
CRIMINOLOGICAL ANALYSIS ON REPEATED OFFENSES BY NARCOTICS PRISONERS AT THE CLASS II A PALU PENITENTIARY

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ABSTRACT

The persistence of narcotics recidivism within Indonesian correctional facilities presents a critical challenge to the nation's criminal justice system. This study investigates the criminogenic factors driving repeated narcotics offenses at the Class II A Palu Correctional Institution, a facility characterized by a high density of dealer-status inmates. Employing a socio-legal research design with a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through in-depth interviews with recidivist dealers and prison officers, alongside participant observation. The results reveal that the prison environment inadvertently acts as a "school of crime," facilitating the maintenance of illicit networks rather than rehabilitation. Recidivism is driven internally by Rational Choice, where inmates calculate that the economic and status rewards of the drug trade outweigh the punitive risks, and externally by systemic failures such as overcrowding and weak intelligence supervision. The study concludes that the current correctional model fails to function as a specific deterrent. To dismantle this "revolving door" phenomenon, the article recommends a paradigm shift towards strict inmate segregation based on risk assessment, the implementation of intelligence-based security protocols, and the development of market-adaptive vocational training to support genuine economic reintegration.

Keywords: Narcotics Recidivism, Correctional Institution, Criminogenic Factors, Socio-Legal Analysis, Prisonization.

INTRODUCTION

The global discourse on narcotics control has long faced a paradoxical reality: despite the intensification of punitive measures and mass incarceration, the illicit drug trade remains resilient. Indonesia, in its declared state of "Narcotics Emergency" (Darurat Narkoba), is no exception to this crisis. Throughout 2024 alone, the National Narcotics Agency (BNN) dismantled 27 syndicate networks 13 national and 14 international and handled over 600 narcotics cases.¹ However, a critical anomaly persists within the Indonesian criminal justice system: the correctional institution (Lembaga Pemasyarakatan or Lapas), mandated by Law Number 22 of 2022 to function as a center for rehabilitation and social reintegration, has increasingly devolved into a locus of recidivism. Instead of severing the chain of narcotics distribution, prisons often inadvertently function as "schools of crime" where criminal networks are consolidated rather than dismantled.

The failure of the correctional system is most starkly evident in the phenomenon of recidivism, particularly among narcotics offenders. Recidivism in this context is not merely a relapse into substance use due to addiction; rather, it represents a complex criminological failure where inmates return to, or continue, criminal operations such as trafficking and distribution from within the facility. While existing literature extensively covers the normative legal aspects of narcotics sentencing² or the general failure of rehabilitation in Java-centric studies³, there remains a significant gap in empirical criminological research focusing on the specific dynamics of recidivism in Eastern Indonesia⁴, particularly in post-disaster conflict regions like Palu, Central Sulawesi.

Class II A Palu Correctional Institution presents a unique and alarming case study for this analysis. Empirical data reveals a severe distortion in the inmate population structure. As of the latest census, approximately 72% of the total 656 inmates in Class II A Palu are incarcerated for narcotics offenses. More critically, the demographic composition is dominated by actors within the supply chain 169 classified as dealers (Bandar) and 224 as couriers/distributors (Pengedar) compared to only 80 individuals classified as pure users (Pengguna). This high

¹ Badan Narkotika Nasional, "Siaran Pers Tahun 2024: Penguatan Strategi Dan Aksi Kolaborasi Dalam P4gn," Desember 2024, <https://bnn.go.id/konten/unggahan/2024/12/23122024-Final-Press-Release-Akhir-Tahun-2024-Compile-All>.

² Edgemon and Clay-Warner, "Inmate Mental Health and the Pains of Imprisonment"; Van Ginneken et al., "An Ecological Analysis of Prison Overcrowding and Suicide Rates in England and Wales, 2000–2014," 2000–2014.

³ Hendris and Edafe, "Behind the Bars"; Olabamiji, "Prison Overcrowding in the Nigerian Correctional System."

⁴ Dal Santo and Sepúlveda Penna, *Southernising Criminology*.

concentration of "criminal experts" within a confined, overcrowded environment creates a perfect storm for what Sutherland termed "Differential Association," where the prison environment facilitates the transfer of criminal techniques and the expansion of illicit networks rather than rehabilitation.^{5,6}

The urgency of this research lies in dismantling the mechanisms that allow Class II A Palu to function as a "revolving door" for these offenders. Preliminary observations indicate that recidivism here is driven by a dual force: internal factors, such as the rational economic calculation of inmates who view imprisonment as a mere "operational cost," and external factors, including systemic supervisory weaknesses that allow business control from behind bars.^{7,8} This study aims to bridge the gap between correctional policy and criminological reality. By employing a socio-legal approach, this article analyzes the criminogenic factors driving narcotics recidivism in Palu and challenges the effectiveness of current rehabilitation models for high-risk offenders. Understanding these dynamics is not only academically vital for the development of Indonesian criminology but practically essential for formulating evidence-based correctional policies that prioritize substantive security and effective reintegration over mere warehousing.

RESEARCH METHODS

Research Design and Approach This study adopts a non-doctrinal or empirical juridical approach (socio-legal research), utilizing a qualitative case study design.⁹ Unlike normative legal research that focuses solely on statutory texts, this approach investigates the operation of law within society, specifically examining the behavioral patterns of narcotics recidivists within the correctional environment.¹⁰ The case study method was selected to facilitate a deep, contextual exploration of the complex phenomenon of repeated narcotics offenses, allowing for an analysis of the interaction between inmate behavior, institutional constraints, and criminogenic factors within a real-life setting.¹¹

⁵ Hendris and Edafe, "Behind the Bars"; Olabamiji, "Prison Overcrowding in the Nigerian Correctional System."

⁶ Krebs and Warr, "Differential Association."

⁷ Lessing and Willis, "Legitimacy in Criminal Governance."

⁸ Skarbek, "Governance and Prison Gangs."

⁹ Bhat, "Empirical Legal Research."

¹⁰ Leeuw and Schmeet, *Empirical Legal Research*.

¹¹ Crowe et al., "The Case Study Approach"; Baxter and Jack, "Qualitative Case Study Methodology: Study Design and Implementation for Novice Researchers."

Locus and Participants The research was conducted at the Class II A Palu Correctional Institution (Lapas), selected due to its status as the largest correctional facility in Central Sulawesi and its high concentration of narcotics offenders. The study population comprised all narcotics inmates within the facility; however, to achieve depth of analysis, participants were selected using a purposive sampling technique. The sample consisted of 10 key informants, divided into two distinct categories: seven (7) recidivist inmates specifically identified as dealers or couriers (bandar/pengedar) who possess critical knowledge of illicit business operations and three (3) prison officers responsible for security and coaching. The sample size was determined based on the principle of data saturation, where recruitment ceased once no new thematic information emerged from subsequent interviews. The data collection period spanned four months, from October to February.

Data Collection Procedures Data collection employed three primary techniques to ensure comprehensive coverage: in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation study.¹² **In-Depth Interviews:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the recidivist inmates to explore their psychological motivations, economic calculations, and operational methods for maintaining drug networks from within the prison. Simultaneously, officers were interviewed to gain institutional perspectives on supervision gaps and rehabilitation challenges. **Participant Observation:** The researcher observed the daily social dynamics and subculture within the prison blocks to validate inmate claims and identify environmental criminogenic factors such as overcrowding and interaction patterns.¹³ **Documentation:** Secondary data was gathered from official prison registers, recidivism statistics, and case files to provide a quantitative backdrop to the qualitative findings.

Data Analysis The collected data was analyzed using qualitative data analysis techniques, relying heavily on data triangulation to ensure validity and reliability. This involved cross-verifying information obtained from inmate interviews against officer testimonies and official documentation. For instance, claims regarding the "school of crime" phenomenon were cross-referenced with observation notes on inmate interactions and disciplinary records. This rigorous process allowed for the identification of consistent themes regarding internal and external criminogenic factors, moving beyond descriptive reporting to analytical interpretation

¹² Goodrick and Rogers, "Qualitative Data Analysis."

¹³ Busetto et al., "How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods."

of the root causes of recidivism.¹⁴

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Paradox of the Penitentiary

The primary objective of this study was to deconstruct the criminological phenomenon of recidivism among narcotics offenders at the Class II A Palu Penitentiary. The empirical realities uncovered in this research suggest a disturbing paradox: rather than functioning as an institution of correction and social reintegration, the penitentiary has inadvertently evolved into a fortified sanctuary for the consolidation of criminal enterprises. The data obtained through the triangulation of inmate census statistics, in-depth phenomenological interviews with seven recidivist offenders (specifically dealers and distributors), and candid disclosures from three correctional officers reveals a systemic collapse of the deterrence mechanism.¹⁵

This section integrates the empirical findings with a rigorous theoretical analysis, interpreting the "how" and "why" of recidivism through the lenses of Rational Choice Theory, Differential Association Theory, Strain Theory, and Labeling Theory. The analysis demonstrates that recidivism in this context is not merely a failure of individual will, but a structural output of a "criminogenic ecosystem" where the logic of the market overrides the logic of the law.¹⁶

The Demography of Deviation: Analyzing the "University of Crime"

The structural composition of the inmate population at Class II A Palu Penitentiary provides the foundational context for understanding the high rates of recidivism. The quantitative data reveals a significant distortion in the inmate demographic profile, which fundamentally alters the social ecology of the prison.

¹⁴ Busetto et al., "*How to Use and Assess Qualitative Research Methods*."

¹⁵ Alves Da Costa et al., "The WHO Prison Health Framework"; Tomaz et al., "Criminal Reactions to Drug-Using Offenders."

¹⁶ Morsing, "PRME – Principles for Responsible Management Education."

Table 1. Distribution of Criminal Roles Among Narcotics Inmates

Criminal Role Classification	Number of Inmates	Percentage of Total Narcotics Cases	Percentage of Total Prison Population
Bandar (Dealers/Suppliers)	169	35.7%	25.7%
Pengedar (Couriers/Distributors)	224	47.3%	34.1%
Pengguna (Pure Users)	80	16.9%	12.2%
Total Narcotics Inmates	473	100%	72.1%
<i>Total Prison Population</i>	<i>656</i>		

Source: Primary Data, Lapas Class II A Palu, Processed (2025).

The Hegemony of Distribution Actors

The data presented in Table 1 indicates that narcotics offenders constitute a staggering 72.1% of the total prison population (473 out of 656 inmates). However, the most critical insight lies in the internal composition of this group. The combined population of "distribution actors" those classified as *Bandar* (Dealers) and *Pengedar* (Couriers) totals 393 individuals, representing 83% of the narcotics population. In stark contrast, pure users (*Pengguna*) account for only 16.9%.

From a criminological perspective, this demographic imbalance is catastrophic for rehabilitation efforts.¹⁷ The prison environment is numerically dominated by individuals who are deeply embedded in the illicit economy, possessing high levels of "criminal capital" and

¹⁷ Gooch and Treadwell, "The Prison Firm."

network connectivity.¹⁸ The sheer volume of distribution actors creates a hegemonic subculture where the values of the drug trade secrecy, manipulation, and profit maximization become the normative standard of social interaction within the facility.

The Failure of Segregation and Differential Association

This demographic density validates the mechanisms of Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory within a closed institution.¹⁹ Sutherland posits that criminal behavior is learned in interaction with other persons in a process of communication, occurring principally within intimate personal groups. In the context of Class II A Palu, the prison blocks serve as the classroom for this learning process.²⁰

Prison Officer 3 admitted in the interview that "overcrowding is the main enemy," acknowledging that the facility lacks the spatial capacity to effectively segregate high-risk dealers from low-level couriers or users. Consequently, the prison acts as a "vector of contamination." Inmate 7 (a Methamphetamine Dealer) explicitly confirmed this dynamic, stating that it is "easier to recruit inmates inside the prison because they have needs and limited access."

This finding suggests that the prison functions as a networking hub. The "pure users," who may have entered prison with an addiction problem but no connections to the supply chain, are incarcerated alongside major suppliers (Bandar). Through daily interaction in overcrowded cells, the techniques of neutralizing guilt, the mechanics of smuggling, and the specific codes of the trade are transmitted from the experienced *Bandar* to the novice.²¹ The penitentiary, therefore, does not disrupt the criminal network; it condenses it, allowing for the recruitment of new foot soldiers and the refinement of criminal skills, turning the facility into a *de facto* "University of Crime".²²

The Rationality of Recidivism: Internal Criminogenic Factors

Why do these offenders return to crime despite the pains of imprisonment? The qualitative data

¹⁸ Foreman-Peck and Zhou, "Crime and Punishment."

¹⁹ Guerrero C., *Narcosubmarines*.

²⁰ Tomaz et al., "Criminal Reactions to Drug-Using Offenders."

²¹ Eberhard Karls University of Tübingen, Tübingen, Germany and Yagunov, "Informal Hierarchies in Modern Prisons."

²² Penitentiary Academy Of Ukraine, Kamianske, Ukraine And Malyshko, "Factors Of Drug Crime Dynamics In Penitentiary Institutions."

gathered from the recidivist subjects (Inmates 1 through 7) strongly refutes the notion that recidivism is solely a product of impulsivity or lack of morality. Instead, the narratives support **Rational Choice Theory (RCT)**, which suggests that crime is a result of a calculated cost-benefit analysis.

The Calculus of Profit: "Occupational Hazard"

For the subjects of this study, imprisonment is interpreted not as a cessation of their career, but as an "occupational hazard" a temporary overhead cost inherent to the business model. Inmate 1 (a Mid-level Distributor) and Inmate 5 (a Re-packer) articulated a clear economic rationale for their recidivism. They cited "financial velocity" (the speed at which money is made) as a factor that legal employment cannot match.

Inmate 5 stated: *"The financial calculation is far greater than legal work, especially to gather capital for a future legitimate business."*

This statement reveals a profound failure of the deterrence doctrine. The "pain" of imprisonment is psychologically discounted against the "pleasure" of the immense profits generated by the narcotics trade. The rational offender assesses that the time spent in prison is a worthy investment for the financial returns secured. Furthermore, Inmate 7 noted that *"The risk of getting caught is very small inside the Lapas... profits are stable."* This indicates that once inside, the perceived risk drops to near zero, while the opportunity for profit remains, effectively tilting the rational calculation heavily in favor of continued offending.

The Psychology of Power and Status

Beyond economic utility, the research identified a strong psychological driver rooted in status and power. Inmate 2 (a Dealer/Supplier) provided a revealing insight into the "seduction of crime." He remarked:

"I feel I have power and am respected in the environment. It is difficult to find similar status in legal employment."

In the sociological context of the underworld, being a "Bandar" confers a status akin to a CEO or a local patron. They command respect, control resources, and wield influence over a network of dependents. Imprisonment often threatens to strip an individual of their identity, reducing

them to a mere number.²³ However, by continuing to operate their business from within the prison, these individuals actively resist this "civil death." They maintain their status as "Big Men" (Orang Besar) within the inmate hierarchy. Recidivism, in this light, is a mechanism for identity preservation. The cessation of criminal activity would result in a "status deprivation" that is psychologically intolerable for these individuals, driving them back to the only role that offers them validation and social capital.

The "Hard-Core" Mentality

The interviews revealed the existence of a "hard-core" criminal mentality among the recidivists, particularly Inmates 2, 3, and 7. These individuals exhibited low levels of remorse and high levels of criminal pride. Inmate 3 described his incarceration as a time to "rest and plan the next business," displaying a total neutralization of the moral and legal authority of the state. This entrenched mindset suggests that conventional rehabilitation programs which often focus on religious counseling or basic vocational skills are fundamentally mismatched with the psychological profile of high-level drug traffickers who view themselves as entrepreneurs rather than criminals.²⁴

Operational Resilience: The Prison as a Command Center (External Factors)

A crucial contribution of this study is the detailed mapping of the *modus operandi* used by recidivists to maintain their operations while incarcerated. The findings demonstrate that the physical walls of the Class II A Palu Penitentiary are permeable, rendered porous by technology, corruption, and human proxies.

The Financial Proxy Network

The investigation revealed a sophisticated financial infrastructure that operates in parallel with the logistical one. Inmate 1 described his wife as the "financial hub," receiving transfers and managing cash flow on the outside. Inmate 2 utilized "trusted men" and even cryptocurrency to obscure the money trail. Inmate 7 alluded to a specific allocation of funds for "operational costs" within the prison a euphemism for the bribery required to maintain their privileges.

²³ Sampson et al., "REASSESSING 'TOWARD A THEORY OF RACE, CRIME, AND URBAN INEQUALITY.'"

²⁴ Morsing, "PRME – Principles for Responsible Management Education."

This reliance on external proxies (wives, siblings, lawyers) highlights the social embeddedness of the offender.²⁵ The criminal enterprise is not a solitary endeavor but a collective one involving family and associates. This supports the Network Theory of Criminology, suggesting that incarcerating the "node" (the dealer) does not disrupt the "network" if the links (communication and money) remain intact.²⁶

Institutional Permeability and Corruption

The ability of inmates to smuggle phones, direct operations, and even consume narcotics within the facility points to severe institutional failures. Prison Officer 1 admitted that smuggling methods are evolving, but also acknowledged the existence of "blind spots" in surveillance.

However, the testimony of Inmate 7 is more damning: "Risk is minimized... with operational costs." This implies a collusion between offenders and elements of the security apparatus. The economic power of the Bandar allows them to subvert the authority of the prison staff. In a transaction of "corruption for comfort," the dealer buys the silence or cooperation of underpaid guards, effectively privatizing the security of the prison for their own benefit. This institutional weakness is a massive external criminogenic factor; the prison environment itself becomes an enabler of crime rather than a barrier to it.

The Cycle of Return: Strain, Stigma, and the Failure of Reintegration

While the previous sections analyzed why crime continues *during* incarceration, it is equally vital to discuss why these offenders return to prison after release. The findings strongly validate **Robert Merton's Strain Theory** and **Labeling Theory** in the context of post-release reintegration.²⁷

Structural Strain and Economic Blockades

Upon release, the narcotics offender faces immediate structural strain. They possess a "criminal record" which acts as a formidable barrier to entry in the legitimate labor market. Inmate 4 expressed this despair vividly: "*It is very difficult [to find work]. That's the reason I returned*

²⁵ Guerrero C., *Narcosubmarines*.

²⁶ Bieda et al., *Legal Challenges of Disruptive Technologies*.

²⁷ Sung and Belenko, "From Diversion Experiment to Policy Movement."

to the old business, because only they would accept me."

In Merton's framework, these individuals aspire to the cultural goal of economic stability but are structurally denied the institutionalized means (legal employment) to achieve it. Consequently, they resort to "Innovation" returning to the illicit trade where they have established skills and connections. The vocational training provided by the prison (described by Inmate 5 as "sewing" or "farming") is wholly inadequate for meeting the economic aspirations of individuals accustomed to the high-velocity income of the drug trade. There is a disconnect between the "supply" of skills provided by the prison and the "demand" of the ex-convict's economic reality.²⁸

The Mark of Cain: Stigma and Labelling

Labelling Theory posits that societal reaction to deviance can amplify criminal behaviour. The interviews confirm that the stigma of being a "mantan napi" (ex-convict) is a powerful engine of recidivism. Inmate 6 noted that his community immediately suspected him of returning to crime, creating a self-fulfilling prophecy.

When society rejects the ex-offender, refusing them social capital and trust, the offender retreats to the only community that accepts them: the criminal network. Inmate 4 described how former associates "persuaded" and "facilitated" his return. The criminal network offers immediate acceptance, status, and income everything that civil society denies them. Thus, the lack of effective "Aftercare" and the passivity of the Bapas (Correctional Center) in mitigating this stigma essentially push the offender back into the revolving door of recidivism.²⁹

Comprehensive Discussion: Synthesis of Findings

The recidivism of narcotics offenders in Class II A Palu is not an isolated pathology but a symptom of a broader systemic dysfunction. The "School of Crime" hypothesis is confirmed by the data: the prison concentrates criminal expertise (Differential Association) without effectively neutralizing the tools of the trade (Operational Resilience via Technology).³⁰

²⁸ Flynn and Higdon, "Prison Education."

²⁹ Agbodike Mmesoma Chinecherem, *Beyond the Prison Gates*.

³⁰ Clark, "Breaking Out of Prison Culture? Or Culture Breaking Out of Prison?: Understanding Convict Code Endorsement during Incarceration and Post-Release."

The offender acts as a Rational Actor, constantly weighing the low risks of prison enforcement against the high rewards of the trade. This calculation is distorted by the prison's failure to impose strict "costs" on continued offending namely, the failure to cut off communication and the failure to segregate kingpins.³¹

Simultaneously, the offender is a Social Actor, embedded in a network of obligations and status hierarchies that imprisonment fails to sever. The "Big Man" syndrome drives them to maintain their distribution lines to preserve their social standing.

Finally, the offender is a Victim of Structure upon release. The "Mark of Cain" (Stigma) and the lack of viable economic alternatives (Strain) ensure that for many, the gate of the prison is not an exit, but a revolving door.

Theoretical Implications

This study contributes to criminological theory by demonstrating the fluidity of the "prison wall." Traditional theories often view the prison as a "total institution" (Goffman) that isolates the individual. However, this research suggests that in the digital age, the prison is "porous." The physical segregation of the body is rendered irrelevant by the digital connectivity of the mind and voice. Therefore, classical deterrence theory must be updated to account for "digital presence" an offender is not truly incapacitated if they maintain digital command and control.

Policy Implications

The findings necessitate a paradigm shift in correctional management at Lapas Palu.

1. From Containment to Intelligence: Security must shift from physical guarding to intelligence-based operations (signal jamming, financial tracking, cyber-surveillance) to cut the "digital umbilical cord."
2. Market-Based Rehabilitation: Vocational training must be modernized to provide skills that offer genuine economic mobility (e.g., digital literacy, mechanics, certified trades) to counter Structural Strain.

³¹ Gooch and Treadwell, "The Prison Firm."

3. Categorical Segregation: A strict separation regime must be implemented to prevent the "contamination" of users by dealers, disrupting the process of Differential Association.
4. Active Reintegration: The Bapas must transform from an administrative body into a proactive "social broker," actively mediating with the private sector to secure employment for ex-offenders to dismantle the barriers of Stigma.

In conclusion, until the Class II A Palu Penitentiary addresses the rational, social, and structural drivers of crime identified in this study, it will remain an inadvertent accomplice in the cycle of narcotics recidivism.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Class II A Palu Correctional Institution currently functions less as a center for rehabilitation and more as a locus for criminal consolidation, validating the premises of Sutherland's Differential Association Theory. The high concentration of narcotics dealers and couriers within the general population has transformed the facility into a "school of crime," where criminal techniques are transferred, and networks are maintained rather than dismantled. The findings reveal that the primary driver of recidivism in Palu is a complex interplay between internal rational choices where inmates view the economic benefits of the drug trade as outweighing the risks of incarceration and external systemic failures. Specifically, institutional overcrowding and gaps in intelligence-based security have allowed high-risk offenders to operationalize the prison as a safe haven for controlling illicit businesses.

The implications of this research underscore a critical need to shift from administrative-bureaucratic correctional models to criminologically grounded interventions. The current "one-size-fits-all" approach to coaching fails to address the hard-core mentality of dealer-status inmates. Consequently, this study advocates for a radical restructuring of the correctional regime in Palu, specifically: (1) the implementation of strict segregation between high-risk dealers and low-risk users to break the chain of influence; (2) the adoption of intelligence-based security to sever illicit communication lines; and (3) the transformation of vocational training into market-based certification programs to provide viable economic alternatives post-release. Future research should expand this inquiry by quantitatively measuring the efficacy of Restorative Justice implementation for pure users as a strategy to reduce overcrowding, thereby allowing resources to be focused on high-risk recidivists.

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