The Relationship between the Social Environmental Factor and the Tendency to Relapse Among Former Drug Addicts

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ABSTRACT

The tendency to relapse is one of psychological and behavioral problems. It is related to the desire of drug addicts to reuse drugs after the end of the treatment and recovery process. This study aims to discover the relationship between interpersonal factors such as familial, friend, and societal support with the tendency to relapse among former drug addicts. This study involves 242 former drug addicts using the questionnaire set of the Social Provisions Scale (SPA) by Russell & Cutrona (1987). The Reliability Coefficient of these scales using the Cronbach's alpha analysis found all of them greater than 70. Findings show the level of social support for the three variables among former drug addicts is at a medium level. Furthermore, the inferential analysis for the familial and societal support factor with the tendency to relapse is significant between $r=.06$ and $r=.05$. Meanwhile, friend support shows a negative correlation with the tendency to relapse. The negative correlation for the friend support factor shows there exists no link between friend support and the tendency to relapse.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Even though there are former drug addicts that are able to control themselves from continuing to use drugs, some of them are unable to resist their desire for drugs. They try to resist from drug use, but factors such as social pressure lead to higher tendency to relapse. Therefore, they require inner strength to resist the desire for drugs and need social support, especially from parents, family, friends, and society. Without social support, it is difficult for former addicts to function as effective and normal human beings. Studies related to tendency to relapse have been carried out by previous scholars in the West (Bowen, Chawla & Marlatt, 2010, Chong & Lopez, 2008, Sinha, 2001; Tate, Brown, Glasner, Unrod & McQuaid, 2006). Results show the tendency to relapse are caused by a number of factors, such as the social environmental factor like familial, friend, and societal support.

Meanwhile, the scenario for tendency to relapse among former drug addicts in Malaysia is also significant based on the implication of social environmental factors on the increase in the number of repeat addicts every year (Fauziah & Naresh Kumar, 2009; Mahmud Mazlan, Schottenfeld & Chawarski, 2006). Previous studies at the local level also acknowledge the tendency to relapse among drug addicts that have completed their treatment and recovery period has been a trend among addicts in Malaysia. Even though various efforts have been carried out by the government, the problem of repeat addicts post-treatment and recovery is still not fully controllable.

2. PREVIOUS LITERATURE

Most previous studies found that lack of social support leads to higher tendency to relapse (Anderson, Ramo & Brown, 2008; Rohsenow, Martin & Eaton, 2007; Martino, Ellickson, & McCaffrey, 2009). This is also acknowledged by Moon, Jackson, and Hecht (2000) in the study that found that social support, especially by family, could be linked to former addicts' success to overcome their desire for drugs (Liddle & Rowe 2006; Martino, Ellickson& McCaffrey, 2009). Brooks and Rice (2007) in the study found that families that do not provide support in the recovery process of former addicts are one of the risk factors in increasing the tendency to relapse. This is because family provides context with a significant effect on the positive development in an individual and could influence one's behavior (Moos, 1990). Simons, Christine, Rand and Glen, (1998) in the study found that lack of familial support cause former drug addicts to feel isolated, rejected, and thus contributing to

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

327

their tendency to relapse.

In addition, friend support is also viewed as contributing to tendency to relapse (Chen, Sheth, Elliott, & Yeager, 2004; Kandel & Yamaguchi). This is acknowledged by Bezuidenhout and Joubert, (2003) that state that during adolescence individuals spend more time with their environment especially with friends and less time with family, leading to friends having a stronger influence compared to family. Friends are said to influence behavior and are one source of rationalization to various deviant behaviors (Akers, 1998; Ary, Duncan, Duncan & Hops, 1999; Conger & Rueter, 1996). Therefore, friends are identified as an important factor that enables tendency to relapse among former drug addicts.

Societal support is also identified as one factor that could cause an increase in the risk of tendency to relapse. This is a main problem to the addicts as they feel rejected by society and environment. According to Luoma, Twohig, Waltz, Hayes, Roget, Padilla and Fisher, (2007), the negative stigma that society projects on former drug addicts have an effect on their self-confidence to change. Therefore, most former addicts use the negative stigma as an excuse to justify their relapse (Room, 2005). Previous studies also found that societal discrimination has a chronic effect on the life of former addicts (Ahern, Stuber & Galea, 2007). This discrimination causes addicts to feel ashamed to face society and take the initiative to isolate them from society. This then makes it difficult for them to carry out activities as usual. In addition, they feel ashamed due to the negative perception about them that could affect social integration (Livingstone, Milne, Fang & Amari, 2011; Simmonds & Coomber, 2009). This shows the social environment pressure factor causes former addicts to be exposed to the risk of relapse.

This study is specifically framed to answer a number of questions:-

• What is the level of tendency to relapse, the level of interpersonal factor (familial, friend, and societal support) among former drug addicts?

• How far does the interpersonal factor (familial, friend, and societal support) influence the tendency to relapse?

3. OBJECTIVE

This study aims to identify the link between interpersonal factor (familial, friend, and societal support) and the tendency to relapse. The specific objective of this study is as such:

• Identify the levels of interpersonal factor (familial, friend, and societal support) among

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

328

former drug addicts.

• Determine if there is a link between interpersonal factor (familial, friend, and societal support) and the tendency to relapse among former drug addicts.

4. METHOD

Measuring tool refers to the questionnaire used as a variable in this study, while scoring is a method to obtain value for each measuring tool item. In this study, the questionnaire used is the Familial Support, Friend Support, and Societal Support (Social Provisions Scale (SPA) by Russell & Cutrona (1987). Social support includes familial, friend, and societal support, measured using the Social Provisions Scale (SPS) questionnaire. This questionnaire was designed by Russell and Cutrona (1987) using the likert scale of 1=strongly disagree 2=disagree 3=agree 4=strongly agree. The total score for each item shows high support from family, friends, and society. An example of items used for the social support scale is as such:-

• "Family/friends/society never reprimand me when I did a mistake"
• "Family/friends/society are always there to help me if I am in need of them"
• "Some among family/friends/society could depend on me in emergencies"

As stated by Russell &Cutrona, (1987) the higher the total score obtained, the higher the social support for former addicts. The Reliability Coefficient of the SPS scale measuring tool is high, of .715 for familial support, .753 for friend support, and .771 for societal support. This means the questionnaire is suitable for this research.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

Levels of Familial Support, Friend Support, and Societal Support

5.1 Levels of Tendency to Relapse

In order to obtain the level of tendency to relapse according to the eight dimensions, researchers have divided the tendency to relapse variables to three levels, the low, medium, and high levels. In this study, the minimum score is one and the maximum score is five. The value range has been divided by three and produces an interval class equal to one.

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

329

Table 1: Level of Tendency to Relapse (n = 242)

Level of Tendency to Relapse	Number	Percentage	Mean	Sd
Negative Emotion				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	53	21.9	3.70	.303
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	136	56.2		
High (3.67 - 5.00)	53	21.9		
Physical Discomfort				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	53	21.5	3.81	.392
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	138	57.0		
High (3.67 - 5.00	52	21.5		
Emotional Comfort				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	29	12.0	3.74	.379
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	168	69.4		
High (3.67 - 5.00)	45	18.6		
Self-Control				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	40	16.5	3.70	.387
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	131	54.1		
High (3.67 - 5.00)	71	29.4		
Drug Craving				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	43	17.8	3.69	.404
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	121	50.0		

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

330

High (3.67 - 5.00)	78	32.2		
Conflict with Others				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	116	47.9	3.65	.311
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	112	46.3		
High (3.67 - 5.00)	14	5.8		
Social Pressure				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	38	15.7	3.68	.401
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	163	67.4		
High (3.67 - 5.00)	41	16.9		
Time Spent with Friends				
Low (1.00 – 2.33)	28	11.6	3.73	.377
Medium (2.34 - 3.66)	174	71.9		
High (3.67 - 5.00)	40	16.5		

Table 1 shows the frequency distribution on the eight aspects of tendency to relapse answered by the respondents. Descriptive analysis results show the mean score of physical discomfort is higher compared to other mean scores, with 3.81 with a standard deviation of .392. 53 respondents (82.5%) has a low level of physical discomfort. 138 respondents (57%) are at a medium level and the remaining 52 respondents (21.5%) are at a high level. This shows the majority of respondents have a low level of physical discomfort. When they faced physical discomfort, they work to reuse drugs in order to avoid suffering physical pain, thus increasing the tendency to relapse.

For the emotional comfort, the mean value is 3.74 with a standard deviation of .379. 29 respondents (12%) are at a low emotional comfort level. 168 respondents (69.4%) are at a medium level and the remaining 45 respondents (18.6%) are at a high level. This shows

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

331

almost half of the respondents are at a medium level of emotional comfort. Emotional comfort refers to positive emotions such as joy, confidence, calm, and satisfaction with their lives. Emotional comfort is said to produce positive feelings and increase good feelings in the former addicts, thus increasing the desire for drugs. This is what causes drug addicts to always be a risk of relapse (National Institute of Drug Addict, 2011).

On the aspect of time spent with friends, the total mean value is 3.73 with a standard deviation of 377. 28 respondents (11.6%) are at a low level. 174 respondents (71.9%) are at a medium level and the remaining 40 respondents (16.5%) are at a high level. Overall results show the aspect of time spent with friends is at a medium level. Time spent with friends refers to time when respondents meet with old drug-using friends and the good times with said friends that lead to respondents to incline to reuse in order to increase the pleasure felt.

Next is the aspect of negative emotion. The total mean value for negative emotion is 3.70 with a standard deviation of 303. 53 respondents (21.9%) are at a love level of negative emotion. 136 respondents (56.2%) are at a medium level, while the remaining 53 respondents (21.9%) are at a high level. This is because they are often plagued with problems involving emotional change, such as stress, sadness, depression, anxiety, apprehension, anger, confusion, and guilt. The same situation is linked to previous studies related to negative emotion found that anxiety and worry is a stimulus for the pressure to relapse to increase.

For the self-control aspect, the total mean value is 3.70 with a standard deviation of .387. 40 respondents (16.5%) are at a low level of self-control. 131 respondents (54.1%) are at a medium level, and the remaining 71 respondents (29.4%) are at a high level. Overall the studies show the level of tendency to relapse for the self-control aspect is at a medium level. Hirschi (1969) believes everyone has a predisposition to crime if they lack self-control. This means lack of self-control affects the addict's ability to choose the right action for himself (Liddle & Rowe, 2006). Based on results, findings show the mean score for the dimension for the drug craving dimension is 3.69 with the standard deviation of .404. 121 respondents (50%) on the question of drug cravings show a medium level on tendency to relapse. 78 respondents (32.2%) are at a high level on the tendency to relapse, while the remaining 43 respondents (17.8%) are at a low level. Overall, the study shows the level of tendency to relapse for the aspect of drug craving is at a medium level.

Next is the aspect of social pressure. Social pressure refers to the situation when the

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

332

respondents face stress from their environment that leads to tendency to relapse. In this study, the total mean value for the social pressure aspect is 3.68 with the standard deviation of .401. 38 respondents (15.7%) have a low level of social pressure. 163 respondents (67.4%) are at a medium level and the remaining 41 respondents (16.9%) are at a high level.

Finally is the aspect of conflict with others. The total mean value for conflict with others is 3.65 with a standard deviation of .311. 14 respondents (5.8%) have a low level of conflict with others. 112 respondents (46.3%) are at a medium level while the remaining 116 respondents (49.2%) are at a high level.

This shows the respondents would have problems or conflicts with people around him. This causes them to feel themselves difficult to communicate with others, thus leading to incline to relapse (Marlatt& Gordon, 1985). Overall, there is no significant mean difference between the eight scales of tendency to relapse and all means are seen to be around 3.81 - 3.65. Results found almost half of the respondents have a high tendency to relapse for all the studied aspects. Therefore, it is proper for the problem of tendency to relapse to be studied for the relevant authorities to eradicate the drug plague, which is the biggest problem in our country.

5.2 Level of Social Support

The factor of social support includes support by family, friends, and society for former addicts. The researcher has divided the social support factor variable to three levels, (1) low (2) medium (3) high based on the five Likert scale of (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain (4) agree (5) strongly agree. Table 2 shows the level of social support among former drug addicts.

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

333

Table 2: Level of Social Support (n = 242)

Level of Social Support	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Sd
Familial Support				
Low (2.96–3.39)	42	17.4		
Medium (3.40–3.82)	161	66.5	3.74	.248
High (3.83–4.45)	39	16.1		
Friend Support				
Low (1.00 - 1.66)	28	11.6		
Medium (1.67-2.33)	174	71.9	3.67	.260
High (2.34-3.00)	40	16.5		
Societal Support				
Low (3.00-3.47)	34	14.0		
Medium (3.48-3.93)	173	71.5	3.74	.252
High (3.97-4.40)	35	14.5		

Table 2 shows the frequency distribution on social support as answered by the respondents. Results found that the level of familial support among respondents record a mean score value of 3.74 with a standard deviation of 248. Findings show most respondents have a low level of familial support of 161 respondents (66.5%). 42 respondents (17.4%) have a low level of familial support while 39 respondents (16.1%) have a high level of familial support. For societal support, the mean score is also 3.74 with a standard deviation of .252. Results show most respondents have a medium level of societal support of 173 respondents (71.5%). 35 respondents (14.5%) have a low level of societal support, and the remaining 34 respondents (14.0%) have a high level of societal support.

Finally is friend support. Results show the mean score of friend support is the lowest, of 3.67 with the standard deviation of 260. Results found that 174 respondents (71.9%) have a medium level of friend support. 40 respondents (16.5%) have a high level of friend support and the remaining 28 respondents (11.6%) have a low level of friend support. Overall, findings show there is no significant mean difference between the three social supports (familial, friend, and societal) and all are around 3.67 - 3.74.

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

334

5.3 Inferential Analysis

This part puts forward the results obtained from inferential analysis. This result is a hypothesis testing using the Pearson correlation analysis method, multiple regression, and moderator analysis.

5.3.1 Correlation between Tendency to Relapse and Interpersonal Factors (Familial, Friend, and Societal Support)

The Pearson correlation is done to determine the link between the interpersonal factor (1) familial support, (2) friend support and (3) societal support and the tendency to relapse. The scores for each variable is aggregated based on the score of each respondent through the five Likert scale of (1) strongly disagree (2) disagree (3) uncertain (4) agree (5) strongly agree. The Pearson correlation analysis is used to test all research hypotheses. All hypotheses are tested with a two-tailed test. In this research, rejection of a null hypothesis occurs when the significant value (p) is less than alpha = (.05), the results fail to reject the null hypothesis. Table 3 shows the correlation results.

Table 3: Correlation between Tendency to Relapse and Interpersonal Factors

Variables	Y	X_1	X_2	X_3	X_4	X_5
Y (Relapse)	1					
X_2(Familial Support)	.564[**]	.530[**]	.526[**]	1		
X_3(Friend Support)	-.059[**]	-.008[**]	.030[**]	-.149[**]	1	
X_4(Societal Support)	.624[**]	.513[**]	.545[**]	.577[**]	-.045[**]	1

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Correlation between Familial Support and the Tendency to Relapse

Results of the study show a significant positive relationship between familial support and tendency to relapse. The relationship strength obtained is at a medium level (r=.564, p<.05). The positive correlation shows a positive relationship exists between familial support and the tendency to relapse. This means, the higher the familial support, the higher the tendency to

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

335

relapse. This study found that former addicts do receive good familial support from their family members to help them cope with their drug addiction, but they are still found to be inclined to relapse. There I a possibility that the support received from family members is still insufficient to help former addicts wean off drug problems. Therefore, parents and family members should prepare themselves with proper knowledge regarding the risk of tendency to relapse among family members involved in drug problems.

This finding is in line with a number of previous studies such as (Carlson and Corcoran, 2001; Gregoire and Snively, 2001; Cattarello *et al*. 1995; Denton and Kampfe, 1994; Thomas and Hsiu, 1993; Van Der Westhuizen, 2007) that found that even though family provides high level of support for former drug addicts, they still are unable to release themselves from the draw of drugs. This is possible because former addicts often got stressed when facing certain family members that refuse to accept their presence. This complicates the recovery process and makes it difficult for them to continue with daily life. Therefore, the most effective method to treat former addicts from relapsing is through high commitment from all family members that serve as the basic social unit and influential on the social and behavioral development of former addicts.

Study by Hser *et al.* (2007) found that strong and close familial bonds are able to prevent addictive behavior and responses that might spark the addict's relapse. Strong familial bond is observed when there is close relationship, openness and sincerity in daily communication between parents and children. With strong familial bonds, children are more respectful of elders, become good listeners, and are highly filial to their parents. In addition, strong familial ties could also help former addicts fill their recreational activities with something other than drug use.

This is acknowledged by previous scholars such as (Hall, Wasserman and Havasay 1991; Brook, Whiteman, Gordon and Cohen, 1986) that emphasize on strong familial ties as encouragement for former addicts to live a drug-free life. The strength and cohesion of family ties prevent children from being influenced by their drug-using friends (Bahr, Mughan, Marcos & Li, 1998). Furthermore, studies by Ramo and Brown, (2008) found that addicts prone to relapse consist of those with a background of family problems such as presence of conflict and divorce in the family. There is a positive relationship between family problems and drug reuse among addicts.

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

336

These findings support previous studies of (Basson 2008; Bezuidenhout and Joubert, 2003; Fraser, 2002; Goodwin, 2000; McWhirter *et al.* 2004; Van Der Westhuizen, 2007) that report social environment including familial, friend, and societal support as important factors contributing to tendency to relapse among addicts. Previous researchers also emphasize on the most effective method to prevent the children from continuing drug problems as the presence of strong commitment from family, as the basic social unit, expected to be a positive influence on the social and behavioral development of children. This proves that family support allows addicts to face positive changes in the recovery process and help addicts shape their self-confidence.

Moreover, children need dependence on family to ensure their self-development is not hampered. Van Der Westhuizen, (2007) in his study found that lack of familial ties and cohesion increase the possibility of children's involvement in negative behavior. Lack of support also causes a decrease in the children's emotional, behavioral, attitude, and self-confidence development. Usually, children in Eastern societies are not solely dependent on self but require relationship with the environment in the social context. Hence, the presence of relationship showed by Malay society in providing support for children with the tendency to relapse by as they need each other's support. This finding indirectly highlights the Eastern societal lifestyle, especially the tradition of the Malays that stress of strong social bonds in a family.

6.2 Correlation between Friend Support and the Tendency to Relapse

Results show there is negative, almost no significant relationship between friend support and the tendency to relapse (r= -.059, p<.05). This is because the value (p) for variables is greater than the significance level of .05. Though the link between friend support and tendency to relapse is weak, this factor is found to have significant links and is identified as a factor influencing the tendency to relapse. Based on results, this provides the picture that even through friends provide support, but support is ineffective in preventing them from living a drug-free life. This is because the tendency to relapse is still present even with support from friends.

This also means that friend support is also identified as one of the factors influencing the tendency to relapse among former drug addicts. This finding is strengthened by studies by Mahmood *et al*. (1999) the strong appeal from friends still involved in drugs is the main

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

337

reason why some addicts relapse. The studies found that 50% of old friends influenced them to reuse after ending their treatment and recovery process. This means friends are the main incentive for former addicts to relapse.

This situation is in line with the view of Van Der Westhuizen (2007) that found social environment is also a factor contributing to the increase in tendency to relapse. Studies carried out on 45 former addicts found that 90% of repeat respondents state that the main factor contributing to relapse is due to peer pressure and the pleasure derived from drug use. The presence of drug-using friends leads to relapse among former drug addicts. Drug-using friends influence one another. This proves that individuals with friends with drug problems and prone to become addicts themselves.

The conclusion here is most respondents to this study state they had received support from their friends at a low level to help them free themselves of drugs. Even though there exist friends that provide support to leave drug-use, it is seen as insufficient in preventing them from relapsing. This is possibly because of pressure and enticement from old drug-using friends to reuse after their recovery. However, researchers do not reject the view that friend support is necessary to ensure former addicts are free of drug problems that plague them.

6.3 Correlation between Societal Support and the Tendency to Relapse

Findings show a significant positive relationship between societal support and the tendency to relapse. The relationship strength is at a medium-level (r=.652, p<.05). Positive linkage shows the existence of positive relationship between societal support and the tendency to relapse. Studies found respondents state they receive medium support from members of society. This situation shows that most members of society provide less support and space to former addicts to begin and continue with a new life.

This is possible because most members of society are not fully confident with the ability of former addicts to fully recover. They have a perception that former addicts could not stop their addiction and would remain as lifelong addicts. This indirectly influences former addicts to return to their old drug-using life as viewed by Heinz *et al.* (2009) and De Waele and Van Hove (2005).

The findings are seen to support most previous studies such as those that reported the lack of acceptance from society leads to social isolation and discrimination that increases the

Citation: Asbah Razali et al. Ijppr.Human, 2016; Vol. 7 (4): 326-341.

338

tendency to relapse. According to previous studies, the problem of stigma, prejudice, and discrimination by members of society has a chronic social effect on the daily life of a former addict (Kilian, Matschinger & Angermeyer, 2001). A stressful life makes it difficult for them to socialize in the new life, thus increasing the tendency to relapse. This situation complicates the former addicts' recovery process, as they would use the stigma and societal discrimination excuse to justify their decision to relapse. Without societal support, it is difficult for former addicts to function as normal members of society.

Westreich, Heitner and Cooper (1997) found that support from members of society could help prevent addicts from relapsing. This is because social support provided would prevent him from feeling isolated. The support also eases their reintegration into society. This is important to prevent them from being frowned upon by society when they seek to become a member of society (Ahern *et al*. 2007). Moreover, societal attitude that only points fingers at former addicts complicates their recovery process. They require societal support in order for them to change (Luoma *et al.* 2007).

7. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, strong social support could help individuals live a happier and quality life. Lack of support from family, friends, and society means former addicts have fewer skills development in supporting a positive chain of social development. They are unable to mix with society due to lack of interactive skills. This proves social support is one factor that leads to increasing in the tendency to relapse. This is because former addicts require family, friends, and society to help them in their recovery process. This shows lack of support from their environment leads to increase in the tendency to relapse.

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339

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340

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341