

## ANALYSIS OF FACTORS DRIVING RECIDIVISM IN GENERAL CRIMINAL OFFENDERS IN CLASS IIA BENGKULU CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION



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**ABSTRACT**

*This study aims to analyze the factors driving recidivism among general crime inmates at the Class IIA Correctional Institution in Bengkulu. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through interviews, observations, documentation, and literature review. The findings show that recidivism is a multidimensional issue influenced by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include economic pressure, mental health conditions, and personal social challenges. External factors involve social stigma, discrimination, and the lack of effective reintegration support after release. The analysis is supported by Robert K. Merton's Strain Theory and Howard Becker's Labelling Theory, which explain how structural pressures and negative societal labeling can reinforce the tendency of former inmates to reoffend. The study concludes that addressing recidivism requires a more comprehensive and holistic rehabilitation approach. It emphasizes the importance of strengthening collaboration between families, communities, and government institutions to create inclusive support systems and sustainable reintegration opportunities for former inmates.*

**Keywords:** *Recidivism; Prisoners; Strain Theory; Labelling Theory; Rehabilitation; Social Reintegration*

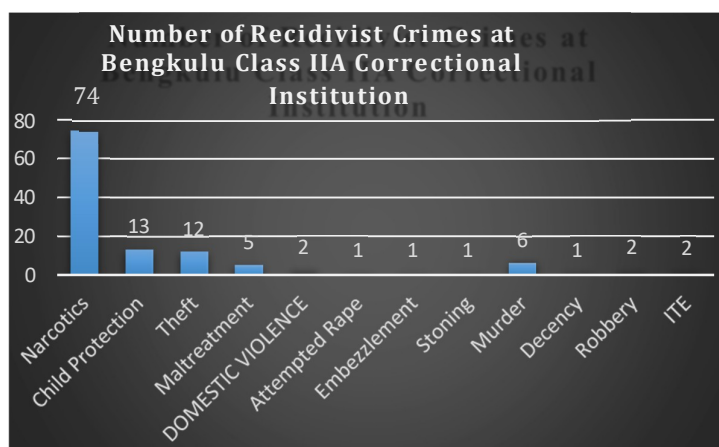
## INTRODUCTION

Recidivism is one of the most serious problems in the criminal justice and correctional system in Indonesia. Recidivism is not only an indicator of the failure of rehabilitation of prisoners, but also shows weaknesses in the coaching system and post-conviction social reintegration. This phenomenon is especially highlighted when it occurs in prisoners of general crimes, such as theft, violence, and child protection, which remains one of the groups with the highest rates of re-offending in Indonesia. This condition shows that the existing correctional system is still not optimal in changing the behavior of prisoners so that they do not return to commit crimes after release.

**Table 1**  
**Data on Criminal Offenses in Indonesia**

No	Type of Crime	Number of Prisoners
1	Narcotics	115.999
2	Child Protection	20.376
3	Theft	20.229
4	Murder	4.862
5	Persecution	3838

According to data from the Correctional Statistics Data Book for the first quarter of 2022, the number of prisoners in narcotics cases reached 115,999 people, followed by child protection offenders as many as 20,376 people, theft as many as 20,229 people, murder as many as 4,862 people, and persecution as many as 3,838 people. This data shows that general crimes such as theft and violence still dominate the prison population in Indonesia. The high rate of recidivism in these types of crimes is an important indicator that confirms the need for serious evaluation of the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs run by correctional institutions.



**Figure 1**  
**Number of Recidivists in Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Center**

One concrete example of this problem can be seen in the Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Institution (Lapas). Based on Register Data as of January 15, 2025, there are 46 people out of a total of 120 prisoners in the prison who are recidivists from General Crimes cases,

including violence against children to information technology-based crimes (ITE). This fact shows that almost 40% of the total inmates in the prison are re-engaged in criminal acts after serving their previous sentences. This is certainly a big question about the effectiveness of the rehabilitation approach that has been applied so far.

Efforts to reduce the recidivism rate have actually been made through strengthening the legal system, as stated in Law Number 22 of 2022 concerning Corrections. This law emphasizes the importance of prisoner development based on respect for human rights and prioritizes the process of social reintegration. In addition, Law No. 1 of 2023 on the new Criminal Code (KUHP) provides space for a more proportional and humane approach to punishment. However, the implementation of these regulations still faces various obstacles, such as limited resources, lack of community participation in the reintegration process, and lack of synergy between correctional institutions and other related agencies.

The problem of recidivism is not only a matter of repeated violations of the law, but also involves complex social, psychological, and structural aspects. Prisoners who have been released are often faced with social stigma, economic difficulties, and lack of family support, all of which are major triggers for returning to the criminal path. Research by Dwiantoro & Subroto (2023) and Kresti et al. (2023) show that recidivism is closely related to failures in psychological and social rehabilitation, as well as the inability of correctional institutions to provide skills and opportunities for a decent life after conviction.

Not only that, the rehabilitation approach that is more administrative than substantive is also the main cause of the failure of the correctional system in carrying out its functions. The study of Thamrin & Lestari (2023) shows that many prisoners only serve formal sentences without any guidance that has a real impact on changes in attitude and behavior. Even the concept of restorative justice, which should be able to provide alternative solutions in case resolution, has not been fully implemented in the context of adult prisoners.

This condition is further exacerbated by the lack of active participation from the community in the social reintegration process. The community tends to ostracize former prisoners, instead of providing support and a second chance. This is in line with the views of Hafiluddin et al. (2021) who state that a holistic and collaborative approach from various parties, including families, communities, and the government, is needed to create a correctional system that is truly capable of changing the behavior of prisoners in a sustainable manner.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

highlighting the high rate of recidivism among prisoners who use drugs. Nitriani et al., (2023) in their research at Singaraja Class IIB Correctional Institution Through a criminological approach and empirical juridical method, this study shows that the repetition of criminal acts cannot be separated from internal factors such as drug dependence and external factors in the form of social environment and weak family support.

Although a counseling program has been implemented, its effectiveness is still considered not optimal in preventing recidivism. This research also emphasizes the importance of a more comprehensive and contextual approach to rehabilitation, including the need for a thorough evaluation of the intervention patterns that have been carried out by correctional institutions.

### **Strain Theory (Robert K. Merton, 1938)**

Strain Theory introduced by Robert K. Merton in 1938 explains that deviant behavior is a result of structural pressures in society. When society strongly emphasizes the achievement of cultural goals such as wealth and success, but does not provide equal access to legal means to achieve them, individuals will experience strain. Under these conditions, individuals who are unable to meet social expectations through legal means tend to seek alternatives, including through deviant behavior such as criminality.

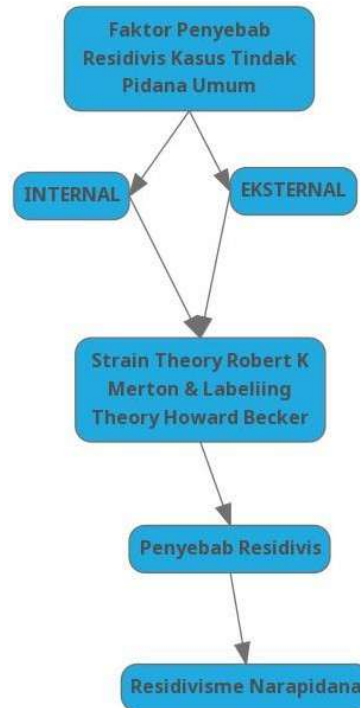
Merton identified five forms of individual adaptation to these social pressures, namely conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion. Innovation adaptation, for example, describes individuals who accept cultural goals but use illegitimate means, such as stealing or committing fraud. In the context of recidivism, this theory helps explain how the economic and social pressures that ex-prisoners face after release can push them back into criminal behavior as a form of adaptation to the limitations they face.

By understanding this theory, it can be concluded that social deviance is not only the result of individual intentions, but also the consequence of an unjust social structure. Therefore, rehabilitation and social reintegration policies for prisoners need to take into account the structural pressures they experience. Providing access to education, employment, and adequate social support after release is an important step in preventing reoffending.

### **Labelling Theory (Howard Becker, 1963)**

Labelling Theory developed by Howard Becker highlights the important role of social labels in shaping individual identity and behavior. In this theory, deviance does not solely stem from the actions of the offender, but from how society responds to and labels the individual. When a person is labeled as a "criminal" or "recidivist", he or she tends to internalize the label, which in turn reinforces the tendency to re-offend. Social labels can arise from formal institutions such as courts and police (formal labelling), as well as from surrounding communities such as family and neighbors (informal labelling).

These labels contribute greatly to the stigma, discrimination and social exclusion of individuals who have served time. These conditions make it difficult for ex-prisoners to adapt, get a job, and rebuild a healthy social life, putting them at risk of returning to a criminal path. In recidivism, Labelling Theory provides an understanding that social stigma and discrimination can exacerbate the condition of ex-prisoners. Therefore, correctional approaches should be restorative and inclusive, emphasizing not only punishment, but also facilitating social acceptance and positive identity restoration for ex-offenders. Removing stigma and providing humane rehabilitation spaces are integral to efforts to prevent recidivism.



Source: Processed by Researcher, 2025

**Figure 2**  
**Framework of Thinking**

This research is based on two main theories in criminal sociology that are used to understand the factors that encourage recidivism in prisoners of General Crimes cases at Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Institution, namely Strain Theory by Robert K. Merton (1938) and Labelling Theory by Howard Becker (1963). These two theories provide a complementary conceptual foundation: Strain Theory explains the structural and social forces that trigger criminal acts, while Labelling Theory highlights how post-conviction social stigma can reinforce the propensity to reoffend. This approach emphasizes that recidivism is not solely the result of individual volition, but is the result of complex social dynamics.

According to Merton, individuals will experience social pressure (strain) when there is an imbalance between culturally recognized goals - such as economic success - and limited access to legitimate means to achieve them. In the context of prisoners, these strains can appear in the form of difficulty finding employment, social discrimination, and economic pressures after their release. When these obstacles cannot be overcome, then deviant adaptations such as returning to crime become alternatives that individuals consider realistic. Therefore, dimensions such as cultural goals, institutionalized means, and adaptive responses to social pressure are key in analyzing criminal reoffending.

Meanwhile, Labelling Theory explains that individuals who have been labeled as "criminals" by the legal system and society will tend to internalize this identity, and eventually get caught in a circle of deviance. Formal labeling from institutions, as well as informal labeling from social environments such as family and community, can lead to social exclusion and loss of opportunities to reintegrate positively. This process creates conditions where ex-prisoners feel they have no choice but to return to a life of

crime. Thus, this framework provides an understanding that the prevention of recidivism requires a comprehensive intervention, both in the form of improving the rehabilitation system and in building a more inclusive and supportive social environment for ex-offenders.

## **METHOD**

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with the aim of understanding in depth the factors driving recidivism in prisoners of General Crimes cases at the Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Institution. This approach was chosen so that researchers can describe the empirical reality regarding the motivation and background of prisoners in repeating criminal acts after serving a previous criminal period.

The focus of the research lies on finding the meaning behind the social experiences of the prisoners, as well as efforts to understand the phenomenon of recidivism in the structural, social, and psychological contexts faced by former prisoners. The data sources in this research are divided into two, namely primary data and secondary data. Primary data was obtained directly through in- depth interviews with four informants consisting of recidivist prisoners and correctional officers, as well as field observations conducted at the Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Facility. Secondary data comes from supporting documents such as policy archives, activity reports, and relevant previous research.

Data collection techniques were conducted through four methods: direct observation, interviews, literature study, and documentation. Observations were conducted four times to get a real picture of field conditions, while in- depth interviews were used to explore informants' perceptions and experiences subjectively. In analyzing the data, researchers used theory triangulation and source triangulation techniques to ensure the validity and reliability of the findings.

The analysis was conducted interactively through a process of data reduction, data presentation, verification, and conclusion drawing. The data was arranged in narrative and matrix form to illustrate patterns of recidivism, and compared with relevant theories such as Strain Theory and Labelling Theory as a basis for interpretation. The end result of this process is expected to provide a comprehensive understanding of the causes of recidivism and contribute to the efforts of coaching and social reintegration of prisoners.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Environmental Conditions and Rehabilitation Programs at Class IIA Correctional Institution Bengkulu**

The observation results show that the physical condition of the Bengkulu Class IIA Prison is generally well maintained. Public facilities such as kitchens, clinics, and sanitation areas are adequate, but some prisoners' residential blocks, especially for narcotics cases, still seem damp and uncomfortable. In the midst of these limitations, the prison seeks to implement two types of coaching programs: personality and independence. Personality coaching includes religious and physical activities aimed at increasing the moral and spiritual awareness of prisoners. Meanwhile, self-reliance coaching is directed at skills training such as agriculture, however the participation of prisoners in this program is still limited.

Low participation is a major issue in the implementation of rehabilitation programs. From the observation results, only about one-eighth of the inmates actively participated in the coaching program. Contributing factors include lack of motivation, low awareness of change and limited resources such as coaches and operational budgets. This condition shows that although the program is available, its implementation is not optimal

and has not reached all prisoners equally.

Family support is an important element in the rehabilitation process, as evidenced by the high frequency of family visits, especially during holidays. Prisoners who receive emotional support tend to show a more cooperative and optimistic attitude in serving their sentence. This finding reinforces that the process of recovery and social reintegration requires an active role from external parties, especially families and the surrounding community.

### **Structural Factors: Economic, Educational, and System Inequality**

In-depth interviews revealed that the majority of prisoners come from poor family backgrounds. Interviewees described stressful economic conditions, where the desire to make their parents happy and make ends meet drove them to commit criminal acts. This economic inequality is closely related to Merton's strain theory, which states that when individuals cannot achieve cultural goals through legitimate means, they will seek alternative paths, including crime.

Low education levels are also a significant barrier. Some prisoners have only graduated from primary school, and do not feel they have sufficient skills to compete in the job market. This adds a layer of social tension, narrows down viable employment options, and increases the risk of reoffending. The inability to access business capital is an additional factor hindering the economic reintegration process of ex-prisoners.

Not only that, many interviewees felt that the legal system favors those with financial power. They assume that individuals with strong economic backgrounds are more likely to get justice. This perception of injustice creates a sense of frustration that leads to the justification of criminal acts. Prisoners also stated that they had never received any assistance or reintegration programs from the government post-release, so they felt abandoned and had to struggle to survive on their own.

### **Social Factors: Stigma, Labeling, and its Impact**

Social stigma towards ex-prisoners is one of the most prominent findings in this study. Society tends to label them negatively, even after they have expressed their intention to change. Becker's labelling theory concept explains that this labeling does not only come from the legal system, but also from the immediate environment such as family and society. The label "ex-convict" carries significant psychological and social consequences, making it difficult for them to get a job, access education, or social acceptance.

The impact of this labeling comes in the form of job discrimination, community cynicism, excessive surveillance, and loss of good name. A number of interviewees said that they felt that they were always being watched, as if they were not truly free. Cynical views are even stronger towards prisoners of certain cases, such as child offenses, which are considered disgusting by society. Such labels create social isolation that hinders the reintegration process and decreases motivation to change.

Furthermore, social stigma also has an impact on mental health. Many interviewees felt depressed, disappointed and unappreciated. These feelings are at the root of a self-fulfilling prophecy, where ex-prisoners end up re-offending because they feel there are no legitimate life options. Without a change in society's perspective, the cycle of criminality will continue to repeat itself, as individuals are not given a second chance to improve their lives.

### **Interpersonal Factors: Social Environment and Peer Influence**

Social environment and peer influence are crucial factors in the criminalization process

of individuals. Most of the inmates stated that their involvement in criminal offenses originated from negative peer influences. In such social groups, the pressure to go with the flow is often stronger than individual moral judgment. Group solidarity can encourage individuals to follow deviant actions in order to maintain social ties.

Daily discussions in social settings, which may seem lighthearted such as topics about women, have a significant impact on the mindset of prisoners. The lack of role models in their environment further increases the risk of deviance. Upon release from prison, many prisoners lose old friends and have difficulty building new social networks due to stigma and distrust.

The reintegration process requires a supportive social environment. One interviewee stated that society should embrace ex-prisoners, not shun them. This is in line with the recommendations of labelling theory, which is the importance of removing negative labels and creating social spaces that enable positive change. Without environmental support, individuals will continue to feel alienated, which ultimately leads them to return to old patterns of life.

### **Theoretical Reflections and Policy Implications**

The findings in this study support the arguments of Strain Theory and Labelling Theory as the two main conceptual frameworks for understanding recidivism. Strain Theory explains the structural roots of criminality, while Labelling Theory shows how society shapes a person's criminal identity. These two theories complement each other in explaining that recidivism is not just an individual problem, but also the result of systemic pressure and social exclusion.

From a policy perspective, these findings point to the urgency of improving the quality and reach of rehabilitation and post-rehabilitation programs. Skills training programs, access to business capital, and psychological counseling need to be expanded to reach more prisoners. In addition, the government needs to build a social support system for ex-prisoners that includes legal protection against employment discrimination and strengthening the role of families in the reintegration process.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND SUGGESTIONS**

Based on the results of research that has been conducted at the Bengkulu Class IIA Penitentiary, this study shows that recidivism in prisoners of General Crimes cases at the Bengkulu Class IIA Penitentiary is a complex and multidimensional phenomenon. The driving factors of recidivism involve internal pressures such as social tension, poverty, and psychological pressure, as well as external factors such as social stigma, discrimination, and lack of support in the social reintegration process.

Existing rehabilitation programs in prisons have not been able to provide a comprehensive response to the psychosocial needs of prisoners, due to limited facilities, human resources, and a less holistic approach. These findings confirm the relevance of Strain Theory and Labelling Theory in explaining the process of criminal recidivism that occurs after prisoners have served their sentences. To reduce the recidivism rate, it is necessary to reformulate the prisoner rehabilitation program with a more holistic and integrated approach.

The coaching program should include not only job skills training, but also psychological counseling, social capacity strengthening, and life skills learning. In addition, it is important for correctional institutions to involve officers who are competent in the field of social counseling and guidance. These efforts need to be collaborated with cross-sectoral support from local governments, non-governmental

organizations and local communities to build a strong social reintegration network. With this approach, ex-prisoners have a greater chance of being accepted back into society and building a better life without returning to criminality.

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