

## **FROM STIGMA TO COMMUNITY'S DISCRIMINATION: THE EXPERIENCE OF 16 FORMER PRISONERS IN MALAYSIA**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Discrimination and stigma have been found to be one of the foremost factors that thwarted former prisoners to integrate well when released from prison. The effects of the discrimination that caused the former prisoners to be marginalized and disowned when to live in the original place. Rejection from the community of origin causes the former prisoner to fail to integrate smoothly and tends to re-engage in criminal life. In-depth interviews have been conducted on 16 former prisoners regardless of the type of offense committed. The analysis of the study has brought identification to the following three situations when respondents are in the community; (1) are excluded or not accepted by the neighboring residence, (2) neighbors do not want to know their presence, and (3) they are labeled with various embarrassing calls. These empirical findings can lead to the suggestion of a community-based program that can be implemented in bringing together former prisoners with the community as soon as they are released.

**Keywords:** Stigma, discrimination, community, former prisoners

### **INTRODUCTION**

On behalf of most former prisoners, the very important and essential thought in their mind as soon as they are being released out from prison is not freedom of life but the re-integration process into community. Meanwhile, as for certain former prisoners, they might struggle with their selves with the hope and ability in forgiving themselves for wrong and unlawful activities that they have done. As for the remaining others, they might strive to stop from getting involved in crime again in a way to start a new life. Nonetheless, due to crime that had been committed along with record of imprisonment which they carried throughout the rest of their lives; thus, this has risen an issue on how can they integrate successfully into community upon their release from prison? In assisting the re-integration process into society, the foremost important matter to be highlighted is on the stigma and discrimination by community towards former prisoners. In this manner, the realization of smooth integration process is actually depended on the challenges experienced by former prisoners upon their release. When former prisoners are being welcomed by community without any stigma and discrimination put onto them, they are more likely to undergo successful integration. This can be happened as imprisonment leads a large and long-term impact on former prisoners. For this, it is submitted that community acceptance towards former prisoners' presence has a significant impact on their social behavior; whether to commit crime again or to stop from re-engaging in criminal activity (McNeill & Whyte, 2007).

In spite of the fact that former prisoners have been convicted for their offences and later been released back into society, it seems that in reality; the sentence and punishment did not stop at that only point of imprisonment. Upon their release out from prison, stigma and discrimination are awaiting for them when they step into community life. In general, former prisoners expect that they shall have the opportunity to lead a better life; such as opportunity of employment, of residency, of being accepted by family members and of successful re-integration into community. Nevertheless, the hope is merely treated as fantasy since former prisoners have to continuously experience difficult lives when they are unemployed for their criminal records, become homeless for they have no family member to rely on, as well as the stigma and discrimination given towards them by society. For most former prisoners, life after imprisonment is much more difficult. Henceforth, it is not surprising that the rate of repeating crime in Malaysia is still very high on every year (Malaysian Prison Department, 2017). As far as it concerned, this might occurred due to former prisoners' failure in re-integration which later caused them to be more inclined in committing crime again.

Till last December 2016, the Malaysian Prison Department (2017) reported that a number of 4, 359 former prisoners had been executed again for imprisonment throughout all the prisons existing in Malaysia. From this number of figure, it is sufficient to say that there are too many former prisoners being stranded back on repeating crime during re-integration process into the society. Indirectly, along with this figure, it can be ascertained that the high number of recidivism shows many former prisoners are incapable to re-integrate into the society, or on the other side of view; the society themselves are unable to accept and acknowledge the presence of former prisoners back in their life. This also gives a comprehension that re-integration is surely not a piece of cake on behalf of former prisoners since they have to face lots of challenges right after they were being released out from prison.

While being imprisoned, all former prisoners need to go through various social integration programs in preparation for re-engagement process into the general public. Unfortunately, vast majority of former prisoners were found to be re-involved with crime again once they were released from imprisonment. The main cause for this circumstance is that they fail to re-integrate into community life (Cuervo & Villanueva, 2014; Kaplan & Nussio, 2016; Pizarro, Zgoba & Haugebrook, 2014; Ray, Grommon, Buchanan, Brown & Watson, 2015; Solomon, Visher, La Vigne & Osbourne, 2006; Visher & Travis, 2003). In addition, the absence of post-release and after-care programs pertaining effective follow-up, monitoring as well as social support programs towards former prisoners in Malaysia has made it harder for them to re-integrate into community life (Agnew, 2005; La Vigne, Brooks & Shollenberger, 2007).

As aforementioned, this study has identified that criminal records have in certain extent; affect the social status of former prisoners which consequently lead to their failure of integration within community (Schnittker & John 2007; Uggen & Manza 2002). As such, discrimination based on criminal records has been seen frequently in the process of employment search, residency, and other acceptance of social services. Notably, the effects of this said discrimination were not only recognized through reports from former prisoners (respondents), but also via numerous audit researches and experimental designs discovered from previous studies (Pager & Shepherd, 2008; Pager, Western & Sugie, 2009; Uggen, Manza & Behrens, 2004).

Notwithstanding, focus of this study is to discuss the stigma and discrimination occurred upon former prisoners' homecoming. By way of this, objective of the study is henceforth to

identify factors that led to the failure of former prisoners' integration within community life. This study will also be clarified with previous studies followed by methodologies and findings that give suggestions to be carried out within community.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### ***Community's stigma and discrimination towards former prisoners***

Given stigma by community towards former prisoners can certainly affect their self-confidence and thus; prevent their successful re-integration. They faced a lot of difficulties as soon as they were released into community, and that mentioned stigma towards former prisoner has been often linked as a major obstacle for successful re-integration. For this reason, former prisoners are the most distressed group in society. This is because criminal behavior is fundamentally influenced by characteristics of neighbourhood which inhabited or resided by individuals (Sampson, Morenoff & Gannon-Rowley, 2002). Public acceptance and support are both important in assisting former prisoners to re-integrate into community. A weak, disadvantageous and conflicted relationship between former prisoners and members of the community has been ascertained to raise a higher risk of former prisoners to become criminal repeaters (Hanson & Harris, 2000; Hipp, Petersilia, & Turner, 2010). Originally, the attitude of society that imparted negative stigma towards former prisoners has given result to social marginalization or isolation among former prisoners, which subsequently led to repatriation of crimes among them (Hipp & Yates, 2009; LeBel, Burnett, Maruna & Bushway, 2008).

Additionally, the categorization by way of giving label that society made has promoted a great impact on former prisoners to think and reflect themselves, as well as the manner for them to look forward for treatment within the neighborhood (Moore, Stuewig & Tangney, 2013). Psychological research suggests that the stigma encountered by former prisoners may lead to disruptive response, criminal behavior, poor mental health, and difficulties in participating within community (Inzlicht, Tullett & Gutsell 2012). Former prisoners are extremely marginalized and neglected in terms of voting rights, access to housing, financial assistance, employment, and other aspects of community involvement (Pogorzelski, Wolff, Pan & Blitz, 2005). Hence, structural barriers can verily influence the former prisoners' integration process in community (Morani, Wikoff, Linhorst & Bratton, 2011). Also, the psychological notion that former prisoners held due to the said stigma is important to be understood with regards to their integration process into community.

Accordingly, most former prisoners that were released out from prison were trapped in destructive environments such as poverty and discriminating communities. Former prisoners who returned to these areas were discovered to face various obstacles (Pager, 2003). The acquiesce and anti-social activities of community has prompted the former prisoners to commit back crimes since the much said attitude of community symbolises a message that doing crime is one lawful way to gain success in life. Moreover, former prisoners also face with life difficulties when their community living areas alienated and boycotted them from pro-social life. This subsequently will make the former prisoners feel unwelcomed and not a part of such community. For the lack feeling of "closeness" in community and unwelcome emotion that former prisoners sense which thus; will

eliminate their togetherness feeling with the society that consequently triggered their very selves to repeat in committing crime as they do not have the sense to secure public interest.

On the other hand, positive environment in community functioned as an important role in ensuring the successful re-integration amongst former prisoners (Phillips & Lindsay, 2011; McNeill & Whyte, 2007). Acceptance of neighborhood towards former prisoners is also one of significant protective factor in influencing their trajectory life. Former prisoners lived with their family members felt more welcome as they went through society that can accept them. It is advantageous for them for successful integration and participation into community activities as they are well-received.

Furthermore, the relationship tie between individuals (former prisoners) and community is also one of the dimensions in cessation of crime. This social bond consisted of former prisoners' emotional attachments in meeting the community's expectation, achieving such expectancy in lawful manner, as well as participating in their objectives and goals. The hypothesis is; the former prisoners' inclination to engage back doing criminal behavior is higher once their social bonding is weak. As such, the inhabited environment created formal and informal controls in aiding and strengthening the bond between former prisoners and community.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

Intrinsically, this study is done in a manner of qualitative study. The researcher chose it to be a qualitative approach as it enabled the researcher to explore former prisoners' aspect of lives such as family acceptance, employment search, peer relationships and much more in detail. Qualitative approach has also helped the researcher to understand former prisoners' social world; especially those relating to their social circumstances, experiences, and perspectives on their life's events. In order to ascertain the community's stigma and discrimination towards former prisoners, the researcher has accordingly applied phenomenological designs (phenomenology). The phenomenology emphasizes experience and interpretation given by subject of the research and it is an approach that focuses on life experience on behalf of particular group. In much simpler words; the phenomenological approach focuses on the experience of human life. Basic aim of this mentioned approach is to achieve the description of a particular phenomenon.

As such, the snowball sampling technique has been applied in selecting respondents which met the characteristics of research population. A total of 16 former prisoners (respondents) consisting of 14 males and 2 females had voluntarily agreed to be the informants of this study and all of them have been identified around Chow Kit Street, Kuala Lumpur. Appropriately, all of them have been thoroughly interviewed by the researcher based on a structured interview protocol which contained several questions related to the objectives of study. Further, the researcher presents the social demographic profile of respondents in Table 1. The accumulated verbatim has been processed by applying Atlas.ti program the verbatim are presented in thematic.

Table 1: Social demographic profile of respondents

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>Amount of Imprisonment</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>Family Relationship</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Acquaintances Relationship</b>	<b>Social Relationship</b>	<b>Drug Addiction</b>	<b>Health Problem</b>
Lufti	36 years	SPM	2 times	Single	Staying under bridge	Accepted by both parents but refused by siblings	Unemployed	Comfortable with fellow members who have the same problem	Not accepted by neighbours	Stop taking	HIV
Siva	54 years	UPSR	8 times	Single	Has no home	Rejected by family members	Unemployed	Has good relationship with fellow friends who have the same problem	Neighbours have negative perceptions	Still taking	HIV
Hafiz	48 years	PMR	7 times	Married	Has no home	Well accepted by only half of family members	Often unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Neighbours have negative perceptions	Stop taking	Hepatitis B and C
Suhaimi	42 years	SPM	Exceeding 3-4 times	Single	Has no home	Rejected by family members	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Neighbours did not interfere with respondent's personal affair	Still taking	HIV
Suhaila	63 years	Year 5	5 times	Widow	Has no home	Rejected by family members	Employed	Mixed with drug partners	Neighbours did not know respondent's record as former prisoner	Stop taking	Hepatitis B
Latif	43 years	SRP	5 times	Single	Refused to stay with family in home	Rejected by family members	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Neighbours discriminated respondent	Still taking	HIV

Source: The findings are taken by Mohd Alif Bin Jasni (2018). The Need of Community Based Post Release and Aftercare Programme For Former Prisoner (Unpublished Thesis Doctorate). University of Malaya

Continuation of Table 1:

<b>Respondent</b>	<b>Age</b>	<b>Educational Status</b>	<b>Amount of Imprisonment</b>	<b>Marital Status</b>	<b>Residence</b>	<b>Family Relationship</b>	<b>Employment Status</b>	<b>Acquaintances Relationship</b>	<b>Social Relationship</b>	<b>Drug Addiction</b>	<b>Health Problem</b>
Rahimah	46 years	SPM	4 times	Single	Has no home	Well accepted	Difficult to be employed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Often labelled by neighbours	Still taking	Psychological problem
Nabil	40 years	PMR	2 times	Single	Came back to stay with family	Rejected by family members	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Neighbours do not know respondent's criminal record	Still taking	HIV
Amir	53 years	SPM	4 times	Single	Has no home	Rejected by family members	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Discriminatory neighbours	Still taking	Hepatitis C
Ramli	38 years	SPM	2 times	Single	Has no home	Rejected by family members	Unemployed Refused employment	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Discriminatory neighbours	Still taking	HIV
Razak	41 years	SPM	3 times	Widowed	Has no home	Rejected by family members	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Discriminated	Still taking	Athma and Hepatitis C
Zahid	33 years	PMR	11 times	Single	Has no home	Well accepted by both parent but not sibling	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	No label by neighbours	Still taking	HIV

Source: the findings are taken by Mohd Alif Bin Jasni (2018). The Need of Community Based Post Release and Aftercare Programme For Former Prisoner (Unpublished Thesis Doctorate). University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

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Naim	46 years	Form 2	2 times	Single	Has no home	Well accepted	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Discriminated	Still taking	Hepatitis C
Zarul	36 years	UPSR	5 times	Single	Refused to stay longer with his sister	Rejected by both parents but accepted by siblings	Employed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Neighbours do not know respondent's criminal record	Still taking	HIV, Hepatitis B and C
Fikri	36 years	PMR	3 times	Married	Stays with family	Well accepted	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Discriminated	Stop taking	Nil
Syamsul	40 years	SPM	4 times	Has a partner	Has no home	Rejected by family members	Unemployed	Mixed with fellow members of the same problem	Discriminated	Still taking	HIV and Hepatitis C

Source: the findings are taken by Mohd Alif Bin Jasni (2018). The Need of Community Based Post Release and Aftercare Programme For Former Prisoner (Unpublished Thesis Doctorate). University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur.

## **RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

Veritably, in real life, the interviewed former prisoners have gone through a lot of difficulties and obstacles in their life which thus caused them to face failure in the re-integration process within community. On top of that, they were even being labeled and discriminated by their community when they went back to their hometown. As such, the attached table shows that all of the interviewed former prisoners were from various states and aged between 36 to 63 years old. Based on table 1, it illustrates that only 4 of them are married while only one respondent has a partner. Henceforth, this situation shows that majority of the interviewed former prisoners are single. Moreover, with regards to drug addiction, 12 respondents were still on drug addiction whilst the other 5 respondents managed to quit their selves from taking drug again, whereas 2 respondents have never taken any drugs previously.

Furthermore, in terms of infectious diseases, 7 of them were found to suffer from HIV disease solely, while 5 were suffering from a series of diseases such as HIV, Hepatitis B & C. The figure is further followed by 2 respondents with Hepatitis C disease, 1 with psychological problems, while the rest of 4 were free from any diseases. What is more, 14 of them are unemployed which subsequently caused them to live in difficulties due to the absence of lawful earning. In point of fact, they have been identified to be located around Chow Kit Road and the mentioned Table 1 shows that 13 respondents were not accepted and acknowledged by their family. This has consequently caused them to flee from their hometown and live as homeless around Chow Kit road.

In addition, one of the reasons for them to be homeless was due to the stigma and discrimination of their own community in hometown and for this; they have no other options except to move out and stay around Chow Kit Road. This is evidenced by the 12 respondents' statement that they were often being labeled and discriminated upon their homecoming to the community as soon as they were released. Due to this matter, it has therefore become the biggest factor for them to choose in moving out from hometown and living in Chow Kit road. It can be safely inferred that public stigma by community on former prisoners has made it fundamentally difficult for the transition process of former prisoners to the community as they encounter lots of difficulties when they were released from prison, apart from being set aside from neighborhood. Vis-à-vis, the discrimination on former prisoners is often linked as a major barrier for successful re-integration process within society. Hence, the focus of this study will be on the discussion of stigma and discrimination experienced by the interviewed former prisoner. It is hoped that this study will be a good contribution which can be employed as a reference in subsequent findings.

Veritably, the success of former prisoners to re-integrate within community life depended on the neighborhood members' acceptance (Bazemore & Stinchcomb, 2004; Kubrin & Stewart, 2006; Visher & Travis, 2003; Warr, 2002; Wolff & Draine, 2002). Following to this, the researcher identified these following three situations of community lived by respondents who were criminal repeater; (1) being excluded or not accepted by neighboring residency, (2) being ignored by neighbors who refused to know about their presence, and (3) being labeled with various embarrassing calls. Should there be any incidents of crime occurred within community, respondents are commonly the first individuals to be suspected.

Also, respondents are often being accused if theft and robbery occurred within the neighborhood too. Ramli said that he had always been accused when there happened situation of losing goods. The statement quoted in verbatim from Ramli is shown below.



*For example, let's say that their houses lost somethings, they will tell that we (referring to former prisoners) are the stealer even if we actually did not steal those items.*

(Ramli/ 29th April 2016/ 2.33 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

Additionally, Lufti, Latif and Amir also express their feelings of the time when they were set aside and labelled by neighbours. Lufti for example; said that there was a wide gap between him and his neighbours; notwithstanding the fact that they grew up together. His friends in his neighborhood refused to befriend him anymore because he was a former prisoner. Latif also said that he was boycotted by his neighbors for he suffered from HIV as well as critical drug addiction. Amir further added that the isolation he encountered has become a reason for him to remain the same as criminal. In fact, he said that he was much more inclined to continuously commit crime due to the above. Three of them said:

*There was certainly less communication, even with their children; there was a gap too between their children and me when I became a former prisoner. They; whom I knew from my childhood, that were once my close friends, had also keep a distance from me, and my neighbors had eventually ignored and did not greet me anymore.*

(Lufti/ 28th April 2016/ 8.29 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

*When my neighbors came to know about my status as a former prisoner, their treatment has become rather different. Once they knew that I suffer from HIV, a former prisoner, there was a gap between me and them.*

(Latif/ 29th April 2016/ 10.21 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

*I have tried to change, but the society refused to accept my presence in their neighborhood. They just did not want to accept me as normal person, therefore, I thought that it is better for to commit the old activities (referring to criminal activities and drug sales). The society is certainly will not accept me so there is no reason for me to be good in front of them.*

(Amir/ 29th April 2016/ 12.33 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

What is more, the neighbours are not only ignoring them, setting them aside and underestimating them, but the neighbours also treated them with unkind behaviour. Lufti said that when he returned back to the neighborhood, he was treated badly. His nearby neighbours hid their valuable items for the fear of such valuable items will be stolen by him. As for Naim, he said that the perception was due to fear that former prisoners will steal their property. Due to the poor treatment that was received, Lufti seek to revenge by stealing the neighbors' goods. Similar situation was also experienced by Siva and Amir. Razak and Naim said that they could not accept the bad treatment. This is different from Zarul wherein he did not care about the bad treatment he received despite of the fact that he was always being the victim of community's paranoid. These are among statements quoted in verbatim by the respondents:

*There were sometimes discriminatory events happened within my neighborhood, for example; when I was released from prison or rehabilitation center, my neighbor would take his expensive shoes or clothes that were put outside for drying purpose into his home whenever I returned. He even hurriedly brought his gas into his house. This situation made me felt grief and mad and for that, I was thinking about stealing their goods as they judged me unreasonably which triggered myself to seek for revenge.*

(Lufti/ 28th April 2016/ 8.31 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

*I would usually return back to my hometown after being released. But, when I was in the village, I heard my neighbors' words that asked their children to bring their clothes and shoes hung outside into their house. I heard by myself that they have to do it for they were afraid I might steal their goods. This kind of circumstance is commonly happened when there is a presence of former prisoner.*

(Siva/ 28th April 2016/ 10.27 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

*In front of me, they would talk nicely. But behind me, we could see clearly their contradictory action. There was a suspicious look that they gave at a distant as if they were afraid of bad things I will do in the neighborhood such as stealing their properties.*

(Amir/ 29th April 2016/ 12.19 ap.m/ IKHLAS association)

*It is very difficult for me to change in becoming a better person due to numerous reasons. Such as the community acceptance, I am mentally exhausted to face this. I could not bear their unkind treatment; this is my weakness and I am honestly is not strong to go through this situation, in dealing with their thoughts and perceptions.*

(Razak/ 29th April 2016/ 3.16 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

*The discrimination was indeed happened. The neighbours will often look down on me and they were always afraid that I might steal their house stuff.*

(Naim/ 29th April 2016/ 5.13 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

*The neighbors were looking down at my presence in their neighborhood but I just did not care about what they wanted to say and think. I just let them be like that.*

(Zarul/ 29th April 2016/ 8.17 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

Additionally, with regards to given stigma, there were various negative calls being expressed by the respondents' neighbors. Lufti was called as 'mat pit' (drug addict), 'mayat hidup' (dead body) and 'penagih bangsat' (bastard addict). As for Siva and Latif, they were often mocked by their neighbors and for Hafiz; he was called as 'anak setan' (devil's son), 'hantu' (monster) and 'budak dadah' (drug boy). Ramli further said that the name-call of 'penghisap dadah' (drug taker) and 'bekas banduan' (former prisoner) were usually voiced out by his neighbors. Similarly, Razak and Syamsul said that their neighbors often called them with 'bekas banduan' (former prisoner) and 'budak jahat' (bad man). Among the verbatim that can prove these are below:

*The society called me with negative words. For example, as I was a drug addict, they would call me with 'mat pit' (drug addict), 'mayat hidup' (dead body) and 'penagih bangsat' (bastard addict).*

(Lufti/ 28th April 2016/ 8.31 a.m/IKHLAS association)

*Although I did not do anything, but whenever I returned home, my neighbors would mock me with various negative words.*

(Siva/ 28th April 2016/ 10.38 a.m / IKHLAS association)

*When I returned to my hometown, my own relatives seeing me at coffee shop, at home, they would say "itu orang dadah sudah balik" (the drug addict has returned). There were also old folks called me as a devil, monster and drug addict. As usual, that is people's perceptions towards former prisoners.*

(Hafiz/ 28th April 2016/ 12.32 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

*There was always sarcasm given to me. That is why I would always be in dispute with them when I lived in my village, since they always mocked me at behind. But to directly confront me; face-to-*

*face, they would never dare.*

(Latif/ 29th April 2016/ 10.29 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

*Sitting and drinking at shop, people would commonly talk about me. They said that I am a drug taker, a former prisoner who had just released out.*

(Ramli/29th April 2016/ 2.34 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

*Well that is certainly to happen, habit of the society. In front of my parents; they were quiet but at behind; they talked about me that I am a former prisoner- the bad man has returned home.*

(Razak/ 29th April 2016/ 3.37 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

*There were neighbors who had negative perception towards me, lots of name-calling were given such as drug addict.*

(Syamsul/ 24th Ogos 2016/ 10.33 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

Moreover, attitude of the community members, especially when the neighbours could not accept and kindly treat the former prisoners had given rise to low self-esteem feeling amongst them. Rahimah said that she is ashamed and feels humiliated in the neighborhood. Amir also responded that he feels low self-esteem and refuses to mix with his local community. In fact, the poor treatment by his neighborhood that he encountered made him decided to move into Kuala Lumpur. Razak also said the bad treatment that he went through each day caused him to feel discouraged in the neighborhood. Below are the statements quoted in verbatim:

*In the neighborhood, I often felt ashamed of myself for my past wrongdoings. Besides, I also felt inferior to face them*

(Rahimah/ 29th April 2016/ 9.31 a.m/ IKHLAS association)

*Indeed, I often felt inferior. I avoided my very self from mixing with them. That is one of the reasons that I fled to Kuala Lumpur as I did not want anyone to know me.*

(Amir/ 29th April 2016/ 12.37 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

*I am actually disappointed with the unkind treatment I encountered within my neighbourhood. I wanted to change, but their perception has made me felt discouraged. And the motivation to change was getting hazy and later gone after a while of being released, hence; I began to get stranded with the wrong activities.*

(Razak/ 29th April 2016 3.36 p.m/ IKHLAS association)

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Aptly, the collected findings show that former prisoners were commonly experienced stigma and discrimination every time they returned to their hometown. Thru this, the existed negative calls and stigmas have caused the failure in former prisoners' re-integration process within community. The unkind attitude and treatment given by community towards former prisoners had truly isolated them from uniting into society. Subsequently, for the feeling of being marginalized and neglected, former prisoners began to isolate themselves and further decided to avoid from mixing with community. This boycotting is no doubt caused them to re-engage in criminal life since public rejection made them to sense the unwelcoming response which later on; triggered them to be more likely involved in crime again. Likewise, this paper wishes to propose the need of particular

program in aiding and reducing the society's inherited stigma. The programs can be on creating awareness amongst the public on their role in assisting former prisoners' re-integration process. By this way, various programs can be conducted such as seminars to provide the realization on challenges experienced by former prisoners as well as the need for community's participation in order to help former prisoners.

Moreover, the much said programs with the aim of reducing stigma and discrimination towards former prisoners have to be conducted in a fundamental manner by treating and controlling the very factors which lead to that stigma and discrimination. The first and foremost step in dealing with this issue is by acknowledging that such stigma and discrimination existed within our treasured society, for this; regretfully, the attitude of discriminating in our community is still taking place towards former prisoners. Essentially, unification of former prisoners into community life is very pertinent as it could re-integrate them and therefore reduce the repetition of crime amongst former prisoners. Consequently, this study is conducted with the intention to examine various complex and dynamic variables influencing the successful integration of former prisoner into community (Shinkfield & Graffam, 2009). Also, this study would like to suggest the need for awareness campaign programs with the hope to reduce stigma and discrimination existed within community.

As what has been remarked, awareness campaign programs aimed to enhance and give the understanding on stigma and discrimination occurring in community. The programs are also aimed to broaden the comprehension on negative effects and implications of such unhealthy stigma given by community towards former prisoners. In addition, such programs seek to create the awareness that stigma and discrimination are verily related to repetition of crime among former prisoners. Such awareness can be raised in many ways; including through written and visual materials, various programs can also be conducted by seeking community members in providing awareness campaigns and seminars workshops. To realize this, the important matter to be considered is to obtain community's cooperation for their participation. The researcher is strongly believed that community must participate in such programs to ensure the success of former prisoners' integration as the full help of each party is very required. Ideally, a collaborative community in conjunction with the awareness programs and campaigns should be made.

Furthermore, one of the possible recommendations is the community involvement during imprisonment and post-imprisonment period. The community involvement in Malaysian prisons aims to unify prison authorities and community in an effort to give an understanding on former prisoners' challenges and needs to be freed from prison. The re-integration process could not be addressed in a meaningful way unless the community is involved. In lieu of this, community involvement requires active and voluntary participation by the community to curb the problems in different ways. Consensus on the assistance or services that can be given to former prisoners can be achieved through community involvement during the release of former prisoners. It is important to note the potential and role that community can give in terms of providing input and support throughout the period of former prisoners' imprisonment until their release.

To highlight this, community acts as a service of physical and social resource. This approach supports the idea of channeling support services and social custody within the community (in community, by community). In a symbolic way, this approach symbolizes that all community members are responsible for the restoration of former prisoners. It is also closely related to the perspective or the flow of restorative fairness that follows the majority of criminal justice systems in most countries.

Notably, most former prisoners face the difficulty of re-integrating into community and consequently; they re-engage with criminal activities or conducts. This discussion shows that successful former prisoners' re-integration process is actually depending on the quality of community environment. Given the said challenges experienced by former prisoners, these proposed social interventions are more effective if they are held in community spaces and supervised within such community. The important aspect of community approach is the community's function as a source of service since community is rich with diverse sources. This advantage is in line with program requirements involving various agencies in public sector which can offer and provide social programs towards former prisoners once they were released.

## **CONCLUSION**

To summarize this discussion, this paper revolves around the researcher's ideas on stigma and discrimination that occurred each and every time former prisoners returned to their community. This inherent stigma has eventually become a reason of former prisoners' failure to integrate which then triggered them to re-engage in criminal life once again. Due to this situation, it has disappointed the criminal justice system in ensuring that former prisoners will continue to recover every time they are being released. Negative calls and accusations were often thrown by community which later; caused these former prisoners failed to re-integrate. For this, this very study paper would like to suggest implementation of community-based programs that can provide vast of benefits towards former prisoners as well as local communities. Implementations of the programs are also believed to facilitate the re-integration of former prisoners into society which thereby reduce the repetition of crime amongst former prisoners. Finally, the community-based programs are also expected to curb the mentioned problems and ultimately; to assist former prisoners to re-integrate into community life.

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