



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***CAPITAL, EMPOWERMENT AND HOPE IN REDUCING RISKS FOR  
RECIDIVISM AMONGST WOMEN OFFENDERS IN  
SUNGAI UDANG PRISON, MALAYSIA***

**SITI MUHAZA SHEIKH ZAINAL**

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By

**SITI MUHAZA BT. SHEIKH ZAINAL**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**July 2015**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**July 2015**

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Recidivism amongst women offenders in Malaysia is slowly increasing each year. This marked a need to grow concerned about the profound impact the problem has on the women themselves, family, and their children and even to the community at large. This problem occurs because traditionally efforts to reduce recidivism derived mainly from using the problems and needs approach in the women offender rehabilitation programs. The top-bottom method was also very much used in constructing the type of rehabilitation for women offenders' community in the prison. The objective of this study is to discover the strengths of women offenders' community typically in Sungai Udang Prison in order to ascertain the capabilities they possess in determining their own goal to reduce their risks for recidivism. This research uses mixed method approach where quantitative findings are connected into the analysis of qualitative studies. Research instruments used were sets of questionnaires including a translated version of the Roberts Empowerment Scale and the Herth Hope Index. A total of 40 respondents of Sungai Udang Prison is selected through using non-probable purposive and maximum variation sampling technique. The respondents are Malaysians with varied ages, race or ethnics and types of offenses. Out of 34 respondents who are involved in the qualitative round, in depth interview is performed to 13 randomly selected respondents. This study also employs data triangulation that involves 8 community leaders. Quantitative results showed that besides having social capital and human capital during stay in prison, women offenders' community also possess a high level of empowerment and hope in life. These are the capitals that motivate women offenders' community to achieve risks for recidivism. Using Mayring's Content Analysis, psychological empowerments emerge as another important capital the women offenders' community own. By means of empowerment process that utilizes all the strengths discovered, women offenders' community is found to be able to plan perceptively about the strategies they will use to reduce their risks for recidivism during post release. These strategies or empowerment goals are the "Fast Track to Target", "Listen and I Will Be Listened To", "Trading Shame for Guts", "Give and I Will Get Back", "If I Cannot Join, I'll Leave Them" and "Please Help

Me I'm Falling". Discussions about the link between capitals, empowerment and hope in the context of psychological empowerment were also set forth.



Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk Ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**KAPITAL, PENDAYAUPAYAAN, HARAPAN DAN RISIKO TERHADAP  
RESIDIVISM DALAM KALANGAN BANDUANITA DI  
PENJARA SUNGAI UDANG, MALAYSIA**

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**SITI MUHAZA BT. SHEIKH ZAINAL**

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Masalah residivism dalam kalangan banduanita secara perlahan semakin meningkat setiap tahun. Keadaan ini menandakan perhatian lebih besar diperlukan memandangkan masalah ini memberi kesan yang serius kepada wanita itu sendiri, keluarga serta anak-anaknya serta juga kepada masyarakat keseluruhan. Masalah ini timbul khususnya daripada usaha-usaha mengurangkan residivism berasaskan pendekatan 'menangani masalah berdasarkan keperluan' dalam program-program rehabilitasi banduanita. Pendekatan 'dari atas ke bawah' juga banyak diguna pakai dalam membentuk program-program rehabilitasi bagi komuniti wanita di dalam penjara. Objektif kajian ini adalah untuk mengenal pasti kekuatan wanita khususnya yang berada di Penjara Sungai Udag bagi memastikan kemampuan yang ada dalam diri dalam menentukan matlamat hidup mereka untuk mengurangkan risiko residivism. Kajian ini menggunakan pendekatan yang menggabungkan kedua-dua kaedah kuantitatif dengan kualitatif iaitu di mana hasil dari kajian kuantitatif disatukan dalam peringkat analisa kajian kualitatif. Alat kajian yang digunakan merupakan beberapa set soal selidik termasuklah Skala Pendayaupayaan Roberts dan Indeks Harapan Herth yang telah diterjemahkan ke dalam Bahasa Melayu. Seramai 40 orang responden dipilih menerusi teknik persampelan bukan kebarangkalian dan teknik variasi pelbagai. Responden kajian merupakan banduanita warganegara Malaysia yang terdiri daripada pelbagai peringkat umur, kaum dan etnik serta jenis kesalahan yang dilakukan. Daripada seramai 34 orang responden yang terlibat di peringkat kajian kualitatif, temuduga dilakukan ke atas 13 orang responden yang dipilih secara rawak. Kajian ini juga menggunakan triangulasi data yang melibatkan seramai 8 orang ketua komuniti. Kajian kuantitatif menunjukkan bahawa selain daripada mempunyai kapital sosial serta kapital insan semasa berada di dalam penjara, komuniti banduanita di penjara juga mempunyai tahap pendayaupayaan serta harapan untuk hidup yang tinggi. Kesemua ini merupakan kapital yang memotivasi komuniti banduanita di dalam mencapai matlamat mereka mengurangkan risiko residivism. Dengan menggunakan analisa kualitatif mengkaji kandungan oleh Mayring, pendayaupayaan psikologikal timbul sebagai satu lagi kapital penting yang dimiliki

komuniti banduanita. Dengan melalui proses pendayaupayaan yang menggunakan kesemua kekuatan yang telah dikenal pasti, komuniti banduanita didapati mampu merancang secara perseptif berkaitan strategi-strategi yang mereka akan gunakan untuk mengurangkan risiko residivism semasa keluar dari penjara kelak. Strategi-strategi ini atau juga merupakan matlamat pendayaupayaan ini adalah “Trek Pantas ke Sasaran” “Dengar dan Aku akan Didengari” “Menukar Rasa Malu kepada Keberanian” “Beri dan Aku akan Menerima Kembali” Jika aku Tidak Boleh Bersama Mereka, Aku Tinggalkan” dan “Tolong Bantu Aku”. Perbincangan mengenai kaitan antara kapital, pendayaupayaan dengan harapan dalam konteks pendayaupayaan psikologikal turut diketengahkan dalam kajian.



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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of the Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ABCD	Asset Based Community Development
BBI	Ex Prisoners Bring Back Bad Influence
CNA	Community Non Acceptance
CCF	Community Capitals Framework
CJLT	If I Cannot Join Them, I'll Leave Them
FBR	Family Play Bigger Role
FP	Find Peers if Community and Family Do Not Accept
FTT	Fast Track to Target
GIGB	Give and I Will Get Back
HCEG	Human Capital of Ex Prisoner for Economic Growth
IHIS	Isolation/Hide Identity to Survive
LLT	Listen and I Will Be Listened To
NC	No Confidence
nic	number of items coded
OR	Optimistic with Women Prisoners' Ability to Repent
PENN	Psychological Empowerment Nomological Network
PF	Proof First
PHMF	Please, Help Me I'm Falling
TSG	Trading Shame for Guts

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Introduction

Recidivism has been one of the major social problems faced by our society for decades. While definitions of recidivism vary, and could sometimes be inconsistent (Beck, 2001) the main construct often includes a previous commitment (crime), previous arrest and previous convictions (law and order) (Willbach, 1942 -1943). Taylor, (2011) reworded recidivism as when an individual who was once incarcerated, get re-arrested, re-incarcerated and re-convicted. In laymen's term, recidivism is when an individual has the tendency to revert to his past pattern of behavior or criminal habits. The term recidivism also emphasizes on time framework such as the time until failure as the time before return to prison or the time until a new arrest is made after a person has gone through a prison term or an initial arrest (Dejong, 1997). Recidivism, therefore, is a future criminal offenses (Owen & Cooper, 2013). Crime is considered as one of the most distressing events Malaysian community face every day (Amar Singh Sidhu, 2005). Hence, predicting recidivism in a view of the probability that a crime could take place would also mean seriously forecasting future wellbeing and safety of the whole society. Thus, failure to pin down this threat would jeopardize the nation's internal stability and to a certain extent endangering the security of our future generation.

Detailed data on women offenders has always been difficult to obtain due to security constraints. However, in limitation, as reported by the Prison Authority (see Appendix A, 1) statistically, there were 104 Malaysian women recidivists recorded in 2010. In 2011 and 2012, there were 122 and 135 women recidivists, respectively. In 2013, there were 142 women recidivists where as in 2014, 169 were recorded. On the whole, a total of 672 women recidivists were verified. Although women offenders conventionally have represented a small fraction of the total offenders, the more important fact is about the increasing trend it showed. The rate of women residivists in Malaysia had increased from 0.13% in 2010 to 0.15% in 2011. Two years later, the rate increase again to 0.16%. In 2014, the rate went up to 0.18%. Though relatively small in terms of percentage rate but it is enough to signal a warning on the needs to control the worsening phenomena.

Generally, failure to curb the recidivism amongst women offenders would amplify the intensity of other social problems like theft and larceny, white collar crime, drug use and selling and also sex crime (Belknap, 2007) amongst women. Because women have a closer and strong interdependent relationship with people around them (Zaplin, 2015), thus, apart from the women themselves that are in difficulties, their parents and children too are at risks (Esmaili, Zieyaei, Khajeh & Baratvand, 2011). Those who were recidivists over time become hard core offenders and face risks of continuing their wrongdoings and staying in and out of prison, labelled and isolated. Women offenders are said to experience emotional deprivation that usually leads to self hatred

and worthlessness. Even their family stays in agony or suffers distress as a result of their daughters' complications and sufferings. Consequently, a dysfunctional family exist in our ecosystem. The situation gets worse if the women offenders were mothers. Not only that distance and time of separation would interrupt their relationship, the children too face risks of involvement in negative activities which will affect their schooling and behaviour. Children of women offenders' may tend to behave aggressively and become antisocial due to lack of attachment. If they are not given attention to seriously, they would be school drop outs and could easily fall into the vicious cycle of family of crime.

Due to this, many efforts were implemented and delineated to tackle recidivism since, other than for the sake of the women themselves, their family and children; it also has a paramount effect onto the whole community in terms of increasing the burden on taxpayers (Gingrich & Early, 2010). An enormous amount of money is required (McKean & Ransford, 2004) for work recidivism has given impact on. This may include building new prisons, hiring and training for more personnel, redesigning new programs and additional costs for maintaining prisoners' needs (Stravinskis, 2009).

In terms of reducing risks for recidivism, the community outside certainly has its role to play. They not only should understand, show respect and offer a supportive environment for women offenders to avoid recidivism but also help to empower them (Austin, Bloom & Donahue, 1992) typically through making them involved in community programs and preparing job opportunities (Austin, bloom & Donahue, 1992). However, the tasks are always stifling by the norm to disagree with social problem actors through isolation and labelling. Uggen and Inderbitzin (2006) for instance, showed that community that isolates and gave a pessimistic view towards ex-offenders can become an effective pulling agent for them to get back into deviant behavior. This in turn would force them to recommit crime. Labels by community members would also trigger a strong reason for the women offenders to heighten their tendency to fall back joining gangs with offensive behavior. Tang (2011) had also put the same emphasis on the importance of positive reactions from the community at large towards supporting ex-offenders to start life anew. In other words, while the whole community's well-being is at stake due to high rates of recidivism, the ex-offenders wellbeing will be in jeopardized too because of the stigma stance imposed by the community. This vicious cycle of recidivism has an enormous impact on hindering the overall growth of a nation. Approaches or strategies are needed to counter recidivism for all the consequences it affected.

There have been many approaches in the community development practice. Asset-based community development or ABCD coined by Kretzman and McKnight (1993) may have the solution for recidivism amongst the community of women offenders in the prison. This approach in this study focuses on the strengths of women offenders as a community on its own where by on being together and for sharing the same experience and knowledge back at home and in the prison would also mean possessing capitals and strategies of the same type to progress in life. These capitals like the social capital and human capital they own are beneficial to promote community of women offenders to lead a healthy lifestyle beginning even from behind the bars.

At one hand, ABCD also emphasizes on empowerment. Empowerment is a process by which individuals achieved control over their own lives while having democratic participation in the life of their community (Rappaport, 1987) and also critical awareness of their ambience (Zimmerman, 1995). Without empowerment, it appears like women offenders' community in the prison are closed away from the knowledge of rights and ideas as well as capabilities on how to get what they want in life, hence would fail to reduce risks for recidivism later. In other words, empowerment through its processes and itself as outcomes should be able to assist women offenders' community leading their way out from recidivism.

Hope on the other hand, has always been said as the force that usually leads to imaginable and feasible good and better life (Ward & Wampler, 2010). According to Snyder (2000) hope can generate effective paths to reach desired goals and signifies one's thoughts about his capacity to use the pathways. Thus, hope too may be considered as has a part to play in eradicating the problem of recidivism among women offenders.

## **1.2 Statement of Problem**

For many years people have deliberated about recidivism especially among women offenders. For those who are concerned about human rights in Malaysia, this fact is ever mind boggling. Women recidivists are at their productive age physically and biologically, mothers or single mothers with children, representing the fastest-growing fragment of the recidivist population (*Perangkaan Sosial Terpilih*, 2009). These states of affairs lead to problem in women's mental health (Morash, Bynum & Koons, 1998), a growing number of children who are deprived (McCall, 2010) and disorganized (Dallaire & Weinraub, 2007), as well as the increase of juvenile crimes and re-offending cases from family cycle (McCall, 2010).

Although lower than the number of male prisoners, Malaysia has seen a significant increase trend in the number of women prisoners (*Perangkaan Sosial Terpilih*, 2009) that is from 2,686 in 1997 to 11,000 in 2008. In 2010, the number showed a decline. It went down to 1,645 women prisoners. The lesser it gets, ironically, the more worrying the situation is. Belknap, (2007) highlighted that the relatively smaller number of women prisoners had always been the justification for establishing low levels of quality in treatment. In fact, the low proportion too had been made to justify "the lack of diverse educational, vocational" and other suitable programs for them. It is either without intervention, the number will undoubtedly intensify like what happened to the international level rate year after year (Morash, et al., 1998; O'Brien, 2006; Shamai & Rinat-Billy, 2008) or, even so the number decrease the impact to them and to the society at large would still be in jeopardy.

A variety of environments may ultimately clue to recidivism amongst women. Of the women re-offenders' community, many had been linked to poverty and financial problems (Steffensmeier & Streiffel, 1992), physical and drug abuse, problematic families and history of family members who have been to prison (Teh, 2006),



possessed a low level of education (Erisman & Contardo, 2005) or emotional struggles (Deschenes, Owen & Crow, 2007).

In most cases, recidivism does not happen due to microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) or individual environments alone. Recidivism does not take place even right after releasing (Bonta, Harman, Hann & Cormier, 2002). Women offenders' community who had undergone rehabilitation phases in the institution carried along considerable strengths and skills to face the world outside and reintegrate into the society, especially right from before released. Unfortunately, labelling, societal stigma and boycotts (Esmaili, Zieyaei, Khajeh & Baratvand, 2011; McCall, 2010; Stravinskas, 2009) by the community dampen their courage and guts. Their confidence, hope and faith subsided. Between less than 6 months to 2 years and more, women ex-offenders would fall back into recidivism (Bonta, et al., 2002).

The problem of recidivism exacts a significant toll on the women themselves, children, family, the community they reside in and the society at large. Women offenders community at post release are often trapped with psychological breakdowns, depression, mental illness and heartache (Morash, et al., 1998; Stravinskas, 2009; Zaitzow, 2004) especially due to losing some rights and resources they use to have (Borzycki & Baldri, 2003; Mc Call, 2010). They may even experience self-loss, a state of mind with serious hopelessness (Kroner, Mills, Gray & Talbert, 2011) and a feeling loosing of dignity. These have resulted in the failure of reaching towards women's wellbeing (Litswan, Sundt, Holsinger & Latessa 2003).

Concurrently, children of the offenders experience similar negative impact. They usually lack of attachment and nurturance from good mothering and experience a series of traumatic separation (Van Womer & Bartollas, 2011). They are prone to be involved with aggressive and interrupted behaviors (Seymour, 1998; Dallaire & Weinraub, 2007). All these, in return, impacted their attendance in school and most likely to become poor in educational achievement ("Criminal Behavior", 2011). At the worst, with all the risk factors, they would themselves turn to become criminals in the making. On the other hand, families of offenders would face difficulties in facing the society due to stigma and hardship, especially when the women offender is the sole breadwinner. Most often than not, a family with a history of incarceration would always be in compulsion and unstable conditions.

In a larger context, once recidivism happens, the safety of the community is at stake (O' Brien, 2006; Liu, 2005; Stravinskas, 2009). Prisoners often originate from and come back to disadvantaged communities. When they returned to the locality they once reside, community is in the tendency to experience further challenges. The number of ex-offenders and increase of crime rate often becomes a hindrance to further economic and social opportunities (Stravinskas, 2009; Borzycki & Baldri, 2003). In fact, an increase in the number of women recidivists would jeopardize their important role as women and productive labor force to their family and the nation on the whole (Che Zarrina Saari & Joni Tamkin Borhan, 2006).

Overcrowding in women's prisons would also lead to an increase in recidivism rates. Ineffectiveness in rehabilitation program would be one of the most detrimental elements in treating women offenders' community in the prison (Brennan & Barnett, 2007; Litswan, et al., 2003). Other than this will inevitably create the vicious cycle of recidivism, it also gets in the way of the Government's budget. Additional of recidivism cases would consequence, additional expenditure on expenses for prisoners and salaries for the increasing number of officials. An amount of RM 1.27 million is recorded to have been used to manage 42,483 prisoners per day in 2006 ("Bernama", 2010). This amount of 465 million per year used, mainly paid from tax payers' money. According to McCall (2010), the community at large feel the pain as a result of re-incarceration and the process mending it. The costs are volatile that even a slight change in the help to reduce recidivism would lead to a magnified impact, implicit and explicit.

In 2010, Malaysia had had 11,000 prison staff and in need of another 4,000 new ones to accommodate the overcrowding problems ("Bernama", 2010). New buildings that cost around RM170 million had also been built to rehabilitate of about an extra 200 women prisoners (along with male prisoners) in Pahang, in 2003. The Government admitted that these had put enormous impact and burden to the national expenditure. Should the amount of money be spent for providing jobs and housing for ex-prisoners, target to lessen the number of recidivism cases would have succeeded.

People have failed to notice that this unstable condition occurs because traditionally, efforts to reduce recidivism derived mainly from using the problems and needs approach in offender rehabilitation program and merely done on the basis of top bottom method. This would ultimately lead to hopelessness. In so far, women offenders' community in Malaysia have not been made seriously involved with the decision making process even in the formulation or the evaluation onset of their rehabilitation program. To counter the weakness, the scenario can be helped with drafting a rehabilitation program that incorporates woman offenders' community's voice on their capacities or strengths (Longstaff, 2008). Only they knew what it takes to lead a normal life, nonetheless up till now the ways this community have in minds were seemingly hidden unrecorded nor compiled, thus ignored. Formulating the right array of strategies they can apply should give them choices of conditions to fair with the so called injustice world outside (Belknap, 2007). This, however, has to start by exploring these women offenders' community's perceptions consist of their experiences, current knowledge as well as expectation which were mostly built on the basis of strengths.

According to Deguera (2004), trusting and believing in people who want to change for betterment by making them tell out or discover their very own capitals would mean that we are building on the positivity these populaces already possessed. In fact, it was believed that the guiding value of working with women offenders' community is empowerment (*Correctional Service Canada*, 2011) and participation. It is where women offenders' community are being made to part take and be supported to develop their perception into their situation and experience, identify their capitals, gain power and take control over their lives (Ibid, 2011; Gobeil, 2008).



By focusing on strength, one can be ascertained that most women offenders' community have some capitals to be used as catalysts that help in reducing their risks for recidivism (Borzycki & Baldri, 2003). This asset-based approach should be carried out or highlighted for practice or else risks of lacking behind in the aspect of new strategy and new knowledge for intervention initiatives (Richie, 2001, Laverack & Labonte, 2000), as well as risks of facing the same problematic consequences of recidivism decades to come.

Several asset-based approaches may be utilised to address the problem of recidivism among women offenders community (Burkett, 2011). The Asset-Based Community Development approach (ABCD) is one of them. The Correctional Service of Canada (CSC) (O'Brien, 2006) for instance, had embarked on an ABCD-based program for women prisoners. Beginning with integrating feedback and views from women offenders' community about their experiences, as well as participation (input) from program and other relationship with prison staffs, (prior to other processes in the trajectory of program that enable them to reduce recidivism), CSC had succeeded to come to a state where Canadian women offenders' community have higher possibilities for successful reintegration into the outside community (Gobeil, 2008; Ibid, 2006).

Asset-based Community Development has become an approach that is accepted globally and could be implemented from within the context of the largest form of community like the global organizations to the smallest community like youth offenders (McNulty, 2005) even to the extent of how marginal or excluded they are (Emery, Fey & Flora, 2006). It could serve as an alternative to the current static progress of risks and needs-based approach used in building the women offenders' community (Martin & Stermac, 2010). This approach has to, however, begin with asking (Blessing & Golden, 2005) or assisting target group in identifying or discovering their own capitals prior to any other form of participations in the decision making process. Kretzmann and McKnight (1993), the founders of ABCD had delineated that the first step to initiate an ABCD approach is to begin with discovering what the community (capacities of individuals) has. Their strength, gifts and abilities, which are seen as assets or capitals (Emery, Flora & Fey, 2006) including their vision (perceived control) and hope, need to be known.

However, there is lack of study that considers the importance of participation from women offenders' community in their development program what more to realize the strength they possess. In order to be more efficacious in reducing the number of recidivism among women offenders' community, hence soften the negative impact this problem laid onto society, smarter approach must be initiated. A study on women offenders' community development that appreciates strengths, need to be embarked on. In fact, there is meagre research that focuses in detail on the women offenders' strengths in the context of Malaysian prison (Teh, 2006; Fauziah, Bahaman, Subhi, Kamaruzaman, Mohamad, Sarnon, Chong & ZM, 2013; Rafizah Abu Hassan & Zaiton Hamin, 2013).

By contrast, there were quite a number of studies on male offenders at the national level and were mostly discussing on the factors that caused recidivism (Ibrahim Samad, 2013; Geshina A Mat Saat, Zaiharul Idrus & Hafizah Nor Hamid, 2013; Nazirah Hassan & Tuan Sharifah Diana Syed Ahmad, 2013) and challenges that are faced by male prisoners in terms of recidivism (Choi, Kavaseri, Desai, Govindasamy, Kamarulzaman & Altice, 2010; Scorzelli, 2009).

Thus, the purpose of this exploratory case study will be about discovering the innate capacities of Malaysian women offenders' community through analysing their perceptions, experience and expectation about reducing their risks for recidivism from within the incarceration stage; the prison. Since, hope is a part of capitals in ABCD and also in the expectation conceptual, this study also has the intention to discover how hope in life can help in achieving low risks from recidivism (wellbeing) through the effort of manipulating or capitalizing their very own strengths.

With these intentions, this research falls into the very initial part of implementing ABCD for women offenders that is at the mapping out capitals and how it works at the personal stage (Moraca, 2005) within their community itself. The level of community development approaches in this study is in the personal empowerment dimension of a community of women offenders in the Sungai Udang Prison. The processes involve is in the action of discovering own capitals which women offenders would portray through their thinking and proclaiming. In so doing, the outcome would help them to be more confident, skilful and of better understanding over what they have and how to manage them. This is in line with what Longstaff (2008) had cited in her article regarding dimensions of community development standpoint.

The researcher's hunch in this study is that, with some experience staying in and out the prison, meeting with labels and stigma enforced by the community outside, acquiring more knowledge and skills and also building more social networks during incarceration period (through rehabilitation programme), women offenders' community should have gained some amount of personal resources or even went through series of empowerment processes (Lord & Hutchison, 1993; Zimmerman, 1995) which probably are alike due to their shared system (Belknap, 2007). The most possible capitals could be in a form of social, financial and human capital as supported by previous research (Mallot & Fromader, 2010; Gobeil, 2008; Wolff & Draine, 2004). For this reason, the community of women offenders should be able to recognize their strengths in the virtue of reaching higher tendency to reduce risks for recidivism. Many academicians advocated that those who have more capitals or strengths have a better chance to staying away from recommitting offence (Akcomak & Bas ter Weel, 2008; Belcher, 2008; Duwey & Doney, 2008; Hearn, 2010; Hipp, Petersilia & Turner, 2010; Mears, Wang, Hay & Bales, 2008; Ulrich & Coid, 2011).

Being empowered would move the community of women offenders to keep on going through many ways (strategies) and by cutting across many situations (domains), skilfully; with the purpose of reaching empowered outcomes that are in their forecast. On the other hand, having hope in life is regarded as a privilege or gift which could

lead to a straightforward achievement to shun the problem of returning back to prison. This is because previous research had postulated that people who are empowered and have hope would be able to succeed in their goals in life (Mc Dermott & Snyder, 1999; Ward & Wampler, 2010).

### **1.3 Research Questions**

In the effort to unearth the strength of the community of women offenders in Malaysia, typically those in the Sungai Udang Prison, Melaka through examining the themes of response emerged from their storytelling, some other issues need to be answered. This is done to better able to understand who they are and how the capitals are perceived to help reducing their risks for recidivism. It is also pertinent to understand the phenomena by the theoretical construct. These include the need to identify the unique cases that emerge by or against the construct. With these in mind, therefore, the topical sub questions that are necessary to be resolved are:

1. What are the backgrounds and history of the women offenders community in the Sungai Udang Prison?
2. What kind of capitals do they possess?
3. What is their level of empowerment and level of hope in life?
4. How does their empowerment motivate the goal to achieve reduced risks for recidivism?
5. How does their hope motivate the goal to achieve reduced risks for recidivism?

### **1.4 Objectives of Study**

The research objectives below have been postulated to achieve the purpose of the study that are:

1. To illustrate the backgrounds and history of Malaysian women offenders community in the Sungai Udang Prison, Melaka.
2. To describe the capitals owned by this community.
3. To identify the level of empowerment and the level of hope in life of the women offenders' community.
4. To explore the women offenders' perception towards achieving lower risks for recidivism by using empowerment as the motivator.
5. To explore the women offenders' perception towards achieving lower risks for recidivism by using hope as the motivator.

### **1.5 Significance of Study**

This study is performed under the spirit that personal empowerment could be extended in a community as mentioned by Lord and Hutchison (1993) for the sake of the overall development of the community and the nation. Currently, treatment and rehabilitation programs for women offenders' community are not fully implemented by assets based thus heightened the propensity for them to opt for recidivism. Efforts to put forward the importance of assisting women offenders community to reduce recidivism by

recognizing their capitals should help in curbing the problem that affect the community and their very own wellbeing. A practical approach is to call for in order to frame the existing, capture the needed and potential capitals of these offenders as accordance to their strengths.

This study is significant in the sense that it drives the women offenders' community to realize and recognize that they had with them some capitals. Descending from this, they would also acknowledge that some other capitals are essential for them to live a life free from recidivism. This finding magnetizes the community of women offenders to understand their own skills, talent and potential from which they could mobilise and use to get empowered if not more empowered. In fact, in its very own sense, this initial study offers a technique that respect informants' experience, at the same time building their skills and relationship. This is but one of the most important parts of evaluation required to be done by practitioners in the community development work (Longstaff, 2008).

Indirectly, this study suggests for women prison authorities to be more sensitive when managing women offenders' community. In that, the data for women offenders should be detailed down so as to gather as much information regarding their social, human and financial capital at pre and post imprisonment. The former is to determine their right type of rehabilitation program during in prison and preparation program upon facing the re-entry phase. The latter will help the prison institution in predicting the probability of them to be back doing crime. Thus, envisage for a sterner action to keeping them free from recidivism by collaborating with other agencies or the communities where the particular ex-prisoners reside.

At a larger scope, the findings of this study would in turn assist the Government and academicians to determine ways through community development strategies to strengthen women capacity and or add up other capitals that are needed to ensure this marginal community be able to reduce their tendency to recidivism. Oladipo (2009) exerted that the overall population's empowerment is the key to enable every citizen of a nation to get the benefit from their economic or social development.

This study itself is an evaluation stage in a community development process. Other than the Government or the prison authority conducting the assessment on the rehabilitation programs (top down approach) to the women offenders' community, this study is focusing on the bottom up approach where views and experience of the community are heard and defined to outspread element of modification for future programs. This is in line with what Longstaff (2008) refer to as searching "the routes of influence" (p. 14) between community development actions and its result. Not only that the participation of women offenders' community are seen as important but the high possibility it offers in empowering these women offenders has got its own merit towards success, the self-help stage. This has always been a concern in the community development discipline (Bhattacharyya, 2004).



By including the hope factor in this study would also support the notion that higher hope would mean better chances to reduce recidivism and *vice versa* (McDermott & Snyder, 1999). This would thus further contribute in suggesting the kind of hope-based intervention or strength-based prevention programme (Blanchette & Taylor, 2009) that is efficacious towards mobilising targeted group.

## 1.6 Scope of Study

This case study which was done from 2009 to 2013 focuses on Malaysian women offenders community only and specifically in the Sungai Udang Prison Women Prison, Melaka alone. No male informants from the same prison or other prisons were involved. Informants of this study were women offenders who received prison sentence and have at least one time experience of recidivism. First time offenders are also included as the informants for to search better results. Successful women ex-offenders who are already in the community are not the subject in this research because this study focuses on the perception of women offenders whom had experience of going out into the community and got back into the prison system or have the probability to experience re-imprisonment. They are the ones who are assumed to have at least a thought or consciously determine to put a stop to their reoffending habits since living in the concrete walls for that moment must have been felt as exacerbating their wellbeing. Therefore, discovering the capacities they have within them is done on the basis of their perceptions and experience alone.

This study also covers only the process to set community of women offenders for change from the pre-release and post release period. In order to spark an initial path of change, recognizing and assessing their capitals, levels of empowerment and hope is just to support the knowledge before indulging into the bigger aspect of study which was about how the concepts empowerment and hope motivate them towards a state where risks for recidivism are reduced. In other words, this study only scopes its attention at the usage of strength at the pre-released and post-released conditions. An extension of time as until a year after and onwards is not in the study scope. In a way, this is not a cohort or a longitudinal study.

Even though indispensably, capitals, empowerment and hope have intricate and intertwined relationships with each other, but for the sake of accomplishing this study, a sense of sagacity is asserted so that the concepts too can be studied on their own. Failure to make such assumption would only jeopardize the aim to see how the three concepts motivate in reducing risks for recidivism among targeted women offenders in their way; through using the appropriate approach. This study which also attempts to discover how women offenders' community perceive their capitals in leading them towards achieving higher tendency towards reducing risks for recidivism does not mean that their perception is concentrated on the capitals they have as individuals but also will encompass those available from her prison community either from within or without the prison as per informed. In other words, any capitals according to the women that could help promote wellbeing may be those derived from them as individuals and or as a community. (Brofenbrenner, 1975).

On the other hand, the main context of empowerment affected in this study is restricted to the personal empowerment of members of the women offenders' community. It is where the aspects on psychological empowerment play its role theoretically in this study. However, in terms of other discussions, matters on community empowerment that is pertaining to the importance of personal empowerment maybe raised accordingly. For instance, in order to successfully implement data triangulation where community leaders were the informants, substances from the importance of community empowerment are included in the study analysis and discussion.

In line with Strauss and Corbin's (1998) suggestion, this study advocates a saturation point when the  $n$  number of persons interviewed reached to a state where it becomes not productive instead, and that whatever new matters added or found does not bring any significant change to the overall story or theory. Therefore any effort that would involve generalization over the findings would have to consider this embarking point as well as the context of study which in this case, is selected to focus only on the Sungai Udang women prisoner's scenario. In fact, Stake (1995) claimed that "direct comparisons" (p. 240) would only lead to misinterpretation and shrinks the opportunity to gain knowledge out of it. Failure to understand that knowledge is socially built, thus, blocks the whole thing about learning something old through new perspectives or new construct.

Having in mind that criminology theories must have some explanations over the issue on recidivism amongst women offenders' community and that Feminism Theory could also have some obligations in the issue, this study however, has its theories as the basis of research differently. Because this study has a strong emphasis on the community development aspect from a community of women offenders, theories which are relevant to the subject matter are the Community Capitals Framework, Empowerment Theory and Hope Theory as well as the Psychological Capital Nomological Framework which on the overall tied to the bigger theory of Asset-Based Community Development Theory. Explicitly, Asset Based Community Development Theory is used because women offenders in this study is regarded as a community on its own despite that the analysis may also begin from examining them as individuals.

### **1.7 Limitation of Study**

In implementing efforts to successfully meet the objectives of this study, certain hindrances were recognized. Financial and time constraints were amongst those that challenged the preparation of this study. Financially, going back and forth to the prison from Serdang to Malacca on a routine basis was rather costly thus, instead of going to the place once for each interview session, the researcher decided to do two or three sessions per going. This decision was also made to counter the limited time frame given by the Prison Authority in meeting the informants. In just a one month period (1<sup>st</sup> January-31<sup>st</sup> January, 2013), phases of procedures need to be comprehended. Though the data collection process was successful in terms that appropriate numbers of informants were gotten and that saturation point was met, the fact it was performed rather hurriedly is quite a concern for a qualitative study phase in this mixed method study. Apart from having enough support in terms of enabling this research to become

a credible mixed method study, and that member checks and inter coder were also made involved, data collection and transcription as well as analysis processes were performed individually. The lack of personnel to ease the work during some stages of this research is thus, very time consuming.

The NVivo 10 Software which design was to specially support the data obtained from the social media, was however not utilised. This was because the members of women offenders' community were not accessible to the internet while in the prison and the community leaders in Malaysia have no good record of keeping their perceptions on women offenders or even recidivism in any form in the social media. Furthermore, only limited items are allowed to be brought into the prison for security and safety reason. Therefore, the researcher did not get the chance to use the most out of the software.

Unlike data triangulation which was performed on the community leaders for Objective 4, where empowerment was confirmed as the concept that does motivate women offenders in terms of reducing risks for recidivism, for hope instead, the triangulation effort was done methodologically but limitedly. Although the depthness of triangulation was not like the former's, however, NVivo 10 supports appeared in terms of producing quantitative proofs that the word "patient" which draw a parallel connotation with the word "hope" was intensely used. This effort of confirmation by using the software was performed to scrutinize further time and financial difficulties that may arise if another data triangulation were embarked into.

## **1.8 Conceptual and Operational Definition**

Four conceptual and their operational definitions in this study are risks for recidivism, community capitals, empowerment and hope. They are explained in brief in this section to provide some meanings to the concept used according to the theory or discipline, and on how they are regarded and used in this study. However, an inclusion of the conceptual and operational definition of women offenders' community is also set forth to elucidate the group of people this study is focussing on.

### **1.8.1 Women Offenders' Community**

Women offenders are a group of women who had committed crimes or offenses that leads to punishment like sentence to jail. Women offenders' community refer to the group of women offenders who are involved in the same system and share the sense and recognitions of the relationships and areas of common concerns (Cook, 1994). In this case, some of the relationships and shared concerns as according to Michael, J.R (2004) in defining a community within a prison are the existing of personnel or prison officers to fairly taking charge of the women offenders' community system, the present of sense of being together in a specific environment, system and building and to an extent a sense of ownership to the culture they have created together in the prison. They also share the same incentives and privileges like early parole, participation in cultural activities during festive seasons and involvement with rehabilitation activities

which are of their favour. These women offenders community too share the same responsibility to obey the rules and regulation of the prison system, of their own relationships with other inmates and of preserving the harmony within the system (Boothby & Margorit Rita Krespi, 2007). The women offenders in this study are also seen as a community when together they are given the chance to perform their religion and own beliefs. The spiritual guidance provided by the authority had played an important role to change the spirituality and demeanour of the members. On being a community on its own, these women offenders too share the same experience and knowledge thus perceptions over their environment may also be alike and distinct from other communities at the outside. Therefore, they may position themselves along the same line in encountering the issue on risks for recidivism (Cook, 1994; Magis, 2007).

Zaplin (2015), urged for those who wish to work with women offenders to have a clear perspective that they (the women offenders) together exist in the setting of a compound system like facing the same impact of informal social controls, the similar type of the criminal offences, received similar services designed for them, the same kind of characteristics of the institutions that provide them services, the same external socio-political situation of the system and even the same perceptions from the public.

### **1.8.2 Risks of Recidivism**

Recidivism in this study focused on recidivism in crime or offense. Recidivism in crime, as mentioned earlier has varied definitions. According to Blumstein and Larson, (1971) recidivism comprises of two fundamentals. First, is the warrant of an offense, and two, is that an individual is already recognized to have done at least another offense. Usually the main construct includes a previous commitment (crime), previous arrest and previous convictions (law and order) (Willbach, 1942-1943). It could also be about an individual who was once imprisoned, get re-arrested, re-incarcerated and then re-charged (Kelly, 2011). Owen and Cooper (2013) stated that recidivism is similar to impending wrongdoings. Since the phrase “risks of” means the “danger of” or “threat of”, therefore, for this study, risks of recidivism means the danger or the threat that are bounded by all the meanings of recidivism in crime as stated above; in order to avoid the negative effects it gives to the person herself and the community at large.

### **1.8.3 Community Capitals**

Community capitals referred in this study is in sequence with the assets or capitals as suggested by Emery et al., (2006). It consists of the seven capitals namely the natural capital, cultural capital, human capital, social capital, political capital, financial capital and built capital. Capitals are defined by Ibid, (2006) as any type of reserve or supply that are proficient of generating added resources which, when those means are invested to form new resources, they turn into capital.

Capitals in this study focuses initially on only social capital, human capital and financial capital. However this study is also considering other form of capitals that



may arise significantly or emergently depends on what is captured in the narratives of informants, for instance, the psychological capital. This is because Luthans and Youssef, (2007) once claimed that other traditional forms of capital could probably be insufficient to explain new phenomenon, especially the one that derived from the individuals (Zimmerman, 1995) from within a community. Possessing and the ability to manage capitals in this study would also mean possessing strengths and capacity.

#### **1.8.4 Empowerment**

Rappaport (1984) mentioned that “*empowerment is a process by which people, organizations, and communities gain mastery over issues of concern to them*” (p. 3). Page and Czuba (1999) stated that empowerment is a social process that assists people to get what they desire. According to them, empowerment is about developing influence in people for them to utilize in their lives in all domains by managing matters that are of their concern. However, Zimmerman’s empowerment definition which focus mainly on the psychological aspect of individuals believed and stressed that this multilevel construct of the concept empowerment, has with it a multi-level of analysis, i.e. from individuals to organizations to community levels of analysis by which, the individual level of analysis stands as a basic component important for understanding the other levels of analysis.

Generally, this study is applying the definition of empowerment given by Rappaport (1987) and Page and Czuba (1999). At the same time it is also registering Zimmerman’s (1995) conception on empowerment and its relation to psychological empowerment. Bound within the context-specific where women offenders community perceive over their ability to control and achieve what they desire in life, empowerment in this study is also subject to influence from family and community members where they might reside in. The phrase “gain control over their own lives” (Rappaport, p. 119) has its applied meaning to women offenders’ effort to grasp strategies that could lead them to get what they want in life (reducing their risks for recidivism for well-being) not by imposing the power (as in authority) of being in power but by “having the capacity to implement” (working on their capitals) without being labelled or stigmatized by other members of the community. In fact the empowerment in this study is also considering the relationship between individuals and community, correspondingly appreciates the conflicting interaction it possess (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995). Hence, this would also mean that the concept empowerment in this study could be in a form of a process and or goal (Lord & Hutchisons, 1993).

#### **1.8.5 Hope**

Abu Hamid Al Ghazzali (1965) viewed hope as a foundation of encouragement or motivation. Hope was perceived as the element that produced constant spiritual war through actions and determination in obedience, even though the journey was hard. Even, if one were not able to accomplish one’s goal, one has to return to God in thankfulness and find pleasure in it. Pieper provides a platform for understanding of human hope. He affirmed that hope is incapable to realize its object simply on the

basis of one's own capitals alone, but it also requires a gift or inputs from other people (as cited in Schumacher, 2003, p. 5). However, Pieper connected his statement with the view that one also remains free not to accomplish his goal in reality (as cited in Ibid, 2003, p. 104). In other words, on the way to be feeling happy (hope to reach the goal), it does not need to imply an accomplishment.

The definition of hope in this study regards hope as accordance to Pieper's and Al Ghazzali's view on hope. Other than that, hope here is not only achieved (as the goal itself) but also motivates the goal attainment process (higher tendency to reduce risks for recidivism) as stressed by Ward and Wampler, (2010). Snyder's (2002) conception which stressed hope as an agent of change towards a goal is also accepted in this study.

In an overall, this study fits into the ABCD discipline because it reputes women offenders' community who are involved in the same system and shared common recognition and experience. Generally, this study is not looking at these women offenders as a marginal community as seen from the perspective of the normal communities at the outside (Jenson, 2000). This study however, is also looking into the aspect of possession of capitals, empowerment and hopes which subsequently lead to reducing risks for recidivism among subjects. All of these finally lead to the outcome which concentrates on the wellbeing woman offender's community as a whole.

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