

**LIVED EXPERIENCES OF FORMER INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS:  
A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY**

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## ABSTRACT

Incarceration in the Philippines includes both convicted individuals and many pre-trial detainees still undergoing legal processes. This study explored the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals in Misamis Occidental, focusing on their reintegration into society and the challenges they face in rebuilding their lives. Using a qualitative phenomenological design, five purposively selected participants with dismissed cases shared personal narratives through semi-structured interviews. Data analysis followed Moustakas' six-step phenomenological reduction. Findings revealed that participants experienced a mix of social acceptance and stigma, faced challenges such as family and community disapproval, limited educational and employment opportunities, and coped through faith, family support, self-determination, and adaptive strategies. These were presented in eight themes: navigating social acceptance and stigma; experiencing personal transformation and renewal; experiencing family and community disapproval; struggling with limited economic and educational opportunities; drawing strength from faith and family; demonstrating self-determination and adaptive coping; family as the cornerstone of reintegration; and institutional and community support as pathways to stability. Reintegration is a complex process influenced by personal resilience, social networks, and systemic barriers, and recommends person-centered interventions, supportive policies, and structured reentry programs. The study recommends person-centered interventions, supportive policies, structured reentry programs, and community-based initiatives to facilitate successful reintegration.

**Keywords:** *coping strategies, formerly incarcerated individuals, phenomenology, reintegration, social support.*

## DEDICATION

*This study is dedicated to the researcher, whose unwavering faith and determination have been the driving force behind this journey. Your perseverance, resilience, and commitment to uncovering truth and fostering understanding have made this important work possible.*

*and also*

*To our mother, father, and siblings,  
thank you for inspiring us with your love and resilience,  
especially during moments when I felt discouraged.*

*Your support has been a guiding light in my life.*

*and*

*And most importantly, to the formerly incarcerated  
individuals who courageously shared their stories, this research is for you.*

*May your voices continue to be heard,*

*and may your experiences inspire change and hope.*

*Let us all work together to protect human dignity and foster healing.*

***The Researchers***

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Background of the Study**

Incarceration in the Philippines encompassed a wide variety of population, from convicted persons to a large number of pre-trial detainees who were still facing judicial processes (Mostaghimi et al., 2023). Incarcerated persons had charges ranging from petty theft and narcotics crimes to violent offences (Miller et al., 2021). But a remarkable characteristic of the Philippine prison system was the high percentage of detainees who were yet to be convicted. As of 2024, about 80% of the over 180,000 persons incarcerated in Philippine prisons were pre-trial detainees still awaiting the conclusion of their cases (Garrett et al., 2024). Most of the detainees spent months in pre-trial detention, with some having waited for more than two years for cases to be decided as a result of backlogs and insufficiency of legal representation (Varma, 2025). The pre-trial detainee overrepresentation not only put pressure on resources but also highlighted the necessity for legal reforms to provide timely access to justice and safeguard the rights of the accused.

Research had long established the link between socio-economic conditions and crime. Poverty-stricken communities often experienced higher crime rates due to financial desperation and limited access to legal income opportunities (Jacobs & Gottlieb, 2020). In the Philippines, poverty, education, and employment opportunities were widely recognized as key determinants influencing criminal behavior (Livingston et al., 2022). Economic hardships, lack of access to quality education, and limited job prospects often pushed individuals toward illicit activities as a means of survival (Dharejo et al., 2023).

Education played a crucial role in reducing criminal behavior, as individuals with higher educational attainment were more likely to secure stable employment and avoid

illegal activities (Farrington, 2020). Conversely, school dropouts and those with minimal education faced restricted employment options, increasing their vulnerability to crime (Silalahi & Walsh, 2023). Unemployment and underemployment further exacerbated crime rates, as individuals without stable income sources resorted to theft, fraud, or drug-related offenses (Mbatha, 2021). Studies had shown that regions with greater access to employment opportunities tended to have lower crime rates, emphasizing the importance of job creation initiatives. Government policies that promoted skill development, entrepreneurship, and labor market stability played a crucial role in crime prevention (Marek et al., 2020).

The reintegration of formerly incarcerated individuals into society was a critical social issue that affected not only the individuals themselves but also their families, communities, and the broader social system (Portes, 2024). The transition from incarceration to freedom presented numerous challenges, including social stigma, employment difficulties, mental health struggles, and limited access to essential resources (Kirkbride et al., 2024). Despite efforts to promote rehabilitation and reintegration, many former prisoners continued to face systemic barriers that hindered their full reintegration into society (Walker, 2024).

In the Philippines, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) implemented programs aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration; however, recidivism remained a concern, indicating that societal acceptance and support systems were inadequate (O'Donnell, 2020). While statistical data on post-incarceration experiences provided an overview, they failed to capture the depth of personal struggles, resilience, and coping mechanisms of these individuals (Duchek, 2020). Given this context, a deeper

understanding of the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals was necessary to inform policies and interventions that fostered successful reintegration (Sinko et al., 2020).

Formerly incarcerated persons described individuals who were previously held or jailed but were subsequently released without a finding of guilt either because their case was dismissed for insufficiency of evidence, or they were found not guilty by the court (Baker, 2020). Even though these people were not found guilty of any offense, the experience of having been incarcerated continued to impact their lives permanently. They frequently endured the same repercussions as convicted criminals, including social stigma, emotional distress, and being unable to find work or a place to live (Baffour et al., 2021). The injustice was that they were still discriminated against and excluded, even though they were legally innocent, simply because they were charged with an offense. This underscored a dangerous weakness in the justice system, whereby being incarcerated even briefly could harm an individual's future, irrespective of the ultimate decision (Van Ness et al., 2022).

Among the most pressing challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals was employment discrimination. A criminal record significantly reduced job prospects, as many employers remained hesitant to hire former prisoners due to concerns about reliability and workplace security (Loosemore et al., 2020). This employment discrimination hindered economic stability and increased the risk of recidivism (Kolbeck et al., 2022). Social stigma and isolation further complicated reintegration, with ex-offenders frequently encountered rejection from their communities, family members, and even social services, leading to emotional distress and a sense of alienation (Monaghan, 2024).

Mental health issues such as anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) were prevalent among this population, stemmed from the stress of incarceration and the reintegration process (Harper et al., 2021). Housing instability was another major concern, as formerly incarcerated individuals often faced discrimination from landlords and legal barriers to housing assistance, resulting in homelessness and further marginalization (Bough, 2023). The research emphasized the key connection between stable residence and enhanced mental well-being, reflected the importance of overall support frameworks (Halfon & Hochstein, 2002). It also examined how specific interventions during the reintegration phase were able to counter psychological distress and enhanced long-term health.

Despite these challenges, many formerly incarcerated individuals developed coping mechanisms to facilitate their reintegration. Personal resilience and self-determination played a crucial role, with some individuals adopted pro-social identities by engaging in education, vocational training, and community service to redefine themselves beyond their criminal past (Perrin, 2024). Peer support and mentorship programs had shown positive outcomes in reducing recidivism and promoting social reintegration, as they provided guidance, encouragement, and practical assistance during the transition period (Kinsella et al., 2022). Strong family support was identified as a critical factor in successful reintegration, offered emotional stability and encouragement (Schaefer et al., 2021).

The availability of institutional and community-based support systems was essential in determining the success of reintegration. Rehabilitation programs focusing on education, vocational training, and life skills development had been shown to significantly improve post-incarceration employment opportunities, equipped individuals with the

necessary skills to secure stable jobs and reduced the likelihood of re-offending (Edet, 2022). Community reintegration programs that provided housing assistance, mental health counseling, and substance abuse treatment were identified as key factors in reducing recidivism (Moore et al., 2020). Additionally, the emergence of peer support groups for formerly incarcerated individuals showed promise in providing emotional support and practical guidance, which aided in their social and economic adjustment (Hawkins & McMahon, 2020).

This study addressed a methodological gap; while recent studies provided valuable insights into the challenges and coping mechanisms of formerly incarcerated individuals, there remained a gap in understanding their lived experiences from a phenomenological perspective. Much of the existing research was quantitative, focused on statistical data rather than in-depth personal narratives. Additionally, there was limited literature on how cultural factors, particularly in specific regions, influenced the reintegration process. This study sought to fill this gap by exploring the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals, providing a deeper understanding of their struggles, coping mechanisms, and perceptions of reintegration.

The research determined the economic, emotional, and social issues faced by individuals released from prison, examining how these individuals perceived societal reactions, whether supportive or stigmatizing (Kılıç & Tuysuz, 2024). It also identified the resources or support networks that had helped or hindered their reintegration process (Sanders, 2024). Additionally, the study sought to highlight existing gaps within current reintegration programs and offered culturally responsive, evidence-based recommendations for policies and community support systems. Ultimately, the research

aspired to foster a more rehabilitative and inclusive justice model by amplifying the voices of marginalized populations and addressing the structural barriers they encountered (McCartan et al., 2021).

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study will be anchored on Strain Theory by Robert K. Merton (1938) and Social Disorganization Theory by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay (1942).

Strain Theory, first developed by sociologist Robert K. Merton in 1938, described how structures within society and cultural expectations could be applied to produce pressures that affected individuals and led them to become involved in deviant or criminal acts (Eisenstadt, 2022). The general idea was that society established culturally accepted goals like financial achievement or social standing and dictated legitimate ways to achieve them, such as education and work. But in settings where access to these means was restricted or obstructed, people felt pressure or frustration (Tully et al., 2023). This imbalance between goals and means generated emotional tension, which led people to look for substitute, usually illegal, avenues to attain success (Kruglanski et al., 2021). Five principal adaptations to this strain were identified by Merton: conformity, innovation, ritualism, retreatism, and rebellion, of which 'innovation' was commonly linked with crime among less privileged groups.

Strain Theory was a guiding theory in this research to analyze how socio-economic disadvantages like poverty, lack of access to quality education, and unemployment generated pressures that made reintegration challenging for previously incarcerated persons. The theory explained how structural obstacles and social pressures perpetuated marginalization, made it difficult for them to form stable social bonds and find meaningful

work, which was crucial for successful reintegration (Saaida & Saaidah, 2023). The research explored how former incarcerated individuals internalized such social and economic pressures, felt frustrated and hopeless, and became more susceptible to reoffending or social exclusion (Mensah, 2024). This viewpoint emphasized the need to address systematic disparities, i.e., social disorganization and inadequate community support, in order to make the environment more supportive for them to rehabilitate. The results sought to inform community-based interventions and policies intended to reduce these stressors, thus enhancing reintegration outcomes and recidivism rates in the local context.

Strain Theory assessed the role of socio-economic stressors in increasing delinquency, reaffirmed how economic strain promoted criminal behavior, particularly among adolescents (Atrey & Singh, 2024). It was implemented in the urban realm in Iran, showed a clear connection between economic distress and deviance (Kabiri et al., 2024). It also examined marginalized youth in the U.S., showed how systemic socio-economic stress led them into deviant behavior (Agyare, 2025). These researches formed the foundation for the applicability of Strain Theory across different socio-cultural settings, confirmed its use in explaining the paths to crime among marginalized communities, including the reintegration groups.

Through Strain Theory, the study attempted to identify significant socio-economic barriers to criminal behavior among ex-offenders. Outcomes informed calls for systemic reform, such as increasing access to education and jobs, to counteract the pressures that drove criminal behavior (Garland, 2023). Awareness of how individuals responded to social pressure also informed policymakers and practitioners in building targeted

interventions that tackled recidivism and fostered a more empathetic environment for reintegration (Lin et al., 2023). It was necessary to understand these dynamics in order to formulate integrated strategies that not only prevented reoffending but also facilitated sustainable social reintegration (Razali et al., 2021).

Using the theory, the study concentrated on the truth that alleviation of systemic inequities poverty, unemployment, and limited access to resources was paramount in the reduction of recidivism (Mahoney & Chowdhury, 2021). It underscored that crime was often a reasonable response to structural shortfall rather than individual moral frailty (Aburass & Rababaa, 2025). Policies therefore aimed at alleviating societal pressures, providing openings for increased equality of opportunity and smoother lines of reintegration for former prisoners. Treating these underlying causes promoted safer, more tolerant communities and minimized the risk of reoffending under environmental pressures (Latessa et al., 2020).

Social Disorganization Theory, as developed by Clifford Shaw and Henry McKay during the 1940s, was concerned with the impact of community structural conditions on crime rates (Ajide, 2021). According to the theory, communities with economic deprivation, residential instability, and a lack of social cohesion experienced weakened social controls such as family, school, and community groups that normally controlled behavior (Chriss, 2022). In such disorderly neighborhoods, informal social norms deteriorated, and criminal activity became a problem more easily (Onyeneke & Karam, 2022). The theory held that crime was more than just a result of individual pathology but rather indicative of those community surroundings that were unable to maintain social order.

Social Disorganization Theory was employed in this study to examine how the social environment within the participants' neighborhoods affected their reintegration process (Quinn-Hogan, 2021). Areas characterized by poverty, high mobility, and poor social cohesion, which were frequent in the urban environment of Misamis Occidental, tended to create settings that were conducive to continued criminality or challenges to creating stability (Sarino et al., 2023). The theory was used to lead a discussion on how factors at the community level, such as social network disintegration, distrust, and lack of institutional support, impeded attempts by ex-offenders to regain stability and social status (Williams, 2025). The results informed the development of community-based interventions that enhanced social cohesion and community resilience.

Social Disorganization Theory established a direct association between neighborhood disorganization, as indicated by economic deprivation and residential turnover, and juvenile delinquency rates (Kotlaja et al., 2020). It showed that communities with high social cohesion and civic participation had lower crime rates, further confirmed the deterrent function of social capital (Blair et al., 2021). It set the role of neighborhood social networks in preventing violence and crime, highlighted that civic participation and communal ties reinforced informal social controls (Alcorta et al., 2020). These researches reaffirmed the efficacy of community cohesion in preventing crime and provided support for Social Disorganization Theory's relevance in explaining environmental factors.

Utilizing Social Disorganization Theory underscored the need to enhance community cohesion as an approach to facilitating reintegration and minimizing recidivism (Skinner-Osei & Osei, 2024). Strengthening local social networks, enhancing community infrastructure, and involving residents in collaborative activities were critical areas of

policy focus (Dašić et al., 2024). Strategies could have encompassed community policing, neighborhood watch schemes, and area development initiatives that enhanced social trust and common purpose. These strategies built a more supportive community for ex-offenders to develop social capital and connect with community resources necessary for effective reentry (Plimley, 2024).

Social Disorganization Theory highlighted that crime prevention and effective reentry relied significantly on community stability (D'Amato et al., 2021). Reentry strategies had to extend beyond individual-level intervention to include community development and empowerment (Christian, 2022). Strengthening community bonds and reducing social disorganization not only lowered crime rates but also created an environment where formerly incarcerated individuals could thrive, contributing positively to societal cohesion and safety (Rahman, 2024). This comprehensive approach aligned with the study's objectives to foster systemic change and community resilience.

### **Conceptual Framework**

This part of the study presented the concepts based on the themes that emerged from the responses of the participants after the interview was conducted. Thus, this part will be done after the data-gathering process.

*Navigating Social Acceptance and Stigma* social acceptance and stigma were a multifaceted and very intimate experience that many people went through during their lifetime (Thornicroft et al., 2022). Social acceptance usually depended on the extent to which one conformed to the norms, values, and expectations of one's society or group. If people followed these unspoken rules, they generally enjoyed inclusion, support, and a sense of belonging (Wise, 2022). But when one deviated by identity, behavior, or

circumstance they risked encountering stigma, in the form of prejudice, discrimination, or social exclusion (Goode, 2022). This dynamic involved a tension between the need to be accepted and the fact of marginality.

Stigma not only influenced the external experience of how others saw and treated people but also influenced the internal lives of those who were stigmatized (Zhang et al., 2021). Individuals that experienced stigma had difficulties with self-esteem, anxiety, and loneliness, since they usually were irrationally stigmatized or stereotyped (Prizeman et al., 2023). For example, individuals experiencing mental health issues, racial prejudices, or non-conforming identities had to go through a world of judgment and ignorance. Such outside pressure made individuals reluctant to be true to themselves or to seek assistance, further reinforcing the process of stigma and loneliness (Prizeman et al., 2023).

To successfully navigate the dynamics of social acceptance and stigma, individual and societal efforts were required (Zhang et al., 2021). At an individual level, developing resilience, self-acceptance, and supportive networks equipped individuals with the ability to handle social rejection (Epli et al., 2023). At a societal level, education, empathy, and inclusive policies were responsible for decreasing stigma and promoting acceptance. When communities actively counteracted stereotypes and affirmed diversity, they built spaces where individuals were respected for who they were, ultimately closed the gap between acceptance and stigma (Obeagu & Obeagu, 2024). This constant process was vital in the construction of more empathetic and just societies.

*Experiencing Personal Transformation and Renewal* Going through personal transformation and rebirth usually was a deep and highly meaningful experience that redefined one's identity and perception of life (Palmer, 2024). This was catalyzed by many

different types of factors, whether it was pushing past struggle, a turning point in one's life, or a willful choice to seek change (Green, 2024). In this process, one usually encountered old habits, patterns, and beliefs that were no longer necessary, made room for new ways of being and seeing. This was not only about transformation, but about developing into a more empowered and authentic version of oneself (Magolda, 2023).

Personal transformation often was a journey of struggle and discovery. It took self-reflection, openness, and occasionally pain, as individuals struggled to come to terms with their fears, vulnerabilities, and unknowns (McKay et al., 2022). But in struggling with these issues, growth was achieved (Alley, 2025). It led many to discover that rebirth could feel like freedom, freed them of past burdens or old negative self-concepts, and provided renewed purpose and direction. This process increased resilience and helped someone connect on a deeper level with their values, passions, and relationships (Wright, 2024).

Renewal and personal transformation were continuous processes, not static occurrences. The ongoing change of life called forth recurring opportunities to examine, change, and grow (Ehrnström & Biese, 2023). To embrace this fluid process was to create an opportunity to not only heal and develop but also to touch others by example (Dunne & Raby, 2024). Through the development of renewal, individuals enhanced their own welfare and the general human experience of growth, hope, and possibility (Hope, 2021). This cyclical nature emphasized the revolutionary strength of change as an inherent aspect of living a purposeful life.

*Experiencing Family and Community Disapproval* It was an emotionally difficult and isolating situation to undergo disapproval from one's family and community (Adlington et al., 2023). When one's lifestyle, identity, or decisions did not synchronize

with the values or expectations of one's family or society, it tended to create rejection and misunderstanding feelings (Gilani, 2025). Such disapproval might have been expressed in direct form, in the form of exclusion, or through indirect non-verbal communication, and all these tended to strongly influence the sense of belonging and self-esteem of an individual. Because family and community were generally primary sources of support and identity, rejection from them brought deep emotional suffering and disorientation (Cabanias, 2024).

More than emotional distress, the effect of disapproval actually shaped decisions, actions, and even mental health (Bishop & High, 2023). Individuals who experienced rejection withdrew, censored their authentic self, or took in hurtful messages, resulting in lower confidence levels and greater tension levels (Orgad & Gill, 2021). For others, this disapproval led to a crisis of identity or resulted in hard decisions between staying true to themselves or gaining approval from those they loved. Winning through this conflict normally demanded a lot of strength and resilience, as they struggled to bring their personal values into line with outside pressures (Schwalm, 2023).

Though not easy, family and community disapproval could also have been a spur to growth and self-discovery (Chui, 2024). It drove people to construct new support structures, work towards more self-acceptance, and speak up for their own needs and their own beliefs. On occasion, after a period of time, these events created empathy and compassion, both for themselves and others who experienced similar difficulties (Depow et al., 2021). Though painful, rejection by intimate social circles occasionally became an effective spur toward establishing a more real and meaningful way, as it emphasized the

need to seek out or establish places of unconditional love and acceptance (Webster et al., 2023).

*Struggling with Limited Economic and Educational Opportunities* The research indicated that most of those previously imprisoned encountered considerable hindrances in securing economic and educational opportunities, which were paramount to being able to reintegrate into society successfully (Mahlangu, 2024). The interviewees, across the board, reported experiencing difficulty in securing stable jobs because of systemically imposed roadblocks like the need for proper documentation such as police or NBI clearance that many were not able to procure easily owing to their past convictions (Prentice, 2021). This barrier led to a cycle of unemployment and economic insecurity, so that it proved almost impossible for these individuals to start anew and gain economic self-sufficiency. In addition, the label of having been incarcerated caused employers to automatically reject their resumes, even after their own cases had been dismissed, further entrenching their economic losses (Pager, 2024).

Aside from access to employment, minimal educational achievement also limited what kinds of work were open to these individuals (Hanna et al., 2025). Most of the participants revealed that they were not able to complete school and some only went as far as primary levels, Grade 3. This lack of education limited them to low-wage, physically stressful work, like collecting plastics or weeding (Bonsu & Nartey, 2023). The absence of educational qualifications delayed them in accessing higher-paying employment or vocational training courses, which might have been avenues for more sustainable livelihoods. The research brought out the way educational barriers structured their

continued challenges with economic stability, which in turn perpetuated the cycle of poverty and marginalization (Shah & Mushtaq, 2024).

Psychological barriers were also responsible for restricting the pursuit of education (Hornby & Lafaele, 2023). Participants mentioned experiencing fear, shame, and judgment from peers and other people in the community that dissuaded them from further education or vocational training (Frank et al., 2025). The risk of judgment or stigma for past offenses granted their difficult situations an added layer of emotion, in many cases deterring them from educational opportunity altogether. Such combined economic and educational barriers highlighted the need to establish open environments and accessible programs that could attend to both structural and emotional barriers, allowing those with a past criminal history to enhance their skills and find improved economic opportunities for successful reentry into society (Day, 2025).

Participating in religious practices, including going to church, reading the Bible, and praying, acted as sources of comfort and resilience (Roberto et al., 2020). Religion provided a sense of direction and assured them that change was achievable, gave them the drive to change their behaviors and restart their lives (Inglehart, 2020). This religious foundation provided them with the ability to keep having hope in spite of rejection by society and internal conflicts, pointed towards the role of religious support in rehabilitation. Support from families was also vital in building emotional strength and stability in reintegration (Onishchenko et al., 2023). Participants reported that family love, acceptance, and encouragement were the main source of motivation and security. Family members who received them back with open arms and offered practical support such as shelter or money provided them with a platform on which to renew trust and confidence (Olasky, 2022). The

emotional connection with family members not only assisted the individuals in managing feelings of shame and rejection but also strengthened their resolve towards positive change. These family relationships were a protective factor against negative societal views, highlighted the importance of acquiring the sense of belonging and hope (Sulimani-Aidan & Melkman, 2022).

Faith and family together were strong pillars that supported the emotional and psychological health of ex-offenders (Awobajo, 2023). They offered a construct of hope, purpose, and belonging that had the ability to neutralize the negative impact of societal rejection and personal loss (Poon et al., 2020). With strength derived from these sources, individuals were more apt to survive the difficulties of reintegration, seek personal change, and work towards re-establishing their lives. Acknowledgment of the value of religion and family relationships encouraged community and program interventions to add spiritual and familial support factors, thus advanced the general success of reintegration (Goodman et al., 2023).

*Demonstrating Self-Determination and Adaptive* Exhibiting self-determination and coping adaptability was an essential part of how ex-offenders coped with the intricate challenges of reintegration into society (Williams, 2025). The testimonies of the participants exposed that positively constructed their new existence through self-discipline, optimistic thinking, and pragmatic means played a major role in their recovery and transformation (Spohrer, 2024). Most participants indicated that disregarding bad remarks or comments from others was a significant step toward preserving their own worth and concentration on change. For example, a few of the participants had spoken to themselves in regard to never going back to prison again, based on personal determination and wanting

a better life. This self-motivation built resilience and strengthened their determination to make real change, emphasized self-empowerment to battle society's stigma and personal failure (McMillian, 2025).

Concrete strategies also played a large role in illustrating self-determination. The participants explained that having small, attainable goals (e.g., going back to school, getting a job, or earning money) allowed them to take back control of their lives and become more confident (Comings, 2023). For instance, some participants reported looking for jobs in new places or doing menial, low-paying jobs for honest work, stressed their intentional move to start anew and showed that they were going in a different direction. These coping strategies of adaptation demonstrated their agency in overcoming economic hardship and social shame, documented that their resilience was frequently based upon concrete behaviors affirming their dedication to a law-abiding existence (Stanford, 2021). These methods, not only served to sustain them through immediate adversity, also established the foundation for long-term stability and achievement (Kucuksuleymanoglu, 2025).

In summary, the focus on self-determination and adaptive coping highlighted the significance of agency in reentry (Petrich, 2020). Through a positive attitude, personal discipline, and taking the initiative, ex-offenders were able to overcome negative attitudes and establish a basis for a new life. Their resilience and resourcefulness were essential tools in overcoming barriers in society, inspired hope, and ultimately reintegration (Oye, 2024). Identifying and nurturing these characteristics through focused initiatives and neighborhood programs could strengthen the ability of individuals to maintain personal change and ease their path toward social acceptance and stability (Carp, 2025).

*Family as the Cornerstone of Reintegration* Family was at the center of the reintegration anchor for previously incarcerated individuals, with emotional, psychological, and practical support being key to effective reintegration in society (Sakib, 2022). The presentations by the participants brought to fore that family acceptance and inclusion had a significant impact on their capacity to restart their lives. For most of them, having supportive family members was a key point of strength, encouragement, and resilience. Reintegration with family members who accepted and supported them assisted in re-establishing their sense of belonging and trust, which was normally lost due to previous errors (Francis, 2021). This psychological support was important in assisting individuals in recovering from the shame and stigma of their imprisonment, providing a good platform for continued development (DeMartini et al., 2022).

Additionally, family support usually went beyond emotional support to encompass practical help such as economic support, provision of homes, and counseling. Members explained that siblings or parent figures in the family tended to offer a safe haven to begin anew by providing shelter and acceptance (Howe & Betts, 2023). Such tangible assistance helped ease some of the immediate challenges that confronted individuals reentering society, such as finding work or continuing education (Burns, 2020). This family support not only enhanced their self-esteem but also served as insulation against society's rejection and discrimination, making their path to stability more viable and sustainable (Panhwar et al., 2023).

The prominence of family as a support network highlighted the need for cultivating strong family ties in order to make successful reintegration into society possible (Liu & Visser 2021). Families served as the first line of pillars of stability, wherein emotional

assurance and concrete help were required to weather adversity. Strengthening family ties through counseling or community interventions enabled them to better support their members (Roman et al., 2025). Appreciation of the role of the family as reintegration's anchor points highlighted the importance of integrated methods that encompassed the involvement of family so that there was a more conducive setting for ex-prisoners that attempted to construct their life back and re-integrate into society (Jeffries et al., 2020).

*Institutional and Community Support as Pathways to Stability* Community and institutional support were the crucial avenues to stability for the reentry of those who had been incarcerated, as they offered structured programs and social acceptance required for a successful process of reentry (Galletta et al., 2021). They stressed the fact that government efforts like skills training, legal aid, and job support were vital in resolving the structural obstacles in their reintegration. Through the provision of vocational education and job placement services, establishments were able to provide the former prisoners with the skills necessary to establish stable livelihoods, thus lessening the chance of recidivism (Mwanza, 2021). Additionally, empowering support programs assisted in addressing the stigma attached to criminal histories, ensuring a more even field where such people got chances for meaningful work and secure integration (Trivedi & Ray, 2024).

Societal acceptance and community understanding were also major factors in creating stability. The participants wanted increased forgiveness and tolerant attitudes on the part of local authorities and citizens towards the released prisoners and their assistance to keep them from returning to old habits (Gopalan et al., 2024). Public education campaigns and community-based programs that encouraged acceptance and a supportive environment for reintegration helped to diminish discrimination and myths surrounding

ex-prisoners (Gopalan et al., 2024). If communities engaged actively in supporting members' reintegration, it promoted social cohesion and positive interaction, which were the key to the restoration of confidence and trust in their ability to contribute positively to society (Edet, 2022).

Institutional and community backing created integral paths toward stability because they dealt with both the practical and social impediments of returning citizens. Successful cooperation among government institutions, local communities, and non-governmental organizations built systems of comprehensive support that ensured integration, resilience, and self-reliance (Bergenek, 2023). Creating clear-cut reentry programs comprising skills training, legal services, and social integration not only allowed for easier transitions but also created a more integrating atmosphere (Donato, 2023). Identifying and consolidating these pathways was essential to minimizing recidivism, maximizing social acceptance, and enabling individuals who had been incarcerated to establish stable, productive lives after release (Lin et al., 2023).

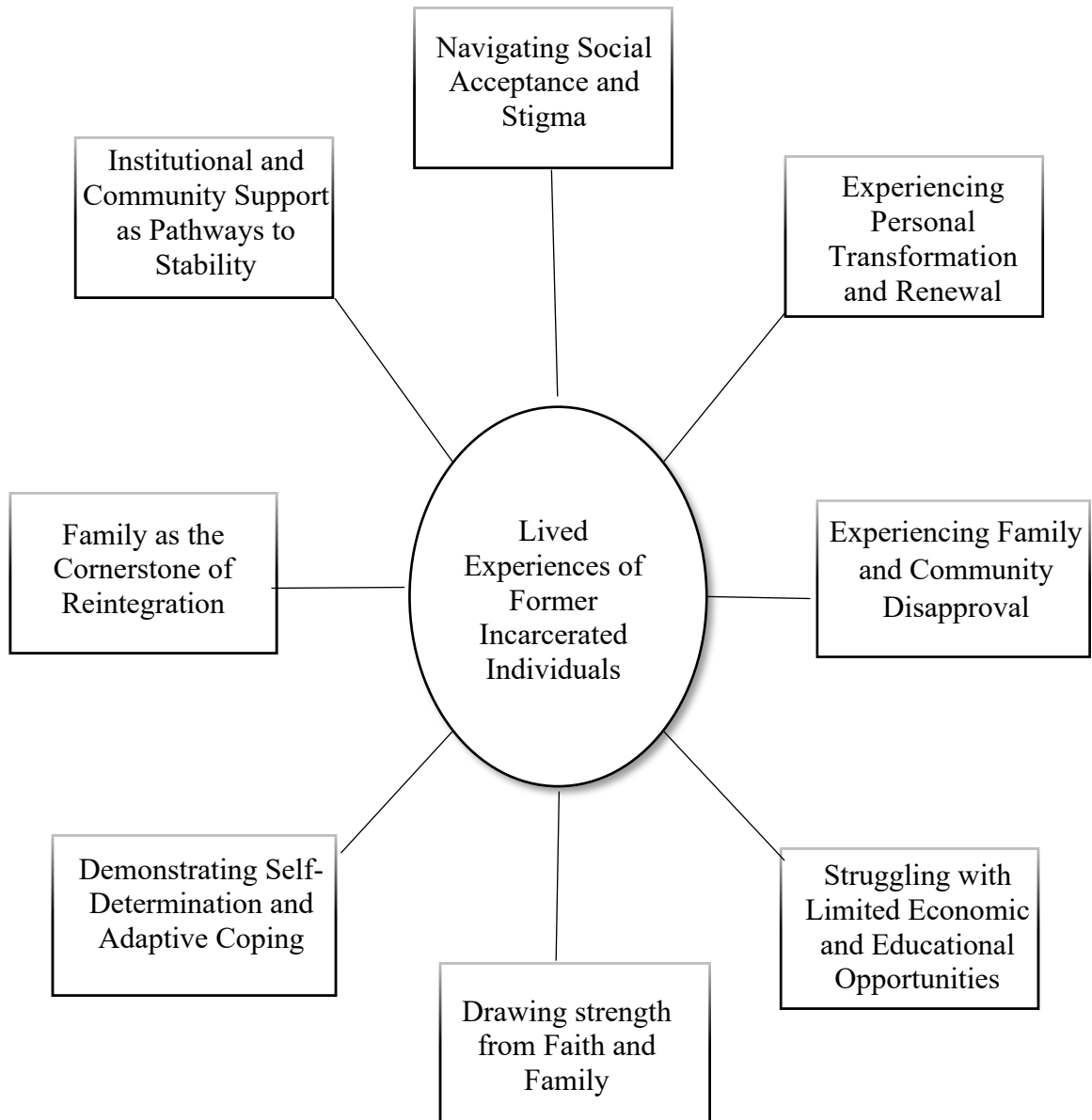


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the study

## **Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed to explore and understand the experiences of individuals who were formerly incarcerated in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. It especially focused on their reintegration into society. Specifically, the study aimed to:

1. Explore and understand the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals upon their reintegration into society.
2. Identify the challenges faced by formerly incarcerated individuals during their reintegration process.
3. Examine the coping mechanisms employed by formerly incarcerated individuals to address these challenges.
4. Determine the support systems perceived as essential by formerly incarcerated individuals for their successful reintegration into society.

## **Significance of the Study**

This study provides meaningful insights into the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals as they reintegrate into society, particularly within the local context of Misamis Occidental, Philippines. By documenting their personal narratives, challenges, coping strategies, and perceived support systems, the research contributes a deeper and more humanized understanding of reintegration beyond statistics, highlighting both the barriers they face and the strengths they draw upon in rebuilding their lives.

For formerly incarcerated individuals, the findings may serve as a source of affirmation and representation, recognizing their struggles, resilience, and capacity for change. By amplifying their voices, the study may help reduce stigma and promote greater awareness of their needs and potential, encouraging more compassionate and inclusive attitudes toward returning citizens.

For families and communities, the results may provide guidance on how relational support, acceptance, and trust-building can influence successful reintegration outcomes. Understanding the critical roles of family bonds, faith, and community involvement may encourage stronger support networks and foster environments that promote belonging rather than exclusion.

For government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and program implementers, the study offers evidence that may inform the development or refinement of reintegration initiatives. Insights on employment barriers, educational gaps, coping mechanisms, and essential support systems may assist in designing responsive programs such as skills training, counseling services, livelihood assistance, and community-based interventions that better address the realities of formerly incarcerated individuals.

For policymakers, the findings may serve as a basis for reviewing policies and practices related to reentry, employment access, and social services, with the aim of creating more inclusive systems that facilitate second chances and reduce recidivism.

Grounding policy decisions in lived experiences may lead to more equitable and sustainable reintegration frameworks.

Finally, for researchers and scholars, this study contributes to the growing body of qualitative research on reintegration and desistance by providing context-specific evidence from a Philippine setting. It may serve as a reference for future studies exploring correctional programs, community reintegration, and social inclusion, and may inspire further inquiry into strengths-based and culturally responsive approaches to supporting returning citizens.

## **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Design**

This study employed a qualitative approach, a phenomenological research design that explored the lived experiences of individuals. As described by Moustakas (1994), phenomenology was concerned with understanding the essence of human experiences by analyzing personal narratives and uncovering shared themes. For this study, this method was utilized to reflect the voices of formerly incarcerated individuals who were released because of insufficient evidence or false charges. This approach allowed the researcher to capture the complexity of their struggles and the meaning they attached to their experiences of reintegration.

The phenomenological design of the study was appropriate as it sought to understand the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals in the Philippines. By emphasizing personal stories, it provided insight into the affective, psychosocial, and social difficulties they encountered during reintegration. This approach yielded rich descriptions of how they experienced and interpreted their lives while revealing common themes that shaped an overall picture of reintegration within the socio-cultural context. Consistent with the study's objectives, phenomenology privileged their voices and informed more person-focused interventions.

### **Setting**

The study was conducted in a growing urban center in Misamis Occidental, Philippines, a location characterized by both economic growth and persistent socio-economic challenges. This setting provided a relevant backdrop for exploring the

experiences of former offenders who had faced poverty, limited educational access, and employment difficulties, which may have influenced their involvement in criminal activities. The urban landscape offered a diverse mix of individuals with varied socioeconomic backgrounds, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

### **Participants**

The participants of this study were 5 formerly incarcerated individuals who were selected through purposive sampling. They were selected through the following specific inclusion criteria as follows: (1) Previously incarcerated individuals whose cases were dismissed and were found not guilty; (2) Individuals were detained for a period of at least one year or more and were able to remember and reflect on their experiences; (3) Were willing to participate.

### **Instrument**

This study utilized a researcher-constructed semi-structured interview guide and an audio recorder to facilitate in-depth discussions. The interview questions were developed based on literature related to poverty, education, employment, and criminal behavior and were reviewed and validated by subject matter experts.

The interview began with a brief rapport-building session to help participants feel comfortable. Open-ended questions encouraged narrative storytelling, allowing participants to express how their socioeconomic circumstances had influenced their decisions and actions. Probing questions were used to gain deeper insights into the emotional, psychological, and social aspects of their lived experiences.

## **Data Gathering Procedure**

The data collection process adhered to strict ethical and procedural protocols to ensure confidentiality, voluntary participation, and data accuracy. Initially, approval was secured from the dean of the Misamis University College of Criminology and relevant ethics boards. Potential participants were identified and approached through social welfare organizations, rehabilitation centers, and parole offices. The study was explained to them, emphasizing their rights, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their responses. Informed consent was obtained before proceeding with in-depth, one-on-one interviews conducted in private and safe locations to ensure participants felt comfortable sharing their experiences. With their consent, audio recordings and notes were taken to capture verbatim responses and emotional cues. The recorded interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy and completeness before proceeding with data analysis.

## **Ethical Consideration**

This study strictly followed the ethical guidelines of Misamis University and complied with Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, to protect participant rights and data confidentiality. Participation was entirely voluntary, with individuals fully informed about the study's purpose, process, and potential impact. They retained the right to withdraw at any time without consequence. Informed consent was obtained through a clear, jargon-free form outlined their rights, including confidentiality and the option to refuse to answer any question. To ensure privacy, participants were identified using pseudonyms (e.g., "Participant 1"), and no personal identifiers were

included in transcripts or reports. All interview recordings and transcripts were securely stored in encrypted digital files, with access limited to the research team. Given the sensitive nature of the discussions, participants experiencing distress during or after the interview were provided with referrals to counseling services.

## **Data Analysis**

The Moustakas' (1994) data analysis technique of phenomenological reduction was used in this study. The following were Moustakas' Six Steps, namely: (1) Bracketing, (2) Horizontalization, (3) Clustering into Themes, (4) Textural Description, (5) Structural Description, and (6) Textural-Structural Synthesis.

*Bracketing.* To minimize bias, the researcher addressed potential preconceived notions and perceptions among participants before commenced the study. Under the guidance of their advisor, the researcher conducted a thorough investigation, encompassing all stages from topic and population selection to interview design, data collection and analysis, and the dissemination of research findings.

*Horizontalization.* The researcher reviewed all verbatim participant expressions relevant to the study, initially assigned equal value to each statement. Irrelevant, repetitive, overlapping, or out-of-scope statements were excluded. The remaining statements, termed "horizons," were considered constituent and meaningful elements of the phenomenon. As Moustakas (1994) noted, "horizons are unlimited, and horizontalization is a never-ending process."

*Clustering.* The researcher derived inferences from the study by reducing invariant horizons to core themes and validated these themes using multiple data sources. Statements were reduced to horizons, clustered into themes, each with a single implied meaning,

effectively translated the phenomenon into "textural language." To validate the invariant horizons, the researcher reviewed findings from studies employed different data-gathering methods, such as observation, field notes, focus group interviews, and relevant literature. This validation process ensured the accuracy and clarity of the representations.

*Structural description.* The researcher described the participants' perception of the phenomenon, provided a textural description using verbatim interview excerpts and a narration of meaning units derived from the themes. The structural description, or "how it occurred," integrated imaginative variation, offered a novel perspective and insights into the textural description. Imaginative variation, a mental experiment detaching the analysis from natural biases, was applied to each paragraph of the textural description to generate the structural description.

*Textural-structural synthesis.* In this process, the researcher synthesized the meaning units from each participant, created a composite of common textural and structural descriptions. A third-person narrative synthesis represented the collective participant experience. This final step in Moustakas' method aimed to capture the essence of the phenomenon's experience.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study, *Lived Experiences of Former Incarcerated Persons*, was implemented in Misamis Occidental, Philippines. Using a phenomenological research design, the study aimed to develop a rich understanding of lived experiences and issues confronting people after imprisonment. The participants in this study were five adult males ranging in age from 23 to 53 years old who had experienced incarceration of varying durations, from as short as one month to nearly six years. Most of them came from modest educational backgrounds, with attainment levels ranging from elementary to senior high school, which had influenced their employment opportunities and led them to engage in manual or informal labor such as farming, construction work, and production work. Their cases had involved different circumstances, including misunderstandings, wrongful accusations, or incidents influenced by personal factors, with several cases ultimately dismissed due to lack of evidence or withdrawal of complaints. Despite these challenges, the participants had demonstrated resilience and a desire to rebuild their lives after release, often supported by family, relatives, and close social networks who had provided emotional, financial, and moral assistance. They had shared common experiences of hardship, reflection, and reintegration, highlighting their efforts to pursue honest livelihoods, continue education, and avoid reoffending while striving for personal growth and stability.

The Moustakas' data analysis technique of phenomenological reduction was used to analyze the collected data. From the insights and experiences shared by the participants, eight predominant themes emerged: (1) Navigating Social Acceptance and Stigma; (2) Experiencing Personal Transformation and Renewal; (3) Experiencing Family and Community Disapproval; (4) Struggling with Limited Economic and Educational

Opportunities; (5) Drawing Strength from Faith and Family; (6) Demonstrating Self-Determination and Adaptive Coping; (7) Family as the Cornerstone of Reintegration; (8) Institutional and Community Support as Pathways to Stability.

### ***Experiences of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals Upon Reintegration into Society***

The first objective of this study focused on the lived experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals as they returned to their families and communities. This objective revealed the essential theme of navigating social acceptance and stigma, which captured their simultaneous encounters of welcome and hesitation from the people around them. Also, it revealed the participants' self-reflection that led to positive change, where participants shared stories of newfound appreciation for life, strengthened values, and a commitment to living responsibly.

### **Navigating Social Acceptance and Stigma**

Social acceptance refers to the experience lived and reported by post-prisoners in the process of rebuilding trust, dealing with negative perceptions, and trying to be included within their families and communities once freed. The operationalization of this concept took place through participants' narratives regarding family acceptance-like emotional support, encouragement, and unconditional understanding; community perceptions, or experiences of judgment, suspicion, labeling, and distrust; identity reconstruction efforts, like seeking employment, involvement in positive community engagement, and behavioral change; and coping strategies used to manage discrimination and regain respect. Social acceptance is portrayed by responses that contain forms of trust, inclusion, and support, while stigma involves reports of prejudice, exclusion, and

enduring negative labeling. Extracted from interview responses, a thematic analysis was done to reveal how these dimensions of acceptance and stigma shape their reintegration experiences.

For formerly incarcerated individuals, returning to the community involved more than securing employment or meeting basic needs; it required regaining social acceptance and rebuilding strained relationships. Navigating social acceptance and stigma refers to the process of managing interactions, behaviors, and self-presentation to earn trust, counter negative labels, and cultivate a sense of belonging within families and communities. Reintegration unfolded in social spaces where acceptance and judgment coexisted, and where past mistakes often overshadowed present efforts to change. These realities show how both support and stigma shaped participants' attempts to reconstruct their identities and reestablish their place in society.

Navigating social acceptance and stigma was the process by which stigmatized or marginalized individuals, like the formerly incarcerated, learned to navigate their behaviors and interactions in a way to achieve respect, recognition, and inclusion in society (Trivedi & Ray, 2024). This included the rebuilding of trust, the ability to show positive change through work or education, and the debiasing of negative stereotypes that interfered with reintegration (Bruneau et al., 2022). It also involved managing discrimination and exclusion when trying to find opportunities for social acceptance in professional and institutional contexts. Practically, this involved self-advocacy, building support networks, and involvement in community activities that reframed public attitudes and slowly eliminated stigma (Robinson et al., 2024).

The participants shared that family acceptance served as a primary source of strength and motivation as they reintegrated into society. Their families provided emotional stability, understanding, and encouragement to rebuild their lives and restore their sense of self-worth. P1 described how both family and neighbors embraced him, while P5 emphasized the unconditional support received from loved ones.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“My family and neighbors accepted me wholeheartedly. I now work to help my family and others who are in need.” (P1)*

*“My family was my biggest support. They accepted me without judgment.” (P5)*

Despite personal efforts to reform, they were often met with suspicion and judgment from neighbors, coworkers, and the wider community. P3 shared how difficult it was to be perceived as someone defined by a prison past, while P4 and P5 noted the reluctance of others to fully trust them.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“At first, it was very difficult because many people still looked at me as someone who came from prison... I felt like others were judging me.” (P3)*

*“Some judged me quickly, like it was hard for them to believe in me again because of my past record.” (P3)*

*“Neighbors and coworkers seemed unsure about me too.” (P5)*

Reintegration, thus, went beyond freedom of the body; it was an ongoing negotiation between gaining acceptance from family and friends and breaking down prejudice by the greater society (Codreanu & Zelinka, 2022). This underscored the necessity for community education programs, second-chance job opportunities, and organized reintegration programs that led to an understanding of and a lessening of

discrimination against those who wished to rebuild their lives after prison. It also needed the cooperation of government institutions, civil society, and communities to provide an environment in which returning citizens were integrated, not stigmatized (Rhyn, 2021). Finally, effective reintegration benefited not just the individual but also reinforced social cohesion and helped make communities safer and more inclusive (Lin et al., 2023).

Research on stigma established that those who had been previously incarcerated were usually subjected to prejudice and labeling that persisted even after release (Feingold, 2021). Neighborhoods tended to judge them based on their history instead of their potential to reform. This mirrored the idea in Strain Theory in which structural pressures like poverty and scarce opportunities exacerbated social judgment, rendering reintegration more challenging (Gupta, 2024). Social Disorganization Theory also accounted for how in societies lacking social cohesion, stigma was an effective limit that barred acceptance, recycling patterns of exclusion (Jones, 2020).

This result implied that the process of social acceptance and stigma among formerly incarcerated had significant implications for communities, families, and institutions. The participants' experience emphasized that reintegration was not a matter of regaining physical liberty but a matter of procuring social acknowledgement and overcoming deeply ingrained prejudice (Rasmiaty, 2025). At the individual level, acceptance by the family was important for emotional support and motivation, emphasizing the need to reinforce family-based reentry programs (McKay et al., 2020). Yet the persistence of community stigma, as evident in the interviews, indicated that without greater social awareness, returning citizens still encountered obstacles in seeking employment, trust, and inclusion. For communities, what this implied was the necessity

of ongoing public education efforts to combat stereotypes and dissipate discriminatory attitudes (Shireesha, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, these experiences may be interpreted through both Strain Theory and Social Disorganization Theory. Strain Theory suggests that when formerly incarcerated individuals encounter blocked opportunities for acceptance, employment, and dignity, they experience frustration and social pressure that complicate lawful reintegration. At the same time, Social Disorganization Theory explains how weakened community cohesion, distrust, and persistent labeling reduce informal support systems that would otherwise facilitate acceptance. Together, these perspectives indicate that stigma is not merely interpersonal but structurally and environmentally produced, shaping the social barriers participants must navigate during reentry.

Reintegration efforts may benefit from approaches that strengthen both family and community support systems. Programs that engage families, promote peer support networks, and provide community education on second chances may help foster understanding and reduce stigmatizing attitudes toward returning citizens. Partnerships among local institutions, employers, and civic groups may also create safer spaces for interaction, trust-building, and meaningful participation in social and economic life. Strengthening these collective supports may contribute to greater social acceptance and more sustainable reintegration outcomes.

### **Experiencing Personal Transformation and Renewal**

Reintegration was not only a matter of returning to society but also a deeply personal journey of change and self-reflection. Experiencing personal transformation and renewal refers to the process of reconstructing one's identity, values, and life direction

through intentional growth, self-discipline, and positive behavioral change. Beyond addressing external barriers, participants described reassessing past experiences, strengthening self-control, and striving to become better versions of themselves. Such efforts highlight how personal growth became a central pathway through which formerly incarcerated individuals redefined their identities and envisioned a more hopeful future.

Experiencing personal transformation and renewal referred to the process by which individuals, particularly those who had undergone incarceration, actively reconstructed their identity, mindset, and life direction as part of their reintegration journey (Holman, 2023). This involved letting go of destructive habits and past mistakes, embracing positive values, and developing new coping strategies that aligned with growth and self-improvement. It could be observed through concrete actions such as pursuing education, seeking employment, engaging in faith or spirituality, and building healthier relationships that affirmed their new identity (Sandua, 2023). The renewal aspect emphasized not only internal change such as self-forgiveness, resilience, and a sense of hope but also external expressions, including contributing to family, community, or society in meaningful ways. In practice, this theme captured how individuals redefined themselves from being identified with a prison past to becoming proactive, responsible, and purposeful members of society (Toscano, 2022).

Participants expressed that the experience of incarceration became a turning point for deep introspection and growth. They recognized the importance of freedom, the value of relationships, and the necessity of making better choices. Their narratives revealed an inner shift moving from regret and hardship toward gratitude and self-improvement.

These are the statements of the participant:

*“Life outside is much better because there’s freedom you can walk around, visit neighbors, and be with your siblings.” (P2)*

*“I’ve learned how valuable freedom is, and I’ve become more grateful for small things.” (P3)*

Several participants emphasized how imprisonment prompted them to reform their behavior and attitudes. They spoke of gaining discipline, appreciating guidance from authorities, and developing a clearer sense of purpose.

These are the statements of the participant:

*“I’ve changed a lot compared to before... I salute [the police] for helping me become a better person.” (P1)*

*“I want to live right and earn an honest living.” (P4)*

*“I am more careful with my actions and with the people I trust.” (P5)*

Desistance from crime was found by research to be a breakthrough point for change at a personal level. Most people learned discipline, toughness, and new values after having endured adversity (Sampson & Laub, 2003). Strain Theory substantiated this by explaining how individuals responded differently to pressures, at times opting for rejuvenation and conformity over deviance (Meehan et al., 2024). On the same note, research on resilience found that change was usually attributed to one's capacity to reframe identity and seek pro-social outcomes, even in adverse environments (Breakwell, 2021).

The research showed that reintegration was not just about transcending external obstacles but also about an internal transformation (Frey, 2022). Initiatives that facilitated spiritual development, life skills training, and post-release counseling helped reinforce this positive path, making it easier for formerly incarcerated persons to maintain their commitment to productive and responsible living (Burns, 2025). This allowed them to develop resilience and self-esteem, making it possible for them to reconstruct their lives

beyond the experience of incarceration. In the end, this personal transformation not only enhanced the individual but also brought about healthier families and safer, more humane communities.

This process of renewal may also be understood through Strain Theory and Social Disorganization Theory. Strain Theory posits that individuals respond differently to social pressures, and some adapt through conformity and positive coping rather than deviance, which is reflected in participants' decisions to pursue lawful and purposeful lives. Meanwhile, Social Disorganization Theory highlights how the presence of supportive relationships and prosocial environments encourages identity reconstruction and distantness. These theories together suggest that personal transformation emerges not only from internal resolve but also from social contexts that enable constructive change.

Reintegration efforts may benefit from recognizing and nurturing the personal strengths and internal motivations of formerly incarcerated individuals. Programs that provide opportunities for counseling, values formation, life skills development, and spiritual or psychosocial support may help sustain the positive changes described by participants. Creating spaces where individuals can set goals, reflect on their growth, and contribute meaningfully to their families and communities may further reinforce their renewed sense of purpose. Supporting this process of personal transformation may encourage long-term desistance and promote healthier, more resilient communities.

### ***Challenges Faced by Formerly Incarcerated Individuals Upon Reintegration into Society***

The second objective of this study examines the specific challenges encountered by formerly incarcerated individuals as they attempt to rebuild their lives. Two major

themes emerged: experiencing family and community disapproval and struggling with limited economic and educational opportunities. Together, these themes reveal the external barriers and social pressures that complicate their reintegration.

### **Experiencing Family and Community Disapproval**

Reintegration was marked not only by efforts to rebuild their lives but also by painful experiences of rejection and strained relationships. Experiencing family and community disapproval refers to encounters of distrust, avoidance, labeling, and withdrawal of support that undermine one's sense of belonging and self-worth. Returning to their families and communities often meant confronting lingering conflicts and negative perceptions that overshadowed their attempts to change. These conditions created feelings of isolation and emotional vulnerability, making reintegration more challenging and psychologically demanding.

This disapproval took the form of tense family relationships, denial of emotional support, and incredulity from neighbors, colleagues, or peers who persisted in blaming them for their previous crimes (Sanchez, 2025). It was usually conveyed in veiled forms of behavior like avoidance, exclusion, or reluctance to embrace their changed identity, which could impede their feeling of belongingness and self-esteem (Bouchama, 2025). Practically, this theme illustrated how social stigma and trust violations imposed further emotional and psychological loads, complicating reintegration efforts even when individuals tried to change (Schneider, 2025). It emphasized the call for family-based interventions, community education, and reentry programs that restored trust, decreased prejudice, and supported more helping environments for returning citizens (Tadros, 2025).

Participants shared how negative perceptions from family members, neighbors, and the broader community created deep emotional distress and a sense of exclusion. They described encounters of rejection, labeling, and judgment that undermined their confidence and sense of belonging. The participants revealed how rejection and stigma deeply affected them after their release. P2 shared the pain of being shunned by a close sibling who even reported them to the authorities, a betrayal that left lasting hurt. P4 described how neighbors and even the parents of friends deliberately avoided contact, treating them as someone to fear or avoid. P5 experienced the weight of being labeled a criminal in the community, hearing rumors that reinforced feelings of exclusion.

These are the statements of the participant:

*“It was painful not being accepted by my own sibling. They were the ones who even turned me in to the police.” (P2)*

*“Some people avoided me, and even the parents of my friends would say, ‘Don’t go near him, he’s from prison.’” (P4)*

*“In the community, I heard some rumors calling me a ‘criminal.’” (P5)*

The participants also spoke of the subtle but wounding ways that stigma persisted in their daily lives. P3 recounted moments when the comments and lingering stares of others felt mocking, creating an unspoken reminder of their past. P5 added that, despite the dismissal of their case, potential employers would sometimes laugh or withdraw job opportunities upon learning about the detention. These experiences underscore how judgment and prejudice can linger quietly, affecting both personal interactions and opportunities for rebuilding life after incarceration.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“Sometimes, their comments or stares made me feel like I was being mocked, even if they didn’t mean to.” (P3)*

*“Even if the case was dismissed, some employers laugh and never call back once they find out I was detained.” (P5)*

Academics found that disapproval by family and community lengthened the punishment beyond imprisonment. Families withdrew support, and neighbors and peers stigmatized people as being untrustworthy, illustrating the labeling process outlined in Social Disorganization Theory. Such experiences created frustration akin to that outlined in Strain Theory, as people were faced with blocked opportunities for repairing relationships (Guyette & Harris, 2025). Yet, some research suggested that rejection like this encouraged people to find alternative support networks and establish independence, illustrating both the corrosive and constructive effects of rejection (Cholakova et al., 2025).

These accounts also pointed out how rejection by family and public labeling put the punishment beyond incarceration. These experiences fit well with social stigma and labeling theories in which a criminal record served as an enduring identity that interfered with acceptance and trust both in private and public life (Pager, 2024). This perpetuation of disapproval created feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and reduced motivation to seek positive change (El Khoury-Malhame et al., 2025). Solving these problems necessitated deliberate work to educate communities, engendered restorative practices, and built environments that fostered forgiveness and second chances (Steffano-Davis, 2024).

These findings are further supported by Strain Theory and Social Disorganization Theory. Strain Theory explains how rejection and blocked social ties create emotional

stress, frustration, and feelings of marginalization that may hinder reintegration. Concurrently, Social Disorganization Theory emphasizes that communities with weak trust and limited cohesion often fail to provide the informal support necessary for acceptance, allowing stigma and exclusion to persist. Viewed through these lenses, family and community disapproval reflects broader structural and environmental conditions rather than solely personal conflict.

Family and community relationships play a crucial role in shaping the emotional well-being and reintegration experiences of formerly incarcerated individuals. Efforts that promote family dialogue, restorative practices, and community education may help rebuild trust and reduce fear and misconceptions surrounding returning citizens. Support groups and peer networks may also provide alternative spaces for belonging when immediate acceptance is limited. Strengthening these relational supports may foster greater social inclusion, emotional resilience, and more positive reintegration outcomes.

### **Struggling with Limited Economic and Educational Opportunities**

For formerly incarcerated individuals, reintegration began with the urgent need to secure stable income and rebuild disrupted educational pathways. Struggling with limited economic and educational opportunities refers to the difficulty of accessing stable employment, completing schooling, and obtaining financial resources necessary for independent living. Returning to society often meant confronting limited qualifications, restricted job access, and financial insecurity that complicated even the most basic attempts to start over. These realities illustrate how such constraints became persistent barriers influencing the pace and sustainability of their reintegration.

The reality of the lived experience of formerly incarcerated was that they, upon release, still confronted systematic barriers in restarting their lives (Lawrance, 2025). Operationally, this theme played out in their struggle to find regular employment on account of lack of qualifications, interrupted schooling, or flat refusal by employers owing to a criminal record, compelling many to settle for low-paying and unsteady jobs or depend on unsustainable survival schemes (Pager, 2024). Meanwhile, efforts to seek or continue education were in turn discouraged by lack of finances, family obligations, and the lingering stigma of being in prison (Finlay, 2024). These overlapping issues demonstrated the ways in which educational and economic constraints fed into each other without work, opportunity for employment was still limited, and without resources, educational pursuit was impossible straining the cycle of disadvantage and emphasizing the imperative for inclusive policies, training in skills, and support systems that could realistically help in their reintegration (Ntholeng, 2024).

Another prominent challenge involved structural barriers to employment and education. Participants described how low educational attainment, job discrimination, and the requirement for police or NBI clearances restricted their ability to earn a living and pursue further studies. Several participants highlighted the challenges of rebuilding their livelihoods after incarceration, pointing to both formal barriers and personal limitations. P4 emphasized how employment requirements such as police and NBI clearances quickly reveal a criminal record, making job searches especially difficult. P5 echoed this struggle, noting that even with a dismissed case, the lingering stigma continues to block opportunities. P1 shared a different but related obstacle—having reached only Grade 3 in school, they can secure work only occasionally.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“It’s very hard to find a job because they require documents like police and NBI clearance. If you have a record, they find out quickly.” (P4)*

*“It’s not easy to find a job. Even if the case was dismissed, there’s still a stigma.” (P5)*

*“I only get work sometimes because I didn’t finish school—I only reached Grade 3.” (P1)*

Participants also pointed to the lasting impact of limited education and the fear of social judgment on their efforts to move forward. P2 explained that not finishing school confined them to small, low-paying jobs such as collecting plastic or weeding. Similarly, P3 described feeling anxious and embarrassed in an educational setting, worried that classmates might judge them because of their past.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“Since I didn’t finish school. I can only take on small and low-paying jobs like collecting plastic or weeding.” (P2)*

*“In school, I also feel scared and embarrassed that I might be judged by my classmates.” (P3)*

These testimonies demonstrate how limited education and employer bias combine to block pathways to stable employment and personal growth. Research on prisoner reentry similarly notes that low skills, lack of credentials, and background checks significantly reduce post-release opportunities.

A vast amount of literature identified that restricted employment and education opportunities ranked as one of the biggest obstacles to reintegration (Kılıç & Tuysuz, 2024). Employers often denied jobs to applicants with a history of incarceration, and limited education further reduced prospects (Ayeni, 2024). This conflict was in line with Strain Theory, as the disparity between aspirations (stable job, education, dignity) and

resources (limited access owing to stigma and structural barriers) bred frustration and marginalization (Green, 2024). Social Disorganization Theory was also consistent with the finding that poor communities with poor institutions lacked reintegration channels, ensuring poverty and crime became cycles.

The results pointed out that previously incarcerated individuals were confronted with systemic restraints against employment as well as education, which significantly influenced their reintegration process (Heim-Jones, 2025). The narratives of participants exposed how limited educational background, combined with employer discrimination and strict clearance policy, formed a cycle of exclusion in which even those with their cases dismissed were still stigmatized (Canlas & Cunan, 2025). This implied that reintegration programs had to transcend offering short-term remedies and instead address structural issues like discriminatory recruitment practices, the need for police and NBI clearances, and the absence of flexible education routes for adult learners (Steel, 2024). Without these reforms, many were locked into irregular, low-income, and unsustainable forms of work that fueled poverty and enhanced the chances of recidivism.

The challenges described by participants strongly align with Strain Theory and Social Disorganization Theory. Strain Theory explains how limited access to legitimate means such as employment and education generates pressure and frustration that can obstruct successful reintegration or increase vulnerability to recidivism. Social Disorganization Theory further suggests that communities lacking strong institutions and economic resources provide fewer opportunities for skill development and stable work. Together, these perspectives frame economic and educational barriers as systemic constraints that shape life chances beyond individual effort.

Economic and educational barriers are not only personal challenges but are also shaped by broader structural conditions that influence access to opportunities after release. Reintegration efforts may benefit from expanded adult education programs, skills training, and livelihood support that address interrupted schooling and limited qualifications. Collaborative initiatives among government agencies, employers, and community organizations may also help reduce stigma and create more inclusive employment pathways. Strengthening these supports may contribute to more stable livelihoods and more sustainable reintegration outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals.

### ***Coping Mechanisms of Formerly Incarcerated Individuals***

The third research objective sought to understand how formerly incarcerated individuals cope with the social stigma, rejection, and structural barriers that challenge their reintegration. Their narratives reveal layered coping strategies that blend spiritual anchoring, relational support, and a strong sense of personal agency. Rather than relying on a single pathway, participants describe a dynamic process of drawing strength from faith and family while simultaneously exercising self-determination and adaptive coping.

### **Drawing Strength from Faith and Family**

Drawing strength from faith and family refers to relying on spiritual beliefs and close relationships for emotional comfort, guidance, and practical assistance during the transition back to society. Beyond material help, these connections offered reassurance, hope, and a renewed sense of purpose amid uncertainty and vulnerability. These

relational and spiritual foundations became essential strengths that sustained their resilience and guided their efforts toward positive change.

The study implied how formerly incarcerated drew upon religious beliefs as well as family ties as crucial sources of strength in managing the challenges of reintegration (Dougall, 2024). Operationally, this was seen in activities such as praying, participating in religious functions, and holding the belief that God had given them a second lease on life, which allowed for hope, emotional stability, as well as moral anchorage (Dougall, 2024). While doing so, encouragement, material support, and moral guidance from the family members provided the practical and emotional support that reinforced their commitment to stay away from negative influences and restart their lives. Together, family and religious faith acted as buffers against social stigma, hopelessness, and recidivism, illustrating that reintegration was not maintained solely by structural opportunity but by the availability of robust relational and personal anchors that enabled people to survive (Smith, 2025).

Faith emerged as more than a religious routine; it served as a source of emotional stability, moral recalibration, and hope for justice. Participants shared that prayer and church attendance allowed them to process fear, guilt, and uncertainty, transforming incarceration from a purely punitive experience into a moment for spiritual awakening. Some participants shared how their faith became a source of strength and guidance as they rebuilt their lives. P2 described committing to positive routines such as attending church regularly, reading the Bible, and following the advice of mentors and even police officers who offered support. P3 echoed this sentiment, emphasizing that faith in God provided hope and inner peace despite ongoing hardships.

These are the statements of the participant:

*“I focused on doing good... continued to go to church every Sunday, read the Bible, and listen to advice from the police and others who gave guidance.” (P2)*

*“My faith in God plays a big role. It gives me hope and peace even during hard times.” (P3)*

Faith and community involvement emerged as vital sources of comfort and perseverance for several participants. P4 shared that trusting in God sustained them through five long years of waiting for a court decision, believing that justice would prevail in time. Similarly, P5 found peace through prayer and by actively helping in the community.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“My faith in God helped me a lot. For five years, I waited for the court’s decision, and I trusted God that justice would happen.” (P4)*

*“Praying and helping out in the community gave me peace.” (P5)*

These testimonies illustrate that faith did not merely comfort but actively shaped their mindset, fostering patience and reinforcing the belief that personal change was possible. This mirrors findings in desistance literature where spirituality can create a “replacement identity,” allowing individuals to redefine themselves beyond their criminal past.

Equally significant was the unwavering presence of family, which offered both practical assistance and emotional reassurance. Participants highlighted how relatives became their safety net providing housing, encouragement, and a sense of belonging when society withheld acceptance.

Family support emerged as a powerful foundation for recovery and renewal among the participants. P4 shared that the encouragement of loved ones inspired positive change and motivated them to move forward. P3 emphasized how staying close to family and trusted friends provided the strength needed to cope with challenges. Similarly, P2 found stability by living with an older sibling, gaining both shelter and a fresh start.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“My family became my source of strength. Because of them, I was encouraged to change and move forward.” (P4)*

*“Staying close to my family and trusted friends helped a lot. Their support and encouragement gave me strength.” (P3)*

*“I stayed with my older sibling, who allowed me to live in their house, and that gave me a place to start over.” (P2)*

Research highlighted that religion and family relationships were essential coping strategies for ex-offenders. Religion offered a model for hope, morality, and strength, and family provided emotional and instrumental support (Plimley, 2024). Such findings resonated with Social Disorganization Theory, which emphasized the importance of social bonds in promoting order and stability (Gonzales et al., 2024). They also related to Strain Theory, as religion and family served as substitute coping mechanisms for pressures that could otherwise drive individuals towards despair or deviance (Braun, 2024).

The result of this study implied family support also served as an antidote for public stigma, providing a personal zone of acceptance where participants were able to heal and regain self-esteem (Embaye, 2025). This balance between religious belief and interpersonal safety showed an intersocial coping mechanism, where both divine trust and interpersonal connection served as parallel sources of strength for resilience (Akhtar,

2024). The dual sources of this strength not only facilitated inner healing but also drove the impetus to seek positive change in life. In this way, faith and family became intertwined foundations that empowered individuals to confront reintegration challenges with greater confidence and hope (Phong, 2025).

The protective role of faith and family can be interpreted through the study's theoretical framework. Strain Theory proposes that individuals often rely on alternative coping resources to manage stress and blocked opportunities, and spiritual beliefs and close relationships may serve as constructive outlets that reduce frustration and discourage deviance. Social Disorganization Theory similarly highlights the importance of strong social bonds in promoting stability and prosocial behavior. In this way, faith and family function as informal support systems that buffer structural pressures and foster resilience during reintegration

Faith and family relationships function as important protective factors during the reintegration process. Programs that recognize and collaborate with families, faith-based groups, and community mentors may help sustain the emotional stability and sense of purpose described by participants. Providing spaces for spiritual expression, family engagement, and peer support may further strengthen resilience and encourage prosocial decision-making. Nurturing these relational and spiritual supports may contribute to more hopeful, stable, and enduring reintegration outcomes.

### **Demonstrating Self-Determination and Adaptive Coping**

Demonstrating self-determination and adaptive coping refers to the intentional use of inner strength, discipline, and practical problem-solving strategies to manage challenges and rebuild stability. They described a conscious decision to move forward,

setting goals and making purposeful changes rather than viewing themselves solely as recipients of assistance. These efforts became vital personal resources that sustained their progress toward independence and long-term reintegration.

Beyond external support, participants reported a conscious internal process of regaining agency. They opted to reinterpret challenges as inspiration, finding psychological resilience and pragmatic problem-solving (Oye, 2024). Their coping went beyond endurance; it included proactive goal-formulation, geographic relocation, and economic planning. These tactics indicated their ability to turn challenges into opportunities for development, not hindrances. By doing so, participants illustrated that self-determination was not solely survival but also active construction of a new path for their lives (Parchomiuk et al., 2025).

The participants also described a determined sense of resilience in facing judgment and hardship. P1 chose to ignore negative remarks from others, focusing instead on personal change. P3 transformed criticism into motivation, striving to prove genuine growth and transformation. P2 demonstrated perseverance by taking on any available work, no matter how small, to sustain daily needs.

These are the statements of the participant:

*“Whatever I hear others say about me I just ignore it, because I want to change.” (P1)*

*“I used it as motivation to show that I’ve truly changed.” (P3)*

Participants expressed a steadfast determination to build a better future despite their difficult past. P2 shared a commitment to keep working, taking any job no matter how small to sustain daily needs. P1 recalled a personal vow made while still in prison, firmly resolving never to return.

These are the statements of the participant:

*“I kept working, no matter how small the job, to help myself survive.” (P2)*

*“When I was still in prison, I told myself: ‘I will never go back in there again.’” (P1)*

The participants highlighted practical steps they took to rebuild their lives and avoid repeating past mistakes. P3 focused on setting small, achievable goals such as returning to school and steering clear of risky situations. P4 chose to relocate to a place where no one knew their history, seeking employment and a fresh start. P5 began saving a portion of income, taking gradual steps toward financial stability.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“I also started setting small goals, like going back to school and avoiding situations that could lead to trouble again.” (P3)*

*“One thing I did was go to another place where no one knew me. I looked for a job there and started over.” (P4)*

*“I also started saving a little from my income.” (P5)*

These strategies highlight cognitive reframing participants consciously shifted their perspective from victimhood to opportunity. Moving to new places or accepting low-wage jobs reflected not defeat, but a strategic reset, enabling them to distance themselves from old environments and re-establish control over their lives.

The coping responses of these individuals are neither purely individual nor purely collective. They demonstrate a nuanced interplay of external support and internal resolve. Faith and family provided the psychological foundation to withstand rejection, while self-determination translated hope into concrete action. Such findings echo theories of post-traumatic growth and resistance, which argue that personal transformation after adversity often requires both a supportive network and an active reconstruction.

Studies indicate that previously incarcerated individuals typically exhibit significant resilience by establishing minute objectives, redefining obstacles, and pursuing avenues for rejuvenation. This resolve is indicative of the adaptation processes outlined in Strain Theory, wherein people react to thwarted opportunities not through deviant but rather persistent and legal channels. Adaptive coping has been found to correlate with reduced recidivism rates and increased reintegration success, validating the notion that individual initiative can override external impediments when accompanied by support mechanisms.

Overall, the participants' trajectories indicate that survival of reintegration difficulties is a multi-faceted, dynamic process. Spiritual faithfulness and kinship unity provided emotional support for healing, while adaptive coping and self-control facilitated concrete advancement collectively creating an integrated journey towards restoration of life after imprisonment. These experiences indicate that reintegration is not accomplished in single dimension but via the mutual interplay of individual strength and communal assistance. They also posit that sustainable reintegration involves both intrinsic motivation and extrinsic opportunities that legitimize and support individual transformation.

These adaptive behaviors may be further explained by Strain Theory and Social Disorganization Theory. According to Strain Theory, individuals facing structural constraints may choose conformity and persistence rather than innovation or retreat, channeling pressure into lawful and goal-oriented actions. Social Disorganization Theory adds that when individuals cultivate new networks or relocate to more supportive environments, they strengthen social ties that reinforce prosocial conduct. Together,

these perspectives highlight self-determination as an active response to strain supported by the search for more stable social contexts.

Reintegration efforts may benefit from recognizing and strengthening the personal agency and problem-solving capacities of formerly incarcerated individuals. Programs that provide goal-setting support, life skills training, livelihood planning, and mentoring may help individuals translate motivation into concrete and sustainable actions. Opportunities that encourage small achievements, financial stability, and safe environments for starting over may further reinforce adaptive coping and resilience. Supporting both internal determination and external opportunities may contribute to more confident, self-directed, and lasting reintegration outcomes.

### ***Perceived Support Systems for Successful Reintegration***

The fourth research objective explored the types of support that formerly incarcerated individuals perceive as crucial to their reintegration. Their reflections reveal two interwoven sources of assistance: family as the immediate and indispensable lifeline, and institutional or community-based programs as structural pathways to long-term stability. These accounts illustrate that reintegration requires both the intimacy of personal relationships and the reach of formal societal support to reduce stigma and prevent recidivism.

### **Family as the Cornerstone of Reintegration**

The journey back to society began at home, where family relationships served as the first source of safety, acceptance, and reassurance. Family as the cornerstone of reintegration refers to the central role of relatives in providing emotional support,

stability, and practical resources such as housing and financial assistance during the transition period. Amid the uncertainties of release, participants described their families as steady anchors who restored their sense of worth and belonging. Such support became a foundational element that grounded and sustained their reintegration process.

Participants consistently framed their families as the first and most vital safety net, offering unconditional acceptance and concrete help during the fragile transition from incarceration to community life. Family members provided emotional healing, a sense of belonging, and practical resources such as housing and financial support elements that were essential to reestablishing normalcy and restoring dignity.

Family support remained a vital source of healing and motivation for the participants. P1 expressed deep love and appreciation for a family that continued to stand by them, while P4 shared that the presence and acceptance of loved ones fostered both emotional and physical recovery.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“My family still supports me, and I love my family so much.” (P1)*

*“Their presence and acceptance helped me recover emotionally and physically.” (P4)*

Family support continued to play a central role in the participants’ journey toward rebuilding their lives. P2 shared how an older sibling welcomed them back and provided a place to stay, offering a stable foundation for a fresh start. Likewise, P5 described receiving both financial and emotional assistance, along with constant reminders that it was never too late to begin again.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“My older sibling...helped me by accepting me back and letting me stay in their house.” (P2)*

*“They supported me financially and emotionally and reminded me that it’s not too late to start again.” (P5)*

Research confirmed that close family relationships were the single most significant predictor of successful reintegration. Family offered housing, economic assistance, and emotional support, which formed a barrier to stigma and exclusion (Alikpala, 2026). Social Disorganization Theory explained family as a balancing force within communities, while Strain Theory focused on how supportive family ties could soften frustrations produced through blocked opportunities (Sharma, 2024). Without family support, reintegration was tenuous; with it, one was more likely to establish a stable and law-conforming life.

Family support was more than tolerant acceptance; it became a source of stabilization that enhanced self-esteem and resisted the stigma of imprisonment (Maharani & Muhammad, 2025). By offering a safe setting to restore relationships and routines, families acted as a social shield against rejection and as agents to facilitate long-term change in the individual (Rousseau et al., 2025). This outcome was consistent with reentry literature that identified the strength of family ties as a means to reduce recidivism and promote psychological health. Ultimately, healthy family bonds served as a pillar of effective reintegration through facilitating responsibility and promising a brighter future of familial bonds in lowering recidivism and enhancing psychological well-being (Skinner & Osei, 2024).

The centrality of family support can also be understood through the lens of the two guiding theories. Social Disorganization Theory emphasizes that strong primary

groups such as families serve as key sources of informal social control, guidance, and stability that discourage deviant behavior. At the same time, Strain Theory suggests that emotional and material assistance from family members helps reduce the pressures created by poverty and blocked opportunities. Thus, family relationships operate as both protective and stabilizing forces that ease reintegration and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

Families play a central role in shaping the stability and well-being of formerly incarcerated individuals during reintegration. Efforts that actively involve families through counseling, education, and family-centered reentry programs may help strengthen communication, trust, and shared responsibility. Providing resources that support families, such as housing assistance and livelihood opportunities, may further enhance their capacity to serve as reliable sources of care and guidance. Reinforcing these family connections may contribute to more secure transitions, improved psychological health, and more sustainable reintegration outcomes.

### ***Institutional and Community Support as Pathways to Stability***

Beyond personal resilience and family support, participants highlighted the importance of broader institutional and community systems in shaping their reintegration experiences. Institutional and community support as pathways to stability refers to the organized assistance provided by government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local networks through services such as employment programs, skills training, counseling, and social inclusion initiatives. Returning to society required not only individual effort but also access to these structured opportunities and supportive environments that could sustain long-term stability. These experiences underscore how

coordinated institutional and community support functioned as critical pathways toward lasting inclusion and security.

This theme pertained to the organized help extended by government agencies, NGOs, religious organizations, and community networks that assisted formerly incarcerated in getting back into society and becoming more stable in the long run (Ford, 2024). Institutional support comprised livelihood programs, education and skills training, counseling, legal assistance, and medical services that addressed systemic disadvantages, while community support manifested in mentorship, acceptance, moral guidance, and stigma reduction. Collectively, these supports existed as complementary pathways; institutions constituted the structural bases to beat exclusion and unemployment, and communities offered emotional and relational support that created belonging and trust (Mugamba, 2024). Where the two types of support operated in concert, they formed a safety net against recidivism, maintained behavioral change, and enabled people to access personal development and social contribution, making reintegration stable, inclusive, and dignified (Chinecherem, 2025).

While family formed the core of immediate reintegration, participants also recognized that long-term reintegration depends on structural opportunities and inclusive community programs. They emphasized that government agencies, non-governmental organizations, and local communities must create accessible systems that address employment barriers, provide education or training, and foster social acceptance.

Participants also emphasized the need for government support to facilitate their reintegration into society. P2 suggested that providing more job opportunities or emergency work could help individuals like them regain stability. P5 recommended the

creation of clear reentry programs offering free skills training, legal assistance, and employment support

These are the statements of the participants:

*“The government provide more support...give more jobs or emergency work to people like us.” (P2)*

*“It would be good if the government created clear reentry programs...free skills training, legal assistance, and employment support.” (P5)*

Participants highlighted the importance of skills development and educational support as key to successful reintegration. P2 emphasized that skills training programs or short courses would be especially helpful for those who did not finish school, providing opportunities to gain practical abilities. P3 echoed this, advocating for programs that offer job placement, livelihood training, and educational support to help rebuild their futures effectively.

These are the statements of the participants:

*“Skills training programs or short courses. would be very helpful, especially for people like me who didn’t finish school. (P2)*

*“Programs that provide jobs or livelihood training...educational support so that we can rebuild our future properly.” (P3)*

Participants also emphasized the need for emotional and social support to aid reintegration. P3 suggested counseling or mentoring programs to address emotional and psychological healing, while P2 highlighted the value of community support groups that provide guidance and acceptance for formerly incarcerated individuals.

These are the statements of the participant:

*“Counseling or mentoring to help with emotional and psychological healing.” (P3)*

*“Community support groups that guide and accept ex-prisoners would make a big difference.” (P2)*

Participants pointed to the need for comprehensive reentry frameworks, such as vocational training, legal aid, psychological counseling, and livelihood programs. Importantly, their comments highlight that these supports must not only address economic needs but also foster social inclusion to counter persistent stigma. Community-based mentoring and peer support groups were viewed as key to sustaining positive identity change and preventing relapse into criminal behavior.

Research stressed that institutional programs like skills training, counseling, legal assistance, and community-based reintegration programs were critical to long-term success (Kelley, 2025). Social Disorganization Theory demonstrated that strong institutions in cohesive communities decreased crime and facilitated reintegration, while Strain Theory emphasized the necessity of breaking down systemic barriers that created frustration and exclusion (Lawal, 2025). Research also reinforced that government agencies, NGOs, and community organizations, when working together, offered opportunities that diminished stigma, fostered inclusion, and prevented recidivism (Uche, 2025).

Reintegration was best achieved when personal and structural supports complemented each other (Vollmer et al., 2025). Family provided the emotional center and immediate sanctuary that moored self-rebuilding, while institutional and community programs offered the scaffolding for long-term economic and social security. Without family embrace, reintegration was emotionally tenuous; without community and government intervention, it was materially impermanent (Hussain & Sajid, 2024). Hence,

sustainable reintegration demanded an equitable partnership where personal resilience was supported by caring social systems and inclusive institutional structures (Pylypenko et al., 2024).

This theme is likewise reinforced by Strain Theory and Social Disorganization Theory. Strain Theory highlights how access to legitimate opportunities such as employment, education, and social services reduces the pressures that often lead to frustration and exclusion. Meanwhile, Social Disorganization Theory underscores the role of strong institutions and cohesive communities in maintaining order, trust, and collective support for vulnerable members. When institutional and community systems function effectively, they create environments that enable formerly incarcerated individuals to rebuild their lives in stable and socially accepted ways.

Stable reintegration is strengthened when institutional resources and community networks work in coordination to address both practical and relational needs. Expanding accessible programs in skills training, employment assistance, counseling, and legal support may help reduce structural barriers that limit opportunities after release. At the same time, community-based mentoring and peer groups may foster belonging, trust, and sustained behavioral change. Integrating these formal and informal supports may contribute to more inclusive environments and more enduring reintegration outcomes for formerly incarcerated individuals.

## **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

Based on the findings of the study, several conclusions were drawn. Reintegration emerged as a multifaceted process shaped by both personal experiences and social interactions, where support from close relationships coexisted with societal prejudice, indicating that the journey involved both emotional adjustment and identity reconstruction. The challenges of reintegration were both social and structural in nature, suggesting that without addressing stigma and systemic barriers, formerly incarcerated individuals remained vulnerable to exclusion and recidivism. Furthermore, coping strategies were observed to combine interpersonal and intrapersonal resources, with family and faith serving as foundational support while personal agency enabled individuals to take practical actions in overcoming difficulties. Ultimately, successful reintegration depended on a combination of familial support and systemic opportunities, where personal determination was strengthened by the presence of supportive social and institutional structures.

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, several recommendations are offered. Families and communities may strengthen supportive networks that encourage acceptance and recognition of personal change, while awareness programs may help reduce stigma and support smoother social integration. Policies may consider minimizing unnecessary employment barriers, promoting fair access to job opportunities, and incorporating public education efforts to lessen stigma and support community acceptance. Reintegration programs may also include spiritual and family engagement, along with opportunities for skills development, goal-setting, and adaptive strategies to help build resilience and independence. In addition, governments and non-government

organizations may consider developing reentry initiatives that provide education, livelihood support, counseling, and legal assistance, while communities may encourage acceptance and mentorship. Families may continue offering support, and individuals may be encouraged to pursue education and skill development for more stable reintegration. Lastly, future researchers may explore reintegration experiences across different regions, genders, and socio-economic contexts, possibly using longitudinal approaches to better understand how coping strategies, family support, and institutional programs relate to long-term outcomes such as social integration and recidivism.

## DECLARATION OF THE USE OF AI TOOLS

The authors accepted the use of Grammarly as a writing tool at the last step of the paper preparation. We used it to proofread and enhanced spelling, grammar, punctuation, sentence structure, and general text clarity. We employed the following instruction: "Suggest ways to improve the flow of words, clarity, and concision. Offer recommendations with examples." We followed its recommendations and revised and edited our work to improve the quality and legibility of the paper.

We also recognized ChatGPT (<https://chat.openai.com/>) as a tool of assistance in crafting the study. More specifically, we employed ChatGPT to assist in providing preliminary ideas for the schematic diagram of the sub-constructs of our research variables. We inputted the following prompt: "Identify the potential sub-constructs of my variables." The response was taken as a beginning point for discovering and contemplating applicable elements for the schematic diagram. We went through and modified all material produced by AI utilized our own thinking and critical reflection to make sure that it was appropriate for our research aims.

Further, we recognized ChatPDF (<https://www.chatpdf.com>) as a valuable aid in our research. ChatPDF helped us comprehend and condense PDF academic papers and documents. It enabled us to engage with research articles through asking questions and getting precise, contextual responses, which made it easier for us to comprehend materials. The information we learned through the tool enhanced our comprehension of major concepts, but all the understanding and final work were based on our critical thinking and analysis.

We further acknowledged Humanize (<https://www.humanize.ai/Humanize>) as a writing improvement tool at the revision phase of our paper. Using Humanize improved the tone and enhanced the natural flow of our language, brought the writing to sound more genuine. The recommendations from Humanize enhanced clarity, interest, and readability without compromising original meaning and intent of the material. We scrutinized and modified all revisions based on our discretion and scholarly standards.

Finally, we recognized the utilization of a URL shortener tool in the process of preparing the paper. The tool assisted us in generating compact and handy links for ease of sharing and referencing internet resources. Utilizing the URL shortener enhanced the tidiness and clarity of the paper without altering the substance or availability of the original sources.

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## **APPENDIX A**

### **INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

#### **Opening Questions**

1. Pls share your age and gender?
2. How long were you incarcerated, and when were you released?
3. What was your highest level of education before and after incarceration?
4. What is your current employment status? Are you currently working? If yes, what kind of work do you do?
5. How long has it been since you were released, and how have things been for you since then?
6. What was the first thing you did or wanted to do after leaving incarceration?

#### **Core Questions**

1. What are your experiences upon reintegration into the society?
  - 1.1. Describe your experiences when you first returned to your community after incarcerated?
  - 1.2. How did people in your family, neighborhood, or workplace treat you after release?
  - 1.3. What changes in your daily life did you notice compared to before your incarcerated?
2. What are your challenges you encountered upon reintegration into society?
  - 2.1. What difficulties did you encounter in finding work, education, or livelihood after release?
  - 2.2. Share situations where you felt excluded, judged, or discriminated.

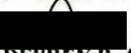
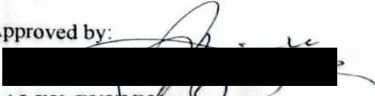
- 2.3. What personal struggles (emotional, psychological, or financial) have you experienced since your reintegration?
3. How are your ways to cope with these challenges?
- 3.1 What personal strategies or practices have helped you manage the difficulties of reintegration?
- 3.2 Tell me about a time when you overcame a major obstacle after your release?
- 3.3 In what ways have your beliefs, values, or faith influenced how you deal with challenges?
4. What are the support systems do you perceive as essential for your reintegration?
- 4.1 Who has been most supportive to you since your release, and how have they helped?
- 4.2 What kind of programs, services, or assistance do you think are most helpful for people like you?
- 4.3 If you had the chance to suggest changes to community or government support what would you recommend?

### **Closing or Exit Question**

1. Looking back at your journey, what message or advice would you like to share with others who are going through a similar experience?

## APPENDIX B

### TRANSMITTAL LETTER

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
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|  <div style="display: inline-block; text-align: center;"><b>MISAMIS UNIVERSITY</b><br/>Ozamiz City, Philippines 7200<br/>Tel. No. +63 88 521 0367 / Telefax No. +63 88 521 2017<br/>E-mail Address: <a href="mailto:mu@mua.edu.ph">mu@mua.edu.ph</a></div>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       |
| <small>CERTIFIED: ISO 21001: 2018 Educational Organizations Management System by DNV<br/>ACCREDITED: Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA)</small>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |
| <b>COLLEGE OF CRIMINOLOGY</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <p>August 26, 2025</p> <p><b>HON. ALEX CUIZON</b><br/>Barangay Captain<br/>BGRY. Lapasan, Clarin,<br/>Misamis Occidental</p> <p><b>Dear Hon. Cuizon,</b></p> <p>Greetings of Peace!</p> <p>We, the Bachelor of Science in Criminology students of Misamis University, Ozamiz City are currently working on our Thesis study entitled, <i>“Lived Experiences of Former Incarcerated Individuals: A Phenomenological Study”</i> as a requirement for the course Criminological Research.</p> <p>In this regard, we humbly request your good office to allow us to conduct face-to-face interview with the Former Incarcerated Individual in your Barangay. Be assured that informed consent will be secured from the participants before the actual interview and the data to be gathered will be used solely for research purposes.</p> <p>Attached to this request are the background and methodology sections of our study.</p> <p>We respectfully seek your approval, which will greatly contribute to the success of our educational undertaking. Should you have any inquiries regarding our research, please feel free to contact us at 0919-802-5771.</p> <p>God bless and more power.</p> <p>Respectfully yours,</p> <div style="margin-left: 40px;"><br/><b>GADFREY B. ALIGO</b><br/>Group Leader</div> <p>Noted: </p> <div style="margin-left: 40px;"><b>MARKDY YORONG, DIT</b><br/>Instructor</div> <div style="margin-left: 40px;"><br/><b>JOSE L. CUEVAS JR. PhD</b><br/>College Dean</div> <div style="text-align: right; margin-top: 50px;"><p>Approved by: </p><p><b>HON. ALEX CUIZON</b><br/>Barangay Captain</p></div> |

## **APPENDIX C**

### **INTERVIEW TRANSCRIPTION**

#### **Person 1**

My life today is quite different from when I was imprisoned. At that time, I was lost, irresponsible, and a slave to various vices I had everything, but I didn't appreciate it. But I have really changed. Today, I live in harmony, taking care of my family and assisting those in need. Although I just attained Grade 3 and it's difficult to obtain steady employment, I prefer to earn a living honestly and with respect for other people. My neighbors and family have embraced me fully, and I'm thankful to the police officers, the captain, and BPat who led me towards a better way. I no longer define myself by my past, and even when others speak about the person I once was, I pay no attention to it because I'm concentrating on the person I am today. I vowed to myself in prison that I would never return, because my family requires me and I will never disappoint them once again. Let us assist each other to clear the road we all tread. [P1]

#### **Person 2**

Life outside prison is improved since there's freedom that you can roam around, go see neighbours, and spend time with your siblings. My experience was however not pleasant since my own sibling in Balintawak didn't welcome me and even reported me to the police, feeling ashamed and unwanted. In there, the policies are stringent, and if you cannot afford some of the fees, you have to do work or get punished, and this made me understand that it is not worth committing a crime. Fortunately, my case was small and dismissed, so I didn't get much discrimination, and I was still accepted for employment. I concentrated on improving by going to church, reading the Bible, listening, and engaging in honest work however small. My elder brother assisted me by giving me a place to stay at his home, a second chance. I think the government can help small offenders such as myself through skills training, livelihood assistance, and community programs so we can be reintegrated into society and do not recidivate to our old habits just to survive. [P2]

#### **Person 3**

Life outside prison was not easy at first due to the judgment of many people based on my history, which filled me with fear and shame, but the encouragement of my family and close friends kept me strong and slowly regained responsibility. Despite the fact that some members of the community still judged me differently, I accepted and concentrated on being a better person. Finding employment and going back to school have been challenging because of stigma, but I am committed to the rebuilding of my future through education and sound decision-making. My belief in God and love from my family have been my most significant sources of resilience. In order to assist others like me, I think the government must continue providing reintegration programs, such as livelihood training, counseling, and scholarships, so we can actually start anew and not fall back into our past ways. [P3]

#### **Person 4**

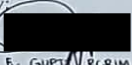
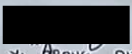
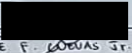
Coming back home after many years behind bars was strange and hard for me, as I feared how people would view me although I was glad to be free and home again with my trusting family. Although my family welcomed me home gladly and became my strength, many others hastily judged me and treated me as an outcast, even teasing me or cautioning their children away from me. It was particularly difficult to find work due to mandated clearances that uncovered my past, and relocating to a new city allowed me to begin anew without the baggage of my past. My faith in God kept me going through the lengthy process of waiting for justice to be served, and when finally acquitted, I breathed a sigh of relief and optimism. I think that free education programs for youngsters are very important in an attempt to avoid others going through the same ordeal, as education can divert young people from the wrong way and establish a brighter future. [P4]

#### **Person 5**

Although my case was dismissed, life following detention was emotionally distressing because many still viewed me differently, causing me to feel shame and fear. My family was my greatest source of support, except that they judged me not, but some of my neighbors and work colleagues remained apprehensive or aloof. It has been difficult to look for employment because of the stigma; I even lost a job chance when employers discovered my history despite my innocence. Community rumors and judgments undermined my self-esteem and brought emotional challenges, but God's faith and love from my family kept me at peace and moving forward. I think that the government must create strong reentry programs which involve job placement, counseling, vocational training, and legal aid in order to enable individuals such as myself to restore their lives with honor. [P5]

## APPENDIX D

### Thesis/Research Data Gathering Approval Form

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                                                    | <b>Misamis University</b><br><i>Ozamiz City</i>                                                               |                                                                |                                                        |
| <b>MISAMIS UNIVERSITY RESEARCH CENTER</b><br><small>CERTIFIED: ISO 21001: 2018 Educational Organizations Management System by DNV<br/>ACCREDITED: Philippine Association of Colleges and Universities Commission on Accreditation (PACUCOA)</small> |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <hr/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <small>MU-RC-042/13 November 2024</small>                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>Thesis/Research Data Gathering Approval Form</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>Date:</b> _____                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>Name of Authors:</b> <u>Alijo, Godfrey B., Bolito Maricel L., Galleteo, Angel Mhac B., Pace, EJ Laurence</u>                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>College/Department:</b> <u>Misamis University College of Criminology</u>                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>Research Title:</b> <u>Lived Experiences of Former Incarcerated Individuals: A Phenomenological Study</u>                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <hr/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>Data Gathering Procedure:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>a. Type of Research: (Kindly check)</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Quantitative                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Qualitative                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> Experimental                                                                                                             |                                                        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved Research Title & Problem/Objectives                                                                                                                                                                    | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved Data Gathering Procedure                                         | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Approved Data Gathering Instrument/Data Sheets                                                                |                                                        |
| <b>b. Respondents/Participants/Subject/Samples to be Collected:</b> _____                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <hr/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>c. Procedure:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Survey                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Interview                                                                 | <input type="checkbox"/> Experimentation                                                                                                          | <input type="checkbox"/> Laboratory Testing            |
| <b>d. Place of Implementation/Study Area:</b> <u>Misamis University</u>                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>If to be conducted outside the school campus, indicate the nature of transportation to be used:</b>                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Own private vehicle                                                                                                                                                                                             | <input type="checkbox"/> public utility vehicle                                                               | <input type="checkbox"/> rental                                                                                                                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Others, please indicate _____ |
| <b>e. Date/s of Implementation/Sampling:</b> _____                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>Attachments:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Approved Letter of Consent from the designated authority in the area/place where the study is to be conducted |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <input type="checkbox"/>                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Signed Parents' Consent                                                                                       |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| The thesis proposal mentioned above is hereby recommended for the commencement of data gathering implementation.                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>Recommended by:</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <br><b>ELMA FE E. GUPIT, RCRIM, MSCT</b><br>Thesis/Research Adviser                                                                                              |                                                                                                               | <br><b>MARKY Y. BRONG, DIT</b><br>Thesis/Research Instructor |                                                        |
| <b>Approved by:</b> _____                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <br><b>JOSE F. LOPEZ JR., RCRIM, PhD</b><br>College Dean                                                                                                         |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |
| <b>CONTROLLED DOCUMENT</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                   |                                                        |

## APPENDIX E

## INFORMED CONSENT

|  <div style="text-align: center;"> <b>Misamis University</b><br/> H. T. Feliciano St., Ozamiz City, 7200 Philippines<br/> <b>MISAMIS UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ETHICS BOARD</b><br/> Phone: +6388 521 0367   Fax: +6388 521 2917<br/> Email: muresearchethics@mmu.edu.ph </div> |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <p>MU-REB-010/03 March 2022</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
| <b>Participants</b><br><i>(Pagpili sa mga Partisipant)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>participants must be former incarcerated individuals who have already been released and are currently reintegrated into the community. They should have served their sentence for at least six months and be willing to share their lived experiences regarding their life during incarceration and after their release.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante niini nga pagtuon mao ang mga indibidwal nga naga-angkon sa mosunod: Kinahanglan nga sila mga kanhi napireso nga nakahuman na sa ilang silot ug karon anaa na sa proseso sa paghalik sa katilingban. Kinahanglan usab nga sila nakapuyo sa prisohan sulod sa labing menos unom ka bulan ug andam nga ipaambit ang ilang mga kasinatian samtang sila napireso ug pagkahuman sa ilang paggawas.)</i></p>                                                        |
| <b>Voluntary Participation</b><br><i>(Boluntaryo nga Partisipasyon)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | <p>Your participation has to be voluntary and will not affect your situation or status in any way, including your relationship with the researcher. You are free to decide if you will take part or not. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions that you do not prefer to answer.</p> <p><i>(Boluntaryo ang imong pag-apil ug kini dili makaapekto sa imong sitwasyon o estado apil na imong relasyon sa nagtuon. Gawasnon ka nga modesisyon kung kung moapil ka niini nga pagtoon o dili. Kung mo-decision ka nga moapil, gawasnon ka nga dili motubag sa bisan asa nga pangutana nga dili nimo gusto nga tubagon.)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Procedure</b><br><i>(Pamaagi)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>The participants will be given ample time when to undertake the interview. The interviews will be undertaken once or several times when necessary. The researcher will transcribe the interviews to be used for the analysis of the data. The information and data provided by you as a participant will be utilized for this study alone and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante pagahatagan og igong panahon sa pag-apil sa interview. Ang interview pwedeng himoon kausa nga higayon o sa makadaghan depende sa panginanghalanon. Isulat sa nagtuon ang interviews para sa pag-analisa sa datos. Ang mga impormasyon ug datos nga nakuha gikan kanimo isip ka partisipante gamiton lamang niining research og hatagan og tumang pag-amping nga dili mahutyag.)</i></p> |
| <b>Duration</b><br><i>(Gidugayon)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | <p>The gathering of data through the interview will last for 30 minutes to 1 hour.</p> <p><i>(Ang pagkuha sa datos pinaagi sa interview mokabat ngadto sa 30 minuto ngadto sa isa ka oras)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| <b>Risks and Discomforts</b><br><i>(Risiko ug Kahasol)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <p>The respondents will be protected from physical, social, or economic risks. In case the items in the survey instrument are too personal and make you feel uncomfortable, you may decline to answer any or all questions and may terminate your involvement at any time you choose.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante ginaprotektahan sa pisikal, sosyal o ekonomikanhong risiko. Kung pananglitan adunay mga pangutana nga personal ra kaayo o kung dili ka komportable, mamahimong dili ka motubag o mobalibad sa pagtubag sa bisan asa o sa tanang mga pangutana ug moatras sa pag-apil sa bisan unsang panahon nga imong gusto.)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                              |
| <b>Benefits</b><br><i>(Kaayohan)</i>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | <p>This study will enable you to shed light and provide understanding about the lived experiences of former incarcerated individuals, particularly their challenges and coping mechanisms during reintegration into society. Thus, your responses shall be highly valued as they are deemed important in the field of Criminology and in promoting effective rehabilitation programs.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |



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MU-REB-010/03 March 2022

|                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participants<br>(Pagpili sa mga Partisipant)              | <p>participants must be former incarcerated individuals who have already been released and are currently reintegrated into the community. They should have served their sentence for at least six months and be willing to share their lived experiences regarding their life during incarceration and after their release.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante niini nga pagtuon mao ang mga indibidwal nga naga-angkon sa mosunod: Kinahanglan nga sila mga kanhi napireso nga nakahuman na sa ilang silot ug karon anaa na sa proseso sa paghalik sa katilingban. Kinahanglan usab nga sila nakapuyo sa prisohan sulod sa labing menos unom ka bulan ug andam nga ipaambit ang ilang mga kasinatian samtang sila napireso ug pagkahuman sa ilang paggawas.)</i></p>                                                        |
| Voluntary Participation<br>(Boluntaryo nga Partisipasyon) | <p>Your participation has to be voluntary and will not affect your situation or status in any way, including your relationship with the researcher. You are free to decide if you will take part or not. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions that you do not prefer to answer.</p> <p><i>(Boluntaryo ang imong pag-apil ug kini dili makaapekto sa imong sitwasyon o estado apil na imong relasyon sa nagtuon. Gawasnon ka nga modesisyon kung kung moapil ka niini nga pagtoon o dili. Kung mo-desisyon ka nga moapil, gawasnon ka nga dili motubag sa bisan asa nga pangutana nga dili nimo gusto nga tubagon.)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                              |
| Procedure<br>(Pamaagi)                                    | <p>The participants will be given ample time when to undertake the interview. The interviews will be undertaken once or several times when necessary. The researcher will transcribe the interviews to be used for the analysis of the data. The information and data provided by you as a participant will be utilized for this study alone and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante pagahatagan og igong panahon sa pag-apil sa interview. Ang interview pwedeng himoon kausa nga higayon o sa makadaghan depende sa panginanghalanon. Isulat sa nagtuon ang interviews para sa pag-analisa sa datos. Ang mga impormasyon ug datos nga nakuha gikan kanimo isip ka partisipante gamiton lamang niining research og hatagan og tumang pag-amping nga dili mabutyag.)</i></p> |
| Duration<br>(Gidugayon)                                   | <p>The gathering of data through the interview will last for 30 minutes to 1 hour.</p> <p><i>(Ang pagkuha sa datos pinaagi sa interview mokabat ngadto sa 30 minuto ngadto sa isa ka oras)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Risks and Discomforts<br>(Risiko ug Kahasol)              | <p>The respondents will be protected from physical, social, or economic risks. In case the items in the survey instrument are too personal and make you feel uncomfortable, you may decline to answer any or all questions and may terminate your involvement at any time you choose.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante ginaprotektahan sa pisikal, sosyal o ekonomikanhong risiko. Kung pananglitan adunay mga pangutana nga personal ra kaayo o kung dili ka komportable, mamahimong dili ka motubag o mobalibad sa pagtubag sa bisan asa o sa tanang mga pangutana ug moatras sa pag-apil sa bisan unsang panahon nga imong gusto.)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Benefits<br>(Kaayohan)                                    | <p>This study will enable you to shed light and provide understanding about the lived experiences of former incarcerated individuals, particularly their challenges and coping mechanisms during reintegration into society. Thus, your responses shall be highly valued as they are deemed important in the field of Criminology and in promoting effective rehabilitation programs.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |



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MU-REB-010/03 March 2022

|                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|-----------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participants<br>(Paggpili sa mga Partisipante)            | <p>participants must be former incarcerated individuals who have already been released and are currently reintegrated into the community. They should have served their sentence for at least six months and be willing to share their lived experiences regarding their life during incarceration and after their release.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante niini nga pagtuon mao ang mga indibidwal nga naga-angkon sa mosunod: Kinahanglan nga sila mga kanhi napireso nga nakahuman na sa ilang silot ug karon anaa na sa proseso sa pagbalik sa katilingban. Kinahanglan usab nga sila nakapuyo sa prisohan sulod sa labing menos unom ka bulan ug andam nga ipaambit ang ilang mga kasinatian samtang sila napireso ug pagkahuman sa ilang paggawas.)</i></p>                                                        |
| Voluntary Participation<br>(Boluntaryo nga Partisipasyon) | <p>Your participation has to be voluntary and will not affect your situation or status in any way, including your relationship with the researcher. You are free to decide if you will take part or not. If you decide to participate, you are free not to answer any questions that you do not prefer to answer.</p> <p><i>(Boluntaryo ang imong pag-apil ug kini dili makaapekto sa imong sitwasyon o estado apil na imong relasyon sa nagtuon. Gawasnon ka nga modesisyon kung kung moapil ka niini nga pagtoon o dili. Kung mo-desisyon ka nga moapil, gawasnon ka nga dili motubag sa bisan asa nga pangutana nga dili nimo gusto nga tubagon.)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                              |
| Procedure<br>(Pamaagi)                                    | <p>The participants will be given ample time when to undertake the interview. The interviews will be undertaken once or several times when necessary. The researcher will transcribe the interviews to be used for the analysis of the data. The information and data provided by you as a participant will be utilized for this study alone and will be treated with the utmost confidentiality.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante pagahatagan og igong panahon sa pag-apil sa interview. Ang interview pwedeng himoon kausa nga higayon o sa makadaghan depende sa panginanghalanon. Isulat sa nagtuon ang interviews para sa pag-analisa sa datos. Ang mga impormasyon ug datos nga nakuha gikan kanimo isip ka partisipante gamiton lamang niining research og hatagan og tumang pag-amping nga dili mabutyag.)</i></p> |
| Duration<br>(Gidugayon)                                   | <p>The gathering of data through the interview will last for 30 minutes to 1 hour.</p> <p><i>(Ang pagkuha sa datos pinaagi sa interview mokabat ngadto sa 30 minuto ngadto sa isa ka oras)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        |
| Risks and Discomforts<br>(Risiko ug Kahasol)              | <p>The respondents will be protected from physical, social, or economic risks. In case the items in the survey instrument are too personal and make you feel uncomfortable, you may decline to answer any or all questions and may terminate your involvement at any time you choose.</p> <p><i>(Ang mga partisipante ginaprotektahan sa pisikal, sosyal o ekonomikanhong risiko. Kung pananglitan adunay mga pangutana nga personal ra kaayo o kung dili ka komportable, mamahimong dili ka motubag o mobalibad sa pagtubag sa bisan asa o sa tanang mga pangutana ug moatras sa pag-apil sa bisan unsang panahon nga imong gusto.)</i></p>                                                                                                                                                                              |
| Benefits<br>(Kaayohan)                                    | <p>This study will enable you to shed light and provide understanding about the lived experiences of former incarcerated individuals, particularly their challenges and coping mechanisms during reintegration into society. Thus, your responses shall be highly valued as they are deemed important in the field of Criminology and in promoting effective rehabilitation programs.</p>                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |



# Misamis University

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MU-REB-010/03 March 2022

e-mail ad: [gadffreyaligo@gmail.com](mailto:gadffreyaligo@gmail.com)

### STATEMENT BY THE RESEARCHER (PAGPADAYAG SA NAGTUON)

I will read the Information sheet to the potential participant. With the best of my ability, I make sure that the participant will understand the interview questions and that possible follow-up interviews may be undertaken.

*(Akong pagabasahon ang mga nasulat niining Information Sheet ngadto sa potensyal nga partisipante. Kutob sa akong mahimo siguroon nako nga masabtan sa partisipante ang mga pangutana sa interview ug ang possible nga follow-up nga interviews.)*

I can assure that the participant will be given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions raised will be answered fully. I can likewise assure that the participant will not be coerced into giving consent that must be free and voluntary.

*(Gisiguro ko nga ang partisipante mahatagan og panahon sa pagpangutana kabahin niining pagtuon og ang tanang pangutana nga iyang gihatag matubag sa hingpit. Siguroon ko usab ang maong partisipante dili mapugos sa paghatag sa pagtugot nga kinahanglan nga gawasnong og boluntaryo.)*

A copy of this Informed Consent Form will be provided to the participant.

*(Ang kopya sa niining Informed Consent Form ihatag ngadto sa respondent.)*

Print Name of Researcher (Ngalan sa Nagtuon): GADFFREY ALIGO, EJ LAURENCE PAEZ, ANGEL MHAEL GALLETO, MARIEL BOLITO



MU-REB-010/03 March 2022

## PART II. CERTIFICATE OF CONSENT

This research entitled "Lived Experiences of Former Incarcerated Individuals: A Phenomenological Study" by Gadffrey B. Aligo, Angel Mhae B. Galleto, EJ Laurence Paez, and Mariel Bolito aims to gather in-depth information and data regarding the lived experiences of individuals who were previously incarcerated. The purpose of the study has been clearly explained to me, including my role as a participant. Since I am a former incarcerated individual with personal experiences relevant to the focus of this research, I have been selected as one of the participants.

*(Kini nga pagtuon gitituloan, "Lived Experiences of Former Incarcerated Individuals: A Phenomenological Study" nga gihimo nila Gadffrey B. Aligo, Angel Mhae B. Galleto, EJ Laurence Paez, ug Mariel Bolito nagtumong sa pagkuha og lawom nga impormasyon ug datos mahitungod sa mga kasinatian sa mga indibidwal nga kaniadto nabilanggo. Ang katuyoan sa maong pagtuon klaro nga gipatin-aw kanako, lakip na ang akong papel isip usa ka partisipante. Tungod kay ako usa ka kanhing nabilanggo nga adunay personal nga mga kasinatian nga may kalabutan sa tumong sa panukiduki, gipili ako isip usa sa mga partisipante.)*

I have read the foregoing Informed Consent Form, or it has been read to me. I had the opportunity to ask questions, which were subsequently answered fully. I consent voluntarily to be a participant of this study.

*(Akong nabasa ang nauna nga Informed Consent Form, o gibasa kini kanako. Natagaan ako og higayon nga makapangutana nga natubag sa hingpit. Ako mosugot nga boluntaryo nga mahimong partisipante sa niining pagtuon.)*

Print Name of Participant (Ngalan sa Partisipante):

Signature of Participant (Pirma sa Partisipante):

Date: [MM/DD/YYYY] **October 10, 2025**

If Illiterate (Kung dili makasulat ug makabasa)

If the respondent is illiterate, a witness who is literate will sign. The respondent will choose him/ her and who is without connection with the researcher or the research group to attest this undertaking. The respondent will affix his thumb print.

*[Kung ang participant kay dili makabasa o makasulat, mopirma ang usa ka makabasa ug makasulat nga testigo. Ang respondent ang mopili kaniya nga walay koneksyon sa nagtuon o sa iyang grupo para mopamatuod sa gimbuhaton. Ang respondent mobutang sa iyang tamlà (thumb print)].*

Name of the Witness  
(Ngalan ug Firma sa Testigo)



## APPENDIX F

### Parent's Consent

|                                                                                                                                                                           |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <br><b>MISAMIS UNIVERSITY</b><br>Ozamiz City<br>Department of Student Affairs & Services |
| MU-DSAS-006/02 June 2023                                                                                                                                                  |

**PARENT'S CONSENT**

COLLEGE OF CEIMINOLOGIA  
Sponsoring Group/Organization

I am allowing my son/daughter/ward, ES LAURENCE PAEZ, to join  
the RESEARCH (activity) to be held on  
SEPTEMBER 2025 at MISAMIS UNIVERSITY under the supervision of  
MACKDY ORONG (Adviser/Faculty).

I understand that Misamis University exercises the necessary safety precautions in this activity.  
In consideration of the benefits to be derived from the above activity, I expressly waive any and all  
claims against the administration or any member of the faculty and staff of the Misamis University on  
account of any unforeseen accident or injury that my son/daughter/ward might incur in connection with  
the aforementioned activity.

|                                                                                                                                                       |                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| <div style="background-color: black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <u>ESTERLITA L. PAEZ</u><br>Signature over printed name of<br>Parent/Guardian | <u>09-01-25</u><br>Date |
| <div style="background-color: black; height: 20px; width: 100%;"></div> <u>ES LAURENCE PAEZ</u><br>Signature over printed name of<br>Student          | <u>09-01-25</u><br>Date |

*Important: This form shall be submitted to the DSAS Office at least two (2) days before the conduct of the activity.*

.....

SUBSCRIBED AND SWORN to before me, this 03 day of JAN 2026 at \_\_\_\_\_,  
Philippines, that the herein affiant personally came and appeared with his/her VALID ID, as evidence of  
his/her personal identity.

Doc. No. 252  
Page No. 03  
Book No. 03  
Series of 2026

**ATTY. SOPHIA BRIDE C. SANES, CPA**  
NOTARY PUBLIC  
Notarial Commission No. 2025-14  
valid until December 31, 2027  
Attorney's Roll No. 87343  
IBP No. INV 558757 for 2026  
PTR No. 6007767, 01/05/2026, Ozamiz City  
MCLE Compliance No. VIII-00253  
valid until April 14, 2028

Notary Public

## APPENDIX G

### DOCUMENTATION



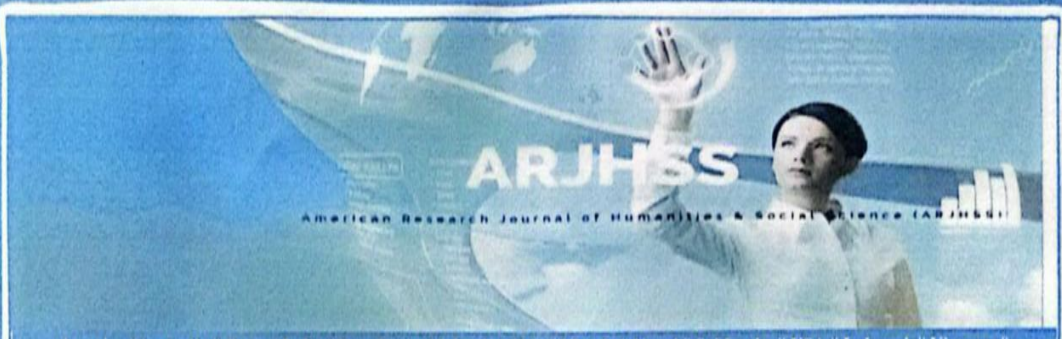
“We extend our sincere gratitude to our research participants for generously giving their time, cooperation, and consent during the interview process. Their willingness to share their experiences and insights greatly contributed to the depth and credibility of our study. We truly appreciate their support in the successful conduct of our research.”

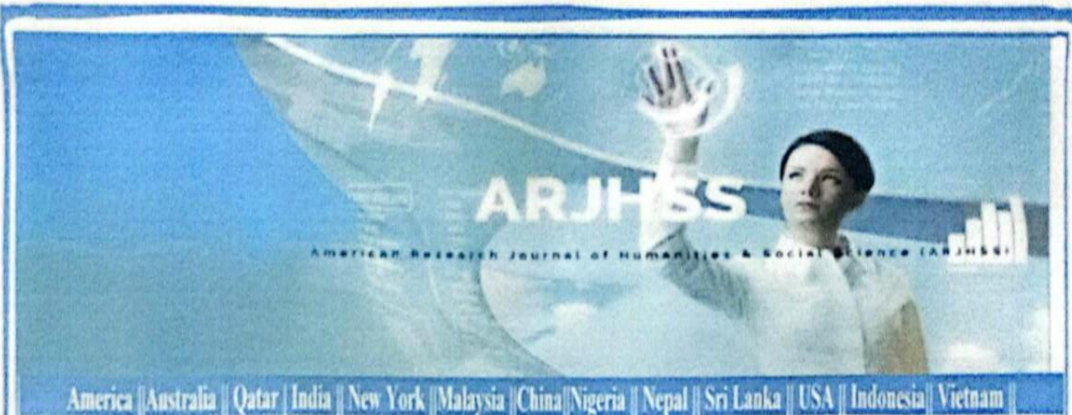


A courtesy visit with the Barangay captain of Lapasan, Clarin, in connection with our request for permission to conduct interviews in his barangay for our thesis study. We are grateful for his time, support, and willingness to assist in the advancement of academic research.

## APPENDIX H

### CERTIFICATE OF PUBLICATION

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                      |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------|
|                                                                                                                                              |                                                                      |
| America    Australia    Qatar    India    New York    Malaysia    China    Nigeria    Nepal    Sri Lanka    USA    Indonesia    Vietnam                                                                                        |                                                                      |
| <b>CERTIFICATE</b>                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                      |
| It is certifying that the paper entitled by " <b>Lived Experiences Of Former Incarcerated Individuals: A Phenomenological Study</b> " has been published in American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science (ARJHSS). |                                                                      |
| Your article has published with following details:                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                      |
| Manuscript Id                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | : AS81125                                                            |
| Author's Name                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | : <b>Gadffrey B. Aligo et al.</b>                                    |
| Journal Name                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | : American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science (ARJHSS). |
| Journal URL                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | : <u><a href="http://www.arjhss.com">www.arjhss.com</a></u>          |
| Review Type                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | : Peer Reviewed                                                      |
| Indexing                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | : Yes                                                                |
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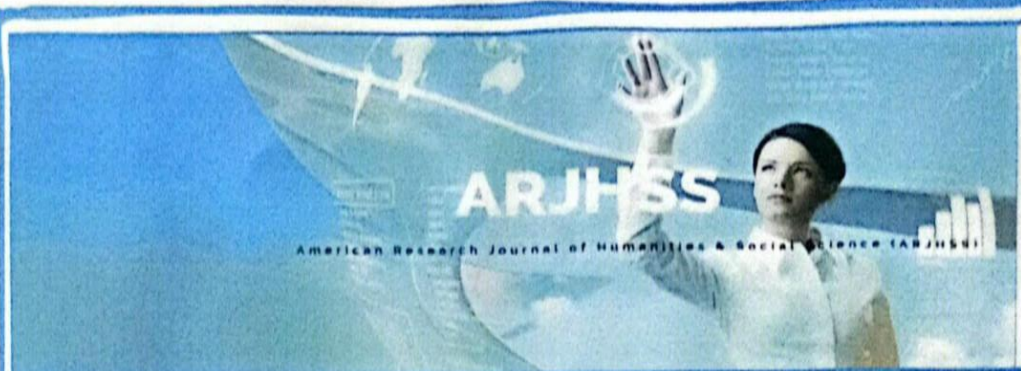
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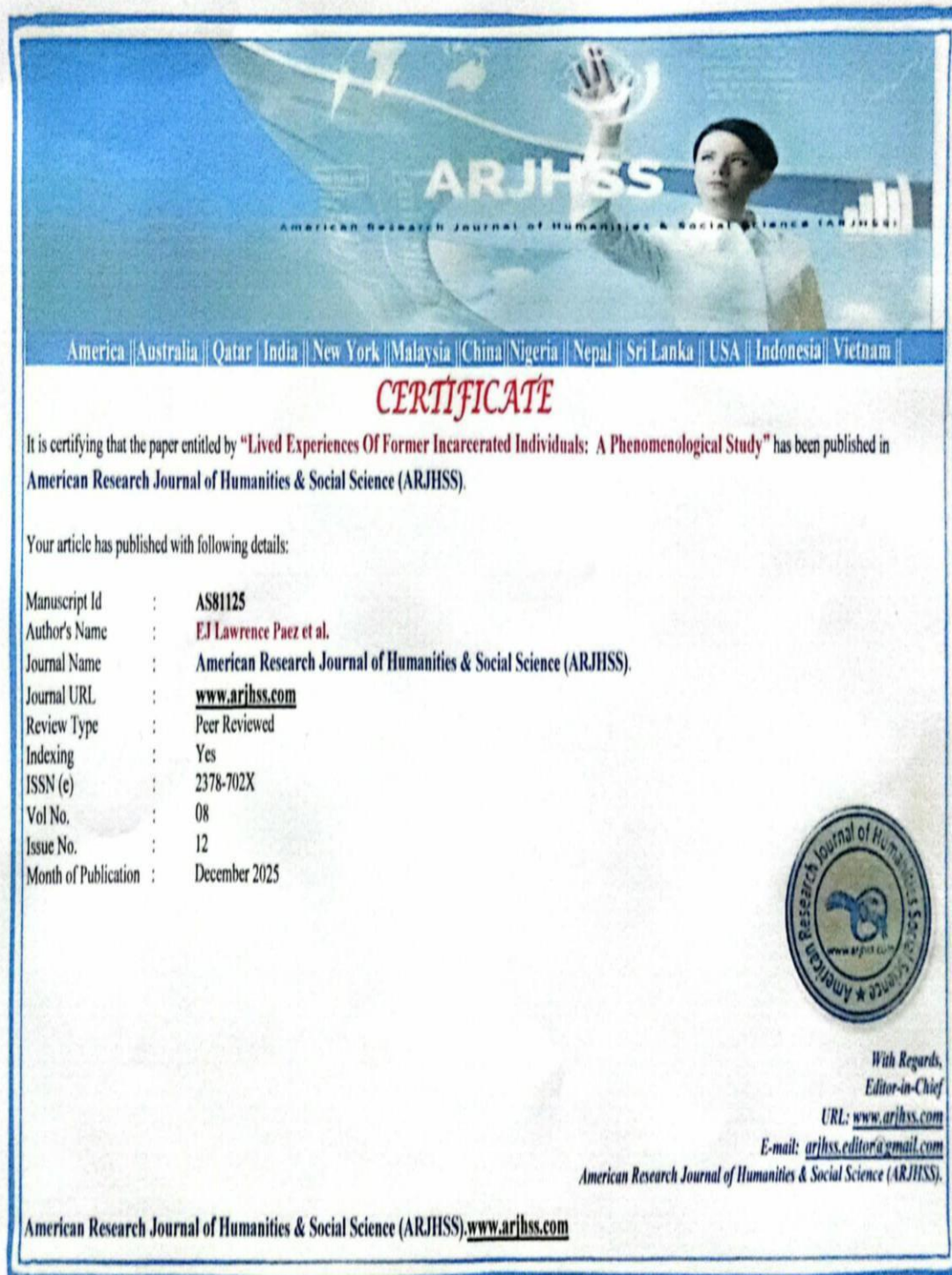
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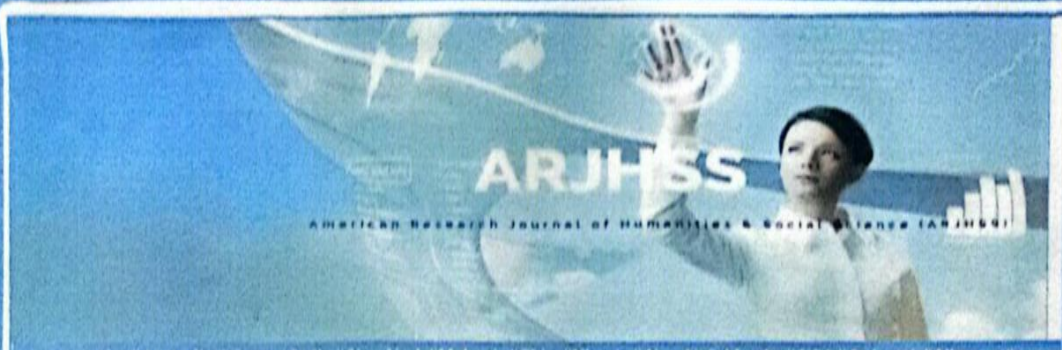
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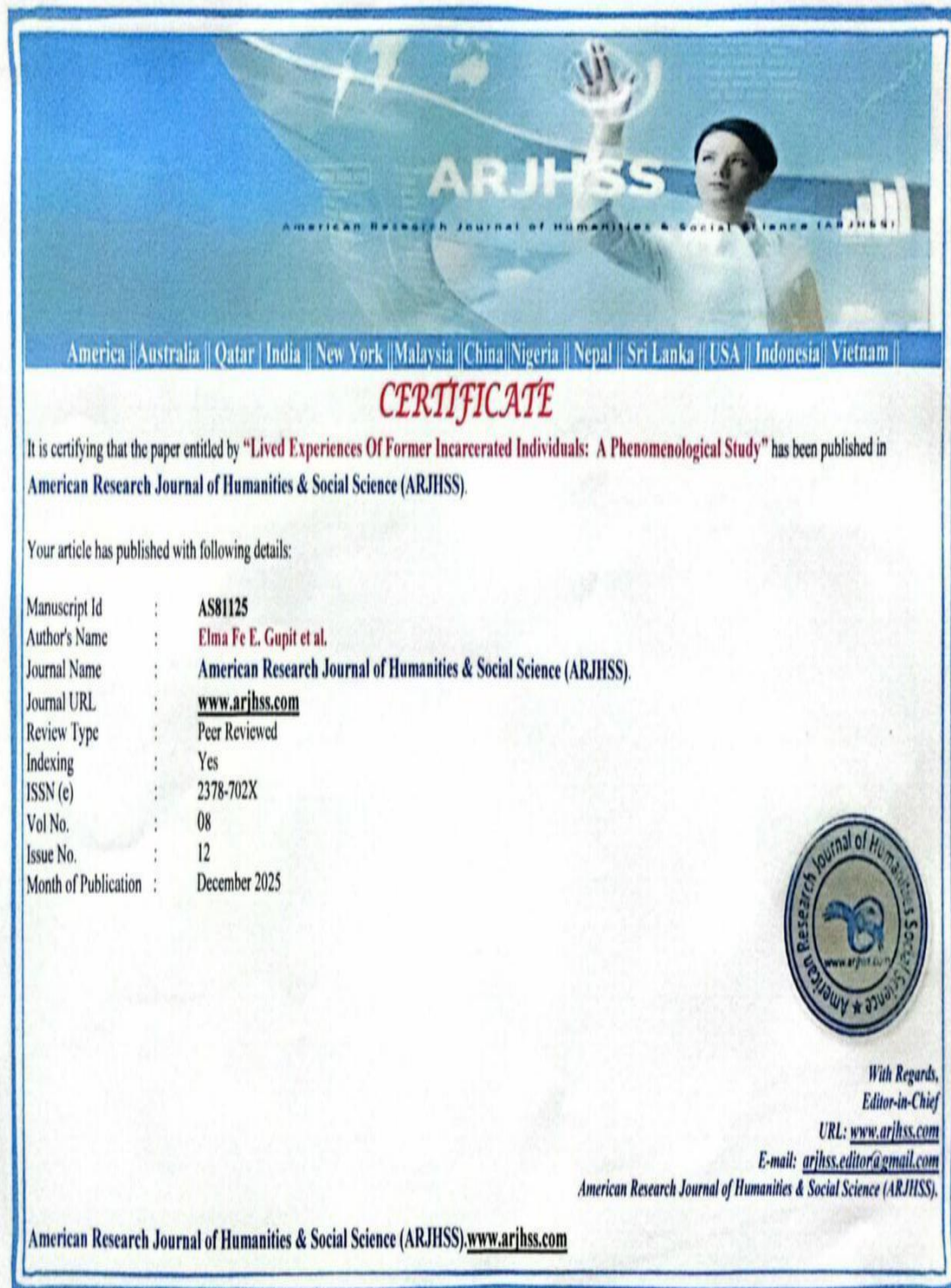
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## APPENDIX I

### TURN IT TEST RESULT



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- Narrative Report Writing English Proficiency
- Theoretical driving course thru LTO Ozamiz at MU Campus
- Pre Deployment Training-ROTC Instructions ctw ROTC Administration Training CL 01-2025
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### **SEMINAR/TRAINING ATTENDED**

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- Narrative Report Writing English Proficiency
- Theoretical driving course thru LTO Ozamiz at MU Campus