

Lived Experiences in Treatment Programs: Probationers in Focus

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DOI: <https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2025.90400463>

Received: 05 May 2025; Accepted: 10 May 2025; Published: 22 May 2025

ABSTRACT

The reintegration of probationers into society remains a critical component of the criminal justice system. Treatment programs under probation are designed not only to prevent recidivism but also to support the personal and social rehabilitation of individuals who have been granted a second chance. This study explored the experiences of probationers participating in treatment programs. It aimed to understand how probationers perceive these programs, their impact on rehabilitation and reintegration, the challenges encountered during the probationary period, and their recommendations for improving program effectiveness. This study utilized a qualitative phenomenological approach; data were gathered from 13 probationers selected through purposive sampling. Findings reveal that probationers view the program as a pathway to personal growth and healing, and recognize probation officers as key drivers of rehabilitation and support. Participants described the program's impact on their internal development, as well as their spiritual and social reconnection. However, they also face psychosocial and economic challenges, along with difficulties balancing family responsibilities and probation schedules. To improve the program, probationers recommend enhancing livelihood and educational opportunities, maintaining consistent support systems, and strengthening personal development initiatives. The study concludes that treatment programs under probation significantly contribute to the personal, social, and spiritual rehabilitation of probationers.

Keywords: criminal justice, probationers, rehabilitation, phenomenology, thematic analysis, reintegration, Philippines

SDG Indicator: #16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions)

INTRODUCTION

The primary goal of the correction pillar, either institutional or non-institutional, is to rehabilitate the offenders. Modern rehabilitation programs, like as those offered by the Philippine Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), focus on transformative programs to help PDLs reintegrate into society (Amancio, 2024). Nonetheless, it is undeniable that the rehabilitation process for our Persons Deprived of Liberty, particularly the probationers, encountered many challenges. The study by Narag (2024) emphasizes the inadequacies within the Philippine parole and probation system, stating that probation officers often have overwhelming caseloads and not enough resources, hindering effective supervision and rehabilitation initiatives. A recent study found that rule enforcement and risk management often prioritize personal growth in probation systems. Together with budget constraints, this approach prevents successful reintegration and rehabilitation (Khan, 2023). In the same way, Pleggenkühle and Summers (2024) say that organizational problems and limited time may make intensive supervision programs with services less useful in the long run, even if they can help with health and possible withdrawal.

The importance of this study is to better understand probationers' experiences in Davao City and how treatment programs can help them cope and change for the better. This study addresses how probation, rather than jail time, can assist someone in reintegrating into society in a more cost-effective and community-based manner, allowing them to improve and reduce their chances of breaking the law again (Del Rosario and Canilang, 2024). It also emphasizes the importance of helping former criminals rebuild family ties and reintegrate into society, as family acceptance and communication are critical components of successful rehabilitation (Malig-

on et al., 2023). The findings can help enhance programs and guide people who interact with probationers to make rehabilitation more effective.

According to a prior study titled "Community Involvement in the Rehabilitation and Treatment of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL): A Case Study of the Iriga District Jail, Philippines", the community plays an important role in helping offenders change and reintegrate into society. It is highlighted by Leonor (2023) that programs such as education, moral and spiritual formation, health services, and livelihood training, when supported by the community, greatly enhance rehabilitation outcomes. Conversely, the lack of resources, insufficient community support, and limited facilities remain major obstacles to successful reintegration.

Additional study by Chan (2021) assessed the Therapeutic Community Modality Program in the Parole and Probation Administration Office in Iligan City. The study found the program effective in promoting behavioral, emotional, vocational, and spiritual growth among parolees and probationers. It showed that rehabilitation activities positively influenced participants' mindset and life direction. This supports the current study's implication that holistic, structured, and continuous support is vital to successful rehabilitation and reintegration.

Probation is based on the fact that community-based rehabilitation is more successfully accomplished than jail-based rehabilitation. Studies reveal that community-based sanctions such as probation allow people to maintain social ties, employment, and access to rehabilitative resources, thereby lowering their recidivism rates compared to incarceration (Yukhnenko et al., 2023).

However, challenges remain, as Gutierrez (2020) emphasized that traditional criminal justice practices often lead to persistent recidivism. His study highlighted how incarceration negatively affects reintegration and how the perspectives of probationers are frequently disregarded in decision-making processes. This concern is echoed by Rizer et al. (2023), who criticized the overuse of probation as a sanction, noting that many systems focus excessively on monitoring rather than rehabilitation.

Contemporary probation is increasingly shaped by a "logic of risk," a framework that has significantly influenced and transformed modern penal practices (Billinger, 2019). Still, probation offers valuable alternatives. In the study of Ruhland (2018), it recognized its cost-effectiveness and its role in keeping individuals within their communities, benefits that align with global efforts to reduce mass incarceration. Complementing this, Burke et al. (2023) advocate for reimagining probation to include personal, social, and moral rehabilitation, shifting the focus from mere compliance to deeper, long-term behavioral change.

Earning the trust of clients enables probation officers to become effective advocates, fostering deeper engagement in the rehabilitation process (Fernando, 2021). Additionally, community support plays a crucial role in promoting successful reintegration. To enhance public understanding and reduce stigma, initiatives such as community symposiums have been recommended to raise awareness and encourage greater acceptance of probationers as they return to society (Malig-on et al., 2023).

The psychological transformation of probationers can be understood through Maslow's (1943) theory of self-actualization, which highlights the pursuit of personal growth and fulfillment. In line with this, fostering moral reasoning is seen as essential in promoting prosocial behavior, a fundamental element of successful reintegration (Miranda-Rodríguez et al., 2023). This aligns with Shlafer et al. (2023), who found that improved family communication is instrumental in the emotional healing and sustained change among probationers. Additionally, Jang and Johnson (2023) underscored the role of religious engagement in helping offenders find purpose and reshape their identities.

Emotions such as guilt, shame, and remorse also play a significant role. Proeve (2023) emphasized how these internal feelings can impact rehabilitation and behavioral change. Yet, external barriers persist, Martí (2023) showed how the stigma of a criminal record hinders employment opportunities, despite equivalent skills and qualifications. This issue is further emphasized by Bersamina and Tolio (2022), who found that many probationers in Ilocos Sur face economic instability due to difficulties securing work and income.

The importance of mutual support within therapeutic communities is emphasized as individuals help one another develop self-confidence and prepare for reintegration, reinforcing the value of community-based treatment and peer support (Lafadchan, 2018).

Globally, similar practices reinforce these insights into effective rehabilitation and reintegration. Japan's integrated approach to community-based rehabilitation, overseen by a single agency and supported by extensive volunteer participation, particularly from organizations such as the Hogoshi and Cooperative Employers, demonstrates the value of community involvement in the process (Someda, 2022).

Restorative justice has also gained prominence for its humanistic approach, emphasizing healing and accountability. Its effectiveness in reducing recidivism and promoting the well-being of both offenders and victims has been widely acknowledged (Townsend, 2023). In contrast, the Nigerian context reveals challenges stemming from an overreliance on imprisonment, which has led to overcrowded prisons and increased health risks due to the lack of restorative alternatives (Ani, 2023).

Other international models offer valuable lessons. In India, probation is a widely accepted alternative to incarceration, helping offenders remain integrated into society (Jodha, 2023). In the United States, probation functions as a bridge between welfare services and penal control, offering support while minimizing dependence on incarceration (Piehowski & Phelps, 2022).

Despite extensive global research showing probation's effectiveness over incarceration (Petrich et al., 2021; Yukhnenko et al., 2023), gaps remain in local, empirical studies on how these outcomes unfold within the Philippine probation system. Most existing research prioritizes quantitative data, overlooking probationers' lived experiences. There is a need for qualitative studies to explore their needs, challenges, and progress. Additionally, the role of community-based support systems like Volunteer Probation Aides (VPAs) and the Probation Officer remains underexplored. This highlights the need for context-specific research focused on probationers' actual experiences to evaluate the effectiveness and impact of current rehabilitation programs.

The primary aim of this research is to understand the lived experiences of probationers who are receiving community-based treatment. To describe the therapeutic approaches being employed and to inform the public of the effectiveness of community-based treatment in rehabilitating probationers during their community reintegration.

To achieve this objective, the researcher aims to know the following: First, to describe the perspective of probationers regarding their engagement in the treatment programs. Second: To explore the impact of treatment programs on the lives of probationers; Third: To understand the challenges faced by probationers in participating in treatment programs, and Fourth: To develop recommendations and strategies for improving the delivery of treatment programs for probationers.

This study anchors the Probation theory developed by Gibbons (1959). Accordingly, probation permits the offender to continue living in a free society, maintain their social standing to some extent, and help them adjust socially in terms of secure employment, stable relationships, etc. Moreover, probation helps the state save money and gives a way to get restitution from people who steal things. A large portion of this idea is more compassionate than rational. In other words, it is stated that, rather than using probation because it has a lower recidivism rate than other possible dispositions, probation should be utilized to "give the offender a second chance."

This study is supported by Social Learning Theory and Rational Choice Theory, both of which offer valuable insights into the rehabilitation and reintegration of probationers. Social Learning Theory, as discussed by Astray-Caneda et al. (2011), emphasizes that learning occurs in a social context where individuals observe and model the behaviors of others.

It was also highlighted by Albert Bandura (1991) that behavior is shaped through a continuous interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences. In the context of rehabilitation, this theory

supports the idea that programs must go beyond technical skills and incorporate the teaching of pro-social behaviors to help individuals understand the consequences of their actions and regulate their conduct.

Meanwhile, Rational Choice Theory posits that individuals make decisions based on a cost-benefit analysis. It was argued by Orsagh and Marsden (1985) that rehabilitation can be effective if it targets economically motivated offenders through income-enhancing interventions such as skills training. By improving an offender's preference for lawful income and work, this theory supports efforts to reduce recidivism through practical and goal-oriented rehabilitation strategies.

This study holds significance for the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA), probationers, and future researchers. For the PPA, examining the experiences of probationers can offer valuable insights to improve probation and parole programs. Understanding the key elements of successful reintegration can help refine policies, projects, and practices. It also allows the agency to identify which interventions and strategies are most effective in reducing recidivism and promoting positive outcomes, leading to more targeted and responsive rehabilitation efforts.

For probationers, this research can offer valuable information on the factors, processes, and resources that will support them in having a successful adjustment and reintegration. This knowledge can provide them with hope, motivation, and the ability to take positive action. It can empower them to develop willpower, access support systems, and acquire essential resources to successfully reintegrate into society, fostering a sense of empowerment and a fresh start.

For future researchers, this study offers a foundation for exploring gaps in the literature related to probationers' rehabilitation and reintegration, an area underexplored in past research. It can guide further studies in addressing key issues, developing innovative approaches, and evaluating evidence-based strategies to improve probation outcomes.

These studies, taken together, highlight the need for a thorough and all-encompassing probationary strategy that addresses emotional, social, and financial issues outside of legal oversight. This integrated model not only facilitates rehabilitation but also aligns with United Nations Sustainable Development Goal (UN SDG) 16, which promotes peace, justice, and strong institutions. By building more inclusive systems and fostering public understanding, such approaches contribute meaningfully to global efforts in criminal justice reform.

METHOD

This section provides a comprehensive overview of the study participants, the materials and instruments utilized for data collection, as well as the research design and procedures employed in conducting the study.

Study Participants

The participants of this study were thirteen (13) probationers who are undergoing treatment programs under the Parole and Probation Administration XI. They were selected through Purposive sampling. This method was employed to intentionally choose individuals who possessed specific characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study. This method is appropriate when the researcher has a clear idea of the characteristics or attributes they are interested in studying and wants to select a sample representative of those characteristics (Heath, 2023). Additionally, Purposive sampling has a long developmental history, and there are as many views that it is simplicity as there are about its complexity. The reason for purposive sampling is the better matching of the sample to the aims and objectives of the research, thus improving the rigor of the study and the trustworthiness of the data and results (Campbell et al., 2020).

The following factors were used by me in selecting the participants: First, I selected probationers with a minimum of one year of experience. Second, I ensured that the sample included both male and female participants to achieve balanced representation. Third, I chose participants who had committed a diverse range of offenses, reflecting the complexity and breadth of the criminal justice system. By including such a varied group, I aimed to develop a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing probation outcomes and to

provide valuable insights for enhancing rehabilitation strategies and reducing recidivism rates, ultimately fostering an inclusive and supportive environment for rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society.

In terms of inclusion criteria, I involved probationers with at least one year of experience, ensuring representation from both genders and encompassing a wide range of offenses. For exclusion, I excluded newly enrolled probationers or those who had served less than one year, as well as individuals outside the jurisdiction of PPA XI – District 1. Regarding withdrawal, probationers who initially agreed but later chose to discontinue their participation had full autonomy to do so; it was their prerogative, and I respected their decision. As a result, I conducted in-depth interviews with eight (8) key informants, who were assigned the codenames IDI1, IDI2, IDI3, IDI4, IDI5, IDI6, IDI7, and IDI8. Additionally, five (5) informants participated in a focus group discussion, with the codenames FGD1, FGD2, FGD3, FGD4, and FGD5.

MATERIALS AND INSTRUMENT

Since this study was phenomenological, I used in-depth interviews as the primary method of data collection. The data collection instrument was an interview guide, which contained open-ended questions along with probing questions designed to expand on the participants' responses. The interview questions were carefully aligned with the research objectives, and the probing questions were crafted to support and deepen the discussion. I developed the interview guide entirely to ensure full alignment with the study's aims. This instrument enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences. To ensure the validity and reliability of the instrument, I subjected it to a thorough validation process.

I prepared written questions for the interviewees and employed a structured interview format. In this context, the structured interview protocols consisted of specific, objective questions presented in a predetermined order. Additionally, I carefully structured, planned, and organized the questions to align with the study's objectives. This approach encouraged the participants to respond as accurately and clearly as possible.

The validation process of the instrument involved several phases to ensure its reliability and accuracy. The interview guide was initially developed based on the research objectives and relevant literature. Then, it was submitted to a panel of internal and external validators for thorough review and validation using the following criteria: ethics, artistry, and rigor. The feedback from these experts was incorporated to refine the questions further. Finally, adjustments were made based on their feedback to finalize the interview guide.

Design and Procedure

In understanding the lived experiences of the participants, the research utilized a phenomenological approach within qualitative research as framed by Badil et al. (2023). It is also stated by Ayton (2023) that the objective of phenomenology is to uncover the underlying personal meaning that underlies people's perceptions regarding their daily activities. The phenomenological approach was useful in understanding the lived experiences of the participants as the study aimed to capture the range and depth of experiences through direct engagement.

As noted by McLeod (2024), phenomenological researchers aim to reveal the particular and question structural or normative assumptions by showing people's experiences and perceptions, where they rely on subjective experiences. This approach can be useful for penetrating accepted beliefs and stereotypical views and revealing the true reasons behind people's actions. Additionally, it also describes by Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) how researchers deal more effectively with the intricacies of cross-cultural social educational experiences through new social educational contexts using a hybrid approach that combines descriptive and interpretative phenomenological qualitative approach. Collectively, these perspectives enhance the power of phenomenology as a qualitative research method for exploring rich, experiential data from diverse disciplines.

Subsequently, as recommended by my Research Adviser, I requested the Dean of the Professional Schools to approve my endorsement letter addressed to the Regional Director of the Parole and Probation Administration XI (PPA XI), seeking referrals for research participants within their jurisdiction. After receiving approval from the Dean, I arranged a meeting with the PPA-XI Director to seek his approval. Once the Director approved, I

organized in-person interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. Eight (8) probationers participated in in-depth interviews (IDIs). Semi-structured, open-ended questions were used during the interviews to allow participants to openly share their experiences. Each interview was conducted privately to maintain confidentiality and comfort, encouraging participants to share personal information. In addition to the IDIs, Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were held with five (5) probationers. The FGDs provided a platform for participants to engage in discussions about shared experiences, with the group dynamics facilitating the exchange of ideas and uncovering collective insights that may not have emerged during individual interviews.

All interviews and focus group discussions were recorded with the agreement of the participants and transcribed exactly as spoken. This transcription process ensured the accurate preservation of each response, retaining the depth and authenticity of the participants' narratives. Following transcription, the data were thoroughly examined to identify recurring patterns and salient themes. The compiled data was then submitted to a data analyst who provided support in the thematic analysis and interpretation. According to Jones (2022), thematic analysis allows researchers to systematically and comprehensively examine their data to identify recurring themes and patterns. In essence, it is a technique used to generate themes from textual sources, such as interview or focus group transcripts. This approach helps organize and interpret large volumes of information, enabling meaningful insights to surface in response to the research question. The thematic framework guided the analysis, with responses being systematically coded and categorized.

The study was conducted in strict adherence to ethical standards, as reviewed and approved by the university's research ethics committee with protocol number UMERC-2024-115. I complied with all established principles, including voluntary participation, informed consent, privacy and confidentiality, risk management, and conflict of interest. I ensured that participants were fully informed of the study's purpose, their right to withdraw at any time, and the protection of their personal information in accordance with the Data Privacy Law. To uphold ethical safeguards, I secured all data in locked storage, conducted post-participation debriefings, provided psychosocial support, and maintained clear communication about all research procedures. No form of deception was employed, and I remained transparent throughout the entire research process. I recruited participants respectfully, based on clear inclusion and exclusion criteria, and emphasized the voluntary nature of their participation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section highlights key themes from the experiences of thirteen probationers in the DOJ-PPA XI program. It covers their views on the treatment programs, the impact of these programs, as well as the challenges faced during probation, and their recommendations for improving the program delivery.

Profile of the Study Participants

Table 1 shows the demographic and socioeconomic profile of the study participants, including their sex, age, crime committed, and current occupation. All participants have been under probation supervision for at least one year or more.

Table 1. Profile of the Study Participants

CODENAME	SEX	AGE	CRIME	CURRENT OCCUPATION
IDI1	FEMALE	23	Violation of Sec. 5 of RA 9165	None
IDI2	FEMALE	25	Violation of Sec. 5 of RA 9165	Student
IDI3	MALE	47	Physical Injury	Delivery Boy
IDI4	MALE	31	Violation of RA 9165	Laborer
IDI5	MALE	22	Violation of RA 9165	Waiter
IDI6	MALE	32	Violation of RA 9165	Laborer
IDI7	MALE	39	Violation of RA 9165	Tricycle Driver
IDI8	MALE	40	Physical Injuries	Construction Worker
FGD1	FEMALE	38	Violation of Sec. 5 of RA 9165	Utility Worker

FGD2	FEMALE	48	Violation of Sec. 5/11 of RA 9165	Vendor
FGD3	FEMALE	26	Violation of Sec. 5/11 of RA 9165	None
FGD4	MALE	28	Violation of Sec. 5/11 of RA 9165	Painter
FGD5	MALE	39	Violation of Sec. 11 of RA 9165	Vendor

Perspectives of probationers on treatment programs

This section explores the perspectives of thirteen probationers undergoing rehabilitation under the DOJ-PPA XI. Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, they shared their experiences with the treatment programs, viewing them as meaningful components of their rehabilitation. The analysis reveals two key aspects: probationers see the programs as a pathway to personal growth and healing, and they recognize probation officers as key drivers of rehabilitation and support, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Perspectives of probationers on treatment programs

Emergent Themes	Cluster Themes	Formulated Meaning
Pathway to Personal Growth and Healing	Probation as a Transformative Experience	Viewing probation as an opportunity to learn from past mistakes [IDI – 1] Considering probation as a life-changing intervention [IDI – 7] Perceiving probation as a guide that provides direction (FGD–2)
	Probation as a Supportive Structure	Perceiving probation as a support system that prevents a return to past mistakes [IDI-2] Seeing probation as a source of positive influence [IDI-6] Perceiving that monitoring during probation is essential for preventing relapse into past behaviors [IDI-4]
	Probation as a Therapeutic Process	Viewing probation activities as engaging and meaningful experiences [IDI-3] Recognizing the value of reporting and participation in activities [IDI-8] Seeing probation programs as sources of stress relief and guidance for life outside incarceration [IDI-6] Viewing counseling sessions as empowering tools [IDI-4, 6]
Key Drivers of Rehabilitation and Support	Officers as Influential Guides	Believing that an officer's leadership influences the success of rehabilitation [IDI-2] Recognizing the importance of guidance of probation officers to personal change [IDI-1, 5, 6]
	Officers as Supportive Figures	Perceiving probation officers as supportive mentors [IDI-4, 5] Considering probation officers as role models who inspire effort and dedication to rehabilitation [IDI-5]
	Officers as Caring Authorities	Acknowledging the role of probation officers' strictness as a form of genuine care and discipline [IDI-2, 4, 6] Valuing the consistent reminders and supervision from officers as motivation to comply with program conditions [IDI8] Appreciating the officers' responsiveness and dedication to monitoring and guiding behavior [IDI-1]

Pathways to personal growth and healing

This emergent theme captures the experience of probationers, who perceive their journey as marked by transformation, recovery, and reintegration into society. As they shared their experiences, three (3) cluster themes emerged: Probation as a Transformative Experience, Probation as a Supportive Structure, and Probation as a Therapeutic Process.

Probation as a Transformative Experience

For many probationers, the program marked a turning point in their lives. It was a chance to break free from the patterns of the past and embrace a renewed sense of self. The probationers perceived the program as a

means to gain insight from their past mistakes and to bring about personal transformation. Complementing these findings, Burke et al. (2023) advocate for a reimagined probation practice that emphasizes personal, social, and moral rehabilitation. This point of view recognizes that, rather than only a legal tool to monitor people following a conviction, probation is a vital opportunity to help great personal development and reintegration into society.

Probation really helped me a lot because I learned many things about what I did in the past. I gained a lot of knowledge, and it truly helped me change” [IDI – 1]

For some, probation was not just an alternative to incarceration, but a life-altering opportunity that opened doors to a better future:

“Probation has been a huge help to me because, without it, I would still be in jail. So, these programs are truly beneficial” [IDI – 7]

Some described their experience as being more than just a legal obligation. It was a guiding force that helped them find direction and purpose in their lives:

“Probation has made a huge difference in my life. It has guided me on what I need to do to move forward.” [FGD – 2]

“These programs are really helpful. In rehabilitation, I have learned many things, and they have guided me on what I should do.” [IDI – 5]

Probation as a Supportive Structure

Beyond personal transformation, many probationers described the program as a support system that keeps them grounded. Probation not only provides structure and accountability but also offers emotional, psychological, and social support that assists individuals in navigating the complex process of reintegration. According to the Bureau of Justice Assistance (2023), community supervision strategies that prioritize human connection, access to services, and consistent guidance are essential to reducing recidivism and supporting behavioral change. Some probationers emphasized how the support they received through probation steered them away from relapse or re-offending:

“Probation has been a huge help to me. Before, I used to think that I could handle everything on my own. But if it were not for probation, aside from my family or other organizations working against drugs, there is a possibility that I might have gone back to my old ways.” [IDI – 2]

Others pointed to the programs and activities within probation as a source of positive influence. These initiatives provided structure and helped distance them from harmful environments:

“Probation has been very helpful because it offers many activities and provides guidance to keep us away from bad influences.” [IDI – 6]

Another probationer highlighted the importance of consistent monitoring as a form of support. For them, being under the watchful eye of probation officers created a sense of accountability that was essential in avoiding relapse:

“The programs are good, especially how they monitor us to ensure we don’t go back to our old habits, like being involved in illegal drugs.” [IDI – 4]

While the overall findings are encouraging, they also highlight the importance of having a supportive and structured environment to both foster personal responsibility for their actions and to foster positive behavioral change and to significantly reduce the likelihood of reoffending, as well as to offer guidance and supervision in addition to emotional support and community connections necessary for successful rehabilitation..

Probation as a Therapeutic Process

In addition to transformation and support, probationers also began to see the program as a deeply therapeutic experience. The activities, counseling, and routines became more than mere requirements; they were means of relaxation and a sense of community. Some probationers found meaning in the various activities offered by the program. They said that many of the activities, such as tree planting, sports competitions, and educational courses, were part of the overall sense of community/mission:

“There are many [activities], like in the past when we did tree planting by the sea. The whole Parole and Probation Office participated. Sometimes we watched basketball games. There are many programs, and they explain to us what we need to do and what’s happening.” [IDI – 3]

Others highlighted the importance of participation and the consistent reminders from their probation officers to stay involved and compliant:

“These programs are truly helpful, especially with the reminders from our probation officer. He constantly emphasizes that we must follow the conditions and actively participate in activities to help ourselves.” [IDI – 8]

Probation also served as a form of emotional release and guidance. For some, the programs helped ease the psychological burden of incarceration and offered direction for life outside prison walls:

“Their programs are good and have helped a lot, especially in relieving stress from being in jail. They also guide us on what we should and should not do outside.” [IDI – 6]

Central to this therapeutic process were the counseling sessions. These were often described as empowering, which helped probationers strengthen their resolve to avoid substance use and make better choices:

“The counseling sessions have also been a great help because they strengthen my resolve to stay away from drugs.” [IDI – 4]

This study supports previous studies that suggest structured activities in probation programs lead to positive behavior changes. The participants who took part in the program were encouraged through the peer-led programmes, life skills workshops, and a variety of group sessions to rebuild their self-identity and help to develop social relationships. They also reflected on their decisions and made choices in their life. According to Dioses et al (2019), healing and personal development are often promoted through participation in the community model; they have shown success in the promotion of personal development and emotional healing by participating in these activities. Much more extensive conclusions were found by Vinais et al (2023) regarding how, in French prisons, large numbers of clients taken into these programs had better family and social relations and self-esteem than those taking part in traditional treatment. These results support the findings of this study that the TC model provides a supportive environment promoting rehabilitation through emotional growth, peer influence and structure.

Key Drivers of Rehabilitation and Support

Another striking perspective was the high regard for probation officers. Rather than seeing officers as just enforcers of rules, probationers described them as guides and support. Based on the in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussion (FGD), three (3) cluster themes emerged: Officers as Influential Guides, Officers as Supportive Figures, and Officers as Caring Authorities.

Officers as Influential Guides

Supervision, counseling sessions, and guidance became more than just requirements; they served as components for meaningful change. Some probationers found significant value in their officers' leadership approaches:

"I believe that how a probation officer leads can really reflect on us. Some say that they are too strict, but for me, that is natural because our case involves drugs. A strict officer actually means someone who genuinely cares." [IDI – 2]

Recognizing the importance of guidance from probation officers became central to personal change for many probationers. The advice, monitoring, and educational components provided by officers were specifically highlighted as valuable resources:

"The words of our officers, especially their advice to us, are really helpful. Their guidance plays a big role in monitoring my actions. The lectures also help me better understand the effects of drugs and other important topics that bring knowledge to us." [IDI – 1]

"The advice and counseling from our officer have been the most helpful. He told us that we need to change and never go back to our bad habits." [IDI – 5]

"The counseling sessions have been the most helpful because, in the past, I never listened to advice. Now, I have learned to listen because I fear losing the privilege of being released. If I do not comply, they can send me back to jail." [IDI – 6]

According to Van Hall et al. (2024), probationers who thought their officials were following the law were more likely to feel obligated to follow it and were less likely to break the law again. Moreover, these results show how important it is for probation officers to help people change instead of just making sure they follow the rules. Thus, training programs that teach probation officers more about cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) and the rules of procedural justice can help with supervision and recovery.

Officers as Supportive Figures

Probationers also came to see their officers as deeply supportive figures in their rehabilitation journey. The relationship with officers evolved beyond mere supervision into mentorship and inspiration. Some probationers found significant value in the supportive yet structured approach their officers provided, seeing this balance as essential to their recovery:

"We have a good relationship because they are very supportive of us." [IDI – 4]

Recognizing probation officers as role models became a powerful motivator for many participants. The dedication shown by officers inspired probationers to match that commitment in their own rehabilitation efforts:

"He has helped not just me but all those under probation. That's why I work hard and take inspiration from him." [IDI – 2]

Within the criminal justice system, probation officials have long been seen as agents of supervision and control. However, recent studies emphasize their crucial function as supportive figures, especially in helping probationers successfully reintegrate and lower recidivism. Moreover, especially for those who might lack family or community networks, probation officials can be quite important sources of social support. The research by Mowen and Boman (2021) emphasizes how a good connection with probationers could help to reduce isolation and enhance emotional well-being. This also serves to prevent recidivism since the person feels supported, which would indicate that they are less likely to revert to criminal behavior.

Officers as Caring Authorities

Probationers also came to recognize the dual nature of their officers' authority as a form of genuine care. The strictness and discipline enforced by officers were interpreted not as punitive measures but as necessary guidance to prevent recidivism. Some probationers found meaningful value in this approach, seeing the firm boundaries as expressions of concern for their future:

“They show strictness because they don't want us to end up back in the same situation. They remind us that since we've been given a chance to change, we shouldn't waste it.” [IDI – 2]

“He is strict, but that's exactly what we need so that we don't commit offenses again.” [IDI - 4]

“Our officers' advice and guidance are a big help. Their strictness is for our own good because some people take things too lightly. They are strict with us to instill discipline, ensuring we don't return to prison.” [FGD – 1]

The consistent structure and supervision provided by officers also served as a motivational framework for many participants. Regular check-ins and monitoring became valued tools for self-assessment and accountability:

“The reporting process has been the most helpful because it allows me to track my progress. The activities also help me learn new things, monitor my improvement, and interact with different people.” [IDI – 8]

Supportive relationships with probation officers were identified as critical to successful rehabilitation. Participants viewed their officers not only as authority figures but also as mentors and sources of guidance. As Fernando (2021) suggests, officers who are perceived as trustworthy can serve as advocates for probationers, reflecting the depth of rapport built during supervision. This highlights the significance of relational trust in enhancing compliance and promoting lasting behavioral change.

Impact of treatment programs during probation

This section discusses the impact of treatment programs during probation on the rehabilitation, reintegration, and overall well-being of probationers. Based on the analysis of in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), probationers perceive these programs as vital to their transformative journey. The treatment interventions offered by the Department of Justice – Parole and Probation Administration XI (DOJ-PPA XI) are not only seen as rehabilitative tools but also as essential support systems that guide individuals toward lasting change. Two key insights emerged from the narratives: first, the programs serve as catalysts for internal growth and development, enabling probationers to reflect, realign their values, and make more responsible life choices; second, they promote spiritual and social reconnection, allowing participants to restore broken relationships and rediscover their sense of purpose and belonging. These findings highlight the holistic role of treatment programs in shaping not only behavioral outcomes but also emotional and social recovery. The thematic insights are further illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Impact of treatment programs during probation

Emergent Themes	Cluster Themes	Formulated Meaning
Internal Growth and Development	Personal Transformation	It helped achieve lasting personal transformation [IDI – 4] It served as motivation to pursue personal change [IDI – 5] It inspired a lifestyle change reflecting new values and priorities It provided motivation to demonstrate personal reform and reject negative influences
	Moral Awareness	It served as a realization of past mistakes [IDI – 1] It helped them distinguish between right and wrong [IDI – 2] It helped them recognize personal limitations and boundaries [IDI – 3] It guided in choosing the right actions and avoiding the wrong ones It emphasized avoiding negative influences on personal growth It encourages to distance from past negative influences.
Spiritual and	Family Relationship	It served as a means to re-establish communication with family [IDI – 5] [IDI – 2] It provided a way to rebuild and improve personal relationships [IDI – 4] [IDI – 8]

Social Reconnection		It led to realizing the importance of prioritizing family [IDI – 6]
	Spiritual Life	It offered a way to renew faith and return to religion [IDI – 5]
		It encouraged regular church attendance with family [IDI – 4] It helped them develop a deeper reverence for God [IDI – 8]
	Community Reintegration	It became a motivation to become a positive example in the community [IDI – 5] [IDI – 6] It helped recognize that mistakes do not define a person and that change is possible. [FDG – 2]

Internal Growth and Development

This emergent theme captures the experience of probationers, who view their rehabilitation as a period of deep self-reflection, change, and value formation. As they shared their experiences, two (2) cluster themes emerged: Personal Transformation and Moral Awareness.

Facilitating Personal Transformation

The responses of the participants highlight how probation serves as a meaningful turning point in their lives, encouraging deep personal transformation. One probationer expressed a strong commitment to change, recognizing the second chance offered by the program and vowing not to return to past behaviors:

“Probation has had a huge impact on my life. Because of it, I have made the decision to change for good. I will not waste the second chance I’ve been given. I will not go back to my past mistakes, and I will avoid any situation that could lead me back there.” [IDI – 4]

Another emphasized learning essential life values, such as respect, time management, and responsibility—skills that contribute to a more productive and socially acceptable lifestyle:

“I have learned to be respectful, value time, and be a responsible person.” [IDI – 8]

The influence of program lectures also surfaced as a strong factor in resisting relapse, particularly with substance use. Malig-on et al. (2023) emphasized that probation officers and government agencies can enhance rehabilitation efforts by conducting symposiums to orient and educate the community about probationers' efforts to change:

“I can say that probation has had a huge impact on my transformation. Their lectures remind me not to return to using illegal drugs.” [IDI – 6]

Similarly, one participant acknowledged how the overall structure and content of the program significantly shaped their behavior and sense of accountability:

“These programs have been a great help in my personal transformation [IDI – 5...They have greatly influenced my desire to change. They have helped me avoid wrongdoing and taught me that I must follow the law.” [IDI – 5]

Lastly, a shift in social dynamics was evident. One probationer shared how they began setting boundaries with old peers to prioritize their new lifestyle and family responsibilities:

“With my friends, things have also changed. My old friends still recognize me, but our dynamic is different now. If they invite me to go out, I say, “No, I have my kids to take care of,” or “I’m busy.” We’re still friends, but not like before when we would stay out all night.” [IDI – 2]

The concept of self-actualization, as proposed by Maslow (1943), offers a meaningful lens through which to understand the personal transformation experienced by probationers. As individuals begin to meet their basic needs through the support and structure of probation, they become increasingly capable of pursuing personal

growth, responsibility, and purposeful change. This internal drive toward self-betterment aligns with the probationers' narratives of renewed commitment, self-reflection, and transformation.

Development of Moral Awareness

The narratives of probationers revealed a significant development in moral awareness brought about by their participation in the probation program. Several respondents reflected deeply on their past actions and expressed a renewed sense of accountability and personal responsibility:

"I truly feel the weight of our past mistakes. It makes me realize that I was wrong before and that I wasted a lot of time, especially with my family and friends." [IDI – 1]

Others emphasized the moral lessons they acquired throughout the program, particularly through counseling and structured reflection:

"I've learned about what's right and wrong, received advice, and reflected on whether I should stay the same as before or move forward. These lessons have helped me a lot." [IDI – 2]

"There's a lot to learn here because it will be discussed to us what to do and what our limitations are." [IDI – 3]

Participants also described how their newfound awareness translated into behavioral changes upon reintegration into the community:

"These programs have had a huge impact. Now that I am back in the community, I make sure to do what is right and avoid what is wrong." [IDI – 5]

"Probation has had a huge impact on me because of the conditions they set. It forces me to avoid engaging in illegal activities." [IDI – 7]

"It helped regulate my actions so I don't fall back into my old ways." [IDI – 7]

Insights from focus group discussions further reinforced the importance of distancing from negative influences, as part of the moral reorientation promoted by the program:

"Through counseling, we were told to distance ourselves from people connected to our past vices." [FGD – 2]

"I'm grateful for the encouragement to avoid old friends and harmful substances. They are serious about rehabilitating us. Their support has motivated me to change." [FGD – 2]

Probation programs that incorporate counseling and structured reflection significantly contribute to the moral development of probationers. These interventions create opportunities for individuals to reassess their values and behaviors, fostering accountability and ethical decision-making. As emphasized by Miranda-Rodríguez et al. (2023), enhancing moral reasoning and competence is associated with cooperative and prosocial behavior, which aligns with the probationers' reported experiences of moral growth.

Spiritual and Social Reconnection

This emergent theme highlights the probationers' efforts to rebuild and strengthen their social ties during the rehabilitation process. As they shared their experiences, three (3) cluster themes emerged: Improved Family Relationships, Renewed Spiritual Life, and Promoted Community Reintegration. These themes reflect the importance of reconnecting with family, revitalizing spiritual practices, and reintegrating into the community to ensure a successful transition post-probation.

Improved Family Relationships

The probationers' experiences highlighted significant positive changes in their relationships with family members, with many acknowledging the pivotal role of the probation program in fostering communication and

emotional reconnection. Several respondents emphasized how the program supported them in re-establishing stronger ties with their families, which were once strained or distant.

"These programs have been a great help in re-establishing communication with my family." [IDI – 5]

Others reflected on how their previous behavior had led to familial discord, but through the probation process, they were able to repair and strengthen these bonds:

"Before, they really hated me because I was hardheaded. My father even cursed me out of frustration. But now, after my release, our relationship is better. We talk more, and I feel like I've reconnected with them—especially with my mother and siblings." [IDI – 2]

"My relationship with my family and friends is no longer the same as before. Now, my family and I are more united." [IDI – 4]

For some probationers, this shift extended to their overall sense of family unity and emotional closeness:

"Before, I was harsh toward my parents. We were not close as a family, but now, I am happy because we have become closer." [IDI – 8]

Furthermore, a broader realization about the importance of family emerged, as probationers recognized the need to prioritize family over past social circles:

"Yes, a huge change. Before, I rarely spent time with my family. Now, I have learned that 'family comes first' before friends. I also realized the importance of surrounding myself with good friends who have a positive influence." [IDI – 6]

The probationers' narratives affirm the findings of Shlafer et al. (2023), highlighting how probation programs can foster emotional reconnection and communication within families. These relational improvements are seen as instrumental in the probationers' reintegration and continued commitment to change.

Renewed Spiritual Life

The probation experience significantly influenced the spiritual lives of many participants, with several noting a profound renewal of their faith and a reconnection to religious practices. This spiritual transformation played a crucial role in their rehabilitation, helping them build a stronger moral foundation.

"These programs have been a great help in renewing my faith and returning to my religion." [IDI – 5]

For some, the renewal of faith also led to a shift in priorities, as they began to focus more on spiritual practices and family connections:

"...going to church with my family, and prioritizing my family over friends." [IDI – 4]

Additionally, probationers reported a heightened sense of reverence and a deeper respect for both their spiritual beliefs and the law:

"I also have a greater fear of God and respect for the law." [IDI – 8]

Religion plays a vital role in the rehabilitation of offenders by fostering moral development and enhancing personal well-being. Jang and Johnson (2023) highlight that religious engagement in correctional settings offers offenders a renewed sense of purpose, helping them reframe their identity and promoting positive behavioral changes.

Promote Community Reintegration

The theme of community reintegration emerged as a significant aspect of probationers' rehabilitation, with many expressing a strong desire to demonstrate personal growth and reform within their communities.

Participants recognized the importance of proving to their neighbors that they had made positive changes and were committed to a new, law-abiding lifestyle.

"I also want to show my neighbors that I have made the right decision." [IDI – 5]

For others, the probation program not only guided personal change but also encouraged them to prove their transformation to the broader community:

"I applied for probation to change my life, and they encouraged me to prove to the community that I have reformed and no longer engage in vices or bad company." [IDI – 6]

Furthermore, probationers found motivation in the supportive messages shared during their rehabilitation, which emphasized that past mistakes should not define them:

"Their words motivated me because they reminded us that having been in prison doesn't define us—no one is perfect, and we all make mistakes." [FGD – 2]

Community reintegration is an important part of the criminal justice system, aimed at supporting individuals in their transition from incarceration to society. Setting up effective reintegration strategies is essential for reducing recidivism rates, enhancing public safety, and promoting the well-being of individuals who have previously been sentenced to prison. Individuals on probation frequently encounter various challenges that impede their successful reintegration. The challenges encompass restricted access to employment opportunities, instability in housing, societal stigma, and insufficient support systems. A comprehensive study conducted by Beaudry et al. (2023) emphasized that elements like stable housing, employment opportunities, and access to mental health services are crucial for effective reintegration. The research highlighted that interventions targeting these areas substantially decrease the chances of reoffending. Hence, these responses demonstrate the essential importance of community reintegration in the rehabilitation journey of probationers. Having an active engagement and demonstrating positive changes within their communities, probationers will certainly overcome previous stigmas, and they could rebuild themselves as law-abiding and contributing members of society

Challenges that probationers encounter challenges in participating in treatment programs during their probationary period.

This section outlines the main challenges probationers face in participating in treatment programs. Analysis of in-depth interviews and focus group discussions revealed two key themes: Psychosocial Challenges, including emotional stress, stigma, and strained family ties; and Financial and Participation Challenges, such as transportation issues, work conflicts, and limited access to resources. These findings highlight the need for more responsive and inclusive program implementation. Details are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Challenges that probationers encounter in participating in treatment programs during their probationary period.

Emergent Themes	Cluster Themes	Formulated Meanings
Psychosocial Challenges	Internalized Guilt and Shame	Struggling with self-blame due to past involvement in illegal drugs [IDI – 1] Battling feelings of shame associated with being a probationer [IDI8, IDI7]
	Emotional and Psychological Distress	Experiencing depression as a major emotional challenge during probation [1] Struggling to cope with the emotional pain caused by a difficult past [7] Facing internal battles and emotional struggles throughout the probation period [8]
	Motivational Deficits	Struggling with a lack of motivation due to the absence of family support [IDI2] Experiencing low morale as a result of past mistakes [IDI8]

	Societal Stigma	Facing discrimination in the workplace due to a criminal record [IDI] Dealing with the ongoing stigma of past drug involvement [IDI4]
Financial and Participation Challenges	Economic Hardships	Experiencing difficulty in finding stable and well-paying employment [IDI4] Facing financial hardships and poverty after release from prison [IDI5] Struggling with transportation costs to attend sessions [FGD1]
	Competing Life Demands	Struggling to make time for participation in probation activities [IDI6] Facing difficulties in balancing probation requirements with parenting and family responsibilities [FGD – 1] Experiencing conflict between work commitments and probation schedules, sometimes leading to job loss [FGD – 5] Dealing with workplace challenges and the risk of losing probation privileges due to scheduling conflicts [FGD – 3] Struggling with the early reporting schedule as part of probation compliance [IDI – 1]

Psychosocial Challenges

This emergent theme reflects the inner struggles and social pressures faced by probationers that affect their ability to fully engage in treatment programs. As they shared their experiences, four (4) cluster themes emerged: Internalized Guilt and Shame, Emotional and Psychological Distress, Motivational Deficits, and Societal Stigma. These challenges reveal the emotional burden carried by probationers and the critical need for psychological support and social acceptance throughout the rehabilitation process.

Internalized Guilt and Shame

The theme of internalized guilt and shame emerged as a critical psychosocial challenge faced by probationers during their rehabilitation. Many participants expressed feelings of deep regret, self-blame, and embarrassment stemming from their involvement in criminal behavior and their status as probationers. These emotions often created internal barriers that affected their confidence and engagement with the treatment process.

"I blamed myself a lot during that time because I went out and got involved in illegal drugs." [IDI – 1]

Others described a sense of personal shame that accompanied their probation status, which further intensified their emotional burden:

"Sometimes, I also felt ashamed because I was a probationer." [IDI – 8]

This internal struggle was also evident in participants who openly acknowledged the stigma tied to their past actions:

"The main challenge I faced was the shame of being involved in illegal drugs." [IDI – 7]

These narratives underscore the significant emotional toll probationers face as they confront their past and attempt to rebuild their lives. A recent study by Proeve (2023) examines the challenges of remorse in the criminal justice system, focusing on the roles of shame, guilt, and regret in offender rehabilitation. The study highlights that internalized emotions such as guilt and shame can significantly impact offenders' rehabilitation processes.

Emotional and Psychological Distress

Emotional and psychological distress emerged as a significant challenge among probationers during their rehabilitation period. Several participants recounted experiencing deep emotional struggles as they confronted their past actions and adjusted to the structure of probation. These emotional burdens often took the form of depression and internal conflict, impacting their overall well-being.

"While having my probation, one of the biggest challenges I experienced was when I went through depression." [IDI – 1]

Others echoed similar sentiments, citing the weight of their past and its lasting emotional impact:

"It's painful and depressing because my past was not easy." [IDI – 7]

The internal struggle was further emphasized by another participant, who identified the psychological toll of the experience as the most difficult aspect:

"The biggest challenge I faced was within myself. This situation was difficult, and at times, I felt depressed." [IDI – 8]

Recent European recommendations emphasize the crucial role of probation in addressing the mental health needs of individuals under supervision. It was emphasized by Brooker (2023) that people in contact with the criminal justice system experience significantly higher rates of mental health conditions than the general population. These responses highlight the need for comprehensive emotional support within the probation system, ensuring that individuals have access to mental health resources as they navigate the challenges of rehabilitation.

Motivational Deficits

A lack of motivation surfaced as a recurring barrier among probationers, particularly when compounded by feelings of isolation and limited family support. Participants expressed that the absence of encouragement from loved ones diminished their drive to fully engage in treatment and rehabilitation efforts.

"One of the biggest struggles is a lack of motivation, especially when we don't feel family support." [IDI – 2]

In addition, unresolved guilt and self-blame contributed to a decline in morale, further impeding personal growth:

"There were times when I felt low morale because I made a mistake in the past." [IDI – 8]

These insights underscore the importance of emotional reinforcement and supportive environments in sustaining motivation throughout the probation process.

Societal Stigma

Societal stigma emerged as a significant challenge for probationers, particularly regarding the judgment they faced due to their criminal records and past behaviors. Several participants expressed the difficulty of overcoming the negative perceptions held by others, which often led to discrimination and exclusion in both personal and professional spheres.

"There are many people who judge me. They still see me as a criminal. And now, in my job, I feel like I'm being discriminated against because of my record." [IDI – 3]

The stigma surrounding past drug use also remained a source of shame and social judgment, further hindering the reintegration process:

"Sometimes, people still judge us because of our past involvement in drugs." [IDI – 4]

A recent study by Martí (2023) investigates the impact of criminal record stigma in the British labor market. The research reveals that individuals with criminal records face significant discrimination during the hiring process, even when they possess equivalent qualifications and experience compared to those without such records. This discrimination extends beyond employment, affecting social inclusion and opportunities for reintegration into society.

Financial and Participation Challenges

This emergent theme highlights the external challenges faced by probationers that impact their ability to fully engage in treatment programs. As they shared their experiences, two (2) cluster themes emerged: Economic Hardships and Competing Life Demands. These challenges illustrate the struggle probationers face in managing their financial instability while balancing personal and family obligations, which often take priority over treatment commitments. Addressing these barriers requires programmatic flexibility and support systems that consider both economic and life-related challenges.

Economic Hardships

Economic hardships were a significant challenge for probationers, particularly in securing well-paying employment. Several participants shared the difficulty of finding a job that could provide enough financial stability.

"Another challenge is finding a job that pays well, which is quite difficult." [IDI – 4]

The difficulties faced by probationers did not end with employment. For some, the struggle extended to basic survival needs, such as transportation. One participant highlighted the financial burden of daily logistics:

"Another challenge was transportation costs." [FGD – 1]

Moreover, economic hardships often felt overwhelming, especially after release from prison. As one probationer described:

"Hardships, poverty—because when I got out when I was released from prison, I faced many challenges again. It was as if life was testing me to see if I could endure it." [IDI – 5]

Hence, the 2022 study by Bersamina and Tolio shows that the significant financial difficulties experienced by Ilocos Sur, Philippines, probationers, it was explained that over half of the participants stated ongoing difficulties in finding a stable job and earning enough money. These financial challenges are clearly personal ones, but they also often increase structural barriers such stigma, lack of access to vocational training, and limited opportunities for people with criminal records. It was stressed out that reaching financial stability can be difficult, which would hinder the rehabilitation process, potentially increase the possibility of recidivism, and limit the ability of the probationers to fully reintegrate into society. These results show that we need a more complete and welcoming support system that not only deals with the legal and behavioral parts of probation but also puts a lot of focus on reintegrating people back into society and their communities. This means making it easier for probationers to get jobs, take part in projects that help them make a living, and get involved in community-based projects that will help them rebuild their lives and make their communities better..

Competing Life Demands

Competing life demands presented significant obstacles for probationers as they navigated the complexities of balancing their rehabilitation with personal and professional responsibilities. Several participants shared their struggles in trying to manage multiple roles simultaneously.

"One challenge is making time to participate in their activities." [IDI –6]

For some, the demands of family life intensified the challenge. One participant reflected on the difficulties of balancing probation with the responsibilities of marriage and parenthood:

"One challenge was that when I got married and had a child, I struggled to balance probation with my responsibilities. My child was left in the province, and it was difficult to attend sessions while breastfeeding." [FGD – 1]

Work responsibilities also created a significant conflict for others. One probationer shared how difficult it was to manage their job alongside meeting probation requirements:

"My main challenge was balancing work and probation. Sometimes, I had to be absent from work, and at times, I even had to quit my job to comply with probation requirements." [FGD – 5]

Another participant echoed this concern, highlighting the possibility of job loss due to scheduling conflicts with probation reporting:

"I have noticed challenges or conflicts at work. If I am unable to attend probation, my privilege might be canceled. Because of the required reporting to probation, I might have to quit my job." [FGD – 3]

For some, even the time commitment of attending probation sessions presented a daily struggle:

"One of the challenges for me is waking up early to report." [IDI – 1]

Probationers on probation often have responsibilities beyond fulfilling probation requirements. In addition to meeting legal obligations like monthly reporting and community service, individuals must also manage personal responsibilities, which encompass caregiving, relationship maintenance, and securing stable employment. The presence of competing needs may lead to stress or a failure to follow through, not due to intentional resistance, but rather as a result of overwhelming life circumstances. Moreover, probationers pointed out other challenges aside from guilt and emotional aspects, if you are feeling cut out of society, having financial difficulties, or dealing with family issues, the reintroduction into society might be challenging. According to the results, probation systems must become more adaptable and all-encompassing if they are to properly handle social as well as personal issues. Therefore, it is essential to provide probationers with services including mental health assistance, job training, and flexible counsel so they may handle their complex circumstances and raise their prospects of rehabilitation.

Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of treatment programs

The recommendations shared by participants for both current and future probationers, as well as for the Probation and Parole Administration (PPA), underscore key aspects of the reintegration process. Based on in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs), participants offered key recommendations to support current and future probationers and improve PPA programs, as shown in Table 5. They emphasized the need for sustainable livelihood and educational opportunities to aid reintegration, and the importance of continuous guidance and support systems for long-term personal and behavioral development.

Table 5. Recommendations to improve the effectiveness of treatment programs

Emergent Themes	Cluster Themes	Formulated Meanings
Sustainable Livelihood and Education	Create Livelihood Opportunities	Provide livelihood programs to address employment barriers [IDI 3] Offer job placement and income generation assistance [IDI - 1] Create skill-matched employment opportunities that meet basic subsistence needs [IDI - 2]
	Develop Educational Initiatives	Maintain educational programs that promote achievement and help overcome barriers [IDI - 5] Conduct skill-building seminars with employment assistance components [IDI - 7] Provide free technical education to develop employable skills [FGD – 1&3]
Continuous Guidance and	Maintain Consistent oversight	Continue supporting growth and rehabilitation by monitoring progress [IDI 4] Maintain good treatment and consistent monitoring [IDI - 5] Enforce mandatory attendance at all reporting sessions [FGD - 5]

Support Systems	Provide Support Systems	Provide valuable advice [IDI – 6] Prioritize spiritual guidance and support [FGD – 3] Ensure timely delivery of requested documents [IDI – 5] Offer Programs that promote personal growth [IDI – 1]
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Sustainable Livelihood and Education

The findings from the in-depth interviews (IDI) and focus group discussions (FGD) underscore the importance of integrating sustainable livelihood and educational components into treatment programs for probationers. Two cluster themes emerged in this domain: Create Livelihood Opportunities and Develop Educational Initiatives.

Creating Livelihood Opportunities

Based on the participants' responses, they face significant employment barriers due to their criminal records. To address this, they suggest implementing livelihood programs:

“I hope they provide livelihood programs for us because sometimes, it is hard to find work due to our record.” [IDI – 3]

Beyond simply finding employment, another participant highlighted the need for work that aligns with their abilities and provides sufficient income to meet their basic needs:

“A job opportunity that fits us and can sustain everyday needs.” [IDI – 2]

The findings reveal that probationers encounter substantial employment challenges due to their criminal records. Many expressed the need for livelihood programs tailored to their skills and capable of meeting their basic needs. This aligns with rational-choice theory, which views some offenders as economically motivated (Orsagh & Marsden, 1985). Income-enhancing interventions, such as skills training and job-matching initiatives, can effectively shift offenders' preferences toward legal and sustainable means of income, reducing the appeal of reoffending.

Developing Educational Initiatives

Participants emphasized the importance of educational programs in supporting their rehabilitation journey and improving their long-term employment prospects. They viewed education as a pathway to overcome various life challenges:

“Programs related to education should continue so that we can succeed in overcoming the challenges in our lives.” [IDI – 5]

Several participants recommended specialized skill-building opportunities with direct employment connections, which highlights the need for practical training that leads directly to job opportunities. Moreover, they specifically mentioned technical education programs like TESDA, which shows their awareness of educational pathways that could lead to employment.

“Seminars that help us learn new skills and provide assistance for employment” [IDI – 7]

“Free education programs like TESDA so we can use the skills we learn in future jobs.” [FGD – 1]

One participant even expressed aspirations beyond local employment, suggesting that technical education could open international opportunities:

“There should be free books or TESDA programs so we can even have the chance to work abroad” [FGD – 3]

The participants often pointed out that the significance of education is to help them reintegrate into society. Many associated how participation in values-building seminars, vocational training, or literacy programs improved their confidence, employability, and sense of direction. It's been reiterated that long-held views on the therapeutic impact of education in correctional environments. The recent study by Schuster and Stickle (2023) shows that involvement in prison education programs lowers the chance of reoffending. In the Philippines, where government initiatives like TESDA offer vocational and technical training, these programs will help the probationers in advancing their skills and education. Thus, findings reveal that education initiatives are one of the important factors in intervention programs of the probation.

Continuous Guidance and Support Systems

Insights drawn from the in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs) highlight the crucial role of continuous guidance and reliable support mechanisms in promoting lasting behavioral change among probationers. Within this domain, two cluster themes were identified:

Maintaining Consistent Oversight

Participants recognized the significant value of ongoing monitoring and support during their rehabilitation process. Rather than viewing oversight as punitive, many saw it as a beneficial structure that promotes growth and accountability:

"The officers should continue to support us in our growth and rehabilitation. They should continue monitoring us and offering different programs, such as livelihood and counseling programs" [IDI – 4]

The quality of treatment from probation officers was specifically mentioned as an important factor, which means that the nature of oversight matters as much as its consistency:

"The good treatment from probation officers should continue, and there should be constant monitoring" [IDI – 5]

Interestingly, some participants advocated for even stricter accountability measures, suggesting that more rigorous enforcement would ultimately benefit the rehabilitation process:

"I recommend that all probationers be required to attend every reporting session. Probation officers should also impose penalties on those who fail to comply, so they are held accountable. Some probationers don't report, so I hope they continue strict monitoring." [FGD – 5]

Based on their probationary experience, participants observed the requirement of continuous monitoring. Regular meetings with probation officials provided support, structure, and accountability, qualities essential for their recovery. This is consistent with Mitchell et al. (2024), who showed that among their caseloads, probationers trained in cognitive-behavioral techniques and maintaining frequent monitoring practices lowered recidivism rates. The study stated that orderly and consistent control enhances officer-client interactions, effectively satisfies criminal-related demands, and increases communication. These findings show how essential consistent monitoring of probation is. Thus, apart from ensuring compliance, regular and systematic contacts between probationary officials and clients give the necessary support for behavioral reform and reintegration into society.

Providing Support Systems

Participants valued various forms of guidance and assistance throughout their probation period, underscoring that holistic support contributes significantly to successful rehabilitation. Some highlighted the importance of continued guidance and advice:

"My only suggestion is to continue monitoring and providing good advice for probationers" [IDI – 6]

Spiritual support was specifically mentioned as an important element of rehabilitation:

"I hope they focus more on livelihood programs, education, and spiritual guidance" [FGD – 3]

Administrative efficiency was identified as a crucial but often overlooked factor in successful rehabilitation. One participant emphasized how prompt document processing directly impacts their ability to make progress:

"I believe that for probation to improve, there should be prompt action on the necessary documents we request. We should not be neglected because addressing our needs quickly will lead to more achievements and success" [IDI – 5]

Personal development programs were also recommended, emphasizing the importance of treating probationers with dignity and supporting their growth as individuals. This also shows that despite their past legal violations, probationers remain human beings deserving of respect.

"I hope they continue their kindness towards us and provide programs that support our personal growth" [IDI – 1]

Wong et al. (2023) emphasize the critical role of consistent monitoring and holistic support in probationers' rehabilitation, noting that those who viewed their probation officers as supportive were more compliant and engaged in rehabilitation efforts. Similarly, Bersamina and Tolio (2022) found that probationers in the Philippines who received continuous guidance, including counseling, livelihood programs, and spiritual support, experienced greater success in reintegrating into society. Both studies highlight that a comprehensive approach, combining oversight with emotional, social, and practical support, significantly enhances rehabilitation outcomes.

IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUDING REMARK

Implications for Practice

The findings of this study offer critical insights that can inform the enhancement of rehabilitation and reintegration strategies for probationers in the Philippine context. Treatment programs should be reframed as tools for holistic personal development rather than mere compliance requirements. Probation officers play a crucial role in this transformation and should be trained not only in supervision but also in counseling, motivational interviewing, and trauma-informed care. The Department of Justice–Parole and Probation Administration (DOJ-PPA) can collaborate with academic institutions, psychological associations, and mental health NGOs to provide specialized training and certification programs for probation officers.

Addressing the psychosocial and logistical challenges that probationers face is equally important. Emotional stress, stigma, and family strain, combined with practical issues such as transportation costs and conflicting work schedules, can hinder active participation in programs. To address this, the DOJ-PPA, in partnership with local government units (LGUs), may establish satellite rehabilitation centers or mobile support units within barangays to bring services closer to probationers. Additional support can be provided through LGU-hired social workers or case managers. Funding for these initiatives can be sourced through the Local Government Support Fund, public-private partnerships, or non-governmental grants.

Furthermore, strengthening access to education, livelihood, and vocational training is essential to sustainable reintegration. The DOJ-PPA can develop collaborative programs with TESDA, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE), and the DepEd Alternative Learning System (ALS) to provide probationer-specific training pathways that lead to employment and economic stability. Financial literacy workshops and microfinancing programs, possibly supported by the DSWD or private sector initiatives, can also enhance long-term self-sufficiency.

Lastly, continuous support beyond the probation period is critical for long-term behavioral change. Establishing community-based mentorship programs and alumni networks, possibly in partnership with Volunteer Probation Aides (VPAs), faith-based groups, and civil society organizations, can provide ongoing guidance. To ensure program effectiveness, the DOJ-PPA can implement a structured monitoring and

evaluation framework, including probationer feedback, outcome tracking, e.g., employment or reoffending rates, and community input. These focused, context-specific strategies can increase the capacity of the Philippine probation system to enable significant rehabilitation and lower recidivism.

Implications for Future Research

Future researchers may expand more on this work by looking into how well different types of therapy work in a range of cultural and political settings, especially in countries that aren't very well developed, like the Philippines. They could also look at how interventions work in rural and urban places. Subsequently, further comparative studies across countries or regions could also help to show how things like a person's income, job, education level, and the support they get from their family affect how they interact with rehabilitation and their overall outcomes.

Moreover, about long-term reintegration, occupational stability, and desistance from crime, long-term research is needed to assess the ongoing impact of probation programs outside the observing period. Such studies could offer empirical data on which components of programs help most to produce long-lasting behavior. Another aspect that could also be looked at by future studies is how technology might be included in probation monitoring, that is, through digital peer support groups, virtual therapy, and mobile-based monitoring, specifically in isolated or underfunded places. Subsequently, these developments might provide measurable, reasonably priced alternatives for increasing access to support services. Lastly, examining these domains can help to clarify successful rehabilitation strategies and direct the building of inclusive, evidence-based, and flexible probation systems.

Concluding Remarks

As a researcher, exploring the experiences of probationers and comprehending their rehabilitation process has been both insightful and moving. This study provides a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of probationers in their treatment programs as part of the rehabilitation process. Findings highlight that probation is not only a legal process but a humanistic approach marked by emotional, psychological, and social challenges as well as growth. The treatment programs, if structured and implemented effectively, will serve not only to prevent recidivism but also to promote healing, reconnect relationships, and even restore a sense of self-worth and purpose.

I have been genuinely moved by the resilience and determination of the individuals who have shared their lived experiences in the rehabilitation programs of DOJ-PPA XI throughout this research. The challenges shared by participants, including emotional stress, social stigma, and conflicting life demands, call for more responsive, flexible, and supportive systems. Rehabilitation efforts must therefore go beyond punitive compliance and embrace a holistic model that integrates emotional support, community connection, and practical resources such as education, employment, and counseling.

The narratives of the probationers offer a powerful reminder that rehabilitation is not just about compliance with legal requirements but is deeply rooted in personal transformation, resilience, and the ability to rebuild lives. By understanding and addressing the multifaceted needs of probationers, we can foster an environment that supports rehabilitation, reduces recidivism, and promotes societal reintegration.

In conclusion, a comprehensive and empathetic probation framework that is founded on continuous support, practical opportunities, and emotional restoration is invaluable for transforming rehabilitation from a regular obedience to a meaningful path toward societal reintegration

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