

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social demographic factors influence on recidivism risk behaviour of offenders: Literature review

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ABSTRACT

Offensive behaviour is motivated by lived experiences, social-demographic factors contribute leading to high risk of recidivism. Correctional centres globally are overcrowded due to the high rate of crime. This review is informed by a Doctoral Degree in Psychology study focusing on Eswatini, a review of the literature was conducted to explore and discuss the influence of social demographic factors on recidivism risk in low-middle-income countries such as Eswatini Correctional Centres. A narrative literature review was used as a research method. Evidence was purposively extracted from databases such as ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and EBSCOHost to collect data. The researcher identified three themes (i) social-demographic factors (Gender, age, and duration of imprisonment), (ii) type of crime, and (iii) frequency of offending. Empirical research must be conducted to investigate the social and demographic factors that contribute to the risk of recidivism.

Keywords: Behaviour; Eswatini; offenders; recidivism risk; sociodemographic

1. Introduction

In this review, drawn from a Doctoral Degree in Psychology study, different variables were examined, including social-demographic factors associated with the risk of recidivism. Recidivism risk means to be at risk of a conviction for one or more new offences at any time during the period after the sentencing date associated with the original charge(s).^[1,2] However, in the study, recidivism risk means that an offender is at risk to become a recidivist after being exposed to a correctional setting. The focus and setting of the primary study was Eswatini, previously known as Swaziland. Eswatini is one of the African continent countries that faces a serious problem of overcrowding in correctional centres. Several factors lead to overcrowding in correctional or prison centres. For example, Mulder, Brand^[3] reported the following factors associated with the risk of recidivism: past criminal or offensive behaviour, conduct disorder, family risk factors, involvement with criminal peers, and lack of treatment (psychosocial rehabilitation) adherence. These psychosocial and demographic factors are not an exception to Eswatini correctional centres in low-income countries with little or no resources, which can improve criminal rehabilitation to reduce the risk of recidivism.

Social-demographic factors are associated with recidivism risk; gender, age, education level, marital status, type of crime, and duration of imprisonment.^[4,8] Male offenders are more likely to be at risk of being

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recidivists than their counterparts (females).^[9-12] This is because men in correctional centres are mostly affiliated with criminal gangs.^[13-16] Therefore, male offenders are forced to join these gangs at times, leading to the revolving door.^[17-20] For example. The location of the Eswatini Correctional Centres, of the eleven correctional centres, one is a Female Centre (Mawelawela female Correctional centre) (See **Table 1** below: number 4).

Table 1. The administrative and geographical regions of the correctional centres in Eswatini.

Hhohho region		Shiselweni region		Lubombo region	Manzini region
1.Piggs-Peak centre	correctional	3.Nhlangano Centre	correctional	5. Mbalekane Farming correctional centre	7.Matsapha correctional centre
2.Sidvwashini centre	correctional	4. Mawelawela correctional centre	Female	6.Big Bend correctional centre	8.Manzini remand centre
					9.Criminal Mental Asylum centre
					10.Malkerns Young prison centre
					11.Mankayane correctional centre

Juvenile delinquency is perceived as a problem in society. Due to peer pressure, criminal behaviour starts at a young age.^[21-23] This behaviour becomes the norm when individuals transition from adolescence to adulthood.^[24] At first, they will be scared of the foreign environment, but once they get used to the setup and set of correctional centres, juveniles are at high risk of recidivating.^[25] Individuals are likely to be at risk of recidivating between the ages of 15-39.^[26,27] Nguyen, Kamada^[28], Galbiati, Ouss^[29] state that recidivism risk is a social problem and an economic problem because these age groups are supposed to contribute to the economy. However, these age groups are involved in criminal behaviour due to lack of job opportunities and extreme poverty in low- and middle-income countries.^[30,31]

After obtaining a high school diploma, people in low and middle-income countries (Eswatini) are more likely to engage in offensive behaviour. Most (50%-63%) will not receive bursaries or scholarships to go to a higher institution of learning or university, no formal, informal, or casual jobs, and no entrepreneurship opportunities.^[32-35] This is a government or system problem that leads to offensive behaviour. This failure leads to committing a crime and being incarcerated. However, being admitted to a correctional centre exposes them to free; accommodation, food, healthcare, and free education (university and vocational skills). If all these basic needs are met, it is more likely that when offenders are released and reintegrated into the community, they will not have basic needs. Therefore, they will commit a more significant crime or offence that will put them in a correctional centre for many years than the first entry. This behaviour is associated with a revolving door for offenders. Studies have shown that few to more minor offenders with high or tertiary education are at risk of recidiving.^[36-39]

Eswatini is mainly dominated by the Black African Nguni (EmaSwati) population, with more than 1 million people. In a small country with fewer than 2 million people, there has been an increase in occupancy level based on the capacity of offenders, reported to be more than 133.8% increase in incarcerated population in the past 23 years (1997-2020).^[40,41] Correctional centres are being renovated, for example, in the largest correctional centre (Matsapha Correctional centre), which accommodates between 800-1000 offenders in a daily correctional count, there is a high recidivism rate of 40% and above in Eswatini Correctional Centres^[42-45], this implies that almost half on the offenders in Matsapha Correctional Centre are more likely to recidivated or reoffend; additionally, the population that is incarcerated are Black Africans. However, other authors question whether race matters in recidivism risk.^[46-49] Eswatini is known for high rate of poverty which is more likely to be main source of crime or offensive behaviour; offenders are likely to be involved in offensive behaviour such as shoplifting, livestock theft, fraud, robbery, and drug-related crimes. These crimes are

committed because most of the population in low-income countries including Eswatini is unemployed while are qualified skilled individuals.^[50-54] Children neglect is reported, this might be a result that parents are incarcerated or revolving door in corrections.^[55,56]

Furthermore, marital status is associated with the risk of recidivism among offenders. Single offenders are more likely to be at risk of recidiving. Not being married and having a husband or wife associated with risk of recidivism.^[57,58] Clearly, this implies that when you are single, there are more chances that you do not have family responsibilities, then are more likely to reoffend. A systematic review and meta-analysis recommended that correctional centres implement community-based sentences for first-time offenders and service short-time sentences to reduce the risk of recidivism^[59], to and be able to serve with loved ones. Married people think of the family before committing a crime, whereas single individuals are less likely to consider anyone when committing a crime other than themselves.^[60] For example, between the ages of 18-39, offenders are reported to be single and at risk of recidiving.^[61] Therefore, being single results in a high risk of recidivism risk.

A preliminary study by Matshaba^[4] indicated that in South Africa the main crimes committed by offenders were theft (26.27%), housebreaking/burglary (18.43%), rape (14.19%), violence (9.53%), theft/ownership of stolen goods (9.32%) and murder (8.26%), and most offenders are repeated in such crimes (both felony and misdemeanor). On the contrary, Hulme, Morgan^[62], Lekalakala^[63] pointed out that sexual crime was often specialised in choosing victims or behaviour and that the likelihood of reoffending depended on the particular criminal, for instance, sexual offences are more likely to high among male offenders. Furthermore, the author notes that most murders, robberies, and sexual offenders commit recurrence within two to three years of release from correctional facilities, or even less. Therefore, the risk of sexual recurrence remains long-term. On the contrary, Muthaphuli,^[64] Muthaphuli and Terblanche^[65] have claimed that the incidence of assault crimes is high and differs from country to country. Similar high-risk crimes are violent, and most convicted commit retaliation. Cervera, Loría^[66] reported that, non-offences are generally more likely to lead to recidivism than violent offences, and nonsexual offences can lead to recidivism. However, van der Put and Assink^[67] argue that offenders who harm families, partners, and communities are more likely to be repeat criminals because there is no support structure for criminals; therefore, criminals may be at risk of reoffending.

Deterrence is likely to occur in the case of the first offender. Deterrence is a utilitarian theory of punishment that the ultimate goal of society is to achieve happiness or pleasure and avoid suffering. Gumboh^[68] Curlewis^[69] noted that social rehabilitation of long-term detainees can be considered the most difficult aspect of rehabilitation facing the risk of recidivism. More notable in low-income countries, such as Eswatini, for instance, low-income countries are more likely not to have human resources (psychologists, social workers, counsellors, and chaplains) to implement rehabilitation programmes. Short-term detainees are vulnerable at the beginning of the process of social reintegration.^[70] The rehabilitation process of offenders in correctional centres takes less than a year, so it is possible that they do not complete the rehabilitation process. Therefore, if the strategy is to allow offenders to serve part of their sentences in communities, it is necessary to bridge the gap between correctional centres and communities^[71], thus reducing the risk of crime.

Social Learning Theory (SLT) in criminology by Glueck^[72] has been studied, arguing that crime and deviance are behaviours learnt by offenders and a life style of lifestyle, leading to the risk of recidivism. This means that if a criminal is exposed, he becomes a criminal; he sees and learns criminal behaviour through the criminal he is doing through his peers, including risk behaviour such as drug use in gangs in correctional centres. For example, joining a gang in a correctional facility is the only way to survive; it may be that an offender who deviates in a correctional facility may be exposed to a risk of reoffending in the correctional centre. This theory is a hypothesis that combines the concepts of reinforcement and punishment of behaviour

with the concepts of consciousness and cognitive expectations of offenders. Social learning theory (SLT) supports that social demographic factors influence criminal or offensive behaviour.

Studies^[4,22,24,73] maintained that social demographic factors (sex, age, education level, marital status, type of crime, and duration of imprisonment) have an influence on the risk behaviour of recidivism of offenders. This review may focus on the influence of social demographic factors on recidivism risk in low-middle-income countries such as Eswatini Correctional Centres. Therefore, the research question of this review is the following: Do social demographic factors have an influence on the recidivism risk behaviour of offenders in low-middle-income countries focussing on Eswatini context? The results of the study will inform policies on rehabilitation and psychosocial interventions to improve the reintegration from correctional centres to the community.

2. Methods

A narrative review was adopted as the research method. A wide range of literature was purposively collected. The focus of the literature was on social demographic factors that influence on recidivism risk behaviour of offenders in low-middle-income countries such as Eswatini. This approach helped to provide an overview of the existing literature. Permission was requested to conduct the primary study from the Health Research Ethics Committee (HREC) of the Faculty of Health Sciences of North-West University (NWU). The ethics number is **NWU-00046-19-A1**. The author critically engaged and summarised the literature. Relevant articles were searched from different databases such as ScienceDirect, Google Scholar, and EBSCOHost. The articles were thematically analysed^[74], data saturation was reached when themes and sub-themes were re-occurring. The researcher identified three themes (i) social-demographic factors (*sex, age, and duration of imprisonment*), (ii) type of crime, and (iii) frequency of offending. The themes are discussed below.

Key words such as “behaviours”, “Eswatini”, “offenders”, “prison”, “prisoners”, “recidivism risk”, and “recidivism” were used in the search and to determine the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Reference lists in the consulted publications were used to manually snowball the search for more publications, getting one article could lead to another to be used in the study. Due to the scope and word limit of this review, the search was limited to publications in the period 2000 to 2024, which covered 24 years of literature on risk of recidivism and recidivism. Titles and abstracts were screened, full-texted was conducted to ensure that all included articles meet the inclusion criteria, then data were extracted.

3. Findings and discussion

In this review, the researcher extracts data samples to identify emerging topics. From the sample articles, the researcher noted social and demographic factors that contributed to offensive behaviour. **Table 2** below shows the themes and subthemes which were extracted from included articles.

Table 2. Emerging themes and subthemes.

Emergед themes	Sub-themes
1. Social-demographic factors	i. Sex ii. Age iii. Duration of imprisonment
2. Type of crime	
3. Frequency of offending	

3.1. Theme 1: Social-demographic factors

Sub-themes: Gender, age, type of crime and duration of imprisonment on the risk of offenders

The review discusses sociodemographic factors that can have a positive or negative impact on the life of an offender, such as gender, age, type of crime, and duration of imprisonment. According to the general criminal and sociological perspective, it is assumed that men, blacks, Africans with fewer secondary education and young people are at increased risk of recidivism.^[7] This implies that when people are not educated and not employed, they are more likely to be exposed to criminal activities. On the contrary, Scanlan, Yesberg^[17] indicated that all individuals were at high risk of reoffending. Furthermore, Alcantud^[16] noted that the most predictive factor of risk and crime is gender, especially men; therefore, correctional centres are filled with men. In all countries, communities, ages, and historical periods, male crime rates are considerably higher than those of women^[18,19], and women often have higher levels of emotional intelligence than men, so they tend to commit less violent and murder crimes.^[12]

The crime rate among young people is high.^[64,65] After interviewing several violent offenders,^[20] concluded that the foundations of violence and crime lie between 10 and 20 years before the impact of society is felt. In other words, the way the state and society respond to children who witness violence, neglect, and abuse in 2015 determines whether we will have the same level of violence in 2025. This shows the high risk of recidivism in correctional facilities over the next five years, because society has ignored its responsibility to ensure the safety of itself and its young people. A study has shown that the risk of recidivism between the ages of 18 and 29 differs from the cultural environment in the juvenile and emerging adult periods. Previous crimes and education or employment have emerged as significant predictors of the rate of juvenile and juvenile recidivism, so different cultural samples have played an important role in the way children are raised and the rate of juvenile recidivism is reduced.^[21] Finally, the duration of imprisonment plays an important role in the risk of reentry, for example, if a first offender is sentenced to more than one year's imprisonment and if the crime type is theft or robbery, it is more likely to commit a reentry. In addition, other crimes, such as murder, rape, sexual, and abuse-related crimes, are also at high risk of being punished for redefamation. This implies that the longer the years in the correctional facility, the greater the chance that people associated with the culture of the correctional community, such as gangs and ritual associations, will have relationships.

3.2. Theme 2: Type of crime

Matshaba^[4] reported increasing rates of different types of crime among South African offences, such as robbery, house breaking/burglary, rape, violence, theft / possession of stolen goods, and murder. These offences indicate that Eswatini, as a neighbouring country of South Africa, is more likely in experience an increase to these offences. Furthermore, such offences are caused by poverty and unemployment. In contrast, Lekalakala^[63] reported that sexual recidivists differ because they are psychologically motivated, for instance, rape, the perpetrator targets victims with the same characteristics, might be women or males. It is essential that rehabilitation programmes be designed for specific offences to avoid using an umbrella or blanket approach when implementing rehabilitation programmes. Cervera, Loría^[66] stated that non-violent crimes are generally more likely to be punished than violent crimes, and crimes not related to sexual crimes are more likely to be punished. However, van der Put, Assink^[67] believed that offenders who were violent towards families or partners and communities are more likely to be recidivists because there was no structure of support for the offender, and hence the offender will be at risk of reoffending.

3.3. Theme 3: Frequency of offending

Gumboh^[68] stated that people in Southern Africa who were first offenders were more likely to change their ways than people who were reoffenders. Therefore, it is likely that specific deterrence will be achieved when dealing with first offenders. Deterrence is a practical punishment theory that states that society's ultimate goal is to achieve happiness and pleasure and avoid suffering. Curlewis^[69] argues that the social integration of

long-term inmates may be considered the most challenging aspect of rehabilitation in effectively combating the risk of recidivism. Mowen, Boman^[70] stated that if the offender is in a correctional facility for less than a year, the offender may not complete the rehabilitation process and may be vulnerable to the early social rehabilitation process, since short-term detention is a rehabilitation process, as the offenders may not complete the rehabilitation process. Therefore, it is said to be important to bridge the gap between correctional centres and communities, which reduces the risk of recidivism, when a strategy is implemented to allow offenders to receive part of their sentences in the community.^[75,76]

4. Conclusions and recommendations

In general, reviewed studies have shown that social demographic factors should be well investigated to understand the impact of social-demographic factors that contribute to recidivism risk. These studies also indicated that regardless of gender, age, type of crime, and duration of imprisonment of the offender, all individuals are at high risk of being recidivists regardless of their sociodemographic background. However, these re-evaluated studies did not explicitly investigate to what extent psychosocial demographic factors can affect the risk of recidivism in the Eswatini Correctional Centre, in particular. In summary, little or no attention has been paid to offenders in Eswatini Correctional Centre. Therefore, in this context, it is recommended that research should be conducted to examine the psychosocial demographic factors which contribute to the risk of recidivism. Intervention programmes that focus on socio-demographic factors are needed in correctional centres. For example, correctional centres should strengthen their human resources (psychologists, social workers, chaplains and educators), collaborative care for rehabilitation programmes, ex-offenders being employed by organisations which will need skills learned by offenders while incarcerated. There is a need to use different rehabilitation programmes rather than using umbrella approaches for rehabilitation programmes.

5. Implications of the study

This review provides evidence from Eswatini and other countries that there is a need for policies to be amended to ensure that offenders are reintegrated to the community. Recidivism risk is an indication that there are socio-demographic determinants (poverty and unemployment) which contribute to recidivism risk. There is a need to revise human resources policies in the correction settings to ensure that offenders are supported by a multi-disciplinary team (psychologists, psychiatrists, nurses, medical practitioners, educators, social workers, and chaplains). Other stakeholders must be included in the rehabilitation process of offenders, for instance assisting with lowering the unemployment rate among those offenders who have been released.

Authors' note

None

Conflict of interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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