

Out and Free: Stories of Former Probationers' Journey to Renewed Life

Philip Dominic M. Pendang¹, Nestor C. Nabe²

¹University of Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines

²University of Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines

ABSTRACT: This study explored the experiences of former probationers as they overcame post-probation challenges and embraced a renewed life. Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, eight former probationers from Davao City were interviewed, and four participated in a focus group discussion. Thematic content analysis revealed that the probationers' rehabilitation experiences led to lifelong learning, social support networks, and increased caution and responsibility. However, they also faced obstacles like humiliation, discrimination, overcoming addictions, and rebuilding family relationships. Factors contributing to their successful reintegration included accepting and taking accountability for past actions, support from family and peers, and a purposeful transition to self-improvement. The study suggests that probation offices can use these findings to develop tailored interventions, raise community awareness, and provide better support to active and former probationers for successful reintegration.

KEYWORDS : *criminal justice, probation, renewed life, phenomenology, Philippines*

I. INTRODUCTION

Former probationers face numerous challenges during their rehabilitation and reintegration into the community. Indeed, the journey to a renewed life after being on probation is an uphill battle. Problems encountered by them are no different from people placed in confinement. They also face numerous obstacles, including difficulty finding employment, housing, and transportation, as well as issues related to substance abuse, mental health, and family relationships. Though they are treated in a community-based setting, which is more compassionate and humanitarian when compared to a prison or jail (Gutierrez, 2020), it is erroneous to assume that they will heal more quickly than others who have been incarcerated.

The empirical basis of this study is built upon existing research observations of former offenders. In the USA, the National Institute of Justice recorded that up to 75 percent of those released from prison are still jobless a year after their release. It is also revealed that many of the former offenders, based on in-depth interviews, admitted that they were "culture shocked." This proves that simple reintegration into society is a big challenge for many former inmates (Gross, 2017). Moreover, in a study conducted by Fitton et al. (2018) among older probationers in the UK, it was found that over two-thirds of the population have clinically relevant mental health symptoms, with high rates of comorbidity. The prevalence of depression (25%) or alcohol abuse or dependence (19%) was found to be high among older probationers. In the Philippines, a problem probationers encounter when applying for a job is that many employers require criminal record clearances (Dioses et al., 2018).

There is still some noticeable opposition to embracing former offenders holistically in society, regardless of whether they are rehabilitated in an institutionalized or non-institutionalized prison system. Such stigma undermines attempts to rehabilitate criminals and disadvantages the offender and society (Besin-Mengla, 2020). They deal with various issues that make it difficult for them to change and make them more likely to commit crimes again (Chikadzi, 2017). Hence, researching former probationers can gain a deeper understanding of their experiences, challenges, and potential avenues for support. This knowledge can inform policy decisions, improve intervention strategies, and contribute to more effective and equitable criminal justice systems.

For most ex-felons, the road to transformation is undoubtedly challenging to navigate. Given the difficulties they face, only a select handful can overcome the obstacles posed by social rejection (Palgan & Apolinario, 2022). It is critical to comprehend how former probationers see their new lives and the remarkable tales they have to share about hope, forgiveness, and redemption. Thus, this impels me to conduct the study.

One of the critical themes of probation is "Redeeming lives and restoring relationships." The Probation Service understands how restorative justice may be utilized to rectify the harm created. Making up for the harm caused by crime is one of the fundamental objectives of probation. Restorative justice responds to that objective

by allowing victims to speak with or interact with offenders to describe and clarify how the crime has affected them (Fernée, 2021). As Butts (2021) also emphasized, probation is provided to help convicts become law-abiding citizens and lower the likelihood of recidivism.

Probation service has several merits over institutional rehabilitation. First, as a community-based rehabilitation approach, it assists the offender in avoiding many disadvantages associated with imprisonment, such as learning about more severe crimes due to the contamination of minor offenders by hardcore criminals. In terms of the costs to governments, probation is also cheaper than imprisonment. It also assists the offender in avoiding stigmatization and labeling typically associated with imprisonment that may lead to recidivism (Omboto, 2022).

In the study conducted by Duwe (2018), the process of self-change among probationers is complex and multifaceted. It involves several interconnected factors such as personal motivation, cognitive transformation, social support, and the influence of external interventions like probation programs. The journey to change for probationers begins with a critical event or turning point that triggers reevaluating their behaviors and values. These turning points can vary significantly among individuals, including personal crises, encounters with the criminal justice system, or positive social influences.

Determining the role of turning points and transformative experiences of probationers can give us insights into their journey toward positive change. Wood and Griller Clark (2019) conducted qualitative interviews with the probationers to identify those points and experiences. They discovered that personal realizations, positive relationships, employment opportunities, educational achievements, and moments of personal growth are the turning points. These serve as catalysts for transformative experiences, leading to shifts in values, attitudes, and behaviors. In addition, transformative experiences contribute to the process of resistance by creating new identities and narratives for probationers. These experiences enable individuals to see themselves in a different light, breaking away from their previous criminal self-image.

When it comes to the long-term experiences of probationers in their journey toward becoming law-abiding citizens, Fox and Doherty (2020) explore the experiences of former probationers. The findings highlight the importance of personal motivation, supportive relationships, and adequate probation supervision. Long-term probationers expressed a strong desire for change and actively pursued personal growth. Supportive relationships with family, friends, and probation officers were crucial in their resistance process. However, they faced challenges such as stigma and barriers to reintegration. The study emphasizes the need for comprehensive support systems and tailored interventions to facilitate successful resistance among probationers.

Positive change in probationers can also be attributed to the supervision of probation officers. The study identifies two types of probation officers: "good" probation officers who were supportive, empathetic and focused on the client's rehabilitation, and "bad" probation officers who were authoritarian, dismissive, and lacked supportive qualities. Clients with positive relationships with their probation officers reported feeling motivated, encouraged, and empowered to make positive life changes. The supportive probation officers provided guidance, resources, and accountability, helping clients develop the necessary skills and confidence to transition from criminal behavior (Smith et al., 2020).

Research conducted by Johannessen et al. (2021) suggested that neighborhood characteristics, such as poverty, unemployment, and crime rates, impact the resistance process of probationers. The findings highlight the significance of neighborhood factors in shaping probationers' journeys toward resistance to criminal behavior. It underscores the importance of considering the broader social and environmental contexts in which probationers reside. Policies and interventions that address neighborhood disadvantage, promote community cohesion, and provide opportunities for positive social integration can contribute to the resistance process among probationers. The findings suggest the need for comprehensive approaches that address neighborhood-level factors alongside individual-level interventions to effectively support probationers in their journey toward resistance.

Many studies focus on immediate outcomes after probation. However, there may be a gap in understanding the long-term trajectory of former probationers' reintegration and their journey to leading renewed lives. Furthermore, much research often focuses on recidivism rates or employment outcomes without exploring the personal transformation and growth experienced by former probationers. Understanding how they redefine their identities, develop resilience, and find purpose and meaning in their lives can shed light on the internal processes and resources contributing to their renewal.

1.1 Research Objectives

The main objective of this study is to investigate the experiences of former probationers who have overcome the living challenges of society. Specifically, I aim to answer the following: (1) to explore the lived experiences of former probationers on the rehabilitation programs of probation; (2) to identify the challenges and obstacles they faced during their journey towards renewed life; (3) to identify the factors that contributed to the successful reintegration of former probationers into society; and (4) to elicit recommendations from former

probationers aimed at improving the rehabilitation and reintegration programs of Parole and Probation Administration (PPA).

1.2 Theoretical Framework

This study's concept is drawn from the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982). Pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and termination are the six stages of change that people go through, according to the theory. The Transtheoretical Model can also be used in a Probation Administration, in which it is possible to determine the stage of change of probationers, what motivates them and what prevents them, and what sort of interventions they may benefit from in order to complete the change preferred and start again.

Support for this further provides significant context in Sampson and Laub's Life Course Theory of Crime (2003). Within this framework built in Criminals Turning Points Theory, it was asserted that specific sociological turning points, such as stable employment or socially solid integration, are crucial in connecting crime desistance development. It emphasizes how social changes and relationships may trigger behavior changes over the years. This study seeks to understand how these sociological turning points aid in rehabilitating the former probationers and their reintegration back into society from their perspectives, focusing on factors that aid desistance.

Equally important, the social support theory suggested by Cohen and Wills (1985) is powerfully relevant to the social interface of everyone. The former probationers will likely enjoy social encouragement from their families, friends, sponsors, and society. Constructive social support makes it possible to receive emotional, practical help and essential resources, increasing the chances of re-entry and decreasing the possibility of recidivism.

1.3 Significance of the study

This study holds national and global significance, particularly in addressing the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UN SDGs). It precisely aligns with UN SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which seeks to create inclusive, accountable, and peaceful societies, as well as equitable access to justice and robust institutions. This study gives insights that could improve rehabilitation and reintegration programs, lowering recidivism and encouraging public acceptance. It also contributes to the worldwide discourse on criminal justice reform by evaluating the experiences of former probationers.

In addition, the research was carried out because of its importance and benefits to the Parole and Probation Administration, ex-residents on probation, and prospective researchers. For policy-making bodies, seeing how the ex-probationers are, through research carried out, provides extreme weight to policies based on facts. Understanding these variables would enable the government to strategically distribute resources, develop programs, and implement policy changes in areas that would foster reintegration. They can use strategies and practices tested and proven to achieve good results for former probationers.

For PPA, studies in the New Lives of Former Probationers may assist in providing information that will enhance the productivity of setting up proper and advanced probation and parole programs operated under the PPA. Understanding these aspects of successful reintegration will enable the PPA to enhance its skills regarding managing individuals under supervision by tailoring its programs, policies, and practices. It can articulate what programs, treatments, and interventions work to help achieve positive outcomes and reduce recidivism. The knowledge and understanding of several aspects, such as the factors, processes, and resources that support successful adjustment and beginning afresh, can enable ex-probationers to be better equipped with useful information for their journey. It can give them optimism, aspiration, and the ability to take positive actions, develop willpower, and obtain essential support systems and services.

For future researchers, the study linking former probationers' rehabilitation to their socio-economic status could assist future researchers in determining the speculated gaps in the literature and areas that still need more research. They can advance the course of knowledge derived from the previous works and understand the reintegration stage, which has not been covered well. That will assist further researchers in addressing research questions and designing studies that help fill those gaps. In addition, future researchers can also expand existing literature to create and evaluate new strategies that seek to solve some of the problems former probationers experience. They can assess the efficiency of novel strategies, evaluate their effect on results, and practice evidence-based work in the field.

II. METHODS

2.1 Study Participants

In this study, the participants of the twelve (12) were the ex-probationers 8 of them were studied in-depth while the remaining four (4) participated in focus group discussions. All of them have been sentenced to a probation program by the Department of Justice- Parole and Probation Administration Xi (DoJ-PPA XI).

However, these aims were fulfilled so that probation supervision was completed. As Creswell and Poth (2018) noted, center-based qualitative studies include a small range of participants, with most of them usually between 5 and 25, to make it possible to look into the details of each participant. The depth of data collection is considered reasonable even for qualitative sampling, for it enables the purpose of phenomenology to explore a person's experience.

For the sampling method, I employed purposive sampling. This allowed me to strategically select participants or cases that can provide rich and informative data for the study, especially for those former probationers who have displayed exemplary improvement in their lives (Creswell, 2013). The 12 former probationers willingly shared their lived experiences before, during, and after their probation journey.

For the inclusion criterion, the selection of 12 key informants was carefully assessed based on their criminal case and socio-economic condition. Only those willing participants were included in the study. On the contrary, excluded in this study are former probationers whose probation was revoked during their probation supervision or otherwise recommitted to re-offending and those unwilling to participate. Further, those respondents who decided or wished to withdraw during the study for some reason were set off. Eight (8) key informants were interviewed in-depth with the codenames IDIP1, IDIP2, IDIP3, IDIP4, IDIP5, IDIP6, IDIP7, and IDIP8, while the other four (4) informants participated in a focus group discussion with the codenames FGDP1, FGDP2, FGDP3, and FGDP4.

TABLE 1 Profile of the Study Participants

CODENAME	SEX	AGE	CRIME	CURRENT OCCUPATION
IDIP1	FEMALE	38	Violation of RA 9287	Meat Vendor
IDIP2	MALE	39	Violation of Sec. 11 of RA 9165	Hair Stylist & Nail Technician
IDIP3	MALE	28	Violation of Sec. 11 of RA 9165	Auto Mechanic
IDIP4	MALE	42	Reckless Imprudence Resulting in Damage to Property	Businessman
IDIP5	MALE	24	Physical Injuries	College Student
IDIP6	MALE	29	Violation of Sec. 11 of RA 9165	Construction Worker
IDIP7	FEMALE	32	Violation of Sec. 11 of RA 9165	Online Seller
IDIP8	MALE	36	Violation of RA 11494	Fish Breeder
FGDP1	MALE	62	Violation of RA 9287	Retired/VPA
FGDP2	MALE	38	Violation of Sec. 11 of RA 9165	VPA
FGDP3	MALE	34	Violation of Sec. 11 of RA 9165	Virtual Assistant/VPA
FGDP4	MALE	42	Physical Injuries	VPA

2.2 Materials and Instruments

For data collection, I utilized an interview questionnaire with probing questions to expand on the selected participant's answers. The interview questions are open-ended and self-made, patterned from the research objectives of this study. According to Ritchie et al. (2013), an interview is a qualitative research approach that entails conducting in-depth, open-ended interviews with key informants to collect rich, comprehensive data regarding their experiences, viewpoints, and thoughts on their path toward a revitalized life. I gained an excellent grasp of the subject by using this tool to delve into their experiences and thoughts in their own words.

This instrument validation method involved different phases to ensure that the tested instrument was reliable. The interview guide was built on the research objectives and existing literature with data collection instruments and theoretical approaches for the study. Subsequently, it was forwarded to a panel of internal and external validators who were asked to review and validate the document using the following criteria: ethics, artistry, and rigor. This was done because they could give suggestions, which were important in revising the questions. In the last stage, comments received from Internal Experts regarding the interviews were addressed, and finally, approved versions of the qualitative interview guides were obtained.

2.3 Design and Procedure

This study followed a qualitative-phenomenological design. This was the most appropriate method because the research focused on the personal accounts of former probationers wishing to start afresh in life. This

study employed qualitative phenomenological design, which is particularly beneficial when studying a group of ex-probationers. However, if the intention is to deepen understanding of the individuals' meanings of experiences, social context, and action, qualitative research should be conducted (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This type corresponded to a phenomenological one as the research was directed toward how former probationers describe their rehabilitation and reintegration into society and how they construct these processes (Groenewald, 2004).

I adhered to all the steps necessary to maintain the rigor and validity of the study. First, I sent the interview guide to the validators after full adherence to the UMERC protocol, which included submission of the document to a live panel of internal and external evaluators.

Next, on this Research Adviser's note, I got an endorsement letter from the Dean of the Professional Schools addressed to the Regional Director of Parole and Probation Administration XI (PPA XI) to refer the research participants under their supervision.

Once permission had been obtained, I arranged for an interview and accessible collection of data through focus groups. Eight (8) former probationers were subjected to in-depth interviews or IDIs. Participants were subjected rather than asked due to the Implicit nature of the semi-structured interviews. All the interviews were held in privacy to let the participants feel comfortable and share some personal information. FGD was conducted in coordinating sessions with four (4) former probationers. The FGDs provided a platform for participants to discuss shared experiences, with the group dynamics helping to stimulate ideas and reveal collective insights that may not have surfaced during individual interviews.

All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded with the participant's consent and transcribed verbatim. The transcription process ensured that all responses were captured accurately, preserving the richness of the participants' narratives. After transcription, the data was reviewed to identify recurring patterns and critical themes. The collected data were then forwarded to the data analyst, who assisted in the thematic analysis and interpretation. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), thematic analysis is a technique for finding, investigating, and summarizing patterns (themes) in data. It frequently interprets different facets of the study issue and, at the very least, minimally organizes and richly defines a data set. The data was analyzed using a theme analysis approach, which involved methodically coding and classifying the responses.

Regarding ethical considerations, I observed the complete ethical standards required by the UMERC in the study, following the research protocols, guidelines, and standards, particularly in collecting and managing data and the study participants. I was mindful of the sensitive aspects of the study, which include the Informed Consent Process, Voluntary Participation, Privacy, and Confidentiality of the respondents. In the Informed Consent Process, the interview was free of technical terms and was easily understandable to the study's respondents. In addition, all the study participants were given the free will to participate without any form of coercion or penalty. Further, the informants' personal information required in the study was kept private and treated with the utmost confidentiality. The research did not present any discernible risks to the participants, whether psychological or socio-economic. The primary ethical considerations involved ensuring the privacy and well-being of the participants. The risk of harm to participants was minimal due to the nature of the research, which was largely qualitative, relying on in-depth interviews. However, the attention to this issue is deontological and requires adherence to ethics and law. In general, regarding this manuscript, the level of risk is relatively safe with correct ethical measures and careful content management. In the end, once several requirements from the University of Medical and Ethical review committee were addressed, I received the certificate of approval with ethical protocol assigned as UMERC-2023-467 on 04th December 2023.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

3.1 Lived Experiences of Former Probationers on the Rehabilitation Program

This section considers the perceptions and feedback of twelve (12) former probationers who took part in the DOJ-PPA XI rehabilitation program. They narrated their experiences through qualitative techniques, including in-depth interviews and focus group discussions. These interviews captured an aspect of these individuals' lives and offered insight into their lives, especially after probation. For example, the study included their perspectives, many of them, of the problems they faced, the help they received, and especially what they experienced that helped them adjust to life after incarceration. Their narratives proved the necessity of individualized attention to each probationer's needs and circumstances. Such a focus was crucial in bringing about positive, enduring changes in these people's lives after they exited probation. The analysis of their narratives uncovered three primary themes that encapsulate their lived experiences: Learned Lifelong Learning Experiences, Gained a Social Support Network, and Became More Cautious and Responsible in Actions, as shown in Table 2.

TABLE 2 Essential themes on the lived experiences of former probationers on the rehabilitation programs of probation

Themes	Significant Statement
Learned lifelong learning experiences	<p>there are many learning opportunities [IDIP1]</p> <p>like probation has become a bridge for me to reach this good condition [IDIP1]</p> <p>they inculcated in my mind the consequences of repeating the same actions [IDIP2]</p> <p>big help for me to strengthen my mindset so that I wouldn't go back to drugs again [IDIP2]</p> <p>I am now more focused on working at the parlor and helping my parents [IDIP2]</p>
Gained Social Support Network	<p>I adjusted quickly because many programs allow me to interact with other people. [IDIP1]</p> <p>The guidance from the officer is a big help what also helped a lot was the counseling provided by the probation office. [IDIP1]</p> <p>because of the encouragement, counseling, and support from probation, I felt the value of my life. [IDIP5]</p>
Became more cautious and responsible in actions	<p>As my probation officer always reminded me, I never forgot to be careful when driving. [IDIP4]</p> <p>I learned how to manage my anger, become more patient, and show respect to others. [IDIP5]</p> <p>I'm afraid to hang out with them because I'm sure they'll engage in foolishness. [IDIP7]</p> <p>I now see myself as more responsible, afraid of getting into trouble again. [IDIP8]</p>

3.1.1 Learned lifelong learning experiences

Former probationers recounted that probation programs provided them with numerous learning opportunities that significantly impacted their lives. Duwe (2018) notes that cognitive transformation is central to the self-change process among offenders. This transformation is supported by structured programs encouraging lifelong learning and personal development. IDIP1 expressed how probation acted as a bridge to better conditions, and she quoted:

“Ang ila man gudmgaprograma kay mura koghibalik ug pagskwela, kay daghansilaprograma na magtuon ka. Naay mga seminar na magtudlounsaonpagtukod gamay negosyo, naa sab mgaespirituhanon na mgaprograma, makatabang na makapamalandongsa imu binuhatan” (IDIP1).

Their programs seem like going back to school for me because there are many learning opportunities. They offer seminars on how to start a small business, spiritual programs that help reflect on one's actions and various other educational activities.

Moreover, rehabilitation programs helped instill an understanding of the consequences of their actions and helped to fortify their resolve against re-engaging in criminal behavior, as IDIP2 quoted:

“...Nakatabangsya na makalikay ug tintal kay ilahajudgitanomsako mind ang unsa ang mahimong consequence kung mabuhatnako to usab” (IDIP2).

It helped me avoid temptation because they inculcated in my mind the consequences of repeating the same actions.

Butts (2021) further supports this by emphasizing that probation programs aim to instill law-abiding behaviors and foster personal growth through structured interventions and support. Through these programs, they redirected their focus on productive activities, such as employment and family responsibilities, as a direct outcome of the lessons learned during probation.

3.1.2 Gained Social Support Network

Participants highlighted the crucial role of social interactions facilitated by probation programs. The guidance from probation officers and counseling sessions were particularly beneficial, offering emotional and psychological support. As IDIP1 described that:

“Nakatabanggyud ang pagmonitorkanunaysamga probation officer. Kay aside sanagapalasto ko, medyodugaynasad ko manunugal. Dako tabang ang paggiyasa officer aronmaundang sad niakobisyo” (IDIP1).

The regular monitoring by the probation officer has been beneficial. Aside from ushering in the last-two, I was also a long-time gambler. The guidance from the officer is a big help in trying to stop this habit again.

This support helped them feel valued and provided encouragement and practical assistance, aiding their positive life changes. As IDIP5 recounted that:

“Tungodsaprograma sir, natagaan ko ug kumpyansa na mubalikusab ug skwela. Abi nakogmaonatoakokadatngan, perotungodsa encouragement, counselling, ug support sa probation nakafeel ko ug bilisakokinabuhi” (IDIP5).

Because of the program, I was given the confidence to return to school. I thought that was the end for me, but because of the encouragement, counseling, and support from probation, I felt the value of my life.

In Social Support Theory by Cohen and Wills (1985), social support can buffer the effects of stress and significantly improve psychological well-being. For former offenders, such networks are vital as they often face social exclusion and discrimination. Chikadzi (2017) also pointed out that supportive networks can help mitigate the adverse effects of social exclusion and facilitate smoother reintegration into society. These networks offer emotional, instrumental, and informational support that can be crucial in overcoming barriers and achieving successful rehabilitation.

3.1.3 Became more cautious and responsible in actions

The probation program instilled a sense of caution and responsibility in the former probationers. Participants learned to manage their anger, become more patient, and avoid situations that could lead to trouble. IDIP5 quoted:

“Tungodsamgaprograma nailaginahatagsamasa counselling kay nakatuon ko mag manage sakokalagot, mahimongpasensyoso, ug respetosaubantawo” (IDIP5).

Because of their programs like counseling, I learned how to manage my anger, become more patient, and show respect to others.

This behavioral change was attributed to their probation officers' consistent guidance and reminders, which helped them develop a more responsible attitude toward their actions. Behavioral change is essential for reducing recidivism. Wood and Griller Clark (2019) identify personal realizations and positive relationships as crucial turning points that lead to transformative experiences among probationers. IDIP8 even testified that:

“...Tanawnako sir mas nahimokog responsible ngatao, hadloknakomadakpanusab” (IDIP8).

...I see myself now as a more responsible person, afraid of getting into trouble again.

Prochaska corroborates the results and Carlo DiClemente's transtheoretical model of change (1982). Probationers start recognizing the negative impact of their past behaviors and consider the benefits of change. Through the support and guidance of probation officers, they move to the preparation stage, planning to adopt more cautious and responsible behaviors. The Action stage involves actively managing anger, practicing patience, and avoiding risky situations.

3.2 Challenges and obstacles faced by former probationers during their journey toward renewed life

Former probationers encountered various challenges during their reintegration. As shown in Table 3, the challenges and obstacles that stood out are the following: (1) Humiliation and discrimination, (2) Fighting the inner beasts to quit vices and avoid wrongdoings, and (3) Rebuilding relationships with family members.

TABLE 3 Essential themes on Challenges and Obstacles faced by former probationers during their journey toward renewed life

Themes	Significant Statements
Humiliation and Discrimination	The embarrassment I experienced when I was arrested was immense. [IDIP1] I have applied to many places but was rejected due to my record. [IDIP3] I felt embarrassed to return to our place because I felt they would judge me. [IDIP5] I have experienced challenges, too. I lost my dream job, and it caused me depression and suicidal thoughts. [FGDP3] Another challenge is finding a job, especially when they know you're a convict [IDIP6] a bit of depression because people look at us differently [IDIP8]
Fighting the inner beasts to quit vices and avoid wrongdoings	The most difficult part, sir, is quitting the vices. [IDIP6] I learned to be patient and not engage in things that made me regret after. [FGDP4] The temptation is always there, especially when my old friends are nearby. I just strive to avoid them. [IDIP3] I haven't been in touch with my old friends anymore. It's tough when they're around because you can't just ignore them. [IDIP3]
Rebuilding relationships with family members	people treat me differently now, especially to my former close friends and family [IDIP2] My eldest child mentioned that the neighbors kept asking about me and what had happened to me. It affected her since she could not grasp the situation. [IDIP1] I will never forget that I almost lost my family because I did not believe them [FGDP1] I could see the disappointment in my parents' eyes, but their care for me still prevailed despite what happened [FGDP3] I can't blame them because it's tough to trust someone with a record [FGDP4].

3.2.1 Humiliation and Discrimination

This theme explores the profound effects of societal attitudes towards individuals with criminal records and the challenges they encounter as they attempt to rebuild their lives. The stigma associated with having a criminal record can lead to social exclusion and marginalization. Former probationers reported experiencing deep embarrassment and a sense of public shame, which can be debilitating, as IDIP1, IDIP5, and IDIP8 recalled. Noting how constant judgment from others created significant barriers to finding employment and maintaining social relationships, severely impeding their efforts to move forward. IDIP1 highlighted this:

“Dakongkaulawgyud ang gihatagsakoa tong nadakpan ko. Di lang para saako, patinasadsakopamilya” (IDIP1)

The embarrassment I experienced when I was arrested was immense. It was not just for me, but also for my family.

This stigma causes problems such as negative self-perception and affects the reintegration effort. This finding validates previous studies which show where the effects of stigma are associated with most of the issues former offenders experience. Chikadzi (2017) remarked that stigma and scapegoating have severe effects on one's mental health because individuals end up feeling depressed and worthless. The study highlighted the need for interventions that address these issues to facilitate successful reintegration.

Furthermore, the stigma of a criminal record can severely limit job opportunities, as many employers are reluctant to hire individuals with past convictions. This discrimination affects not only their economic stability but also their sense of purpose and self-worth. Participant IDIP4 shared his frustration:

“Daghan ko giapplyan na girejectako application tungodsa record. Lisod kayo mangitakwartalabi nag nabuntisannakoako partner ato na time. Di kayo ko kahatag-hatagniya” (IDIP4).

I've applied to many places but was rejected due to my record. It is challenging to earn money, especially when my partner got pregnant during that time. I couldn't provide for her.

The Employment Discrimination in Social Work: Sociological Issues and the Legal Regime determines the relevance of Merton's Strain Theory, as the last two paragraphs familiarize the reader with the problem. The Strain Theory was developed by Robert Merton, one of the most outstanding criminologists of the last century, in the year 1938. Merton held that against the aspirations of individuals and the expectations from society, there are certain modes of achievement of the goals that prompt one towards criminality

3.2.2 Fighting the inner beasts to quit vices and avoid wrongdoings

In this case, emotional intelligence is too vital to restart old habits or go to places that can trigger re-offense. This theme puts some positive aspects on the whole process of probation when the constant threat of going back into the criminal world due to overwhelming negativity and hopelessness becomes apparent, although overly idealistic. Amongst these afflictions is the craving to commit crime which is made worse by being around former peers and segregation. For example, IDIP3 shared:

“Pinakalisod sir kay ang undangon ang bisyo. Di gyudmalikayan na taod-taodmangita ang lawas” (IDIP3).

The most difficult part is quitting the vice. It's tough to avoid it when your body craves it constantly.

Substance Use Relapse Prevention Plan (Marlatt & Donovan, 2005) comes to the eye particularly in this regard. This model holds that to sustain behavioral change in the longterm, and it is necessary to prevent high-risk situations and learn how to cope with them. In the case of former probationers, this is to prevent their old, crime-promoting socialization networks and form pro-social interactions. IDIP3's claim that “try to avoid” old friends, who may be a possible threat, is an example of a practical application of this model. Moreover, reintegrating with family and friends was an equally important and difficult task.

3.2.3 Rebuilding relationships with family members

Reestablishing trust and relationships with family and friends was another significant challenge. The strain on family ties due to the probationer's past actions can create a barrier to reintegration, affecting both emotional support and stability. Participants highlighted the significance of mending these relationships, with some noting the difficulty of reconnecting with family members who may harbor resentment or distrust. IDIP2 expressed this challenge:

“...lain na ug tagad ang mgataosaako, labi na tung mgadatinako na mga close friends, sukadpagkabalonila ana user ko sauna, nag anam-anam na sila ug layo” (IDIP2)

...people treat me differently, especially my former close friends since they found out about my past drug use. Since learning about it, they have started to distance themselves from me.

Rebuilding family relationships is not without challenges. According to Mowen and Boman (2019), former offenders often face skepticism and strained relationships due to past behaviors and breaches of trust. Restoring these relationships requires time, effort, and demonstrating changed behavior.

Former probationers in the study expressed the difficulty of regaining trust and rebuilding connections, highlighting the need for sustained effort and patience. FGDP 1 also recalled how he won back his relationship with his family, as quote:

“dijudnakomalimtan na hapit ko biyaansaakongpamilya kay di man ko patuosailahalulong ko sugal, maprenda na ang pwede ma prenda, hantodsanagpalast two nako ug didtonakonadakpan. Nilayojud ang loob sakomgaanakato na time, peromafeel na gasuportagihaponsila. Maongnaningkamot na magkugisa probation ug nakitanilaakokausaban” (FGDP1)

I will never forget that I almost lost my family because I did not believe them when I was addicted to gambling; I pawned everything that could be pawned until I resorted to the last two. My children distanced themselves from me then, but I could still feel their support. That is why I strive to work hard during probation; they have seen my change.

Recent research suggests that structured interventions can facilitate the process of family reunification. A study by Visser et al. (2019) found that family-focused reentry programs, which include family counseling and mediation services, significantly improve the chances of successful reintegration.

3.3 Factors contributing to the successful reintegration of former

Successful reintegration of former probationers into society is a multifaceted process influenced by various vital factors. As depicted in Table 4, three (3) themes revealed: (1) Acceptance and Accountability of what had happened in the past; (2) Support System from family, friends, and peers; (3) Transitioned to becoming a better person with a purpose.

TABLE 4 Essential themes on factors that contributed to the successful reintegration of former probationers into society

Themes	Significant Statements
Acceptance and Accountability of what had happened in the past	In this way, I achieved progress and regretted what I had done. [IDIP2] I accepted it was my fault, and now I am changing for the better. [IDIP8] If only I had listened to my parents, I would not have experienced such [IDIP1] I have no choice but to accept it. [IDIP7]
Support System from family, friends, and peers	The probation officer has been a tremendous help. [IDIP1] The support of my family has been invaluable. [IDIP2] The volunteers at the probation provided me with moral support [IDIP3] My family has been very supportive of me. [IDIP4] my family is also supportive of what I am doing as a volunteer. [FGDP2]

Transitioned to becoming a better person with a purpose Deciding to become a Volunteer Probation Assistant has indeed been a significant help. [FGDP3]
 Aside from the spiritual aspect, returning to school also gave me a sense of purpose. [IDIP5]
 like other VPAs, I find it fulfilling to help others [FGDP4]

3.3.1 Acceptance and Accountability of what had happened in the past

Acceptance involves acknowledging one's past mistakes and understanding their impact on oneself and others. This self-awareness is essential for probationers to move forward and make positive life changes. After embracing their past, ex-probationers can even start forgiving themselves and asking for forgiveness from the injured parties. Supporting the authors' viewpoints, Besin-Mengla (2020) argues, among other ideas, that acceptance is important for one's reintegration process since it creates a way of thinking ready for transformation and change.

The decliners paid attention to the need to admit their own shortcomings. Such acceptance contributed to their progress so that they concentrated on efforts towards recuperation without the barriers of denial or less rationalization of their past actions. From the words of IDIP8:

“Dawat na akongsayop, unyakaronnagapanigkamot ko magbag-o” (IDIP8)

I accepted it was my fault, and now I am changing for the better.

Accepting one's limitations also means accepting the need to be held accountable, which is a reasonable process. Accepting responsibility means that an individual takes responsibility for the harm that an action has caused to him/her and others or even society. This sense of responsibility is a crucial element for cultivating a non-offending mentality and ensuring that reoffending does not occur. Former probationers feel responsible for their behavior and, therefore, work towards complying with their probation conditions and effecting changes in their behavior to avoid future re-offenses. This change implies making direct and concerted efforts toward amends (Sung, 2024).

3.3.2 Support system from family, friends, and peers

Family members, friends, and even peers are essential when it comes to helping such offenders avoid relapsing into further crimes. It is the emotional, psychological, and practical support systems that these networks provide that help with these problems during the process of reintegration, and thus, the same networks assist in reducing the chances of relapse after completing probation.

Affective constancy is prevalent in the family and social networks of ex-probationers, which is important for their psychosocial health. It has been stated that emotional support from one's family helps reduce the isolation, anxiety, and depression that many experience post-probation. Fox (2020) indicates that such relationships play an important emotional resilience role, hence minimizing the chances of re-offending. Several participants, including FGD2, IDIP4, and IDIP2, described the role of family support in achieving successful integration following release. In the words of IDIP2:

“Ang suportasaakongpamilya. Bisan pa nganaglisodsilapanahonsaakongpag-Probation, ilakonggipakitaogpagtagad ug gihataganogkahigayunanngamabag-o” (IDIP2)

The support of my family has been invaluable. Despite their challenges during my probation, they showed me understanding and provided me with opportunities to change. Their faith and belief that I could improve gave me great motivation.

IDIP1 and IDIP3 also identified that probation had been a pillar of support for them, especially the help from probation officers and volunteers. As IDIP1 expressed:

“Dako gyud ug tabang para nako ang probation officer, kay di siyamakalimot ug tambagnako na di na muusabsapagalasto” (IDIP1)

The probation officer has been a tremendous help to me because they constantly reminded me not to revert to illegal number games.

IDIP1 discussed how the regular check-ins and guidance from the probation officer helped her stay committed to her recovery journey. This form of social accountability is supported by Cohen and Wills' (1985) Social Support Theory, which posits that solid social ties can significantly enhance an individual's ability to manage stress and make positive changes.

3.3.3 Transitioned to becoming a better person with a purpose

Participants found that engaging in meaningful activities during and after their probation period was pivotal in their transformation and reintegration. This sense of purpose significantly contributed to their self-worth and motivation to stay on the right path. For instance, FGDP 3 and FGDP 4 found that becoming Volunteer Probation Assistants allowed them to give back to the community and support others in similar situations. As expressed by FGDP4:

“...samapudsauban na mga VPA, fulfilling ang makatabangsaubantao” (FGDP4)

...like other VPAs, I find it fulfilling to help others.

This involvement provided constructive use of their time and helped develop empathy and responsibility. Recent literature by Maruna et al. (2019) suggests that desistance from crime is often facilitated by opportunities to contribute positively to society, thus helping individuals construct a new, pro-social identity. Returning to school and pursuing further education was another significant factor for many participants. IDIP5 shared how continuing his education gave them a new direction and purpose. Education equips individuals with knowledge and skills that improve employability and foster a sense of accomplishment.

“...nakahatag sad ug sense of purpose ang pagbaliknako ug skwela” (IDIP5)

...returning to school also gave me a sense of purpose.

Davis et al. (2019) opine that there are benefits, such as reducing rates of delays and assisting in successful reintegration through tiling on the right path of obtaining self-improvement by transforming offenders using education programs.

The experiences of change included the search for new activities that could be gratifying. For instance, they let the sports or artistic abilities they hit buried long ago and could not even think they could be valuable. More recent studies, including Brown and Ross (2018), show that such individuals should be able to find legitimate means to get recognition and accomplishment for their rehabilitation to have any chance of being complete.

In summary, transitioning to a better person with purpose involves engaging in meaningful activities that foster personal growth, provide structure, and enhance self-worth. Volunteer work, education, skills training, and discovering new passions are critical components of this process. By addressing internal and external barriers, probation programs can significantly aid former offenders in their journey toward successful reintegration and a fulfilling, law-abiding life.

3.4 Recommendations from former probationers to their fellow probationers and Parole and Probation Administration (PPA)

The recommendations provided by participants to both active/former probationers and the Probation and Parole Administration (PPA) highlight various aspects of the reintegration process. As listed in Table 5, study participants discuss their recommendations for active and former probationers and suggestions to improve the rehabilitation and reintegration programs of the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA). Participants emphasized the need for enhanced support services, including job placement assistance and counseling, to better address the diverse challenges faced during reintegration.

For the recommendations for active and former probationers, participants such as IDIP1 and IDIP6 emphasized the importance of following the guidance of probation officers and adhering to the rules set by the PPA. Adherence to probation conditions is critical for successful reintegration. This compliance demonstrates

acombitment to rehabilitation and helps build a structured and law-abiding lifestyle. Research by James et al. (2020) indicates that compliance with probation conditions positively correlates with lower recidivism rates.

Several participants, including IDIP2 and FGDP2, suggested finding inspiration from successful

Codename	Core Ideas	Core Ideas
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probationers and supportive individuals. Social support is a crucial factor in preventing crime. Maruna et al. (2019) highlight that positive social relationships provide the emotional and practical support needed to overcome challenges during reintegration. This support can come from family, peers, or mentors who encourage and motivate probationers to stay on the right path.

Furthermore, participants such as FGDP1 and IDIP4 stressed the importance of family and community support. Family and community support play a vital role in the reintegration process. According to Brown and Ross (2018), strong family ties and community acceptance provide a supportive environment that encourages positive behavior and offers practical assistance, such as housing and job opportunities.

For the recommendations to the PPA, participants such as IDIP1 and IDIP3 suggested that the PPA should offer continuous support and monitoring. Continuous support for post-probation is essential for long-term success. James et al. (2020) found that ongoing support, including regular check-ins and access to resources, helps probationers maintain their progress and reduces the risk of recidivism.

FGDP2 and IDIP7 recommended that the PPA ensure the availability of seminars, training, and vocational programs. Providing access to educational and vocational training is critical. Davis et al. (2019) highlight that these programs improve employment prospects, enhance self-esteem, and provide a sense of purpose, essential for successful reentry.

TABLE 5 Recommendations from former probationers to their fellow probationers and Parole and Probation Administration

IDIP1	Follow the guidance of the probation officers and adhere to the rules and regulations of PPA	Offer livelihood programs and continuous monitoring to support probationers' reintegration.
IDIP2	Be inspired by fellow probationers who have completed their probation and become successful. Avoid associating with people who can have a negative influence.	Treat probationers well so that they feel valued and can contribute positively to society.
IDIP3	It is never too late to change. Keep moving forward, especially if someone trusts and believes in you.	Continue to support probationers with livelihood and skills training post-probation.
IDIP4	Strive to avoid wrongdoing and fulfill responsibilities at home, to their victims, and their probation obligations.	Promote community understanding of probation.
IDIP5	Be consistent in reporting to the probation office. Do not evade responsibilities. For former probationers, it is never too late to change. If you have discontinued your studies, continue pursuing them. If you are struggling to find a job, do not lose hope. God will always help.	Invite religious groups that regularly visit probationers.
IDIP6	Just follow the rules. Avoid temptation and let your family be an inspiration.	Assist former probationers in finding employment as well as moral support
IDIP7	Since finding a job is difficult, they may try other ways, such as online selling	Support probationers with continuous livelihood and skills training even after probation.
IDIP8	Maintain a positive mindset; have faith in God and ask forgiveness from those they have hurt	Promote non-stigmatization of probationers when finding a job
FGDP1	Your family plays a massive role in urging you to straighten up. It is never too late to change.	Continue the probation programs because they help prevent the escalation of criminality in society.
FGDP2	If there is someone by your side who has been supporting you, let them be your inspiration	Ensure there are more seminars and training available for probationers.
FGDP3	Find reasons to continue living and not succumb to depression.	CADAC's rehabilitation efforts are also beneficial
FGDP4	Strive to change because the probation officers' tasks are not easy. Everyone has a second chance.	Assist probationers in finding employment

Lastly, participants such as IDIP2 and IDIP8 emphasized the need for the PPA to promote community understanding and reduce the stigma associated with probation. Reducing stigma is crucial for successful reintegration. Brown and Ross (2018) suggest that community education programs can help change public perceptions and encourage community members to support reintegration efforts. Reducing stigma can lead to greater acceptance and opportunities for probationers.

IV. IMPLICATION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS

4.1 Implication for practice

The findings of the study provide very useful insights with regard to the process of reintegration of ex-probationers and offer practical solutions as well.

To start with, probation officers and other key players are to ensure a positive attitude and a good use of family and legacy as sources of assistance.

Also, there is a need for some follow-up after the probation ends and some encouragement. This includes participation in educational and training opportunities that offer a structured approach to improving oneself and increasing one's chances of getting a job and one's self-worth. Promoting the participation of

previous probationers in positive roles can also assist them in acquiring a constructive self-image and drive.

Apart from that, collaborative work between the social services and the criminal justice agencies should be enhanced. Specific service delivery approaches, which combine vocational and mental health services and enzymatic municipal reunion facilities, can respond adequately to the multifactoral needs of the former probationers. Such integrated treatment approaches aim to fulfill the people's individual needs.

Last but not least, the need to lessen the shame attached to the criminal record cannot be ignored. Ideas such as public awareness campaigns and community outreach strategies will assist in changing the way people perceive such crimes and overcoming such societal stigmas for successful reintegration. Promoting a more inclusive and supportive environment makes former probationers more likely to find employment and reintegrate successfully into society

4.2 Implication for future research

One means of achieving this is through involvement in access to education and job training programs, which are vital as they follow an organized course towards individual betterment while improving chances of employment and self-worth. University comparative studies of this nature have the potential to expand their understanding of how different societies, economies, and cultures affect the process of reintegration. This would further assist in establishing possible scenarios that may be adopted to better integrate strategies in various countries.

Moreover, such longitudinal studies would help appreciate the most efficient ways to assist the former offenders and their families over time and to reduce relapse by having all rehabilitative formulas at one clinic. One's discernment would then assist in evaluating which parameters contributed most to long-term positive changes and which need to be tweaked. Longitudinal datasets would also shed more light on the ex-probationers' life experiences over time concerning their tribulations and achievements at different periods. Moreover, understanding the rehabilitation work of previously declared offenders under supervision as a psychological intervention and incorporating support via the Internet can be a potential area of future study.

Lastly, additional information regarding enhancement in this area or understanding of the problems that need to be addressed will be possible by addressing the views and experiences of the probation officers and other stakeholders in reintegration. Their insights could reveal systemic barriers and facilitators that influence the success of reintegration efforts. Engaging with these stakeholders in participatory research could lead to more practical and contextually relevant solutions.

4.3 Concluding Remarks

As a researcher, delving into the lives of former probationers and understanding their reintegration journey has been both enlightening and humbling. This study sheds light on these individuals' transformative journeys as they strive to reintegrate into society.

Throughout this research, I have been profoundly moved by the resilience and determination as they narrated their lived experiences in the rehabilitation programs of DOJ-PPA XI. The findings underscore that they have learned lifelong learning experiences, gained a social support network, and become more cautious and responsible in their actions. Everyone's journey is a testament to the power of second chances and the reformative impact of support and understanding.

Their stories of struggle and triumph highlight the human capacity for change and growth. It is evident that while the path to reintegration is fraught with difficulties, it is not insurmountable. Most experienced humiliation and discrimination, fought their inner beast to quit vices, avoid wrongdoings, and rebuild relationships with family members. Former probationers face numerous challenges, but with the proper support and opportunities, they can overcome these obstacles and lead fulfilling, law-abiding lives.

The resilience and determination demonstrated by the participants in this study highlight the human capacity for change and growth. Many former probationers can transform their lives despite their significant hurdles, contributing positively to their communities. Factors that were revealed to their successful reintegration include acceptance and accountability for what had happened in the past, support system from family, friends, and peers, and becoming a better person with a purpose.

The insights gained from this study reinforce the critical role that probation officers, community members, and policymakers play in shaping the reintegration landscape. As researchers, practitioners, and policymakers, we are responsible for creating an environment that supports this transformation. This means advocating for comprehensive support systems, challenging stigmatizing attitudes, and promoting policies facilitating access to education, employment, and mental health services.

Reflecting on the journey of this research, I am reminded of the profound impact that understanding and compassion can have on marginalized individuals. The resilience of former probationers serves as a potent reminder that with proper support, anyone can turn their life around. This study is not just an academic exercise; it is a call to action for all of us to support the reintegration of former probationers.

In conclusion, this research highlights the imperative of a holistic approach to reintegration, combining

emotional support, practical assistance, and societal acceptance. The road ahead may be challenging, but with concerted efforts, we can make a significant difference in the lives of those striving to reintegrate. As we progress, let us learn from this study and work towards a more inclusive and supportive society.

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