authors have attributed recidivism challenges to the overcrowded nature of several correctional centres in South Africa. Although the incarceration rate in South Africa has expanded over the years, several correctional facilities are still jam-packed, with attendant violence owing to the poor living conditions of the offenders (Van Hout & Wessels, 2022; Shabangu, 2006).

Recidivism raises doubt about the effectiveness of the various rehabilitative programmes introduced to transform offender behaviour and make them responsible citizens when integrated into society. Although ex-offenders need support from their family members and society for their smooth reintegration back into society and to help reduce the possibility of recidivism (Chikadzi, 2017). In the current study, authors observed that families and society find it difficult to accept the parolees back because they were incarcerated for a long time, family members and community find it difficult to trust them, the parolees violate their parole conditions, and this leads to recidivism and overcrowding in correctional centres. Why has this problem lingered, and what are the key contributory factors to recidivism in Limpopo, South Africa? The current study aims to explore and describe factors contributing to recidivism in Limpopo, South Africa, and suggest measures for curbing it in Limpopo Province of South Africa.

### ***Literature Review***

Broadly, recidivism has significant consequences not only for individuals but also for communities. It perpetuates a cycle of crime, resulting in a strain on the criminal justice system and increased costs for society. Moreover, it limits the potential for rehabilitation, reintegration, and positive change (Tegeng & Abadi, 2018). However, several factors have been advanced for the increasing rate of recidivism. These factors include social stigma, unemployment, lack of reintegration, personal distress, violent behaviour, drug abuse, lack of educational facilities, socioeconomic struggles, deficiencies in the legal system, previous criminal history, and lack of employment opportunities (Ahmad, 2022; Mongelli et al., 2020; Haviv & Hasisi, 2019; Tegeng & Abadi, 2018).

Factors such as age, type of crime committed, gender, history of mental illness, and race also play significant roles in shaping recidivism (see Moles-López & Añaños, 2021; Moles-López & Añaños, 2021; Glover, 2018; Tinik & Hudak, 2014). For instance, a study conducted by Tiniki and Hudak (2014) found that factors contributing to recidivism in women include national origin, age, addiction profile, criminal antecedents as a minor, and age at first imprisonment.

Scholars have considered these factors as economic problems (such as poverty and poor living conditions), family problems (including family conflict and lack of love and affection), psychological problems (such as anxiety and depression), labelling, discrimination, false witness, and lack of adequate rehabilitation and reintegration services (Admad, 2022; Tinik & Hudak, 2014). For instance, a study by Orlando and Farrington (2021) found that age at first contact with the law, low school achievement, poor school attendance, substance abuse, delinquent peers, and community disorganisation were essential

predictors of juvenile recidivism. Similarly, age, no custody of children, substance use frequency, and number of substance problems were also predictors of recidivism (Scott *et al.*, 2014). However, for this study, efforts are made to expand on the key resonating ones and how they shape recidivism.

### ***Linkages between socioeconomic factors and recidivism***

#### *Poverty and recidivism*

Research has shown that there is a strong correlation between poverty and recidivism. Offenders from low-income backgrounds often face limited access to resources, such as education, healthcare, and employment opportunities, increasing the likelihood of reoffending (Colon, 2022; Bowen, 2020; Brand, 2015). Poverty is reported to push people into engaging in various illegal activities to survive (Bowen, 2020).

#### *Unemployment and recidivism*

Unemployment is a significant risk factor for recidivism (Bowen, 2020; Brand, 2015). Without a stable job or income, individuals may struggle to meet their basic needs and resort to criminal activities (Bushway & Apel, 2012). Additionally, unemployment can contribute to frustration, hopelessness, and a lack of purpose, making it difficult for individuals to reintegrate into society successfully (*see* Brand, 2015; Bushway & Apel, 2012).

#### *Lack of stable housing and recidivism*

A lack of stable housing is another crucial factor that promotes recidivism (Jacobs & Gottlieb, 2020). Upon release from incarceration, homelessness or unstable living conditions make it challenging for individuals to establish a stable and supportive environment (Link *et al.*, 2019). The absence of a safe and secure living situation can lead to increased stress, exposure to negative influences, and a higher likelihood of engaging in criminal behaviour (Colon, 2022; Branley-Bell & Talbot, 2021; Namitha & Sulaiman, 2021).

#### *Substance abuse and recidivism*

Studies have reported a strong link between substance abuse and recidivism (Goodson *et al.*, 2020). Substance abuse and recidivism often go hand in hand. Many individuals with substance abuse disorders end up in the criminal justice system due to drug-related offences (Houser *et al.*, 2019). The cycle continues as the lack of effective treatment programs in correctional facilities often fails to address the root causes of addiction, making relapse more likely upon release (Mongelli *et al.*, 2020; Haviv & Hasisi, 2019).

#### *Lack of education and employment opportunities as contributors to recidivism*

Limited access to education is a significant barrier to successful reintegration into society (Craig *et al.*, 2020; Glover, 2018). Without the necessary skills and knowledge, individuals may struggle to find employment, making them more vulnerable to the cycle of crime. Education is vital in equipping individuals with the tools needed to secure stable employment, support themselves, and avoid criminal activity (Denver, 2020; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2019).

Employment barriers pose a significant obstacle for individuals with a criminal record. Many employers have policies that discriminate against hiring individuals with past convictions, limiting job opportunities (Rodolfa *et al.*, 2020). The lack of viable employment options can lead to frustration, financial instability, and a higher likelihood of returning to criminal behaviour (Denver, 2020; Eisenberg *et al.*, 2019; Ahmed, 2016).

Although existing literature has considered the factors contributing to recidivism rates and hindering successful reintegration into society, some of these studies have contextual and environmental limitations. Moreover, little is known about the views of parolees in specific settings, which may hinder effective interventions. Hence, the need for this study. The current study can foster the development of appropriate strategies and intervention programmes to reduce recidivism and promote better outcomes for individuals who have once had contact with the criminal justice system.

### **Research Method and Procedures**

Data for this study was obtained from a survey of parolees in Limpopo, South Africa, in 2021. A descriptive and exploratory research design was used. The population comprises parolees at Polokwane. Probability simple random sampling was used to select Parolees from Capricorn Districts of the Limpopo Province. The sample size was calculated from three Parolees, and 10% of Offenders from villages at Polokwane were drawn. Based on the literature review, questionnaires with close-ended items were designed in English to accommodate all Parolees through consultation with the supervisors. The questionnaire had two sections. Section A focuses on participants' demographic information, and section B contains self-assessment questions. The first author (the primary researcher) ensured that face validity was observed to avoid bias and ensure that the instrument measured the desired contents. The first author also ensured that, at face value, the questionnaire appeared to be a relevant measure of the content under discussion in the study (Creswell & Clark, 2012, p. 239; Gravette & Forzano, 2003, p. 87).

Close-ended self-administered questionnaires were used to collect data from Parolees who were re-admitted to the Centre. One hundred questionnaires were handed out. Out of 100 distributed, 80 questionnaires were completed, ten were incomplete, and ten were missing. The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 22 was used to analyse the data. The results are presented as tables to show the frequency and percentages.

### **Results**

**Table.1 The demographic composition of study participants**

The table below depicts the demographic information about the study participants. From the table, most participants were high-risk offenders who had served sentence terms of up to 20 years. Most (78%) of them had no certificate.

Demographic data	Characteristics	Frequency	Percentages
Years of sentence impose	< 2 years	Years of sentence impose	< 2 years
Classification category	High-risk offenders	20	62.5
	Medium Risk offenders	06	18.8
	Low Risk offenders	04	12.5
Qualification	No qualifications	-	-
	Certificates	25	78.125
	Diplomas	03	9.375
	Degree	02	6.25

Age	20-25	15	46.875
	25-35	10	31.25
	35-45	06	18.75
Marital status	Single	21	65.625
	Married	06	18.75
	Divorced	02	6.25
	Widowed	02	6.25
Total			100.0

**Table 2. Perception of recidivism**

This aimed to determine factors contributing to recidivism in Correctional Centers in Limpopo Province. The results were interpreted separately. Some responses to similar items were together to facilitate the interpretation of the findings.

Questions	Agree		Disagree	
	F	%	F	%
1. Do you know that the correctional Centre is a place of rehabilitation, not punishment?	20	62.5	12	37.5
2. Are parole conditions challenging to comply with?	28	87.5	5	15.6
3. Did you enrol at the Correctional Centre while serving your sentence?	30	93.7	2	6.25
4. Did you attend and understand Correctional Programs rendered by social workers while serving your sentence?	23	71.9	9	28.1
5. Did you attend the Victim Offender Dialog during your parole preparations?	15	46.9	15	46.9
6. Were you part of the gang's stars before you were detained?	4	12.6	28	87.5
7. Were you detained in a safe custody or a safe environment than in your Society?	25	78.1	7	21.9
8. Do community members in your society accept you back as a rehabilitated person?	25	78.12	8	25
9. Did you interact with your community members after you were released on parole?	8	25	21	65.6
10. Did you get support from your family members and relatives after you were given a chance to be released?	28	87.5	4	25
11. Did you convince your community members that you have changed from your criminal behaviour?	11	34.4	21	65.6
1.2 Do you know some ex-offenders in your community who were employed?	15	47.9	18	56.2
1.3 Did you attend spiritual care programs in the community where you are staying?	8	25	24	75
1.4 Did you know you are not allowed to commit a crime or re-offend while on parole supervision?	30	93.8	2	6.25
1.5 Did you know that parole is a privilege not a must?	10	31.2	22	69.6

### **Perception of Correctional Centre as a Place of Rehabilitation**

Out of the 32 parolees, n=20 (62.5%) confirmed that a good relationship between officials and offenders helps them have positive minds through rehabilitation since they are serving their half sentences outside the centre. However, n=12 (37.5%) offenders displayed negative thoughts since they were arrested until they got released on parole. Therefore, the current study indicates that Correctional Centers are no longer prison-like back then now Correctional facilities are referred to as Correctional Centers a place of a new beginning where rehabilitation is aimed at helping the offender gain insight into his / her offending behaviour and understand that the crime has caused injury to others (including the primary victim/s and the broader community—section 52 of the Correctional Service Act, 1998 (Act No 111 of 1998).

### **Perception about conditions of parole**

Out of the 32 parolees, n=28 (87.75%) agreed that conditions of parole are not difficult because they have reintegration case officers who are responsible for monitoring them and also to supervise them, n=5(15.6%) disagreed that conditions of parole are challenging to comply on. After all, they don't have the freedom to do their own thing at their own time, because whatever they do, they must report to their reintegration case officers. House detention: If you are unemployed, you are expected to spend most of the daytime and all of the night at home, work obligations will determine the period of house detention. However, you may participate in religious and organised sports activities. The White paper on Corrections indicates that officials must strive to achieve the objectives to explore and describe factors contributing to recidivism, which leads to recidivism. (Curt, Anne & Bartol 2017, p. 55).

### **Perception about enrollment for educational development**

Out of 32 parolees confirmed that all registered with Abet, whereas n=2 (6.25%) have not registered to improve themselves since they serve different years of the sentences imposed. In contrast, n=30 (.93.7%) agreed that they have registered. Therefore, the current study revealed that Correctional Facilities must be the best service providers by delivering services with integrity and commitment to excellence. Offenders, after serving their sentences back to society with skills they have learned from the centre, can improve themselves. (Strydom, Fouche, Poggenpoel & Schurink,2015, p. 517).

### **Perception about correctional programmes**

Out of 32 parolees, n=23 (71.9%) agreed on attending Correctional programs offered in the institutions by social workers and correctional intervention officials, and n=9 (28.12%) disagreed that they did not attend programs rendered by the social workers, which led to recidivism. Therefore, all offenders must attend programs such as substance abuse, anger management, behaviour modification, educational programs and life skills to improve themselves physically, emotionally and spiritually. These programs aim to improve the rehabilitation process of each offender so that they can reduce the percentage of parole violations when they are granted that opportunity to go and improve their lifestyle in their communities because they differ like their risk factors and criminogenic needs. (Hanson, 2016, p. 214).

### **Perception about community members accepting parole**

Out of 32 parolees, n=25 (78.12%) confirmed that community members from their societies had accepted them since rehabilitation is also a societal responsibility, n=8 (25%) disagreed, saying that community members did not accept them since they do not allow them to participate in community activities such as participating in sports activities and also to participate at the community churches. However, when seeking employment, you will have the opportunity to seek employment if unemployed; the reintegration officer may request that you furnish him/her with evidence of your search and also comply with the conditions of your employment. (Hebert, 2017, p. 120).



### **Perception about support system from the family members**

Out of the 32 parolees,  $n=20$  (28.7%) confirmed that support system from their family members, such as spouses and parents, helps them to change from offending behaviours,  $n=4$  (4.25%) disagreed that their family members do not support them during their parole supervision, the lack of support system lead them re-offend by violating one of their parole conditions, family members do not give them a chance to prove themselves, family members do not even supports them when they seek employment around the community or when they want to start small business.

Offenders are released on parole so that their family members can support them after their wrongdoings, but family members are the ones who insult their parolees. Poverty also contributes to a violation of the parole conditions because there is no food at home to eat, not enough shelters for them to sleep in, or her institution cost-effectively and in the public's interest; Reintegration Case Officers must have good relationships with the Offenders or parolees, so that they can prevent recidivism at the Correctional Institutions. Family involvement in mental health as the family has a primary decision-making role in caring for their children and the policies and procedures governing care for all children in their community, tribe, territory and nation (Mabunda, 2018, p. 193).

### **Discussions**

The demographic distribution of the current study includes sentences imposed, qualifications, age and gender who participated in the study. The current study reveals that offenders sentenced to 5 to 10 years imprisonment have high percentages, 46.9%, which means they have the highest numbers inside the correctional centre; they are the highest offenders who re-offend by committing new crimes repeatedly. However, sentences imposed were influential in the current study. The current study reveals that sentences with high percentages of high-risk offenders differ for different ages because there is juveniles, youth and adults. This is similar to the views shared by scholars (see Moles-López & Añaños, 2021; Moles-López & Añaños, 2021; Glover, 2018; Tinik & Hudak, 2014).

A classification category was influential in the current study because it helps the officials differentiate the offenders or parolees according to their crimes. The current study reveals that categories also help us identify them and accommodate them at the same housing units according to their age, e.g., juveniles to juveniles, youth to youth, adults to adults and also females to females not mixed with male offenders.

The study indicates the highest grades they completed and the qualifications they obtained while serving their sentences. The current study reveals that offenders have the right to free education at correctional centres, and the Department of Education is responsible for providing services at correctional institutions by providing qualified educationists to teach offenders to improve themselves. Offenders and parolees with certificates have a high percentage of 78.1% because most of them are admitted with grades 12; these motivate them to register or to further their studies while they are incarcerated. Offenders with or parolees with diplomas are very few; the percentage rates are 9.3%, which means that they do not put effort into registering with the universities because they do not get support from their family members to encourage them when they are back from the community. The current study reveals that parolees can apply for study loans and improve themselves.

The current study indicates that aged 20-25 juveniles have a high percentage of 46.8% of crimes that they commit, which leads to overcrowding inside the correctional institutions; juveniles are also getting long sentences so that they can change from offending behaviour. Youth aged 25 to 35 have 31% of crimes they commit; youth offenders must attend programs such as Life Skills, which will help them improve their lifestyles and further their studies.

The study reveals that gender base was influential in the current study because we managed to identify variances from both genders, males and females. The researcher assumes that the highest number of single offenders is 65.6%. It could be the fact that they do not have responsibilities because they are not married. Married people have a better percentage, 18.7%, than the offenders or parolees who do not have many responsibilities in their families.

Respondents regarding correctional centres as a place of rehabilitation reveal that parolees are not rehabilitated. However, the absence of rehabilitation leads them to re-offend and be admitted back to correctional institutions since the institution is not a place of punishment but rehabilitation; some think that correctional institutions have not transferred the prison system to a place of rehabilitation.

Respondents confirmed that conditions of parole during correctional supervision were identified to be most challenging because parolees cannot comply with these conditions because of their negative attitudes when the reintegration case officers visit them at their home since they must monitor and supervise their movements at the society. However, the current study indicates that some abscond from their homes when granted parole. The current study further indicates that some do not stay at the specific addresses they produced during parole preparation, even after release.

The study participants confirmed that a family member supports them when they comply with the conditions rather than breaking them. The current study believes that a family member does not accept parolees who repeatedly re-offend. The current study further indicates that parolees re-offend because they enjoy the lifestyles practised inside the institutions. The current study reveals that family members and society as a whole must support these parolees and ex-offenders so that they can reduce the percentage of recidivism.

## **Conclusions**

Parolee's perceptions of recidivism in correctional institutions of Limpopo Province revealed that challenges hinder the provision of a quality rehabilitation process. However, the provision of quality rehabilitation implies that family members and society should be involved in interacting with parolees and discuss how to reduce recidivism and affect their lives. Therefore, the current study believes family involvement is crucial to promoting recidivism recovery of parolees. The current study identified areas that hinder the effectiveness of the rehabilitation process.

## **Recommendations**

Future studies should be conducted on parolees re-admitted to correctional institutions and serve long sentences to determine factors contributing to insufficient family involvement in correctional institutions. Addressing the underlying causes of recidivism, such as socioeconomic challenges, substance abuse, lack of education and employment opportunities, mental health issues, inadequate rehabilitation programs, and the crucial role of social support and family dynamics is crucial. Additionally, we will examine the importance of policy and systemic changes to create a more effective and supportive environment for those seeking to break the cycle of recidivism.

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