

# Parolees' Lived Experiences: Stories of Reformation

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## ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study examined the lived experiences of parolees in Dipolog and Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte, Philippines. It specifically explored the challenges they faced, their aspirations, and the impact of intervention programs on their quality of life. Ten parolees participated in in-depth interviews, and data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method. Thirteen major themes emerged, categorized into four areas: parolees' experiences, coping strategies, aspirations, and intervention program outcomes. The findings revealed that parolees perceived themselves as victims of circumstances but acknowledged that the therapeutic community program provided them with a renewed sense of purpose. This study highlights how community-based corrections and intervention programs support social reintegration and personal transformation. However, the relatively small sample size may limit the generalizability of the results. Additionally, the use of self-reported data may introduce bias, as participants might portray their experiences in a socially desirable manner. Future studies could involve a larger, more diverse group of parolees and incorporate quantitative data to complement qualitative findings. Conducting longitudinal studies could also provide insights into long-term reintegration outcomes.

**Keywords:** community-based correction, parole, parolee, therapeutic community, transformation

## INTRODUCTION

Parole is the conditional release of a prisoner before the completion of their sentence, aimed at promoting rehabilitation and reintegration into society. Parolees often encounter significant challenges during their transition back into the community, including social marginalization, unemployment, and stigma (Schuman, 2022; Harding et al., 2013). These challenges may have psychological, social, and economic impacts, including difficulties in securing housing and employment (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018).

Further, parolees are prone to social marginalization, substance abuse, and mental health issues (Stone et al., 2018; Kunnie, 2018). Restorative justice and therapeutic community interventions play a critical role in addressing these challenges by fostering community engagement and offering counseling support (Johnstone & Van Ness, 2013; Marier & Reyes, 2014). This study aimed to understand the lived experiences of parolees, their coping mechanisms, and the role of intervention programs in their journey toward reformation.

## Objectives

1. To explore the lived experiences of parolees.
2. To examine how parolees address the challenges they encounter.
3. To identify the aspirations of parolees.
4. To assess the impact of intervention programs on their quality of life.

## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive phenomenological qualitative design was used in this investigation. Ten purposefully chosen parolees participated in the study, which was carried out in Dipolog and Dapitan City, Zamboanga del Norte. Using an interview guide, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted to collect data. To guarantee comfort and clarity, participants were urged to speak in their native tongue. The transcribed tales were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step process, which allowed for the emergence of key themes and meanings. Before data collection, ethical approval was acquired, and each subject gave their informed consent. Throughout the study, complete adherence to ethical norms was maintained about confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis yielded four major domains with thirteen emergent themes:

### Lived Experiences of Parolees

Upon their release, the majority of parolees expressed feelings of liberation and gratitude. However, these positive emotions were often overshadowed by experiences of discrimination and social stigma. Many reported being judged and socially shunned by neighbors and even family members. These findings align with previous research indicating that social estrangement and stigma are common obstacles to reintegration into society (Ricciardelli & Mooney, 2018).

Recent studies have further highlighted the multifaceted challenges faced by individuals transitioning from incarceration to society. These challenges include employment barriers, housing instability, and social stigma, all of which hinder successful reintegration (iResearchNet, n.d.). In the Philippine context, poverty has been identified as a significant factor preventing parolees and probationers from successfully reintegrating into the community, as many lack the financial means to meet the requirements of their parole or probation (Philippine Information Agency, 2024).

### Overcoming Obstacles

As coping strategies, concepts like "being sensible" and "religiously inclined" surfaced. In order to resist temptations and emotional lows, parolees reported turning to prayer, personal discipline, and community faith-based groups. These observations support those of Stone et al. (2018), who highlighted the significance of personal and spiritual resilience in the healing process following incarceration. These coping strategies are essential for assisting people in overcoming reentry obstacles and continuing on the road to effective recovery. We can assist people when they reintegrate into society more effectively if we include these topics in reentry policies and programs.

Parolees' emotional, spiritual, and personal needs must undoubtedly be met in order to facilitate their effective reintegration and lower recidivism rates. It is crucial to take into account the comprehensive requirements of formerly incarcerated people and give them the assistance they require to succeed in their post-incarceration lives as we strive for more successful reentry programs. Parolees employed various coping strategies to navigate the challenges of reintegration. Notably, spirituality and personal discipline emerged as significant factors. Many parolees turned to prayer, personal discipline, and community faith-based groups to resist temptations and emotional lows. These coping strategies are essential for assisting individuals in overcoming reentry obstacles and continuing on the path to effective recovery. This emphasis on spirituality aligns with findings from a study on rehabilitated drug users in the Philippines, which revealed that spirituality played a crucial role in their recovery and self-actualization (Torres et al., 2023). Additionally, the Therapeutic Community Modality Program (TCMP) implemented in Dipolog City Jail has been recognized for its focus on behavior management and spiritual aspects, contributing to the rehabilitation of Persons Deprived of Liberty (Teves, 2023).

## Parolees' Aspirations

The participants shared aspirations for "self-development," including going after business or vocational training. They also sought "life satisfaction," especially the desire to support their families and live in peace. These goals are in line with those of Harding et al. (2013), who stress that goal-setting after release lowers recidivism and enhances wellbeing. It's clear that people who have served time in prison have aspirations to improve themselves and have happy, fulfilling lives. We can facilitate the successful reintegration of parolees into society by recognizing and encouraging their goals. Giving people access to tools for entrepreneurship, vocational training, and other self-improvement initiatives can enable them to reach their objectives and, in turn, lower their risk of reoffending. It is critical for society to acknowledge that people can develop and change after being incarcerated and to give them the support they need to succeed. The participants shared aspirations for self-development, including pursuing business or vocational training. They also sought life satisfaction, particularly the desire to support their families and live in peace. These goals are in line with previous research emphasizing that goal-setting after release lowers recidivism and enhances well-being (Harding et al., 2013).

Education and skills development play a crucial role in the successful reintegration of former Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs). Providing educational opportunities, vocational training, and skill-building programs empowers former PDLs to acquire new competencies and enhance their employability. Equipping them with relevant skills not only improves their chances of finding gainful employment but also fosters a sense of self-worth and purpose (Humanitarian Legal Assistance Foundation, 2023).

## Intervention Programs' Effects

Parolees recognized the importance of frequent counseling, skills training, and moral recovery sessions in changing their attitudes and behaviors, and the Therapeutic Community Program was recognized as a significant driver for "life transformation." The findings of Marier and Reyes (2014), who discovered that organized community correctional programs greatly enhance reintegration results, are reflected in this. Significant gains in self-worth, communication abilities, and general mental health were reported by participants in the Therapeutic Community Program. They gave the program credit for assisting them in escaping their previous criminal behavior patterns and forging a new course for themselves. The effectiveness of these intervention programs emphasizes how crucial it is to fund reentry and rehabilitation services to assist people on their path to a bright and fulfilling future.

Parolees recognized the importance of frequent counseling, skills training, and moral recovery sessions in changing their attitudes and behaviors. The Therapeutic Community Program was identified as a significant driver for life transformation. Participants reported significant gains in self-worth, communication abilities, and general mental health. They credited the program for assisting them in escaping their previous criminal behavior patterns and forging a new path for themselves. The effectiveness of these intervention programs underscores the importance of investing in reentry and rehabilitation services to support individuals on their journey to a brighter and more fulfilling future. A study conducted in the Philippines highlighted the positive impact of the Therapeutic Community Modality Program on the rehabilitation of former PDLs, emphasizing the program's role in promoting behavioral change and facilitating reintegration into society (Dioses et al., 2019).

## CONCLUSION

Reintegrating parolees into society is complex, involving social, emotional, and economic challenges. While parolees use personal resilience and community support to overcome obstacles, structured programs like the Therapeutic Community are vital for fostering behavioral change and reducing recidivism. Addressing the small sample size and potential bias of self-reported data, future research should involve larger and more diverse samples, quantitative approaches, and longitudinal studies to better understand the long-term outcomes of parolee reintegration. Reintegrating parolees into society is a difficult process that involves emotional ups and downs, social obstacles, and a constant quest for personal growth. Parole exposes people to stigma and marginalization even as it gives them hope for change. The results showed that in order to deal with these

challenges, parolees use coping mechanisms such as proactive decision-making and religious participation. The study also made clear how important organized intervention programs, such as the Therapeutic Community, are for promoting skill development, value reorientation, and behavioral change. Reintegration, independence, and personal development were highly desired by parolees, highlighting the necessity of ongoing assistance and policy focus in community-based prisons. These findings provide insightful information that society, governments, and rehabilitation professionals can use to create welcoming, encouraging situations that promote reformation and worthwhile second chances.

## Ethical Consideration

Institutional ethics procedures were adhered to in this investigation. Before data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the research ethics committee. Following an explanation of the study's objectives and the voluntary nature of their involvement, informed consent was acquired from the participants. Anonymity and confidentiality were upheld during the entire investigation.

## Conflict of Interest

The writers disclose no conflicts of interest. In line with university regulations, they want to use this publication as a foundation for their request for institutional incentives from their university.

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