

**LIFE AFTER IMPRISONMENT: EXPLORING THE REPERCUSSIONS OF JAIL TIME ON EX-CONVICTS**

**ABSTRACT**

Deprivation of freedom occurs when a person is subject to violations. Significantly, the opportunity to see the world after being incarcerated can be exciting and terrifying at the same time for prisoners serving long sentences. This study aims to explore the challenges of selected ex-convicts, its repercussions, coping mechanisms, and insights. The participants were comprised of five ex-convicts within the province of Davao del Sur, chosen using snowball sampling and an in-depth interview. A qualitative research method and a phenomenological approach were used to conduct the investigation. The data were analyzed based on the themes from the participants' responses. It was found that these ex-convicts faced challenges such as (1) anticipated stigma and stigma management, (2) emotional and material support, and (3) social readjustment and reintegration due to their preconceived detachment from society outside prison. The results showed that ex-convicts dealt with the repercussions, the jail itself caused them (1) emotional distress, and it served as a tool to (2) restore their faith and become more (3) reflective in their thinking and practiced behavior. Their coping mechanisms provide them hope and a positive mindset in overcoming the challenges they've encountered, such as (1) social and spiritual, and (2) mindful acceptance of their current situation, which shows their resilience, faith, and as a repercussion of their violations. Furthermore, imprisonment became insightful learning to them to have a (1) stronghold between family ties and emotional support, as well as (2) renewed their faith in God.

*Keywords: challenges, coping mechanism, ex-convicts, insights, phenomenological study, repercussions of jail time.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Life in a cell can be punishing. To be isolated and deprived of freedom could be life-threatening, and the committed crime could leave a scar they have to live within. However, what could be the difference if convicted prisoners are offered a second chance? To reintegrate and be freed? Will this make a difference? Or will it just wound them even further? Liberty is freedom; however, limitations occur with the presence of law and morality. Deprivation of liberty occurs when a person is subject to violations. Significantly, the opportunity to see the world after their confinement can be exciting and terrifying at the same time for prisoners serving long sentences (Garcia, 2021). Despite being freed from incarceration, various cases regarding the mental well-being of these people have been negatively overwhelming (Ali et al., 2018)

Globally, research has indicated that incarceration harms the job direction of formerly jailed populations in Norway, Denmark, Finland, and Sweden (Aaltonen et al., 2017). Moreover, Wildeman and Wang (2017) stated that incarceration should be noted in and of itself, has a significant detrimental impact on ex-convicts' general well-being. Ex-convicts freed from jail suffer poorer health than those without confinement records. Furthermore, Western (2018), stated that ex-convicts are lifetime victims of violence during and after their incarceration; they are victimized by racial inequality, unemployment, difficulty reentering society, and chronic and mental illness.

In the Philippines, Pino et al. (2021) stated that ex-convicts' first problem was finding a job. After being released from incarceration, no one provides them with household

needs, thus making it difficult for them to start over and land better employment. Ex-convicts are ashamed to seek employment due to their record as ex-offenders, resulting in unemployment for several months or years.

In Mindanao, particularly in Davao de Oro, the ex-offenders are deemed for lifetime conviction as they are subjected to neglect and restrictions since most people stigmatize individuals sent to prison for constant deviance. It emphasizes that they are expected to have social disconnection and constraint as a punishment even after their conviction. It is undoubtedly challenging to combat all these factors; some ex-offenders have continued living, regaining self-esteem, establishing healthy personalities, and interacting with family, friends, and others (Palgan & Apolinario, 2022).

There are limited studies examining how ex-offenders overcome life outside of prison difficulties while still being subject to stigma and expected legal constraints. In addition, there are even few studies on determining how prison time affects ex-offenders and changes their lives meaningfully. Furthermore, with the ex-convicts in the Philippines and the prejudice against them, it is critical to hear their stories and give them a chance to reintegrate into a society free of discrimination. This research explores the repercussions of selected ex-convicts, challenges, insights, and coping mechanisms to express their concerns and acknowledge their sentiments. The findings of this study may shed light on the negative and positive changes in the ex-offenders' perspectives on life that occur after their reintegration into society.

The researchers have taken theories that would guide this study. These theories are the Labeling Theory and Psychological Stress Theory. Labeling theory is defined as people in the community evaluating and labeling a person based on their previous misdemeanor records (Becker, 1963). The sociological method known as labeling theory focuses on how social labeling contributes to the growth of crime and deviance. According to the theory, although a variety of factors may at first cause deviant behavior, once someone has been given the label of being deviant, they frequently experience new issues as a result of how others and themselves react to the stigma (negative stereotypes) associated with the deviant designation (Bernburg, 2019; Lemert, 1967; Becker, 1963).

Psychological Stress Theory has two significant components, appraisal and coping (Lazarus, 1993). Stress is regarded as a conceptual belief, which implies that it is not defined as a specific form of external stimulation or a pattern of physiological, behavioral, or psychological reactions. A study by Lazarus (1991) understood stress as an interaction between people and their environment. The appraisal is founded on the premise that people's genuine expectations about the significance and outcome of a particular encounter influence their emotional processes, such as stress (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus and Launier, 1978). Moreover, coping is inextricably linked to cognitive appraisal and, by extension, to the transactions of a stressful person-environment. Folkman and Lazarus (1984) define coping as a cognitive and behavioral endeavor to master, tolerate, or decrease internal and external demands and tensions.

The ex-offenders can try to change the person-environment reality that underlies negative emotions, called problem-focused coping. Concerning the internal elements and attempting to reduce the negative emotional state or change their assessment from a problematic situation, it is called emotion-focused coping. With these coping strategies given by Folkman and Lazarus, ex-convicts can cope with stress and the label of society.

## **Research Question**

This study explored the repercussions of jail time on ex-convicts after liberation. This research study answers the following research questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by ex-convicts from conviction to freedom?
2. What are the changes or repercussions of Jail time on ex-convicts after incarceration?
3. After liberation, what are the coping mechanisms of ex-offenders to continue their life?
4. What are the insights of ex-convicts after their imprisonment?

## **METHOD**

### **Participants**

In this research, the participants were comprised ex-convicts within the province of Davao del Sur who had been released from prison upon completion of their imprisonment. A number of five participants were interviewed. Creswell (1998) recommended five to twenty-five interviews for a phenomenological study. The research participants were ex-convicts categorically chosen based on the following: Ex-convicts (convicted for four years or more) regardless of the reason for being convicted, male and female, ages 25 years old and above, and at least six months of liberation. Moreover, snowball sampling was used to collect the needed and necessary participants for this research study. Snowball sampling, stated by Creswell (2012), is a phrase for purposeful sampling that occurs after research begins and occurs when the researcher asks a participant to nominate another individual to be a participant.

### **Instrument**

In this study, interviewers followed a documented list of questions, and four research questions with probing questions were developed and validated by experts. A semi-structured interview was used, an appropriate data collection method when a researcher needed to collect open-ended qualitative data to evaluate the respondent's ideas, emotions, and views regarding the given issue; and delve deeply into one's own life and frequently sensitive themes (Dejonckheere & Vaugh, 2019). The researcher asked more open-ended questions, allowing for a dialogue with the interviewee (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009).

### **Design and Procedure**

This study utilized a qualitative and phenomenological research approach to investigate people's perspectives and experiences. Qualitative research, as described by Ravitch and Carl (2016), involves understanding how individuals perceive the world and connect their own experiences. Phenomenological inquiry, following Patton (2015), helps researchers delve into the deeper meanings of everyday experiences. Due to pandemic protocols, interviews were conducted online using platforms like Google Meet and video messenger, with recorded dialogues agreed upon by participants. The interviews used open-ended questions to gather detailed information on important topics. The collected data underwent thematic analysis, involving identifying recurring patterns and themes. The study followed six main procedures: familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme examination, theme definition and naming, and writing up, as outlined by Kiger and Varpio (2020).

### **Ethics**

The researchers closely adhered to the following standards in gathering the study data: First, the researchers requested a formal permission letter from the Dean of the UM Digos College. Following the ethical guidelines in conducting this research,

authorization from an ethics specialist was sought. Consent was given knowingly, explaining the study's fundamental nature, their right to decline to participate, and the risks associated with their participation. Except perhaps their life experiences, which were used in the study, researchers ensured each participant's involvement would be kept confidential. Members were allowed to think for themselves, voluntarily agree, and be free of abuse and compulsion while the researcher began the data-gathering process.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Encountered Challenges of Ex-convicts from Conviction to Freedom

The first research objectives examined ex-convicts' challenges as they try to rebuild their lives after being released from jail. The following themes emerged in accordance with the responses of the participants: (1) *Anticipated Stigma and Stigma Management*, (2) *Emotional and Material Support*, and (3) *Social Readjustment and Reintegration*.

Based on the findings the challenges experienced by the ex-convicts revolves in the societal stigma and readjustment, crippling the emotional and material support offered to these individuals. The empirical data is graphically presented in Figure 1, providing a clear



Figure 1. Theme Illustration of Encountered Challenges of Ex-convicts from Conviction to Freedom

illustration of the research findings.

**Anticipated stigma and stigma management.** Those who have served time behind bars are frequently confronted with social isolation, prejudice, and persistent shame. These obstacles can impede their efforts to reintegrate into society after their release. Regrettably, some community members may treat them unjustly and subject them to feelings of inferiority, leading them to doubt that they deserve a fresh start. The following are insights from individuals who have encountered such difficulties and how they cope with the negative perceptions of their prior imprisonment.

Anne, who struggled with drug addiction, has been restricting herself from participating in outdoor activities due to concerns about societal judgment. In contrast, Roel, who faced similar challenges as Anne, has experienced societal judgment but found it to be a motivating factor to overcome his struggles.

*“...kay sakatilingbanilahangpangkutya kay mahiuboskaayu ko, naayalanganin ug kaulaw. Naa judsilayalanganinsaakoaperogibuhatnako ang hinagiban para mag padayunsakinabuhin. Gihimonako ug kusog para malampasannako ang tanan***(The society mock me and that made me feel inferior, I was hesitant and ashamed. They are hesitant towards me but I made it as a weapon to continue my life. I worked hard so I could get through it all).** (Roel, L0228-0234)

In addition, Manuel has a conviction for theft and has confided that he has experienced discomfort with the way people react to him. He finds it difficult to cope with the constant judgment he receives for his past mistakes. Similarly, Charlie, who has been convicted of manslaughter, has shared that he feels isolated and ostracized by those around him since his release. He has expressed that people often exhibit fear towards him, which has made it challenging for him to reintegrate into society.

*“...saunanggawasnakonaadayunmgasilinganmamisitasa among balaymangukit ug naunsaakongkasonaa sad ubannamakitanimosailangmganawungnganahadlok dalapanabi kay lagikuyawakongkaso.***(Upon my release, my neighbors went into our home asking about my case and there were some who were afraid of me.)** (Charlie, L0515-0520)

The statements above are supported by many studies stating that the issues of these ex-convicts must cope with is the stigma that comes with being labeled as an ex-convict portraying them as criminals (Palgan & Apolinario, 2022; Obatusin & Ritter-Williams, 2019; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Chiricos et al., 2006). Several studies have proven that stigmatic labeling and shaming cause social withdrawal and exclusion, increasing the likelihood of involvement in deviant peer groups (Quinn-Hogan, 2021; Moore et al., 2016; Harding, 2003). The study of Palgan and Apolinario (2022), supported the statements of the participants above that people's humiliation and criticism cannot be prevented, regardless of whether they choose to listen or not.

**Social readjustment and reintegration.** These ex-convicts can now live outside of prison after finishing their sentences. Being free involves readjusting their lives to have constraints in order to finally state that they have successfully reintegrated into society. Social readjustment and reintegration were shown to be difficult for these ex-convicts primarily upon their incarceration, they needed to reestablish their life, daily routines, and practices to show in society that they were changing their lifestyle away from doing an unlawful act.

Furthermore, ex-convicts who lose their jobs because of incarceration find reintegrating difficult. Finding work, as well as keeping a job is tough for them. Being an ex-convict will remain on their record for the rest of their lives, complicating their journey outside prison bars. Participants Anne and Roel have responded that they have struggled to interact within society and have difficulty adjusting. Anne fights the urge to be with her previous friends, and Roel fights the temptation to use illegal drugs again.

*“Akoanginalikayanato kay ako lang mgabarkada, labi nag wala ko kabalounsailangmgabinuhatbasigmadamaynapud ko. (I avoided*

**my friends because I don't know what they are up to and I don't want to get involve again)** (Anne, L088-090)

Roel also mentions another difficult habit he has developed when drinking alcohol. He used to get out with a friend but now prefers to stay at home. Roel mentioned:

*"...karonnagainom ko dirinalangsabalaypamilya ang kauban kay dili naman ko pwedemakit an sagawasnganagainom kay naka label naman samgataongainigmakit an ko nilasagawas nag inom or maabtan lang ko ug gabii or kadlawonsagawas moana nanasilanganibalik ko saakongbisyo. (I only drink occasionally here in my house because I can't be seen in public places drinking due to the society label me as having a relapse in my addiction.)* (p3, Roel, L0245-0256)

Moreover, participants Mary Jane lose her business as being a fish vendor in their community and she could not get some money to fund her business.

*"...Nawala saakoaakongnegosyosapangingisda. (I lost my business in selling fishes.)* (Mary Jane, L019-020)

Charlie loses his job as he was being convicted and experience difficulty finding one. Additionally, Manuel also expressed his concern about his struggles on finding a job as an ex-convict. He works as a laborer in a corn mills in his neighborhood where he gets minimum wage after long day of working.

*"...mgaupat ka bulan ko usanakakita ug trabaho. Hastang lisuda kay singot ug dugo kay mag abotjudaronmabuhi lang jud ko saakongpagusab. Kay dili naman ko gusto mabalik pa didtosaprisohan. (It took me four months before someone hired me. I need to hard work so that I could survive because I don't want to go back in prison.)* (Manuel, L0667-0681)

After being incarcerated, the structured prison life was quickly replaced with a life of planning, decision-making, and project execution (Yin, 2018). Ex-offenders with a history of drug offenses expressed fear of leaving halfway of their homes because of the temptations of the community (Singapore After-Care Association, 2018). Moreover, finding work is one of the most challenging problems that ex-offenders face. Ex-offenders confront four significant professional barriers: (a) a lack of employability skills such as low education, poor training, and job experience (Chen & Shields, 2020; Obatusin& Ritter-Williams, 2019; Ahmed & Lang, 2017; Williams, 2007); (b) a poor attitude (Chen & Shields, 2020); (c) limited work options owing to employer prejudice and stigmatization based on criminal record (Chen & Shields, 2020; Sheppard & Ricciardelli, 2020; Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2017; Harrison & Schehr, 2004). On the other hand, ex-offenders cannot remove or regulate several of these professional restrictions on their own (Chen & Shields, 2020).

**Emotional and material support.** Support is significant for ex-convicts who have suffered while in jail and until their release. Even if they have been given the opportunity to see the light and rebuild their lives outside of jail, these ex-convicts will find it impossible to reintegrate without emotional and material support. However, support is uncommon, especially for guilty individuals, and receiving support from relatives is extremely rare. Participants ask their families for assistance in reorganizing their lives and reintegrating successfully. However, not all families can support a family member who has been in prison due to shame.

Moreover, being the ones who provided food and other necessities for their family was difficult for Mary Jane and Anne. Although, in the case of Participant Manuel, he seeks assistance from his family despite their outright rejection. Because of his imprisonment, the ones he considers his family turns their back on him. Thus, these ex-convicts suffer because they need to support themselves without the help of their families.

Mary Jane who loses his husband while being convicted; she now struggles to supports her family.

*“Oo, wala man koybana, syemprewalakoyginikanan. Nangingkamot pudintawon ko sasarilinako para lang mabuhiakongpamilya. Dili ko magsaligsaakongigsuon. Problema intawonnako may rag makasuroy may rag dili. (Of course, since I don’t have a husband anymore and I don’t have parents to rely with. I worked hard for myself to support my family. I don’t want to rely on my siblings. Being also a fish vendor now is hard, really) (Mary Jane L06-010)*

Meanwhile, although Anne has a partner, she could not depend on him and she needed to step up to put food on their table.

*“...saakoangbana (live in) pirmi ko molayas kay tapulan, dilikabalomangita ug paagingamakakwarta. Ako ang mangita ug pamaagimaomaulaw ko saakongginikanan. (I had a hard time with my live-in partner and I always run away because he was lazy and he doesn’t find a way to provide our needs. And I will be the one to work for us because it is shameful to ask for my parents.) (Anne L0100-0103)*

Manuel was neglected by his family while he was in prison, now that he was being liberated, he struggles to communicate and gain their trust. He expressed the rejection from his child and loved one, made him lose his sense of worth. He was hopeful but disheartened on his family’s action.

*“Akong anakdilinamodu-olsaakoa, akoangmgaigsoon ug akong mama ug papa ug ang inahansaakoanganak. Nawala ko sa pang hunahunapagbiyasainahansaakonganak. Naka hunahunajud ko mag hikogato kay walanajudkoypuwangsakalibutangani kay tungodnapriso ko. (crying) grabengsakitato kay siyara baya akonggihandominigmakagawas ko, siyarajudakongulian. Unya kay dili naman siyawalakoymahimo. (My child wouldn’t seek for me, even my siblings and my father and mother and especially the mother of my child, they could not accept me. I have thoughts of committing suicide because I didn’t have a place in this world since I was imprisoned. (crying) I am in great pain that time, she was the only one I thought I have when I get out. Then she doesn’t want me back and I couldn’t do anything about it.) (Manuel, L0694-0704)*

Life became tough for ex-convicts when their immediate relatives lacked the financial capital to reintegrate them into society. Ex-offenders were barely getting support from their society and families. Other than that, the ex-convicts themselves were ashamed to ask for help providing them with money and their needs for their families (Yin, 2018; Chikadzi, 2017). In cases where family members avoided contacting their family member while in prison, they did not want them back in their homes. In most cases, family members ostracized and shamed ex-convicts. Despite the efforts to strengthen the bonds, some ex-convicts faced rejection from family members. Family members were hostile because of the pre-existing issues and the stigmatization that the ex-convicts may have caused the family. The arrest and imprisonment provided some family members with a reprieve from dealing with a problematic family member. As a result, when they were discharged, some family members were concerned about having their relative back in the family. Some prisoners come home to find their family members no longer trust them (Yin et al. 2022; Peace, 2016).

### **Repercussions of Jail Time on Ex-convicts**

One of the objectives of this research is to discover the changes that ex-offenders experienced from their jail time to liberation. The repercussions of jail time on ex-convicts impacted the life of ex-offenders inside and outside the prison. The following themes emerged in accordance with the responses of the participants: (1) *Restored Faith*, (2) *Reflective Thinking and Practice*, (3) *Emotional Distress*. Based on the data results, apart from the emotional distress they struggled with, faith restoration is one of the emerged changes of the participants from jail time to liberation, along with reflective thinking and practice. The themes can be observed in the following figures.

### Restored Faith



Source: <https://bit.ly/42qDbtX>

### Reflective Thinking and Practice



Source: <https://bit.ly/3lCFjhl>

## Repercussions of Jail Time on Ex-convicts



Source: <https://bit.ly/40l3Zd0>

### Emotional Distress

Figure 2. Theme illustration of Repercussions of Jail Time on Ex-convicts

**Restored faith.** The ex-offenders stated that spiritual activities and their value are part of their recovery process. Participating in religious activities highlighted the spiritual connection that gives way to ex-convicts to share their experiences with others, to know the almighty, and as a way to have a stronghold between family relationships. Thus, spirituality, as mentioned, brought changes to ex-convicts to restore their faith despite being incarcerated. Below are the participants' statements and responses in accordance with restored faith.

Roel even stated how incarceration changed him from becoming more enthusiastic and responsible with his family and more so going to church with them. Similarly, Anna shared how imprisonment brought back her faith due to faith-based activities conducted inside the prison, and how it motivated her to spread the words of God. Anna confirmed:

*“Daghan, kay didtosulodsaprisohannaga bible sharing mi unya kana kay walajud konanaagi-andirisagawas, didtonakona experience sasulod (prisohan). Maka hatagnakog advice saubantao. Unyanagabasapudkogsalmosasulodmaongmaka share ko sauban kung unsaakongmganakat-unanlabinasamga nay problema. (I changed a lot...because inside the prison we have this activity, such as bible sharing and I didn't experience it in my previous life before I got imprisoned, and I only experienced it when I was inside the prison. I could give advice to other people that*

**have problems. Then, I read God's words, in that I could share it with my co-inmates.)"** (Anne, L0109-0115)

Additionally, participant Charlie shared his insights brought by his imprisonment by always praying and being thankful for the chance to change his past mistakes, even for the fact that he was not a believer back then, this experienced made him more grateful. He stated that:

*"Pag ampokanunaysaGinoo para  
aningikaduhanghigayunnaiyanggihatagnako para  
mausabakongmgasayup kay kaniadtowala man ko kailagGinoo  
puros ramanbinuangsulodsaakongutokkarunmupasalamatjud ko  
kanunayniya ug galikaynasad ko mag apilapilanangsugal kay mao  
nay makapainitsaakong ulo unya di ko  
kasabotsaakongpaminsarlabi nag mapildi ko,lisud kayo  
ibawijudlabaw nag dakogpildimausabjudakongkinaiya. (I always  
pray to God, gave thanks for giving me another chapter in life,  
for me to change all of my mistakes because before, I don't  
believe in God, but now, I always thanked him and avoided  
myself getting involved in any gambling activities because it is  
the reason why I went berserk. I can't understand my emotions  
when I lost (in gambling), I can't control myself.)"* (Charlie,  
L0540-0550)

These responses confirmed the value of spirituality in prison. Hallett et al. (2017) emphasized how religious behavior and spiritual learning helped individuals reshape their sense of purpose and belonging to society. The value of spirituality in prison, as emphasized by prison chaplains, a view that is also backed by the minimal research that has been done on the efficacy of prison-based spirituality programs (Mowen et al., 2017; Petersilia, 2003). The few faith-based re-entry programs that have been studied also emphasize the importance of spiritual connection as a source of direction during the recovery (Stanfield, 2017; Roman et al., 2017). Spirituality is an essential aspect of human life that should be considered in the context of someone incarcerated. Inmates who participated in religious activities were less anxious and unhappy than those who withdrew themselves from the spiritual life available (Skowroski&Domalska, 2017).

**Reflective thinking and practice.** Ex-offenders were found to reflect on their committed mistakes and practice avoiding unfavorable outcomes. Further, the responses emphasized how imprisonment molds ex-convicts' attitudes to rely more on the rules within and outside the prison. It explains how imprisonment changes the ex-convicts' thinking and actions to be more careful and reflective.

Participant Mary Jane became more reflective in every action she makes after the imprisonment by listening to her siblings advise not to get involved with drugs again. Furthermore, Roel highlighted his experiences brought by incarceration to his life. He shared how sorry he was to his family, how much emotions he felt that time, and how much of a disappointment he felt for himself. After he was freed from prison, he felt overwhelmed by seeing the outside world again. He shared that:

*"Maka ingon ko ngasakagahisaakong ulo, nag mahay ko kay  
nganowala ko naminawsailahangmgatambagsaakoa.  
Lisudstoryawalaytukmana word or sentence na ma describe  
nakoakonggibatisapag ka priso. Sa  
paghatagsahigayonnanakagwas ko  
walaytukmasakalipayakongnasinatiunyadilinalakokabalounsaakongbu  
hatonperoatleastnakitanako ang taasnapaglantaw,  
nakakitanakogkahoy, nakakitanakogbulan. (I blame myself  
because of my hardheadedness; I blame myself for not  
listening to their advice. I can't even put up in a word or in  
sentence of how I felt when I get in prison. And when I was  
given a chance to be free it was the happiest things that could  
ever happen in my life and that day, I don't know what to do  
next but at least I was able to see the outside.)"* (Roel, L0310-  
0322)

Consequently, due to the incarceration, Anne mentioned how it changes her view of herself. She was a hard-headed type of person and prideful, but later she became more understanding and patient. She mentioned:

*“Sauna kay maldita man ko taposdili ko nagapaubosperokaron kay kabalonako mag pa ubos, mag pa ilobunyataastaasnaakongpag sabot. (It changes my view because before I was ill-mannered then I have excessive pride but now I am more patient, and understands the situation.)”* (Anne, L0132-0135)

Meanwhile, Manuel has also shared how much it changed him for not doing the same mistake of his life again. On the other hand, Charlie, mentioned how much changes it caused him due to his imprisonment. He avoided himself from getting into trouble, and think of the consequences of every actions he makes. He confirmed that:

*“Sa karunmakaingunjudkogdakoakongpagusabgalikaynakoggubot, ug mas gahunahunanakosaakongpamilya ug unsay dangatan ug makahatagnapudkogproblemasailaha. (For now, I can say that I change a lot I avoid myself in any trouble and I think more about my family for the consequences if I gave them another problem.)”* (Charlie, L0561-L0565)

This finding was parallel to the research suggesting that the jails' unpleasant climate had positive benefits on Filipino elders' prisoners (De Guzman et al., 2020). Additionally, jail experiences may be beneficial or harmful to them because, to cope with the prison environment, the participant opted to become subjective, bear the consequences of their acts, stay busy, and participate in religious activities (Flores-Barolo & Vicente, 2019). Hence, imprisonment influenced every ex-offender's actions, way of thinking and decision-making. Moreover, ex-offenders with a history of drug offenses express fear of leaving halfway out of their homes because of the temptations of the community. Singapore After-Care Association (2018), in which ex-offenders feared that the community would again influence them by using drugs. This, resulting them reflecting on their past experiences and practicing what it taught them.

**Emotional distress.** Although in previous themes, it was clear that imprisonment brought positive outcomes to the ex-inmates, on the other hand, it has never been easy for them inside the prison, to be specific. This study discovered that ex-offenders experienced emotional instability while incarcerated, such as loneliness, stress, overthinking, and longing. That being said, the impact of incarceration on ex-convicts was overwhelming.

Participant Mary Jane shared her experiences of how much she felt distress by missing her children and grandchildren at home. Mary Jane also highlighted how she used to overthink about whether she will be able to be free or not. Anne, on the other hand, experienced having to think her family outside with her mind outside yet her body is inside the prison. She also mentioned how unstable she was psychologically. She stated that:

*“dilinakomaiwasanmakahunahuna kay akonglawasnaasasulodperoakonghunahunanaasagawaspinaminte, naasaakongpamilya. Sige rakogsakitdidtoasasulod kay tungodsa depression. (I can't help to think about my family outside. I would always think of them and I was sick because of depression.)”* (Anne, L0116-0120)

Consequently, Roel shared his awful experiences to which he highlighted how he gets easily irritated and stressed. He felt so much guilt leading him to overthink and be in distress. He confirmed that:

*“Sa suloddali ko maburyo (mairita). Gikansaimongpalibot, kanang stress pinaminte. Halo-halo ang emosyon, naanatanan. Daghangemosyonkanang mag mahay, nganongmali ko ba? nganongnasukod ko anangbutanga? kanangmaingongani ko kung mabalikpalanguntanako ang panahongani. Dako kogpagmahay. (Inside the prison I easily get irritated from the surroundings,*

**and stressful. A mixed of emotion such as guilt, why I was wrong? Why did I end up with this? I could just think if only I could go back in time. My thought was, Will I be given a chance to be free? Will I get out? What will happen to me? What can be my situation? If I will be release, I think I am old. I have so many regrets.)” (Roel, L0283- 0300)**

Meanwhile, Manuel stated how incarceration brought so much distress in his life. Manuel became psychologically challenged within the prison, thinking about his mistakes. He even shared how he used to wander in comfort room and just stayed there, losing his mind, and thinking about cutting his life. He confirmed that:

*“Na depress ko kay sigekoghunahuna, ngano kaya nabuhatkona no. tungodjudsapagsalignakosaakongmga amigo ba, ako ray naadtosasulod. Pag sulodnako, naabtanpagmgasemanakapindidtorajud ko sulodsacr nag hinuktok. Nawala nakosa pang isip. Boot huna-hunaonpwedenako mag pa kamataysasulod.(I got depressed because I overthink why did I did that thing. It was probably because I trusted my friends and I am the only one that got jailed. When I got imprison almost one month, I was inside the comfort room wandering. I lost my mind. To be honest I can kill myself inside the cell.)” (Manuel, L0746-0753)*

The findings backed up Harries' (2017) assertion that solitary confinement is a human example of social isolation that causes prisoners distress, and she emphasized the importance of connectedness or good social interaction and relationships with everyone, such as family members who visit them, correctional officers, and other inmates. The studies also show that prisoners suffer emotionally, with their emotions changing and influencing their judgments, as well as their sentiments of pain and pleasure, hatred, pity, and fear toward their fellow inmates (Flores-Barolo & Vicente, 2019). When people who have their rights taken away have negative views, they display self-pity, blame themselves, and feel discriminated against. Shammas (2017) elaborated on the considerable harms associated with the frustrations or deprivations that accompany the loss of freedom, such as the absence of heterosexual relationships, isolation from the free community, withholding of commodities and services, and so on.

### **Coping Mechanism of Ex-convicts**

Coping mechanisms play an essential role in ex-offenders' lives because their various strategies upon release help them accept and continue their lives after being in prison. It gives them the energy to look forward to their lives and inspires them to avoid and ignore negative thoughts and opinions about them. Their coping mechanisms also assist them in seeing the fact that they can only rely on themselves to survive with the aid of their families. The following themes emerge in accordance with the responses of the participants: (1) *Social and Spiritual*, (2) *Mindful acceptance of the current situation*. Based on the participants' responses, their social or family and spiritual life were found to be one of the coping mechanisms of the ex-convicts along with mindful acceptance of their current situation. Figure



Figure 3. Theme illustration of Coping Mechanism of Ex-convicts

3 depicts these themes.

**Social and Spiritual.** Individuals' effective re-entry requires social support; however, little is understood about how it works or how individual and systemic factors influence it. Understanding why social support is crucial for those who have been convicted is critical because they may have a different reintegration experience due to the nature of their crime and post-conviction restrictions. Spiritual support has a significant impact on the ex-offenders to change the way they think about their lives. It is also the most essential support that ex-offenders learn inside the prison up until their release because it strengthened their faith in God led them to cope with their situations. Below are the statements of the participants on how their social and spiritual life has become their coping mechanism for re-entering in society. Below are the statements of the participants about how they cope with the challenges they have been through after they have been liberated.

Anne's coping mechanism was his spiritual belief in life, she stated that through God and prayers, she copes with the struggles she has been through.

"Pag-ampo, gina-ampo lang judnakosaGinoakongmgaproblemadidto kay wala man koy lain namadoolan.**(I always pray, I pray to God all of my problems because in there I have no one.)**" (Anne, LO144-LO146)

Moreover, Charlie has the same coping as Anne through God they overcome their challenges. Aside from God, Charlie also found his family as his coping and shared how important his family to him. He says:

"Wala may laingakonggidangpan ang Ginoorajud ug ang akongpamilya kay dugay sad ko naprisodaghankaykoggimahayanperowalamao naman judnanahitabo naman ang karunnalang ang importante para nako. **(No one else but only God and my family, I was in prison for a long time and I have so many regrets but I can't change the past and the most important for me is what I have right now.)**"(Charlie, L0581-0585)

On the other hand, Roel found comfort to his family while he was still in prison, in small action like visiting him in prison gives him joy. He appreciates his family's efforts that in times in needs his family never leaves him. Roel stated that:

"Akong pamilya, silananay, tatay ug akongmgamanghud, siladodong. Kay didtopakomaihapramangudngapwedasilamakaadtodidto. Kananginigabotsaakongmgaigsoon kay dlenako ma-explain ang kalipaynaniduawsilanako. Sa paggawasnakodidtonakonakitana in times ma dapa ka, ma failure ko kay ang mag alalayajud kay akongpamilyarajud, wala nay lain. Ang moandamsatanankanangnaapirnamintesaakongkiliran kay akora rang pamilya. **(My family, my mother, father and my younger siblings. Back when I was in jail, they often visit me and when they visit me, I could not explain the happiness I've felt. When I got out, I have realized that in the moment I failed, my family were the one helping me, no one else did. The one that prepares everything for me and the people always beside me were my family.)**" (Roel, L0354-0364)

The benefits of social support for ex-offenders have been documented in the literature, including a decrease in recidivism rates (Schnappauf& DiDonato, 2017). This also assists the ex-inmate to lessen suicidal, depressive, guilt, and shameful sentiments. As a result, the inmate spreads the gospel both within and outside the prison walls. Since purpose may be defined as "an open-ended readiness to face present uncertainty with a hope for good or evil," programs like Prison Fellowship and Inner Change ignite an inmate's purpose, and others in the community challenge the inmate's intrinsic purpose. Scholars agree that social supports are a vital tool for managing penitentiary clients and that these persons may be a

key aspect in minimizing criminal behavior (Executive Session on Community Corrections, 2017; Schaefer, Cullen, & Eck, 2016). According to recent research, views of family support can aid to minimize delinquency, and beliefs of instrumental family support, in particular, can even serve to mitigate the negative impacts of arrest (Dong & Krohn, 2017)

**Mindful acceptance of the current situation.** It describes the positive attitude of ex-convicts towards other opinions about them by accepting the consequences they get outside prison. It is also important and helpful for ex-convicts to continue their lives without thinking about the judgments they get from others and only focusing on their current situation to make a change for their lives and the people surrounding them. Ex-convicts developed a component that decreases their assimilation to their fears and challenges in resuming life after release by directing their focus and concentration to the happiness they felt relieved when they were ultimately released from prison, and being reunited with their families.

Being mindful was the coping mechanisms of Roel, despite that he faced struggles upon his liberation, it did not stop him from going forward in his life. He does not think much that he was once imprisoned and did not define his entire life around the fact that he was an ex-convict. And in fact, he also believed that God has a plan for his life. Roel responded that:

*"Ako man gudnaklasenataonadili ko mag pa apektoba. Wala kaayu ko ga huna-huna. Ang akoo lang go with the flow, kung unsa ang dagan, okay, kung unsa ang ihatagsa Ginoo. Wala nanakogihunahunanganapriso ko. Ang ako kay mag padayun lang gudwalanakogina base ang akongkinabuhisaakongpag ka prisoo. Kung unsa ang ihatagsa Ginoo, maoakoo. Ginooramangudtanangudakongginasandigan. Kumbagasa Ginoo ko nagakuha ug kusogaronmaka cope up ko satanan. Wala nakoypakialamsamga nag judge nako, ug kung husgahanbakosamgatao. (I am the kind of person that doesn't get affected by others' judgment, I don't think it thoroughly. I go with the flow I just go with life and God's plan. I don't mind that I once got imprison, for me, it is to continue and I doesn't base my entire life in my past being convicted. I accept whatever God's plan to me. I lean everything to God. It is God who provides me strength to cope up everything. I don't care if people were judging me)"*  
(Roel, L0375-0387)

On the other hand, Charlie focused on supporting his family especially his child, he said:

*"Karun ngalayanako mas focused ko sapangitagpangwarta kay labinaronnaakoyanakmawalatanankalisud basta masulodsaakongutoknganaakoygibuhinganakmaoramanna (Now that I have been released. I focused on my financial income since I have a child that needs my support. All of my struggles seem to disappear when I think of my child)"* (Charlie, L0586-590)

It is a positive Filipino cultural value to see a thread of positivity in an otherwise negative reality. Despite all the obstacles, the participant remains optimistic and has a bright future. After release, their preparations for their family confirm that they value their family above everything else. Their willingness to fulfill their shortfall and make up for lost time indicates that they have changed to become a better and more responsible person, a study by Pansag (2016). Grateful people enjoy even minor joys so that when they face adversity or pain, they remain strong and realize there is always wisdom behind the tragedy (Maulidah, 2016). Gratitude is uplifting, makes you feel good, and can even help you achieve your goals. Positive emotions, particularly thankfulness, can motivate people to participate in self-improvement practices, according to Armenta et al. (2017).

### **Insights of Ex-convicts after their imprisonment**

Research question 4 (four) indicates the ex-convicts' reflective observations about their insight into their lives as they battle inside and outside prison. These show in their new thought and perspectives in life. The following themes emerged from the participants'

responses: (1) *Family ties and emotional support*, were found as an insight of the ex-convicts' because of the incarceration. Moreover, it shows that as they fight to re-enter society, these ex-convicts opt to view the bright side of their lives in light of their (2) *Renewed Faith in God*. Below is Figure 4, which displays the themes of family ties, emotional support, and renewed faith in God among ex-convicts.

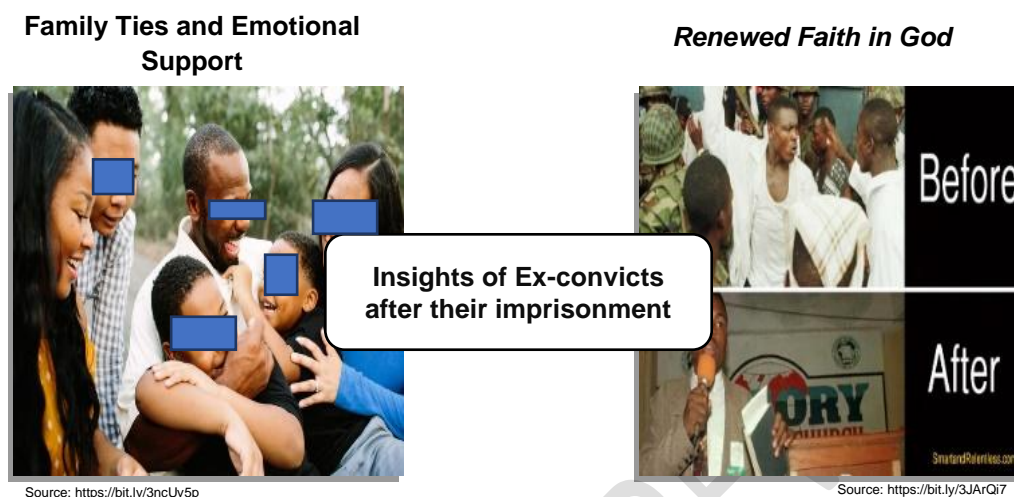


Figure 4. Theme illustration of Insights of Ex-convicts After their Imprisonment

**Family ties and emotional support.** Family is the most essential thing you could ever have in Filipino society. Based on the transcription, some of the ex-offenders have close-knit relationships with their families and desire to keep these close relationships for they offer strong emotional support. They also, claim that their imprisonment has taught them the value of their family and learned to respect their opinion.

The statement below shows that upon the liberation of these ex-convicts, they find support from their families. Even though Anne was ashamed to ask for money for her family she was grateful that her family was her strength during and after her imprisonment. She decided to focus her attention on her child and stay away from using (drugs) again.

*“...karon kay naka focused nakosaakongpamilya, saakonganak.  
(Now I focus on my family and to my child)”* (Anne L0171-172)

Roel used to be distant from his family, but after being imprisoned, he learned to value their gatherings and occasions over going out with friends.

*“...bahinsaakongpamilyakanang gamay naokasyon kay ginatagaannako ug importansya nag focus nakosaakongpamilyakaron kay naajudsilapirmisaakongkikiranbiskankatongnaapakosatulod. Unykaronginatagaannapudnakogimportansaya ang ilahangmgapagtambagsaakoa unlike sauna tong walapakonapriso.  
(As of my family, I give more importance to them even if it was just a simple occasion because they were there when I was convicted. And I also give importance to their advices unlike before I got convicted.)”* (Roel, L0455-0463).

Charlie held onto the belief that his family was his stronghold, regardless of any hardships he faced. Even during his imprisonment, he realized the importance of family as they never abandoned him and continue to support him now that he's been released.

*“...paghatagjud ug importansyasapamilyamaora mana silaymutambayayongnimo ug magkinaunsawalajud ko nilaybiyaibisanpamantuodgapait mi labawnakaniadtopero ana-a ragihapunsilanitabangnakohantodsamakagawas ko walajud ko kasinati ug pangkwentagikansailahabisanklarosailangnawongang kalisud. (My family is the most important for me right now, because they didn't leave me even though we experienced crisis during that time (my imprisoned), but they still continue helping me until I got release. I didn't experience to be left behind even though they were tired.)”* (Charlie L0641-0648).

These statements from the respondents revealed that families, especially in the Philippines, usually accepting their family members recently released from prison. The committed crime would be unimportant to the family when one part of a family sticks together. Blood is always denser than water (Pansag et al). The broad definition of "family support" as a unidimensional notion implies that it is conceptually and methodologically imprecise. Whereas, family support comprises several different components, including more affectionate such as emotional and interactional relationships, and more functional bonds called instrumental support (Mowen et al., 2019; Martinez, 2006;). As stated in the essay published by the Michigan Department of Corrections (2018), a good and supportive family relationship is one of the most significant elements in avoiding crime. By assisting convicts in forming social relationships, criminal behavior can be avoided (Janer et al., 2019).

**Renewed faith in God.**Renewing one's faith does not suggest that their previous beliefs were incorrect or invalid. Rather, it serves as a way to prioritize what truly matters in life - Jesus and one's relationship with God. By renewing their mind with His teachings every day, individuals can maintain a strong connection with God both during and after their time in prison. This can lead to a more profound and meaningful connection than they have ever experienced before.

Roel has developed a steadfast faith and openly expresses that he attends church every Sunday to devote time to his spiritual practice. In contrast, Anne had previously distanced herself from God and had never visited a church until she faced conviction. However, her time in prison proved to be a turning point, as it drew her closer to God and reignited her faith. Now, Anne regularly reads the Bible and devotes time to her spiritual journey.

*“Daghan. Sauna dili ko nagabasa ug bible ug dilipud ko nagasimbaperokaron kay naanakoypanahonsaGinoo, sapagampo. (A lot. Before I don't read the bible and I don't go to church but now I always give time to God, to pray.)”* (Anne, L0189-0191)

Charlie has exhibited contrition for his prior transgressions and professes to have sought absolution during his period of incarceration. He maintains that his faith in a divine being has not wavered and endeavors to reassure having faith in God means He will never abandon you.

*“sigenakogpangayo ug pasaylosaGinoo ga ampo ko kanunayniyaatongnaapakosaprisohan ug hantodkarun, kay bisan ug unsa pa diay ka kasalbahis di jud ka niyatalikdan basta naarakaypagtuosaiyaha.(I keep praying to him until now because even how bad you are, he still helps you and never leave you behind, if you just believe and have faith in him)”* (Charlie, L06625-0630)

By choosing to be a Christ-follower, one chooses to set aside and rid oneself of prior desires (Van der Walt, 2017). This also assists the ex-inmate in lessening suicidal, depressive, guilt, and shame sentiments. As a result, the inmate spreads the gospel both within and outside the prison walls. Since purpose can be defined as "an open-ended readiness to face present uncertainty with a hope for good or evil," programs like Prison Fellowship and Inner Change ignite an inmate's purpose, and others in the community challenge the inmate. A recent study indicates that the protective effects of religion, particularly Christianity, can be essential in suicide prevention (Norko et al., 2017). A former inmate's desire to transgress again is

reduced by living a life that acknowledges one's sins and how Christ pardoned them (Das, 2018).

## CONCLUSION

Thus, this research focuses on the repercussions of jail time on ex-convicts incarcerated for criminal offenses. The repercussion of being in jail has brought emotional distress to them as they pay the consequences of their cases. However, their incarceration has become a tool to renew their faith and become more careful of their actions. Life after imprisonment has been challenging yet hopeful. Ex-offenders faced discrimination, stigma, and lack of emotional and material support from their loved ones, making it difficult for them into re-entering society. Despite these challenges, ex-convicts found ways to cope and learn from these experiences. The coping mechanisms provide them hope and a positive mindset in overcoming the challenges, such as their social and spiritual life, and mindful acceptance of their current situation, showing their resilience, Faith, and repercussion for their violations. As the absence of their freedom, imprisonment became insightful learning to them to have a stronghold between family ties and emotional support, as well as renewed their faith in God. Therefore, the impact of their incarceration was not bad at all, instead, it became a stepping stone for the ex-convicts to learn, change, and become a better version of themselves.

The ex-convicts are burdened by their criminal records regardless of their offenses, making it hard for them to reintegrate into society. The researchers recommend that the policymakers implement a re-entry program for these ex-convicts by preparing them on how to re-enter society, especially the people outside the prison who fear them. Society must be educated that these ex-convicts have already paid for their crimes inside the prison and have been liberated. In addition, the government should provide the resources for these ex-convicts to obtain a job and provide a home for those rejected ex-convicts.

Moreover, this study has not yet discovered the entirety of the lived experiences of the ex-convicts. Thus, it is highly recommended to further discuss the phenomenological experiences of ex-offenders by using many participants conducted in different regions. Cases should be homogenous. Furthermore, it is also recommended to elaborate more on the life struggles of ex-offenders within the prison with a psychologist on standby.

## CONSENT

Prior to conducting the study, the author ensured that participants provided informed consent as per academic ethical standards.

## ETHICAL APPROVAL

The present inquiry was executed with meticulous observance of ethical norms. Multiple ethical factors were duly accounted for, including the principle of voluntary participation, the assurance of anonymity and confidentiality, and the thorough evaluation of potential risks and benefits. The scholars have likewise exerted utmost diligence in maintaining scientific integrity in all their communications.

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