



# ALMOST A DECADE OF COMMUNITY REINTEGRATION: LIFE AFTER INCARCERATION

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**Abstract—** This study explored the reintegration experiences of ex-offenders in the community following incarceration. It focused on the programs undertaken during imprisonment, the struggles encountered during reintegration, coping mechanisms employed, motivations to avoid recidivism, and the current lives of the participants who have successfully reintegrated for nearly a decade. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, the research captured the lived experiences of five ex-offenders who are not recidivists, were incarcerated for 6 years and above, and have been reintegrated into the community for 8 years to 10 years in the Province of Ilocos Norte. The participants were purposefully selected.

Based from the data, there were themes formulated, which are the Technical, Vocational, and Livelihood Program, Social Stigma, Positivity amidst Negativity, Community Engagement, Specific Deterrence, Hope Through Family, Free Will, Work Done, and Community Acceptance. The findings highlight the pivotal role of rehabilitation programs in skill development, the significant impact of stigma and discrimination as barriers to reintegration, and the importance of community support and personal resilience. Themes of family motivation and community engagement emerged as critical to sustaining long-term reintegration and reducing recidivism. This study underscores the need for comprehensive aftercare services, societal acceptance, and targeted interventions to facilitate sustainable reintegration and societal harmony.

*Keywords: Ex-offenders, Life After Incarceration, Lived Experiences, Rehabilitation Program, Community Reintegration, Aftercare Services Stigma and Discrimination, Coping Mechanism, Successful Reintegration*

## I. Introduction

Reintegrating into the community is often a difficult process for ex-offenders, who face numerous challenges, including stigma, discrimination, and obstacles that make them

vulnerable to recidivism. These barriers hinder their smooth transition back into society. However, despite these challenges, many ex-offenders successfully reintegrate by finding paths and receiving support from the community, allowing them to rebuild their lives as law-abiding citizens.

Ex-offenders bring diverse experiences from their time in prison, with reasons for incarceration and sentence lengths varying widely. Upon reentry, they often encounter stereotypes and judgment from others, perpetuating stigma and discrimination. These societal attitudes further complicate their efforts to reintegrate and socialize, making their journey back into the community both challenging and complex.

The rehabilitation of offenders and their successful social reintegration into society should therefore be among the basic objectives of Criminal Justice System. Aftercare programs provide essential support after treatment or rehabilitation, helping individuals maintain progress and reintegrate into society. Their success relies on factors such as quality training for providers, community involvement, and continuous program evaluation. Well-implemented aftercare services can significantly improve long-term outcomes and reduce setbacks.

Interestingly, legally binding international human rights conventions, as well as the United Nations standards and norms in crime prevention and criminal justice, clearly acknowledge this point and emphasize the importance of interventions to support the social reintegration of offenders as a means of preventing further crime and protecting society (Massive Media Inc, 2019). Prisoner reentry should be understood as a critical piece of any racial justice agenda. Over 640,000 people return to communities from prison each year. However, due to the lack of institutional support, statutorily imposed legal barriers, stigmas, and low wages, most prison sentences are for life—especially for residents of Black and Brown communities (Goger et al., 2021). As per the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), challenges persist in the rehabilitation and reintegration of persons deprived of liberty (PDL). Out of nearly 100,000 PDLs reintegrated in 2022, about 27,000 individuals have re-offended,

highlighting the need for more effective measures to prevent recidivism (Amancio, 2024).

Research emphasized the struggles that the ex-offenders encountered during their reintegration process, which hinders them to a smooth reintegration to the community. However, despite those struggles, ex-offenders were able to find their way to overcome their struggles by employing their coping mechanism which helped them for their successful reintegration. By giving attention to the struggles that were faced by the ex-offenders, this may bring a development on how people see those ex-offenders who are recently released from penal institution. Giving them opportunities to show that they are already changed persons may also reduce discrimination and stigmatization and helps them avoid recidivism leading to successful reintegration and fulfilment of life.

#### A. Background of the Study

Community reintegration is a process of transition that begins at the offender's earliest point of contact with the criminal justice system. It involves a series of concurrent social, behavioral, and cognitive changes (Doherty, 2014).

Moreover, the reintegration of offenders into their own community and society is one of the universally accepted goals of corrections. To ensure that offenders discharged from detention centers, jails, penal institutions, or rehabilitation centers reclaim their part and role in society, there is a need to assist them in their reunification with their families and reentry into the community.

Conversely, ex-convicts in the Philippines encounter significant challenges during their reintegration into society, which can hinder their successful transition. These challenges are multifaceted, encompassing social, economic, and psychological dimensions.

On the other hand, recidivism refers to the repetition of criminal behavior by an individual. It often leads to reincarceration when someone violates their parole or commits another crime. To assess the likelihood of an individual returning to prison, many correctional facilities use recidivism risk assessments (Estel and Portes, 2017).

This study has a gap from others because it delved into the reasons behind recidivists and the programs that help them to reintegrate successfully. It investigated why some are motivated to turn their lives around after being incarcerated. It also explored the life experiences of ex-offenders as they reintegrate into the community.

#### B. Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to explore the life of ex-offenders as they reintegrate into the community after their incarceration. Specifically, it sought answers to the following:

1. What are the programs during incarceration enjoined by the participants that helped them in reintegration into the community?
2. What are the struggles faced during their reintegration into the community?

3. What are their coping mechanisms to overcome the difficulties faced in their reintegration into the community?
4. What motivates the participants to avoid being a recidivist?
5. What is the current life of the participants after being reintegrated into the community for almost a decade?

#### C. Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is a set of concepts, theories, ideas, and assumptions that serve as a foundation for understanding a particular phenomenon or problem (Hassan, 2024).

Theory of Social Learning is based on the idea that individuals learn from their interactions with others in social contexts. Separately, by observing the behavior of others, people will develop similar behaviors. After observing the behavior of others, people note and imitate that behavior, especially if their observed experience is positive or includes rewards associated with the observed behavior. Social learning theory has become perhaps the most influential theory of learning and development. It is rooted in many of the core concepts of traditional learning theory. This theory is often considered a bridge between behavioral learning theory and cognitive learning because it includes attention, memory, and motivation (Bandura, 1977). In relation to this theory, ex-offenders upon reintegrating into the community can be in high tendency to commit a crime again. Many of the ex-offenders highlighted that while they appreciated the support they get prior to release, after-care and follow-up services after imprisonment were not provided. If an ex-offender does not have adequate social support, such as from family, or community organizations, they may struggle to adapt to life outside of prison and turn to criminal behavior as a coping mechanism and through direct observation and interaction from the community can contribute to commit a crime again.

Social Identity Theory originated from the conviction that group membership can help people to instill meaning in social situations. Group membership helps people to define who they are and to determine how they relate to others. Their goal was to specify and predict the circumstances under which individuals think of themselves as individuals or as group members (Tajfel and Turner, 1970). In connection with this study, the experiences of the ex-offenders in reintegrating into the community can be highly relevant to the study. This theory was developed to explain how individuals create and define their place in community. By incorporating social identity, individuals derive a significant part of their self-concept and self-esteem from their community. When individuals are released from prison, they often faced challenges in reintegrating into community due to social stigma attached to their criminal past.

Experiential Learning Theory the importance of experience and its role in the learning process. It explains that concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation form a four-stage process (or cycle) transformed into effective learning. Learners have natural preference for how they enter the experiential learning cycle. "Because of our hereditary equipment, our particular past life experience and demands of our environment, we develop a preferred way of choosing" (Kolb, 1984). In relation to the study, the ex-offenders, as they reintegrate into

the community, may encounter new experiences or reinterpret existing experiences and the challenges they may face outside the prison. Giving them the support can build their strong relationship with their family as well as with the community. However, having close ties with one’s family is not easy. One might be ashamed or embarrassed about the crime of which you he or she was convicted of, but getting involved in positive community events helps others to see his or her value.

*D. Conceptual Framework*

The conceptual framework of the study illustrates the expected relationship between the variables. It defines the relevant objectives of the research process and maps out how they come together to draw coherent conclusions (Swaen and George, 2022).

*The Input, Process, Output and Outcome Model.* The Input, Process, Output and Outcome (IPOO) Model was used in this study. This represents a comprehensive approach to evaluating systems by considering not only what goes in and comes out immediately but also the broader and longer-term consequences of the system's outputs.

The inputs were the programs during incarceration enjoined by the participants that helped them in their reintegration into the community, the struggles faced during their reintegration, their coping mechanisms to overcome those difficulties faced in their reintegration into the community, motivation of the participants to avoid becoming recidivists, and the current life of the participants after being reintegrated into the community for almost a decade.

The process involved a conduct of one-on-one interviews and an interpretation of findings to understand the experiences, coping mechanisms, and pathways to reintegration post-conviction.

The output of the study is a documentary video titled “Life After Lock Up”. This video could shed light on the current lives of ex-offenders, their motivation to avoid recidivism, and the challenges they face as they work towards maintaining a positive future.

The community will give a deeper understanding of the lives of the participants and lessen the discrimination towards the participants as a result of the outcome.

*E. Significance of the Study*

The results of the study are significant to a number of individuals who may directly and indirectly benefit from these. Hence, the beneficiaries of this study would be:

- Community. The results of the study may give insights to the community about how the ex-offenders cope with the struggles they face every day and the current life they have after being incarcerated.
- Ex-offenders. This study may help the ex-offenders in dealing with the struggles they encounter.
- Family of ex-offenders. Through this study, the family members of the ex-offenders could become aware of the struggles of their loved ones’ stories; hence, they would know the kind of support that they will be giving them.
- Government organizations. Concerned government organizations may use the findings of this study as bases for policy formulation or implementation as regards the

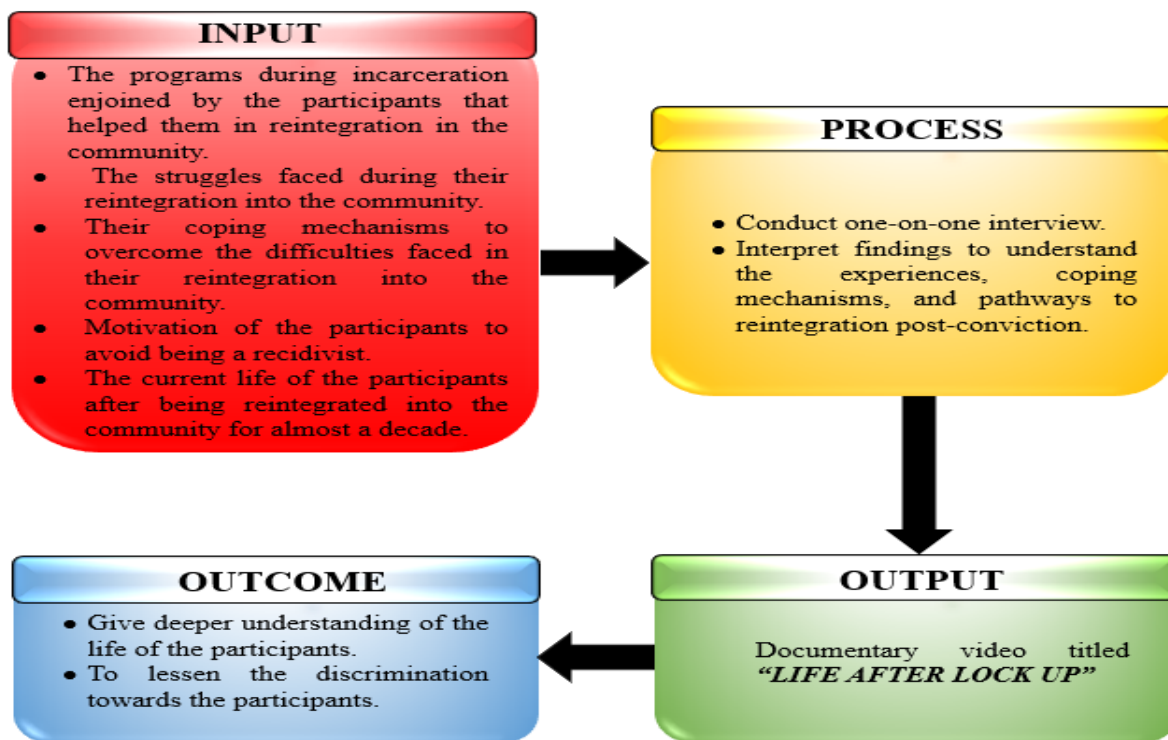


Figure 1: Paradigm of the Study

- use of resources and strategy for effective reintegration.

- Non-Government Organizations. These NGOs may gain valuable insights from the results of the study to improve their support programs.
- Researchers. The result of this study could help the researchers have a deeper understanding about the lives of the ex-offenders after being incarcerated.
- Future Researchers. This study may provide future researchers with a thorough understanding of the ex-offenders' reintegration into the community after incarceration and they may use the results as bases to conduct other studies related to such.

#### F. Scope and Delimitations of the Study

This study focused on the life experiences of ex-offenders during their incarceration period and reintegration into the community. Particularly, the researchers aimed to know their programs or activities during their time of incarceration that helped them in reintegrating into the community and the struggles they faced during their reintegration. The researchers also investigated the coping mechanisms used by the ex-offenders in reintegrating into the community.

Furthermore, the researchers interviewed five (5) ex-offenders who are not recidivists and are living in the Province of Ilocos Norte. The ex-offenders were being incarcerated for 6 years and above and are being reintegrated into the community for 8 to 10 years.

#### G. Definition of Terms

The following terms are operationally and technically defined to help the readers better understand these terminologies used in this study.

- Almost a Decade. It is a measure of time that describes a part of time from 8 years to 10 years.
- Community. It refers to where the ex-offenders go back after being incarcerated.
- Incarceration. It refers to the act of detaining a person in a penal or correctional facility.
- Ex-offenders. They are those who are incarcerated for more than six (6) years and reintegrated into the community for 8 years to 10 years.
- Recidivism. It refers to the act of a convicted person to reoffend.
- Recidivist. It refers to the person who reoffends after being convicted.
- Community Reintegration. This refers to the process of individuals who have been isolated or excluded from society to reintegrate into their communities.
- Stigma. A set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have something about.

## II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURES AND STUDIES

### A. Reintegration of Ex-Prisoners into Normal Life: Overcoming Barriers and Successful Experiences

After serving time in prison, ex-prisoners often face significant challenges reintegrating into society. One of the most prominent obstacles is the stigma of a "criminal record,"

which hinders their ability to find suitable employment. Employers may be reluctant to hire ex-convicts due to concerns about their reputation, fear of recidivism, or other factors. As a result, many ex-prisoners are forced into temporary or informal jobs, making their return to normal life more challenging. One effective way to address these challenges is through collaboration between government agencies and public organizations. Interestingly, the Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law has been working in this area, conducting training for ex-prisoners on business planning, personal development, and social entrepreneurship. According to Nargis Zokirova, the director of the Bureau for Human Rights and Rule of Law, if ex-prisoners can find stable jobs and earn good salaries after their release, they are less likely to re-offend or join extremist groups (Kholboev, 2024).

### B. Prison Education Programs: What to Know

Postsecondary prison education programs come in various forms, ranging from noncredit workshops taught by volunteers to full degree-granting programs. Classes function as they would in a traditional college classroom, but with some added obstacles including occasional lockdown disruptions and limitations to technology and supplies. For instance, during nearly 14 years in an Alabama prison, David Garlock focused on self-improvement through education, earning a certificate in architectural and mechanical drafting. After his release, he pursued higher education, enrolling at Eastern University in Pennsylvania, where his prison-acquired credits helped him graduate with a bachelor's degree in 2017. "It takes a village for a returning citizen to be successful," says Garlock, now a public speaker and co-teacher in Eastern's Prison Education Program. "It takes the person's family, the community, and educational programs that will accept the individual." Education programs can reduce recidivism. A [2018 meta-analysis](#) published in the *Journal of Experimental Criminology* found that individuals who enroll in postsecondary education programs are 48% less likely to be reincarcerated than their peers who do not. (Wood, 2023)

### C. Capacity Enhancement on Aftercare Treatment for Providers Empowers Filipino Drug Dependents to Overcome Addiction

Aiming to fight drug addiction by supporting the recovery of drug dependents, the Philippine Council for Health Research and Development (PCHRD) supported a project entitled, "Follow-up Study on Pilot-Testing A Manualized Tele-Synergistic Aftercare Program for Recovering Drug Dependents among 17 DOH-DATRCs". Seeking to empower treatment providers with enhanced competencies in telehealth approaches, participatory action research (PAR), and health policy systems research (HPSR), the project equipped treatment providers with the necessary skill set to implement an evidence-informed, culturally-nuanced, cost-effective, and treatment-effective aftercare program. Beyond empowering treatment providers with advanced skills to deliver effective aftercare to PWUDs, the event highlighted the crucial role of research in developing evidence-based and cost-efficient interventions for drug-dependent individuals. By identifying and addressing concerns from treatment to continuity of care and recovery, this initiative is designed to cater to the specific needs of Filipino PWUDs/RDDs, creating a sustainable and

positive impact on communities (Philippine Council for Health Research and Development, 2023).

#### *D. Effects of BJMP Livelihood Program to the Lives of Released Inmates*

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) in Iloilo is keeping persons deprived of liberty (PDL) busy with various livelihood activities, not only to kill boredom inside the facility but also to prepare them once they are released. PDL are engaged in vegetable gardening and furniture-making and during the holiday season, they accept orders for Christmas lanterns (parol). PDL earn income by selling their produce to visitors and the community outside the facility. Their products are also open to bulk buyers while the rest are for their own consumption. The income directly benefits the PDL. They send the money to their families. With this, it is believed that, with help to change their lives, a safer nation is built in which PDL will not feel that they are inside the jail and they tend to forget their situations. (Estillore and Aoas, 2020)

#### *E. The Road to Redemption: How Rehabilitation and Employment Unlock Potential in Ex-Offenders*

Integrating ex-offenders into the workforce helps them rebuild their lives and addresses the labour shortages faced by many businesses. Initiatives that help prisoners record and develop their talents build confidence, making them more employable upon release and easing their transition into a society that has undergone significant changes since their incarceration. By investing in such initiatives, recidivism can be reduced, job vacancies are being filled, and a more inclusive and productive society is created. Moreover, a successful rehabilitation strategy should focus on helping prisoners reflect on their talents and skills, both from before their incarceration and during their time in prison. Encouraging self-awareness and skills' development is essential for preparing them for employment and life upon release, addressing mental health issues, and building confidence. This approach benefits the individual, with a knock-on effect on society by reducing crime rates and filling job vacancies (Chairman, 2024).

#### *F. The Extent of Effectiveness of Treatment Programs Implemented in Provincial Jail, Tagbobolo, City of Mati*

The effectiveness of a treatment program in addressing inmate rehabilitation and reintegration implemented in the Provincial Jail of Tagbobolo, City of Mati was determined. The research investigated the program's impact on behavioral changes, recidivism rates, and reintegration prospects for participating inmates. Recidivism rates were significantly reduced among inmates who completed the program. Additionally, the study revealed a positive correlation between program participation and improvements in behavioral patterns, including reduced aggression, increased self-control, and enhanced social skills (Relatado et al., 2016).

#### *G. Life on the Outside: Returning Home after Incarceration*

The successful reintegration of individuals back into their communities following extended periods of incarceration is a critical yet complex challenge. Long-term community

reintegration is being experienced by individuals who had been incarcerated for at least 10 years and had been out of prison for nearly a decade. The study found that ex-offenders faced significant difficulties in multiple domains upon release, including securing stable employment, finding suitable housing, and rebuilding family relationships. Many struggled with the persistent stigma associated with their criminal records, which posed barriers to full reintegration into their communities. However, it stated that some ex-offenders were able to successfully rebuild their lives over the long term through perseverance, accessing support services, and developing strong social connections. This underscores the importance of comprehensive, long-term reentry programs and policies to address the complex, multifaceted needs of individuals reentering society after extended incarceration and the lived experiences and challenges faced by individuals during the community reintegration process, particularly for those who have spent a significant amount of time incarcerated (Chua et al., 2022).

#### *H. Beyond Incarceration: Identification of Post-Incarceration Strategies for Successful Reintegration*

The focus of this study was post-incarceration strategies that lead to successful reintegration after release from prison. The greatest issue with re-entry is the failure to successfully reintegrate and desist from future criminal activities. This study involved examining which strategies were employed by non-recidivating ex-convicts to navigate five policy-driven social barriers upon release from prison. Data were collected via interviews with 10 individuals who had successfully reintegrated into their communities after release from prison. To be eligible, ex-offenders had to be successful non-recidivating ex-convicts who served a minimum of 2 years and had been released from prison for at least 3 years. Purposive and snowball sampling strategies were used to identify prospective ex-offenders. This study employed qualitative and a phenomenological design. Findings provided a deeper understanding of the ways non-recidivating ex-convicts create, build, and sustain success. A key finding was that support was essential to successful reintegration. Success seemed largely contingent upon having people who believed in ex-offenders, encouraged them, and helped them obtain skills and information they needed (Walker, 2024).

#### *1. Walking a New Beginning: A Case Study on the Chronicles of Ex-Offenders in Surpassing the Challenges of the Living Outside the Bars*

Society's fear of crime often leads to the stigmatization of ex-offenders, treating them as lifelong criminals and fostering hostility that increases recidivism. This redefines rehabilitation as punishment, ignoring the challenges ex-offenders face in reintegrating into society. Addressing this issue is crucial to promoting effective reintegration strategies. This qualitative study used a case study approach to explore ex-offenders' challenges in real-life contexts. Five purposively selected ex-offenders participated in in-depth interviews with open-ended questions, audio-recorded and supplemented by field notes. The unstructured format allowed probing to clarify responses and meet study objectives. The findings aligned with Hirschi's Social Control

Theory, emphasizing societal bonds—attachment to family, commitment to goals, and engagement in lawful activities—as key factors in preventing crime. Supportive family relationships and participation in conventional activities were highlighted as critical for reintegration (Palgan and Apolinario, 2022).

*J. Reintegration of Ex-Offenders Convicted of Violent Crimes into the Community in the Iranian Context: A Qualitative Study*

Reducing recidivism largely depends on the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into the community. This study examined the reintegration experiences of Iranian ex-offenders convicted of violent crimes, focusing on their challenges and strategies for rebuilding their lives. A qualitative approach was employed, using purposive sampling to recruit 26 participants, including 16 ex-offenders and 10 experts (social workers and psychologists). Sampling continued until data saturation was reached. Participants met specific criteria, such as a history of imprisonment for violent crimes, at least one year of incarceration, a minimum of six months post-release, and no reoffending during this period. Data were collected through in-depth interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire.

The study identified the “worry trap” as the main challenge faced by ex-offenders, characterized by concerns about stigma, acceptance, and future stability. To overcome this, participants engaged in strategies to “restore lost social capital” through supportive interactions with others and efforts to rebuild their lives. These strategies contributed to redefining an independent identity and facilitating reintegration (Khoshnami et al., 2021).

*K. Aftermath of Incarceration: Lived Experiences of the Ex-Convicts*

Ex-convicts often face significant challenges after release, including stigma, limited resources, and difficulties reintegrating into society. Despite these barriers, many show resilience and seek support from community organizations, family, or faith-based groups to rebuild their lives. This study gathered data through interviews with ex-offenders. Prior to the interviews, researchers explained the study’s purpose, ensured confidentiality, and obtained informed consent from participants. Participation was voluntary, and interviews were conducted at a time convenient for the ex-offenders to allow thorough responses. The findings revealed that ex-convicts face significant struggles with acceptance and trust, often encountering hostility and unfair treatment. While families may provide conditional support, ex-convicts must demonstrate complete change and effort to regain acceptance and trust (Curib et al., 2023).

*L. Life After Bars: A Narrative-Case Study of Ex-convicts*

Ex-convicts in the Philippines face significant challenges during reintegration, including stigma, limited job opportunities, lack of support, and discrimination. This study examined the psychological, social, and economic aspects of their lives post-incarceration, focusing on their struggles and coping mechanisms. Using the Life Course Perspective as the framework, this qualitative narrative case study interviewed six successfully reintegrated ex-offenders, each with a minimum five-year prison sentence. Participants were selected through

snowball sampling, and interviews were conducted in secure and quiet settings. Findings revealed significant challenges, including societal stigma, economic hardships, and disrupted social relationships. Coping strategies, such as spiritual rehabilitation and emotional acceptance, were essential to reintegration. Transformative realizations, driven by familial support and a desire to protect loved ones, motivated positive change and social contributions (Bidola, 2024).

*M. The Reintegration of Ex-Convicts in Society: A Case Study*

The primary goal of the Criminal Justice System is to protect communities from high-risk offenders, often through imprisonment as the most severe form of punishment. While incarceration denies many fundamental rights, such as liberty, reintegration into society post-incarceration is critical. Employment plays a vital role in reducing recidivism and supporting ex-convicts' adjustment to civilian life. This study aimed to provide insights into the challenges ex-convicts face and how communities can support their successful reintegration. This qualitative study used a case study design to explore the lives of ex-convicts after incarceration. Participants, identified through purposive and snowball sampling, were former inmates who had completed their sentences. Data were collected using an Interview Guide with questions translated into Bisayan to ensure clear communication. Findings revealed significant barriers to employment for ex-convicts due to derogatory records, lack of competitive skills, and extended unemployment during incarceration. Vocational training provided in penal institutions was limited, leaving ex-convicts ill-prepared for the job market. This lack of opportunities led to struggles in earning a living, further hindering their reintegration (Vivares, 2023).

### III. METHODOLOGY

*A. Research Design and Methodology*

The researchers utilized qualitative research method in this study. Qualitative research involves ideas, behavior, opinions, perceptions of the ex-offenders being studied and deals with non-numerical data. This type of method can be used to explore and seeks to understand the meaning of the ex-offenders ascribe to a social human difficulty rather than to explain and manipulate variables (Nassajil, 2021).

The qualitative phenomenological design is appropriate in this study to look approximately into the lived experiences of the ex-offenders and to examine why and how the ex-offenders behaved a certain way from their perspective. Phenomenological approach widely focuses on describing and explaining a phenomenon from the perspective of the ex-offenders who have experienced it (Brannan, 2022).

*B. Population and Locale of the Study*

The participants of the study were five (5) ex-offenders who are not recidivists and are living in the Province of Ilocos Norte, specifically, one (1) ex-offender from Brgy. 1 Canaan, Badoc, one (1) from Brgy. 2 Garreta, Badoc, one (1)

from Brgy. 3 Alogoog Badoc, one (1) from Brgy. 19 Napu, Badoc, and one (1) from Brgy. 29 San Juan, Pasuquin.

In obtaining the representative sample from the given population, the researchers used the purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-randomized sampling technique that selects sampling units based on certain criteria. Purposive research sampling is a type of non-probability approach in which the researcher chooses a sample (person, cases, or events) based on their assessment that it would fit the study's objectives. (Brisht, 2024).

### C. *Data Gathering Tool*

The researchers used an interview guide, recording device, and informed consent in gathering the data for this study. The interview guide consists of questions related to the problems of the study, specifically the activities/programs during incarceration enjoined by the ex-offenders that helped them in their reintegration into the community, the struggles faced during their reintegration, their coping mechanisms to overcome the difficulties faced during reintegration into the community, motivations of the ex-offenders to avoid becoming recidivists, and the current life of the ex-offenders after being incarcerated into the community for almost a decade. A validated interview guide was used to conduct the semi-structured interview, including the questions for the ex-offenders. The recording device is an instrument that stores sound and helped the researchers to duplicate the answers of the ex-offenders. Finally, the researchers also had a letter of informed consent for the ex-offenders to ensure ethical standards in the conduct of the study.

### D. *Data Gathering Procedure*

The researchers developed an interview guide focused on addressing the study's key problems, which was validated prior to use. They also created an informed consent form for the ex-offenders, which received approval from their research adviser. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using this guide, with responses recorded using a recording device, after obtaining the participants' permission.

The researchers explained the purpose of the study to the ex-offenders, assured them of the confidentiality of their responses, and informed them of their right to refuse participation at any point. The participants were then given sufficient time to review and fully understand the consent form before signing it.

### E. *Treatment of Data*

Thematic Analysis was used to analyze the data, enabling an in-depth understanding by uncovering patterns and nuances. Its flexibility and adaptability make it suitable for various research questions, study designs, and qualitative data sources, allowing the process to be tailored to the study's specific needs (Trymata, 2023).

Thematic Analysis is a qualitative data analysis method that identifies patterns and themes, emphasizing the researcher's reflexivity and subjective experience in interpreting the data (Villegas, 2023).

Familiarize with the Data. The collected data from Almost a Decade of Community Reintegration: Life After Incarceration through form of audio that transcribes, transcripts and has patterns of the data.

Initial Codes. The researchers created an initial code that represents the meanings and patterns in the data.

Group Codes into Themes. The researchers chose a theme describing the topic and meaning that is important in the research questions.

Evaluate and Revise. The researchers had an initial theme that was reviewed and revised to ensure that each theme has enough data and be clear on what data should be included and not.

Write Narrative. The researchers described the data, included their own interpretive analysis, and made an argument about the claim being presented.

### F. *Ethical Considerations*

Ethical considerations in exploring the experiences of ex-offenders in reintegrating into the community involve ensuring the well-being, autonomy, and confidentiality of the ex-offenders.

The primary objective of this research is to raise awareness regarding the ethical challenges that researchers must carefully address when conducting studies involving ex-offenders' experiences. This study specifically focuses on the ethical considerations that should be followed throughout the entire research process. Informed consent is of utmost importance, ensuring that ex-offenders fully understand the study's purpose, potential risks, and benefits. Confidentiality is essential to protect the ex-offenders' personal and identifying information, with data anonymization during analysis and reporting. Transparency and accountability are emphasized, with the researchers taking full responsibility for the ethical conduct of the study and addressing any concerns or issues that may arise. Maintaining accurate and transparent records of the research process is essential to uphold integrity and allow for evaluation and scrutiny of the research.

By incorporating these ethical considerations into the research design and implementation, researchers can ensure the protection of ex-offenders' rights, privacy, and well-being.

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### A. *Programs that Enjoined by the Participants during Incarceration*

Ex-offenders enjoined different programs that provided them with a sense of purpose and support while fostering a positive and hopeful environment as they serve their sentence. Such programs offer activities that are relevant to their lives, both inside and outside of the institution that might help in preparing for a successful reintegration into the community.

This section of the research study discusses the programs that ex-offenders participated in during their

incarceration, which helped them reintegrate into the community after their release.

*“Nasursurok idiy uneg idi iti mushroom production ken pinagtaraken iti manok. Pinagtraining dakami pay iti electrical idiy uneg. Idi rimwarak isu ti immuna nga inaramid ko ditov. isu in-applv ko.”*

➤ *Technical, Vocational, and Livelihood (TVL) Program*  
The Technical-Vocational-Livelihood (TVL)

*“Nagbasaak idi iti tailoring, food processing ken tay mushroom production. Nakatulong dagitoy kanyak kasi nagyannak karinderia ken nagnegosyo nak lechon after pandemic. Dakkel nga tulong kanyak, kasi mapakanko ti pamilyak ken maitedko ti kayatda.”*

program in penal institutions equips persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) with practical skills through training in areas such as carpentry, welding, sewing, agriculture, and food processing, aligned with TESDA certifications in the Philippines. By earning nationally recognized credentials, PDLs gain better opportunities for employment, entrepreneurship, or self-sufficiency after their release, promoting rehabilitation, reducing recidivism, and aiding their reintegration into society.

Several studies highlight the importance of

*“Adu, nagubra kami ti food processing, dress making. Adu ti naadalmi. Nagaramid kami ti longganisa, boneless bangus, adda pay diay sumrekanmi idi nga baking, nga agaramid ti kankanen. Nagar-aramid kami met ti tapa kada boneless bangus, tocino nga inlakomi ditoy. Dakkel ti naitulong na, ta isu ti igatang mi ti agserbi”*

rehabilitation programs in the reduction of criminal behavior and reoffending. These programs often focus on developing life skills, such as job readiness, financial management, and emotional resilience, to prepare inmates for reentry (Reamico, 2022).

In this study, TVL programs were enjoined by the ex-offenders during their incarceration period. They underwent the Technical, Vocational, and Livelihood during their reintegration process which helped them to have a successful reintegration; and such serves as the sub-themes.

#### *Technical Program*

Technical programs equip ex-offenders with the tools to overcome reintegration barriers, rebuild their lives, and positively impact their communities while reducing the risk of reoffending. By emphasizing skill development and personal growth, these programs offer a pathway to a fresh start and a brighter future.

The statement of Participant 2 who was incarcerated for 8 years and has been reintegrated to the community for 8 years and 5 months, further supports the sub-theme by stating: (I studied inside the penal institution, I took

*“Nagbasaak idiy uneg ti pagbalodan, Accountancy of Business Management iti innalak idiy ket isu ti nakatulong kanyak. Diay kuma biag ko idi ngamin, awan turturongen na. Tattan haanen, ta adda disiplina kon.”*

Accountancy of Business Management there, and it helped me. My life before had no direction. But now it's different, because I already have discipline.)

#### *Vocational Program*

A vocational program equips inmates with practical skills while promoting personal development, and preparing them for reintegration into society. The ability to earn a legal and sustainable income serves as a powerful deterrent to reoffending, as financial independence significantly reduces the likelihood of returning to criminal activities.

The prison system has made significant progress in offering both basic and vocational education to inmates, aiming to reduce unemployment and promote social reintegration after release.

After 6 years and 3 months of being incarcerated and 9 years of reintegration into the community, Participant 3 further shared the following that supports the sub-theme:

(I learned how to grow mushrooms and raise chickens inside, and we were also trained in electrical work. When I got out, the first thing I did was apply what I had learned.)

After serving more than 7 years of incarceration, followed by 9 years of reintegration into the community, Participant 4 went on to share that:

(I studied tailoring, food processing, and mushroom production. These helped me because I worked in a small eatery (carinderia) and started a lechon (roast pig) business after the pandemic. It has been a big help to me because I can feed my family and give them what they want.)

After completing 6 years of incarceration, followed by 8 years of reintegration into the community, Participant 5 added that:

(We did a lot of work, such as food processing and dressmaking. We learned a lot. We made longganisa, boneless bangus, and even baked goods like *kakanin*. We also made tapa, boneless bangus, and tocino, which we sold here. It helped a lot because that was how we earned a living.)

#### *Livelihood Program*

Livelihood programs are essential for the successful reintegration of ex-offenders by offering job opportunities, business support, healthcare, and other resources. These programs help improve their lives and enhance community efforts to address poverty and reduce recidivism. Through skills training and support, ex-offenders are empowered to become productive, independent members of society.



Livelihood programs help rehabilitate inmates and prepare them to reenter society as independent, contributing members.

The statement of Participant 1, who was incarcerated for 7 years and reintegrated to the community for 8 years, supports the sub-theme as stated below:

(The activity that helped me was making lanterns and turning newspapers into flower vases. That is one of my sources of livelihood now.)

One of the effects of the livelihood program, as shared by the participant, is that the programs can provide new trainings and skills to inmates that they can use to provide income for their families. As supported by Saludar (2014), the participant stated that, through the livelihood programs, inmates can develop skills to become more productive and it can also help them to ease their boredom and avoid acquiring vices in jails.

Similarly, livelihood programs offer income-generating activities for Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) during imprisonment, allowing them to meet personal needs and support their families. These programs play a key role in rehabilitation and reintegration, equipping PDL with skills and knowledge to secure employment, generate income, and lead productive lives after release (Castillo et al., 2023).

*“Mailangda nga umasideg kanyak, ken dagiti tattao simmabali ti pinagkita da kanyak, tay haan da unay dumukdukot kanyakon, haan dak pay umay kasarsaritan, tay immadayo rikna da kanyak, adadaywandak. Tay no adda pay agpapaala no adda agbirthday ket haan dak pay pagunyan nga awisenen.”*

On a global scale, prison systems have increasingly recognized the value of education and vocational training in promoting rehabilitation. For example, in Ghana, the prison system has made strides in providing both basic and vocational education to inmates, with the goal of reducing unemployment and fostering social integration post-release. Similarly, the Philippine Corrections System integrates educational, vocational, and counseling programs, aiming to address the rehabilitation needs of convicted individuals (Baffour, 2021).

The responses of the ex-offenders that were supported by the experiential learning theory state that the study suggests that livelihood programs during incarceration help ex-offenders divert attention from family, alleviate boredom and loneliness, and acquire knowledge and skills for productivity and life development, which can be applied post-release and community reintegration.

TVL programs during incarceration help ex-offenders transform through hard work, discipline, and a willingness to learn new skills. Despite challenging circumstances, they acquired knowledge in fields like business management, food processing, and crafts. These skills enabled them to create businesses that supported their families and fostered self-sufficiency. The success of reintegration largely depends on the

*“Syempre idi agsublinak dito, kasla mabutengak payla rumwar, ta ammok nga adda diskriminasyon. Dakkel diskriminasyon nga nag gapu pagbaludan kunada, syempre uray nalalaingak ngem isuda, diay kuma makitada idiy ket ex-convict daytuy kunada. Isu tay makaperdi kanyak met, isu nga mabutengak payla ag-apply.”*

*“Ti nakipasetak idiy nga nakatulong kanyak ket tay pinagaramid iti par-parol ken dagitay newspaper nga pagbalinen mi nga flower vase. Isu ti maysa pagsapulak ita.”*

ex-offender's willingness to follow program guidelines and embrace positive changes.

#### *B. Struggles Faced during their Reintegration into the Community*

One of the most significant hurdles faced by the ex-offenders during their reintegration is the pervasive presence of challenges that hinders them into a smooth reintegration into the community. Individuals returning to society may carry the weight of past experiences, often labeled by societal perceptions rather than their inherent worth.

##### *➤ Social Stigma*

Stigma refers to the negative perception or attitude towards a person based on a certain characteristics or belief, this stigma can be associated with past behaviors or experiences. That people are categorized or labeled often in a way that sets them apart from the “norm”. Sadly, stigma can lead to discrimination, prejudice and social isolation. People with the label are treated unfairly or excluded due to the negative stereotypes associated with them.

Social stigma often presents significant challenges for individuals as they attempt to reintegrate into their communities, and this can be felt in various ways. The following responses from the ex-offenders offer a glimpse on what struggles they faced as they reintegrate into the community.

As perceived by Participant 1, who was incarcerated for more than 7 years and reintegrated into the community for 8 years, he stated that:

(They rarely get close to me, and the people see me differently. They do not often approach me; they do not even come to speak to me, as if they feel remote from me. They regard me with contempt. During celebrations such as birthdays, they do not invite me anymore.)

The statement of Participant 2, who was incarcerated for 8 years and reintegrated into the community for the same period, supports the theme developed by the researchers, affirming that:

(Of course, when I got back here, I was still hesitant to go out because I knew there was discrimination. My history has resulted in a great deal of discrimination, which they attribute to my criminal record. Of course, no matter how skilled I am, people will still perceive me as an ex-convict. That is why it impacts me, and I am still hesitant to apply for jobs.)

As shared by Participant 3, who spent more than 6 years in prison and has been reintegrated into the community for 9 years, he expressed that:

(People are somewhat afraid of you, as if they are avoiding you, as if they are really scared. When I was released from prison, people seemed afraid of me, as if they did not want to approach me, there was fear among them to mingle with me. Because of course I came from the prison. You can see their reactions, their actions as if they are distancing themselves, not like before, when they were close and could socialize with me.)

Participant 4, who spent more than 7 years in prison and has been reintegrated into the community for over 9 years, shared that:

(There were many challenges here before. It was hard for me to start. Because they were afraid of me, because I came from prison. Unlike before, they would distance themselves when I would go out, they would move away.)

Stigma, defined as a social phenomenon in which labeling, separation, and discrimination occur together in a power situation that allows them, may be a central cause of the social inequalities that formerly incarcerated persons face. Such attitudes may contribute to prejudiced responses (e.g., fear or disgust) and discriminatory behaviors from others such as rejection from job opportunities and social alienation (Feingold, 2021).

Stigma affects behavior through interactions among institutional barriers, social discrimination, and individual responses. Perceived stigma, or the belief that one's group is devalued, negatively impacts self-esteem, self-efficacy, and future expectations, ultimately affecting coping, mental health, and behavior (Moore et al., 2015).

In addition to the responses of the ex-offenders that were supported by the social identity theory, it states that reintegration into a community often faces challenges due to persistent social isolation, even after personal growth. Building trust within the social circle is a slow process that requires patience and resilience. Overcoming social isolation requires reflection and community engagement, with both parties actively fostering understanding and acceptance.

Further reintegration challenges stem from the difficulty of returning to normal life after prison. Ex-offenders often face negative labels and perceptions, making it hard to shift others' ingrained views. Reintegration involves more than physical presence; it requires rebuilding emotional connections and demonstrating through actions and words that change has occurred. These challenges highlight the struggle of rebuilding a life when society is unwilling to move beyond past mistakes.

### C. Coping Mechanisms to Overcome the Difficulties on their Reintegration

Coping mechanisms are essential tools for navigating the complexities of reintegration. They are the strategies and techniques that the ex-offenders employed to manage the emotional, psychological, and practical challenges that arise during this transition.

#### ➤ Positivity amidst Negativity

The ability of the ex-offenders to maintain an optimistic outlook and focus on the good, even when surrounded by challenges, difficulties, or negative is crucial. This is about finding hope and strength in the face of adversity.

*“Medyo naatap ti tao kanyam, kasla detay makawa da, kasla mabutbuteng da. Idi kagapgapok idiy kasla kabutengdak ti tattao, kasla haandak nga asitgan, adda amakda nga maki halobilo kanyak, gapo ta syempre naggapo ka ti uneg. Madlaw mo diay reaction da, diay action-da nga kasla umadayoda, haan da nga kasla naasideg nga tav dati nea close”*

This is not about ignoring the negativity, but rather about

*“Adu ti pagsubok dituy idi. Narigatan nak nga mangrugi. Kasi mabutengda nga makikadwa kanyak, kase naggapo nak pagbaludan. Kasla kuma, idi, adadaywandak no tay rumwarak, umadaywandak, inapakitakitak latta ti kinasayaat ko kanyada nga makilangenlangen kanyada ken nagbalbaliw nakon”*

choosing to focus on the positive aspects of a situation and using them as a motivation to move forward.

In this study, the ex-offenders showed positivity amidst negativity in surpassing the struggles that they encounter as they reintegrate into the community.

Participant 1, who spent over seven (7) years being incarcerated and has been reintegrated into the community for eight (8) years, expressed that:

(I will just show them my goodness when mingling with them so they can see that I have changed and become a better person.)

Participant 3, who spent over six (6) years being incarcerated and has been reintegrated into the community for nine (9) years, additionally shared that:

*“Babaen kadagiti panagaramid ko dagiti nasayaat, inpakitak latta nga kasla awan ti nangyari nga kasdiay, tapno umasidegda kanyak. Asitgak latta no man pay ammok nga medyo adda ti amakda, kasla tay iyas asideg ko latta ti bagbagik tapno ti kasta medyo agclose diay rikna mi”*

(By doing good things, I continue to act as if nothing happened so that they will interact with me. I still approach them, despite their fear. I always show nice intentions so that they feel at ease.)

Participant 4, who spent over seven years in prison and has been reintegrated into the community for nine years,

*“No adda da pay ububra yanti purok wenna barangaymi innak tumultulong. Idi ngamin puro gulo ipakpakitak, ken no anat kayatko ubraen, byark latta pulwya idi. Ngen itay baapen. Na keda da sula merca kon binanunay a makitibag ang kawanan agas nasenyao.”*  
*“Napakitak kanyada ti kinasayaatko. Inistoryak ti karigat ko idiy tapnu maawatanda nu kasano ti rigat na.”*

expressed that:

(I showed them my goodness. I talked about my hardships in prison so they could understand the challenges I faced.)

A positive outlook means being optimistic, expecting success and favorable outcomes of one's plans, being happy, and looking at the bright side of life. When one has a positive attitude, he or she is more alert, and less stressed. As an ex-convict, maintaining a positive attitude in the face of adversity is essential; it will assist him or her in successfully becoming a newly abiding citizen in the community while also regaining the trust and confidence of the people (Farrington, 2020).

Ex-offenders' personal beliefs and values can also influence their attitudes towards community reintegration. Some may feel a strong desire to turn their life around and make amends for their past mistakes. Their personal beliefs and values can shape how they view their role in the community and their willingness to participate in community activities (Health, 2023).

Positivity amidst negativity is vital for ex-offenders during reintegration. Despite facing stigma, mistrust, and limited opportunities, many maintain hope and focus on personal growth. A positive mindset helps them overcome societal barriers, rebuild relationships, and lead law-abiding lives. By focusing on strengths, setting goals, and seeking support, ex-offenders can challenge negative perceptions and create new opportunities, driven by a desire for redemption and self-improvement.

#### ➤ *Community Engagement*

It is the process of collaborating with individuals, groups, or organizations within a community to address concerns, resolve challenges, or achieve common goals that benefit everyone involved. It emphasizes building strong relationships, encouraging active participation, and fostering open communication to empower community members and support collective decision-making.

This refers to the action of the ex-offenders as their coping mechanism, as they overcome the difficulties during their reintegration to the community.

As what Participant 1, who spent over 7 years in incarceration and has been reintegrated into the community for 8 years, expressed:

*“Inpakitak kanyada ti kinasayaatko. Inistoryak ti karigat ko idiy tapnu maawatanda nu kasano ti rigat na.”*

(If there are works in our neighborhood or barrio, I would join and help. Previously, I was always in trouble and did whatever I wanted. But now, things are different. If there is someone I have conflict with, I would be the first to seek forgiveness and make amends.)

Participant 2, who was incarcerated for over 8 years and has been reintegrated into the community for the same length of time, shared that:

(It is really my family that matters to me because they are the ones whom I can rely on for help. They are my life; there is no one else. What I did before was to approach our Barangay Captain. He welcomed me and encouraged me to forget my former pals. Because if I would still be with them, people might perceive me differently again, as someone who has not changed at all. Sometimes, because of fear, when I get to see my former pals, I would avoid them. I am afraid that people might think that I again resorted to my bad vices before when they would see me with them.)

Participant 3, who was incarcerated for over 6 years and has been reintegrated into the community for 9 years, additionally shared that:

*“Pinagubra ti mushroom production. Siempre makita da met nga kaslang nagbalbaliw, idi mabaybayagen immasidek metlang rikna da. Ken babaen latta ti pinag pakpakumbaba, tapnu makisama nak latta kanvada”*

(I worked in mushroom production. Of course, they saw that I had changed, and over time, their feelings toward me softened. It was through humility and showing them that I could get along well with them.)

Ex-offenders who have a criminal record may find it more difficult to reintegrate into society because they are often the target of prejudice and social stigma. Their ability to reintegrate and start afresh may be hampered by unfavorable assumptions and stereotypes that prevent community members from welcoming them. By encouraging acceptance and inclusion, society may help ex-offenders rebuild their lives, contribute positively to their communities, and reduce the likelihood of recidivism (Suarez and Baines, 2021).

Furthermore, acceptance and gaining trust once again can take a toll on the ex-convict and requires a lot of effort to fully be accepted. Fair treatment cannot be given and was still hostile toward them. Ex-convicts may explore ways in which they can use to sustain their financial needs through people who trust them (Curib et al., 2023).

The responses of the ex-offenders that were supported by the social identity theory state that the study reveals that despite community negativity, ex-offenders demonstrate

*“Haanen. Didiay ti lugar nga diak ninamnana idi. Karirigatan ti panag biag.”*

change through humility and sharing stories, relying on their families, and understanding their experiences. Various coping mechanisms work best for each individual, and experimenting with different strategies can help find the best fit.

The way ex-offenders engage with the community often involves building new, positive relationships, essentially "befriending" the community as part of their reintegration process. This engagement helps shift the perception of the ex-offender from a former criminal to a responsible and reliable member of society. As they form bonds with neighbors, peers, and local organizations, ex-offenders gain emotional support, reduce isolation, and foster mutual trust, creating a supportive environment that aids in their successful reintegration and reduces the likelihood of recidivism.

#### D. Motivation to Avoid being Recidivists

Recidivism, the disheartening reality of individuals returning to criminal activity after release from prison, is a complex issue with far-reaching consequences. One of the most potent motivators is the desire for personal growth and redemption. Many individuals who have served their sentences yearn for a second chance, a chance to rebuild their lives and contribute positively to society.

##### ➤ Specific Deterrence

Specific deterrence is a strategy aimed at preventing an individual offender from committing future crimes by imposing a punishment that is meaningful and impactful for that person. This concept emphasizes the idea that the consequences of criminal behavior should instill fear in the individual, making them less likely to re-offend. By focusing on the specific person who has committed a crime, the justice system seeks to reduce recidivism and promote rehabilitation through tailored consequences.

This refers to the experiences of the ex-offenders when they are incarcerated, that this gives them motivation to avoid being a recidivist. That being confined to a limited space with strict rules and being separated from their family are impactful aspects of their lives.

Specific deterrence is one of the main reasons for ex-offenders to avoid being a recidivist. That the depth of these difficulties encouraged them to change in a better way.

After spending over 7 years in prison and 8 years back in the community, Participant 1 agreed to the main idea of the theme and said:

*“Haan ko kayag agsublin ta narigat ti adda ti pagbaludan, ta makontrol ti makan, kada gunay mo.”*

(I do not want to go back because it is hard being inside the penal institution, the way you eat and move are being controlled)

After spending 8 years in prison and 8 years in the community, Participant 2 supported the main idea of the theme and said.

(Not anymore. That was the place I did not expect back then. The hardest part of my life.)

Participant 3, who was incarcerated for 6 years and reintegrated into the community for 9 years, added that:

*“No mabalin ket haan kuman, ta narigat ti adda idiy uneg. Haan ka makapan idiy kayag mo papanan, haan mo maaramid dagiti kayag mo nga aramiden. Uray no adda ti paubra da kuma idiy, adda limit ti oras mo. Awan ti waya wayam nukwa, no di ket aggapo kadagidiay mangbanbantay ti desisyon”*

(If it is possible not anymore, the life inside the prison is difficult. It is difficult because you have no freedom. You cannot go where you want to go, you can not do what you want to do. Even if they ask you to do something there, you have a time limit. There is no freedom there, the decision comes from the one who supervises you.)

Participant 5, having served 6 years in prison and spent 8 years reintegrating into the community, remarked that:

*“Agpayso nga adu ti masursurom idiy. Ngem dagiti pamilya ti panunutem, ti kaadayo na nu agsubli ka man idiyen. Madi ka met makaadayo. Ket imbag dituy ta makapan ka ta ili, makapan ka dita simbaan. Agpayso nga adda simbaan idiy ngem haan nga kasla dituy kuma ta makalangen-langen mo ti gagayyem mo”*

(Indeed, there are many things to learn there. But you should think about your family. The distance when you return there. You cannot go far neither. In here you can go to town freely, you can go to the church, and so on. There is indeed a church inside the prison, but it is not like the one here outside the prison where you can mingle with your friends.)

Specific deterrence focuses on deterring individual offenders from reoffending after they serve their sentence and are released, and focuses on deterring individual offenders from reoffending after they have already been convicted and punished based on the idea that fear of punishment will discourage people from committing crimes (Poli, 2023).

Moreover, the core tenet of specific deterrence is that an offender will abstain from criminal activity owing to his or her negative experience of punishment for a similar offence. An individual indicted and sentenced to a period of imprisonment

would, owing to the unpleasantness of that experience and the deprivation of his or her liberty, be less likely to offend in the future (Pathinayake, 2019).

Specific deterrence seeks to prevent reoffending by drawing on an individual's experience of punishment. Ex-offenders may avoid recidivism out of fear of further penalties, the hardships of incarceration, or societal pressures like preserving reputation and employment. These experiences can lead to reflection and a stronger motivation to avoid actions that could result in similar outcomes.

➤ *Hope through Family*

Family serves as a strong motivator in preventing recidivism. The love, support, and encouragement from family members foster positive change and provide the necessary accountability to break the cycle of reoffending.

The family of the ex-offenders plays a vital role in their efforts to avoid recidivism. That this underscores the importance of the family involvement in the reintegration process.

Participant 2 who spent 8 years in prison and 8 years in the community, supported the theme and stated that:

*“Siempre number one tay pamilya kon. Iti rason nu apay nga pamilya, idi panawak ida babattit da pay, tattan ket college dan, agasem ket mano nga tawen nga madi kam nagkikita. Isu nga ti panpanunutek, tatta metten agsubutak dagitay kurkurang ko idi pinaka balud ko. Isu da ti pigsak, awan sabalin.”*

(Of course, my family is number one. The reason why I say family is because, back then when I entered the prison they were still very young, now they are in college, and it has been so many years since we last saw each other. So now, as I think about it, I realized that I also need to make up for the things I was not able to provide them when I was in prison. They are my strength, nothing else.)

Participant 3, who served his sentence for 6 years and reintegrated into the community for 9 years, added that:

*“Narigat kase awan ti waya wayam, narigat ti adda idiy maadaywam ti pamilyam”*

(It is hard when you do not have your own freedom, and it is hard when you are away from your family.)

Participant 4, who served 7 years in prison and has been reintegrated into the community for 9 years, shared that.

*“Saanen, diak kayaten, ta kasi narigat. Ta ni mother ko adda da gamin idiy Hawaii, idi ti inbagana, awirem dagita anak mo, madim naited ti tawen nga ited mo kenyada”*

(No, I do not like it because it is difficult. Because my mother is in Hawaii, she said, take good care of your children

for all the years that you missed the chance to fulfill your obligation to your family.)

After serving 6 years of incarceration and spending 8 years reintegrating into the community, Participant 5 stated

*“Haanen ket dagitay pamilyak ngarud, dagitay anakko”*

that:

(Not anymore, because of my family, my children.)

They usually experience a loss of autonomy, limited mobility, and restricted access to opportunities and resources when they are housed in correctional facilities or detention centers (Saguran et al., 2023).

However, the pains of prison confinement affect all PDLs differently. In some PDLs, the significant cause of depression would include the loss of communications with family and friends outside the prison. There is also the fear of deterioration — the lack of personal choice within the prison environment which may affect PDLs (Flores et al., 2019).

Furthermore, family support appears to relate to prosocial reentry outcomes not because of emotional or interactional bonds, but because families provide for the basic needs of returning individuals. Instrumental familial support mechanisms such as providing housing and financial support appear more salient in promoting prosocial reentry outcomes than mechanisms of emotional or interactional support (Mowen et al., 2018).

The responses of the ex-offenders that were supported by the social identity theory state that the ex-offender's mental perspective is influenced by their past jail experiences, motivating them to avoid returning due to the hardships. This drives them to approach life with caution and gratitude, appreciating freedom and opportunities outside prison walls. This mindset allows them to embrace freedom and strive for a positive life.

Specific deterrence and the hope through family has a great impact towards the ex-offenders that made them repent on their wrong doings in their past. The memory of the challenges and experiences they faced behind bars serves as a constant reminder for them, that these aspects, particularly being controlled, having their limitations and the longing and importance of their family help them avoid being recidivists. By maintaining a sense of vigilance and cherishing their current circumstances, they are able to fully embrace the value of their freedom and strive towards a more positive and fulfilling life.

*E. Current Life of the Participants after being Reintegrated into the Community*

The journey of reintegration into the community is not as simple as walking out on a penal institution and going back to how things before. It is a process of rebuilding of life, finding their place in the community, and overcoming the stigma that

*“Ti trabahok tatta ket electrical. Adda ti mushroom production ko tatta, isu ti maysa nga nasursurok idiay uneg, isu in-applyko ditoy ruwar. Dagidiay nga trabaho ket masuportarak ti pamilyak.*

is often associated with their past. This section explores the current life of the ex-offenders, offers a glimpse into their lives, showcasing their triumphs.

➤ *Free Will*

Free will is synonymous with freedom, reflecting the sense of liberation ex-offenders experience after years of incarceration. That this represents ownership of one's life and shaping one's own path. It is about the ex-offenders acknowledging their regained freedom that was once taken away from them, that it is a liberation from the weight of limitations and deprivation.

The weight of the past can be heavy, but it does not have to define the future. That this free will that is connected to their new found freedom can make positive changes in their lives.

Participant 2, who spent 8 years in prison and 8 years reintegrating into the community, supported the central idea of the theme and shared that:

*“Napintas ta maaramid ko amin, kayat ko sawen didiay ket adda ti waya waya itan”*

(It is good because I can do everything; what I mean is, there is freedom now.)

After spending over 6 years in prison and 9 years in the community, Participant 3 supplemented the main idea of the theme and said.

*“Ti pinagbiag ko kasla nagsubli metlang ti kinaragsaken gapo ti panaka waya waya.”*

(In my life now, there is happiness because of freedom.)

Participant 4, who served his sentence for more than 7 years and has been reintegrated into the community for 9 years, stated that:

*“Tatta ket mawaya wayaan kan, maaramid mo amin. Mawaya wayaan kan, kasi maaramid ko diay kayat ko, haan a kasla :. : ”*

(Now, you have freedom, and you can do anything. You have freedom because you can do what you want, unlike before.)

Free will, in philosophy and science, the supposed power or capacity of humans to make decisions or perform actions independently of any prior event or state of the universe. Arguments for free will have been based on the subjective experience of freedom, on sentiments of guilt, on revealed religion, and on the common assumption of individual

moral responsibility that underlies the concepts of law, reward, punishment, and incentive (Moore,2024).

Reintegration into society is one of the things that Persons Deprived of Liberty or those who committed crimes and are serving their sentences inside a correctional institution look forward to. The restoration of freedom and the thought of spending time with their families brought them so much joy and comfort amidst all their experiences and struggles (Vivares, 2023).

Similarly, coming out from the prison of our own minds requires a willingness to embrace the possibility of something better. It means letting go of the norm and stepping into a realm of intuitive wisdom. The renewal of freedom and the thought that they will spend their time with their families brought them so much joy and comfort amidst all the experiences they encountered (Faridi, 2023).

After reintegrating into the community, ex-offenders often experience a profound sense of freedom, which allows them to make choices and take control of their lives once again. This newfound freedom is crucial as it enables them to pursue personal goals that were restricted during incarceration. The ability to engage with family, contribute to society, and shape their own future is a vital aspect of successful reintegration. This freedom not only restores their dignity but also fosters a sense of responsibility, helping reduce the likelihood of reoffending and promoting long-term social stability.

➤ *Work Done*

A job that gives security and consistency of employment is often one of the most important factors in successfully reintegrating into the community. A stable job not only provides financial independence but also contributes to the social well-being, a sense of purpose, and personal responsibility. This promotes personal growth, and supports long-term success.

Job stability provides financial security, purpose, and community connection, highlighting the transformative impact that stable employment can have on both individual lives and successful reintegration.

The core idea of this theme is highlighted by Participant 1, who served 7 years in prison and has been reintegrated into the community for over 9 years.

(The way they treat me has improved because they can see that I have change and I can even go to work.)

After spending over 6 years in prison and 9 years in the community, Participant 3 supplemented the main idea of the theme and said:

(My job now is electrical. I have mushroom production now, which is one of the things I learned inside the prison, so I applied it outside. With those jobs, I can support my family.)

*“Mayat ti pannakikadwa da kanyakon, ta makita da metten nga nagbalbaliw nakon ta innak pay maki ububran.”*

Participant 4 who served his sentence for more than 7 years and reintegrated in the community for 9 years stated that: (There are many musicians in our community, and I

*“Adu ti musician idiy yan mi, maysa ak kadagidiay, bali siak ngamin ti panaka boss da tattan. Kasi diak pay naibalod, maysa ak nga musician ditoy komunidad mi, inggana ita isu iti trabahok. Adda bambantayak nga funerarya, siyak ngamin pagkatiwalaan da”*

am one of them. I am considered a leader among them now. When I was not yet in prison, I was already a musician here in our community, and that is my work until now. I am a caretaker in a funeral home, and they trust me with it.)

Having a job reduces the likelihood of ex-offenders returning to criminal activity. Employment offers a stable source of income, reducing the financial strain that can lead individuals back into the cycle of offending and incarceration. It also fosters a positive change in self-esteem and identity, steering ex-prisoners away from a life of crime (“Employment Support for Ex-Offender,” 2024).

Similarly, securing employment leads to many benefits for the justice-involved individual including an increase in self-esteem, a positive sense of identity, and ultimately a more stable lifestyle out of crime (Parker, 2022).

Moreover, securing stable employment is often an uphill battle due to the stigma surrounding their past mistakes. However, a progressive shift towards inclusivity and empathy is essential in breaking down these barriers. This commitment can lead to reduced turnover rates, increased productivity, and a more positive work atmosphere for all employees. This change in perception influences public attitudes towards ex-offenders and helps foster a more compassionate and understanding society (Macshane, 2023).

Finally, a stable job serves as a foundation for successful reintegration into the community for ex-offenders. Employment provides financial security, reduces the risk of recidivism, and fosters a sense of purpose and self-worth. It enables them to contribute to their families and communities while breaking the cycle of stigma and isolation. Stability in work reflects their ability to overcome past challenges, rebuild their lives, and demonstrate accountability and responsibility, marking a significant step toward full societal acceptance and personal success.

#### ➤ *Community Acceptance*

Community acceptance is the process through which individuals or groups are welcomed, valued, and integrated into a particular community. It is fostered through social interactions, shared values, mutual respect, and collective efforts to ensure that all members feel equal and appreciated.

Community acceptance is essential for promoting positive relationships, reducing discrimination that leads to a successful reintegration of the ex-offender.

The core idea of this theme is supported by the statement of Participant 1 who served 7 years in prison and reintegrated into the community for more than 9 years.

*“Naragsak nak ta ita haan nga mabuteng ti tao nga dumukot kanyakon. Makita da metten nga nagbalbaliw nakon nga awan dapat pagbutungan da. Simmayaan ti panangtrato da kanyakon, ta makita da metten nga nagbalbaliw nakon.”*

(I am happy because now people are no longer afraid to approach me. They noticed that I have already changed and that they no longer have anything to fear. They treat me well because they saw that I have changed.)

After spending 8 years in prison and 8 years in the community, Participant 2 endorsed the main idea of the theme and said:

*“Maaramid ko amin, kayat ko sawen ket adda ti waya waya. Tay pamilyak kuma makasangsangom ida manganen. No gamin idiy balay, ket no kurang maysa a pamilya, ket madi naragsak, kasla kasdiy ti panangiladawak. Naragsakak nga makidenna, ta naragsak nga buo ti pamilya”*

(I can do everything. I mean, there is freedom. In my family, we can eat together. In one home, if one member is not around, there is no happiness, that is how I see it. I am happy to be with them because having a complete family gives you happiness.)

Participant 5, who spent 6 years in prison and has been reintegrated into the community for 8 years, stated that:

*“Naragsak ditoy ngem adda met ragsak iti uneg, ngem naragragsak met lang ditoy war ta kadennam ti pamilyam, ta kalangen-langen ko dagitay anakko, appokok, kakabsat ko, gagayyem ko, bale isuda’t sumarungkar kanyak, no saan agtawag da. Pagsublien dak pay a part ti Women’s Club, ngem haanko kayaten”*

(It is happy here, but there is also happiness inside. Still, it is even happier here because I am with my family and be with my children, grandchildren, siblings, and friends; they are the ones who check on my situation, and if not, they call. They also want me to go back as a part of the Women's Club, but I do not want it anymore.)

Ex-offenders successfully reintegrated into the community with the help of their family and peers. Family and peers of ex-offenders gave them strength and motivated them to overcome those challenges, along with the guidance of the Lord. Community acceptance is one of the best solutions to the ex-offenders who may reentry into the community to have a successful reintegration. Through the hardship of the ex-

offenders, there are still people who will accept them without any criticism (Arreola et al., 2024).

Peaceful means being satisfied and feeling at ease in a situation in life and happiness is a feeling of delight or positive well-being aside from the conviction that life is amazing. These ex-offenders were at peace and happy now that they were back with their families and in the community. The day a person is released from prison is often a day of great happiness for him or her. Returning to loved ones and the free world can be utterly euphoric (Jackson, 2020).

The responses of the ex-offenders that were supported by the social identity theory state that the study explores the concept of freedom, referring to the freedom individuals have gained after being incarcerated and deprived for years. Ex-offenders feel the freedom to make their own choices and engage in daily life without restrictions. By exercising their autonomy, they rediscover their identity, reestablish social connections, and rebuild their lives with independence and purpose.

Community acceptance for formerly incarcerated individuals can be challenging due to skepticism and fear. However, ex-offenders' journeys emphasize the potential for change and growth. They demonstrate that individuals are not solely defined by their past actions, and that they can learn and contribute positively to society. This narrative symbolizes hope, resilience, and the belief in personal reform and societal reintegration, despite potential repeat offenses and harm.

## V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

### A. Summary of the Findings

In this study, the researchers found out the different programs during incarceration enjoined by the ex-offenders that helped them in reintegrating into the community based on the following themes: TVL Program as the main theme and its sub-themes: 1) Technical Program, 2) Vocational Program, and 3) Livelihood Program.

As the ex-offenders reintegrate into the community, they also faced different struggles. The study found out that Social Stigma is their major problem as they reintegrate into the community. However, the ex-offenders managed themselves in facing this challenge as they go on with their lives in order to rebuild what they have lost.

Ex-offenders were asked on what coping mechanisms they employed in order for them to reintegrate into the community, and the study found out that there are two mechanisms they used: 1) Positivity Amidst Negativity and 2) Community Engagement. They showcase their development to the public, and stay humble in their lives to avoid further difficulties that can cause risk to them.

Upon the interview of the ex-offenders, the results on what motivates them to avoid being recidivists revealed the following: 1) Specific Deterrence, and 2) Hope Through Family. They choose to regret and avoid being a recidivist because they already experienced the difficulty of being incarcerated, and how tough it is to be away with and their longing to their family.

When asked about the current life of the ex-offenders after being reintegrated to the community, the study found out that after years of being reintegrated and living the life into the community, the ex-offenders were able to meet the success in their lives, where they gained what they have lost before: 1) Free Will, 2) Work Done, and 3) Community Acceptance. The ex-offenders are already enjoying their current situations, that they are happy because the community has already accepted them, disregarding their flawed life in the past. And also, with the freedom that was returned to them, they are already able to do things that they desire.

### B. Conclusion

Ex-prisoners often find it hard to reconnect with their families and get used to normal social life after their release from. Many struggle to fix relationships that were damaged while they were away. Many use skills they learned in prison to start businesses or work for themselves to earn money. The training and resources they got while in prison help them support themselves and give back to their communities. These show that they want to change and grow. Many try to use their past experiences to build better lives for themselves and their families.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions that are derived from the data gathered, these are the recommendations provided by the researchers:

- The Local Government Unit (LGU) may offer more comprehensive and specialized job training programs that align with the programs in which the ex-offenders were involved in while inside the institution to address their specific needs and skills. They may promote fair hiring practices with the local businesses that consider the abilities of the ex-offenders, rather than focusing on their criminal records. And they shall also make housing assistance programs more accessible and less restrictive for the ex-offenders, providing financial support and guidance.
- The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) may evaluate and enhance the existing TESDA programs and services to develop new initiatives specifically designed for the ex-offenders; that shall provide job placement and support services to ex-offenders, contributing to a more effective reintegration system that reduces recidivism and promotes successful reintegration of the ex-offenders.
- A policy shall be made that recognizes the effects of incarceration on people and their families in terms of psychology, society, and the economy should be given priority. This entails supporting thorough reentry initiatives and removing structural obstacles that perpetuate cycles of reincarceration. When working with those who are getting out of jail or prison, an approach that considers trauma should be considered, acknowledging that there may be trauma and mental health issues. Culturally sensitive and individualized



support services that address the unique needs of each person should be provided.

- The complexities of mental health and well-being of the ex-offenders shall be tackled to address access to mental health services, including trauma-informed care, for individuals returning from incarceration. Individuals with mental health needs upon release should be screened and ongoing support and referral services should be provided. Staff to recognize and address mental health challenges should be trained to promote a supportive and understanding environment.
- The ex-offenders should be provided with access to job training, employment services, and financial literacy programs for those with criminal records. Policies that restrict employment opportunities based on criminal history should be reformed. Individuals with employment resources, including job placement services, career counseling, and entrepreneurship support should be connected. Finally, fair hiring practices should be advocated and the skills and talents of individuals returning from incarceration should be promoted.

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