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Exploring the Causal Factors of Recidivism among Children in Conflict with the Law: The Case of Addis Ababa Women's, Children and Youth Affairs Rehabilitation Center, Ethiopia

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Abstract: Recidivism is a complex issue arising from a variety of sources. The increasing number of children in conflict with the Law in Ethiopia became a pressing issue of the law enforcement agencies to reduce the participation of children in crime. This study aims to identify the factors motivating children to commit crimes after rehabilitation. Children aged 12-15 years and experts working in the rehabilitation center participated in interviews. The study is qualitative by design, and nineteen informants were selected purposively. Reflections and opinions of informants gathered from in-depth interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. The study findings shed light that using illegal drugs, peer pressure, street life, family divorce, and lack of affiliation with civic organizations are identified as the drawbacks to mitigate the prevalence of child recidivism. The study recommends the government, and other stakeholders work together to reduce the participation of children who are essential to society in crime.

Keywords: Children, Conflict, Crime, Law, Recidivism and Rehabilitation

Introduction

Background of Study

The issue of children in conflict with the law has garnered significant attention from law enforcement agencies, researchers, and practitioners, aiming to reduce the impact of child recidivism on society. The complex nature of this problem affects not only the victims but also the defendants, their families, and society. Studies have shown that many countries contribute a substantial number of recidivists, with findings indicating that at least one in every five individuals re-offends within two years (Yukhnenko *et al.*, 2023). As recidivism continues to rise, juvenile courts are increasingly focusing on understanding the factors influencing repeat offenses and the persistence of offenders in the justice system. In response, comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs are crucial to mitigating the prevalence of repeat offenses and facilitating successful reentry into society (Reeta and Singh, 2020).

On one hand, it is essential to identify the social factors that expose offenders to recidivism through research, as this allows for the development of prevention strategies based on concrete evidence tailored to the criminogenic

needs of everyone (Villanueva *et al.*, 2019). Moreover, recognizing the role of social norms as a regulatory framework within society further aids in encouraging positive interactions among individuals in the same community. Reducing youth involvement in crime requires discouraging criminal behavior through the enforcement of cultural and social norms widely accepted by society. Additionally, a significant portion of societal resources is allocated to combating crime to protect communities from the negative effects of recidivism (UNODC, 2018). Designing protective strategies to minimize youth engagement in recidivism is vital for steering the younger generation away from criminal tendencies. In this regard, law enforcement agencies, including the police, are established to promote a crime-free environment and reduce antisocial behaviors, ultimately addressing the impact of recidivism after incarceration. However, recidivism remains a contentious issue within the criminal justice systems of countries worldwide (Shahid and Ashraf, 2022). It refers to the relapse of individuals into criminal conduct, typically after facing sanctions or undergoing interventions for prior offenses (Namitha and Suleiman, 2021). Criminologists and justice professionals use terms such as re-offending,

rearrest, reconviction, and re-incarceration to describe this recurrence of criminal activity interchangeably (Collins, 2010; Håkansson and Berglund, 2012).

Studies on recidivism in countries like Ghana, Nigeria, and Kenya indicate that a large proportion of recidivists are young people who form a significant part of the country's workforce. The contributing factors to their recidivism include insufficient rehabilitation facilities, poor coordination between prisons and local communities, community labeling, and underlying belief systems (Baffour, 2020). In Ethiopia, the issue of recidivism has been a long-standing debate due to its rising prevalence and the absence of effective protection strategies aimed at instilling behavioral change among offenders. Juvenile delinquency is often the result of inadequate parental care, leading to street life, substance abuse, peer pressure, economic hardships, and family disintegration (Wondimu, 2014; Ewnetu, 2014; Mebratu, 2017; Fufa *et al.*, 2021).

Reports from the police indicate a growing trend of children participating in criminal activities, posing significant safety and security threats to urban areas. These reports highlight that children aged 15-18 years old are often seen on the streets engaging in activities like sniffing benzene and smoking drugs, which make them feel fearless enough to commit crimes such as pickpocketing from vulnerable individuals. To reduce youth involvement in crime, rehabilitation centers play a crucial role in addressing the root causes of recidivism. However, the effectiveness of these centers is limited by insufficient resources, including a lack of skilled personnel and inadequate budgets for proper rehabilitation (Haregewoin, 2016; Zegeye, 2016; Getachew, 2019). Therefore, this study investigates the causal factors leading to recidivism among children at the Addis Ababa Women's, Children, and Youth Affairs Bureau Rehabilitation Center.

Statement of the Problem

The increase in child involvement in crime and reoffending has prompted researchers and law enforcement professionals to explore and understand the underlying causes, supported by empirical research. The formative years of childhood are critical for establishing positive moral values and integrity. Studies in Ethiopia have highlighted a high rate of juvenile crime in cities such as Addis Ababa, Gonder, Dire Dawa, and Adama (Tesfaye, 2004; Nayak, 2013; Wondimu, 2014; Ewnetu, 2014). Wondimu (2014) further pointed out that dysfunctional families, peer pressure, and a lack of necessities are key factors contributing to recidivism among children in Addis Ababa Remand Home. Additionally, reports show a growing number of juvenile offenders in Ethiopia, attributed to poor management and treatment within correctional facilities (Haregewoin,

2016; Fufa *et al.*, 2021). Getachew (2019) also noted that the absence of service guidelines and the failure to adopt effective models for rehabilitating children accused of crime are among the challenges weakening correctional centers' ability to provide quality services. Therefore, recidivism remains a critical issue requiring in-depth investigation (Essix, 2021; UNODC, 2018). However, the causes of recidivism in Ethiopia have not been thoroughly studied to understand the factors pushing children toward unlawful behavior and crime. This study aims to address these gaps and contribute to the understanding of the factors motivating children to reoffend after their release.

Significance of Study

This study holds significance for various organizations involved in criminal and juvenile justice, offering valuable insights that can inform justice policies and rehabilitation programs. Its findings will be beneficial to the community, academic institutions, as well as national and international organizations.

Review of Related Literature

A literature review was conducted to explore the theories and practices related to child recidivism. The topics reviewed were chosen based on research problems and objectives. The review extensively covers key concepts and theoretical frameworks related to the rehabilitation of children, factors influencing recidivism, and the challenges faced by rehabilitation centers.

Basic Concepts of Children in Conflict with the Law

The term "children in conflict with the law" refers to individuals under the age of eighteen who are suspected or accused of committing an offense. These children often violate the law, either intentionally or unintentionally (UNCF, 2006). Various terms are used to describe these children, including teenagers, young offenders, street children, gang members, young criminals, abandoned children, and societal outcasts (Barnett and Hagel, 2006). Juvenile delinquency, therefore, refers to the actions of minors who break the rules set forth in the country's criminal law (Farrington *et al.*, 2021). These children can be categorized based on their behaviors and the environments they are exposed to (Davis, 2017).

Studies examining the causes of child recidivism have identified weak social supervision (social control) by families and schools as major contributors to reoffending (Junger-Tas *et al.*, 2012). Key factors include parenting style, peer influence, lifestyle choices, the presence of a delinquent subculture, ineffective family interactions, family problems, emotional tensions in adolescence, and the influence of peer and father attachments (Fitriani and Hastus, 2017). Moreover, the criminal behavior of children in conflict with the law is shaped by social constructs formed through interactions and psychological

influences within their environment. These factors are divided into internal and external elements that affect the child's mindset (Unayah and Sabarisman, 2015). Internal factors often involve crises and weak self-control, while external factors include family dynamics, peer influence, and an unfavorable environment. Additionally, Siregar (2015) emphasized that child delinquency stems from inadequate parental supervision, lack of moral or religious grounding, and a disregard for their environment.

Rehabilitation

Rehabilitation is a process aimed at transforming criminal behavior into law-abiding ones by addressing offenders' behavior through treatment, education, and training. It involves detection, prevention, and rehabilitation interventions designed to reduce the frequency and recurrence of juvenile delinquency. According to Raturi and Rastogi (2022), primary delinquency prevention begins at the school and community levels, utilizing social skills training and cognitive and behavioral self-control strategies. Some juvenile courts have recognized unmet or inconsistent mental health care as a significant factor contributing to youth remaining in the system, often due to reoffending.

The concept of rehabilitation can vary depending on the context in which it is applied, particularly in areas related to crime and substance addiction. Various terms, including rehabilitation, desistance, reintegration, and re-entry, are used to describe the social and psychological processes that help individuals desist from criminal activities and reintegrate into society. Criminologists tend to favor terms like desistance and reintegration over "rehabilitation," as the latter often implies returning individuals to a previously acceptable state (Laws and Ward, 2011). In this study, rehabilitation is defined as a program that equips children in conflict with the law with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to make them physically and psychologically prepared to rejoin society after successful completion.

The primary goal of rehabilitation is to address recidivism (Andrews *et al.*, 1990), meaning that effective correctional rehabilitation services should prevent reoffending. Therefore, creating rehabilitative environments is essential for the successful rehabilitation and reintegration of incarcerated offenders (Horiuchi, 1995). Effective rehabilitation involves various programs and therapies that help incarcerated individuals acquire skills necessary for leading a productive and normal life upon release. These programs should prepare offenders for a fulfilling life after their reintegration into society (Ward and Laws, 2010). Rehabilitation programs offered in correctional facilities typically include education, mental health treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and substance abuse treatment (Benson, 2003).

To this end, rehabilitation centers provide life skills and vocational training to reduce the likelihood of recidivism after release. Such centers, designed to offer specialized programs, are essential for rehabilitating children and preventing further trauma, ultimately preparing them for reintegration. However, ineffective rehabilitation programs, especially in overcrowded centers, can exacerbate recidivism, particularly when children lack positive support systems from family, peers, and the community, as noted in studies across Africa.

Factors Affecting Recidivism

Recidivism is a critical issue in the field of crime, drawing significant attention in both emerging and developed countries (Raturi and Rastogi, 2022). Research conducted in various nations has highlighted that the high rate of crime contributes to overcrowding in rehabilitation centers. However, the effectiveness of the programs offered in these centers can influence recidivism, provided they are properly managed. In contrast, the ineffectiveness of these centers can contribute to an increase in recidivism (Lekalakala, 2016). Children in these centers often come from unstable family backgrounds and have low literacy levels, which are factors that increase the likelihood of reoffending, as they may not fully understand the goals of the rehabilitation programs. Additionally, peer influence plays a significant role in encouraging delinquent behavior, as children can be swayed by deviant peers to reoffend. Substance abuse also plays a crucial role in perpetuating criminal behavior, as exposure to drugs can harm social skills and increase delinquency and risky behaviors (Mogano *et al.*, 2022).

Simiyu (2017) observed that Kenyan prisons experience high rates of male juvenile recidivism despite the many rehabilitation programs aimed at reducing repeat offenses. He identified several factors contributing to reoffending in Kenya, including the lack of completion of primary education, religion and access to spirituality, family dynamics, peer pressure, environment, community influences, and even legal and judicial factors. The study also found that high recidivism rates pose risks to public safety and security, as well as increase the financial burden on law enforcement and the criminal justice system, especially in countries struggling with overcrowded juvenile populations. The growing prison population and elevated recidivism rates contribute to significant social and economic costs.

In general, the experiences that lived in Africa reveal that poverty, drug use, and low economic conditions are key factors driving young people to engage in unlawful activities and contributing to child recidivism. Additionally, factors such as the offender's social environment, family background, peer group, and low educational or skill levels undoubtedly compel children to

reoffend. Other contributing factors include marginalization, physical or emotional abuse, drug addiction, physical disabilities, mental disorders, health issues, poor cognitive or emotional functioning, and ineffective interventions.

Challenges of Rehabilitation Centers

Rehabilitation centers are designed to provide services aimed at reducing recidivism among inmates. Proper rehabilitation is essential to decreasing the likelihood of recidivism in children in custody, as it is more important than simply cycling through the justice system and returning as recidivists (Lipsey, 2000). Studies conducted in various countries have found that rehabilitation systems are often underfunded and lack the professional resources necessary to bring about meaningful behavioral changes in children after incarceration. For instance, Acheampong *et al.* (2022) reported that meals provided in correctional centers for juveniles are insufficient, even though they are served at least three times daily. Children are also required to prepare their own meals in addition to the food provided. While the living spaces for juveniles are relatively more spacious compared to adult prisons, they are still limited by the center's capacity to manage the number of inmates. The centers offer various training and treatment programs, including literacy training, vocational skills, medical care, and counseling, to support juveniles' well-being. However, despite these efforts, the effectiveness of these programs in shaping behavior and deterring recidivism remains questionable (Acheampong *et al.*, 2022). Studies from across Africa have highlighted that many children in these centers face significant barriers to receiving well-structured and effective services that could help deter recidivism.

In the Ethiopian context, several studies have examined the effectiveness of rehabilitation centers in providing quality services that lead to behavioral change among inmates. For example, Fufa *et al.* (2021) investigated the practices and challenges of rehabilitating juvenile delinquents in the Jimma Zone rehabilitation center in Oromia Regional State. They found that the centers face challenges such as inadequate rehabilitation facilities and services, including limited recreational, educational, and psychosocial programs, and a lack of proper sleeping arrangements. Additionally, there is a shortage of trained staff and a lack of financial and material resources to effectively support the rehabilitation process. (Engdawork and Demelash, 2021) further emphasized that correctional centers have not achieved significant success in reducing recidivism following the release of juvenile offenders.

Research Methods

This qualitative study examines the factors contributing to recidivism among children in conflict with the law following rehabilitation. The methodology section outlines the study area, research design, target population, sampling technique, data collection methods, and procedures used for data analysis.

Description of the Study Area

The research was conducted at the Addis Ababa Women, Children, and Youth Affairs Bureau Rehabilitation Center, the only facility in Ethiopia dedicated to rehabilitating children aged 12-18 in conflict with the law. Located in the Lideta sub-city, the center spans over 42,000 square meters and currently serves 230 children. It offers essential services, including education, counseling, and family reintegration. With its established reputation as a leading institution for juvenile rehabilitation in Ethiopia, it was selected as the ideal site for this study.

Study Design

A descriptive research design, complemented by a phenomenological approach, was used to identify the factors influencing recidivism among children residing in rehabilitation centers. This approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the participants' personal insights and experiences, focusing on the social and psychological dimensions of recidivism. The phenomenological method was particularly effective in capturing the perspectives of both children and service providers, thus enabling a thorough understanding of the complexities surrounding rehabilitation and recidivism (Creswell, 2009; Flick, 2017).

Instrument Development and Procedures of Data Collection

In-depth interviews and key informant interviews were employed as the primary data collection tools, due to their effectiveness in qualitative research for obtaining detailed, narrative information. These methods were aligned with the study's objectives, allowing for the collection of rich, firsthand accounts on the factors influencing recidivism among juveniles (Kothari, 2004).

Key-Informant Interview

Key informant interviews were conducted to gather information from both children and experts within the center. Eligibility criteria were established to select those with relevant experience. Interview guidelines were reviewed to ensure they effectively gathered the intended information. Face-to-face communication was used to facilitate smooth interaction, with conversations being

recorded via tape recorders and field notes. The interviews were conducted in Amharic, one of Ethiopia's native languages, and later translated into English for analysis. Participants' consent was obtained prior to the interviews to confirm their willingness to take part in the study.

Selection of Informants

The study's target group included child recidivists and employees with diverse educational backgrounds. A total of 13 children and 6 employees participated in the study. The selection criteria were developed based on the information obtained from the center, and archival data was reviewed to select informants who had been accused of recidivism.

Data Analysis

The data gathered through the interviews were analyzed using thematic analysis. This approach helped identify patterns and themes within the textual and observational data, offering insight into the meanings and perspectives based on the participants' experiences. The process involved coding, categorizing, assigning meaning, and generating themes.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the key themes that emerged through systematic analysis. The discussion covers the demographic information, factors contributing to recidivism, the lived experiences of children, and the challenges faced by rehabilitation centers in delivering improved services.

Biographical Information from Respondents

The data in Table (1), indicates that the respondents were male children aged 13-15, with education levels ranging from Grade 2-7. Most of the participants originated from areas outside Addis Ababa. Crimes committed predominantly included theft, pickpocketing, and property-related offenses. Some children reported recurring involvement in serious crimes such as rape and murder attempts.

As depicted in Table (2), staff members included probation officers and counselors aged 27-39, with work experience spanning 6-15 years. Educational qualifications ranged from bachelor's to master's degrees in psychology, social work, and education.

Table 1: Informants' biodata by age, sex, educational level, reoffending and types of crimes

Code No	Age	Sex	Place of birth	Educational level	Frequency of detentions	Types of crime (previous to present)
01	14	M	Addis Ababa	Grade 6	Three times	Quarrelling, disturbance, and theft
02	14	M	Jimma	Grade 7	Two times	Theft of a phone and a metallic wheel from a defense patrol car
03	15	M	Dire Dawa	Grade 6	Two times	Stealing a phone and bullying
04	14	M	Gurage	Grade 5	Two times	Attempt of rape and phone theft
05	15	M	Harar	Grade 2	Two times	Theft of vehicle's mirror
06	15	M	Weliso	Grade 3	Two times	Attempt of repeated rape
07	14	M	Yabelo	Grade 3	Two times	Stealing money from shops and murder
08	13	M	Siltie (Worabe)	Grade 3	Two times	Pickpocketing
09	15	M	Sodo	Grade 7	Two times	Stealing money from a car
10	14	M	Addis Ababa	Grade 4	Three times	Possessing drugs
11	13	M	Hawassa	Grade 6	Two times	Theft
12	14	M	Bahrdar	Grade 6	Three times	Snatching the purse of a girl
13	13	M	Mekele	Grade 5	Two times	Stealing a mobile phone

Table 2: Biographical data of staff of the center by their profession

Code	Age	Gender	Work experience	Educational level	Area of expertise
01	27	F	15 years	BA in psychology	Probation officer
02	25	M	12 years	MA in psychology	Counselor
03	32	M	10 years	Bachelor of Social Work	Counselor
04	28	F	14 years	BA in psychology	Counselor
05	35	M	6 years	Master of Social Work	Probation officer
06	39	M	9 years	BA in education	Probation officer

Factors Contributing to Recidivism among Children

Children are vulnerable to crime and crime-related problems. The reasons for their vulnerabilities arise from poor parenting style, addiction to substances, and peer pressure. In support of these, the reflections and opinions obtained from informants indicate the following as the major ones prompting children to commit crimes. The result advocates child recidivism relates to social, familial, and individual factors.

Addiction and Peer Pressure

Substance addiction emerged as a critical factor influencing recidivism. Children recounted using substances like diesel, cannabis, and Khat (a green leaf with stimulants) to suppress fear and gain courage for criminal activities. Peer pressure further exacerbated the issue, with children influenced by friends to re-offend upon release. A lack of separation between recidivists and non-recidivists in rehabilitation centers also facilitated the transfer of criminal knowledge and techniques. The child under rehabilitation for recidivism said the following.

I was addicted to sniffing diesel and smoking cannabis as homeless. I use both at night to get warm and avoid the fear of committing a crime. I consume both to stimulate myself to do something illegal before people or not. Do you test or know about it? Using both gives me energy and entirely alters my mind.

Another child living in the center reflected his view in support of using substances:

I use substances to stimulate myself by taking substances such as diesel, cigarettes, and chat. Most of the time, I consume these substances with my friends on the street when the weather is cold because we do not have clothes to wear at night and become audacious to get money to commit a crime.

The cases above suggest that addiction triggers children to recidivism. As noted, they were using drugs to get the energy and audacity to commit a crime.

Peer pressure is one of the factors that puts children at risk of reoffending. Child recidivists have further noted their case by amplifying peer influence as the most dominant factor forcing children who are homeless to be involved in repeated crimes. A child under rehabilitation reflected the following:

I can say that my friends were part of the agitators who pushed me to participate in theft crime after being released from the center. I went directly to my family upon release and met my friend, who was detained with me in the

rehabilitation center on my way. He called me and shared the idea of going to a military camp where unattended items like car wheels were left over. I entered the camp to steal the materials scattered on the ground and eventually was arrested by the guardian. I am in the center for the second time, though my friend escaped by jumping over the fence.

The above case indicates that peer pressure is one of the makings children are to commit crimes repeatedly. The informant stated his agreement on how peers influence and use substances impact children to recidivism.

Another child described his observation by saying:

When I saw the money that my friends collected by stealing, I felt a sense of inferiority and took stealing as a good means of getting money. I attempted to steal property from someone that eventually brought me here.

Similarly, the informants said that the rooms for recidivists and non-recidivists were not adequate to accommodate separately and, hence, arresting the recidivists and non-recidivists in the same room is the preferred option of the center. To simplify, children accused of crime live with adult criminals learn several types of modus operandi and do the same upon release. The key informant reflects the following:

Most of the recidivists change their names when arrested. From my experience and exposure, the trend of re-offending is alarmingly increasing. They guess the sentence the court decides when they think of theft of property or snatching purses of girls. For example, if they get detained for a month for a thief, they commit the same crime since the punishment is the same. They even give orientation to the newer ones about the sentence for the crime of theft and the technical applications to commit the crime. The modus operandi learned from adult offenders in the centers boosts children to re-offend after release.

From the above descriptions, we can understand that repetitive criminal behavior is learned from the relationship children establish in the center with adult offenders. The advice and experiences shared in the cells of adult criminals teach new techniques and encourage children to commit more crimes.

Family Divorce and Its Impact

Family disintegration, particularly parental divorce, left children vulnerable to street life and recidivism. Many

respondents described how estranged parental relationships and neglect from stepparents drove them to criminal behavior as a means of survival. A child who experienced the consequence of parental divorce to child recidivism said:

My parents separated five years ago. My father married another wife, which caused me to live with my stepmother. She hates me very much and refuses to give me food. Then, I left home and started living the street life. To feed myself, I must do something, and the only options I have are stealing property or begging bystanders crossing the road around the traffic lights. You can imagine that if my parents were not separated, my life would be better. Look at me, I am a child; how can I handle a life without family; they do not care about me and the rest (his brother and sister). Dear brother, that is beyond my capacity to manage, always forcing me to commit a crime after release. I preferred to stay in the center rather than lead a life on the street.

In support of family divorce and child recidivism, the social worker in care of children in the center said the following:

Most children who come here are street children and from divorced families. Being from a divorced family exposes them to lead a life on the street, which increases the risk of developing criminal behavior. When the parents continue to live separately, children suffer in the middle. It is because the child cannot get treatment impacting on their reintegration, leading to reoffending.

From the above findings, it can be noted that divorce can impact children's risk of developing repetitive criminal behavior through lack of parental support and supervision. Moreover, ill-treatment from their stepmother or stepfather can increase the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviors and places such as joining street life and other criminal activities.

Challenges Faced by the Rehabilitation Centers

The rehabilitation centers are established to support children in conflict with the law under the establishment proclamation of the Ethiopian Civic Organizations Law. However, the centers face significant challenges including lack of infrastructure, office space and support from charitable organizations, which weakens the capacity to reduce youth reoffending.

Infrastructure Deficiencies

Rehabilitation centers face deficiencies in infrastructure, including inadequate office spaces, water supply, and other essential resources. These limitations hinder the provision of quality services, including counseling and basic hygiene facilities for children. The key informant said the following:

We are here to counsel and provide other services to children in conflict with the law. However, the shortage of offices and water supply impacted on our service to meet the expected outcomes of our duties and responsibilities. Children living in the center for correction are suffering from a lack of water to wash their bodies and clothes and clean their rooms.

Shortages of infrastructure and water supply are the blockades to deliver efficient and effective services to children in rehabilitation centers. In support of the above remarks, another social worker has mentioned the drawbacks of the shortage of offices conducting face-to-face counseling services for their clients:

I understand that there is no well-furnished area at all. Before moving to this office, we shared a small office for 8 or 9 staff. Some will wait outside until others finish counseling of children in the office. The facility is not furnished with the necessary materials. A shortage of offices is a challenge to deliver counseling and other services to children in the center.

In general, the centers are highly affected by the shortage of infrastructure. The problem draws the capacity of the centers to bring change in the behavior of children and reduce the participation of youth in recidivism.

Lack of Support from Charitable Organizations

The centers face difficulties in establishing partnerships with aid organizations that could assist in reintegration efforts. A lack of external support has compounded challenges, limiting the ability to provide economic and psychological support to children post-release. Considering the challenge, the head of the institution shared the following:

We could not get any organization to responsibly handle the case of children to reduce the degree of recidivism upon release. The presence of organizations working with children in conflict with the law is preemptive to manage the reintegration process. We expect the existence of various organizations to

work on issues related to children and providing services upon release to lower the rate of crime and recidivism. However, we could not find any organization working with us in partnership to either rehabilitate or facilitate the reintegration process when released from the center.

The explanation above is supported by a reflection from the social worker working in the department of counseling:

A child from an economically weak family is subject to non-governmental organizations founded to assist children accused of a crime. We try to relate with parents with organizations to get support for their children. If they get such support, I do not think they will enter criminal activities back again. But no organizations are willing to assist us for unknown reasons.

The challenges that the center encounters are weakening the services to meet the expected objectives of mitigating child recidivism after correction. Despite the problems in the center, scarcity of water is the most critical to keeping individuals hygienic and cleaning the rooms.

Conclusion

This study underscores the complex nature of child recidivism, focusing on key factors such as addiction, peer influence, family instability, and shortcomings in rehabilitation centers. Notably, substance abuse and peer pressure were found to play significant roles in reoffending. Family instability, particularly divorce, makes children more vulnerable to engaging in risky behaviors. Additionally, rehabilitation centers often lack the necessary infrastructure and partnerships to facilitate successful reintegration.

Overall Conclusion

This research provides valuable insights into the factors that lead children to re-offend after undergoing rehabilitation. Key factors include social, individual, and family influences. Children are especially susceptible to recidivism due to reasons such as peer pressure, substance abuse, family conflict, and parental divorce. The inability of families to provide emotional and material support emerges as a primary cause of children turning to crime.

Influence of the Rehabilitation Environment

The environment within rehabilitation centers, including exposure to adult criminals, is a significant

contributor to children learning new criminal behaviors. Inadequate facilities, the failure to separate recidivists from non-recidivists, and a lack of resources all worsen the challenges children face when reintegrating into society.

Limited External Support

The lack of cooperation between rehabilitation centers, charitable organizations, and external partners hinders efforts to provide essential education, training, and post-rehabilitation support for children. This problem is compounded by insufficient funding and inadequate infrastructure within rehabilitation centers.

Psychological and Social Impacts

Children caught in the cycle of criminal behavior often feel hopeless and distrustful of their environment. Experiences such as living on the streets, substance abuse, and mistreatment by stepfamilies or relatives contribute to their eventual return to criminal activities.

Strategic Recommendations

To effectively reduce child recidivism, a collaborative approach involving families, communities, governments, and social organizations is essential. Key recommendations include:

- Multi-stakeholder collaboration: Strengthening cooperation between rehabilitation centers, families, communities, and religious organizations to support children upon their release from rehabilitation
- Addiction prevention program: Implementing nationwide drug resistance education to reduce substance abuse among adolescents
- Improving rehabilitation facilities: Upgrading the infrastructure of rehabilitation centers, including better educational and training facilities, and ensuring the separation of adult and child offenders in detention
- Increasing public awareness: Engaging the community through initiatives like community policing programs and creating a supportive environment for the reintegration of children into society
- In conclusion, this study highlights the crucial role of families, communities, and governments in establishing effective rehabilitation systems and providing continued support to prevent children from returning to criminal behavior

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Authors Contributions

Demelash Kassaye Debalkie: Considerable contributions to the conception, design, and acquisition of data and analysis. Author was a response to comments from the reviewers until the manuscript was published.

Fiseha Abadi: Considerable contributions to the conception, design, and acquisition of data and analysis.

Ethics

Informants of the study were informed about the aim of the study, and their consent of participation was secured before running the interview. Pseudonyms were employed to protect their identity.

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