From Wrong Living to Right Living: Understanding the Desistance Process of Filipino Parolees

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Abstract

Narratives of (13) Filipino parolees who were regarded as having successful reintegration experiences were analyzed to understand their desistance process: forming a commitment to change, persisting with discontinuance amidst setbacks, and maintaining the decision to stop. Key components that impeded and facilitated parolees' reintegration into life outside of prison were examined. Family destabilization, psychosocial distress, diminished employment opportunities, housing and homelessness, and stigma were the challenges that they had to navigate. Factors that helped parolees facilitate the desistance process included supportive others, employment, schooling, agency, correctional/parole officers, spirituality, and parole itself.

Narratives reflect that desistance, which commences during incarceration, is a result of the combination of individual factors and situational contexts that buffer the negative implications of having a history of offending.

Keywords: incarceration, parole, turning point, desistance, reintegration

Introduction

Parole, the "conditional release of a prisoner from a correctional institution after serving the minimum period of a prison sentence" (BPP Manual, 2006, p.1), encourages desistance and assists persons deprived of liberty (PDL) to transition back into the community by promoting a conventional lifestyle (Bahr et al., 2010; Pogrebin et al., 2015). While it encourages desistance and (re)integration, parole can place individuals in a position where they face challenging dynamics that can complicate efforts to attain a conventional lifestyle, a phenomenon called the 'parole paradox' (Pogrebin et al., 2015).

In the Philippines, according to the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA) report on the profile of parolees, 11,916 were released on parole in 2017. Of this number, approximately 3% recidivated and were brought back to prison.Looking at the numbers, one could deduce that only a few parolees recidivated and got rearrested back to prison. This then could imply that reintegration is a relatively easy process.

However, the success of reintegration could not be gauged alone by the low rate of recidivism, the tendency to revert to a criminal lifestyle (Chiricos et al., 2007). The quality of life of those who were able to desist from engaging in unlawful acts outside of prison would be a better focus of inquiry, as this would provide a better understanding of how the process of reintegrating into the community had been for parolees, after years of incarceration.

Desistance Process

Desistance is the process in which people who have a history of offending, work toward a point where they no longer commit crimes (Maruna, 2012). While several theoretical frameworks provide a plausible explanation of desistance, the life course perspective provides the most beneficial approach to understanding desistance from crime, because of its explicit focus on the unfolding of lives in a social context

(Laub & Sampson, 2001). Moreover, a life course is also more appropriate as it is aligned with the key assumption of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, that is to fully understand the individual, the context should be taken into consideration (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

This framework also focuses on the sources of change and their role in the process of desistance from unlawful behaviors. Trajectories and transitions are the two key concepts to explain a life course theory (Laub & Sampson, 2003). Trajectories are long-term patterns and sequences. Many individuals in carceral facilities have been on a long-term trajectory of crime, and the major challenge as they reintegrate into society would be how to break that trajectory (Bahr et al., 2005). Transitions, on the other hand, are life events that are embedded in trajectories, changing the course towards reintegration to mainstream society.

Reintegration is a complex process that is not well understood (Maruna, 2001; Healy & O'Donnell, 2008; Petersilia, 2005; Bahr et al., 2010). There is a need for more theorizing and research on how released prisoners can transition in the community and (re)adjust to life outside of prison (Laub & Phelan, 2001), especially in the Philippines where there is a dearth of understanding of their experiences. Additionally, parolees are in a unique position, being regarded as transitioning individuals "between and betwixt" two social worlds, or as being liminal (Turner, 1969): while they are physically free, they are still bound by law and are under supervision. What are in the minds of [former] offenders as they make the transition from criminality to the convention is difficult for researchers to access. It is therefore useful to document the process of reform as it happens, and to chart associated changes in the lifestyles and psychology of desisting offenders.

This study hopes to contribute to the body of knowledge about desistance and reintegration among former persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) on parole, or parolees. It is hoped to have functional and practical use to several bodies. More specifically, the research may be relevant to policymakers, the public, and parolees themselves. For

policymakers, understanding the factors that facilitate desistance is important in shaping interventions that reduce reoffending among those already involved in crime (Laub & Phelan, 2001). Additionally, the main objective of the parole system is to reintegrate the parolees into their families, and with the latter, back into their communities, where both parolees and family members alike get a feeling of being excluded (Bahr et al., 2005). Research such as this could be an opportunity to build public awareness, which is fundamental to helping former PDLs successfully reintegrate into the community. Lastly, a better understanding of desistance and reintegration would enable family members, peers, and professionals to help more former prisoners (re)adjust to life outside of prison, and successfully complete their parole, thus lowering recidivism rates (Bahr et al., 2010).

Penal Management in the Philippines

Penitentiary system

In the Philippines, there are three primary types of carceral facilities: 1) local jails (district, city, and municipal); 2) national prisons; 3) prison farms (RA 10592, 2013).

Local jails are for short-term sentences, to house those who are in pre-trial detention, and those sentenced for less than three years. These facilities are managed by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP). Detainees usually spend two to seven years in the facilities during trial, and upon conviction, are then [usually] transferred to national penitentiaries, to serve their sentence (Narag, 2005).

National prisons and prison farms are for longer-term sentences. These facilities are administered by the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) which houses males who are convicted to sentences of more than three years. The Correctional Institute for Women (CIW) is the national prison facility for females serving their sentence. The National Training School for Boys (NTSB) is a facility whose mandate is for children in conflict with the law (CICL) to be

transformed into individuals with improved self-image and psychosocial functioning, and to be trained to adapt to and cope with a more productive life.

Each carceral facility offers a variety of rehabilitative programs on livelihood, education, religion, and social skills. These are the means of helping the PDLs acquire skills that may assist them in becoming productive citizens once they are released and reintegrated to mainstream society.

Parole system

The Parole and Probation Administration (PPA), an agency under the Department of Justice (DOJ), is mandated to redeem convicted offenders who are under the probation and parole system, and to promote correction and rehabilitation by using innovative interventions and techniques that respect the dignity of a person. A therapeutic community (TC) is a tool that PPA uses to prepare the clients for reintegration into the community.

According to the Board of Pardons and Parole (BPP) Revised Manual (2006), an inmate's case may be eligible for review provided that one: 1) is serving an indeterminate sentence, the maximum period of which exceeds one year; 2) has served the minimum period of the indeterminate sentence; 3) has conviction that is final and executory; 4) has no pending criminal case; and 5) is serving sentence in the national penitentiary (unless confinement in a municipal, city, district, or provincial jail is justified).

The Board may grant prisoners parole, based on reports on the prisoners' work and conduct, provided that upon its findings, the following circumstances are present: 1) Prisoners are fit, by their training, for release; 2) There is a reasonable probability that if released, they will live and remain at liberty without violating the law; Their release will not be incompatible with the welfare of society (BPP Manual, 2006).

Methodology

A qualitative approach was employed to facilitate the exploration of the processes, and to gain an understanding of the experiences of the parolees. They were selected through purposive sampling from parole and probation offices in Metro Manila. Purposive sampling was the appropriate method, which clearly indicated the characteristics and rationale for inclusion/exclusion in the selection of participants (Willig, 2013).

The criteria were that the participating parolees: 1) have met the Board requirements for parole; 2) were nominated by their supervisor as having noteworthy reintegration experience; 3) viewed their reintegration to be basically satisfying; and 4) were articulate.

There was a total of thirteen (13) respondents, with ages ranging from 26-64 years old. Eleven (11) of the respondents were male, and two (2) were female. The respondents varied in civil status, educational attainment, and employment level, and had been on parole from one to five years.

The study included only parolees who were under supervision, who had no history of recidivism, and who were involved in unlawful acts that were criminal in nature. The two characteristics of criminal record (having no history of recidivism and having received conviction for criminal acts) are requirements to qualify for parole. Those with a lower sentence for a crime of lower severity would be detained but not imprisoned, and would qualify for probation, not parole.

The study was guided by McAdams' (1995) Life Story Interview, with modifications. In McAdams, respondents are asked to divide their lives into chapters and to provide a summary for each. Then they are asked to describe low and high points, turning points, greatest life challenges, most influential people in their lives, future plot, and personal ideology.

For this study, the interview was divided into sections: 1) life chapters (pre-incarceration, during incarceration, and post-incarceration); 2) critical life events; 3) life challenge; 4) positive and negative influences on their life story; 5) personal ideology; 6) perceived stigma; 7) perceived future for the self.

Narratives are particularly powerful for marginalized individuals, because by telling their stories, they can be heard, recognized, and acknowledged by others (Opsal, 2011). Before the conduct of the interviews, the guide was presented to the supervising officers to ensure the appropriateness of terms and language in general, so that respondents would be more able to express their innermost sentiments, ideas, perceptions, and attitudes (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

The respondents were met by the researcher at their respective supervising offices, where the interviews were conducted. The Participant Information Sheet was explained to them. Then, each was asked to sign the Informed Consent Form as confirmation of their participation. All the interview sessions were done using the semi-structured interview guide, conducted in an in-depth, one-on-one format. A guide was used, but the flow had been flexible. The questions developed were open-ended, to allow the respondents to speak freely about their experiences (Potts & Palmer, 2014).

The data were analyzed by searching for general relationships among codes and categories, and by employing constant comparative methods (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Interviews were transcribed and subjected to open coding to identify general themes, followed by axial coding to relate categories to their subcategories (Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Data were categorized into conceptual domains to the general sense and overall meaning of the data (Creswell, 2009).

Ethical Considerations

Measures were taken to get the respondent parolees' informed consent to be interviewed; to assure them of data privacy; and to prevent or lessen any distressful interview effect, as well as to thank them.

Informed consent

Before attempting to access the sample, approval from their respective supervising offices was acquired. Parolees were directly referred by the offices where they were attending supervision; they might have felt compelled to participate in the study. Because of this, it was important that the procedure, their rights, as well as the risks and benefits, of the study were explained to them properly in private.

Confidentiality and privacy

Respondents were asked to provide a pseudonym for the study to help ensure confidentiality (Potts & Palmer, 2014). With the respondent's permission, each interview was recorded to obtain detailed data for qualitative analysis. Confidentiality and privacy of information were also explained to the respondents for them to be more comfortable in sharing their experiences. Aside from the written assurance through the informed consent form, respondents were also provided with verbal assurance before the start of each interview.

Maleficence and beneficence

The procedure was designed to be carried out in a way that would not inflict harm on the respondents. However, some questions posed potential distress since the negative experiences of the respondents were recalled and relived. To minimize risks, the researcher practiced and employed good interviewing skills, and showed sensitivity to the stories that were told by the respondents.

Additionally, respondents were debriefed after each interview to ensure that the interview would have no unpleasant effects, or only the least. Should there be any, they were offered psychosocial support services through a referral system set in place by the researcher. Fortunately, no respondent reported any adverse experience. After the interview, the respondents were each given a token for their participation.

Results and Discussion

Results show that desistance is a three-stage process. It begins with the resolution to change, followed by discontinuance of wrongdoing, and ending with the maintenance of the decision to avoid wrongdoing.

Dina, a mother of two, regrets most leaving her children behind when she got incarcerated. Her youngest ended up knowing her aunt as her mother, not acknowledging Dina. *Gusto kong makapag-parole para sa anak ko. Gusto ko pang maagang makalabas para maasikaso ko 'yong anak ko.* [I want to be paroled for my children. I want to be released earlier (than my sentence) to take care of my children.]

Stage 1. Formation of a commitment to change

Forming a commitment to change is the initial step in the three-stage desistance process (Baskin & Sommers, 1998). This is usually triggered by a personally identified critical experience, regarded as one's turning point (Maruna & Toch, 2005). Parenthood, the death of a loved one, and the incarceration experience itself were identified as turning points by the parolees. Incarceration can serve as a lull in one's trajectory (Maruna & Toch, 2005), suspending the offending career. This is not to discount the influences of desistance-degrading opportunities in carceral facilities. What will be highlighted, however, is how the incarceration experience of now-parolees had been a window of opportunity to facilitate the transition.

> *Hindi mo marerealize 'yon kung hindi mo naranasan 'yong nasa loob ka. Doon mo lahat talaga maisip 'yong mali mo, tapos dapat anong ginawa mo para magiging tamap s'ya. Mamuni-muni mo, tapos maisip mo kung, anong gagawin pag binigyan ka ng chance lumabas anong dapat mong gawin—umiwas.*
> – Dina
>
> [You will not realize that had you not experienced being incarcerated. That's where you'll realize your shortcomings and what you could have done to make up for them. You'll reflect on what you will do if you were to be given a chance to be released – (you have to) avoid.]

This kind of self-reflexivity is arrived at through internal moral conversation that is often embedded in terms of the ultimate concerns and most valued relationships of the individual being challenged (Vaughan, 2006). Through the lens of *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, this is the onset of what Pe-Pua (2012) construes as *pagbabagong-loob* (renewal of *loob*), in which the individual experiences a form of conversion and paradigm shift to better oneself. It is internal development, brought about by the struggles within. For the respondents, the result of such an internal process was that while the incarceration experience had been beyond challenging for all of them, it was eventually regarded as a transformative experience.

When faced with the opportunity to transform one's life, a person undergoes an internal process that moves through three phases (Vaughan, 2006): discernment, deliberation, and dedication (O'Sullivan, et al., 2015). Discernment is the first phase when the individual reviews possible choices. Then one deliberates on the pros and cons of actions. This leads to the third and last phase—deciding on which option to commit to. While there are identified phases, there is no definite timeframe for an individual moving along the process.

Some respondents started within two weeks; others took about a year. The length depended on the individual's own agency, as reflected, realized, and made meaning of a situation that would be a turning point in breaking away from trajectories, and would thus lead to a transition towards betterment.

When Dina was in the discernment phase during her detention, she looked at her situation, and realized how much better her life had been in the free world. Prior to incarceration, she had not been spending much time with her family, as she was *busy making money*. Her time away from her family, especially from her children, made her realize how much they mean to her. She thought to herself, she could passively wait on serving her sentence, or actively make do her best to build a good reputation. The longer she was away from her loved ones, the more she got dedicated to doing well to be eligible for parole.

> *Kung gusto mong makitang lumaki ang mga anak mo, pakabait ka d'yan sa loob. – Gelo*
>
> [If you want to see your children grow up, do good inside.]

These words had always been what Gelo's mother would tell him every time she would visit. This had not been more relevant for Gelo than when he lost his father while he was still detained for the hearing of his case, and so was not able to pay his respects. Gelo had admittedly been delinquent since his teenage years, and later, was convicted for his involvement in a gang war. His father had always been to his rescue, even while unwaveringly disciplining him. Losing his *rescue* made Gelo realize that he had to be his own rescue—make things right, and be responsible not so much for himself (making sure he gets to go out of gang wars alive), as for his daughter. He would not want his daughter to experience totally losing her father, as he just did. That made Gelo decide to take to heart and put into action his mother's reminder: Do well, to be eligible to apply for parole, be released earlier, and be with his daughter.

Although parolees had their own processes of discernment, they all shared that incarceration had eventually been regarded as a learning experience. Lessons included behaviors they had to unlearn, and aspects of themselves (e.g., immaturity, selfishness, emotional reactivity) that they had to transform—weaknesses that would have gone unnoticed, had they not been incarcerated. *Sabi ko nga kung hindi pa ako nakulong, hindi pa ako nakapag-isip, hindi pa magmamatured 'yong isip ko.* [I said, had I not been imprisoned, I would not have reflected (on matters), my mind wouldn't have matured.]

Knowing what the consequences of their actions would be, the parolees echoed Mar, who had grown to be able to think things through and deliberate his options – beneficial or detrimental – before making any decision.

> *Iniiisip ko na kung anong kahihinatnan – papakinabangan ba o ano mapapahamak ba. Pag-iisipan ko po muna bago ako mag desisyon.*

They then made the decision to actively exert effort in doing well to be eligible for parole and be released earlier than their sentence dictated.

The *pagbabagong-loob* is not an easy feat, as it would entail opening oneself to struggles (Ileto, 1979, cited in Pe-Pua, 2012). Pe-Pua's (2012) various conceptions of *loob* would, and should be tapped to succeed. To initiate the process, the individual has to have the capacity to open *loob* (*maging bukas ang loob)* and make space *(maluwag ang loob)* to accept the situation, and the fate that comes toward change, challenges included.

Being incarcerated, in general, made the *loob* weak (*humina ang loob)*, as they had been away from their loved ones and had limited resources in all aspects. *Loob* had to be [re]strengthened (*palakasin ang loob*), then, in a positive, regulated manner: not the type disdained that someone had too much of, which was wrongly placed (Pe-Pua,

2012), as in their case—unlawful daringness. Moreover, such inner strength *loob* should also be developed so as to be durable (*patibayin ang loob)*, enough to sustain dedication and commitment to change.

The *loob* is not static (Pe-Pua, 2012). Although they had committed a crime, positive qualities were now being honed. But *loob's* negative qualities (Ileto, 1979, cited in Pe-Pua, 2012) could [re]surface. *Pagbabagong-loob* could be tedious, and the *loob* is likely to experience vacillation (*pag-urong-sulong ng loob*) even after the individual had already committed to change. In the next stage of the desistance process – discontinuation – the challenges that impeded (*urong)* their progress and the facilitative factors that helped the parolees proceed *(sulong)* with the change process will be discussed.

Stage 2: Discontinuance

The second stage in the desistance process is discontinuance (Baskin and Sommers, 1998), which shows how offending stops amidst setbacks, and entails changes facilitated by structural and contextual factors enabled by personal agencies. While the focus would be challenges and facilitative factors during their parole period, it should be noted that discontinuance commenced during their incarceration and was carried on to their parole period.

Challenges

Respondents had been working through the following potential risks: 1) family destabilization; 2) psychosocial distress; 3) diminished employment opportunities; 4) financial difficulties; 5) homelessness; 6) stigma. All of these were collateral consequences of their incarceration. Going through these challenges weakened the *loob* (*humina ang loob)* and affected their relationships with their loved ones and community (*lumayo ang loob)*. It even led some of the parolees into reconsidering their commitment to change.

1. Family destabilization

The incarceration period affected the relationships of the now-parolees with their families, as they had been away for several years. Gelo had been incarcerated for over ten years. He was not around when his daughter was growing up. Gelo and Dina alike had to make it up with their children, who had grown estranged from them.

> *'yong panganay ko, no'ng una, nagkaproblema talaga. Lumaki 'yon nang wala ako eh. Pero, ngayon, okay na kami. Kasi gawa nga, ako lagi ang hatid-sundo sa kanya sa eskwelahan.*– Gelo
>
> [I had difficulty with my eldest in the beginning. I wasn't around when she was growing up. But now, we're okay. What I did was I drop off and fetch her at school.]

2. Psychosocial distress

Narratives of the respondents reflected their experiences on how incarceration had undermined their flexibility to cope with challenges, impaired their decision-making capacities, lowered their self-esteem, and affected their socializing skills. While they were grateful for the opportunity to be released earlier through parole, the life they had to reintegrate with upon their release, was no longer the same one they had left behind when they were incarcerated. A lot would have had happened for them then [*Dapat maraming nang nangyari sa buhay ko dito ngayon.*—Ben], had they not been involved in unlawful engagements and been incarcerated.

3. Financial difficulties

All the respondents were the primary providers prior to their incarceration. Difficulties ensued when they spent much of their finances processing their cases. The responsibility had to be shouldered mostly by their partners, with some assistance from other family members when they were incarcerated. While they were willing to take

on their responsibilities again, it was more challenging for them to look for decent work because of being tagged as "ex-convicts."

> *'yon bang kinikita ko, paano ko pagkakasyahin. Siyempre, nag-aaral din 'yong mga anak ko lahat. Mahirap magsimula*. – Ben
>
> [The challenge for me was how to make ends meet. All my children are in school. It was difficult to start again.]

4. Diminished employment opportunities

Getting employed had also been a challenge because of being tagged as "ex-convict", especially in the beginning. After several attempts, it came to a point such that Tuper started having self-doubts about ever being able to land any decent job.

> *Pero nilagay ko din sa biodata ko, parolado ako. Sabi nila, "Naku mahirap magtiwala sa mga 'yan. Nanggaling kulungan 'yan." So hindi kami natanggap*. – Tuper
>
> [I indicated in my biodata that I'm a parolee. They said:
> Oh, it is hard to trust someone like him. He's an ex-convict. So, we weren't hired.]

5. Homelessness

Allan had no place to stay upon his release. Conflicts with his family had not yet been resolved. It seemed that he was not welcome in their home. Allan was supposed to live with his grandmother, who unfortunately died the day before he was released. Luckily, his friend accommodated him until he could fend for himself.

6. Stigma

Being cast out and scorned by others upon their release had been a primary concern for former offenders. There were instances when, because of the anticipation of rejection, they had second thoughts about their decision to be released on parole; they were thinking that it might have been better to just serve the entirety of their sentence.

Upon knowing that his application for parole was approved, Ben disclosed that he was having second thoughts if that was what he preferred then, as he was afraid the community might not accept him. He was thinking that perhaps staying in prison would be the better option – truly, prison life was difficult, but it was what was familiar.

> *Parang ayaw ko lumaya eh. Kasi naisip ko, baka hindi ako matanggap—"Parang mas gusto ko pa dito yata ah."* – Ben
>
> [I felt like I didn't want to be released. I was thinking, I may not be accepted—"I think I like it better here (inside the prison)."]

When asked how others were relating to him upon his release, Ben said that he felt as if others were avoiding him. When probed further about which instances, he said that he could not pinpoint a particular instance; it was just how he felt, considering that he was a parolee.

> *Parang gusto mo rin umiwas eh, kasi siyempre, parang nakatatak sa isip nila 'yon eh. "Parolado lang 'yan, parolado lang s'ya. Makukulong din 'yan." Masama 'yong pagtingin nila sa iyo. Ako, iniisip ko rin, baka pangilagan nila ako kaya umiwas ako.* – Ben

> [You would also tend to avoid them. You're already tagged: That one is only a parolee, he's a parolee. He'll be back in prison, eventually. They consider you bad. I assumed that they would avoid me that's why I avoided them.]

Being labeled as a stigmatized individual, in the respondent's case, as an "ex-convict," causes one to internalize stigmatizing attitudes and adhere to the same beliefs about their environment (Moore et al, 2016). This in turn affected their reintegration into the community.

Facilitative factors

Respondents navigated their desistance and reintegration through the following facilitative factors: 1) supportive others; 2) correctional/parole officers; 3) employment opportunities; 4) education; 5) spirituality; 6) agency; 7) parole. Such factors served as catalysts for starting change and continual desistance.

1. Supportive others

Family

Knowing that they had a family to go home to has reassured the respondents upon their release. This had been a significant factor that facilitated their adjustment, from imprisonment, to their anticipation for parole, and then to eventual release. Upon their release, for almost all of the respondents, the family had been their primary support. Family bonds aid in changing the criminal trajectories of parolees (Laub & Sampson, 2001). The roles played within the family, like being a parent, being close to parents, having a partner, and having frequent contact with family (especially when sustained during incarceration), were associated with parole success (Bahr et al., 2010).

Upon their release, the parolees' children continued to be their inspiration and motivation to maintain their good status as parolees, and to work towards maintaining desistance. Respondents spent more time with their children, to make up for the time that they were apart.

> *Iniisip ko agad, uuwi agad sa mga anak ko eh pagkatapos ng trabaho. Mas priority ang pamilya ko na naghihintay na akin kesa 'yong sumama sa mga inum-inuman. "Ay, nag-aantay sa akin ang pamilya ko. Sa susunod na lang*."– Ben
>
> [I would think, I will go home after work right away, for my children. My priority is my family: "My family is waiting for me. I'll join next time."]

Moreover, marital partners served as informal monitors who had been instrumental in the respondents' commitment to avoidance strategies, staying away from occasions that would likely subject them to the revocation of their parole. Tuper made an agreement with his wife to text him or fetch him when he would drink with his friends, so that he would have a reason to go home earlier.

> *Kaya ginagawa ko no'n, papasundo ako sa asawa ko. "Sunduin mo ako rito para kunwari pauuwiin mo na ako." So 'yon, basta lahat ng ano, ng paraan na para makaiwas lang ako sa inuman nila.* – Tuper
>
> [What I did was, I would ask my wife to fetch me. "Come here so that they would think that you were the one asking me to be home already." I did everything so that I could avoid drinking with them.]

Peers

Peers also assisted the respondents to readjust in the free world, and for some, their peers had been their primary source of support. Allan had not resolved his conflict with his family [yet]. Fortunately, he had friends who had been supportive of him, and who

had let him stay with them until he was able to look for a job and then fend for himself.

> *May naging kaibigan din akong naging preso. Minsan tumutuloy ako sa bahay n'ya. Siya na rin 'yong parang nagpapakain na rin sa'kin.* – Allan
>
> [I have a friend who had been my co-detainee. Sometimes, I stay with him. He also provides my food.]

Community

According to PPA, one of the main concerns in the implementation of parole would be the community, particularly the safety of its members, who may think that reentry might cause a commotion. This is also a concern of all the respondents. It is a practice of the agency to conduct an information drive in the communities where the parolees will be reintegrated, so that the members will be aware of the existence and functions of parole. Through this, community members are also encouraged and guided on how they can become instruments in the rehabilitation of parolees. Eventually, communities where the parolees now belong had been generally accepting of them.

> *Noong katagalan, sabi nila "Mabait naman pala 'to eh." Hanggang sa nagkakwentuhan na kami, hanggang matanggap na rin nila. Hindi naman nila nababanggit 'yong mga pangyayari, 'di ko rin binabanggit eh.* – Ben
>
> [As time went by, they said "He's actually nice." After some time, we would have conversations. They don't mention it. I don't talk about it as well.]

2. Correctional/parole officers

Practical assistance provided by the respondents' correctional/parole supervisors—information drives and therapeutic community (TC) sessions—had been instrumental in building hopes for then-PDLs. Effective parolee-officer relationships could help parolees increase their feelings of agency (Healy & O'Donnell, 2008). Assistance during supervision and TC sessions were appreciated by all respondents. Aside from practical support and guidance, the sense of belongingness provided by their "family" aided them.

> *Do'n mo lahat na realize yong mga mali na dapat pag nakalabas ka eh dapat i-correct mo 'to. Sa TC philosophy—from wrong living to right living. Kasi may TC din kasi kami sa loob.* – Dina
>
> [That's when you'll realize your shortcomings that you must correct once you are released. According to TC philosophy—from wrong living to right living. We also had TC sessions inside.]

Moreover, it is noteworthy how assistance was extended beyond the work functions of the personnel. Zel was sponsored by one of her supervisors in CIW. Her supervisor took Zel under their family's care upon her release. Zel's family was in the province; she preferred to stay in the Metro as there were more work opportunities. Her supervisor guided her to readjust to her life in the free world, until she was able to fend for herself.

> *Sila ang sumundo sa akin. Kaya nga sabi nila, "Swerte mo naman." Wala nang hassle 'yon, kapag empleyado. Kumbaga, diretso-diretso ka lang. Sobrang saya nga.*– Zel
>
> [They were the ones who fetched me. Others [co-PDLs] said, "You're so lucky. It's hassle-free if it's with employees. I was happy."]

3. Employment

All thirteen parolees engaged in livelihood activities they were incarcerated. Realizing how these activities had been of help to them not only financially, but more so in facilitating their adjustment, the parolees became more eager to find a job upon their release.

Securing employment is one of the requirements to gain and maintain favorable status for parole (BPP Manual, 2006).

Upon their release, eventually gaining employment and having accepting and supportive superiors also helped the parolees rebuild themselves, regaining self-confidence after several rejections during their application. These also gave them the opportunity to provide again for their families, after years of not having the capacity to do so. Others were able to reconnect with relatives, and some, even with previous employers who had been of great assistance in terms of occupational opportunities upon their release.

4. Education

Respondents who enrolled in the educational programs offered in the facilities had been more equipped, and better adjusted upon their release. Education could serve as a compensatory factor for those with a history of incarceration, through offering other forms of human capital and providing them with a few marketable skills (Schnittker & John, 2007).

5. Spirituality

Identifying with any form of spirituality could help relieve psychological crises (Maruna, Wilson, & Curran, 2006). Their faith pulled them through the difficult times and made them believe that there is hope even during the times that they were struggling while still incarcerated. Spirituality fills the experience with strength and

allows a sense of control over an unknown future – from the time when they were still incarcerated, to the present when they are now parolees.

> *Naging kalakasan ko kasi nag-pray ako nang nag-pray eh. Eh, 'yon ang inisip ko lagi na ang Panginoon ay talagang pinaka matibay na mahihingan ko ng tulong. Pakiramdam ko mas lumalakas ako pag nagdarasal.* – Mar
>
> [Being prayerful had been my strength. I always think that the Lord is the strongest I could yield to for support. It felt like I am getting stronger when I pray.]
>
> *Basta, lahat ng ginagawa ko, tinatanong ko muna sa taas eh. Lagi akong sa Kanya humihingi eh, kung tama ba ang desisyon ko, gano'n. 'Di ako nagde-desisyon dahil baka mali nga ako eh*. – Ben
>
> [In everything I do, I seek counsel from above first. I always ask God if I'm making the right decision. I don't make any decision by myself because I could be wrong again.]

6. Agency

Agency involves successfully rising to challenges and increasing insight into oneself (McAdams, 2001). Bottoms et al. (2004) claim that one should have not only an individual, subjective understanding of desistance, but also a recognition that choices are always made within a social context. It was apparent in the narratives of the respondents how they practiced their agencies while in facilities and upon release on parole. Most of them set their minds earlier on that they would live in prison in a way that would qualify them for parole grant, as they resolved to achieve their goal of being reunited with their families. They used the opportunities they had, to make their stay productive and meaningful. Upon release, they were intent that their actions would not implicate the revocation of their parole, leading to rearrest back to prison. Being reminded of how their lives had been during incarceration made the parolees keener in following the parole agreements.

> *Oo [umiiwas na ako]. Naranasan mo na kung paano eh – pamumuhay, 'di ba?* – Ben
>
> [Yes (I'm making it a point to avoid it). You already experienced how it was (to live in prison).]

7. Parole

Parole had been a facilitative factor, and at the same time, had been the goal towards desistance as soon as they were in prison. Such an anticipation made the then-PDLs more purposive in their behaviors so as not to go against the rules and regulations for parole eligibility.

> *Di na ako masyadong nanlumo kasi iniisip ko makakalaya pa naman ako. May parol naman. So 'yon kaya nagpakabait nalang kami sa loob, nagfocus ako sa craft, sa pag-aaral. Mga away do'n, di na kami nakikipag-away doon kasi pag nakikipag-away ka kasi ro'n 'yong karpeta mo, malalagyan ng pula.* – Tuper
>
> [I wasn't too disheartened as I was thinking I would be released in time; there's parole. We made it a point to do well. I focused on crafts (livelihood programs), on studying. We didn't engage in fights so that our prison record wouldn't be marked red (indicator of a violation).]

Interactions through such facilitative factors helped the parolees [re]gain their strength and confidence (*lumakas ang loob)* and improve relationships, as they were able to [re]build rapport and [re]gain the trust (*nakipalagayang-loob)* (Pe-Pua, 2012) of supportive others, officers, employers, and the community where they reintegrated, all compromised because of their incarceration.

Stage 3: Maintenance

Parolees under supervision continue to maintain their decision to stop (Baskin & Sommer, 1998) and stay away from unlawful engagement. Parole release is discretionary and a privilege that must be earned. If former prisoners violated parole, they could be rearrested and returned to prison to serve the remaining period of their sentence. Such is considered a strong incentive to not engage in criminal acts. Parole serves as a transition in breaking the trajectory of offending.

Conclusion

The study provided an understanding of the experiences of Filipino parolees across stages of their desistance process in terms of transitions, challenges, and factors that aided in their adjustment.

The challenges that surfaced were family destabilization, psychosocial distress, diminished employment opportunities, housing and homelessness, and stigma. Facilitative factors that aided the transition (Agnew, 2005; Bahr et al, 2005; Bahr et al, 2010; Laub & Sampson, 2005) were: family, parole officers, employment, education, and agency, spirituality, and parole per se—a goal they had to gain and maintain.

This study on desistance leads to a focus on stability and change in criminal behavior over time, especially its embeddedness in contextual features of the parolees' lives (Laub & Sampson, 2012; Hunter & Farrall, 2018). In support of this idea, recent research suggests that salient life events, serving as transitions, influence behavior and modify trajectories—in this case, criminal trajectories. Life events include having a partner, being a parent, being employed, and/or being at school, to name a few. For the respondents of this study, turning points included the death of loved ones, parenthood, and notably the incarceration experience itself.

Along with these contextual features was the individual making informed choices to turn away from criminal engagements and associations. The results of this study show that desistance is the result of a combination of individual actions, situational contexts, and

structural influences. The progressions involved with the desistance process operate simultaneously at different levels and across different contextual environments. This study reveals that desistance had been initiated as early as during incarceration itself, and not only upon one's release on parole; it is a continuous process that constitutes assistance from supportive others, a provision for learning and occupational opportunities, and commitment from the individual to continue to desist amidst challenges.

Implications and Recommendations

Practice and Program Development

The implementation of livelihood programs inside prison helped the now-parolees during their incarceration. While it is understandable that manpower is a challenge in correctional institutions and parole offices, it would be beneficial for parolees to have continued support and job placement upon release. It would be helpful to initiate partnerships with external organizations to maximize opportunities for parolees, as they reintegrate into mainstream society.

Facilitating reflections about the parolees' own experiences and guiding them to transform their attitudes could be used in therapy and/or counseling. Group interventions drawing on cognitive-behavioral principles that challenge discrimination expectancies and increase community involvement (among other skills) have shown significant decreases in internalized stigma (Maruna & LeBel, 2004; Lucksted et al., 2011).

Lastly, programs to be developed should consider other stakeholders. Involvement and support for the families of PDLs should be given priority. Support groups as well as learning sessions for families should be provided to increase their awareness of how they could assist their loved ones, and consequently, be assisted as well.

Research

Gaining insights from supportive others (family, correctional/parole officers) would provide a substantial supplementary perspective on the process of reform. Thus, it is recommended that further studies focus on parolees' narratives. Additionally, all respondents of this study are currently under parole supervision. Conducting a follow-up study with these parolees upon the termination of their parole, when they are totally free, is recommended in order to know how their desistance and reformation process would develop. Moreover, the study could investigate similarities and differences, if any, between the processes experienced by male and female parolees in their incarceration experiences. Such research may also inform policies being implemented for males and females during the incarceration and/or parole period. Lastly, all the respondents of this study were considered successful. Narratives of those released instead upon completion of their sentence or through other means will give insights on other facilitative factors and motivations of such samples.

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