

Individuals with Justice History: A Life Transformation

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Abstract: This research study explored the life transformation of individuals with justice history focused on the personal struggles in applying for jobs, strategies employed after failing to secure a job, and the quality of life they have today. A phenomenological design was utilized wherein five (5) self-employed individuals with justice history residing in the Province of Ilocos Norte were purposefully selected.

There were four themes formulated, which include declination due to a criminal record, financial constraints, starting a business, and improvement of life status. This suggests that after being reintegrated into society, individuals with justice history had difficulties; yet, they managed to transform their lives. It has been remarkable initiative and effort from the local government and the non-government office in providing programs to those individuals with justice history. Hence, the researchers may recommend the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) to provide vocational training to equip the individuals with justice history with marketable skills to can help them to cope with their lives. Local Government Unit (LGU) may provide local economic development programs that may offer incentives and support individuals with justice history in their transformation in the community. Institutional Corrections may issue a certificate upon the released of inmates to strengthen that they are equip with skills and can work properly. Ilocos Norte Youth Development Office could provide a scholarship program for the children of individuals with justice history during incarceration to lessen the financial burden and help them finish their education.

Keywords: *Individuals with Justice History, Life Transformation, Criminal Record, Declination, Financial Constraints, Personal Struggles, Business, Improvement of Life Status*

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I. INTRODUCTION

Life is full of unexpected turns that test the determination and resilience of individuals. These changes shape their ability to persevere through challenges, such as facing biases, overcoming personal struggles, or battling inner thoughts. For many, adapting to change can be difficult, especially during life transitions. Whether it is adjusting to a new environment, stepping into a different role, or confronting an unforeseen obstacle, the struggle to cope with change is universal.

This struggle is particularly evident among individuals with a justice history. Upon release from prison or jail, they often face significant challenges, including discrimination, stigma, and restricted access to essential resources. Their criminal record subjects them to societal stigma, making reintegration into the community exceptionally difficult. Additionally, a lack of resources further compounds the barriers they face.

Securing employment is often seen as a crucial first step for individuals with justice history to sustain their daily needs. Many eagerly apply for jobs, hopeful for a chance to rebuild their lives. However, they frequently encounter difficulties in finding employment and forming social connections due to their criminal record. Job rejections are common, leading to feelings of disappointment, isolation, and shame. These rejections can significantly hinder their ability to reintegrate into society, further deepening their struggles.

Despite these challenges, such experiences often serve as stepping stones for growth and positive change. While the rejection can be disheartening, many individuals with justice history display remarkable resilience and determination to overcome the barriers they face. With the right support—especially from their families—they can lead fulfilling and productive lives. When confronted with problems, some focus inward, finding solutions that relieve discomfort and unhappiness.

For many, starting a business becomes a viable path to success. Entrepreneurship offers a way to achieve self-reliance and financial stability, bypassing the barriers associated with traditional employment. By embracing self-employment, they create meaningful opportunities for themselves and turn rejection into a stepping stone toward a better future.

Research highlights the employment challenges faced by individuals with justice history, often leading to emotional distress and limited opportunities. However, alternative paths such as entrepreneurship or self-support can empower them to reintegrate successfully into society. By addressing these barriers and fostering new opportunities, individuals with justice history can reduce their dependence on traditional employment and carve out successful, sustainable lives.

A. Background of the Study

The re-entry process for ex-convicts is a challenging experience, characterized by a range of barriers and obstacles. They experienced difficulties in employment opportunities and social discrimination (Curib et al., 2023).

The severe social discrimination they experienced included exclusion, biased treatment, and hatred in daily encounters. This stigma can cause feelings of loneliness, low self-esteem, and hopelessness for individuals with a justice history that may affect their mental and emotional health.

Individuals with a justice history face severe hurdles during reintegration, including societal stigma and economic constraints that impede their smooth return to the community. They are having difficulty because of insufficient income and resources, which make it more difficult for them to afford necessities during reintegration.

Employment is the most salient barrier the ex-offenders experience (Marziah et al., 2018). Employment barriers prevent these individuals with a justice history from entering the workforce, leading to prolonged unemployment. Some of them were not able to reintegrate successfully, which led them back to their bad habits and committing crimes again. However, other individuals with a justice history were able to take different paths that helped them reintegrate successfully into the community even after experiencing job rejection.

Ex-convicts overcame the stigmas and hurdles by starting their businesses. They highlight the spirit of entrepreneurialism among ex-convicts (Walker, 2024). With the challenges they experience, they can rebuild their lives, grow personally, and contribute positively to society, often finding new purpose and success. Life may be cruel sometimes, but some individuals with justice history remained strong and determined. Their stories of inspiration and change show the value of equal opportunities and second chances. They proved that it is possible to overcome previous mistakes and build a brighter and more successful future.

Researching the life transformations of individuals with justice history can provide valuable insights for unemployed individuals with justice history and their families, institutional and non-institutional corrections, the government, the community, and future researchers. This study is closely connected to Criminal Justice Education as it explores the lives of individuals with justice history and their successful reintegration into the community. It offers a deeper understanding of reintegration challenges, improvements to programs for individuals with justice history and inmates, and strategies to reduce recidivism.

Currently, there is inadequate research on the life transformations of individuals with justice history. Most existing studies focus primarily on the challenges, employment barriers, and failures these individuals face when reintegrating into the community. However, this study shifts the focus to their successes, highlighting how they overcame challenges and transformed their lives despite the difficulties of reintegration.

Recognizing this gap, the researchers developed the idea to conduct a study on the life transformations of individuals with justice history in a local setting. While many continue to face struggles, some have successfully transformed their lives. This study aims to understand their perspectives, give significance to their experiences, and shed light on their journeys without invalidating the hardships they endured.

By emphasizing the success stories of individuals with justice history, this research seeks to inspire hope and provide actionable insights for reintegration programs and community support systems. It underscores the importance of acknowledging not just the struggles but also the resilience and achievements of these individuals as they rebuild their lives.

B. Statement of the Problem

The main aim of this study is to explore the life transformation of individuals with justice history. This study particularly answers the following questions:

- What are the personal struggles faced by the participants while applying for a job?
- What are the strategies employed by the participants after failing to secure a job?
- What is the life of the participants after employing strategies?

C. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework provides a foundation for understanding and analyzing specific phenomena, guiding researchers in exploring the life transformation of individuals with justice history.

Operant Conditioning theory was developed in the 1930s by Burrhus Frederic Skinner, also known as B.F. Skinner. The theory suggests that the reactions of an individual to their environment significantly shape their learning process and directly influence their observable actions and responses. When a specific pattern is reinforced, the individual becomes conditioned to respond accordingly. Individuals with justice history who start businesses often experience positive reinforcement, feeling accomplishment and satisfaction. This motivation encourages them to persist, overcome obstacles, and avoid negative consequences like unemployment or financial instability.

Hope theory was developed in 1989 by Charles R. Snyder. The theory emphasizes two key factors influencing goal movement: pathways thinking, which involves the human ability to create pathways to the desired future, and agency thinking, which involves intention, confidence, and positive motivation. It also focuses on the positive motivational state that drives individuals toward achieving goals. This theory empowers individuals with justice history to view entrepreneurship as a new path toward a positive future. By setting clear goals, believing in their abilities, and surrounding themselves with supportive networks, they can increase their chances of success and build a fulfilling life beyond their past.

Social Cognitive theory was developed in 1896 by Albert Bandura. This theory suggests that learning can occur through observing the behavior of others. It focuses on attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation in influencing behavior, emphasizing the dynamic interaction between people, behavior, environments, and past experiences. Individuals with justice history can learn from successful entrepreneurs, build confidence, and improve business skills. Self-regulation helps them monitor progress, adjust strategies, and stay focused on objectives.

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was proposed in 1985 by Edward Deci and Richard Ryan. This theory of motivation suggests that people tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfillment. Also, it suggests that people are motivated by autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Job rejection often leads individuals with justice history to seek new directions, gain control, learn new skills, and find support. Pursuing a new path can fulfill these needs and enhance well-being and purpose, ultimately improving quality of life.

D. Conceptual Framework

A conceptual framework should describe the components of the investigations (Luft et al., 2022). This framework is an essential component of any research study that facilitates understanding a particular phenomenon or issue and directs the entire research process.

The Input-Process-Output-Outcome (IPOO) Model was used in this study. This model is a functional graph that includes input, process, output, and outcome, as well as specific steps and descriptions of all ends and byproducts.

The inputs were the personal struggles of individuals with justice history while applying for a job, the strategies employed by individuals with justice history after failing to secure a job, and the life of individuals with justice history after employing strategies. The research process involved designing the research design and methodology, gathering data through interviews, and interpreting and analyzing the collected information. The output of the study is a documentary video titled "The Silent Battles Turned into Success." This video aims to shed light on the struggles and triumphs of individuals with justice history.

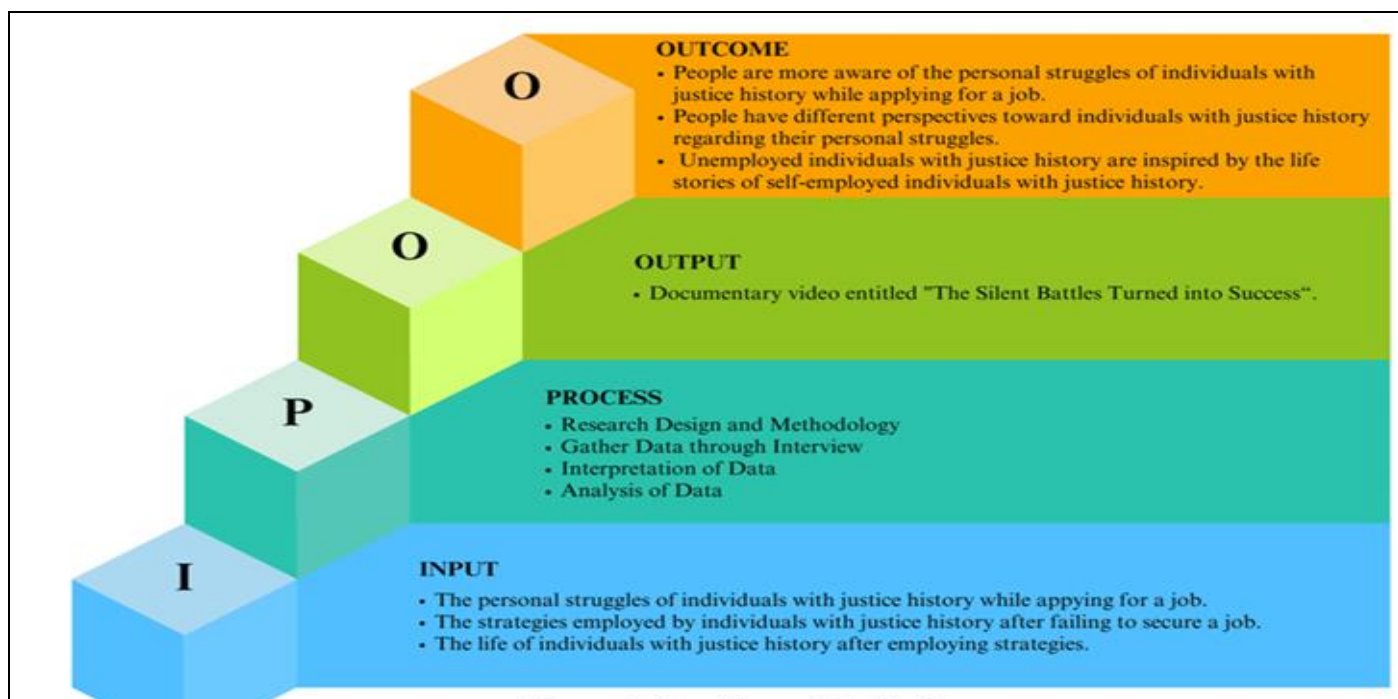


Fig 1: Paradigm of the Study

The outcomes include: it increased public awareness of the personal challenges faced by individuals with justice history, particularly in securing employment; it encouraged a shift in societal perspectives, fostering greater empathy and understanding toward their experiences; and it inspired unemployed individuals with justice history by showcasing the life stories of self-employed individuals who overcame similar challenges.

E. Significance of the Study

➤ *This Study will be Beneficial and Significant to the Following:*

- **Individuals with Justice History.** The results of this study may inspire individuals with justice history to take different paths after experiencing rejections in a job application.
- **Family.** This study highlights the significant role of families in motivating individuals with justice history to overcome challenges. By fostering shared values, building trust, and providing consistent support, families can empower these individuals to achieve their goals and successfully reintegrate into the community. Their encouragement and understanding are essential in rebuilding confidence and resilience during the reintegration process.
- **Institutional and Non-Institutional Corrections.** This study underscores the importance of both institutional and non-institutional corrections in supporting individuals with justice history. These organizations can provide critical resources to help individuals reintegrate into society and address the challenges of job rejections caused by their criminal records. Additionally, corrections programs can focus on equipping inmates with entrepreneurial and business skills, preparing them

for self-employment opportunities and successful reintegration upon release. Such initiatives can reduce recidivism and promote long-term societal inclusion.

- **Government.** This study will provide a basis for making or improving government policies, rules, and regulations to assist individuals with justice history to reintegrate successfully. It will also involve implementing programs aimed at helping these individuals with justice history to acquire essential business skills.
- **Community.** The result of this study will help the community to gain the appropriate information necessary for them to be aware of the life transformation of individuals with justice history.
- **Researchers.** The findings of this study may give the researchers a deeper understanding of the life transformation of individuals with justice history after job rejection.
- **Future Researchers.** They may use the findings of this study as a reference when conducting similar or related research.

F. Scope and Delimitations of the Study

The general scope of this study focuses on the life transformations of individuals with justice history. It examines their personal struggles while applying for jobs, the strategies they employed after facing job rejections, and the quality of life they achieved after implementing these strategies.

The delimitation of this study includes five (5) self-employed individuals with justice history residing in the Province of Ilocos Norte. The participants were selected based on specific criteria: they must have completed their sentences in any penal institution in the Philippines, achieved success through strategies to cope with job

rejections, resided in Ilocos Norte, and willingly consented to participate in the study.

This research was conducted from the second semester of the academic year 2023-2024 to the first semester of the academic year 2024-2025.

G. Definition of terms

The following terms are operationally and technically defined for a better understanding of the terminology in this study.

- **Business.** It is the organized efforts and activities of individuals to produce and sell goods and services for profit.
- **Criminal record.** This is defined as a known record of having been arrested, imprisoned, and convicted in the past for committing a crime.
- **Declination.** It is defined as failure to be hired after individuals with justice history apply for a job. It shows that the person is not selected for the job position.
- **Financial Constraints.** These are defined as the lack of money in searching for a job.
- **Individual with justice history.** This refers to a person who has served a sentence and been released from prison or jail and tried to apply for a job but was rejected, so he/she decided to take a different path.
- **Job.** It is a specialized task performed by a person who is hired by a company or organization.
- **Life transformation.** This is the positive change that occurs in the life of the individual with justice history after using strategies to cope with job rejection.
- **Personal struggles.** These are the combined effects of having a criminal record and financial constraints that impede the ability of individuals with justice history to be employed in a job.
- **Reintegration.** It is how an individual with a justice history returns to the community.
- **Self-employment.** This refers to the practice of working for oneself instead of an employer.
- **Strategies.** These are the methods the participants used to successfully reintegrate into the community after being rejected in a job application.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE AND STUDIES

A. 'Gizza a Job, I Can Do That': What the Literature Tells Us About How the Inability to Secure Employment Can Lead to Ex-Offenders Starting a Business

There are different challenges faced by minorities in gaining employment. Despite these obstacles, entrepreneurship paradoxically offers an ideal solution. People, particularly those with criminal records, often encounter difficulties securing traditional employment. As a result, entrepreneurship becomes a viable career option for them. Initiatives such as prison-based entrepreneurship programs aim to equip offenders with essential business skills, fostering employment and reducing recidivism. Minorities are disadvantaged and face discrimination and

challenges in gaining employment. This situation becomes worse when individuals have a criminal record and have been in jail. For many ex-offenders, unemployment, recidivism, and a criminal career path seem inevitable (Smith, 2021).

B. Ex-inmate turns Entrepreneur, Champions Second Chances

A former inmate has transformed into an entrepreneur, transforming his past into a stepping stone for his future. He founded a skill-training business for fellow ex-prisoners, advocating for universal access to opportunities for reform and reintegration. His firm, 'Queen Coffee Bean', aims to change societal perceptions and reaffirm the idea of a second chance. Despite facing challenges like reduced flexibility, stagnant wages, and fear of a probation officer visit, he found an opportunity through an online entrepreneurship course from a non-profit, Inmates to Entrepreneurs (I2E). He created a business plan focused on selling high-quality, fair-trade coffee beans and introduced the venture into the competitive coffee industry. Now a successful business owner in High Point, North Carolina, he serves distinct coffee beans and a dedicated customer base, showcasing the potential to overcome obstacles to achieve success (Campbell, 2024).

C. He was an Ex-Convict, now a Businessman

Kuya Daga is currently trending on social media because of his blockbuster hotdog sandwich, which is a favorite in Divisoria. Before becoming a businessman, Kuya Daga used to be a notorious snatcher in Recto. He was released in 2014 after serving 10 years in prison, so he made sure to turn his life around and change it for the better. Kuya Daga started his hotdog sandwich business using the money he saved from working while in prison. Now, his business is very successful. At 4:00 AM, customers wait for him in Divisoria due to his high-quality ingredients, including bread, hotdogs, and vegetable fillings. Kuya Daga used to make easy money through illegal activities but has since turned his life around and now works hard for his earnings. His story is truly inspiring, serving as a living testimony that it is never too late to change for the better. Many people admire his courage and diligence in entrepreneurship. He is an inspiration to other Filipinos who have strayed, especially those who have been incarcerated but want to change, start a business, and succeed (Go Negosyo, 2022).

D. From Prison to Entrepreneurship: Can Entrepreneurship be a Reentry Strategy for Justice-Impacted Individuals?

The article explores the potential of entrepreneurship as a re-entry strategy for individuals with criminal records in the United States. It highlights the prevalence of entrepreneurial entry among this population, reveals the mechanisms and consequences, and highlights the challenges faced by reentering entrepreneurs. The article also highlights policy implications and proposes initiatives to strengthen the viability of entrepreneurship as a re-entry strategy for those with criminal histories. Both quantitative and qualitative work documents were used that discussed

that entrepreneurship helps reduce income gaps, boost economic mobility, and reduce recidivism compared to wage employment and unemployment. Many formerly incarcerated individuals use personal savings or family and friends for capital to start new businesses due to financial barriers. Entrepreneurship can lead to similar or, at times, improved outcomes compared to employment for justice-impacted individuals in terms of higher earnings, lower recidivism, and long-term economic mobility. People with criminal records can achieve improved earnings in entrepreneurship compared to other alternatives they face in the labor market: unemployment and underemployment. Entrepreneurship helps formerly incarcerated individuals achieve long-term economic integration and mobility, by providing opportunities to gain work experience that they can leverage to secure subsequent employment. The increasing trend of entrepreneurship among justice-impacted individuals is a promising alternative for successful reentry into society. Entrepreneurship has helped other marginalized groups in the labor market to overcome poverty and achieve economic and social mobility. Individuals with criminal records face significant obstacles to employment in the United States. A key factor causing these adverse employment outcomes is that criminal histories expose justice-impacted individuals to employer discrimination. Employers view criminal records as a “negative credential” signaling low worker quality, untrustworthiness, and lack of honesty. Employers are thus over 50 percent less likely to hire justice-impacted individuals than comparable job applicants without a criminal record. The increasing trend of entrepreneurship among justice-impacted individuals is a promising alternative for successful reentry into society. However, this concept is relatively new, and more attention is needed to support and foster entrepreneurship among returning citizens. Addressing unique barriers and challenges can enhance their opportunities for successful reintegration into society. This suggests that entrepreneurship could lay a legitimate path for justice-impacted individuals to secure work and achieve successful reentry, particularly in the context of limited viable labor market opportunities (Hwang, 2022).

E. Beyond Incarceration: Identification of Post-Incarceration Strategies for Successful Reintegration

Ex-convicts face discrimination in employment, but self-employment offers a way to overcome it and foster an entrepreneurial mindset. They had post-incarceration strategies that led to successful reintegration. This qualitative research used a phenomenological design to gather data through participant interviews. The data was collected through semi-structured interviews with 10 ex-offenders who had successfully reintegrated and had not been under supervision for at least 3 years. Thematic analysis was used to analyze the data. Participants who were released from prisons experienced overcoming stigmas and hurdles by starting their businesses. Participants B, C, G, and H shared their experiences, highlighting the spirit of entrepreneurialism among released offenders, who have since owned successful businesses such as consulting agencies, construction firms, and

transportation companies. Participants used various strategies to overcome policy-driven reintegration barriers, including obtaining jobs, starting businesses, and securing income for basic needs. They provided for food and housing through income streams or relied on family, friends, or government programs. The narratives of successful non-recidivating ex-convicts argued for shifting research focus from failure to success (Walker, 2024).

F. Aftermath of Incarceration: Lived Experiences of the Ex-Convict

The re-entry process for ex-convicts is a challenging experience characterized by a range of barriers and obstacles. It is difficult to find stable employment and housing, often facing discrimination and stigma due to their criminal record. They also strained relationships with family and friends and struggled with mental health. This study utilized the qualitative type of research, specifically the phenomenological approach. A phenomenology that refers to experience, this approach seeks to understand human experiences. The study reveals that being an ex-convict presents various challenges, including limited job opportunities and discrimination. Acceptance and trust-building can be challenging and require significant effort. Reconciliation with family members is a long process, and fair treatment is often hostile. Social discrimination can lead to difficulties in finding employment, housing, and social acceptance, often hindering reintegration into society and rebuilding lives after serving a sentence. Overall, overcoming these challenges is crucial for ex-convicts to regain their sense of acceptance and support (Curib et al., 2023).

G. The Reintegration of Ex-Convicts in Society: A Case Study

Released offenders often lack support systems and resources for community reintegration. The study examined the experiences of ex-convicts in post-incarceration, revealing their challenges in reintegration into the community, including job loss, relationship issues, and psychological issues like stigma, discrimination, isolation, and instability, thereby enhancing community understanding. The study was conducted in Ozamiz City, Misamis Occidental, Philippines, and used a qualitative case study design and a combination of purposive and snowball sampling to identify seven ex-convicts who completed their sentences in prison or jail. From the responses of the participants, there were seven emergent themes: (1) having difficulty applying for a job, (2) struggling to earn a living, (3) feeling indifference among family members and relatives, (4) enduring the negative treatment of other people, (5) trying to start a new life, (6) having a positive outlook in life despite hardship, and (7) aiming to reconcile with the family. Ex-convicts face economic and social challenges in reintegrating into society due to their criminal records. They struggle with employment, daily needs, and family balancing. They create coping mechanisms, often starting from scratch, selling items to support their families, and avoiding job loss. Social treatment, motivation, and divine intervention

help them accept their life transformation (Cuevas & Vivares, 2023).

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

The study explored how ex-offenders can live life after incarceration while grappling with outside difficulties, such as alienating their capability to live anew. As a result of their release, they developed strategies and gained perspective on the difficulties they faced. They also buried thoughtful insights. This study used the qualitative method through a case study approach. Five participants were interviewed using interview guide questions, and a thematic analysis was conducted. Research question 2 investigated the strategies of ex-offenders in surpassing the living challenges outside the bars. They are passive about job opportunities offered to them. They are content to become the recipients of the available job nearby to start. They took the opportunity and became content with what they could accomplish with the job. Rather than societal issues, ex-offenders deal with problems that affect their families, put their lives in danger, and increase recidivism. They are motivated to change through their children, parents, and loved ones, and their healthy interactions with family and children foster an objective approach to living a new beginning (Palgan & Apolinario, 2022).

III. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Method and Design

The researchers used a qualitative research method in this study. According to Brannan et al. (2022), qualitative research gathers participants' experiences, perceptions, and behavior.

Phenomenological research was used in this study as part of this methodology since it facilitates understanding and exploration of the life transformation of individuals with justice history. Phenomenological research explores deeply the meaning of an individual's experiences. Primarily, it is about examining common human experiences to discover their basic perceptions and the interpretations they create of their own and other people's experiences (Bliss, 2016).

B. Population and Locale of the Study

Five (5) self-employed individuals with justice history in the Province of Ilocos Norte were the participants of the study, two (2) from Brgy. Cali, Dingras, one (1) from Brgy. 57 Pila, Laoag City, one (1) from Brgy. Manalpac, Solsona, and one (1) Brgy. 13 Naglicuan, Pasuquin.

The researchers used purposive sampling as a sampling method to gather in-depth knowledge and detailed information from the five (5) chosen participants. Purposive sampling refers to a group of non-probability sampling techniques in which participants are selected because they have characteristics that are needed in the sample (Nikolopoulou, 2023).

The selection criteria were based on the following: a) has finished serving a sentence in any penal institution in the Philippines; b) has transformed life after employing strategies to cope with life; c) has been residing in Ilocos Norte; and d) had consented to participate in the study.

C. Data Gathering Tool

The researchers used an interview guide, recording device, and semi-structured interview to gather data. The interview guide consists of questions related to the problems of the study specifically the personal struggles faced by individuals with justice history while applying for a job, the strategies they employed after failing to secure a job, and the quality of life they have after employing strategies. A validated interview guide was used to conduct the semi-structured interview, including the questions for the participants. A recording device is an instrument that stores sound. This instrument helped the researchers to transcribe the answers of the participants.

D. Data Gathering Procedure

The researchers created an interview guide consisting of questions regarding the personal struggles while applying for a job, strategies employed after rejection, and the life of an individual with justice history after employing strategies with the supervision of their research adviser and to be validated by the guidance counselor. Upon validation of the tool, the researchers created a consent letter for the participants, which was approved by their research adviser. A semi-structured interview was conducted with the participants using an interview guide and a recording device. The researchers ensure data confidentiality, clearly explain the purpose and importance of the research, inform participants about their right to refuse or withdraw, and allow them time to read and understand the consent form before signing. The participants were given enough time to answer each question. After data collection, treatment of the data proceeded.

E. Treatment of Data

The researchers used Thematic Analysis to treat the data that was collected. Thematic analysis is an analytical method that breaks down and arranges large amounts of data from qualitative research by applying relevant codes to specific observations and quotations to make it easier to identify important themes (Rosala, 2022).

The data gathered was treated first by familiarizing it and using quotations to label important information from the answers of the participants. Next, initial codes were created to identify and interpret the main themes representing the patterns. Finally, the researchers provide a report and present the findings of the study.

F. Ethical Considerations

According to Abhulimhen-Iyoha (2020), due to the length of the interview and the degree of sensitivity of the questions asked, it is thought that the participants' private lives have been invaded. Maintaining a high level of ethical considerations is important.

Researchers provide an oral explanation to the participants about the purpose and significance of the study and their role, rights, withdrawal, and confidentiality. Participants signed a consent letter, indicating understanding of study objective, and protection of privacy and confidentiality. Researchers adhere to ethical procedures, securing necessary approvals and maintaining honest discussions about their rights.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Personal Struggles of Individuals with Justice History While Applying for Jobs

As a new chapter begins, individuals with justice history try to restart their lives by reconnecting to society. Despite their eagerness to reconnect with people, they still face different struggles upon re-entry into society. This section of the research study discussed the personal struggles of individuals with justice history while applying for jobs.

➤ Declination due to Criminal Record

Rejection is more than just a simple “no.” It is the experience of being excluded, denied, or cast aside by others. It can be a job application that was turned down (NeuroLaunch, 2024).

A criminal record is typically defined as the document of individual with his interactions with the criminal justice system (Nelson, 1989). It is used to track the criminal history of people and can have significant impact in life, such as employment opportunities and social reintegration (Pager, 2003).

In this study, one of the significant struggles faced by individuals with justice history is the presence of a criminal record, which participants perceived as a primary obstacle in their job applications. According to the participants, their criminal record was a key factor hindering their employment opportunities. However, it is noteworthy that there were no reported instances from business establishments explicitly stating that an applicant with justice history was declined due to their criminal record. A criminal record is defined as an official record documenting an individual's history of arrests, imprisonment, and convictions for past crimes.

Declination due to a criminal record refers to the rejection of a job application based on an applicant's past criminal conviction.

As perceived by Participant 1, who was incarcerated for 6 years, he stated that:

“Haan lang nga uppat. Sobra pay ah. Kanayun nak mareject idi. Adu ti nangrej-reject kanyak panggep dijay kaso nga nakasangkutak.”

(It was not just four times; it was far more than that. I have faced countless rejections, many of which were due to the crime I was involved in.)

After being incarcerated for 6 months, Participant 2 stated that:

“Naminsan pay lang. Haan nak naawat ti pagubraan gapo ti record ko iti criminal case. Gapo ti record ko, nakita da didyay ti background ko.”

(I only applied once, but I was not accepted for the job because of my criminal record. Because of that record, they saw my background.)

Participant 3, who was incarcerated for 6 years, further stated that:

“Nag apply nak naminsan. Adda met ti nag-applyak nga mangreject kanyak, siyempre makita da met nga adda ti record tayo nga criminal case ket dagijay met ti dadduma nga pagibasehan da.”

(I applied only once, but there were others who rejected me because they could see my criminal record, and at times, that became the basis for their decision.)

After being incarcerated for 6 years, Participant 4 stated that:

“Napanak met nagbirok naminsan. Didak met nga tinanggap kasi didyay nga napasamak ti biyag ko nga naibalud.”

(I also tried applying for a job once, but they did not accept me because of my past, specifically my time in prison.)

Participant 5, who was incarcerated for 8 years, also stated that:

“Namin ado nak nagsapol iti trabaho ngem narigat. Nakabasa nak met ngem awan latta met. Gapo siguro iti criminal record ko ket naawan ti tiwala dagiti employers.”

(I have searched for a job many times, but it has been difficult to find one. Perhaps because of my criminal record, employers lost trust in me.)

According to Curib et al. (2023), in their study “Aftermath of Incarceration: Lived Experiences of the Ex-Convict” being an ex-convict presents various challenges, including limited job opportunities. Job-seeking becomes the hardest part for the ex-convicts because it holds them back from rebuilding the trust of the community. Having a record as a law violator breaks the trust of everyone.

Individuals with criminal justice involvement face significant challenges in finding work. Employers do not want to hire individuals with a criminal record, even those with good qualifications (Wanberg et al., 2019).

Furthermore, in the study of Cuevas & Vivares (2023), ex-convicts face economic and social challenges in reintegrating into society due to their criminal records, which led to their struggle with employment.

Individuals with criminal records face significant obstacles to employment in the United States. Employers view criminal records as a “negative credential” (Hwang, 2022).

As individuals with justice history try to start their lives back in society, they try to look for jobs. However, they are being rejected after trying to apply for jobs. Many of the participants applied for jobs at least once, while some made multiple attempts. Unfortunately, all were rejected during the job application process. This rejection not only hindered their reintegration into society but also triggered various personal struggles.

Individuals with justice history have so many things to deal with during job application. Having a criminal record often results in a decline in job opportunities, as it becomes a barrier in the eyes of potential employers. They viewed their criminal record as one of the main obstacles to securing employment. Indeed, many of them were rejected based solely on their past convictions, further impacting their chances of reintegration into society.

➤ Financial Constraints

Financial constraint is the difficulty in managing personal finances, where people or households struggle to meet basic needs and obligations due to a lack of sufficient financial resources (Cani, 2019).

In this study, a financial constraint is defined as the lack of money while searching for a job. Individuals with justice history faced financial constraints while applying for jobs, and it is considered one of the challenges they encountered.

After 6 years of incarcerated, Participant 1 stated that:

“Umuna unay problema ti kwarta. Kwarta iti maysa kasapolak idi ta amin met nga requirements ket mabayadan.”

(First and foremost, money is a major problem. It is one of the things I need, as all the requirements come with associated costs that must be paid.)

The Financial Constraints is also supported by Participant 2, as he stated:

“Gapo met ti kwarta. Awan talaga idi ta siyempre nu aggapo ka didyay awan talaga pulos. Problemaek ta amin a tignay, panag biyahe, panagi pasa ti requirements ket ti agtigtignay kwarta.”

(It is because of money. I do not have any, especially after being in jail, where you leave with nothing. It is a real problem because everything you need to do—traveling, submitting requirements—comes with costs.)

Participant 5 also stated that:

“Nakabasa nak met ngem awan latta met. Awan payen iti kwartak. Sakbay kanga makarugi iti trabaho kasapulan un-unay ti kwarta nga mausar para kadagiti dokumento a kasapulan iti maysa nga pagubraan.”

(I studied, but I still do not have any money. When you start a job, you need money to cover the costs of the necessary documents.)

One of the challenges experienced by the participants in the study of Alano and Palma (2019), was financial problems during job applications.

Also, unemployed individuals tend to face issues; one of them was financial uncertainty, making the job search stressful for job seekers (Wanberg et al., 2019).

Individuals with a history of justice involvement face significant challenges as they attempt to reintegrate into society, particularly when seeking employment. Despite their efforts, many are rejected during the job application process, which not only hinders their reintegration but also leads to personal struggles. A primary barrier is their criminal record, which they believe plays a crucial role in their rejection by employers. Furthermore, they often encounter financial difficulties during their job search. These constraints worsen their situation, limiting their ability to cover transportation costs and other essentials needed to secure employment. As a result, their efforts to rebuild their lives and contribute meaningfully to society are severely hindered.

B. Strategies Employed by Individuals with a Justice History

One of the most difficult challenges Individuals with a Justice History face after re-entry into society is rejection in job applications. After the rejection, they employ different strategies to deal with it. They decided to take a different path after failing to secure a job. The outcome of the strategies they employed was starting a business.

➤ Starting a Business

Business is the organized efforts and activities of individuals to produce and sell goods and services for profit (Investopedia, 2019). It also refers to any organization or individual engaged in the exchange of goods or services to generate profits (Singh, 2023).

In this study, starting a business is the outcome of the strategy employed by individuals with a justice history after declination in the job application to sustain their daily needs and to support their relatives and friends. Some of the strategies of individuals with justice history were seeking

help from their relatives and friends and using their savings, which also served as the sub-themes.

➤ *Seeking Help from Relatives and Friends*

The subtheme Seeking Help from Relatives and Friends is supported by Participant 1, who stated that:

“Nagrigat agsapul ti pagubraan, kapilitan nga mapanak dumawat ti tulong dagiti kabagayak. Kaasi ni Apo Diyos, inikkan dak met ti maysa nga chansang idi, inikkan dak ti puhunan mi tapno agkaroon kami iti maliit na negosyo. Nagawid kami probinsya isu nagnegosyo kami. Nag negosyo kami ti canteen ti eskwelaan. Kaasi ni Apo Diyos dijay negosyo mi, agingana tatta, negosyo mi pay laeng.”

(It was difficult to find a job, so I turned to our relatives for help. Thank God, they gave me a chance and provided the capital to start a small business. We returned to the province and began a business—a canteen at a school. By God's grace, it is still our business to this day.)

Participant 3, stated that:

“Ag bis-bisness nak, buy and sell ti karne, ikan. Inikkan dak pagrugyanak agnegosyo dagijay kasinsin ko jay Hawaii.”

(I have a buy and sell for fish and meat. My cousins from Hawaii gave me the capital to start the business.)

Participant 4 added that:

“Gapu ta haan nak met inawat jay nag-applyak iti trabaho napanunatak iti nagal alaga iti animal kasla ti kalding, baboy ken baka. Inikkan nak puhunan tay asawak. Inikkan dak dagitay kabsat ko ti baka nga dwa ken baboy inggana napaganak ko inggana napaadok idi.”

(Since I was not accepted when I applied for a job, I decided to take care of animals like goats, pigs, and cows. My wife gave me capital for livestock farming. My siblings gave me two cows and a pig until I was able to breed them.)

Participant 5 stated that:

“Nagpatulongak iti barkadak nga agpaiserrek nga maysa nga construction worker, gapo ta isu la iti alisto nga pagserrekan nga awan requirements. Rinugyanak iti bassit a negosyok, bassit a kapital a naurnong ko idi agub ubraak ti construction worker. Rinugyak iti bassit a negosyo, buy and sell iti alahas ken pautang.”

(I asked a friend to help me get a job as a construction worker because it seemed like the easiest way to find work

without requiring many qualifications. Through working in construction, I was able to save money. With those savings, I started a small business buying and selling jewelry and offering loans.)

➤ *Savings*

In this study, savings refer to the money earned by individuals with a justice history, which they used to start their businesses. These savings were accumulated prior to their incarceration

Participant 2 who was a businessman before incarceration, further states that:

“Nangrugi kam naglako ti frozen foods immun-una idi haan nak pay naibalod. Idi rimwar nakon, gapo ta adda met payla nabatbati idi nga kwartak ken urnong ko, nagpatakder nak iti bukod ko nga negosyo, isu ti home décor.”

(Before my incarceration, we were already in the business of selling frozen goods. After I was released from jail, we used our savings to start our own business, which is home décor.)

According to Walker (2024), ex-convicts employed various strategies to overcome policy-driven barriers to reintegration. They shared how they met their needs by securing jobs, starting businesses, and finding sources of income necessary to support their basic requirements. By starting their own businesses, they were able to bypass the stigmas and challenges associated with traditional employment.

Additionally, ex-convicts developed coping mechanisms to manage their problems. Since most companies were unwilling to hire them, they often had to start from scratch. To sustain their daily needs and reduce the burden on their families, they resorted to selling goods as a way to survive (Cuevas & Vivares, 2023).

Moreover, the increasing trend of entrepreneurship among justice-impacted individuals is a promising alternative for successful reentry into society. Entrepreneurship has helped them in the labor market to overcome poverty and achieve economic and social mobility. It could also lay a new path for them to secure work and achieve successful reentry (Hwang, 2022).

Many offenders are likely to work in their businesses after facing difficulty finding employment. Running a small business or self-employment can improve the chances of success (Rieple & Harper, 1993).

Individuals with justice history view entrepreneurship as a new path toward a positive future. They are hopeful and increase their chances of success by building a fulfilling life by starting a business. The Hope theory states that one of the key factors in influencing goal movement is pathway

thinking, which involves the human ability to create pathways to the desired future (Synder, 1989).

Despite the rejection experienced by individuals with a justice history, they managed to move on from these painful events in their lives. They chose different paths that would lead to a better and more secure future. One of the strategies they employed was seeking help from relatives and friends, as well as using their savings to start a business. For example, one participant began livestock farming, while many others engaged in selling goods. Rather than seeking a job, they created opportunities for themselves and others. Their entrepreneurial spirit reflects their resilience and determination to overcome various challenges. By starting their businesses, they not only secure their own livelihoods but also contribute to their communities by providing employment opportunities and fostering economic growth.

C. Life of Individuals with Justice History after Employing Strategy

Individuals with a justice history face significant challenges upon their re-entry into society. In coping with the rejection they experience during job applications, many turn to starting businesses that help sustain them in their daily lives. From the difficulties of reintegration to the strategies they employ, the positive impact of owning a business becomes clear.

➤ Improvement of Life Status

The result of starting a business for individuals with a justice history is an improvement in their life status, primarily due to the income generated from their ventures. Improvement of life status refers to an enhancement in income levels, whether through higher earnings or more stable income, which can contribute to increased life satisfaction and overall well-being (FitzRoy & Nolan, 2021).

In this study, Improvement of Life Status is defined as the enhancement of the well-being and quality of life of individuals with a justice history. This encompasses subthemes such as changes in life perception, change in lifestyle, and financial stability.

➤ Change in Life Perception

Participant 2 stated that:

"Nalipatak pay dagiti dati nga ububrak ken mai-liwliwag ko iti rikna kon. Awan iti mapanpanunut ko nga madin."

(I have already forgotten what I did in the past and have been able to manage my feelings. I no longer dwell on negative thoughts.)

➤ Change in Lifestyle

Participant 1, stated that:

"Nakabili na din kami ng sariling sasakyan at nakaipon na din kami ng gamit sa bahay."

(We were able to buy our own car and some items for our house.)

Further, Participant 2 stated that:

"Nakapundar nak met iti naduma-duma nga appliances para kadetoy negosyo, ken dagiti services nga pangikargaan dagita home décor."

(I was able to buy appliances for my business and purchase cars for our use, to transport the home décor.)

Participant 5 supports the subtheme Change in Lifestyle, as he stated:

"Nain inot a nagbaliw iti biagmi, addaan kamin iti bassit a negosyo nga isu ti pangalaan mi ti inaldaw aldaw a kasapulan iti uneg ti familia mi."

(Our lives gradually improved when we started a small business that provided for our family's daily needs.)

➤ Financial Stability

Participant 1, who has 4 sons, stated that:

"Gapo toy negosyo nga daytoy naka luwag luwag kami sa pamumuhay. Haan kamin unay a marigrigatan, nga kasla idi. Duwa nga ubing kon iti nakalpas iti kolehiyo gapo kadetoy a negosyo."

(Because of this business, our lives have improved. We are no longer struggling as we did before. My two kids have already graduated from college thanks to this business.)

Participant 2, who has 3 children, also stated that:

"Simmayaan met ketdi iti biag, haan nga kasla idin."

(Our life has improved; we are no longer struggling as we did before.)

Further, Participant 3 said that:

"Kaasi ni Apo ket medyo makaang-angat kamin iti pinagbiyag."

(By God's mercy, our lives are better.)

Additionally, Participant 4's statement further supports the improvement in economic stability after starting the business.

"Ket kaasin Apo Diyos adda met bassit a nga makitak, kasla didyay pangal-alaak iti panagbiyag mi nga sanga pamilya."

(By God's mercy, I was able to earn a small income, which I used to support our family's needs.)

Participant 5, who has 2 children, stated that:

“Uray bassit lang met detoy negosyo mi, wennu toy income mi, kaya na metten a sustentuan iti inaldaw aldaw nga kasapulan iti pamilyak.”

(Even though our business and income are small, they are enough to sustain my family's daily needs.)

The study of Hwang and Phillips (2020) stated that entrepreneurship offers justice-impacted individuals the opportunity to achieve higher earnings. It gives them the opportunity to earn competitive earnings without relying on or being hindered by employers' negative perceptions. For justice-involved individuals, entrepreneurship offers an opportunity to earn competitive earnings without relying on or being hindered by employers' negative perceptions.

Entrepreneurship provides new and interesting opportunities and challenges for ex-convicts to find community acceptance, financial stability, and socialization and re-start life in their community (Van Wyk, 2015).

Entrepreneurship can lead to similar or, at times, improved outcomes compared to employment for justice-impacted individuals in terms of higher earnings, lower recidivism, and long-term economic mobility. People with criminal records can achieve improved earnings in entrepreneurship. It also helps formerly incarcerated individuals achieve long-term economic integration and mobility by providing opportunities to gain work experience that they can leverage to secure subsequent employment (Hwang, 2022).

Individuals with justice history who start businesses after rejection often experience positive reinforcement, feeling accomplishment and satisfaction. This motivation encourages them to persist, overcome obstacles, and avoid negative consequences like unemployment or financial instability. The Operant Conditioning theory states that the reactions of an individual to their environment significantly shape their learning process and directly influence their observable actions and responses. (Skinner, 1930).

Job rejection often leads individuals with justice history to seek new directions, like starting a business. Pursuing a new path can fulfill their needs and enhance well-being and purpose, ultimately improving quality of life. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) stated that people tend to be driven by a need to grow and gain fulfillment (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

After starting their businesses, individuals with a justice history experienced significant changes in their lives, particularly in the financial aspect. With their income, they were able to meet their families' daily needs. This

newfound financial stability enabled them to send their children to school and restored their confidence and sense of self-worth, knowing they could provide for their loved ones. Through their businesses, they transitioned from a state of uncertainty and dependence to one of control and independence. This entrepreneurial path also gave them a renewed sense of purpose and connection to their community. Their journey highlights the transformative power of resilience and entrepreneurship in overcoming personal and societal challenges.

V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

A. Summary of the Findings

The findings show that individuals with a justice history face significant challenges when it comes to securing employment. To gain insights into their personal struggles, the researchers asked about their life experiences after their release. The study revealed that individuals with justice histories encountered two major challenges during their job search: 1) Declination due to Criminal Record, and 2) Financial Constraints.

Despite these rejections, individuals with justice history were able to employ strategies to overcome the challenges they faced. The study found that one such strategy was starting a business, which became a key outcome of their efforts. The strategies they used included seeking help from relatives and friends and utilizing their savings to fund their ventures. Furthermore, individuals with justice histories took proactive steps by creating businesses, which allowed them to regain control of their lives.

When asked about their life after employing these strategies, the researchers found that the individuals experienced an Improvement of Life Status. This improvement included changes in their life perceptions and lifestyle, with many regaining their confidence and sense of self-worth. Their mindset shifted, leading to personal growth and success.

Having a job is often considered the first step for individuals with a justice history to provide for their daily needs. Despite facing rejection, they demonstrated resilience and determination to rebuild their lives and reintegrate into society. Ultimately, starting their own businesses improved their lives, providing them with opportunities to work, earn income, and support themselves and their families.

B. Conclusions

Based on the statements provided by the participants, it can be seen that the experiences of individuals with justice history in job applications led to something different. There was a transition in their lives as a result of their struggles and efforts.

The journey of individuals with justice history has never been easy. From the moment they step out of prison or jail, they try to reconnect with society and find

jobs. However, finding a job was difficult for them because of their criminal records and financial problems. They thought that they were declined in job application because of their criminal records. Rejection in job applications made them feel different emotions, which led to emotional distress.

Despite the challenges of life, they always find a way to live a life for the better. Through the help of their relatives and friends and by using their savings, they were able to start their own business after failing to secure a job. This strategy has a great impact on their lives. Their life after employing strategies was different from the life they had experienced while applying for a job. As a result of their resilience, the life perceptions and lifestyle of individuals with justice history changed. Some of them were able to achieve financial stability, which enabled them to support the education of their children and provide for their daily needs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

➤ *From the Aforementioned Findings and Conclusions, the Following are Hereby Recommended:*

- The Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) may provide Vocational Training to individuals with justice history. They offer specialized training in various fields to equip individuals with justice history with marketable skills that can help them to cope with their lives.
- The Local Government Unit (LGU) may provide local economic development programs that may offer incentives and support to the individuals with justice history in their transformation into the community. They can help the individuals with justice history by reviewing the Anti-Discrimination Law.
- The Institutional Corrections can play a significant role in inmates by improving programs such as vocational programs and entrepreneurship education. They may issue a certificate upon the release of inmates to strengthen that they are equipped with skills if they will apply for a job and they can reintegrate and can work properly.
- The Ilocos Norte Youth Development Office may provide a scholarship program for the children of individuals with justice history during incarceration to lessen the financial burden and help them finish their education.

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