

Entrepreneurship as a Pathway to Recovery for Former Drug Addicts in Malaysia: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

Drug addiction remains one of Malaysia's most pressing social issues, with former addicts often struggling to reintegrate into society due to stigma, unemployment, and limited opportunities. While rehabilitation programs typically emphasize medical and psychological interventions, long-term recovery requires sustainable pathways that empower individuals both socially and economically. This concept paper examines entrepreneurship as a potential route to recovery for former drug addicts, positioning it not only as an economic strategy but also as a mechanism for social reintegration. Anchored in the National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 and initiatives such as SEMy2030 and KUSKOP programs, the paper reviews existing literature on entrepreneurial ecosystems, resilience, and recovery. It highlights how access to training, financial support, mentorship, and community acceptance are critical in enabling former addicts to build viable businesses and avoid relapse. The findings suggest that entrepreneurial resilience, self-efficacy, family support and institutional backing play pivotal roles in sustaining recovery. Ultimately, this study argues that entrepreneurship can move beyond economic empowerment to function as a social instrument that restores dignity, fosters inclusion and provides former addicts with genuine second chances.

Keywords : Entrepreneurship, Recovery, Drug Rehabilitation, Entrepreneurial Ecosystem, Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (DKN 2030) was launched by YAB Tun Dr. Mahathir Mohamad. DKN 2030 will be a catalyst to drive an entrepreneurial culture in the country, with the main goal of creating a holistic and conducive entrepreneurial ecosystem to support an inclusive, balanced and sustainable socio-economic agenda. DKN 2030 aims to increase the number of qualified, viable and resilient entrepreneurs and enhance the capabilities of local entrepreneurs, especially in the SME sector, in line with the Government's concept of shared prosperity. Entrepreneurship stands as a vital component for enhancing socio-economic development within Malaysia (Hassan et al., 2020). Small to medium-sized enterprises are integral to economic dynamism and innovation, playing a pivotal role in fostering growth and resilience within the national economy (Ridzwan et al., 2021).

Entrepreneurship is expected to contribute to half of the total gross domestic product by 2030. Given the importance of entrepreneurship to the Malaysian economy, understanding the factors that contribute to entrepreneurial success is of paramount importance (Ridzwan et al., 2021). Thus, this field of entrepreneurship is seen as being able to help groups of addicts who have recovered back into society while also helping to improve their socio-economic levels. Entrepreneurship represents a pathway to socio-economic recovery and empowerment for marginalized populations, including former drug addicts. Government initiatives, such as the National Entrepreneurship Framework, seek to cultivate a vibrant entrepreneurial ecosystem and empower individuals to pursue entrepreneurial ventures (Koe et al., 2021).

Meanwhile, the problem of drug addiction is complex and is agreed upon globally as a chronic disease. Drugs directly affect the brain of users and can influence changes in their thoughts, feelings and behavior. Drug addiction causes major health problems, social problems, family problems, and workplace problems. This problem can also pose a serious threat to the health, safety, well-being and prosperity of the family, community

and country, in addition to the addict himself. However, with the cooperation and support of the government, family and community, individuals involved in drug addiction can be recovered and are able to stop using drugs and return to society. Intervention and rehabilitation programs for drug addicts often focus on psychological, social, and vocational aspects of recovery, but entrepreneurship can provide a unique opportunity for these individuals to rebuild their lives, regain self-esteem, and contribute positively to society.

Recognizing these challenges, AADK is an agency under the Ministry of Home Affairs and is the lead agency in combating drug abuse in Malaysia. Through the Medical Treatment and Rehabilitation Division (BRPP), AADK has taken the initiative by implementing various approaches in drug treatment and rehabilitation programs in line with AADK's policy by providing holistic treatment and rehabilitation, accepting drug addicts as patients and restoring drug addicts as individuals who function for themselves, their families and society. Malaysia has made persistent efforts to combat drug addiction and drug-related crimes by establishing rehabilitation centers and therapeutic programs (Nawawi et al., 2024). The source of AADK's authority to play this role is through the AADK Act 2004 (Act 638), the Drug Addicts (Treatment and Rehabilitation) Act 1983 (Act 283), the Dangerous Drugs Act 1952 (Act 234), the Dangerous Drugs (Special Preventive Measures) Act 1985 (Act 316), the Dangerous Drugs (Forfeiture of Property) Act 1988 (Act 340).

AADK provides comprehensive treatment and rehabilitation through institutional and community-based rehabilitation approaches. Emphasis has been placed on the implementation of psychosocial programs, medical treatment, and skills and career training, as well as expanding spiritual and religious approaches. Entrepreneurship offers a unique opportunity for former drug addicts to reintegrate into society, overcome stigma and achieve financial independence (Ghazalli et al., 2021). By starting their own businesses, these individuals can gain a sense of purpose, develop valuable skills and create a supportive network of peers and mentors.

AADK is constantly striving to improve the effectiveness of treatment and recovery that covers physical, mental, social and spiritual needs so that individuals trapped in drug addiction can regain their lives and live drug-free. The expansion of AADK services has been done in an effort to provide treatment and recovery for as long as they need it. In addition, AADK always strives to collaborate with various government agencies, private sectors, non-governmental organizations and community leaders at all levels in an effort to identify problems related to drug abuse and to implement prevention, treatment and recovery programs in a more comprehensive and effective manner.

The Ministry of Entrepreneur and Cooperative Development (KUSKOP) program, which seeks to develop more entrepreneurs among ex-convicts and drug addicts, such as the Entrepreneur and Cooperative Rehabilitation Plan, the Social Entrepreneurship Blueprint (SEMy2030), and all the entrepreneurial training that supports the policy. The program aims to provide them with the skills and resources they need to start and run their own businesses, fostering self-sufficiency and economic empowerment (Yusop et al., 2021). Through this plan, the Malaysian Government will provide income tax relief to social enterprises that employ people with disabilities, ex-convicts, ex-drug users, and the homeless for three years. Exemptions will also be given to environmentally conscious businesses. The Malaysian Social Blueprint (SEMy) 2030 also contains tax relief for those who contribute to social enterprise initiatives (National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (DKN 2030, 2019). SEMy2030 will be implemented in two phases from 2021 to 2025, with the aim of strengthening the social entrepreneurship ecosystem. The second phase, which starts in 2026 and ends in 2030, aims to mainstream social enterprises (Malaysia Gazette, 2022).

Through the New Cluster Entrepreneur Program, the Ministry of Entrepreneur Development is reaching out to ex-prisoners, recovered drug abusers, and young people (Bernama, 2022). Creating a society with an entrepreneurial mindset and culture by fostering a holistic entrepreneurial ecosystem, enhancing the capabilities of local entrepreneurs, increasing access to financing and financial support, domestic and international markets, and entrepreneurial innovation and technology (Astro Awani, 2019).

Through the KUSKOP Program, ex-convicts and former drug addicts are encouraged to engage in entrepreneurship by joining local training initiatives and accessing financial support such as micro-loans and zakat. These initiatives enable them to establish businesses, gain financial resources, and promote an

entrepreneurial culture. Ultimately, this effort aims to foster an entrepreneurial mindset and culture across society.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Drug abuse is one of the major social challenges in Malaysia that has a major impact on individuals, families, and society. The recovery process of former drug addicts not only involves physical and psychological treatment, but also requires economic and social empowerment to ensure that they remain free from addiction.

Recovery has become a complex issue and is very difficult to define until now. Society and stakeholders often place this issue as a significant benchmark to explain the success of an intervention or program implemented, especially those involving drug treatment and rehabilitation programs. Often, the relapse rate or the time when an addict returns to using drugs, becomes the main and sole yardstick to define the success of an addict's recovery after undergoing treatment and rehabilitation (National Drug Policy, 2017). The majority of drug users relapsed and were re-arrested after release from prison (Sariwulan et al., 2020).

In this context, entrepreneurship is seen as one of the paths to recovery with high potential. It not only provides income, but also builds self-confidence, responsibility, and the opportunity to contribute back to society (Majoriti, 2023; Malaysia Gazette, 2023). The National Anti-Drug Agency (AADK), through various programs such as skills training, aftercare, and strategic collaboration with TEKUN, GIATMARA, SOCISO, and zakat agencies, has supported many former clients to start businesses (Agensi Antidadah Kebangsaan [AADK], 2022). The involvement of rehabilitated drug addicts in entrepreneurship programs has demonstrated positive changes in their lives (Dewan Masyarakat, 2022; Sabah News, 2023; Selangorkini, 2023).

Entrepreneurship helps them avoid the stigma of past addiction, enables them to create their own financial security, and enables them to make valuable contributions to the economy (Indrakurniawan et al., 2023).

However, systematic and in-depth studies on their success factors as entrepreneurs are still underexplored. What is the most effective form of support? What are their real challenges in the field? And what distinguishes those who succeed from those who return to the addiction cycle? Therefore, research on entrepreneurship among former drug addicts is very important to provide a more complete understanding and contribute to more effective and sustainable recovery efforts (Aziz & Ramachandran, 2022; Dingle et al., 2015; Maraire et al., 2020; Naong, 2011).

Problem Statement

Drug addiction continues to be one of Malaysia's pressing social issues, with many individuals entering rehabilitation programs every year. While treatment helps them break free from substance dependence, the journey does not end there. Life after rehabilitation is often filled with new struggles — finding work, earning a stable income and rebuilding trust in society. Former addicts frequently face stigma, rejection and limited opportunities, which not only undermine their confidence but also increase the risk of relapse.

Entrepreneurship offers a different kind of hope. For many, starting a small business can be more than just a way to make a living — it can be a chance to regain independence, build self-worth, and create a new identity beyond their past. Yet, success in entrepreneurship does not happen in isolation. It depends heavily on the broader entrepreneurial ecosystem — access to training, mentorship, financial support, fair policies and acceptance from the community. Unfortunately, little is known about how this ecosystem truly works for former drug addicts in Malaysia or how it can be strengthened to help them succeed.

This gap highlights the need for a closer look at the relationship between recovery and entrepreneurship. By exploring the success factors, challenges and the role of institutional support, this study aims to provide valuable insights for policymakers, practitioners and communities to design more inclusive and supportive entrepreneurial pathways for former addicts, enabling them to rebuild their lives with dignity and resilience.

Research Objectives

1. To synthesize existing literature on the entrepreneurship ecosystem in supporting the recovery process of former drug addicts in Malaysia.
2. To propose a conceptual framework on entrepreneurial ecosystems, social supports and individual capacities in the context of drug rehabilitation.

Research Questions

1. How does the entrepreneurship ecosystem facilitate the recovery and reintegration of former drug addicts in Malaysia?
2. What are the critical factors of the entrepreneurship ecosystem, social support, and individual capacities that contribute to resilience and successful rehabilitation of former drug addicts?

Justification Of the Study

This study is important because it explores an economically based recovery pathway that has not been studied in depth. Entrepreneurship not only helps former addicts build a stable income, but also serves as a long-term recovery mechanism that reduces the risk of relapse. The findings of this study are expected to strengthen AADK support policies and programs and help stakeholders develop a more holistic approach to drug recovery.

METHODOLOGY

This concept paper adopts a systematic literature review approach to examine entrepreneurship as a pathway for recovery and social reintegration among former drug addicts. The review focused on both academic research and policy documents to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the topic within the Malaysian context.

Relevant studies were retrieved from leading academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, PubMed, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect, complemented by searches in Google Scholar for broader coverage. In addition, government reports and policy documents such as the *National Entrepreneurship Policy 2030 (DKN2030)*, *SEMy2030*, and *KUSKOP initiatives* were incorporated to situate the discussion within national priorities. Keywords and Boolean operators used in the search included combinations of “drug addiction,” “substance abuse,” “entrepreneurship,” “recovery,” “rehabilitation,” “reintegration,” “entrepreneurial ecosystem,” “training,” “financial support,” “Malaysia,” and “developing countries.” The review was restricted to literature published between 2010 and 2024 in English and Malay.

The screening process followed a three-stage procedure: (i) reviewing titles and abstracts for relevance, (ii) assessing full texts according to the inclusion criteria, and (iii) applying a snowballing technique to identify additional relevant references from bibliographies. Approximately 120 records were initially identified, of which 48 sources met the criteria for in-depth analysis. Studies focusing exclusively on medical or clinical interventions without a social or economic dimension were excluded.

A thematic analysis was then applied to synthesize findings across the selected literature. In the first stage, open coding was used to identify recurring factors such as *resilience*, *self-efficacy*, *access to finance*, *stigma* and *social support*. In the second stage, these codes were clustered into broader categories: *entrepreneurial ecosystem inputs*, *individual capacities*, *social support and recovery outcomes*. Finally, the themes were integrated into a conceptual framework that highlights the relationships between entrepreneurship ecosystem factors, support mechanisms, and recovery trajectories. This systematic approach ensures transparency, validity, and reliability while providing a solid foundation for conceptualizing entrepreneurship as a sustainable recovery pathway.

DISCUSSION

Entrepreneurship plays a crucial role in driving economic growth and development worldwide (Mothibi et al., 2025). It serves as a catalyst for innovation, job creation, and increased productivity (Motoyama & Wiens, 2015). Small and medium-sized enterprises, which are often the backbone of entrepreneurial activity, significantly contribute to economic dynamism and competitiveness (Al-Yazidi & Hassan, 2022). Entrepreneurship education plays a vital role in fostering an entrepreneurial mindset and equipping individuals with the skills necessary to succeed in the business world (Zhang, 2023). Entrepreneurial intention, which is the conscious decision to start a new business, is influenced by various factors, including self-motivation, family support, peer influence, and institutional support (Shahzad et al., 2021). Governments and educational institutions are increasingly recognizing the importance of entrepreneurship education in promoting economic development and providing support through various programs and initiatives. However, many of these initiatives primarily focus on external capital resources, which may be inadequate for entrepreneurs who require a greater level of commitment and resilience to overcome the risk of failure (Gungah, 2021).

Entrepreneurial resilience, defined as the ability to overcome obstacles and setbacks, is particularly critical for entrepreneurs facing challenging circumstances (Bullough & Renko, 2013). Entrepreneurs must possess the ability to adapt to changing market conditions, manage risks, and persevere through difficult times (Lee & Wang, 2017). Entrepreneurial resilience is a multifaceted construct encompassing individual psychological traits, learned coping mechanisms, and the capacity to learn and adapt from both successes and failures (Duchek, 2017). Self-efficacy and resilience are important factors in motivating individuals facing challenges to engage in entrepreneurial activities (Bullough & Renko, 2013).

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The challenges and strategies faced in developing businesses are important for their success (Hamed & Mehdiabadi, 2020). The role of the AADK recovery program and support agencies in shaping entrepreneurs and proposing strategies to increase entrepreneurial support among former AADK clients (Dewi, 2024; Duchek, 2017). Entrepreneurship education contributes to risk-taking attitudes, new business formation, and self-employment inclinations (Miço & Cungu, 2023). Entrepreneurship can serve as a tool to build self-confidence, responsibility, and provide opportunities for contribution to society (Hou et al., 2022). The insights are meant to create an understanding to the policy makers, practitioners, and other stakeholders on the need to promote entrepreneurial mindset (Saoula et al., 2023).

Previous research has identified self-efficacy, family support and entrepreneurial motivation as key determinants of entrepreneurial career choice among former drug addicts in Malaysia, aiming to improve their quality of life after rehabilitation. The study adopts the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to support the theoretical framework and examines the role of self-efficacy, family support, and entrepreneurial motivation in raising awareness of the interest in becoming entrepreneurs. Young people are generally known to be strongly influenced by their family members and educators (Othman et al., 2012), and their motivation to do something different is a trait that supports their intention to become entrepreneurs. Therefore, these factors are crucial in assisting entrepreneurship educators to raise awareness of entrepreneurship among this group, to develop their entrepreneurial intentions, and ultimately to support their economic development upon reintegration into

society. The findings are expected to provide insights for policymakers, practitioners, and other stakeholders on the need to foster an entrepreneurial mindset (Saoula et al., 2023), in addition to examining the challenges and strategies faced by this group in building their businesses.

Sustainable business practices are vital for small and medium-sized enterprises, enhancing their competitiveness and offering long-term benefits such as cost savings and improved market positioning (Nik Mohd Azmi & Abd Talib, 2025). Sustainability in SMEs requires strategic adaptation, policy support, and innovative approaches (Nik Mohd Azmi & Abd Talib, 2025). Furthermore, transitioning towards sustainable business practices is supported by global best practices and local initiatives, emphasizing the importance of stakeholder engagement and robust regulatory frameworks (Nik Mohd Azmi & Abd Talib, 2025). Motivation to be an entrepreneur comes from their internal drivers (Nik Mohd Azmi & Abd Talib, 2025).

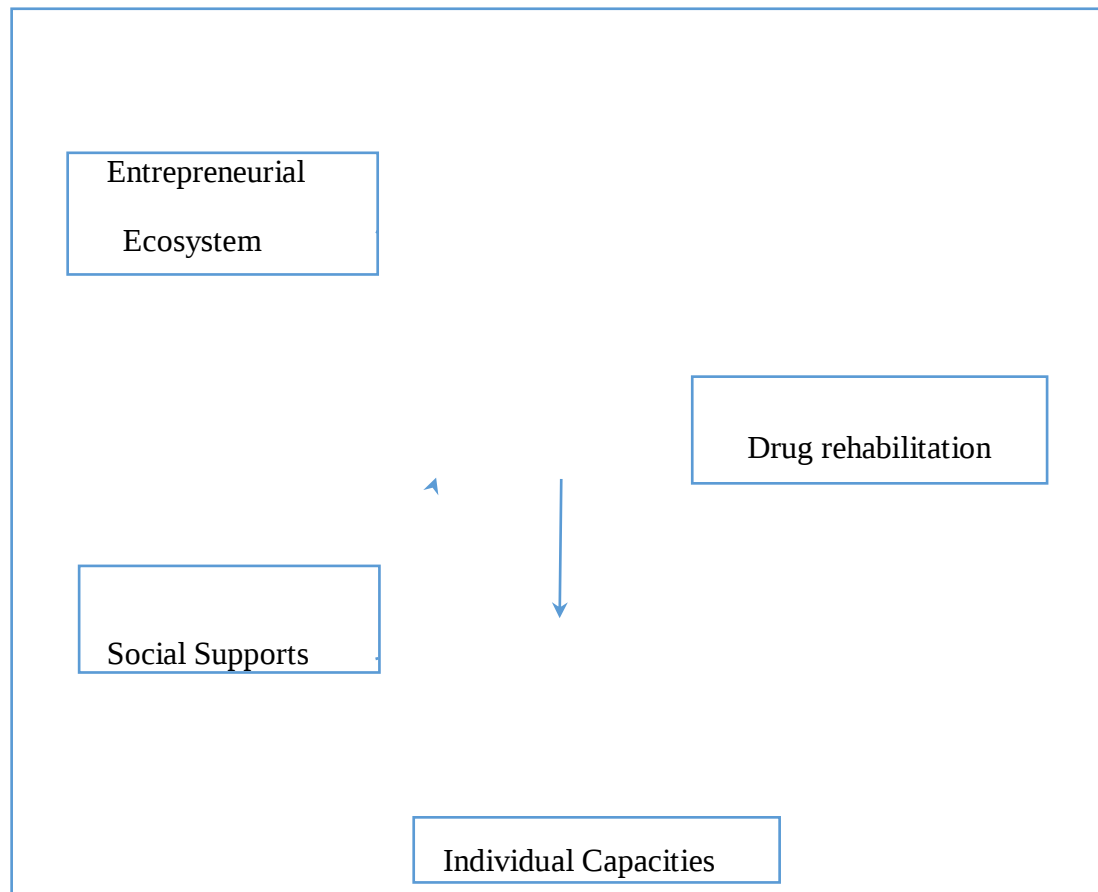


Figure 1: Proposed Theoretical Framework

Research Suggestion

Future studies could deepen this understanding in several ways. First, exploring the lived experiences of former addicts who have attempted or succeeded in entrepreneurship would provide richer insights into their motivations, barriers and strategies for coping. A comparative approach - examining those who succeed and those who struggle - could help identify key differences that shape outcomes.

Second, involving multiple stakeholders such as AADK, policymakers, community leaders, NGOs and rehabilitation centers in research would offer a more complete picture of how the ecosystem functions. This may reveal gaps between policy intentions and the real challenges on the ground.

Finally, longitudinal studies are worth considering, as recovery is not a linear process. Tracking individuals over time could show how entrepreneurship contributes to sustained recovery and social reintegration, rather than capturing experiences at only one moment.

CONCLUSION

This concept paper highlights the potential of entrepreneurship to serve as a meaningful route to recovery for former drug addicts in Malaysia. The ability to run a business can open doors to independence, confidence and social acceptance. Yet, this path is not shaped by individual effort alone. The entrepreneurial ecosystem surrounding them - from training and funding opportunities to supportive policies and community attitudes - plays a defining role in determining whether recovery through entrepreneurship is truly sustainable.

The discussion also shows that entrepreneurship, when supported effectively, can move beyond being an economic solution. It can become a social instrument that restores dignity and creates opportunities for inclusion. By investing in stronger entrepreneurial ecosystems that address stigma, build capacity and provide fair access, society can play an active role in helping former addicts reclaim their lives.

In short, entrepreneurship should be viewed not only as a business venture but also as a pathway for healing and reintegration. Strengthening the ecosystem is therefore not just about economic growth; it is about ensuring that recovery leads to resilience, dignity and genuine second chances.

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