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**Unlocking Second Chances: scoping review of the parole system and the path to successful community reintegration in Malaysia**

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**Abstract**

This paper explores how the parole system can assist with the successful reintegration into society especially for parolees who often face limited job opportunities which hindering their reintegration. However, the parole system can be a platform for implementing effective strategies for change. Despite studies on employer perceptions, further research on successful workforce and societal reintegration is needed. Using scoping review methods, this paper identifies existing literature on Malaysia's parole system and successful reintegration strategies. This paper concludes that Malaysia's parole system implements unique strategies for effective reintegration.

Keywords: parole system; parolees; reintegration; Malaysia

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**1.0 Introduction**

In criminal justice system, the Malaysian Prison Department serve as the main correctional body focusing on enhancing rehabilitation programs to promote successful reintegration for prisoners. While in prison, the prisoners being treated humanely, providing them with basic needs such as healthcare, ensures their safety, and facilitate programs to help prisoners transition back into society. However, the increasing number of criminal cases being brought to court including many prisoners serving long-term incarceration, causing Malaysia to face prison overcrowding issues. To date, around 75,000 prisoners including remand and pretrial detainees are being housed in 60 prisons across the nation, exceeding the actual 71,000 prisoner's maximum capacity (Bernama, 2024). In addition to grappling with prison overcrowding, the Malaysian Prison Department also faces the significant challenge of managing the financial burden associated with the cost of living for prisoners. According to Loh & Ley (2023), the estimated daily cost for Malaysia's prisons is RM3,015,272 per day. This has resulted the Malaysian government implementing alternative incarceration methods to reduce the number of prisoners, such as Resident Reintegration Programme (PRP), Compulsory Presence Order (PKW), Licensed Prisoner Release (OBB) programme, Conditional Leave (CB), Resettlement programme, Halfway House, and introducing parole system.

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The parole system was introduced under the Prison Act 1995 (amendment) 2008 and was enforced on 30th June 2008. The parole system is designed to smooth the reintegration into society, minimize prison overpopulation and the high maintenance costs faced by the government by giving prisoners a chance to create a new, high-quality life. This system also is intended to reduce recidivism and encourage rehabilitation. In addition, this system is overseen by the Parole Board. The board decides based on assessing the prisoner's risk and other factors. The parole period usually lasts for two (2) years.

The parole system allows prisoners to be released on a conditional basis, provided they adhere to certain guidelines. The eligibility for parole is subject to the offense committed and is considered if the prisoner has served half of his sentence in. Prisoners who intend to seek release on parole must follow the procedure, which is as follows:

- (i) Prisoners have completed half their prison terms and rehabilitation requirements.
- (ii) The Malaysian Prisons Headquarters (IPPM) recommends the application for parole.
- (iii) The Parole Board reviews the applicant's request for parole release.
- (iv) If the prisoner's application is accepted, the Parole Board will issue a parole order with the terms specified in it; and
- (v) The remaining time of a parolee's sentence will be served on parole until their release.

Despite the widely known of some aspects of the parole system, there are still significant gaps in understanding how the system effectively contributes to successful reintegration, particularly in Malaysia. Although there has been extensive research on the factors contributing to recidivism among former prisoners, for instance, substance abuse, peer associations, and the social environment, a well-structured investigation into how effectively the parole system addresses these factors is still promptly needed. Hence, this paper aims to review specifically the lesser-known aspects of the parole system and how the system can lead to effective reintegration

## **2.0 Methodology**

### *2.1 Scoping review method*

This study adopted scoping review method by following the methodological framework originally proposed by Arksey & O'Malley (2005) which used as a guideline and reference throughout the scoping process. There are five (5) stages in conducting this scoping study;

Stage 1: Identifying the research question.

Stage 2: Identifying relevant studies.

Stage 3: Study selection.

Stage 4: Charting the data.

Stage 5: Collating, summarizing, and reporting the results.

### *2.2 Identifying the research question*

To construct a search strategy, the first thing to do is identify the research question to be addressed. This helps to narrow the focus of the search, ensure that the right databases are being used, and limit the amount of information that needs to be reviewed. It also helps to determine the keywords that should be used in the search query.

The research question of this study is: 'What is known from the existing literature about the parole system in Malaysia? How can the parole system assist with successful reintegration into society, and what factors contribute to the successful reintegration of parolees?'. As part of this process, we also had to determine what contexts should be included in the term "parole system". In the context of this study, the parole system refers to the method used to implement the reintegration strategy.

### *2.3 Identifying relevant studies*

In this stage, an extensive literature search uses key terms related to the parole system and the Malaysian context. This was to ensure a comprehensive result, as well as all relevant topics, were covered. Besides, it also helped narrow the focus and make the search more efficient. The search used Boolean operators, such as "AND" and "OR," and quotation marks for exact phrases. A search string consisting of "parole system", "parole", "parolees", "reintegration", "rehabilitation", and "Malaysia" is used to locate articles about the subject.

We use various sources to find research evidence as part of the research process. The sources include online academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, Google Scholar, ProQuest, ERIC, and grey literature, including conference proceedings, working papers, and technical reports. In addition, the online library catalog was used to find physical resources such as library materials, if any

### *2.4 Study selection*

The scope of the search focuses on Malaysia. Therefore, results from studies outside Malaysia will be excluded as they may not apply to the Malaysian context. This is important because Malaysia's economic, social, and legal factors differ from other countries. The related sources discuss the parole system's components, practices, and impact on successful reintegration. The selected sources also provide insight into challenges, opportunities, or recommendations for improving the Malaysian parole system. The selected sources must be published in either English or Malay. Articles written in other languages will not be considered for selection. Moreover, English

and Malay are Malaysia's two most widely spoken and written languages. This step ensures that every article is included on both sides and that the selection process is evaluated equally.

Search results are drawn from the earliest to the most recent studies. With this strategy, everything might be covered from the beginning, and the most recent data will also be considered to capture the pattern appropriate to the current context of the parole system.

Regarding article journals, those that are not full-text accessible or cannot be accessed through academic databases would not be included. Full-text access makes it possible to verify the journal's content's accuracy and reliability. A summary of the inclusion and exclusion criteria for this topic can be found in Table 1.

Table 1. Inclusion and exclusion criteria for a scoping review

	Inclusion	Exclusion
Types of sources	Peer-reviewed journal articles, Conference proceedings, Government reports and policy documents, Theses and dissertations, Grey literature, Books and book chapters, and Official websites.  Published in the English and Malay language.	Personal blogs and websites, Non-peer-reviewed sources, Outdated or irrelevant sources, Sources from non-Malaysian contexts, Fictional literature, News articles, and media sources.  Non-English / Malay language sources.
Context	Malaysian Context, Research conducted in Malaysia, Malaysian population, Comparative studies, Relevant policies, and initiatives.	Non-Malaysian context, Studies conducted outside Malaysia, General criminal justice literature, and Studies on unrelated topics.
Concept	Parole System Successful Reintegration Rehabilitation and Support Stakeholders Contextual Factors	Unrelated aspects of criminal justice General criminal justice literature, Studies on unrelated populations, Non-relevant outcomes, Irrelevant interventions, or strategies.

### 2.5 Charting the data

A data-charting table was developed to identify the variables for extraction. Independently, the authors charted the data by extracting the key information, such as (i) title, (ii) author(s), (iii) year, (iv) data collection methods, (v) study location, (vi) study population, (vii) study design, (viii) aims of the study, (viii) important results, (x) key terms and (xi) future works. Upon completion, the data systematically organized by sorting the sources into major themes and issues. This allows the data to be easily compared and analyzed into different categories for further analysis in the final stage.

### 2.6 Collate, summarize, and report results

From the data-charting method, five (5) major themes have been identified. The authors categorized the themes based on common issues discussed, aligning them with the objective of addressing the research questions. Each source underwent a comprehensive assessment and evaluation to ensure alignment with the specific themes. Finally, the result reported in the findings.

## 3.0 Findings

Our findings reflect the patterns, trends, and gaps identified through literature selection and synthesis in line with the scoping review method. Although a scoping review provides a broad overview, our findings are reliable. Through a systematic search across multiple databases and sources, a total of 299 articles were identified. After the removal of duplicates, articles were screened for further assessment. Of these, 295 articles were assessed for eligibility, and 266 were excluded.

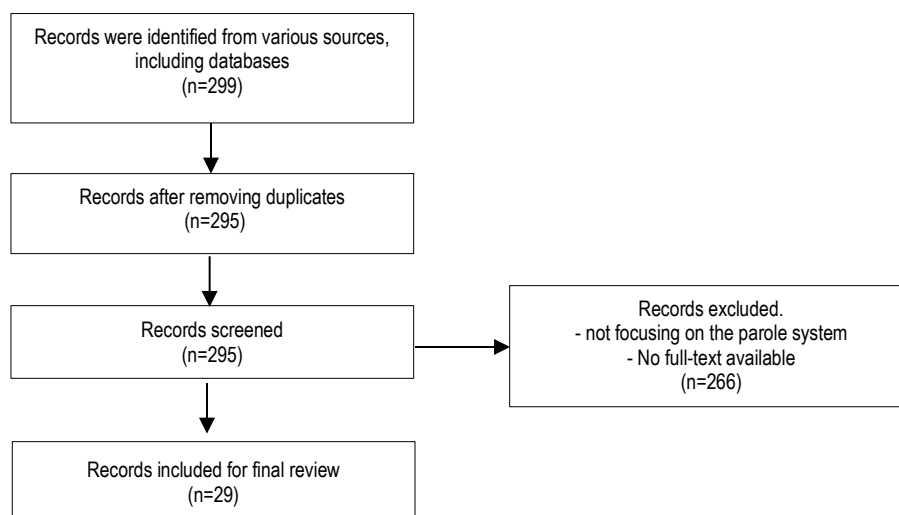


Fig. 1: Selection of studies for the scoping review

Of these articles (n=266), none focus on the parole system in the Malaysian context, and some full-text access is not available. Thus, a comprehensive assessment of their relevance cannot be made. After a thorough review, the team concluded that 29 articles were the most suitable for the review (see Fig 1).

Table 2. Description of included studies

No.	Authors	Data collection method	Type	Study population	N	Study design	Themes
1.	Hassan et al. (2017)	Document analysis / Face-to-face interviews	Article	Parole officers, parole board	13	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
2.	Goh Yeok et al. (2020)	Face-to-face interviews	Article	Prisoners	19	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
3.	Abu Hassan et al. (2018)	Document analysis / Face-to-face interviews	Article	Parole officers, parolees, parole board	13	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
4.	Ibrahim et al. (2016)	Survey method	Article	Parolees	280	Quantitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
5.	Azim & Shaharudin, (2021)	Library method / Document analysis / Secondary sources	Discussion paper	N/A	N/A	Qualitative	Policy and institutional factors
6.	(Syamsulang & Huzaini, 2023)	Face-to-face interviews	Article	Parole officers	5	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
7.	(Abdul Latib & Zaik, 2023)	Face-to-face interviews	Article	Parolees	13	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
8.	(Hamin et al., 2015).	Library method / Document analysis Secondary sources	Article	Parole board	13	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
9.	Gisler et al. (2018)	Document analysis and secondary sources	Working paper	N/A	N/A	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
10.	Mohd Rosli et al. (2021)	Telephone interviews /document analysis	Article	Prison Vocational Training Officer, former prisoner	2	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
11.	Che Mohd Nasir et al (2020)	Face-to-face interviews	Article	Parole officers	13	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
12.	Jasni et al. (2022)	Face to face interview	Article	Former prisoners	19	Qualitative	Impact of positive life events and turning points
13.	Hamin et al. (2014)	Document analysis and secondary sources	Article	N/A	N/A	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
14.	Yaakob & Hj. Sarifuddin (2022)	Document analysis & Face-to-face interviews	Article	Parole officers, parolees	40	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
15.	Mustaffa & Ishak (2019)	Face-to-face interview	Article	Parole officers	40	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
16.	Mokhtar et al. (2023)	Online Gmeet interview	Article	Director of Pahang Prison Department	1	Qualitative	Policy and institutional factors
17.	Hamin et al. (2018)	Library method / Document analysis/ Face-to-face interviews	Article	Prison rehabilitation officers, parole officers, parolees, Parole board	20	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
18.	Hashim et al. (2018)	Document analysis/ Face-to-face interviews	Article	Prison officer	N/A	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
19.	Hashim et al. (2021)	Documents review / Face-to-face interviews	Article	Prison officer	N/A	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
20.	Cheah et al. (2020)	Face-to-face interviews	Article	Prisoners, former prisoners, recidivists	14	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
21.	Wan Sulaiman et al. (2016)	Survey method	Article	Parolees	280	Quantitative	Impact of Positive Life Events and Turning Points
22.	Sathoo et al. (2017)	Survey method	Article	Parolees	52	Quantitative	Community and Stakeholder Involvement
23.	Sathoo et al. (2021)	Survey method	Article	Parolees	240	Quantitative	Community and Stakeholder Involvement
24.	Alavi et al. (2013)	Survey method	Article	Parolees	280	Quantitative	Impact of Positive Life Events and Turning Points
25.	Hamin et al. (2012)	Library method / Document analysis	Article	Parole board	N/A	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
26.	Jasni et al. (2020)	Library method / Document analysis	Article	N/A	N/A	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs
27.	Abu Hassan (2018)	Face-to-face interviews	Thesis	Parole officer	N/A	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
28.	Hamin & Abu Hassan (2012)	Face-to-face interviews	Article	Parole officer, parole board	15	Qualitative	The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration
29.	Abu Mutalib (2019)	Library method / Document analysis	Training material	N/A	N/A	Qualitative	Rehabilitation and reintegration programs

Among the studies, 25 were published in peer-reviewed journals, 1 in discussion paper, 1 in resource materials for training course, 1 in a working paper, and 1 in a thesis. The majority of studies were published between 2012 and 2023. In most studies, qualitative methods were used, including interviews (n = 16) and other qualitative methods (n = 8). The remaining interviews were face-to-face except for 1 using the Google Meet platform and one via telephone. Among the participants interviewed by the studies, nine studies are interviewing parole officers, four are interviewing parole boards, one is interviewing a former director of the prison department, and four are interviewing parolees. In only 3 cases, structured interviews are used, whereas in the other cases, semi-structured interviews are used. There was a total of 5 quantitative studies, all of which consisted of parolees as respondents. 4 studies refer to specific studies that were conducted in Pahang, Terengganu, Perlis, Selangor, and Negeri Sembilan, whereas others remain only mentioned in Malaysia.

Upon conducting a thorough review, it has been observed that a significant body of literature is available on Malaysia's parole system. This literature comprehensively covers various aspects of the system, including the roles played by parole officers, the rehabilitation programs offered, the social support provided to them, and the extent of community involvement in facilitating their successful reintegration into society. Thus, we were also able to identify several key themes: the role of parole officers as facilitators of reintegration (n=9), rehabilitation and reintegration programs (n=13), policy and institutional factors (n=2), the impact of positive life events and turning points (n=3), and community and stakeholder involvement (n=2). The following table describes the included studies (see Table 2).

## 4.0 Discussion

Throughout this section, we explore the key themes from our scoping review to show how the parole system contributes to successful reintegration among Malaysian parolees.

### 4.1 *The Role of Parole Officers as Facilitators of Reintegration*

The role of parole officers emerged as key factors in the effectiveness of parole systems. Our findings showed that parole officers' active involvement in mentoring, monitoring, and moral support was crucial to successful reintegration. They act as intermediaries between parolees and the criminal justice system.

However, based on the review, the Prison Act 1995 does not explicitly cover the specific duties of parole officers and the purpose of rehabilitation for parolees (Abu Hassan, 2018). Consequently, rehabilitating parolees can be very difficult and places a heavy burden on parole officers as the precise responsibilities need to be specified clearly. Parole officers need more clarity on how to proceed when rehabilitating parolees.

Additionally, due to their dual roles, which are both legal and operational, they are faced with the challenge of monitoring prisoners while reintegrating them back into society (Abu Hassan et al., 2018; Abdul Mutalib, 2019). According to Hamin et al. (2018), it has been discovered that the operational challenges faced by parole officers can be linked to their roles, qualifications, and expertise, as well as the policies and priorities of the prisons within which they serve. This often leads to a lack of resources, understanding of the parolee's needs, and a lack of support from the prison system. The successful reintegration of parolees relies significantly on parole officers' ability to address these predicaments.

### 4.2 *Rehabilitation and Reintegration Programs*

According to our review, rehabilitation, and reintegration programs are essential to the effectiveness of parole systems. Most studies concluded that successful rehabilitation and reintegration programs can decrease recidivism rates. Hassan et al. (2017) suggest that integration success depends on the effectiveness of the rehabilitation programs provided to parolees. In Malaysia, the rehabilitation program implemented for prisoners is systematic and orderly. Most ex-prisoners are satisfied with the rehabilitation programs offered, which indicates that those programs are effective and appropriate (Siew et al., 2020).

According to Hashim et al. (2021), the rehabilitation program for prisoners is well-balanced since it considers various critical dimensions, such as rehabilitation's physical, mental, and moral aspects. As part of this comprehensive module, prisoners should undergo physical rehabilitation, mental health treatment, attitude, behavior, and spiritual development to prepare them for successful reintegration into society. To date, parolees have access to various programs, such as intervention, religious, NGO partnerships, and community involvement.

Among the interesting findings of the rehabilitation program implemented is through vocational training programs. The prisoners in this program are given access to workshops, which serve as jobs (Mohd Rosli et al., 2021). The prisoners will receive compensation based on the color of their shirt collar, representing the prisoner's punishment level. The initiatives are part of the prison's rehabilitation and reintegration program to encourage prisoners to behave properly and to contribute economically to the family income.

### 4.3 *Policy and Institutional Factors*

We identified broader contexts where parole operates by analyzing policy and institutional factors. These factors accounted for the differences in parole decision-making and outcomes across jurisdictions. It is believed that rehabilitation in the institution is crucial to successful parole release. For instance, parole officers work closely with prisoners to create individualized rehabilitation plans that address the prisoners' needs and risks. By strengthening the institutional rehabilitation framework, parolees can have a better chance of reintegrating into society.

In deciding on a parole release, several factors are considered, including legal considerations, the experience and expertise of the parole board members, individual viewpoints, and the content of the parole dossier. As a result of properly understanding these factors,

the parole decision-making processes can be made fairer and more knowledgeable in the future. It can be seen whereby the Parole Board is responsible for maintaining checks and balances in assisting prisoners to integrate into society and ensuring society's safety. As such, they must carefully assess all decisions regarding the parole of prisoners to ensure that the proper justice has been served.

Comprehensive and transparent data about prisons and prisoners are essential for identifying areas of reform and including various stakeholders in the reintegration process. Such data can formulate policy decisions and enhance reintegration outcomes through evidence-based decision-making.

#### *4.4 The Impact of Positive Life Events and Turning Points*

Among the fascinating findings of the scoping review is the role of "Positive Life Events and Turning Points" in determining successful reintegration pathways. These events refer to significant moments that change an individual's life trajectory and can be positive or negative. The review found that these events are a key factor in successful reintegration into society and can be used to design more effective interventions.

The review further identified that homelessness after release is a major challenge in reintegrating parolees into society (Mohd Rosli et al., 2021). Currently, a halfway house is available under the parole program, but it is insufficient due to a lack of infrastructure in Malaysia (Jasni et al., 2020). Besides that, according to Cheah et al. (2020), discrimination and isolation are key factors preventing ex-prisoners from reintegrating into society and reestablishing social connections. These feelings of isolation can lead to depression, stress, and substance abuse. This situation somehow led to recidivism. Recidivism is driven by four dynamic risk factors: unemployment, stigma, personal factors, and willingness to change, as well as family rejection (Che Mohd Nasir et al., 2020). These risk factors can profoundly impact an individual's ability to succeed in the community after release from prison. Managing public safety risks requires internal and external support, as parole agencies play a key role in ensuring successful reintegration and reducing recidivism.

Thus, four primary elements are involved in parole's effectiveness in preventing recidivism. The elements are regularly testing parolees' urine, monitoring their progress, offering moral support from parole officers, and implementing drug prevention education programs to reduce reoffending rates and support their successful reintegration into society (Abdul Latib & Zaik, 2023). These measures must be taken to ensure the safety of the public and the successful rehabilitation of parolees.

Although there are difficulties and barriers in putting this parole system into place, the parolee benefits much from it. Malaysian parole benefits offenders, prison management, and socioeconomic development (Yaakob & Sarifuddin, 2022). A further review finding is that most parolees possess positive entrepreneurship characteristics, indicating they can contribute to their communities and successfully reintegrate into society (Ibrahim et al., 2016). Rehabilitation and reintegration strategies can be more effective if these strengths are recognized and leveraged.

#### *4.5 Community and Stakeholder Involvement*

The "Community and Stakeholder Involvement" theme is a fundamental dimension of our scoping review. As parolees transition back into society, communities, organizations, and stakeholders play an important role in facilitating their successful reintegration. Providing comprehensive support programs and community-based initiatives to parolees by engaging community members and stakeholders led to an inclusive environment.

Meanwhile, Syamsulang & Huzaini (2023) stated the crucial factors that play a role in parole activities: social factors, family factors, community factors, private factors, and government policies. As a result of these factors, it is evident that reintegration is a multidimensional process that requires an integrated approach that requires collaboration between stakeholders to address the complex challenges facing parolees. It is important to create supportive environments where they can accept and understand (Sathoo et al., 2021).

In addition, returning prisoners, including parolees, will benefit from expanded social support opportunities. This can help break the cycle of recidivism and lead to more successful rehabilitation outcomes. In this regard, having a parole monitoring system in place can be useful for parolees at risk of losing their autonomy so that they have the support of their families, employers, and other members of society who can help them build their resilience. Moreover, it has been shown that protective factors such as family, peers, and communities in the social environment can help parolees to stay away from crime and successfully reintegrate into society.

### **5.0 Strengths and limitations**

As a result of our review, we found several strengths. First, we used an extensive range of sources to cover the literature comprehensively, both online and offline. Second, no date restrictions are applied to our searches across multiple databases and search engines. This enabled us to capture a wide breadth of the literature and assess the full scope of the research conducted over many years.

Nevertheless, there may have been some limitations in the search for this study. First, the geographical scope of the study was limited to Malaysia. Therefore, the findings may only apply to some countries. Second, because a scoping review is based on the existing literature, the inaccessibility of primary research studies on the parole system in Malaysia and successful reintegration in Malaysia could limit the depth of the study. Moreover, as much effort as is made to reduce bias, with the absence of an appraisal exercise, there is a possibility of personal judgment or unintentional biases in selecting the studies for inclusion.

### **6.0 Conclusion**

This scoping review has shed light on various dimensions of Malaysia's parole system and reintegration strategies. The study's findings emphasize the importance of evidence-based rehabilitation programs, the role of social support networks, parole officers and chances

given by the parole board in supporting the transition of prisoners back into society. The parole system in Malaysia has demonstrated its efficacy in providing a second chance to prisoners. To reinforce this positive impact, there is a critical need to enhance it further by actively encouraging increased employer participation in the reintegration program. It is important to note that these findings are only sometimes generalizable to other countries, as the Malaysian parole system has unique features. However, the findings can still be used to inform similar systems elsewhere. The study identified gaps and challenges by systematically examining existing literature, providing a foundation for future research and policy considerations. As the landscape of parole and criminal justice evolves, the insights garnered from this review can serve as a valuable reference for enhancing the effectiveness of parole systems, improving reintegration outcomes, and contributing to the broader goal of a rehabilitative and just society.

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## Paper Contribution to Related Field of Study

This paper offers a better understanding of Malaysia's parole and rehabilitation systems. This paper highlights the role of the parole officer, explores program effectiveness, identifies influencing factors, and provides recommendations for enhancing the overall effectiveness of rehabilitation and reintegration efforts, with the ultimate goal of reducing recidivism rates and promoting successful reintegration into society. Hence, it significantly contributes to the field of policy studies, sociology, human capital, and social justice.

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