

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

ABSTRACT

Representation is imperative to help society comprehend what life is like after imprisonment. This qualitative study delves into the nuanced experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals, commonly referred to as ex-convicts, within the province of Davao del Sur. Through snowball sampling and in-depth interviews, we explored the challenges they faced, the consequences of these challenges, the coping mechanisms they employed, and the insights gained during their reintegration into society. Utilizing a phenomenological approach, the research uncovers three primary challenges faced by ex-convicts: (1) anticipated stigma and stigma management, the struggle to secure emotional and material support, (2) emotional and material support, and (3) social readjustment and reintegration due to their preconceived detachment from society outside prison. Moreover, the findings indicate that former inmates experienced negative effects caused by their time in jail, leading to (1) emotional distress. However, the experience also served as a means for them to (2) restore their faith and become more (3) introspective in their thoughts and actions. Their coping mechanisms provided them hope and a positive mindset in overcoming the challenges they encountered, such as (1) social and spiritual, and (2) mindful acceptance of their current situation, which showed 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. Consequently, government social reentry programs must be reinforced to help these individuals in many facets of their lives to promote resilient adjustments and prevent recidivism.

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

INTRODUCTION

Life inside a prison cell is undeniably punishing, where isolation and the loss of freedom can have profound, life-altering effects, leaving behind scars that are not quickly healed. Even beyond incarceration and life after imprisonment, still, the ghosts of their past mistakes still linger throughout their existence. Liberty is freedom; however, limitations occur with the presence of law and morality. In lieu of freedom deprivation, an individual is imprisoned because of some serious violations they have committed and they are denied their liberty all at once. However, cases may change to those who have served their sentence in compensation and have been liberated. Garcia (2021), stated that the opportunity to see the world after being incarcerated can be exciting and terrifying at the same time for prisoners. Especially when the people in question are ex-convicts guilty of a crime. Despite being released and given freedom from prison, ironically these individuals still are deprived of freedom in many aspects of life.

Globally, research has indicated that incarceration harms the job prospects and direction of formerly jailed individuals, as seen in studies from 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, (Ali et al., 2018; 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 **employment**. 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, 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. They are **subjected to social disconnection and constraint as a punishment even after their incarceration is over**. 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).

Its objective is to comprehend what life is like for individuals after their release from prison, which is not often discussed. This research sheds light on the real-life obstacles and difficulties that ex-convicts encounter as they strive to rebuild their lives in society. It's not solely about comprehending their experiences; it's also about making our communities safer by helping them successfully reintegrate. In doing so, we may also break down the walls of stigma and judgment that ex-convicts frequently encounter, fostering empathy and support. This study is not solely academic; it is a step towards a more compassionate and inclusive world where everyone has the opportunity for a fresh start after serving their sentence in prison.

There were two scientific theories from social science that guided this study; the Labeling Theory and Psychological Stress Theory. Labelling theory is defined as people in the community evaluating and labelling a person based on their previous misdemeanour records (Becker, 1963). In sociology, the labelling theory focuses on how social labelling contributes to the growth of crime and deviance. According to the theory, although a variety of factors may at first cause deviant behaviour, 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 (Bermburg, 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, behavioural, or psychological reactions. A study by Lazarus (1991) **defined** 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 behavioural endeavour to master, tolerate, or decrease internal and external demands and tensions.

Research Question

This study explored the repercussions of jail time on ex-convicts after liberation. This research study **aimed to answer** 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 of ex-convicts within the province of Davao del Sur who had been released from prison upon completion of their imprisonment. A total 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 technique for purposeful sampling that occurs after research begins 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 interview questions with probing questions were developed and validated by experts. A semi-structured interview was used, an appropriate data collection method when a researcher needs to collect open-ended qualitative data to evaluate the respondent's ideas, emotions, and views regarding the given issue (Dejonckheere & Vaugh, 2019). The researcher asked more open-ended questions, allowing for a dialogue with the interviewee (Teddle & Tashakkori, 2009).

Design and Procedure

This study utilized a qualitative design and a 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 dialogues recorded after consent by participants. The interviews used open-ended questions to gather detailed information on important topics. The collected data underwent thematic analysis, which involved 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 by participants after they were explained about the study's fundamental nature, their right to decline to participate, and the risks associated with their participation. Researchers ensured each participant's involvement in the study would be kept confidential, only utilizing their life experiences. 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 objective was to examine ex-convicts' challenges as they tried 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*.

Individuals who have been released from incarceration often encounter difficulties stemming from the negative perceptions and limited assistance they receive from society, including both emotional and material support. The data is graphically presented in Figure 1, providing a



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

clear 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 sa katilingban ilahang pangkutya kay mahiubos kaayu ko, naay alanganin ug kaulaw. Naa jud silay alanganin sa akoo pero gibuhat nako ang hinagiban para mag padayun sa kinabuhi. Gihimo nako ug kusog para malampasan nako 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 received for his past mistakes. Similarly, Charlie, who has been convicted of manslaughter, has shared that he **felt** 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.

*“...sa unang gawas nako naa dayun mga silingan mamisita sa among balay mangukit ug naunsa akong kaso naa sad uban na makita nimo sa ilang mga nawung nga nahadlok dala panabi kay lagi kuyaw akong kaso. **(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 **which have found that one of the main issues faced by** these ex-convicts **was about coping** with the stigma that comes with being labelled as an ex-convict, **often** portraying them as criminals (Palgan & Apolinario, 2022; Obatusin & Ritter-Williams, 2019; Hirschfield & Piquero, 2010; Chiricos et al., 2006). Several studies have proven that stigmatic labelling 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 **lost 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 had difficulty adjusting. **Anne fought the urge to be with her previous friends, similarly, Roel fought the temptation to use illegal drugs again.**

*“Akoang ginalikayan ato kay ako lang mga barkada, labi nag wala ko kabalo unsa ilang mga binuhat basig madamay napud 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 mentioned 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:

“...karon naga inom ko diri nalang sa balay pamilya ang kauban kay dili naman ko pwede makit an sa gawas nga naga inom kay naka label naman sa mga tao nga inig makit an ko nila sa gawas nag inom or maabtan lang ko ug gabii or kadlawon sa gawas moana na na sila nga nibalik ko sa akong bisyo. (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 **lost** her business as a fish vendor in their community and she could not get some money to fund her business.

“...Nawala sa akoa akong negosyo sa pangangisda. (I lost my business in selling fishes.) (Mary Jane, L019-020)

Charlie **lost** his job as he was being convicted and **experienced** difficulty finding one. Additionally, Manuel also expressed his concern about his struggles in finding a job as an ex-convict. He works as a labourer in a corn mill in his neighbourhood where he gets minimum wage after a long day of working.

“...mga upat ka bulan ko usa naka kita ug trabaho. Hastang lisuda kay singot ug dugo kay mag abot jud aron mabuhi lang jud ko sa akong pag usab. Kay dili naman ko gusto mabalik pa didto sa prisohan. (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 offences 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 was 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.

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

“Oo, wala man koy bana, syempre wala koy ginikanan. Naningkamot pud intawon ko sa sarili nako para lang mabuhi akong pamilya. Dili ko magsalig sa akong igsoon. Problema intawon nako 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.

“...sa akoang bana (live in) pirmi ko molayas kay tapulan, dili kabalo mangita ug paagi nga maka kwarta. Ako ang mangita ug pamaagi mao maulaw ko sa akong ginikanan. (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, but when he was liberated too, he struggled to communicate and gain their trust. He expressed that the rejection from his child and loved one, made him lose his sense of worth. He was hopeful but disheartened by his family's action.

“Akong anak dili na modu-ol sa akoa, akoang mga igsoon ug akong mama ug papa ug ang inahan sa akoang anak. Nawala ko sa pang huna-huna pag biya sa inahan sa akong anak. Naka huna huna jud ko mag hikog ato kay wala najud koy puwang sa kalibutan gani kay tungod napriso ko. (crying) grabeng sakit ato kay siya ra baya akong gihandom inig maka gawas ko, siya rajud akong ulian. Unya kay dili naman siya wala koy mahimo. (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 with money and their needs for their families (Yin, 2018; Chikadzi, 2017). In cases where family members avoided contacting their convicted loved one, as they do 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 preexisting 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 individuals 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 was to discover the changes that ex-offenders experienced from their jail time to liberation. The repercussions of jail time on ex-convicts impacted the lives 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 results, apart from the emotional distress they struggled with, faith restoration was 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/3ICFjhl>

Repercussions of Jail Time on Ex-convicts



Source: <https://bit.ly/40i3Zd0>

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 **were** part of their recovery process. **Participation** 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 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 stated how incarceration changed him from becoming more enthusiastic and responsible with his family and **went more often** 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 didto sulod sa prisohan naga bible sharing mi unya kana kay wala jud ko na na agi-an diri sa gawas, didto nako na experience sa sulod (prisohan). Maka hatag nakog advice sa uban tao. Unya naga basa pud kog salmo sa sulod maong maka share ko sa uban kung unsa akong mga nakat-unan labina sa mga 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 on by imprisonment which has made him pray and be more thankful for the chance to change his life. Rectifying his past mistakes, even for the fact that he was not a believer back then, has made his experience more satisfying. He stated that:

“Pag ampo kanunay sa Ginoo para aning ika duhang higayon na iyang gihatag nako para mausab akong mga sayup kay kaniadto wala man ko kailag Ginoo puros raman binuang sulod sa akong utok karun mupasalamat jud ko kanunay niya ug galikay nasad ko mag apil apil anang sugal kay mao nay makapainit sa akong ulo unya di ko kasabot sa akong paminsar labi nag mapildi ko, lisud kayo ibawi jud labaw nag dakog pildi mausab jud akong kinaiya. (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 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 unfavourable outcomes. Further, the responses emphasized how imprisonment moulds 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 made after the imprisonment by listening to her siblings advise her not to get involved with drugs again. Furthermore, Roel highlighted his experiences brought by incarceration to his life. He shared how regretful he was to his family, how emotionally overwhelmed he felt at that time, and how disappointed he was in himself. After he was freed from prison, he shared the immense joy he felt through it and how this has made him see the world in a better light. He shared that:

“Maka ingon ko nga sa kagahi sa akong ulo, nag mahay ko kay ngano wala ko naminaw sa ilahang mga tambag sa akoo. Lisud storya walay tukma na word or sentence na ma describe nako akong gibati sa pag ka priso. Sa pag hatag sa higayon na nakagwas ko walay tukma sa kalipay akong nasinati unya dili nako kabalo unsa akong buhaton pero atleast nakita nako ang taas na pag lantaw, nakakita nakog kahoy, nakakita nakog bulan. (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 that it **changed** her perspective of herself. She was a hard-headed type of person and prideful, but afterwards she became more understanding and patient. She mentioned:

“Sauna kay maldita man ko tapos dili ko naga paubos pero karon kay kabalo nako mag pa ubos, mag pa ilob unya taas taas na akong pag 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 it changed him. It made him realize not to make the same mistakes again. On the other hand, Charlie, mentioned that due to his imprisonment, he avoided getting himself into trouble.

“Sa karun makaingun jud kog dako akong pag usab galikay nakog gubot, ug mas gahunahuna nako sa akong pamilya ug unsay dangatan ug makahatag napud kog problema sa ilaha. (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 **elder** 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 offences **expressed** 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 influence them **to use** drugs **again**. This **resulted in** them reflecting on their past experiences and practising what it taught them.

Emotional distress. The prior theme has indicated favourable results regarding incarceration as a means of rehabilitation for former prisoners, yet the experience of being incarcerated remains one fraught with challenges and hardships. 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 experience of how **distressed she was for** missing her children and grandchildren at home. Mary Jane also highlighted how she used to overthink about whether she would be free or not. **Anne, on the other hand, shared a dilemma of having her mind on her family outside while being unable to do anything due to the fact that she is inside the prison.** She also mentioned how unstable she was psychologically. She stated that:

“dili nako maiwasan maka huna huna kay akong lawas naa sa sulod pero akong huna huna naa sa gawas pirnaminte, naa sa akong pamilya. Sige ralog sakit didtoa sa sulod kay tungod sa 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)

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 **the** comfort room and just stay there, losing his mind, and thinking about cutting his life **short**. He confirmed that:

“Na depress ko kay sige kog huna huna, ngano kaya nabuhat kona no. tungod jud sa pag salig nako sa akong mga amigo ba, ako ray na adto sa sulod. Pag sulod nako, naabtan pag mga semana kapin didto rajud ko sulod sa cr nag hinuktok. Nawala nako sa pang isip. Boot huna-hunaon pwede nako mag pa kamatay sa sulod. (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 imprisoned 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. Shammass (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 emerged 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

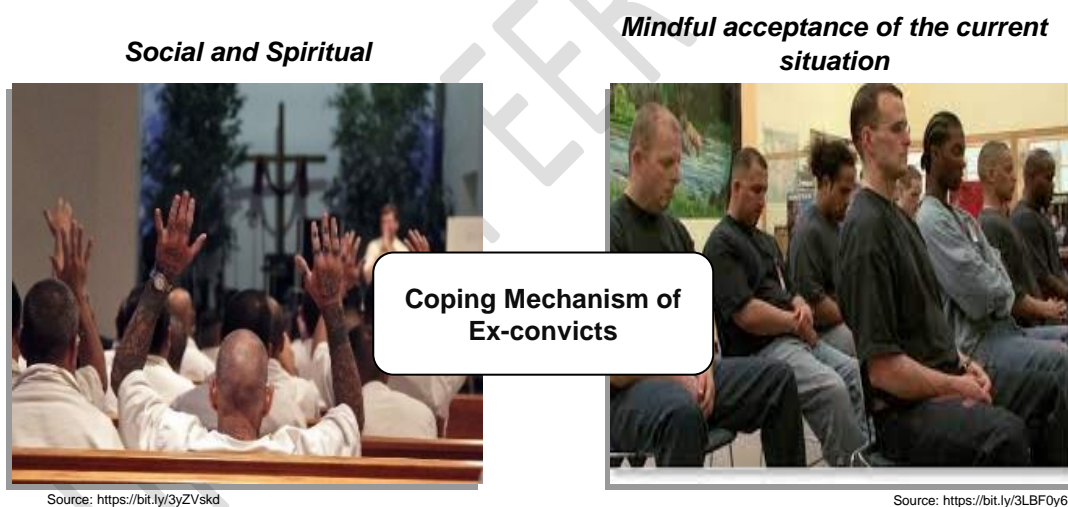


Figure 3. Theme illustration of Coping Mechanism of Ex-convicts

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 strengthens their faith in God and leads them to cope with their situations. Below are the statements of the participants on how their social and spiritual life became their coping mechanism for re-entering society. Below are the statements of the participants about how they coped with the challenges they had been through after they were liberated.

Anne's coping mechanism was **her** spiritual belief in life, she stated that through God and prayers, she **coped** with the struggles she **had** been through.

"Pag-ampo, gina-ampo lang jud nako sa Ginoo akong mga problema didto kay wala man koy lain na madooloan. **(I always pray, I pray to God all of my problems because in there I have no one.)**" (Anne, LO144-LO146)

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

*"Wala may laing akong gidangpan ang Ginoo rajud ug ang akong pamilya kay dugay sad ko na priso daghan kaykog gimahayan pero wala mao naman jud na nahitabo naman ang karun nalang 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 from his family during his jail time. Their small actions of visitation have elicited so much joy in the participants. He appreciated his family's efforts during his incarceration. Roel stated that:

*"Akong pamilya, sila nanay, tatay ug akong mga manghud, sila dodong. Kay didto pako maihap raman gud nga pwede sila maka adto didto. Kanang inig abot sa akong mga igsoon kay dle nako ma-explain ang kalipay na niduaw sila nako. Sa pag gawas nako didto nako na kita na in times ma dapa ka, ma failure ko kay ang mag alalay rajud kay akong pamilya rajud, wala nay lain. Ang mo andam sa tanan kanang naa pirnaminte sa akong kiliran kay akoa 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 support is a vital tool for managing penitentiary clients and that these persons may be a key aspect in minimizing criminal behaviour (Executive Session on Community Corrections, 2017; Schaefer, Cullen, & Eck, 2016). According to recent research, views of family support can aid in minimizing 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 have developed a way of coping. **Individuals who have been released from prison have developed a technique to help them cope with the challenges of returning to normal life. This involves focusing on the happiness they experienced when they were released and reunited with their families, which helps to reduce their anxiety and fear.**

Being mindful was the coping mechanism of Roel, despite that he faced struggles upon his liberation, it did not stop him from going forward in his life. He did not let his imprisonment define his entire life. And in fact, he truly believed that God has a plan for his life. Roel responded that:

*“Ako man gud na klase na tao na dili ko mag pa apekto ba. Wala kaayu ko ga huna-huna. Ang akong lang go with the flow, kung unsa ang dagan, okay, kung unsa ang ihatag sa Ginoo. Wala na nako gihuna-huna nga na priso ko. Ang ako kay mag padayun lang gud wala nako gina base ang akong kinabuhi sa akong pag ka priso. Kung unsa ang ihatag sa Ginoo, mao akong. Ginoo raman gud tanan gud akong gina sandigan. Kumbaga sa Ginoo ko naga kuha ug kusog aron maka cope up ko sa tanan. Wala nakoy paki-alam sa mga nag judge nako, ug kung husgahan bako sa mga tao. **(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 nga laya nako mas focused ko sa pangitag pangwarta kay labi na ron naa koy anak mawala tanan kalisud basta masulod sa akong utok nga naa koy gibuhing anak mao raman na **(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 remained optimistic for a bright future. After release, their preparations for their family confirmed that they value their family above everything else. Their willingness to fulfill their shortfall and make up for lost time indicated that they have changed to become a better and more responsible person, as indicated by 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) was about the ex-convicts' reflective observations about their insight into their lives as they battled 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.

Family Ties and Emotional Support



Source: <https://bit.ly/3ncUv5p>

Renewed Faith in God



Source: <https://bit.ly/3JArQi7>

Insights of Ex-convicts after their imprisonment

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 transcripts, some of the ex-offenders had close-knit relationships with their families and desired to keep these close relationships for they offer strong emotional support. They also claimed that their imprisonment 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 found support from their families. Even though Anne was ashamed to ask for money from 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 nako sa akong pamilya, sa akong anak.
(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.

“...bahin sa akong pamilya kanang gamay na okasyon kay gina tagaan nako ug importansya nag focus nako sa akong pamilya karon kay naa jud sila pirmi sa akong kiliran biskan katong naa pako sa sulod. Unya karon gina tagaan napud nakog importansaya ang ilahang mga pag tambag sa akoa unlike sa una tong wala pako na priso. (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 afterwards.

“...paghatag jud ug importansya sa pamilya mao ra mana silay mutambayayong nimo ug magkina unsa wala jud ko nilay biyai bisan paman tuod gapait mi labaw na kaniadto pero ana-a ra gihapun sila nitabang nako hantod sa makagawas ko wala jud ko kasinati ug pangkwenta gikan sa ilaha bisan klaro sa ilang nawong ang 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 **accept** 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 definition of "family support" is too broad and lacks precision both conceptually and methodologically.** The concept of familial support involves a combination of emotional and practical connections, serving as a fundamental component of the societal structure (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 to consider 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 expressed that he attended 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. Presently, Anne regularly reads the Bible and devotes time to her spiritual journey.

"Daghan. Sauna dili ko naga basa ug bible ug dili pud ko naga simba pero karon kay naa nakoy panahon sa Ginoo, sa pag ampo. (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 mistakes and professes to have sought redemption during his period of incarceration. He maintains that his faith in a divine being has not wavered and yearns to reassure having faith in God means he will never abandon him.

"sige nakog pangayo ug pasaylo sa Ginoo ga ampo ko kanunay niya atong naa pako sa prisohan ug hantod karun, kay bisan ug unsa pa diay ka kasalbahis di jud ka niya talikdan basta naa rakay pagtuo sa iyaha.(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 assisted the ex-inmate in lessening suicidal, depressive, guilt, and shame sentiments. As a result, the inmate spread 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 focused on the repercussions of jail time on ex-convicts incarcerated for criminal offenses. The repercussion of being in jail brings emotional distress to them as they pay the consequences of their actions. However, their incarceration has become a tool to renew their faith and become more careful of their actions. Life after imprisonment is challenging yet hopeful. Ex-offenders face discrimination, stigma, and lack of emotional and material support from their loved ones, making it difficult for them to re-enter 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 repercussions 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 the nature of their criminal offense as societal biases and stigma hinder their reintegration. Thus, rehabilitation interventions must be frequently implemented at different phases of criminal justice engagement. In caveat by punitive measures such as confinement or probation. In the correctional settings in the Philippines, the local and national governments should reinforce programs addressing at least one of the subsuming risk factors related to their incarceration. These factors may range from a continuum of mental health issues, social and spiritual support, stigma management and reintegration, substance use, education level, and/or employment status. Furthermore, the government should provide an alternative intervention targeting those people surrounding the ex-convict. With enrichment and intervention sessions as to how they can help these individuals. The community must be educated that these ex-convicts have already paid for their crimes inside the prison and have been liberated.

The main goal of social reintegration programs is to offer support and guidance to offenders in order to help them stop committing crimes. These programs aim to help them successfully reintegrate into society and prevent them from returning to criminal behavior again. The researchers suggest that governments and policymakers should establish a re-entry program for ex-convicts to help prepare them for re-entering society. Consecutively, after their release needs assessment should be utilized to gauge their capabilities and skills for their reintegration. Scaffolding in their weak areas should be implemented to increase their quality of life.

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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