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

Vionizer R. Bidola[1*], Rosalinda De Leon[1], Ella Ignacio[1], Mary Jane Mori[1], Samantha Nicole Valdez[1], Jover Bernabe[1]

ABSTRACT

In the Philippines, ex-convicts face severe hurdles during reintegration, including public stigma, restricted work opportunities, insufficient support, and discriminatory behaviors, all of which impede a smooth return to society. This qualitative narrative case study investigates the psychological, social, and economic aspects of ex-convicts' lives after jail. The Life Course Perspective is used as the study's theoretical framework, acknowledging the importance of personal, societal, and historical elements in individual development. Six successfully reintegrated participants, each with a minimum five-year prison sentence, constituted the basis for in-depth interviews conducted in a quiet and secure atmosphere using snowball sampling. The study sought to explore ex-convicts' issues, coping methods, life realizations, and viable therapeutic programs. The findings highlight the numerous challenges, such as societal stigma, economic constraints, and disrupted social bonds. Coping methods, which include spiritual rehabilitation and emotional acceptance, emerge as critical components of the reintegration process. Life realizations become transforming forces, characterized by a dedication to positive change and social contributions, which is frequently motivated by familial support and a desire to protect loved ones. For effective reintegration, the study underlines the importance of public acceptance, tailored interventions, and support networks. It finds that addressing these issues, as well as encouraging familial stability, boosting community involvement, and engaging employers, are critical to reducing recidivism and facilitating long-term rehabilitation. Recommendations urge for coordinated efforts from families, communities, and businesses, emphasizing the importance of a complete strategy to assisting ex-convicts on their path to successful society reintegration.

INTRODUCTION

Life after imprisonment can be challenging for many individuals. Reintegrating into society after being incarcerated can be difficult and often involves facing multiple barriers such as stigma, lack of employment opportunities, and difficulty finding housing. However, there are resources available to help individuals adjust to life after bars. These may include programs such as job training, substance abuse counseling, and mentoring services. Many nonprofit organizations, community groups, and government agencies provide support to help individuals successfully re-enter society and reduce the likelihood of reoffending. It's essential to recognize that life after bars can be a difficult and complex process and that everyone's journey will be unique. With the right support and resources, however, individuals who have been incarcerated can go on to lead fulfilling and productive lives.

This study aims to understand the life stories of ex-convicts as they navigate the challenges of reentry into society after serving time in prison. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions.

   1. What are the difficulties faced in life after the bars of ex-convicts in terms of

     a. psychological

     b. social

     c. economic?

   2. What are the coping strategies and support systems of ex-convicts to rely on to overcome the challenges they face during reentry?

   3. What are the life realizations of ex-convicts?

   4. Based on the result, what informative intervention programs aimed to support their successful reentry into society?

LITERATURE REVIEW

With over 2 million people incarcerated, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world. This equates to about 25% of the total prison inmates worldwide. The incarceration rate in Russia is also very high: over 600,000 people are in prisons or detention centers, which is 4% of the total prison population worldwide. Conversely, many European countries have significantly lower incarceration rates. In Norway, the incarceration rate is only 75 per 100,000 people, compared to over 700, per 100,000 in the United States. Globally, men are significantly more likely to be imprisoned than women, and men account for over 95% of the world's prison population. The most common reasons for incarceration worldwide are drug-related, property-related, and violent crimes. The use of pre-trial detention varies widely across countries, with some countries relying heavily on pre-trial detention to manage their inmates.

About 600,000 people-about 1,600 a day-are being released from state and federal prisons to return to their communities. The transition from prison to the community may seem trivial. These statistics highlight the significant differences in incarceration rates and practices

[1] Mary the Queen College of Quezon City, Philippines

* Corresponding author's e-mail: vionizerbidola@gmail.com

across countries and regions. They also underscore the need for sustained efforts to reform criminal justice systems and reduce reliance on incarceration to solve crime and social problems.

Physical and Mental Impacts

The psychological impact of returning to prison after serving a sentence can be significant, as individuals may experience a range of emotions and challenges as they adjust to life outside of prison. Everyone has faced the challenges of transitioning prisons since they transitioned from confinement to freedom on the streets. From different political perspectives, however, the age-old problem of prisoner rehabilitation is gaining more and more importance. Increasing numbers of prisoners are being released and returning home after more time behind bars, leaving them less prepared for life outside and less reintegrated. Upon return, they may find it difficult to reconnect with work, home, and possibly family, and continue to suffer from drug addiction and health problems. Most are re-arrested and sent back to prison for new offenses or probation violations. And this cycle of displacement and return of large numbers of people, especially men, is increasingly concentrated in a small number of communities already facing enormous social and economic problems. American psychologist Craig Haney states: "Prison is downright painful, and inmates often suffer the long-term effects of pain, deprivation, and highly unusual patterns and norms of life and behavior. others." Psychological responses to these states include learned passivity and dependence, over-vigilance accompanied by compulsive interpersonal distrust, psychological detachment, and self-alienation, emotional denial that can lead to emotional flattening, including exploitative attitudes toward others because of the values imbued the prison subculture, decreased self-esteem, and reactions to post-traumatic stress or "traumatization" (ASPE, 2001). Incarceration can trigger or worsen general health and depressive symptoms for a short time (Esposito et al., 2017). While those who come into contact with prisons are more likely to experience health problems, and some people may see improvement in prison after mandatory health care, incarceration often does little to alleviate long-term health problems. The length and agony of imprisonment can encourage the emergence of new problems. Those issues could be exacerbated by conditions in some prisons, which the US Department of Justice says violate the Eighth Amendment. Constitution (U.S. Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, 2019). While the health-based leaving model is widely used, focusing on the reintegrated population where the impact of health on adult roles and recidivism becomes acute. The US Department of Justice investigated a health-based model of desistance with a sample of individuals transitioning from prison to the community. They provide an important complement to research that has examined the effects of incarceration on health by highlighting the reverse process from a life-course framework, regardless of whether health problems are the direct result of the stressors of confinement or of some other source.

Researchers in the literature tend to separate these dimensions of health and examine one or the other individuals in a study. This may make sense given the complexities of mental and physical health and the inherent difficulty of measuring either alone. However, the science of medicine and psychiatry has produced findings that indicate physical health problems trigger depressive symptoms, or perhaps why many ex-offenders are depressed in the first place (Novisky & Porter, 2016) – worsening existing depression. Studies have shown a negative impact of incarceration on infectious diseases and stress-related morbidity. Individuals who experienced long incarceration are likely to suffer from long-term health problems (Porter & DeMarco, 2018). Long-term incarceration has serious lifelong consequences (Wakefield & Apel, 2016), including the added penalty of reduced life expectancy—an effect that appears to be particularly strong in the US (Wildeman, 2016). Health problems related to incarceration do not develop throughout life.

According to Western (2018), ex-convicts are victims of a lifetime of incarceration. Violence: both while incarcerated and after being released; racial inequality, unemployment, difficulty re-entering the social cycle, mental illness, and chronic pain are all issues. Studies have assessed trauma experienced by prisoners or ex-prisoners throughout life stages with more emphasis on childhood trauma (Bowen et al., 2018). According to experts, the long-term effects of incarceration can result in post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), "waking nightmares," and long-term trauma. Among different forms of trauma, interpersonal trauma including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse was consistently associated with higher odds of both Axis I (anxiety, depression, PTSD, ADHD, psychosis, etc) and Axis II (personality disorders) mental disorders among prisoners and ex-prisoners. Studies have also found a positive link between post-imprisonment trauma and higher odds of mental disorders after release from incarceration to the community (Sommer et al., 2017). Painful incarceration experiences are difficult to forget and can have long-term mental health consequences. Solitary confinement, abuse, deprivation, harsh living conditions, and elevated levels of stress and anxiety can all befall prisoners. As a result, prisoners are likely to experience significant mental health issues after their release, which can persist after release and impact their ability to reintegrate into society. (Alarabiya News,).

Marie Byrne is a Professional Counselor, runs the Jumeirah Wellness Clinic, and volunteers with the Emirates Foundation, which provides free mental health support. There are social consequences such as severe physical inactivity and severe depression. Even in everyday life, there are reactions that others do not consider normal. Ex-convicts may react violently to a situation in which they perceive no threat. Or they cannot

handle confrontations or problems that make them feel insecure and extremely withdrawn. According to Byrne, the most difficult effects are often not the "live" hangover, but the unconscious effects of the night. The current problem is having nightmares and unknowingly reliving some of your experiences in your sleep and waking up in horror and fear without finding a way to fix the problem. A grown man after his release from prison feels like a child, insecure and unable to form informed judgments and decision-making strategies for rebuilding his life after prison. Many prisoners cannot process the loss and are filled with anger, sadness, or regret at missed opportunities. It's an emotional whirl, a kind of psychological prison. Expectations for a return to normal life should be very realistic and gradual. The shock and pain can leave the nervous system in a constant fight-or-flight state. Trauma is also known to impair a person's ability to regulate their emotions, endure "normal hardships," and feel safe and confident.

Victims' remedies are deemed more effective, especially in cases involving negligence or third-party liability, as they promote safety measures and potentially reduce criminal activities. In complex cases like sexual offenses, they offer an alternative to criminal prosecution, aiding compensation and societal control (Abubakar, 2023). This review emphasizes the significance of considering victims' perspectives and the potential role of victims' remedies in the rehabilitation of ex-convicts. It aims to shed light on post-prison support systems and contribute to comprehensive understandings of life after incarceration. The government must consider the physical limitations of ex-offenders and how the stressed community might put additional strain on their mental health after being released. It is important to emphasize that the manifestations of physical and mental health after imprisonment can lead to difficulties in family relationships, employment, and income, failure to reintegrate can have serious consequences for recidivism and lead to re-incarceration.

Economic Stability and Role of Employment

Fulfilling the adult role is important for criminologists because it can trigger desistance processes toward an ex-convict. Conviction brings both collateral and direct effect. Every year, over 600,000 people make the difficult transition from prison to the community, and while there are numerous challenges, the barriers to finding work are particularly severe (Carson, 2018). Employment assists formerly incarcerated people in gaining economic stability after release and reduces their likelihood of returning to prison, promoting greater public safety to the benefit of all. Despite the overwhelming benefits of employment, people who have been incarcerated are largely excluded from the labor market (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Statistics reveal that ex-convicts have a slimmer chance of being employed after their release. It is very likely that some of these critical dynamics are affected by health issues. For some ex-prisoners, employment is

a crucial turning point. Ex-convicts find it difficult to successfully reintegrate into mainstream society because of the stigma attached to their individuality. Those who are limited by health conditions find it more difficult to find and potentially maintain employment because of the stigma associated with mental status after incarceration or physical lacking (Western, 2018). In addition, physical ailments can impair work performance, which is particularly important for ex-prisoners as they are often confined to physically demanding industries such as construction, warehouse, and factory work (Western *et al.*, 2015). Wiafe (2021) discovered that the majority of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs) were unwilling to hire ex-convicts. Ex-offender workers who suffer from depressive symptoms have higher rates of absenteeism and poorer job performance, which can increase the risk of being fired.

Some ex-offenders attempted to find work in order to supplement their income but were unsuccessful. Those who were employed were fired once their past was revealed to their employers. Employers, if not all, are reluctant to hire ex-convicts because of their criminal past. It is unfair that ex-prisoners are denied a decent living after their release from prison because of the stigmatization of their criminal past. Such ex-convicts suffered an identity crisis for not being able to engage in legitimate employment to take care of their needs (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2016). Most ex-convicts experience depression because of being unemployed. Erstad (2018) states that employment is a high factor associated with recidivism as employers will most likely not hire those with any sort of background on their record. Former prisoners require meaningful, dignified jobs that will sustain them and secure their financial well-being. According to a 2017 study from the University of Michigan Law School, employers in New York and New Jersey were 60% more likely to call back applicants who did not have records, even if the records detailed only minor crimes, such as a single nonviolent felony two years prior (Cox, 2019). According to Cox, even if previously incarcerated people find a place of employment, they are vulnerable to abuse.

Employers understand how difficult it is for people with a criminal record to find work. This can result in an unbalanced power dynamic in which the employer may feel empowered to exploit them at work or engage in illegal practices such as wage theft. The estimated unemployment rate of formerly incarcerated people who want to work but face structural barriers to finding work, particularly in the period immediately following release. For those who are Black or Hispanic, particularly women, being "formerly incarcerated" reduces their employment opportunities even further. This continuous labor markets punishment creates a counterproductive system of release and poverty that harms everyone involved: employers, taxpayers, and, most importantly, formerly incarcerated people seeking to break the cycle (Couloute & Kopf, 2018). Based on an experiment conducted in the Swedish

labor market. Ex-offenders faced the most discrimination in high-skilled, female-dominated occupations. They contended that ex-offenders are more likely to come into contact with male-dominated populations and low-skilled groups because offenders tend to be male with less education. As a result, they expected employers in male-dominated, low-skilled occupations to be more accepting and tolerant of ex-offenders. Ex-offenders were not discriminated against in any of the low-skilled male-dominated occupations included in our study, according to the findings of the field trial. Ex-offenders would face less discrimination in large cities than in small towns. Large cities typically have higher crime rates, which means that the burden of ex-offenders is higher. These elements, when combined, would lead to a greater acceptance of ex-offenders in large cities. The outcome may not be entirely surprising, given that, while crime rates in large cities are higher than in small towns, areas within large cities are more likely to have job availability than others. They have high crime rates, making comparisons between large and small towns irrelevant. Eventually, the findings show that female ex-offenders are treated in the recruitment process in the same way that male ex-offenders are. The study demonstrates that ex-offenders face significant barriers in the labor market and in society, even when the traces of crime are less severe (Lng & Ahmed, 2017).

In the face of stigma, Yin (2018) discovered that ex-convicts lacked marketable skills that would allow them to find work. Aside from a lack of available structures to promote skill acquisition, some ex-convicts had lost marketable skills due to incarceration because the prison did not provide them with the opportunity to sharpen or learn new skills. This was the foundation of ex-convicts' difficulties reintegrating into society after their release. The majority of ex-convicts were not ready to work since prison did not prepare them for the mainstream job market. According to Yin, almost no rehabilitation practice exists in almost all penal institutions, making it difficult for inmates to reintegrate into mainstream society (Baffour, 2021). The consequences of a lack of rehabilitation structures in most Ghanaian prisons are reflected in family acceptance, economic status, and the FCO's acceptance of former inmates.

The majority of inmates did not participate in vocational training programs due to a lack of interest and training opportunities. Certain statistics also reveal the vast majority of ex-convicts' economic circumstances. This issue is complicated by the fact that these ex-convicts have been incarcerated for many years. They did nothing in prison to improve their chances of success after they were released. According to Yin (2018), in prison, "they eat, walk, and sleep." They fail to pay their bills. What can one expect from them once they are released? They have internalized a culture of incarceration with no opportunity for skill development. They have developed a shared institutionalized laziness personality.

In general, the data indicated that life was difficult for some ex-convicts to the extent that prison was thought to be a better option than living as a free citizen.

Social Status and Family Conflict

Societies are so reluctant to commit a crime that they are willing to distance themselves from the deemed criminal in order to feel safe. A single error, on the other hand, is enough to permanently stigmatize a criminal offender. It is hostility that goes beyond wanting to be safe and, at the same time, causes ex-offenders to recidivate. Ex-offenders are considered for life sentences because they are subjected to neglect and restrictions because most perspicacity stigmatizes individuals who were sent to prison for constant deviance. Ex-offenders experienced being an outcast in their community. People let them feel that they are not accepted in society. There are some who are not treating them well, and they also experience negative attitudes from the people around them (Rade *et al.*, 2016). Because of their criminal history, they may face stigma and discrimination, which may lead to feelings of loneliness, guilt, and low self-esteem. There is open shaming and discrimination that severely limits the ex-convicts' chances of receiving their rights to a good and meaningful life.

Criminals frequently mentioned stigma as a problem, and it was established as a significant barrier to reintegration. Furthermore, respondents who witnessed criminals as unwilling to improve, as well as those who felt more morally outraged by the crimes they had committed, preferred social distance more. Criminals are labeled as lifetime criminals because it is an unavoidable stigma for convicted individuals (Tan *et al.*, 2016). They can internalize and absorb those stigmas, which have been found to be riskier for mental health and development to antisocial behavior and environmental avoidance (Moore *et al.*, 2016). Ex-offenders are people who are vulnerable to a variety of factors. Their conviction was even more threatening because it reinforced the feeling of being forced to resort to violence and other incarceration difficulties such as abuse, which can later affect their ethical decision-making. The abhorrent conviction of young people, particularly those whose lives after prison cannot be reintegrated into society, will handicap them for unemployment, which forces them to survive in other ways. Aside from the problems that lead to re-offending, social reintegration is difficult because they are perceived as traumatized individuals who will resort to violence at any time (Maruna, 2020). The stigmatized ex-convict is hesitant to engage with those who share less of their stigma. Ex-offenders preferred to be associated with criminal friends in order to gain acceptance, recognition, and other material benefits from their in-group.

Family members play an important role in the re-entry of those ex-prisoners. They are the ones who provide support such as shelter, food, clothing, and guidance from avoiding criminal behaviors. Families affect position outcomes that can help them make a successful transition from prison to the community (Michigan Department of Corrections, 2018). Few ex-convicts were fortunate to have families with the resources to reintegrate them into the family and community, their institutionalized personality of indolence has become an impediment. The

family is willing to help ex-convicts reclaim their "spoiled" identities through job training; ex-convicts, on the other hand, lack the inner drive and motivation to complete the apprenticeship. Improved family relations and acceptance of ex-convicts helped to reduce reoffending rate (Brunton-Smith & McCarthy, 2016). However, very few ex-convicts were accepted by their families. Even so, they became a burden to their respective families. Their livelihoods became dependent on family members whose meager income could hardly sustain the household. In addition, the return of an ex-convict meant that family members assumed new roles of taking care of them. Introspectively, the ex-convicts were very conscious of the burden they had placed on their various families, but they had resigned to their fate.

Indeed, there may be several parallels between conflicts among family members of formerly incarcerated people with mental illnesses and conflicts among recently released psychiatric patients. Goffman's concept of courtesy stigma—the negative result of associating with a stigmatized person—is especially relevant here because family members of former prisoners with mental illnesses may be stigmatized twice because of their family member's mental illness and status as a former prisoner (Van der Sanden *et al.*, 2016). This is a global issue in which ex-offenders are being denied the opportunity to address the heavy burdens of challenges they are carrying because rehabilitation has been redefined by stigmatization to punishment. Instead of comprehensive rehabilitation of those who are given a new chance, confinement is used. The issue of abuse, worst violations, superiority, and inferiority became prominent (Muthee, 2020).

Murray Bowen's Family Systems Theory suggests that family members are emotionally connected, but sometimes they struggle to accept ex-offenders due to their lack of understanding, trust, care, and love. Ex-offenders should be accepted in the family, community, and society, and each family member has a responsibility to help them understand their life experiences and make positive changes. Family members should not treat ex-offenders as insignificant individuals, but should assist them in starting a new life. Poverty, economic marginalization, religious extremism, and prison overcrowding emerged as major drivers of radicalization among youth in Isiolo County. Despite government efforts at the national and county levels to combat this issue, challenges persist within the prison aspect of the criminal justice system. These challenges hinder the effectiveness of measures aimed at preventing youth radicalization in Isiolo County (James & Pontian, 2022).

Most ex-convicts in the Philippines still face prejudice based on their status orientation, although the country understands the need to accommodate ex-convicts. To prevent abuse or maltreatment, the Commission on Human Rights proposed continuing its Philippine Human Rights Plan for the Prisoners/Inmates Sector (Preda Foundation, 2016). According to the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (2017), the Philippines is one of the countries with the most inmates in the world. In fact, the Philippines ranks 12th overall. As a result of this data, the Commission on Human Rights and the Bureau of Pardons and Parole work together to follow up on the records of those inmates ready for signatures and approval from the President's office. According to the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, only 804 of the 1,927 detainees with medical conditions are considered non-recidivists, or those who will not relapse into previous criminal habits. According to the data, there are 3,384 individuals deprived of liberty (PDLs) who are 60 years old or older and charged with minor offenses. (Cabrera & Nonato, 2020).

President Marcos has directed the Department of Justice (DOJ) to continue releasing inmates who are eligible for parole in order to decongest the country's jails. President Marcos issued the decision during a Cabinet meeting at Malacañang on January 10, 2023. Throughout July and December 2022, the agency freed nearly 3,000 inmates. (Flores, 2023). Citing his experience as governor of Ilocos Norte, Marcos stated that most offenders linger in jail because they cannot afford the services of decent lawyers. By digitizing the Probation and Parole Administration's systems, the DOJ accelerated the processing of qualified convicts' release.

The Barriers Faced by Ex-Offenders

Ex-offenders in the Philippines face multiple obstacles in their journey to reintegrate into society. These challenges encompass psychological, physical, employment-related, and social aspects. Comprehensive support systems and initiatives are necessary to address these barriers and promote successful reintegration, thereby improving the overall well-being of ex-offenders and reducing the likelihood of re-offending. Correctional facilities cannot even hold a huge population, so incarceration and recidivism rates rise. Despite some failures of the judiciary to protect the innocent from conviction, criminal suspects struggle to survive. In addition, the local problem includes stigmatization, which significantly affects the perception of the life of ex-offenders. Since they have little contact with their immediate family during their incarceration, this potential becomes an open wound in the relationship that causes many problems. So, getting out of prison is also a reminder to them that their families are already broken, that no home is ready to take them, and that their job skills don't matter at all. Jones and Narag (2019) stated that the Philippines has recently overtaken the Haitian prison, which operates at a capacity of 80–100 inmates per cell. Society may be concerned with eliminating deviant and delinquent behaviors, but it also needs to be aware of how these individuals begin their lives while influenced by factors associated with crime.

Ex-offenders face life sentences for exposure to negligence and restraint, as most ideas stigmatize people who are sent to prison for constant distraction. This underscores the fact that social distancing and restraint

are likely to be punishments even after your conviction. It is certainly difficult to counteract all of these factors. The ex-offenders face challenges as they resume life after being released from prison. Ex-offenders' difficulties and struggles are two distinct determinants identified in the study as driving forces behind uncontrollable challenges they perceive as typical difficulties and struggles. Another fact they consider a difficulty they cannot escape the loss of their wife and the stigmatization of a former prisoner because criticism and humiliation on the part of people are inevitable, regardless of whether they choose to ignore them or listen. Starting over is difficult for a variety of reasons, including being penniless, and lacking capital. Difficulties in both categories affect individuals, families, and society. Most challenges demonstrate everyone's ability to amplify or mitigate problems. These difficulties are relevant to the strategies of ex-offenders motivated by the desire to survive life outside of prison. The absorption of the stigma, on the other hand, is a series of criticisms and humiliations that the ex-offenders accepted as their reality from the start (Palgan & Apolinario, 2022). Imprisonment in society is a painful experience. However, the agonies of imprisonment are not limited to the loss of physical liberty. Significant hurts stem from frustrations or deprivations that led to the withdrawal of freedom, such as a lack of heterosexual relationships, isolation from the free community, withholding of goods and services, and so on. So, no matter how painful these frustrations or deprivations are in terms of thwarted goals, discomfort, boredom, and loneliness, they carry more pain like a set of threats against the prisoner's foundations. The individual's image of himself as a valuable person begins to waver and dim. Prisoners also lost society's trust, status, citizenship, and material possessions, all of which were important components of their self-perception.

No research has addressed how ex-offenders cope with the challenges of life outside of pubs within the limits of the law and how stigmatization occurs against them. Rotating the camera means seeing the positive while focusing on a complex issue. Ditto for the "no panacea" to figure out what kind of influence the person is supposed to have on crime, is the lack of research and interest in how ex-offenders overcome challenges. It was only found that crime in Manila in the Philippines is associated with some demographic covariates such as population density, percentage, young males, education, marriage, and immigration (Mojica *et al.*, 2017).

When the ex-convict's family was separated from the ex-offender, they faced a variety of difficulties. Because of their loved one's situation, the majority of them felt pain and loneliness. They also had difficulty socializing with others and with their family. Some people can socialize well because their community was open about the issue and accepted by society. Not all families and the people around them accept ex-offenders in the same way. Some people have difficulty trusting others and simply forget what happened (Janer, *et al.*, 2019).

Coping Accessories Towards Successful Reintegration

Society has imperceptibly enforced the act, stigmatizing them as lifelong criminals. It signals urgency by emphasizing that ex-offenders are no different from the rest of the population, who make decisions based on their needs. Therefore, there are ex-offenders who move on with their lives, regaining their self-esteem, developing a healthy personality, and interacting with family, friends, and others. Against the background of the intertwining of emotional, discursive, and material forms of work, successful reintegration becomes more difficult. for those hosting low-income families along with the community and who lack institutional support. Family unit is a dynamic social support system that is willing to accept inmates' reintegration into society. Life at home is not automatic. As a support network, members used a variety of personal, symbolic, and financial resources to repair relationships and establish new roles, challenge stigmatizing social norms, and restore daily routines and practices. Through the family accounts, we will continue to advocate for formerly incarcerated parents. Conversations between families on the brink of transformation with community workers and legislators. (Bertulfo *et al.*, 2016). Filipinos are stereotyped as family-oriented people. They believe in strong family values, which allows them to have close relationships with their children. Being in each other's company gives them the strength to carry on with their lives, through thick and thin, failures and disappointments (Marie, 2018). Additionally, research (De Guzman *et al.*, 2020) postulated the positive effects of a negative prison climate, particularly for older Filipino prisoners. In addition, prison experiences could help or hurt you. To cope with the prison environment, participants chose to become subjective, accept the consequences of their actions, remain employed, and continue to engage in religious activities (Flores-Barolo & Vicente, 2019).

Pansag *et al.*, (2016) suggested that a former convict watcher's coping strategy gives him the opportunity to live longer. Based on studies, results revealed the significance of the immediate family's bond that diverts offenders' attention from other people to their immediate people. As motivated and enforced by them, ex-offenders give importance to the meaning of living life anew as a contribution to their family and as a way to prevent children and families from any form of risk impact. This explains the motivation of the mission of a crime as being influenced by friends. It also explains that with several challenges, ex-offenders' approaches are induced by the need to change their behavior (Palgan & Apolinario, 2022).

To address these challenges and promote successful reintegration, the literature emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems. This includes government initiatives, such as rehabilitation programs and livelihood initiatives provided by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP). Additionally,

reducing social stigma, providing access to healthcare, employment opportunities, and strengthening family support are crucial factors in facilitating the reintegration process and reducing recidivism rates.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The qualitative narrative-case study approach was utilized in this study, which includes an in-depth assessment and analysis of a single case or circumstance, with the goal of capturing the unique experiences, viewpoints, and insights of ex-convicts. This method was widely used in qualitative research because it produced rich, detailed, and contextualized data that helped researchers get a better understanding of complicated occurrences. It also aided researchers in understanding the case's social, cultural, and historical circumstances, as well as revealing the subjective experiences and perspectives of the ex-convicts involved, notably in subjects such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology.

Researchers used Snowball sampling to choose participants for this study, which focuses on the experiences of ex-convicts who have reformed and reintegrated into society after a history of incarceration. Individuals who have agreed to share their stories and insights into their post-release life, including challenges and successes, were selected. Due to the sensitive nature of the research issue, six (6) participants are required to suffice this study. Participants for this study are as follows: a.) Filipino, b.) either male or female, and c.) have served at least (5) five years in prison. The study aims to avoid stigma by excluding age and reason for incarceration as selection criteria, allowing participants of all ages to share their experiences. This exclusion criteria acknowledges the valuable insights of people with diverse criminal backgrounds into the reintegration process. These requirements would make it possible to investigate in depth the successful reintegration experiences of Filipinos who had previously served time in prison, giving important insights into their post-incarceration lives and the factors that led to their reformation. To achieve the purpose of this narrative case study, the questionnaires were crafted in alignment with the study's objectives and the literature reviewed.

The interview guide was unstructured, validated by professionals, and enriched with potential follow-up questions to gather more in-depth information when required. In addition, the interview questions were translated into Tagalog to enhance participants' understanding and enable them to respond more effectively and freely, expressing their thoughts and experiences in a way that best conveyed their intentions. The data collection was reflective to allow participants to express their experiences reflectively. An in-depth interview guide was used to learn about the participants' experiences. The researchers interviewed each participant face to face, and all conversations were recorded. The research participants were interviewed in a quiet, disturbance-free environment where they felt safe.

The researchers transcribed the participants' recorded interviews. The data collected were analyzed using thematic analysis. To answer the research objectives, common themes were grouped and analyzed. After developing themes, the researchers conducted a member check with the participants to ensure the legitimacy or validity of the interpretation of all collected data. Participants can assess the sufficiency of the data and preliminary results and confirm specific parts of the data using member checking.

The researcher supervised the process, asked questions, actively listened, documented responses, adapted to the circumstance, maintained ethical standards, assured objectivity, created rapport, explained uncertainties, and assessed the data obtained. Researcher also displayed adaptability, responded to the dynamics of the interview, and developed favorable interactions with participants. Following the transcription of the interview, the researchers were responsible for pulling major findings and insights from the interview, assuring the research's reliability and validity.

The researcher owed it to the participants who were expected to provide this knowledge to consider their rights strictly. The researcher thought it was critical to build trust between the participants and herself and respect them as autonomous beings, allowing them to make sound decisions. Consent, confidentiality and anonymity, privacy, dissemination of results, and the right to withdraw from the study are all ethical measures in this study.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Upon analyzing the transcriptions of the interviews with the participants, the results of the gathered data were then coded and themed from the six participants who were interviewed. Six participants underwent in-depth face-to-face interviews, all of whom were ex-convicts. The findings revealed that most individuals had multiple incarcerations and have multiple reasons for being incarcerated, with drug-related offenses being the primary cause of their legal troubles. Four participants linked their drug-related activities to family abandonment. Prior incarceration with drug-related led them to reoffending, driven by financial difficulties, physical dependency, and isolation. The purpose of this research is to learn about the lives of ex-convicts as they reintegrate society after serving time in prison.

Difficulties Faced in Life After the Bars of Ex-Convicts

Prisoners and ex-convicts frequently face a variety of challenges and difficulties, both while incarcerated and after their release. These difficulties can have a serious impact on their ability to reintegrate into society and lead productive lives.

Adjusting to Prison Life

Adjusting to prison life can be extremely difficult for newly incarcerated individuals, particularly those incarcerated

in their younger years. The prison environment is vastly different from the outside world, and inmates frequently face a variety of challenges as they adjust. The most common difficulty that newly incarcerated people face is being separated from their loved ones. These people experience feelings of isolation, loneliness, disconnection from the outside world, and hopelessness. They feel abandoned, depressed, alone, and have a sense of being "one of them," and they develop a shared prison culture in order to survive alone inside the prison cell. Inmates feel powerless because they lack basic necessities like food and financial resources, and they have little control over their daily routines and meals. Overcrowding and unsanitary conditions in prison exacerbate the sense of powerlessness. This powerlessness leads them to feelings of hopelessness, helplessness, and a lack of purpose in life. The threat of violence and physical assault exacerbates inmates' powerlessness, leaving them vulnerable to harm and unable to defend themselves. Prisons' harsh and violent environment, including dungeons and physical beatings, contributes to the prison culture in which violence is used to assert power and control. This culture frequently involves violence, physical confrontations, and a mindset in which inmates may feel the need to engage in conflicts to protect themselves, assert their identity, and secure resources.

Re-Integration: Freed but Still Chained
Several factors contribute to the difficulty of starting over, individuals who have been released from incarceration still face significant challenges and constraints in reintegrating into society. Despite their physical freedom, they may continue to experience barriers that hinder their full participation in social, economic, and personal spheres.

Proclivity to Recidivism
Relapse into substance abuse, insufficient rehabilitation and reintegration, and emotional and relationship challenges, such as marriage and family breakdown, are all significant factors in ex-convict criminal behavior and recidivism. When it comes to their situation, social judgment plays a crucial part in them returning to their old and wrongdoings. Stigmatization causes them to be rejected for their desired job, and being bullied by their coworkers causes them to be financially unstable and unable to support themselves and their families' basic needs. The allure of wealth and the ease of making money through criminal activities can motivate ex-convicts to return to their old ways, which can be difficult.

Employability and Workforce Participation
Ex-offenders face significant barriers to employment and workforce participation. They have trouble finding work because of the stigma associated with their criminal record, as well as workplace bullying. A sense of purposelessness can lead to a relapse into criminal activities such as hiring guns and drug pushing. If ex-convicts cannot find legal work or face significant obstacles, the cycle of incarceration may continue. Finding employers who allow ex-convicts to reintegrate into the workforce is a relief because it gives them a chance to survive in this judgmental society.

Housing and Safety
Individuals transitioning from incarceration require assistance in rebuilding their sense of self-worth and spiritual well-being in order to successfully reenter society. One of the challenges they faced was finding stable housing and ensuring personal safety. Being held in prison for a long time and being released may be a new experience for them, but it's more like they were like a baby learning to walk or a bird learning to fly. Having someone they can rely on can help them stay physically and mentally safe from their own negative thoughts.

Stigmatization
Judgment and prejudice are another significant barrier to successful reintegration, particularly in communities where the perception of ex-convicts is negative. Stigmatization is a common problem for people with criminal records. It's disheartening to see that the stigma surrounding ex-convicts isn't just limited to society at large; even some of their former peers behind bars may doubt their capacity for change, brushing off their efforts at transformation as insignificant. This stigma result in social avoidance and labeling, making it difficult for them to integrate into society and form positive relationships. Feels looked down on and shunned, which can harm their self-esteem and impede their reintegration.

Acceptance and Relying on Support Systems
Coping mechanisms and strategies are essential tools that people use to navigate and overcome the numerous challenges they face in life, including those encountered in prison or during the period of reintegration after incarceration. A strong sense of self-acceptance and openness helps individuals let go of stigma and embrace their circumstances. Government intervention programs, such as non-formal education, high school diplomas, and theology, have positive outcomes. Drug-related rehabilitation programs teach essential life skills and reject negative influences. Religious and pastoral education can be incorporated into rehabilitation programs to help inmates develop new skills and perspectives. Ex-convicts find solace and transformation through their faith and spiritual beliefs, which they view as a source of redemption and hope. Healthy family relationships are essential for ex-convicts in their successful reintegrating into society, providing financial stability, emotional support, and open communication. Positive reinforcement from family members motivates ex-convicts to make positive changes and stay on the path of rehabilitation.

Overall, a supportive and supportive environment can help ex-convicts overcome their challenges and achieve their full potential.

Life Realizations

Metaphorical reflections on personal growth emphasize the journey from struggle and insignificance to a renewed and admirable existence. The most important lessons learned from these adversities include not passing judgment, gaining wisdom from life's challenges, discovering purpose and meaning through faith, and acknowledging the presence of a higher power. The transformation from being a burden and troublemaker to a valued partner positively contributes to the community.

CONCLUSION

The difficulties faced by ex-convicts both during incarceration and upon reintegration into society are multifaceted and deeply challenging. While adjusting to prison life presents its own set of obstacles, the process of reintegration often proves to be equally daunting. Ex-convicts encounter barriers that can perpetuate cycles of incarceration and hinder individuals from fully participating in society. However, amidst these difficulties, there are glimmers of hope and opportunities for positive change. Coping mechanisms, including self-acceptance and reliance on support systems, prove to be essential in navigating the complexities of post-incarceration life. Government intervention programs, rehabilitation initiatives, and religious or spiritual beliefs offer avenues for personal growth and transformation. Moreover, the importance of healthy family relationships cannot be overstated in the successful reintegration of ex-convicts. Families provide vital emotional support, financial stability, and motivation for positive change. Through open communication and reconciliation, ex-convicts can rebuild relationships and find strength in familial bonds. The journey from incarceration to reintegration is not without its challenges, but it also presents opportunities for growth, redemption, and meaningful contributions to society. By addressing systemic barriers, fostering supportive environments, and promoting acceptance and understanding, we can empower ex-convicts to overcome obstacles and realize their full potential as valued members of our communities.

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