

Exploring The Concept of “Desistance” and Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control by Sampson and Laub

Meneroka Konsep “Desistan” dan Teori Kawalan Sosial Umur Tidak Formal Pengkelasan Umur oleh Sampson dan Laub

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ABSTRACT

“Desistance” is a criminological concept that discusses a person’s dismissal from criminal behaviour. The ambiguity of this concept leads to confusion about what words to use: stop, cease, evade or distance from crime. There is even no translation of this concept into the Malay language, which can cause problems, especially when discussing the study of re-offending. Thus, comprehensive research is required to scrutinise the causes of success in stopping or abstaining from crime in a group of former prisoners. This concept paper addresses the questions that arise and summarises the definitions made in previous studies while using the secondary study methodology to underpin this entire study. Also, it includes the Age Graded Theory by Sampson and Laub (1993) because this theory discusses how a person can successfully stop committing crimes through informal social control. This paper also discusses the critical components of this theory in detail, such as crime trajectories, life transitions, and turning points. This study concludes with the strengths and weaknesses of the theory concerning the discussion of the success of a former prisoner in avoiding crime.

Keywords: Desistance; crime; age graded theory; trajectory; turning point; transition

ABSTRAK

“Desistance” adalah konsep kriminologi yang membincangkan pemberhentian seseorang dari tingkah laku jenayah. Kekaburan konsep ini membawa kepada kekeliruan mengenai perkataan apa yang hendak digunakan: berhenti, mengelak atau menjauhkan diri dari jenayah. Bahkan tidak ada terjemahan konsep ini ke dalam bahasa Melayu, yang boleh menimbulkan masalah, terutamanya ketika membincangkan kajian pengulangan jenayah. Justeru, kajian komprehensif perlu dilakukan untuk meneliti penyebab kejayaan menghentikan atau menjauhkan diri dari jenayah dalam sekumpulan bekas banduan. Kertas konsep ini menekankan persoalan yang timbul dan meringkaskan definisi yang dibuat dalam kajian sebelumnya sambil menggunakan metodologi kajian sekunder untuk menyokong keseluruhan kajian ini. Juga, ini merangkumi Teori Pengkelasan Umur oleh Sampson dan Laub (1993) kerana teori ini membincangkan bagaimana seseorang berjaya menghentikan jenayah melalui kawalan sosial tidak rasmi. Kertas konsep ini juga membincangkan komponen kritikal teori ini secara terperinci, seperti trajektori penjenayahan, transisi kehidupan dan titik perubahan. Kajian ini diakhiri dengan kekuatan dan kelemahan teori berkenaan dengan perbincangan mengenai kejayaan bekas banduan dalam mengelakkan jenayah.

Kata kunci: “Desistance”; Jenayah; Teori Pengkelasan Umur; trajektori; Titik perubahan; transisi

INTRODUCTION

The article “The Concept of Recidivism: Ambiguity Definition, Measurement, and Practice” published in *Akademika* in 2017 serves as the basis of this paper. The author discusses the ambiguity in defining the concept of recidivism. In brief, this concept means “to repeat the crime”. Crime repetition can be understood as re-engaging in a habit of past misconduct, primarily by prisoners. It can also be described as ex-prisoners returning to unlawful activities after being released from prison (Mohd Alif, Siti Hajar, Jal Zabdi, Khairiyah

& Noralina 2017). Various definitions have led to the inconsistency and ambiguity of the concept of recidivism. Maltz (1984), for example, has defined recidivism as ad hoc because of the difficulty in assigning the correct definition of the reality of crime repetition. Despite the inconsistency and ambiguity surrounding desistance, the primary purpose of this study is to explore the concept.

The study findings will lead to a clearer understanding of the phenomenon of crime cessation among ex-prisoners. One of the objectives of the criminal justice system is to ensure that the recurrence crime rate is low each time ex-prisoners

are released. Thus, achieving crime cessation among released ex-prisoners should be an aspiration that must be achieved. In fact, the criminal justice system in Malaysia has stipulated that the recidivism rate should be below 10%. The rate is a crucial milestone that has to be achieved. Unfortunately, in reality, the recurrence rate in the country is rising rapidly. Over the past ten years, recidivism in Malaysia has been increasing. In 2020, 32,902 repeat offences were committed by 210,251 inmates released from prison in a period of three years (Malaysian Prisons Department 2021). The number of recurrences of these crimes amounted to 15.64% for the year. This situation proves the target to achieve a 10% total recidivism rate failed. Generally, every ex-prisoner is expected to quit crime, but due to existing criminogenic risk factors, they are still or frequently exposed to criminal behaviour after their release. When discussing crime repetition, it is crucial to keep in mind that there are a group of ex-prisoners who continue to re-offend, but also some who have ceased to commit crimes.

To date, there is no precise translation of desistance. Does it translate to "a cessation", "abstinence" or "to avoid crime"? This situation makes it difficult to comment on the issue of crime repetition academically. The absence of a direct translation of desistance into the Malay language causes difficulty when researching the repetition of criminal justice in Malay.

Many words do not have a translation from one language to another. The phenomenon is typical, particularly in discussing specific fields or areas that have their own terminology. Evidently, desistance is one of the most crucial terminologies in criminology. In fact, this terminology is a breakthrough in the criminal justice system or criminology in rehabilitating a person. An example of a Malay word that does not have a direct translation in English is desistance. Desistance carries various meanings in English, such as cease, stop, evade and distance. Unfortunately, these words do not translate the desistance concept correctly. Similarly, desistance, can also be termed as 'pemberhentian dari jenayah' in Malay. Concurrently, other phrases that also carry the same meaning to desistance include 'penjarakkan dari jenayah', 'pengelakkan dari jenayah' and others.

In linguistics, 'lexicalisation' refers to the process where the language provides terminology for a concept. This process is influenced by various factors within a language community. English is a

language with 50% of words borrowed from other languages. A terminology that has no translation can be borrowed and translated into Malay. Hence, can desistance be recognised as 'desistan'? The doubt is an interesting idea to be pondered. It is recommended for Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka to consider registering desistan as a Malay word. The idea is to give justice to the discussion of this criminological study. In other words, this process can be called Loan-Translation or Calque. The root for the word 'desistance' is 'desist' or 'berhenti' in the Malay language. The suffix '-ance' (condition of) or 'to' + '-an' in the Malay language.

In the criminology field, desistance is generally defined as the cessation of other anti-social behaviours. However, researchers have not reached a consensus regarding the definition. Various social researchers have shown limitations in defining this concept. Although desistance has been a popular research topic in recent years, discussions regarding the definition are relatively limited. Very little is known explicitly about the process that discusses the desistance concept.

Two opposing definitions of desistance can be found in the study of criminological literature. The first definition derived from the criminal career model is immediate "desistance". Blumstein et al. (1986) built the model during his early research, which provides a brief description of how offenders start a criminal career, commit crime at a steady rate throughout their lives, and stop committing a crime, moving immediately to a zero rate from making a mistake. Previous studies on re-entry suggest that desistance refers to "when some offenders would suddenly and permanently quit" (National Research Council, 2008).

The re-integration process is simple and seamless for some ex-prisoners, as their family welcomes them (Hochstetler, DeLisi & Pratt 2010; Mohd Alif et al. 2023). They have a job as an income source (Sampson, Laub & Wimer 2006; Mears & Mestre 2012) or a network of social support to assist them throughout the process (Cochran 2014; Haerle 2014; Liem, Zahn & Tichavsky 2014; Martinez & Abrams 2013). Conversely, the re-integration process of other ex-prisoners can be difficult when their family does not accept them (Morash, Kashy, Bohmert, Cobbina & Smith 2017). They fail to secure stable employment (Holzer, Raphael & Stoll 2004) and the presence of anti-social friends induces them to re-engage in criminal behaviour (Taylor & Becker 2015) or return to alcoholism

and drug addiction (Noor Zalifah 2009; Nurhazlina 2009). Nevertheless, not all ex-prisoners are repeat offenders who commit a crime or engage in criminal activities. Some ex-prisoners have successfully re-integrated into society, abstained from criminal behaviours or activities, and successfully become a part of the community (Mohd Alif, Siti Hajar & Norruzeyati 2022).

Recidivism and desistance of crime are two social phenomena although both phenomena are part of the re-integration process of ex-prisoners. The desistance or re-offence of an ex-prisoner is determined by the presence of a group of risk factors and protective factors in the social environment of ex-prisoners, which can be a driving factor or deterrent factor for the ex-prisoners to re-engage in criminal activities. Risk factors are factors that influence ex-prisoners to re-engage in risky lives (Casey, Warren & Elek 2011). On the other hand, protective factors are a set of inhibitory factors that protect ex-prisoners from re-engaging in criminal activities (Maruna 2001; Laub & Sampson 2003). The inherent differences of these two phenomena have attracted more studies to explore the concept of desistance. In particular, this study focused on defining the concept of desistance in order to gain a better understanding on why certain ex-prisoners succeed in preventing repeat crimes after their release from prison. A comprehensive understanding on how the concept of desistance is defined, especially in influencing ex-prisoners to re-engage in criminal activities, can provide realistic information on the intervening actions required to ensure successful re-integration process and prevent them from re-engaging in criminal behaviour or activities.

Desistance is one of the dimensions of criminology and is considered a criminal career parameter. One of the vital theories linked to this concept is the Age Graded Theory (Laub & Sampson, 2003; Sampson & Laub 1993). This theory is viewed as necessary when discussing desistance, primarily in elaborating the dismissal process of the crime.

UNDERSTANDING OF THE DESISTANCE

Research on desistance or the process of ceasing criminal behaviour has increased in recent years (Bersani & Doherty 2018; Broidy & Cauffman 2017; Gålnander 2019; Rocque 2014). The concept has deep roots but did not emerge as a mainstream study focus in the field until the 1990s movement towards developmental or life-course criminology

(Maruna 2017). From these origins, the term has taken on a life of its own, influencing policy and practice in criminal justice (Maruna 2017). Much of contemporary desistance research seeks to identify and understand mechanisms that can facilitate individuals' move away from criminal lifestyles (Bersani & Doherty 2018; Rodermond, Kruttschnitt, Slotboom & Bijleveld 2016). Criminologists have grown increasingly interested in what is referred to as life-course or developmental criminology (Rocque 2014).

The works on recidivism and desistance have garnered much attention among Malaysian researchers where an earlier systematic review by Tharshini and Fauziah (2018) outlined four underlying factors that contribute towards the successful reintegration of prisoners, namely, (i) motivation to change, (ii) social support, (iii) religious beliefs, and (iv) employment. Subsequently, Cheah et al. (2019) recorded the experiences of drug offenders who participated in a rehabilitation program besides investigating the factors leading to recidivism and the need for rehabilitation while Mohd Alif et al. (2020) focused on three major interrelated factors that contribute to homelessness and repeat crimes among former prisoners: (i) family denial, (ii) addiction and (iii) unemployment. Whereas Fauziah et al. (2020), discuss the identifying factors related to aspects of social integration among former addicts who have undergone treatment and rehabilitation programs is an important aspect of the nation's efforts to provide formula for successful recovery. Additionally, in a more recent study, Tharshini et al. (2020, 2021) discuss the influence of self-concept, sense of community and social support towards social integration among young offenders in Malaysia. Similarly, Sathoo et al. (2021) expounded on the importance of social support for prisoners participating in a parole program that facilitates reintegration. These studies highlight the need to explore reintegration by considering the context of crime repetition especially since the cessation of crime is highly significant in recidivism. To date, only four studies (Kausalya et al. 2021; Tharshini & Ibrahim 2018; Tharshini 2020, 2021) were found to be focused on protective factors in the local context. Crimes that occur in the country is also supported by the study of Rahim et al. (2016), who say Malaysia is facing various criminal challenges including violent homicide rates. The study of Rahim et al. (2016) also says although there are punitive provisions, yet the number of crimes is seen to continue increases every year (Rahim et al. 2016).

DEFINITION OF “DESISTANCE”

In Malaysia, the discussion of crime repetition is particularly important as the Malaysian Prison Department (MPD) (2021) statistics show a significant increase in crime repetition each year. Existing statistics show that the number of recidivists is increasing every year to this day. The statistics reported the number of repeat offenders based on the number of releases within a three-year free period. The year 2015 recorded a total of 102,214 people released in a three-year free period. The number increased to 110,683 people in 2016 (Malaysian Prisons Department 2021). Subsequently, this number increased in 2017 to 124,567 people and up to 134,690 people in a three-year free period in 2018. In 2019, a total of 141,636 people were released in three years. Most recently, in 2020, the highest number of 210,251 people were released in three years. When discussing the repetition of crime in this country, we must not forget that some ex-prisoners who have successfully re-integrated into the community and have stopped engaging in criminal behaviour. The process of avoiding or refraining from re-offending can be

referred to as “desistance”. Just as the concept of recidivism has a series of risk factors that discusses the reasons for an ex-prisoner becoming a survivor, the concept of desistance also has its factors known as the protective factor. These protective factors can prevent, interfere with, or prevent the former inmate from becoming a recidivist during his release (Farrall, 2002; Maruna, 2001). Often, the main objective in criminal investigations when reviewing a criminal stay is to identify the protective factors that influence a person to avoid crime and to explain why an ex-prisoner chooses to stop committing crimes.

Desistance can be defined as restraining or deterring from a crime (Laub & Sampson, 2003). It is a period in which ex-prisoners do not commit any criminal offence or a length of time in which ex-prisoners become compliant with social norms and regulations and choose not to engage in any form of crime (Maruna, 2001). Desistance can also be understood as a condition of termination or cessation of ex-prisoners from further involvement in crime (Laub & Sampson, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2003). Table 1 shows the definitions regarding the concept of desistance from previous studies.

TABLE 1. Definition of the concept of desistance by previous studies

Studies / Researchers	Operationalised Definition
Bushway, Piquero, Brody, Cauffman, & Mazerolle (2001)	Ex-prisoners have stopped or successfully prevented themselves from committing or re-engaging in criminal activities.
Farrall & Bowling (1999)	The moment when a criminal career ends.
Farrington & Hawkins (1991)	Individuals who have been convicted of a criminal offence. However, they have not been arrested and convicted within ten to eleven years after the first conviction.
Haggard, Gumpert & Grann (2001)	In the subsequent period, there is no re-conviction of former inmates for a criminal offence within ten years (at least).
Kruttschnitt et al. (2000)	No new offences or surveillance violations are officially recorded within two years.
Laub & Sampson (2003, 2001)	Cessation of crime, which is a process of cause and effect that supports the termination of criminal behaviour. The causal process supports the termination of offending.
Loeber, Stouthamer-Loeber, Van Kammen & Farrington (1991)	The former prisoner did not commit a crime for less than one year.
Maruna (2001)	Individuals make no mistakes in the future and report at least one year of crime-free behaviour. It is the long-term abstinence from crime by individuals who had previously engaged in persistent offending.
Maruna, LeBel, Mitchell & Naples (2004)	Absence of re-conviction after being released from prison within ten years.
McNeill (2016)	Proposed the concept of tertiary desistance to denote social recognition of change and the development of a sense of belonging
Nugent & Schinkel (2016)	Desistance is a process, rather than an end-point, and the conceptualization of the desistance process is perhaps the clearest in describing and distinguishing between key elements of the process, without implying a sense of linearity
Pezzin (1995)	Individuals who have made offences in the past and did not do so again (no reports of arrests after the first one).

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Sampson & Laub (1993)	Juvenile delinquency but have not been arrested (no involvement in criminal activity) in adulthood.
Shover (1996)	Termination from engaging voluntarily in serious criminal activity.
Shover & Thompson (1992)	No arrests were made within thirty-six months (three years) after release from prison and termination from serious crime.
Weaver (2019)	Desistance is distinct in criminology, in seeking to explain why people cease and sustain cessation from offending, rather than why they offend.
Weitekamp & Kerner (1994)	Cessation of criminal behaviour or indefinite delinquency.

It is with high hopes that ex-prisoners cease to commit crimes after they are released. However, this expectation often fails when only a small group of ex-prisoners can achieve this goal and be able to integrate. According to Laub and Sampson (2003), it is evident that many of the released prisoners stopped engaging in crime unintentionally. The unintentional stop is due to a person getting older, which leads to better maturity. Thus, they will stop committing crimes without realising or involving any planning to stop committing a crime. On the whole, the concept of desistance is a long process in which it ends with a situation where former inmates are no longer involved in crime and have been technically integrated.

Accordingly, the process of dismissing ex-prisoners from their criminal behaviour or desistance or cessation of crime is linked to the process of “keeping away” or “distancing” themselves from criminal behaviour, habits, or activities (McNeill & Maruna 2007) and maintaining a crime-free life (Kazemian 2007). Not all ex-prisoners fail to rebuild their life. Certain ex-prisoners do not commit any criminal offenses and remain committed to the social norms and regulations. Apart from the risk factors that may lead ex-prisoners to be repeat offenders, abstinence from crime has been a major focus in criminal studies, as it presents a series of protective factors that can prevent ex-prisoners from becoming repeat prisoners (Maruna 2001; Farrall 2002). Similar to the multifaceted risk factors of recidivism, there are also different protective and distinctive factors of criminality that can explain why ex-prisoners successfully undergo the re-integration process. In general, there are two groups of factors that influence the desistance of crime, namely external factors that influence one’s surrounding environment and one’s internal factors (Kazemian & Maruna 2009).

Some of the external factors that are often linked to the desistance of crime include obtaining legal employment and family acceptance as well as the influence of pro-social and conducive social

circle. For instance, there is a general consensus that stable employment promotes the desistance of crime among ex-prisoners (Maruna & Farrall 2004). Work is a critical factor that helps ex-prisoners to avoid engaging in criminal behaviour and activities (Sampson & Laub 2005; Mears & Mestre 2012) because having a stable job prevents them from returning to crime (Baron 2008; Sampson et al. 2006; Western 2007). Working offers hope in ensuring an ex-prisoner does a good job, attend to work every day, arrive on time, perform assigned work and others. Employment provides a form of social control to these ex-prisoners. They will avoid committing crimes as it will affect their employment. Besides, most of their time is occupied, and no time is available to commit a crime. The presence of co-workers causes them to be warier in engaging in a crime. These ex-prisoners earn an income through employment. Hence, no reason exists for these people to commit crimes or earn illegal income through criminal conduct. Thus, employment has allowed these ex-prisoners to gain a sense of purpose in life.

Besides that, the quality of relationships between ex-prisoners and their family is important in helping them to rebuild their life (Tewksbury & DeMichele 2005). Strong family ties are important because a family functions as an informal social control in monitoring ex-prisoners and preventing them to engage in crime activities. Good relationships are formed between ex-prisoners and their family into “glue” that connects former inmates with their families, which subsequently motivates these ex-prisoners to avoid engaging in crime activities for them to maintain such relationships (Martinez & Abrams 2013; Maruna 2001; Maruna & Farrall 2004).

Last but not least, peer relationships and the surrounding community also influence the desistance of crime. Returning to and staying in an area with a positive environment and being surrounded by peers who are not involved in any crime can protect ex-prisoners from the influence of crime (Farrall 2002;

Maruna 2001; McNeill & Maruna 2007). Apart from these listed external factors, there are also several internal factors that contribute to the desistance of crime among ex-prisoners, such as age and maturity (Giordano, Cernkovich & Rudolph 2002). Older ex-prisoners are more likely to refrain from committing crimes (Maruna 2001) and cautious in making decisions in order to avoid behaviours that may lead them to crime. Empirical evidence and literature have revealed that ex-prisoners who successfully avoid criminal behaviour have specific characteristics

To provide a clearer understanding of the concept of desistance, the next section of this paper examines one of the most well-known theories that discuss social control that can lead to the cessation of crime.

AGE GRADED THEORY OF INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL BY SAMPSON AND LAUB

In criminology, some questions about crime often come to mind: What makes a former prisoner more likely to be involved again in crime? Why does a group of ex-prisoners show a repeat of similar offence despite coming from various demographics? What steps can be taken to mitigate the risk factors that lead to the recurrence of crime? What causes the former prisoners to integrate successfully? These questions have led to the introduction of criminal theory, such as the Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control (Sampson & Laub 1993).

This theory is part of the criminological perspective of the Life Course Perspective of Criminality Theory, which explains how each the age and event in an individual's life acts as a turning point to influence the individual's decision to either re-engage in a crime or to avoid it. Various studies show that a thorough understanding of the social events faced by ex-prisoners of all ages can help in analysing re-offending ex-prisoners as well as those who successfully re-integrated and avoided committing a crime. This theory also serves as a guide in discussions of recidivism and desistance of former prisoners. This theory discusses the social control that exists through institutions that are present in the former prisoner's life events. The presence of social control determines the trajectory the ex-prisoners will follow whether they would be involved in criminal behaviour or to reform.

BACKGROUND OF AGE GRADED THEORY OF INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL

Sampson and Laub introduced the Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control in 1993 in the book "Crime in the making: Pathways and turning points through life". The authors developed this theory to explain criminal behaviour by looking at the events and transitions that occur in a criminal's life at every age that has led or prevented them from committing the crime. The life events and transitions include marriage, occupation, family control, school conditions, individual relationships with peers in childhood and adolescence, education level, marital relationships, parenting relationships, and individual relationships with the surrounding community. Glueck and Glueck (1950)'s study of delinquent behaviour among juveniles serves as the basis of Sampson and Laub's Age Graded Theory.

"Unravelling Juvenile Delinquency" used a sample of 500 delinquent and 500 non-delinquent students matched by age, race, intelligence quotient (IQ), and their place of residence in Boston. Sampson and Laub (1993) reconstructed the data and conducted follow-up interviews with the original respondents, who were then in their 60s. They found that most of the respondents in the Glueck and Glueck (1950) study were involved in crimes throughout their lives. Some respondents went on to live a normal life and had no legal problems. This positive change has led Sampson and Laub to ask why some with a history of juvenile delinquency change would for the better as they grow older or reach a certain age. It, in turn, prompted them to look into the crimes that were committed throughout an individual's life and found that there are continuity and change from childhood to adolescence to adulthood that influences crime involvement. This theory refutes Moffitt (1993)'s Life Course Persistent, which refers to individuals who commit crimes from childhood to adulthood continuously. Contrarily, Sampson and Laub (1993) argue that people have the potential to divert themselves from crime through social relationships that are built throughout one's life. However, an individual who exhibits devotional behaviour at an early age will not necessarily commit crimes continuously as they grow old because the life cycle of a criminal can change due to the positive events that occur throughout their lives.

Sampson and Laub (1993) found that young delinquent respondents, who later reformed and repented of their criminal behaviour, experienced

a life event that became a turning point for them to leave their criminal lifestyle and start a new, lawful life. They also found that job stability and marital relationships in adulthood were significant factors in the respondent's social behaviour. The stronger the respondent's relationship with their work and family, the less crime they commit. These findings suggest that the social relationships that exist during the transition to adulthood, i.e., marital relationships and job stability, explain variations in criminal behaviour. The findings of this study have prompted Sampson and Laub (1993) to strengthen their Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control by inferring that the personal characteristics of criminals, their experiences in childhood, adolescent, and adulthood are important factors that influence the life trajectory towards the positive or negative.

ASSUMPTION OF AGE GRADED THEORY OF INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL ABOUT INDIVIDUAL CRIMINAL BEHAVIOUR

Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control emphasizes the importance of certain events and life changes experienced by criminals that influence their decision to commit a crime or not. Individual criminal behaviour will change through each life stages. It can mean better performance at a younger age but also poor performance in adulthood (Martinez & Abrams 2013; Maruna 2001; Sampson & Laub 2003). According to Sampson and Laub (1993), each experiences a transitional process; from life as a child to adolescence to adulthood, from unmarried to married, from unemployment to employment, and from childless to having children. Each of these social transitions influences the determination of the antisocial or criminal behaviour within the individual, for example, children (Sampson et al. 2006; Maume et al. 2005). The family institution, school environment, and peer relationships greatly influence the formation of a child's life, criminal behaviour, thinking, and personality. A harmonious family institution can produce law-abiding citizens. Contrarily, the presence of a criminal influence in a family can have a significant effect on a child's criminal tendencies. Children who grow up in antisocial families with conflict tend to grow up to be antisocial and abusive. Individuals who go to school spend most of the time surrounded by peers who have influence them in almost all aspects of life. The influence of a prosocial peer will shape the personality of the other peer. If peers exhibit

negative behaviours such as stealing and skipping school, all individuals belonging to this group will also exhibit antisocial behaviour.

As individuals age, work and marriage become significant factors in influencing individual behaviour. Work can create a sense of responsibility where individuals will start to ponder on the consequences of committing a crime such as loss of job and source of income, especially if the individual is the breadwinner in the family. A marriage can be a turning point in one's life. Individuals will avoid crime if their loved ones and their dignity are at risk. In short, as individuals reach the age of maturity, the factors that influence their behaviour will change correspondingly throughout their lives. As people age, their behaviour changes as well. Positive life experiences or social events can help criminals to reform, while negative experiences and social events will allow them to continue their criminal activities (Sampson & Laub 2003). In 2003, Laub and Sampson revised their Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control in the "Shared Beginnings, Divergent Lives". They have also expanded their analysis of the process of dismissal from crime while maintaining their assumptions about Social Theory on the trajectory of individual criminal behaviour. They find that certain things happen at a certain age or a particular stage in life that drives former criminals to stop committing crimes.

Laub and Sampson (2003) emphasize the importance of particular turning points and life-changing factors that can influence a former criminal's decision to commit a crime or not. They have also highlighted two crucial concepts of crime, namely the age and type of crime as well as the mechanism for criminal termination. The authors found that individual involvement in crime decreases with increasing age, regardless of low IQ factors, aggressive behaviour, or early onset of antisocial behaviour. Some turning points such as marriage, joining the military, school, and having a profession are aspects that can prevent an individual from committing a crime, or distance an individual from desistance. In summary, the discussion of Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control is about turning points that occur throughout the life stages of individuals and the protective factors that exist at every age that motivate them not to perform or engage with criminal activity. Since one of the main focuses of this paper is to explain the process of crime cessation among former inmates, the use of the Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control

can be systematically explained by how an ex-prisoner of a certain age would distance themselves from criminal behaviour or activity. The same theory can also explain the antisocial and criminal behaviour that occurs among ex-prisoners after being released from prison. This theory explains the

criminal behaviour that is formed during the process of reintegration of former prisoners as a result of their life events. Figure 1 illustrates the relationship between social events occurring in adulthood with the treatment of recidivism and the cessation of ex-crime as described by Age Graded Theory.

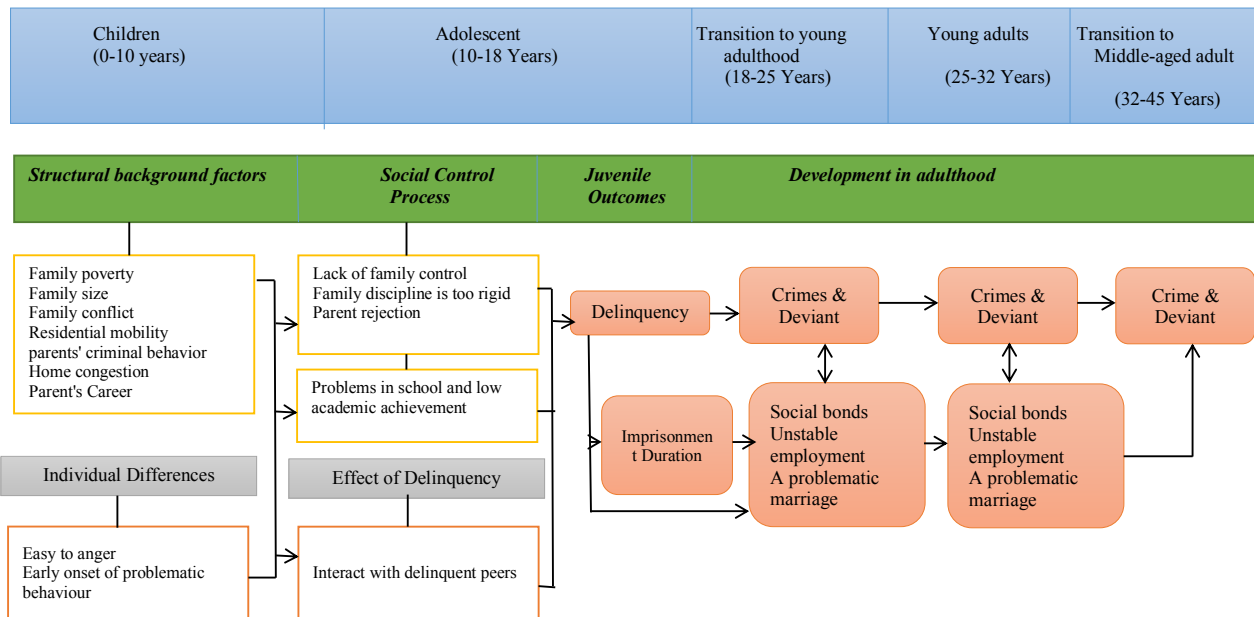


FIGURE 1. Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control
Source: Sampson & Laub 1993

THE KEY COMPONENTS OF AGE GRADED THEORY OF INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL IN THE BEHAVIOUR OF INDIVIDUAL CRIMES

Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control explains the behaviour of criminals through the following three basic components (Blokland & Nieuwebeerta, 2005):

1. The criminal trajectory
2. Life transitions
3. Turning Point

CRIMINAL TRAJECTORY

The Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control discusses how an individual’s life is determined by certain life events that occur in an individual’s life (Benson 2001). This theory looks at life events in the context of life stages, turning points and individual pathways. Criminal trajectory involves a long-term pattern of change and stability in one’s life, which involves many transitions (Elder, Kirkpatrick & Crosnoe 2003; Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub 2003). For example, getting married is a transition since it is a journey that leads to stability or may

involve other transitions along the way. Sampson and Laub (1993) say that marriage alone does not necessarily enhance social control. However, holding on to the partner and the emotional bond that exists between married couples create a social bond between two individuals. It, in turn, leads to a reduction in criminal or anti-social behaviour.

TRANSITION

Transitions involve short-term activities such as marriage, divorce, or family relationship that result in life changes (Elder 1985; Wolfgang, Thornberry & Figlio 1987). It plays a vital role in future trajectories. Experiences in childhood affect behaviours in adolescence and adulthood, just as events in adolescence or adulthood can change trajectories in adulthood (Sampson and Laub 1990).

The transitions that take place can have a profound effect on the journey of life through modification of directions or trajectories (Thornberry 1997). The Age Graded Theory suggests that individuals experience transitions that represent a different deviation from their previous role (Elder et al. 2003). Each individual’s life is full of transitions, such as entering school, reaching puberty, leaving

school, getting the first job, retiring, and marriage. Most of the transitions take place concerning family life, including marriage, divorce, remarriage, and death. Transitions can be triggered by a variety of events that can influence direction, and then modify them in the future. Individual life events vary from person to person, which can lead to different trajectories in their criminal behaviour (Elder 1985).

TURNING POINT

The turning point at every level of an individual's life can direct the criminal trajectory either positively or negatively (Sampson and Laub 2005). Therefore, to understand criminal behaviour throughout an ex-convict's life, the turning point experienced by the former criminal needs to be known. Social events such as marriage and engaging in meaningful work are among the positive examples of change that can lead to cessation of crime. In contrast, being incarcerated for long periods, alcohol abuse, and prolonged unemployment have been identified as negative turning points, leading to recidivism. Researchers acknowledge that family institutions, schools, and peers are the most influential groups in an individual's life. Sampson and Laub (1993) found three components of informal social control in the family context, namely consistent family discipline, quality of family monitoring, and close relationships that are formed among family members. Parents who reject their children's presence, use harsh and indiscriminate discipline, and do not monitor children's activities increases the likelihood of children engaging in antisocial activities, contrary to children whose parents did not reject them, exercised gentle and consistent discipline, and monitored their daily activities (Demuth & Brown 2004).

The Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control also confirms that social structural factors such as family disruption, unemployment, residential mobility, immigrant status, family socioeconomic status, and family social ties indirectly affect individual antisocial behaviour. Sampson and Laub (1993) state that poverty, home mobility, and family disruption have a significant impact on an individual's social behaviour. Children born into troubled or low-income families are prone to experience emotional rejection. They are less likely to develop strong emotional bonds with their parents and future partners and children. Socioeconomic disadvantages can negatively impact parenting. Factors related to socioeconomic disadvantages, such as poverty and in-house distress, may interfere

with the relationship between an individual and his or her family members, especially with parents and siblings. A strong family relationship can prevent an individual from developing antisocial and criminal behaviour (Laub & Sampson 2001). Sampson and Laub (1993) have also used weak social ties to explain the continuity of adolescent and adult antisocial behaviours. They found that the antisocial behaviour of adolescents predicts weak social bonds later in adult life. Two indicators of weak social ties are low educational attainment and low marital quality. Delinquency affects adult criminal behaviour through weak social bonds.

Weak social ties have caused many adults to fail in securing stable employment, which then promotes the continuation of criminal acts. Employment promotes cessation of crime (Kazemian and Maruna 2009) by promoting social compliance (Sampson and Laub 1993). Job stability, work commitment, and interdependent relationships with employers are important factors in influencing former criminals to stop committing crimes. Also, marriage is seen as a factor that can prevent ex-prisoners from re-offending and stop committing crime altogether. The literature review on ceasing from committing crimes has long discussed the romantic relationship of marriage as a critical instrument in stabilizing the relationship between couples (Maruna 2001). Strong relationships within marriage institutions allow individuals to adhere to the law and reduce their tendencies to reengage in criminal activities (Laub and Sampson 2003). Marriage promotes informal social control and cessation of crime through the following four ways (Sampson et al. 2006):

1. Marriage reduces the potential to commit crime because the criminal activity can threaten happiness, which can lead to divorce (Sampson and Laub, 1993).
2. Marriage makes ex-prisoners avoid negative social situations and relationships that would lead to crime.
3. Marriage provides structure and supervision, especially when the couple expects the ex-convict to have a legitimate job, contribute to household income, and avoid activities that may threaten the family's economic stability.
4. Marriage can change the way formers prisoner view themselves, their responsibilities, and their relationships with others and reinforce the conventional norms upon them, which might help them stay away from conflicting expectations.

In brief, the Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control concludes that all ages, stages of life, and turning points are essential in understanding the processes of behaviour change in an individual, specifically concerning the antisocial behaviour and individual crime.

THE STRENGTHS AND WEAKNESSES OF THE AGE GRADED THEORY OF INFORMAL SOCIAL CONTROL IN DETERMINING WHY EX-PRISONERS BECOME CRIMINAL REPEATERS

The Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control explains that the antisocial behaviour and crime of the individual by considering the changes that occur and the factors that influence each cycle of human life. It sees changes in the behaviour of individuals from different cycles of life; from birth to childhood to adolescence and adulthood. This theory also discusses in detail each institution that exists throughout the individual life cycle, which can influence the turning point of the individual's life at different ages.

The Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control is different from Moffitt (1993)'s idea of categorizing human life into two: persistent life course and limited adolescence. According to Moffitt (1993), limited adolescence exhibits antisocial behaviour during adolescence only while persistent life course exhibits antisocial behaviour from childhood to adulthood. The question of life course persists when compared to the Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control, which states that ex-prisoners can change and stop committing crimes when they are adults (Moffitt, Caspi, Dickson, Silva & Stanton, 1996). According to the Age Graded Theory, there is a tendency for ex-prisoners to refrain from committing crimes at any age. Theories discuss that the life events experienced by ex-prisoners can change the trajectory of his life. In contrast, the persistent life course states that individuals who commit crimes in adulthood will continue with their criminal behaviour. It shows the strength of the Age Graded Theory, which is neutral in discussing both situations in the life of a former prisoner.

Other models and theories of crime that are mostly psychologically oriented to individual criminal behaviour provide a more static view of crime in individuals over time. Examples can be seen in the Dual Taxonomy Theory introduced by Moffitt (1993) and the Social Control Theory introduced by

Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990). The Perspective of Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control is quite different from these theories as it assumes that there may be a modification in behaviour that change according to the level of intimacy or social bond that is formed over time. Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) say that children will either develop self-control in early childhood or fail to develop it at all. Initially, Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990) concluded that low self-esteem, problems at school, lack of interest in engaging in school activities, problematic parental relationships, and antisocial peer relationships were the reasons for individuals, especially children, to be involved in antisocial and criminal behaviour. The Social Control Theory tends to focus on childhood and adolescents and fails to include the individual's age. Although Sampson and Laub (1993, 2003) agree with Hirschi (1969) that crime begins at a young age, they believe that behaviour in childhood does not predict future behaviour. It is because many life events can change the behaviour of the child or individual. The Age Graded Theory believes that age is crucial in determining individual criminal behaviour.

Furthermore, the Age Graded Theory is useful for understanding why, at a certain age, the individual commits or does not commit a crime because it also emphasizes the turning point in an individual's life event. Cessation of crime among adolescents (14-15 years old) is more likely to be associated with a negative assessment of crime. For adolescents (18-19 years old), growing old is often associated with life-cycle events such as work or family relationships, and the transition to adulthood is more likely to move toward cessation of crime. For young adults (22-25 years old), cessation of crime is associated with a new role assumption, such as becoming a parent.

As there are many important factors that help ex-prisoners to secure the cessation of crime, age-graded theory has several limitations in explaining why some ex-prisoners commit crime. Firstly, the theory fails to discuss the effects of incarceration on ex-prisoners. The jail term has several adverse effects on ex-prisoners. Incarceration causes ex-prisoners to lose their livelihood, personal belongings, important personal relationships, and ability to maintain housing as well as encounter barriers to home ownership and receiving public assistance and substance abuse and mental health problems (Cohran et al. 2012; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; La Vigne, Davies, Palmer, & Halberstadt, 2008; Mears

& Mestre, 2012). Moreover, as incarceration ends, the transition to society is difficult for ex-prisoners. They do not have access to these assets, which put them at greater risk of repeating crime after their release from prison. The difficulties and challenges of the re-integration process for these ex-prisoners have a significant influence on their ability to become a repeat offender.

Apart from that, age-graded theory emphasises marriage as an important factor for ex-prisoners to achieve abstinence from crime but in reality, not all ex-prisoners enter the realm of marriage. Their crime-related past makes it difficult for them to find a spouse. In short, the marriage factor cannot be applied to all ex-prisoners. The assumption of the classification of age as a non-formal social control on the relationship between marriage and cessation of crime is less consistent (Giordano et al. 2002; Western, 2007).

Adding to that, age-graded theory also emphasises employment as an important institution in ensuring abstinence from crime. Through employment, ex-prisoners are consistently provided with a source of income, pro-social environment, and limited incentives to commit crimes (Bushway & Reuter 2002; Solomon et al. 2006; Uggen, 2000). However, this has raised the question of whether the process of securing a job is that simple for ex-prisoners. In fact, unemployment occurs among ex-prisoners due to limited job opportunities (Vennard & Hedderman, 2009). Unlike those who manage to secure a stable job, unemployed ex-prisoners are more likely to repeat crimes (Meredith, Speir, & Johnson, 2007). Age-graded theory fails to consider certain barriers of securing a job for ex-prisoners, such as low education level, criminal records, negative public stigma, legal restrictions on workers' compensation, discrimination from prospective employers, and reluctance of employers in employing ex-prisoners.

Besides that, the differences in practices and empirical evidence abroad show that the recovery from alcoholism and drug addiction is very important in the process of desistance. However, age-graded theory also fails to discuss the importance of continuing treatment for ex-prisoners. Ex-prisoners previously received treatment for alcoholism, drug addiction, and other psychological problems at the rehabilitation centre in prison. After their release from prison, they are no longer provided with these rehabilitation services. As a result, ex-prisoners do not have proper access to address these inherent risk

factors. Last but not least, another limitation of age-graded theory is linked to the importance of one's faith that they do not engage in crime. The theory fails to see this element as one of the components of spirituality and self-discipline. It appears to overlook the importance of this element in the development of anti-social behaviour or individual crime. When strong faith and spirituality are strongly built into one's life, the probability of avoiding crime is higher (Maruna, 2001; Sampson & Laub, 2003). On the other hand, if one's faith and spirituality are not strong, ex-prisoners are at higher risk to commit crime (Sampson & Laub, 2003; Serin & Lloyd, 2009). This is due the social control that derived from the strong faith and spirituality made them avoid from committing into crime.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed inconsistencies in defining the concept of desistance. The variety of definitions makes it difficult for this study to make a detailed assessment. This study also aimed to provide explanations and theoretical justifications for showing factors of cessation of crime that have led some former prisoners to abstain from crime. Conceptually, the Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control studies different age groups such as children, adolescents, and adults in crime. The theory focuses on the development of the individual and recognizes the influence of social events at different stages of life. However, this study focuses only on the age group. This theory explains how every life event experienced throughout life by adult prisoners acts as a turning point that determines their decision to either reengage (recidivism) or stop from committing a crime. According to the Age Graded Theory of Informal Social Control, the pattern of individual involvement in criminal behaviour or activity is different depending on the experiences or life events that transpired during their release. It is in line with the concept of desistance discussed in the study that seeks to understand how former prisoners successfully reform.

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