

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

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### **ABSTRACT**

*Ex-offenders are deemed for lifetime conviction as they are subjected to neglect and restrictions since most perspicacity stigmatizes individual who were sent to prison for constant deviance. The overall intent of this case study was to explore how ex-offenders can live life after incarceration while they grapple difficulties outside such as alienating their capability to live anew. Their perceptions on the encountered challenges and vantage on the overcoming strategies they generated themselves after their release; and, reflective insights, were burrowed. Utilizing interview guide questions to instrument the in-depth or one-on-one interview of the five participants agreed from the initial search through purposive sampling, open-ended responses were obtained and carried through thematic analysis. From the excerpts of the candid data, it is found that people are pertinent for ex-offenders on living their lives after release that either trigger problems or motivates constructive-drive in overcoming. In conclusion, ex-offenders are concerned on the objective approach for challenges that impact their immediate family, risk their lives, and compels recidivism requiring them to decide adhering with conventional activities and detach from friends. Refusal to social association is their subjective approach to criticisms and stigma in the society, hence became passive on receiving comfort and acceptance assimilated by immediate family and by the liberty they are exercising— outside the prison.*

**KEYWORDS:** Challenges, ex-offenders, objective approach, reoffending, strategies.

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Society fears incidence of crime that the willingness to distance with the deemed criminal is necessary for them to feel safe. A single mistake, however, is instead an issue to stigmatize an offender criminal for life. It is hostility beyond wanting oneself to be safe and triggers ex-offenders to recidivism at the same time. As stipulated by Western (2018), ex-convicts are victims of lifetime violence: from being incarcerated and after being released from prison; of racial inequality, unemployment, difficulty to rejoin social cycle, mental illness, and chronic pain.

This is a global concern in which ex-offenders are disregarded of their need to address the heavy loads of challenges they are carrying because rehabilitation was redefined by stigmatization to punishment. Confinement, instead of comprehensive rehabilitation of those who are given a new chance of life, became the prominent issue of abuse, worst violations, superiority, and inferiority

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(Muthee, 2020; Papaioannou & Anagnou, 2019). Consequently, social reintegration is difficult because they are perceived as traumatized individuals who at any time will enforce violence.

Besin-Mengla (2020) stated that most ex-convicts in Cameroon became recidivists because of their inability to reintegrate into society. It is found that ex-convicts' rejection causes them to consume vices and commit crimes leading to re-imprisonment. As Chikadzi (2017) mentioned, ex-convicts face myriad challenges that could drive their recidivism. Their adjustment to broken family and community, unemployment, and after-care services are among the factors that struggle them, so the crime-fighting strategy is an essential component for an offender to reintegrate. It is said that human interaction improves ethical decision-making, so with ethical-decision making weakens when social disconnection occurs (Macdonald, 2020).

According to Tan et al. (2016), stigmatization was often pointed to by criminals as a problem and was established as a significant obstacle to reintegration. Furthermore, respondents who regarded criminals as unwilling to improve, as well as those who felt more morally outraged by the crimes they had committed, demonstrated a greater preference for social distance. Criminals are considered lifetime criminals as it is an expected stigma of the convicts (Moore et al., 2016). They can internalize those stigmas and absorb heavily, which found riskier for mental health and development to anti-social behavior and avoidance to the environment (Moore & Tangney, 2017; Moore et al., 2018; Phillips, 2016).

Ex-offenders are individuals that are even at the risk of many determinants. Their conviction was even more threatening as it has enforced the feeling of being strained to violence and other incarceration difficulties such as abuse that later on can impact their ethical decision-making. The abhorrent conviction of young individuals, particularly those whose life after prison cannot reintegrate into society, will handicap them for unemployment that drives them survives differently. Maruna (2020) reported that over 2 million adults were placed under correctional supervision in the United States. In addition, these people are incarcerated and stigmatized because of their criminal record, aside from the problems that lead to re-offending.

In the Philippines, correctional establishments are not even capable of a massive population, so the increase of prisoners and recidivism rates. Aside from some failure to justice that is supposed to protect the innocence from conviction, the deemed criminals have difficulties to seizing survival. Moreover, the local problem includes stigmatization that significantly affects ex-offenders toward perceiving life. Perchance, as they barely maintain intimate relationships with their immediate family while being incarcerated, will become a gaping wound of the relationship that causes much arousal of problems. Leaving prison, thus, is also reminding them that their families are already broken, that no homes are willing to receive them, and that their employment capabilities do not matter at all.

Pansag (2016) suggested that an ex-convict observer's coping strategy provide him/her with an ability to live more. Further, (De Guzman et al., 2020) research posited the positive effects of the prisons' negative climate, specifically to Filipino elders' prisoners. Besides, prison experiences could be either a help or harm to them in a way that in order to cope with the prison environment, the participant chose to become subjective, to bear the consequences of their actions, to remain busy and to remain active in religious activities (Flores-Barolo & Vicente, 2019).

Ex-offenders are deemed for lifetime conviction as they are subjected to neglect and restrictions since most perspicacity stigmatizes individual who were sent to prison for constant deviance. This emphasizes that they are expected for social disconnection and constraint as already a punishment even after their conviction. It is surely difficult to combat all these factors, hence, there are ex-offenders who have continued to live their life, regain self-esteem, establish healthy personalities, and interact along with family, friends, and other people.

No research has delved on how the ex-offenders surpass the living challenges outside the bars with the anticipated restrictions provided by the law and as stigmatization against them exists. Turning the camera around is recognizing the positive part while lensing with a whole complex fact. Same as the no panacea to identifying which among which influences the person to commit the crime, is the no research and interest on how ex-offenders overcome the challenges.

It has only been found that in Manila, Philippines, the crime is associated to some demographic covariates such as density, percentage, young males, education, marriage, and immigration (Mojica et al., 2020). Additionally, Jones & Narag (2019) stated that recently, the Philippines has overtaken the Haiti's prison which has operated over a capacity of 80-100 prisoner each cell. The society is maybe concern with eliminating deviance and criminal behaviors, however, must also be aware of how these individuals are embarking life while being affected by crime associated factors. The society has been unnoticeably enforcing on the act through stigmatizing them as criminals for life. It signifies urgency on emphasizing that ex-offenders are no different from the rest of the population who made choices as responses on what they need. This study must become an eye opener for society to realize that beside offenses, are choices to live a new life which a society could greatly impart with. Helping ex-offenders, however, is relevant even more to the decrease of recidivism, and so implicate social harmony and inclusion. This intensifies that this study is indeed necessary which reinforces the exploration of ex-offenders in their accounts to living and challenges after their imprisonment. While everybody urges to define them as criminal for being abnormal from the societal normalcy, this study urges to understand the source of their strength while the post-incarceration is a challenge. Ex-offenders in this study are individuals who are living life anew. These are any individual who has gone from prison, either convicted by the court or sent to jail for several days, and were freed.

## **Objectives of the Study**

The study's main objective was to explore the chronicles on how ex-offenders surpass the living challenges outside the bars when they are expected to face post-incarceration that includes stigma, a vital factor compelling recidivism. This study delved into the following queries: (1) What are the challenges of ex-offenders in living their life outside the bars? (2) What are the overcoming strategies ex-offenders develop in surpassing the living challenges outside the bars? (3) What are their reflective insights to encourage other ex-offenders or even the prisoners to live their life anew?

## **Materials and Methods**

This qualitative study utilized the Commonwealth Association for Public Administration and Management ([CAPAM], 2010) method that appropriately proceeds to the case study approach which suits the study's attempt in exploring how ex-offenders surpass challenges as they continue living after released from prison. According to Taylor et al. (2015), qualitative study is a sense of spoken words and behavior which is produced descriptively. Additionally, a case study is a suitable approach as it allows in-depth, multi-faceted explorations of complex issues in their real-life settings (Crowe et al., 2011). Purposively selecting participants who fits the inclusion criteria, five participants has guaranteed their voluntary participation. To instrument the in-depth or one-on-one interview, open-ended questions were responded and were audio-recorded complemented with field notes. Unstructured instrument allowed the researcher to correspond with probing questions to clarify questions, also ensure that objectives were cope.

## **Data Collection**

Before the conduct of the study, the research has been approved by Technical Committee. Instruments were validated specifically by psychometrician who were expert to sensitive issues involving human factors. Later, the study was provided with (REC) Research Ethics Committee approval and was carried directly to procedures.

### ***Contacting Potential Respondents***

Six target participants fit the inclusion criteria from the initial in-depth interview within the community being administered face-to-face. They were selected following the criterion that referred participants who were incarcerated in prison either correctional facilities or detention centers even for few days, and were currently freed for liberty after being released in prison. Their immediate family were contacted for primary data profiling to assure their suitability, then were personally asked for confirmation to partake through in-depth interview. Only those who agreed to the terms implied in the Informed Consent participated in the study. They were provided with opportunity to specify the time allotted of their availability before the conduct.

### ***Administer the Research***

Collection of data were assessed through one-on-one and in-depth interview using unstructured questionnaire validated. This was recorded through audio-recording materials and complemented with field notes. They were asked for approval for the recording and with privacy and confidentiality kept at extensive protection.

## **Data Analysis**

Wa-Mbaleka (2018) data analysis model was used to thematic analysis the study. The provided 10 steps to QLR (Quality of Life Research) were followed thoroughly as it produces for in-depth analysis on the line-by-line coding and analysis required.

## **Results and Discussions**

The findings are aligned to the social control theory of Travis Hirschi that explains societal bonds as a diverting force of each individual from committing a crime, as cited by Costello & Laub (2020). These bonds emphasize an individual's attachment to parents and others and commitment to conventional goals, activities, and law. As highlighted, the theory focuses on the prevention strategy through immediate supportive family and socialize and engage in different conventional activities.

The congruence refers to the findings explaining the relevance of immediate family to ex-offender. Hence, it does not suit overly to the term society as the finding specified immediate family only, while society/friends as coercion to commission or reoffend. Findings explain that the theory applies to an individual, but specifically ex-offender, limiting to the primary cycle, not society as a whole. The difference between the result and the theory is that ex-offenders live anew, which refers to behavior adhering to conventional activities, not according to society, but to their need essential for their immediate family.

The findings show that people are pertinent to ex-offenders proceeding to their new lives after release. Ex-offenders are affected by either society or immediate family differently, to which their approaches also differ in accordance. People surrounding the ex-offender could be either the challenges inducer or the coping motivator.

Research Question 1 investigated the challenges of the ex-offender as they continue living their lives after being released from prison. The extracts entail numbers of challenges implying that ex-offenders are deluged to post incarceration —imprisonment— caused by the society on their return.

Ex-offenders' challenges are two distinctive determinants to which the study identified as forces — incontrollable challenges that they would view as typical difficulties and struggles that constrain them even more. Furthermore, factors-driven — challenges found viable for ex-offenders precipitate constructive drive by the need to live their life in a new beginning. Two influences found that are revealed forces for ex-offender to bear with the challenges subjectively: internal forces— derivative from oneself; and external forces—derivative from immediate people (wife and family) and society that includes all the other people surrounding the ex-offender.

Losing the wife is an instance for ex-offender, which they assumed is bound to happen for a person imprisoned. This emphasizes that their assurance to remain married right after release is vague. Moreover, people's stigma of a former prisoner is another occurrence that ex-offender is subjective in dealing with. They consider this as a difficulty that they cannot prevent as people produce it. People's criticism and humiliation cannot be hampered regardless of choice to ignore from listening. Criminal labeling and suspecting are the occurrences under this difficulty. This clarifies that ex-offenders are tagged criminals and are easily accused because of their previous criminal offense/s.

On the other hand, factors-driven are not just influences that carry difficulties worsening the state of the ex-offenders, but also challenges that are considered beneficial and advantageous because they accompany factors of motivation just like daughter and family, safety, and the fear of recidivism. The difficulty of starting again is enforced by several reasons, including being penniless and having no capital, being a former prisoner who restricts ex-offenders from obtaining government and company employment, and failure to continue the peak of success. Risk on safety is a difficulty inflicted on ex-offenders that would drive them to protect themselves for self-defense that induces reoffending or social separation. Whereas, reoffending in return is caused by the search for capital, to save oneself from the threat or for self-defense, and is influenced by friends. These challenges are relevant to ex-offenders' strategies as enforced by the motivation to survive life outside the bars.

There is a relative relationship between external forces and factor-driven. The challenges found in both categories engage people in either the family and society. The majority of the challenges illustrate the impact of all people in augmenting or alleviating the problems. Observably, these challenges are the cause of internal forces felt by ex-offenders. They are ashamed to show oneself hinged by the worries and problems emanated from the thought of the society and people nearby and their perceptions of ex-offender as a former prisoner. On the other hand, absorption of stigma is a collection of criticisms and humiliation beforehand accepted by the ex-offenders as their reality. This is caused by ex-offenders' fear of showing themselves and is a reason to be ashamed even more, refuse integration to people, and get anxious about applying for jobs. Ex-offenders learned to absorb the stigma and believe that prison, as perceived by people outside, is the tomb of criminals engraved alive as they experienced lifetime suffering.

The findings show that ex-offenders' challenges are stimulated or influenced by people in the immediate cycle and society, which affect how they perceive themselves and how they worry about other challenges. These problems are forces and factors that might drive them to reoffend or commit a crime. This revealed that external forces are labeling the former prisoner as people who have died during imprisonment. This is due to reason of normalizing that these people receive rare opportunities to obtain a job; are subject to losing their wives or be separated; and are willing to commit crime again are indicative to handicapping them even more due to its impact to the mindset towards themselves, their family, and work field.

Research Question 2 investigated the strategies of ex-offender in surpassing the living challenges outside the bars. Their release is coalited with both the challenges and the few elements to relieve from worrying and difficulties. The findings show different approaches that ex-offender used to cast off the weight of the challenges.

Ex-offenders devised an element that reduces their assimilation to their worries and difficulties to start living after their release by soaking their attention and thought to the happiness they felt as they were freed from prison, and finally, together with their family. A necessary inductor that helps them is their family. The latter are welcoming, showing affection and acceptance, consistent communication with significant and primary people, and relationships with family and children that do not change because of separation. They are passive on job opportunities offered to them. They are contented on becoming the recipient of the available job nearby to start. They took the opportunity and became contented with what they can accomplish with the job. This clarifies that aside from restrictions, ex-offenders limit their capabilities to the nearest opportunity. They became content with the small things they can accomplish in simple living. Focusing on happiness felt and job offered as an opportunity are passive approaches chosen by ex-offender. After the chaos and difficulties inside the prison, their passive approach to the little positive things that come into their lives outside became a more substantial element for them to attain contentment. The findings display that ex-offender has desired a life outside the bars despite difficulties rather than inside prison.

Further, ex-offenders are subjective on the incontrollable challenges outside the bars induced by worries and other people's perceptions and intentions. Their change is not dependent on their actions alone but God's purpose. Ex-offenders learned to surrender everything to God, clarifying that he is in control of the uncontrollable challenges. Ignorance and acceptance of their circumstances is the only way to divert attention from worrying about their problems and thinking about how people perceive them.

Hence, they are objective in living their lives in overcoming challenges that already impact their loved ones and their safety. A strategic way to make a living is to earn money to their extent regardless of the undesirable amount in heavy jobs to save money and begin a business to sustain their children's needs. Evidence of change is their means to respond with criminal labeling and avoid risking their lives by changing their lifestyle. While, avoiding troubles is their strategy to avoid arguments with people and aggravating conflict between people by less involvement in social gatherings and removing oneself from certain people. This strategy posits that ex-offenders tend to distance themselves from people to avoid interacting with society. They do not make friends as they conceive it as a strategy to obviate their behavior from emancipating and reaching the commission of a crime as influenced by friends.

The result revealed the significance of the immediate family's bond that diverts ex-offenders' attention from other people into their immediate people. As motivated and enforced by them, ex-offenders give importance to the meaning of living life anew as contributory for their family and as a way to prevent children and family from any form of risk impact. This explains

that with several challenges, ex-offenders' approaches are induced by the need to change behavior and bend lifestyle to prevent inflicting problems involving immediate people (girlfriend, children, parents, and family).

Research question 3 affirms that ex-offenders' reflective insights are pertaining to one's behavior and change. The findings show that ex-offenders choose to obtain peace by applying correctives to themselves in engaging with people, friends, and behavior other than putting attention to challenges that are already typical for them.

Ex-offender considers encouraging others to reduce involvement with other people by being selective with friends and consider their immediate family as their friends to avert getting swayed by any behavior that induces offense and conflicts. Here signifies strong argument that they had lost their confidence of safety and goodness while with their friends. Ex-offenders must have learned from their mistake and refuse to reoffend by honestly pursuing a change of oneself and without deception. Finally, they intend at prevention of any form of vices. The use of vices is the inducer to committing a crime, so they are encouraging ex-offenders, prisoners, and other people to never try it even once.

The findings revealed that the people they choose to surround them are influential for how they evolve themselves after their release. They encourage ex-offenders to surround themselves with selected people, engage in honest change, and not use vices as ex-offender's challenges are provoked by defying these.

## **Conclusion and Recommendations**

Ex-offenders' challenges are induced by internal forces, external forces, and factors-driven to which their approaches differ according to the relevance of these to be addressed. They are passive to typical challenges, and that is inflicted to one's mind by one's own. It is an approach that allows them to devise contentment towards the receipt of acceptance and relationship given by immediate family, and comfort on the life outside the bars regardless of the wage on a particular job available and offered, notwithstanding their state despite simple living. They are subjective on uncontrollable challenges induced by people in the society. It comes with their submission to God and religious activities that helps them divert attention and alleviate worrying about particular challenges. Their worries and people's perception of them are irrelevant since their freedom from prison dominates to be significant. They become objective to specific challenges that involve their family and life stake. They are concentrated on living anew regardless of the difficulties to repress, impacting this to their family, reoffending, and securing life safety.

In conclusion, ex-offenders are concerned about overcoming the challenges that impact their immediate family, risk their lives, and compels them to recidivism other than worrying about their difficulties as perceived by society. These challenges are unbearable than mere stigma and criticisms that they collected and absorbed. They are enforced and motivated to live their life anew through their children or family, parents and even newly found loved one's drive for them to change, and repress from the previous unconventional behaviors. Moreover, ex-offenders are not removed from society but instead refuse to reintegrate themselves into society for an intimate association, especially with friends for they are considered as a compelling factor for recidivism. Ex-offenders and their healthy interaction with their family and children nourish with an objective approach to choose to live their life in a new beginning.

This research focuses on ex-offenders who are incarcerated for a criminal offense. However, the result of the entire qualitative investigation is limited to the five participants in the Municipality of New Bataan. Further, this is limited to the crime committed in the Philippines. To

gather more substantial information about the raised concern in this study, it is recommended to have a mixed-method study to unravel and at the same time measure which among the challenges and overcoming strategies weight most that help ex-offenders to pursue living anew.

Furthermore, to accumulate more in-depth related data, it is recommended to conduct a long-term study to include observation, obtain information that is less expressed through the interview, and create an associative approach to the participants for them to be casual on responding. Lastly, most of the respondents were interested in sharing their crime commission experiences; further research must include unraveling those commissions to the extent of their interest in sharing to explain further the weight of how they perceive their commission to their coping. Coping might differ under their motif and intention of commission following guilt.

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