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The influence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) on the self-control of recidivists of the women's correctional institution

Pengaruh pengalaman masa kecil yang buruk (adverse childhood experiences/ACEs) terhadap pengendalian diri residivis di lembaga pemasyarakatan perempuan

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ABSTRACT

A recidivist is an individual who reoffends after serving a previous sentence, which is often associated with low Self-Control. Low Self-Control can be influenced by traumatic childhood experiences, also known as Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). This study aimed to analyze the effect of ACEs on the Self-Control of recidivists in women's correctional institutions. The research used a quantitative correlational design. The study population consisted of 549 inmates, and the sample comprised 107 female recidivists selected through purposive sampling. The research instruments were the WHO ACE-IQ and the Indonesian-adapted Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS). Data were analyzed using simple linear regression with JASP 0.19.3 software. The results showed that ACEs had a significant negative effect on Self-Control, explaining 8.7% of its variance ($p < 0.01$). These findings highlight the importance of trauma-based psychological rehabilitation to improve Self-Control and help prevent recidivism in women's correctional institutions.

Kata Kunci:
Residivisme, pengalaman masa kecil yang buruk, pengendalian diri

ABSTRACT

Residivis adalah individu yang kembali melakukan tindak pidana setelah menjalani hukuman sebelumnya, yang sering dikaitkan dengan rendahnya pengendalian diri. Rendahnya pengendalian diri dapat dipengaruhi oleh pengalaman traumatis di masa kanak-kanak, yang dikenal sebagai Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs). Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis pengaruh ACEs terhadap pengendalian diri residivis di lembaga pemasyarakatan perempuan. Penelitian ini menggunakan desain kuantitatif korelasional. Populasi penelitian berjumlah 549 narapidana, dengan sampel sebanyak 107 residivis perempuan yang dipilih melalui teknik purposive sampling. Instrumen penelitian yang digunakan adalah WHO ACE-IQ dan Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS) yang telah diadaptasi ke dalam bahasa Indonesia. Analisis data dilakukan menggunakan regresi linier sederhana dengan bantuan perangkat lunak JASP versi 0.19.3. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa ACEs berpengaruh negatif secara signifikan terhadap pengendalian diri, dengan kontribusi sebesar 8,7% ($p < 0,01$). Temuan ini menekankan pentingnya rehabilitasi psikologis berbasis trauma untuk meningkatkan pengendalian diri dan mencegah residivisme di lembaga pemasyarakatan perempuan.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Crime can be understood as a social phenomenon that reflects behavior deviating from legal norms and collective values, with its roots often traced to both structural and individual determinants (Fathi, 2016). Among the internal factors, low self-control is considered a significant driver of criminality. Prior studies suggest that individuals with poor self-regulation are more inclined to take risks, and this tendency shows a strong correlation with the likelihood of engaging in unlawful acts (Friehe & Hörisch, 2016; Boccio & Beaver, 2021). Such vulnerability is strongly linked to recidivism, the repeated commission of offenses after serving a legal sanction (Kurniawati & Soetikno, 2024). This pattern is particularly evident in the South Kalimantan Women's Correctional Institution, where all cases of recidivism are narcotics-related, rising from 101 individuals in 2023 to 110 individuals in 2024. Conceptually, self-control is defined as the capacity to regulate one's cognitions, emotions, and behaviors, particularly the ability to suppress short-term impulses in favor of long-term objectives (Tangney et al., 2004).

Data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) indicates a sharp rise in criminal cases in Indonesia, from 372,965 incidents in 2022 to 584,991 in 2023 (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). Within this trend, narcotics offenses occupy a critical position, with the Indonesian National Police recording 43,580 cases by the end of 2024. These offenses are categorized as extraordinary crimes, given their profound consequences for both individuals and society (Hartanto & Amin Ningrum, 2021). South Kalimantan ranks among the provinces with the highest prevalence of narcotics-related cases (Badan Pusat Statistik, 2024). The observed increase in female recidivism within this context highlights the necessity of investigating psychological determinants, particularly self-control, which has been identified as a central internal predictor of repeat offending (Hamzah et al., 2020; Billen et al., 2019). Such findings underscore the relevance of self-control in shaping the propensity to re-engage in criminal behavior within correctional settings.

The development of self-control is shaped by a combination of psychological, social, and biological influences. Research by Kim et al. (2022) demonstrates that family dysfunction and mental health problems during adolescence are linked to diminished self-control in adulthood. In addition, Hagger and Hamilton (2024) highlight the role of cognitive-social dimensions, including internalization of social norms and the capacity to orient behavior toward long-term objectives, in regulating impulses. Another factor consistently shown to impair self-control is exposure to Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs), encompassing physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, neglect, as well as household dysfunction (Felitti et al., 1998; World Health Organization, 2020).

The pervasive influence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on psychological and behavioral development underscores their importance in understanding the likelihood of recidivism. Empirical studies indicate that exposure to ACEs heightens vulnerability to maladaptive behaviors, substance abuse, and law violations in adulthood (Merluşcă &

Chiracu, 2018). While Kowalski et al. (2023) emphasize that Positive Childhood Experiences (PCEs) may serve as protective factors, individuals with substantial exposure to ACEs continue to face elevated risks of deviant behavior. Within this framework, ACEs can be understood as a critical antecedent of diminished self-control, which subsequently contributes to the propensity for recidivism.

A substantial body of research supports the negative relationship between ACEs, self-control abilities, and the tendency toward risky behavior. Jones et al. (2021), through a longitudinal study, demonstrated that higher exposure to ACEs in childhood is associated with lower levels of self-control in adolescence and young adulthood. Similarly, a meta-analysis by Rahapsari and Levita (2024) confirmed that ACEs consistently impair cognitive control and inhibitory functioning, which are central components of self-control. Extending this, Oei et al. (2023) highlighted that ACEs exert long-term effects across multiple domains of life, increasing vulnerability to risky behaviors such as substance abuse, unsafe sexual activity, and criminal involvement. In line with these findings, Wolff et al. (2017) and Heirigs et al. (2020) reported that individuals with higher levels of ACE exposure are more likely to engage in deviant behaviors and criminal activity in adulthood. Moreover, Astridge et al.'s (2023) meta-analysis demonstrated that the cumulative impact of ACEs nearly doubles the risk of recidivism, underscoring ACEs as a critical predictor of repeated offending.

Although extensive research has examined the relationship between ACEs and self-control, most studies have focused on children, adolescents, or the general population. Empirical evidence specifically addressing adult recidivists in Indonesia remains scarce. Moreover, prior studies have largely emphasized correlational patterns without clarifying the quantitative contribution of ACEs to self-control. To address this gap, the present study investigates the effect of ACEs on self-control among female recidivists in South Kalimantan Women's Correctional Institutions. This research is expected to provide contextual contributions to the development of trauma-informed psychological interventions within correctional settings. Accordingly, the hypothesis of this study is that higher exposure to ACEs predicts lower levels of self-control among female recidivists.

2. METHOD

This study employs a quantitative approach with a correlational design, which is used to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables as well as predictive contributions, without inferring causal relationships (Christensen et al., 2015). This design was selected to assess the extent to which Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) influence self-control among female recidivists in the South Kalimantan Women's Correctional Institution. The research consists of two variables: (1) the independent variable, ACEs, defined as traumatic or stressful experiences occurring before the age of 18 that may negatively affect psychological well-being in adulthood; and (2) the dependent variable, self-

control, defined as the individual's ability to regulate impulses, resist immediate urges, and make decisions oriented toward long-term outcomes, particularly in situations involving risks or temptations.

The respondents in this study were female inmates who were recidivists at the South Kalimantan Women's Correctional Institution. As of January 9, 2025, the total inmate population was 549 individuals. A purposive sampling technique was applied with the following inclusion criteria: (1) having committed repeated violations of the law at least once, (2) being involved in narcotics-related cases, (3) voluntarily agreeing to participate, and (4) possessing basic literacy skills in reading and writing. Based on these criteria, 107 respondents met the requirements and were included as the research sample.

The first instrument used to measure the ACEs variable was the *Adverse Childhood Experiences – International Questionnaire* (ACE-IQ), developed by the World Health Organization and adapted into the Indonesian context by Rahapsari et al. (2021). The instrument comprises 29 items that assess 13 indicators of traumatic childhood experiences, including emotional neglect, physical abuse, sexual abuse, as well as family and community dysfunction. Response formats vary according to each indicator, and the overall score ranges from 0 to 13. Prior to its application in this study, the scale was tested for reliability on a sample of 40 inmates, yielding a Cronbach's alpha of 0.807, which demonstrates satisfactory internal consistency.

The second instrument used to measure Self-Control was the Brief Self-Control Scale (BSCS) developed by Tangney et al. (2004) and adapted into the Indonesian context by Arifin and Milla (2020). This scale consists of 10 items presented on a five-point Likert scale, ranging from "Very Inappropriate" to "Very Appropriate." The BSCS assesses general aspects of self-control, including impulse regulation and decision-making in risky situations. A reliability test was conducted on a pilot sample of 40 inmates, yielding a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.834, which indicates high internal consistency and confirms the suitability of the scale for use in this study.

Data collection was carried out offline by distributing printed questionnaires directly to respondents within the correctional facility. The research procedure began with a try-out phase to examine the reliability of both measurement instruments. After confirming that the instruments met reliability standards, data were collected from 107 respondents who fulfilled the inclusion criteria. Prior to the main analysis, statistical assumption tests were conducted, including the Kolmogorov-Smirnov normality test and a linearity test. The normality test produced a significance value of 0.500 ($p > 0.05$), indicating that the data were normally distributed. The linearity test confirmed that the relationship between ACEs and self-control was linear and statistically significant. To assess the relationship between variables, Pearson's correlation test was applied to determine the direction and strength of the association between ACEs and self-control. Furthermore, simple linear regression analysis was employed to evaluate the predictive contribution of ACEs to self-control. All statistical analyses were performed using JASP software version 0.19.3.

3. RESULTS

The following table presents data regarding the demographic characteristics of respondents in the study.

Table 1. Overview of Research Respondents

Characteristic	Total	Percentage (%)
Age		
• Under 40 years old	45 person	45%
• Over 40 years old	62 person	65%
Residential Block		
• Maximum Security	30 person	28%
• Medium Security I	22 person	21%
• Medium Security II	11 person	10%
• Minimum Security I	21 person	20%
• Minimum Security II	5 person	5%
• Mapenaling	7 person	6%
• Tamping (worker)	11 person	10%
Recidivist to		
• One time	95 person	89%
• Two times	8 person	7%
• Three times	4 person	4%
Narcotics Case	107 person	100%

The demographic profile of respondents showed that the majority were aged over 40 years, totaling 62 individuals (65%). Most participants were housed in the Maximum Security block, comprising 30 individuals (28%). With regard to recidivism, the largest proportion had committed repeat offenses once, amounting to 95 individuals (89%). All respondents in this study (100%) were incarcerated for narcotics-related offenses. Although a total of 109 recidivists were initially identified, two did not participate in the data collection process, resulting in 107 valid respondents.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics Results of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Self-Control

	Valid	*Mean*	*Std. Deviation*	*Minimum*	*Maximum*
ACEs	107	6,5	2,2	0	13
Self-Control	107	30	6,7	10	50

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the study variables based on data from 107 respondents. The average ACEs score was 6.5 (SD = 2.2), reflecting a relatively wide variation in exposure to adverse childhood experiences. In comparison, the average Self-Control score was 30.0 (SD = 6.7). The ACEs scores ranged from 0 to 13, while the Self-Control scores ranged from 10 to 50.

Table 3 *Frequency Distribution of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) and Self-Control*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Adverse Childhood Experiences (*ACEs*)	≥ 4	37	34,58 %
	3	8	7,48 %
	2	26	24,30 %
	1	26	24,30 %
	0	10	9,35 %
Total		**107**	**100 %**
Self-Control	High	28	26 %
	Medium	78	73 %
	Low	1	1 %
Total		**107**	**100 %**

Based on Table 3, it was found that 37 respondents (34.58%) reported experiencing four or more types of ACEs. In addition, 8 respondents (7.48%) experienced three types of ACEs, while 26 respondents (24.30%) experienced two types of ACEs and another 26 respondents (24.30%) experienced one type of ACEs. Only 10 respondents (9.35%) reported no history of ACEs. In terms of Self-Control, the majority of respondents (n = 78; 73%) were categorized as having moderate levels of Self-Control. Meanwhile, 28 respondents (26%) demonstrated high levels of Self-Control, and only 1 respondent (1%) fell into the low Self-Control category.

Table 4 *Assumption Test Results*

No.	Assumption Test	Statistic/Uji F	df	Sig. (p)	Criteria
1	Kolmogorov- Smirnov Normality Test	0,080	-	0,500	P > 0,05
2	Linearity Test	F = 10.048	(1,105)	0,002	P < 0,05
3	Deviation from Linearity	F = 0.708	-	0,700	P > 0.05
4	Pearson Correlation Test	- 0,296	-	0,002	P < 0,005

The normality test using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov method produced a significance value of 0.500. Because the p-value was greater than 0.05, the data met the assumption of normal distribution, allowing the use of parametric analysis. The linearity test yielded an F-value of 10.048 with a significance level of 0.002 (< 0.05), while the deviation from linearity was 0.700 (> 0.05). These results indicate that the relationship between the independent variable (ACEs) and the dependent variable (Self-Control) is linear and statistically significant. Furthermore, the Pearson correlation analysis demonstrated a significant negative association between ACEs and Self-Control, with a correlation coefficient of r = -0.296 and a significance value of p = 0.002 (p < 0.01). This finding suggests that higher levels of ACEs are associated with lower levels of Self-Control among recidivists.

Table 5 *Hypothesis Test Results*

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	RMSE
H_0	0.000	0.000	0.000	3.779
H_1	0.296	0.087	0.079	3.627

Hypothesis testing was performed using simple linear regression analysis. The results, presented in Table 5, indicate that 8.7% of the variance in Self-Control is accounted for by ACEs, while the remaining 91.3% is attributable to other factors not included in the model. The adjusted R^2 value of 0.079 suggests a modest but consistent explanatory power, and the Root Mean Square Error (RMSE) of 3.627 indicates a relatively small average prediction error for the model.

Table 6 Regression Coefficient Test Results

Model		*Unstandardized*	*Standard Error*	*Standardized*	t	p
H_0	(Intercept)	32.075	0.365		87.807	< .001
H_1	(Intercept)	33.476	0.564		59.342	< .001
	ACEs	-0.482	0.152	-0.296	-3.170	0.002

Based on the results presented in Table 6, the unstandardized regression coefficient (B) for ACEs was -0.482 with a significance value of $p = 0.002$ ($p < 0.01$), indicating a significant negative effect of ACEs on Self-Control. This finding suggests that each one-unit increase in the ACEs score is associated with a 0.482-unit decrease in the Self-Control score. The standardized regression coefficient (β) of -0.296 further indicates a moderate strength of influence. These results support the study hypothesis, confirming that adverse childhood experiences significantly reduce the level of self-control among recidivists in the Women's Correctional Institution.

4. DISCUSSION

This study aimed to examine the effect of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on Self-Control among recidivists at the South Kalimantan Women's Correctional Institution. The results indicated that ACEs have a significant negative impact on Self-Control, accounting for 8.7% of the variance. These findings suggest that higher exposure to ACEs is associated with a reduced ability to regulate impulses and control behavior. This outcome aligns with the research hypothesis, confirming that traumatic childhood experiences can impair self-control and increase the likelihood of recidivism. The results underscore the importance of addressing psychological factors, in addition to legal and social considerations, when understanding and preventing reoffending behavior among women.

The negative relationship between ACEs and Self-Control can be explained through both psychological and neurobiological mechanisms. Exposure to ACEs generates chronic stress that disrupts brain and nervous system development, thereby reducing emotion regulation and impulse control (Sadeh et al., 2020; Jebraeili et al., 2023). ACEs have been shown to alter activity in brain regions such as the striatum and cerebellum, increasing the risk of impaired self-regulation, anxiety, and addictive behaviors (Keator et al., 2024). Experiences of abuse, neglect, and family dysfunction during childhood also hinder the development of effective Self-Control (Meldrum et al., 2020). This aligns with Gottfredson and Hirschi's (1990) General Theory of Crime, which posits that low Self-Control renders individuals more susceptible to risky behavior and legal violations. Consequently, ACEs act as a psychological risk factor that amplifies the tendency for recidivism by diminishing self-regulatory capacity.

The majority of recidivists in this study were over 40 years old, all of whom were drug offenders, with the number of recidivists increasing from 101 in 2023 to 110 in 2024. Approximately 34.5% of respondents had high ACEs scores ($\geq$ 4), while the majority exhibited moderate levels of Self-Control (73%). Although classified as moderate, this level of Self-Control still presents a risk for criminal behavior. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that individuals with moderate Self-Control remain susceptible to recidivism, particularly in the context of addictive behaviors (Mulya et al., 2021). These demographic observations further support the statistically significant negative relationship between ACEs and Self-Control.

The findings of this study are consistent with previous research demonstrating the impact of ACEs on Self-Control and subsequent criminal behavior. Namusoke et al. (2024) reported a negative relationship between ACEs and Self-Control, indicating that higher exposure to ACEs is associated with lower Self-Control and an increased risk of substance abuse. Similarly, Jones et al. (2021) found that each additional ACE significantly reduced an individual's Self-Control. Fava et al. (2023) also observed that individuals with high ACE exposure exhibited lower Self-Control, sleep disturbances, and higher engagement in criminal behavior. Additional studies have shown that elevated ACE scores increase the likelihood of substance abuse and maladaptive behaviors post-release (Merrick et al., 2018; Malouf et al., 2014). Moreover, Self-Control serves as a critical mediator linking ACEs to criminal involvement (Craig, 2019; Wolfe et al., 2015).

The consistency of this study with prior research lies in the finding that high exposure to ACEs reduces Self-Control and increases susceptibility to criminal behavior. This study, however, contributes additional evidence by focusing specifically on female drug recidivists, whereas most previous studies have examined the general population or mixed-gender samples. This contextual distinction underscores the relevance of low Self-Control resulting from ACEs in explaining recidivism among women. Previous research also highlights the moderating influence of gender, indicating that women generally exhibit greater emotional resilience and social adaptation skills than men, who tend to be more impulsive (Chapple

et al., 2021). Similarly, Bakhtiar et al. (2023) found that men are more prone to externalizing behaviors such as aggression and rule-breaking, whereas women are more likely to experience internalizing problems, including anxiety, depression, and social withdrawal.

This study has several limitations. First, it was conducted exclusively on female drug recidivists in a single correctional facility, limiting the generalizability of the findings to male recidivists or individuals involved in other types of criminal cases. Second, the measurement of ACEs relied on self-report questionnaires, which are susceptible to recall bias, particularly among middle-aged and older participants. Third, the quantitative design did not capture the subjective experiences of childhood trauma that may influence Self-Control. Fourth, comprehensive national and regional data on recidivists, including records from South Kalimantan correctional institutions, were not accessible through Statistics Indonesia (BPS) or the police. Future research should consider more diverse populations, adopt mixed-methods designs, and investigate potential mediating or moderating factors such as social support and coping strategies to provide a more holistic understanding of the psychological mechanisms underlying recidivism.

5. CONCLUSION

The results of this study indicate a significant negative influence of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs) on Self-Control among recidivists at the South Kalimantan Women's Correctional Institution, highlighting ACEs as a critical psychological factor in rehabilitation. Many female recidivists carry enduring psychological burdens stemming from traumatic experiences during childhood and adolescence, which impair their ability to regulate emotions and behavior. Consequently, the success of rehabilitation and efforts to reduce recidivism depend not only on life skills training but also on addressing these underlying psychological factors. Integrating psychological considerations into rehabilitation programs, including early identification through psychological screening, is therefore essential to enhance the effectiveness of interventions and support sustainable behavioral change among inmates.

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