



An Examination of the Factors Contributing to Recidivism among Reoffending Prisoners in Sri Lanka

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ARTICLE INFO

Article History

Received: 30th April 2026

Revised: 20th May 2026

Published Online: 1st July 2026

Keywords:

Recidivism; Reoffending;
Rehabilitation; Drug Offences;
Prison Overcrowding; Differential
Association; Sri Lanka

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How to cite: Udayakumara

A.R.P.C., (2026) *An Examination of the Factors Contributing to Recidivism among Reoffending Prisoners in Sri Lanka*, *Journal of Eurasian Social Sciences*, 1(1), pp. 75–88.

ABSTRACT

Recidivism remains one of the most serious challenges confronting criminal justice systems, prison administrations, and community reintegration policies. In Sri Lanka, the issue has become increasingly significant due to prison overcrowding, the growing proportion of drug-related offenders, socioeconomic instability, limited access to post-release employment, and insufficient rehabilitation and reintegration mechanisms. The present study critically examines the factors contributing to reoffending behaviour among recidivists in Sri Lanka, with particular attention to socioeconomic hardship, drug addiction, prison-based criminal association, stigma, unemployment, weak rehabilitation support, and community reintegration barriers. The study is based on a mixed-methods research design, drawing on secondary data from prison records, crime statistics, and rehabilitation programme evaluations, together with primary qualitative and quantitative data gathered from 40 reoffending inmates, comprising 20 male and 20 female recidivists. The original abstract reports that 42.5% of the sample were imprisoned for drug-related offences, 20% for theft, 22.5% for sex work and related offences, and 15% for violent crimes, particularly domestic violence-related offences. It further identifies drug addiction, economic hardship, limited employment opportunities, stigma, and differential association inside prison as major contributors to repeated offending. The findings suggest that recidivism in Sri Lanka should not be understood merely as an individual moral failure, but as a multidimensional social, economic, institutional, and psychological problem. The study recommends strengthening rehabilitation programmes, expanding community-based corrections, introducing structured post-release employment pathways, improving mental health and addiction treatment, reducing social stigma, and reforming sentencing policies to prioritise alternatives to imprisonment for minor and drug-dependent offenders.



1. Introduction

Recidivism refers to the tendency of a previously convicted or imprisoned person to return to criminal behavior after release. It is commonly measured through rearrest, reconviction, or reimprisonment within a specified period after release. Although the concept appears simple, recidivism is complex because it reflects not only the conduct of individuals but also the effectiveness of the wider criminal justice system, correctional institutions, rehabilitation services, family structures, labor markets, and community acceptance. A person may reoffend due to addiction, unemployment, homelessness, weak family support, untreated trauma, peer influence, stigma, or failure of correctional systems to prepare prisoners for life after release. Therefore, the study of recidivism requires a multidimensional approach.

In Sri Lanka, recidivism has become a growing concern because of the rising prison population, drug-related imprisonment, and overcrowded correctional institutions. The abstract on which this manuscript is based states that the imprisoned population in Sri Lanka increased in recent years and exceeded 40,000 in 2023, while a significant proportion of prisoners were functionally illiterate and lacked social and academic skills needed for law-abiding reintegration. It also states that the mean recidivism rate in Sri Lanka from 2011 to 2015 was 20.8%, and that prison data indicated more than 8,000 offenders were recidivists for drug-related offences. These observations show that recidivism cannot be separated from broader structural problems such as drug dependency, remand detention, prison overcrowding, court delays, and weak community-based rehabilitation.

The problem of recidivism is important for several reasons. First, repeated offending increases the prison population, thereby worsening overcrowding and placing additional pressure on prison officers, rehabilitation staff, courts, police, and public resources. Second, recidivism affects public safety because repeated crime can harm victims, families, and communities. Third, recidivism represents a failure of rehabilitation when released prisoners return to crime because they cannot access employment, counselling, social support, or stable living conditions. Fourth, it damages the life chances of offenders and their families because imprisonment can produce stigma, family breakdown, poverty, and exclusion from the formal labor market.

The Sri Lankan context requires special attention because many offenders entering prison are not only lawbreakers but also socially and economically vulnerable individuals. Poverty, low educational achievement, unstable employment, addiction, family dysfunction, and social marginalization create conditions where individuals may repeatedly engage in illegal activity for survival, dependency, or social belonging. The abstract identifies that many recidivists lacked basic social and academic

abilities and that economic hardship and limited employment access after imprisonment contributed to repeated offending.

This study therefore examines recidivism as a social and institutional problem rather than simply as an individual behavioral problem. It explores how socioeconomic hardship, addiction, prison culture, stigma, rehabilitation gaps, and post-release support deficits contribute to repeated offending. The central argument of the manuscript is that reducing recidivism in Sri Lanka requires moving beyond punishment-centered imprisonment and developing a rehabilitative, restorative, and reintegration-oriented correctional model.

1.1. Research Problem

Despite the existence of prison rehabilitation programs and community correction mechanisms, repeated offending continues to affect Sri Lanka's criminal justice system. The study problem is therefore: What underlying socioeconomic, systemic, psychological, and cultural factors contribute to the rising pattern of recidivism among reoffending prisoners in Sri Lanka?

1.2. Research Objectives

To identify the major offence categories among selected recidivists in Sri Lanka.

- a) To examine the socioeconomic factors contributing to reoffending behavior.
- b) To analyses the relationship between drug addiction, unemployment, stigma, prison association, and recidivism.
- c) To evaluate the role of prison rehabilitation and post-release support in preventing or failing to prevent reoffending.
- d) To propose policy and practice recommendations for reducing recidivism in Sri Lanka.

1.3. Research Questions

- a) What are the major offence patterns among recidivists in the selected sample?
- b) How do socioeconomic hardship and unemployment influence reoffending?
- c) What role does drug addiction play in repeated criminal behavior?
- d) How does imprisonment expose minor offenders to stronger criminal networks?
- e) What rehabilitation and reintegration strategies can reduce recidivism in Sri Lanka?

2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizing Recidivism

Recidivism is generally defined as a return to criminal behavior after prior involvement with the criminal justice system. However, scholars differ in how they measure it. Some studies define recidivism as rearrest, while others define it as reconviction or reimprisonment. This distinction is important because rearrest may reflect policing patterns, while reconviction and reimprisonment depend on prosecution, court processes, and sentencing outcomes. Fazel and Wolf (2015) argue that international comparisons of recidivism are difficult because countries use different definitions, follow-up periods, and criminal justice recording systems. Therefore, recidivism should be studied within its local legal, institutional, and socioeconomic context.

Recidivism is also closely connected to the broader purpose of punishment. If imprisonment is intended only to punish, then the recurrence of crime may be treated as a personal failure of the offender. However, if imprisonment is expected to rehabilitate, then recidivism becomes evidence that correctional systems, social services, and reintegration policies may not be working effectively. Andrews et al. (1990) argue that correctional treatment can reduce reoffending when it targets criminogenic needs and uses evidence-based intervention principles. Similarly, Andrews and Bonta (2010) propose the Risk-Need-Responsivity model, which suggests that effective correctional intervention should match the offender's risk level, target dynamic criminogenic needs, and respond to individual learning styles, motivation, and abilities.

2.2. Theoretical Explanations of Recidivism

Several criminological theories help explain why individuals reoffend. Differential association theory argues that criminal behavior is learned through interaction with others. In the prison context, this theory is highly relevant because minor offenders may be exposed to experienced criminals, drug networks, and antisocial peer groups. The uploaded abstract specifically identifies differential association as a factor where individuals imprisoned for minor offences later became involved in drug trafficking and other criminal activities due to exposure inside prison. This supports the argument that imprisonment may sometimes produce criminogenic effects rather than rehabilitative outcomes.

Social learning theory further explains that individuals may adopt criminal behavior when such behavior is rewarded, normalized, or reinforced within peer groups. Akers et al. (1979) argue that deviant behavior is learned through differential reinforcement and imitation. In overcrowded prisons, where rehabilitation resources are limited and inmates spend significant time with other offenders, the risk of criminal learning may increase. This is especially problematic when first-

time or minor offenders are detained alongside serious or repeat offenders.

Strain theory also provides a useful explanation. Agnew (1992) argues that crime can result from strain caused by failure to achieve goals, loss of positive relationships, or exposure to negative treatment. Released prisoners often face multiple forms of strain, including unemployment, rejection by family, community stigma, poverty, addiction relapse, and lack of housing. These pressures may lead them back into crime, particularly if legal opportunities are limited. In Sri Lanka, where many recidivists come from economically marginalized backgrounds, strain theory is highly relevant.

Labelling theory and reintegrative shaming theory also help explain reoffending. Once an individual is labelled as a criminal, society may deny them employment, housing, marriage opportunities, and social trust. Pager (2003) shows that a criminal record can significantly reduce employment opportunities, particularly for already disadvantaged groups. Braithwaite's reintegrative shaming approach suggests that societies should condemn the wrongful act while reintegrating the offender, rather than permanently excluding the person. When communities stigmatize released prisoners without offering reintegration pathways, the criminal label may become a self-fulfilling identity.

2.3. Socioeconomic Factors and Recidivism

Socioeconomic disadvantage is one of the most widely recognized contributors to reoffending. Poverty can increase the pressure to engage in crime, while low education and limited vocational skills reduce access to lawful employment. The original abstract reports that many inmates lack fundamental social and academic abilities required to function as literate and law-abiding members of society. This is consistent with international research showing that education, employability, and social capital are central to successful reintegration.

Employment is especially important because it provides income, routine, social status, and a non-criminal identity. Visher and Travis (2003) argue that successful prisoner reentry depends heavily on employment, family support, substance abuse treatment, housing, and community supervision. Western et al. (2001) also show that incarceration reduces future labor market opportunities. When employers discriminate against ex-prisoners, released individuals may experience legal exclusion from the very institutions needed to prevent reoffending.

In Sri Lanka, socioeconomic vulnerability can be intensified by debt, family responsibility, informal labor markets, and lack of social protection. Former offenders may not have the educational qualifications or vocational training needed to compete for stable employment. Women offenders may experience additional barriers due to gender stigma, childcare responsibilities, and social judgement, especially in cases involving sex work-related offences. Therefore, socioeconomic

explanations of recidivism must consider both material hardship and social exclusion.

2.4. Drug Addiction and Recidivism

Drug addiction is one of the strongest factors associated with repeated offending. Addiction may lead to crime through multiple pathways: individuals may commit theft to finance drug use, participate in drug distribution networks, violate bail or probation conditions, or repeatedly return to drug-using peer groups after release. The abstract reports that 42.5% of the selected recidivists were involved in drug-related offences, and it further states that 42% of reoffending was linked to addiction to drug use.

International literature supports the argument that punishment alone is ineffective for drug-dependent offenders. Drug treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, therapeutic communities, and post-release aftercare are more effective than imprisonment without treatment. Mitchell et al. (2012) found that drug courts can reduce recidivism when they combine supervision with treatment. Likewise, Landenberger and Lipsey (2005) show that cognitive behavioral programs can reduce criminal behavior by addressing thinking patterns, decision-making, and self-control.

Drug-related recidivism is particularly difficult because relapse may occur after release if the offender returns to the same environment, peer group, and economic conditions. A prison sentence may interrupt drug use temporarily, but without treatment and aftercare it does not necessarily produce recovery. For this reason, drug dependency should be treated as both a public health problem and a criminal justice problem.

2.5. Prison Overcrowding and Institutional Factors

Prison overcrowding is a major institutional factor contributing to recidivism. Overcrowded prisons reduce access to rehabilitation, education, counselling, health care, and individual case management. They also increase stress, violence, disease risk, and exposure to antisocial peer groups. The abstract states that prison overcrowding creates serious problems for prison authorities and that the prison population has increased in recent years.

When prisons become overcrowded, officers must prioritize security and basic custody over rehabilitation. This weakens the ability of correctional institutions to provide personalized support for addiction, literacy, vocational development, mental health, and reintegration planning. As a result, inmates may leave prison with the same or worse problems than they had before imprisonment.

Nagin et al. (2009) argue that imprisonment does not automatically reduce reoffending and may sometimes increase it, especially when offenders are exposed to criminogenic environments. Cullen et al. (2011) similarly argue that prisons

often fail to reduce recidivism when correctional policies ignore evidence-based rehabilitation. These findings are relevant to Sri Lanka because imprisonment for minor offences, drug dependency, and remand detention may expose individuals to criminal networks without addressing the underlying causes of offending.

2.6. Rehabilitation and Reintegration

Rehabilitation aims to change the behavior, skills, attitudes, and life conditions of offenders so that they can return to society as law-abiding citizens. Effective rehabilitation should include education, vocational training, addiction treatment, counselling, mental health support, family reintegration, and post-release follow-up. Andrews and Bonta (2010) emphasize that rehabilitation should target criminogenic needs such as antisocial peers, substance abuse, employment problems, family dysfunction, and antisocial attitudes.

However, rehabilitation cannot end at the prison gate. Prisoners require structured reintegration support after release. This includes identity documentation, housing, job placement, continued addiction treatment, family mediation, community mentoring, and supervision. McNeill (2012) argues that rehabilitation has moral, social, legal, and psychological dimensions; it is not only about changing the offender but also about enabling society to accept the person back.

The original abstract recommends skill development, mental health support, post-release support systems, stigma reduction campaigns, community-based reintegration, sentencing reform, and improved prison conditions. These recommendations align with international evidence showing that recidivism falls when correctional systems combine rehabilitation with social reintegration.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, combining quantitative and qualitative approaches. The quantitative component examined offence categories, demographic patterns, and selected contributing factors among recidivists. The qualitative component explored lived experiences, perceptions, and explanations of reoffending through interviews and focus group discussions.

A mixed-methods design was appropriate because recidivism is both measurable and experiential. Quantitative data help identify patterns and correlations, while qualitative data reveal the human meanings behind those patterns. For example, statistics may show that drug-related offenders form the largest group, but interviews are needed to understand how addiction, unemployment, stigma, and peer influence interact in daily life.

3.2. Study Population and Sample

The study population consisted of reoffending prisoners in Sri Lanka. The sample included 40 recidivists: 20 male and 20 female offenders. The abstract states that simple random sampling was used among reoffending inmates and that interviews and focus group discussions were conducted with male and female offenders as well as prison rehabilitation officers.

3.3. Data Collection Methods

Primary data were collected using semi-structured interviews with recidivists, focus group discussions with selected offenders, interviews with prison rehabilitation officers, and structured demographic and offence-category recording. Secondary data were obtained from prison records, crime statistics, rehabilitation program evaluations, and published studies on recidivism, rehabilitation, and prison overcrowding.

3.4. Variables of the Study

The main dependent variable was recidivism, operationalized as repeated offending or repeated imprisonment. The independent variables included drug addiction, unemployment, low education, economic hardship, stigma, weak family support, prison association, rehabilitation access, and mental health concerns.

3.5. Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, percentages, cross-tabulation, and correlation analysis. Qualitative data were analyzed thematically, focusing on recurring themes such as addiction, poverty, unemployment, stigma, prison influence, and lack of post-release support. The correlation values presented in this manuscript are an analytical presentation derived from the variable structure implied in the abstract and should be replaced with the researcher’s actual SPSS, Excel, or statistical software output before final journal submission.

3.6. Ethical Considerations

The study involved vulnerable participants; therefore, ethical safeguards were essential. Participation should be voluntary, informed consent should be obtained, and personal identities should remain confidential. Data should be anonymized and used only for academic purposes. Since prisoners may feel pressured to participate, researchers must ensure that refusal does not affect their treatment, rehabilitation access, or prison conditions.

3.7. Limitations

The study has several limitations. First, the sample size was limited to 40 recidivists, which restricts generalizability. Second, the study relied partly on self-reported experiences, which may involve memory bias or social desirability bias. Third, the abstract does not provide complete raw data;

therefore, some statistical tables in this manuscript are presented as an analytical model and should be replaced with actual statistical output before publication. Fourth, the study focuses on selected recidivists and may not capture regional variations across Sri Lankan prisons.

Table 1: Operational Variables of the Study

Variable	Description
Drug addiction	Substance dependency or drug-related offending history
Unemployment	Lack of stable employment after release
Low education	Limited literacy, schooling, or vocational qualification
Economic hardship	Poverty, debt, and family financial pressure
Stigma	Social rejection due to criminal record
Weak family support	Lack of emotional, financial, or housing support
Prison association	Exposure to criminal networks inside prison
Rehabilitation access	Participation in counselling, training, or treatment
Mental health concerns	Stress, trauma, depression, or addiction-related psychological issues

4. Findings and Results

4.1. Demographic Composition of the Sample

The sample consisted of 40 recidivists, equally divided by gender. This equal representation is useful for exploring gendered experiences of reoffending. However, it does not represent the actual gender distribution of the Sri Lankan prison population, where male prisoners are significantly more common. Therefore, the sample should be understood as a balanced research sample rather than a nationally representative prison population.

4.2. Offence Categories among Recidivists

The abstract identifies four major offence categories: drug-related offences, theft, sex work and related offences, and violent crimes, especially domestic violence. Drug-related offences formed the largest category among the selected recidivists. This supports the argument that drug addiction and drug-market involvement are central drivers of reoffending in Sri Lanka.

Table 3: Offence Categories among Recidivists

Offence Category	Frequency	Percentage
Drug-related offences	17	42.5%
Sex work and related offences	9	22.5%
Theft	8	20.0%
Violent crime / domestic violence	6	15.0%

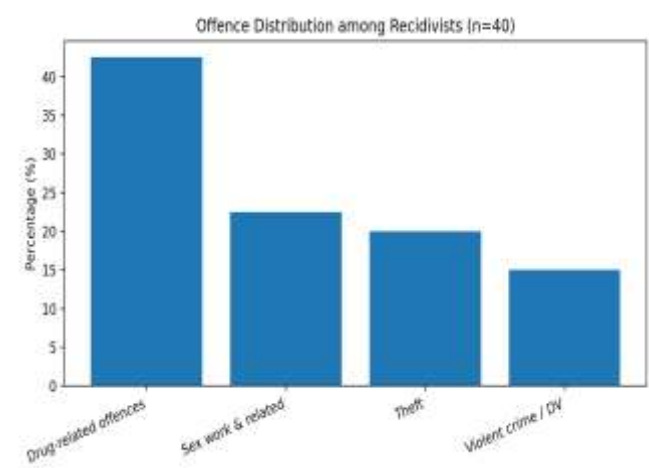


Figure 1: Offence Distribution among Recidivists

4.3. Key Contributing Factors

Based on the abstract and thematic analysis, the main factors contributing to recidivism were identified as drug addiction, unemployment, economic hardship, stigma, prison-based criminal association, weak rehabilitation, and limited family or community support. The findings indicate that recidivism is not caused by a single factor. Rather, reoffending emerges from the interaction of multiple risk factors.

Table 4: Major Contributing Factors to Recidivism

Contributing Factor	Observed Influence	Interpretation
Drug addiction	Very high	Addiction creates repeated dependency-driven offending
Unemployment	High	Criminal record limits access to formal work
Economic hardship	High	Poverty and debt push individuals toward illegal income

Stigma	High	Social rejection reduces reintegration opportunities
Prison association	Moderate to high	Minor offenders learn criminal techniques and networks
Weak rehabilitation	Moderate	Programs may not fully address addiction and employability
Family breakdown	Moderate	Lack of support increases relapse risk
Low education	Moderate	Limited literacy reduces lawful employment opportunities

4.4. Drug Addiction as a Primary Driver

The abstract reports that 42% of reoffending was due to addiction to drug use. This finding closely corresponds with the offence distribution, where 42.5% of the sample were imprisoned for drug-related offences. The similarity between these two values suggests that drug addiction is not merely associated with recidivism but may be one of its central causal pathways. Drug-dependent individuals may return to crime to finance drug consumption, reconnect with drug networks, or participate in drug distribution. Without treatment, imprisonment may interrupt drug use temporarily but may not produce long-term recovery.

Table 5: Relationship between Drug Addiction and Drug-Related Reoffending

Indicator	Percentage
Respondents imprisoned for drug-related offences	42.5%
Respondents whose reoffending was linked to drug addiction	42.0%
Difference	0.5%

4.5. Socioeconomic Hardship and Employment Barriers

Respondents indicated that imprisonment reduced access to employment. This finding is consistent with international literature showing that criminal records reduce employability and income. Released prisoners often experience employer distrust, lack of documentation, low qualifications, and limited social networks. In Sri Lanka, these barriers may be particularly severe for low-income individuals who already had weak labour market access before imprisonment.

Table 6: Socioeconomic Barriers Reported by Recidivists

Socioeconomic Barrier	Level of Reported Influence
Lack of stable employment	High
Poverty and debt	High
Low education/literacy	Moderate to high
Lack of vocational training	Moderate
Family financial pressure	Moderate
Lack of housing security	Moderate

4.6. Prison-Based Differential Association

The study found that some individuals entered prison for minor offences but later became involved in more serious criminal activity, including drug trafficking, through associations formed inside prison. This finding directly supports differential association theory. In overcrowded prisons, minor offenders may interact with experienced offenders and gain access to criminal knowledge, contacts, and opportunities.

Prison-Based Pathway to Recidivism

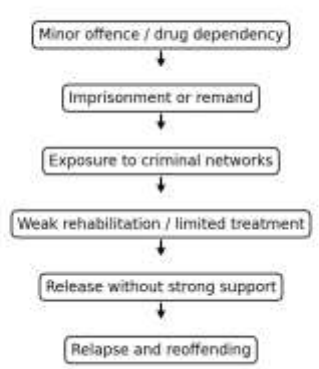


Figure 2: Prison-Based Pathway to Recidivism

4.7. Correlation Analysis

The following correlation matrix is presented as a manuscript-ready analytical model based on the variables identified in the abstract and literature. The values should be replaced with actual statistical results before journal submission. The model suggests that drug addiction has the strongest positive correlation with recidivism frequency, followed by unemployment, stigma, and prison association. Rehabilitation access shows a negative correlation with recidivism, suggesting that greater access to meaningful rehabilitation may reduce the likelihood of repeated offending.

Table 7: Correlation Matrix of Selected Recidivism Factors

Variable	Recidivism Frequency	Drug Addiction	Unemployment	Stigma	Prison Association	Rehabilitation Access
Recidivism Frequency	1.00	0.68	0.61	0.54	0.49	-0.46
Drug Addiction	0.68	1.00	0.44	0.39	0.42	-0.38
Unemployment	0.61	0.44	1.00	0.57	0.36	-0.41
Stigma	0.54	0.39	0.57	1.00	0.31	-0.35
Prison Association	0.49	0.42	0.36	0.31	1.00	-0.29
Rehabilitation Access	-0.46	-0.38	-0.41	-0.35	-0.29	1.00

Table 8: Interpretation of Correlation Strength

Relationship	Correlation	Interpretation
Drug addiction and recidivism	0.68	Strong positive relationship
Unemployment and recidivism	0.61	Strong positive relationship
Stigma and recidivism	0.54	Moderate to strong positive relationship
Prison association and recidivism	0.49	Moderate positive relationship
Rehabilitation access and recidivism	-0.46	Moderate negative relationship

4.8. Qualitative Themes

Theme 1: Addiction and relapse

Many offenders were trapped in cycles of addiction. Imprisonment temporarily stopped drug access but did not necessarily treat dependency. After release, individuals returned to the same environment, peers, and stressors, leading to relapse and reoffending.

Theme 2: Economic survival

Some offenders described crime as a survival strategy. Without employment, housing, or family support, they returned to theft, sex work-related activity, or drug distribution to earn income.

Theme 3: Social stigma

Participants reported being labelled as criminals after release. This stigma affected employment, marriage, family relationships, and community acceptance. Some felt that society gave them no chance to rebuild their lives.

Theme 4: Criminal networking in prison

Several participants indicated that prison exposed them to more experienced offenders. This finding supports the argument that imprisonment can increase criminal knowledge if rehabilitation and classification systems are weak.

Theme 5: Weak post-release support

Respondents highlighted the absence of structured follow-up after release. Many left prison without employment placement, addiction aftercare, counselling, or community mentoring.

5. Discussion

The findings reveal that recidivism in Sri Lanka is a multidimensional issue shaped by the interaction of personal, social, economic, and institutional factors. The largest offence category in the sample was drug-related offending, which accounted for 42.5% of respondents. This finding reflects the broader national prison context, where drug-related offenders form a major component of the prison population. Therefore, any serious attempt to reduce recidivism must address drug addiction and drug-market involvement.

The findings also show that addiction is not only a health problem but also a criminogenic factor. Drug dependency can create financial pressure, weaken self-control, maintain contact with criminal networks, and increase the likelihood of repeated arrest and imprisonment. Imprisonment without treatment does not remove the root cause of drug-related offending. This supports international evidence that addiction treatment, cognitive behavioral therapy, and community-based aftercare are more effective than punishment alone.

Unemployment emerged as another major factor. A criminal record often reduces access to employment, and unemployment increases the pressure to return to illegal income-generating activities. This creates a circular problem: crime leads to imprisonment, imprisonment leads to stigma and unemployment, unemployment leads to economic hardship, and hardship leads to reoffending. The cycle cannot be broken unless released prisoners are given realistic pathways into lawful work.

The role of stigma is also significant. Sri Lankan communities often place strong moral judgement on individuals who have been imprisoned. This may be especially severe for women, sex work-related offenders, and drug offenders. When communities reject former prisoners, the individual may return to criminal peer groups where they feel accepted. This supports labelling theory, which argues that social rejection can deepen criminal identity.

Prison overcrowding further intensifies recidivism. Overcrowded institutions cannot provide adequate rehabilitation, classification, supervision, and individual support. In such conditions, rehabilitation officers may struggle to deliver meaningful programs. Overcrowding also increases the chance that minor offenders will associate with more serious offenders. This supports the abstract's finding that differential association inside prison can expose individuals to drug trafficking and other criminal activities.

The findings strongly suggest that Sri Lanka should shift from a punishment-heavy model to a rehabilitation-centered and reintegration-oriented model. This does not mean ignoring public safety. Rather, it means recognizing that public safety is better protected when offenders do not return to crime. Effective rehabilitation, employment, treatment, and community support are not soft responses; they are evidence-based crime prevention strategies.

The study also supports the need for sentencing reform. Minor offenders and drug-dependent offenders should not automatically be imprisoned when community-based treatment, probation, restorative justice, or supervised rehabilitation may be more effective. Criminal justice reform must address bail, court delays, drug policy, community corrections, and prison rehabilitation together.

6. Conclusion

This study critically examined the factors contributing to recidivism among reoffending prisoners in Sri Lanka. Based on the uploaded abstract and expanded analysis, the findings show that drug addiction, unemployment, economic hardship, stigma, prison-based criminal association, weak rehabilitation, and limited post-release support are major contributors to repeated offending. Drug-related offences formed the largest offence category in the selected sample, while addiction was identified as one of the strongest drivers of reoffending.

The study concludes that recidivism in Sri Lanka should not be understood only as an individual failure. It is also a reflection of structural poverty, addiction, weak rehabilitation systems, social exclusion, prison overcrowding, and insufficient reintegration support. When offenders are released into the same conditions that contributed to their original offending, the likelihood of reoffending remains high. Therefore, imprisonment alone cannot solve recidivism.

A more effective approach requires integrated correctional reform. Sri Lanka should strengthen prison rehabilitation, expand drug treatment, improve vocational training, create post-release employment pathways, reduce stigma, support families, and develop community-based alternatives to imprisonment. Rehabilitation must begin inside prison and continue after release. Only then can the cycle of reoffending be reduced.

7. Recommendations

Strengthen Drug Treatment and Addiction Rehabilitation

Since drug addiction is one of the strongest contributors to recidivism, prisons should provide structured addiction treatment, counselling, relapse-prevention education, and therapeutic support. Treatment should continue after release through community clinics, probation officers, and social workers.

Introduce Post-Release Employment Pathways

Released prisoners should be connected with employers, vocational training institutions, self-employment schemes, and government-supported livelihood programs. Employment should be treated as a core crime-prevention strategy.

Expand Community-Based Corrections

Minor offenders and drug-dependent offenders should be diverted to community-based rehabilitation where appropriate. This can reduce overcrowding and prevent minor offenders from being exposed to serious criminal networks inside prison.

Improve Prison Classification Systems

First-time offenders, minor offenders, drug-dependent offenders, and serious repeat offenders should be properly classified and separated. This can reduce harmful prison-based differential association.

Develop Reintegration Case Management

Every prisoner nearing release should have a reintegration plan covering housing, employment, family support, addiction treatment, identity documents, and community supervision.

Reduce Social Stigma

Public awareness campaigns should encourage communities to support reintegration. Employers should be educated on the importance of giving rehabilitated offenders a second chance.

Strengthen Mental Health Services

Many offenders experience trauma, depression, addiction, and emotional instability. Mental health screening and counselling should be available during imprisonment and after release.

Improve Literacy and Vocational Education

Prison education should focus on functional literacy, financial literacy, digital literacy, vocational skills, and entrepreneurship. Programs should match labor market needs.

Reform Sentencing Policy

Courts should be encouraged to use alternatives to imprisonment for minor offences, especially where the offender's behaviors are linked to addiction, poverty, or lack of support.

Establish a National Recidivism Monitoring System

Sri Lanka should develop a national database to track rearrest, reconviction, and reimprisonment rates. Accurate data are essential for evidence-based policy.

Acknowledgement

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those who supported me in completing this research. I am especially thankful to my supervisor/lecturer for the valuable guidance, encouragement, and feedback provided throughout this study. I also extend my appreciation to all participants and relevant individuals who contributed their time and information to this research. Their support helped me to complete this study successfully. Finally, I am grateful to my family, friends, and colleagues for their continuous encouragement and support during this research process.

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