



## Perceived Social Support and Psychological Well-being of Individuals with Criminal Labels: A Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Study

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### Abstract

This study examined the Psychological well-being and social reintegration experiences of individuals with criminal labels in the Philippines, using a mixed-methods sequential explanatory design. The quantitative phase assessed 115 participants under probation supervision using the Psychological Well-being Scale (Ryff, 1989) and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988). Findings revealed that participants perceived the strongest support from friends ( $M = 6.13$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ) and significant others ( $M = 6.09$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ), while family support was lower ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ). Psychological well-being was highest in Purpose in Life ( $M = 31.37$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ), Self-Acceptance ( $M = 30.29$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ), and Personal Growth ( $M = 30.17$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ), and lowest in Positive Relations with Others ( $M = 27.42$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ), highlighting relational challenges. These results corroborate existing literature on the role of social support in post-incarceration adjustment and the vulnerability of relational domains. The qualitative phase, involving seven participants with extreme PWB scores, identified six themes: Complex Physical Stress, Adaptive Psychological Transitions, Social Reintegration, Ambivalence in Spiritual Coping, Survival Amid Economic Exclusion, and Weight of the Criminal Label. Narratives revealed that participants navigated physical, emotional, spiritual, social, and economic challenges while striving for resilience, acceptance, and self-sufficiency. Interpreted through the Kaginghawaan Theory, the findings underscore the significance of material sufficiency, relational security, and inner peace in culturally grounded well-being. Labeling Theory contextualizes how stigma and societal judgment perpetuate psychological and social barriers, emphasizing the need for interventions that integrate psychosocial support, restorative justice, and community acceptance. The study contributes to Philippine-based reintegration research by combining quantitative and qualitative evidence, highlighting both internal strengths and structural obstacles that influence holistic well-being, social belonging, and sustainable post-incarceration outcomes.

**Keywords:** *Psychological Well-Being, Perceived Social Support, Criminal Label, Individuals with Criminal Labels, Province of Laguna*

### INTRODUCTION

Psychological well-being remains a critical yet often overlooked aspect of incarceration and restorative justice. Globally, correctional systems aim not only to punish but also to reform individuals through rehabilitation programs, skills training, and psychosocial support. In the Philippines, agencies such as the Bureau of Corrections and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology run programs to assist persons deprived of liberty in preparing for reintegration. However, research indicates mixed effectiveness; many still face social exclusion and limited opportunities after release.

Employment remains a central challenge; many individuals with criminal labels struggle to secure stable jobs due to stigma and legal barriers, undermining both their mental health and social reintegration (Matias et al., 2024). They are also vulnerable to discrimination in the workplace, as criminal labels often overshadow their skills, qualifications, and potential, making employers hesitant to hire them. Without meaningful work, they remain vulnerable to poverty, psychological distress, and potential recidivism (Bidola et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, where incarceration rates are high and reintegration programs are insufficiently constructed,

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understanding these employment-related difficulties is vital for achieving restorative justice and Psychological well-being.

The study draws upon psychological and sociological frameworks to illuminate the post-incarceration experience. Firstly, the Labeling Theory shows how the “ex-convict” label perpetuates stigma, impedes opportunity, and damages self-concept. When people internalize this negative label, they may feel excluded from mainstream society and pushed toward deviant groups that accept them, increasing the risk of reoffending (Simply Psychology, 2025). In this sense, society’s judgment ironically reinforces the very behavior it seeks to prevent.

Building on these psychological and sociological perspectives, the Kaginhawaan Theory introduces a culturally grounded, Filipino-centered lens in which well-being is framed as a state of comfort, balance, and communal harmony (*maginhawa*) (Samaco-Zamora & Fernandez, 2016). Its dimensions, material sufficiency (*mayroon*), relational security (*kasama*), and inner peace (*magaan ang loob*), are especially applicable in this study because they emphasize that reintegration is not only about survival but also about belonging and dignity. For individuals with criminal labels, achieving kaginhawaan requires more than release from prison; it demands access to livelihood, acceptance in the community, and emotional healing.

Recent Philippine-based studies reinforce the importance of this perspective, revealing that reintegration into society is shaped by multiple pathways (including entrepreneurship, self-employment, unemployment, government employment, and farming), each presenting distinct challenges and opportunities, while underscoring how emotional resilience cultivated during incarceration supports post-release adjustment across these varied trajectories (Aripal, 2025). Community involvement and spiritual support significantly contribute to holistic rehabilitation (Leonor, 2023).

Incarceration exposes individuals to significant psychological stressors that contribute to high rates of mental health disorders, underscoring the need for comprehensive, trauma-informed mental health services in correctional settings to support rehabilitation and reintegration (Megari & Argyriadou, 2025). Despite the growing recognition of the importance of mental health, there remains a lack of research focusing specifically on the Psychological well-being and perceived social support of individuals with a criminal label, particularly in the Philippine setting. For instance, a study of recidivism at BJMP–NCR from 2020 to 2022 found higher recidivism among younger, male, married PDLs, particularly those involved in drug-related, violent, and fraud-related offenses, with patterns also influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic; however, no significant associations were identified between predictive variables, antecedents, and recidivism trends (Dausan et al., 2023).

In another light, a qualitative study in a rural province in Northern Philippines found that ex-inmates face major reintegration barriers such as social stigma, financial hardship, and insufficient transitional services, while family support and renewed purpose aid adjustment, underscoring the need for stronger reintegration programs and policy reforms (Aggari et al., 2025). In like of these, a mixed-methods evaluation of the “HOPE Behind Bars” project at Bataan District Jail found that education and vocational training improved PsDLs’ morale, self-esteem, employability, and reintegration prospects, while highlighting gaps in evidence on long-term impacts on recidivism and personal development (Castro & Gabor, 2025). Lastly, Akilith (2023) explored recidivism among CICL using Ecological Systems, Labeling, and Differential Association theories.

Interviews with youth at the Second Chance Home revealed key factors influencing reoffending, including dysfunctional households, early school leaving, social marginalization, labeling effects, and the influence of delinquent peers. Most existing studies on incarceration emphasize crime prevention, rehabilitation programs, or recidivism rates, while few examine post-release lived experiences; notably, none systematically assesses psychological well-being and perceived social support or explores these experiences through in-depth qualitative methods using

Filipino-based theory, such as *Kaginhawaan*, alongside Labeling Theory.

To address this gap, the present study examines the perceived social support and Psychological well-being of individuals with criminal labels, Filipinos, through the lens of *Kaginhawaan Theory* and Labeling Theory, aiming to contextualize post-incarceration experiences within a culturally grounded understanding of well-being, which situates well-being within the Filipino worldview of *maginhawa* (comfort) as balance, harmony, and relational connectedness.

By highlighting the limited number of studies currently available, this research underscores the need to generate culturally relevant insights to inform recommendations to policymakers and lawmakers. Further, by generating culturally grounded insights, this study aims to inform evidence-based laws, community initiatives, and mental health interventions that foster genuine reintegration and Psychological well-being among individuals with criminal labels.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Criminality in the Philippine Context

Criminality in the Philippines continues to evolve alongside social, economic, and political changes. Although the [Sigales \(2024\)](#) reported a 61.87% decline in index crimes from 2022 to 2024 and a further 22.53% decrease in focus crimes in the first half of 2025, persistent concerns remain regarding drug-related offenses, theft, and organized crime ([Global Initiative Against Transnational Organized Crime, 2024](#)). The country ranks 33rd globally in organized crime, with widespread activities such as human trafficking, cybercrime, drug trade, extortion, and smuggling, aggravated by weak institutional resilience, corruption, limited law enforcement capacity, and judicial inefficiencies.

Beyond crime trends, reintegration challenges continue to shape patterns of reoffending. [Fuentes \(2025\)](#) identified unemployment, family rejection, and social exclusion as major sources of psychological distress among ex-offenders in Southeast Asia, while [Voices of Recidivism \(2024\)](#) showed that stigma and economic marginalization often push released individuals back into criminal activity. These structural and psychosocial barriers impede the attainment of material sufficiency, relational security, and inner peace emphasized in *Kaginhawaan Theory*, reinforcing cycles of exclusion and recidivism. Consequently, sustainable crime reduction and long-term community harmony require addressing both systemic weaknesses and the social reintegration needs of formerly incarcerated individuals.

### Psychological Well-Being of Offenders with Criminal Labels

The psychological impact of incarceration and post-release stigma is well documented. [Brehmer et al. \(2024\)](#) found that self-stigma among individuals with a criminal label leads to heightened depression, anxiety, and difficulties in community reintegration, while [LaBarbera et al. \(2025\)](#) showed that psychosocial support and community involvement significantly improve resilience and overall well-being among post-release populations. [Monteron and Daniel \(2025\)](#) further argued that although correctional systems have strengthened surveillance and enforcement, rehabilitation efforts remain inconsistent and underfunded.

Crime pattern studies also indicate that location and socioeconomic status strongly influence criminal activity, with higher incidence rates in urban centers ([Leikuma-Rimicane et al., 2022](#)). Moreover, parole represents a lived and embodied transition beyond supervision, as even individuals previously well integrated before incarceration face emotional, spatial, and systemic challenges during reintegration ([Emprechtlinger et al., 2024](#)). The [National Institute of Justice \(2023\)](#) similarly recommends shifting research beyond recidivism toward holistic measures of well-being, including quality of life, mental health, and social participation, aligning with the present study's culturally grounded framework.

Post-incarceration stigma and systemic barriers heighten distress and hinder reintegration, even among those who were previously well integrated, while social support plays a critical role in improving resilience. From the perspective of the Kaginhawaan Theory, these obstacles limit material sufficiency, relational security, and inner peace, while Labeling Theory explains how societal stigma reinforces exclusion. Together, these perspectives highlight the need to address both psychosocial and structural factors to promote holistic well-being and a sense of belonging after release.

### **Kaginhawaan Theory**

Kaginhawaan Theory provides a Filipino-centered framework for well-being, grounded in the cultural values of comfort (*maginhawa*), harmony, and relational connectedness. It defines kaginhawaan as a state encompassing material sufficiency (*mayroon*), relational security (*kasama*), and inner peace (*magaan ang loob*). Its contemporary relevance has been demonstrated across studies. [Leonor \(2023\)](#) showed that kaginhawaan can inform rehabilitation efforts, with community and spiritual engagement enhancing post-incarceration adjustment, while [Zamora \(2025\)](#) proposed culturally grounded well-being indicators aligned with kaginhawaan and argued against reliance on purely Western frameworks. [Gonzales et al. \(2025\)](#) further illustrated how street children cope with hardship by drawing on internal and external resources, such as faith, social connections, and emotional resilience, underscoring the importance of acceptance and a sense of belonging in contrast to the alienation produced by labeling.

Expanding this framework, [Rungduin et al. \(2025\)](#) identified internal (*ginhawang panloob*) and external (*ginhawa panlabas*) dimensions of *ginhawa*, emphasizing the need to maintain balance between them to achieve a good life. Similarly, [Cristobal and Bance \(2021\)](#) developed the BLOOMS Model of Well-being for Filipino University students, identifying academic, psycho-emotional, physical, social, and spiritual dimensions shaped by personal, social, and contextual factors, and highlighting strategies that promote holistic growth consistent with Kaginhawaan Theory. In relation to the present study, Kaginhawaan Theory provides a cultural framework for interpreting social support, psychological well-being, and the lived experiences of criminally labeled individuals, enabling analysis beyond standardized constructs toward an integrated understanding of the material, social, and emotional dimensions of recovery.

### **Labeling Theory**

Labeling Theory asserts that societal labels shape self-concept, behavior, and social opportunities, with criminal stigma leading to social exclusion, restricted access to resources, and internalized identities that perpetuate offending. Empirical studies consistently demonstrate these effects: [Heilicher et al. \(2025\)](#) noted a decline in dehumanizing labels from 99% in 2013 to 88% in 2022, though stigma remains influential in policy and public perception.

[Moore et al. \(2024\)](#) showed that intersecting stigmas related to criminal involvement, substance use, HIV, and race or ethnicity undermined well-being, treatment engagement, and reintegration; and [Smith and Torres \(2023\)](#) found that incarcerated women internalized stigmatizing labels, resulting in social withdrawal and reduced self-worth. In the Philippine context, [Reyes \(2025\)](#) confirmed that criminal labeling strongly predicts reoffending, [Villanueva \(2022\)](#) demonstrated that early stigmatization among juvenile offenders reinforces deviant identities and obstructs rehabilitation, and [Cruz \(2021\)](#) emphasized that the “ex-convict” label functions as a significant employment barrier regardless of qualifications.

Collectively, these studies show that labeling operates as both a social barrier and a psychological mechanism that undermines psychological well-being, limits opportunities, and inhibits recovery. [Peleg-Koriat and Weimann-Saks \(2025\)](#) further highlighted that gender-sensitive

and restorative justice approaches can mitigate stigma, as incarcerated women are motivated by forgiveness, rebuilding family relationships, reciprocity, and being heard despite barriers of shame and fear.

While Labeling Theory offers valuable insights, it is largely Western in orientation. In contrast, Kaginghawan's Theory provides a culturally relevant lens that emphasizes balance, communal ties, and harmony, yet remains underutilized in post-incarceration research. The limited integration of these theories in Philippine-based studies points to a gap that, when addressed, can advance a culturally responsive framework for understanding psychological well-being and reintegration among individuals with criminal labels.

## RESEARCH METHOD

This study employed a mixed-methods sequential explanatory research design, as defined by [Creswell et al. \(2018\)](#), integrating quantitative and qualitative approaches within a single study to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The design consisted of two phases: a quantitative phase using a descriptive design and a qualitative phase using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) framework.

In the quantitative phase, the descriptive design aimed to summarize the levels of perceived social support and psychological well-being among individuals with a criminal label who were on probation. Rather than testing hypotheses or determining statistical relationships, the purpose was to provide a descriptive overview of participants' responses using standardized instruments.

In the qualitative phase, IPA was employed to explore how participants made sense of their post-release experiences, interpreted their challenges, and ascribed meaning to their reintegration into society. This two-phase design enabled the researchers first to identify descriptive patterns in the quantitative data and then deepen their understanding through interpretive, experience-based inquiry. For the quantitative phase, the researchers utilized two (2) standardized tests.

### Psychological Well-Being Scale (PWB)

The *Psychological Well-Being Scale* ([Ryff, 1989](#)) measures six dimensions of well-being: autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, positive relations, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. Participants rated each item on a 6-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." Higher scores indicate greater Psychological well-being, reflected by self-acceptance, positive relationships, effective life management, purposeful living, and personal growth. Lower scores may suggest challenges in these areas, such as feelings of stagnation or reduced self-development. Reported internal consistency in prior research ranges from 0.70 to 0.78.

### Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)

The *Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support* ([Zimet et al., 1988](#)) is a 12-item measure assessing perceived support from family, friends, and significant others. Items are rated on a 7-point Likert scale ("very strongly disagree" to "very strongly agree"), with higher scores denoting stronger perceived support. Previous studies have demonstrated high reliability, with Cronbach's  $\alpha$  values ranging from 0.85 to 0.91 ([Kieu et al., 2023](#)).

Participants who obtained the highest and lowest composite scores on the Psychological Well-Being (PWB) measure were purposively selected for in-depth interviews to explore the underlying experiences and factors influencing varying levels of well-being and perceived social support. The researchers developed and validated a semi-structured interview guide to examine the lived experiences of individuals with a criminal label, and Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis (IPA) was employed as it focuses on how individuals make sense of significant life experiences, particularly those shaped by transition and stigma.

Due to the limited accessibility of individuals under probation supervision, convenience sampling was used in the quantitative phase, which included 115 participants. Although Cochran's formula indicated a sample size of 385, logistical and ethical constraints limited participation; nonetheless, the data were deemed sufficient for the study's descriptive purpose of summarizing observed patterns rather than generalizing to a wider population.

Data collection commenced after formal approval was secured from the Head of the Parole and Probation Office in Laguna Province. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, who were fully apprised of the study's purpose, procedures, and confidentiality safeguards, and only those who provided written consent were included. During the quantitative phase, participants completed the MSPSS and PWB questionnaires in person, while the qualitative phase involved one-on-one interviews with purposively selected participants from the highest- and lowest-scoring groups, using a validated, semi-structured protocol to elicit open, reflective accounts of their reintegration experiences.

To ensure confidentiality and protect participant privacy, pseudonyms and identification codes were used in place of real names. All electronic files were stored in password-protected folders accessible only to the research team. Audio recordings of the interviews were transcribed verbatim and deleted immediately after verifying their accuracy. These measures were implemented to minimize the risk of data breaches and to maintain the anonymity of all participants throughout the research process.

The potentially sensitive information was reviewed in consultation with the Parole and Probation Office solely to ensure compliance with confidentiality and data protection policies. This review did not involve any assessment or alteration of participant responses. The validated transcripts were returned to participants for member checking to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of their accounts. Ethical clearance was obtained from the researchers' academic institution, and all data-handling procedures adhered to institutional ethical guidelines governing research involving human participants.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in the study were individuals with criminal labels, selected through convenience sampling. Those who were available at the time of data collection were invited to complete the quantitative portion of the study.

**Table 1.** Distribution of Participants of the Study (Quantitative Portion)

Case	Number	Percentage
Theft	46	40%
Acts of Lasciviousness	18	16%
Drugs (Sec. 12, RA 9165)	42	36%
Illegal Betting	9	8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 presents the criminal profiles of 115 individuals who participated in the quantitative phase of the study. The data reveal that Theft (40%) and Drug-related offenses (36%, Sec. 12, RA 9165) are the most prevalent, jointly accounting for 76% of the total cases. This pattern indicates that the sample is predominantly composed of individuals involved in property crimes and minor drug-related violations. Acts of Lasciviousness constitute a smaller but notable proportion (16%), whereas Illegal Betting is the least frequent offense, representing only 8% of the cases.

Participants with the highest scores in the quantitative phase of the study were selected for the qualitative phase. Their profiles are presented below.

**Table 2.** Profile of Participants of the Study (Qualitative Portion)

<b>Participant</b>	<b>Case</b>	<b>Age</b>
<i>Participant 1</i>	Illegal Betting	28
<i>Participant 2</i>	Theft	24
<i>Participant 3</i>	Robbery case later reclassified as Theft upon plea	38
<i>Participant 4</i>	Drugs (Sec. 12, RA 9165)	29
<i>Participant 5</i>	Acts of Lasciviousness	25
<i>Participant 6</i>	Drugs (Sec. 12, RA 9165)	32
<i>Participant 7</i>	Drugs (Sec. 12, RA 9165)	23

Table 2 presents the profiles of seven participants selected for the qualitative phase of the study, including their case type and age. Among the participants, three were involved in drug-related offenses (Sec. 12, RA 9165), making it the most common category. Other cases include Theft, Robbery case later reclassified as Theft upon plea, Acts of Lasciviousness, and Illegal Betting. The participants' ages range from 23 to 38 years, with the youngest participant involved in drug-related offenses and the oldest in a robbery case. This distribution reflects a diverse age range and a predominance of drug-related cases among those selected for qualitative analysis.

### **Purpose Statement 1: Determine the Level of Perceived Social Support of Individuals with a Criminal Label**

**Table 3.** Perceived Social Support of Individuals with a Criminal Label

<b>Subscales</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Deviation</b>	<b>Rank</b>
Significant Other	115	6.09	1.70	2
Family	115	5.30	2.04	3
Friends	115	6.13	1.63	1
<b>Overall</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>5.84</b>	<b>1.91</b>	

Perceived social support among 115 individuals with a criminal label was assessed across three subscales—Significant Other, Family, and Friends—and as an overall score. Friends emerged as the strongest and most consistent source of support, with the highest mean ( $M = 6.13$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ), followed closely by Significant Other support ( $M = 6.09$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ). Family support showed the lowest mean ( $M = 5.30$ ) and the greatest variability ( $SD = 2.04$ ), indicating greater diversity in family experiences. Overall perceived social support across all subscales was 5.84 ( $SD = 1.91$ ).

Although family support ranked lowest, this contextualizes rather than contradicts existing literature. [Fahmy and Testa \(2025\)](#) found that emotional and instrumental family support enhances physical and mental health during reentry, while lower family-support scores reflect commonly reported strained or disrupted family ties. This pattern aligns with [Akilith \(2023\)](#), who noted that inconsistent or absent support networks heighten social and psychological vulnerability, limiting reintegration benefits.

Despite overall crime declines, drug offenses, theft, and organized crime remain persistent in the Philippines, while unemployment, family rejection, and social exclusion continue to increase psychological distress and reoffending risk ([Sigales, 2024](#); [Fuentes, 2025](#); [Voices of Recidivism, 2024](#)). Supporting these findings, [LaBarbera et al. \(2025\)](#) showed that psychosocial support and community involvement improve well-being, and [Emprechtinger et al. \(2024\)](#) observed that even

previously well-integrated individuals face systemic and relational obstacles during parole. Together, these findings align with the present study's results, indicating that individuals with a criminal label rely more on friends and significant others than on family for social support, reflecting variability in reintegration experiences amid ongoing systemic and social barriers.

**Purpose Statement 2: Determine the Level of Psychological Well-being of Individuals with a Criminal Label**

**Table 4.** Psychological Well-Being of Individuals with a Criminal Label

Subscales	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Autonomy	115	29.70	1.99	4
Environmental Master	115	28.03	2.03	5
Personal Growth	115	30.17	1.94	3
Positive Relations with Others	115	27.42	2.03	6
Purpose in Life	115	31.37	1.92	1
Self-Acceptance	115	30.29	1.91	2
<b>Overall</b>	<b>115</b>	<b>29.49</b>	<b>1.98</b>	

Psychological well-being among 115 individuals with a criminal label was assessed across six subscales, yielding an overall mean score of 29.49 (SD = 1.98). Participants reported the highest scores in Purpose in Life (M = 31.37, Rank 1), followed by Self-Acceptance (M = 30.29, Rank 2) and Personal Growth (M = 30.17, Rank 3). In contrast, the lowest score was observed in Positive Relations with Others (M = 27.42, Rank 6), indicating that forming and maintaining meaningful relationships posed the greatest challenge. The relatively low and consistent standard deviations across subscales (SDs = 1.91–2.03) suggest generally similar levels of well-being across domains, highlighting strong internal capacities alongside weaker relational functioning.

These findings align with existing literature on justice-involved populations. [Fahmy \(2021\)](#) emphasized the importance of stable emotional and instrumental support from family and friends for mental health, which corresponds with the low relational well-being observed. [Hidayati et al. \(2021\)](#) similarly reported moderate to high overall psychological well-being among incarcerated individuals, with interpersonal domains requiring targeted support. Further support comes from [LaBarbera et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Emprechtlinger et al. \(2024\)](#), who highlighted the role of psychosocial support and persistent relational and systemic barriers during parole, as well as [Fuentes \(2025\)](#), who linked social exclusion, family rejection, and unemployment to distress.

[Lemon \(2023\)](#) underscored the benefits of community and spiritual engagement for adjustment, while [Smith and Torres \(2023\)](#) showed that internalized stigma contributes to social withdrawal and reduced self-worth. Collectively, these studies support the present findings that, despite substantial internal strengths, relational well-being remains the most vulnerable dimension of post-incarceration psychological health.

**Purpose Statement No. 3: How Do Individuals with a Criminal Label Describe Their Experience?**

Interview Guide Question No. 1: How has your health and daily life been since the judgment of your case?

*Theme A: Complex Physical Stress*

In the first question, the theme **Complex Physical Stress** emerged. It captures the varied physical experiences of participants following conviction. This theme highlights the complex, individualized nature of physical stress, illustrating how participants navigate their bodily responses differently after conviction.

As a subtheme, **Healthy Physical Disposition** was described as the participants' feeling physically okay despite their legal circumstances. In relation to this, Participant 1 stated:

*"... My health is okay"—Participant 1*

Others exhibited **Emotional Suppression**, a subtheme referring to participants who appeared to be okay even when they were not. This was evidenced by the response of Participant 4, who stated:

*"...I need to be strong because my wife is not here, she is in Dubai, so my health is actually okay."—Participant 4*

Finally, some experience **Exhaustion**, characterized by drained energy resulting from the lengthy legal process. This could be seen in the response of Participant 6 when he stated:

*"...however, it is tiring"—Participant 6*

[Sawyer and Wagner \(2021\)](#) explain that the harsh prison environment can produce toxic stress, leading to trauma that alters brain functioning and impedes post-release adjustment. It shows that emotional suppression, or the habitual concealment of emotions, undermines relationships and reduces social support by inhibiting genuine emotional connection.

Interview Guide Question No. 2: How have you been feeling and thinking since the judgment of your case?

#### *Theme B: Adaptive Psychological Transitions*

In response to the second guide question, the theme **Adaptive Psychological Transitions** emerged. This theme refers to the psychological process individuals experience upon realizing that they will not be incarcerated or will be released following the court's judgment. It captures the cognitive and emotional adjustments made in response to the legal outcome.

One of its subthemes, **Profound Sense of Relief**, reflects the comfort and reassurance individuals feel upon learning that they will not serve their sentence in jail. This was illustrated in the response of Participant 1, who stated:

*"...I feel happy because after conviction, I was set free."—Participant 1*

The second subtheme, **Reliving the Past**, is described as the persistence of thoughts and dreams about attending court and re-experiencing the trial. This is reflected in the response of Participant 5, who stated:

*"...sometimes I think about the time when I was incarcerated, the stress that I felt was too much."—Participant 5*

The third subtheme, **Limited Legal Awareness**, reflects the individuals' lack of

understanding that they have already been convicted, often leading them to assume that their case has merely been resolved or set aside. This is illustrated in the response of Participant 6, who stated:

*"...I was not even given judgment, there is no judgment, but I was confused because it is just new."—Participant 6.*

The last subtheme, **Holding Through Resilience**, captures the individuals' efforts to stay strong and cope effectively despite being aware of their criminal label and its consequences. This is evidenced by the response of Participant 7, who stated:

*"...you need to fight, if you do not, you will go crazy."—Participant 7*

Dumornay et al. (2022) indicate that individuals who have undergone difficult or traumatic experiences, including involvement in the criminal justice system, can achieve significant emotional recovery by focusing on personal growth and emotional regulation, and further explain that learning to manage problem anger through approaches such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) supports healthier emotional adjustment following trauma.

Interview Guide Question No. 3. Social Well-Being: How would you describe your relationship with your family, friends, and community since the judgment of your case?

#### *Theme C: Social Reintegration*

In the third guide question, the theme **Social Reintegration** emerged. This refers to the challenges faced by individuals labeled criminally in reestablishing themselves in society after being convicted of the crime with which they were charged. This theme encompasses the social, emotional, and behavioral difficulties they experience as they attempt to reconnect with their communities and rebuild their lives.

The subtheme **Love and Acceptance** reflects how family members continue to provide unconditional care, support, and acceptance despite the individual's criminal history. This demonstrates the family's role as a primary source of emotional stability and belonging. This is evident in the response of Participant 2, who stated:

*"Nothing changed with my family; they are still the same"—Participant 2*

Another subtheme, **Stigmatization**, is characterized by experiences of social exclusion and discrimination due to their criminal label. This highlights the challenges participants face in gaining others' acceptance and rebuilding their social identity. This is evidenced by Participant 3's statement, who said:

*"... it is hard for me, I always adjust with my community, there are times where I think they look at me differently."—Participant 3*

As a subtheme, **Overcompensating** reflects participants' efforts to make amends for past actions by giving back to the community. This demonstrates their desire to restore their social image and regain a sense of moral balance. This is shown in the response of Participant 6, who stated:

*"...if they need something, they will come to me with prescriptions or for money to buy rice. I*

*help them even if that is my job (the crime), I have helped a lot, I do not wish to be paid back, if they need something from me, like money to buy rice, or for medicine, I will give it without immediate payment.”—Participant 6*

Lastly, the subtheme **Avoidance** describes individuals’ tendency to distance themselves from friends and family due to perceived discrimination or fear of being associated with their criminal identity. This is supported by the response of Participant 7 when he stated:

*“...I am afraid that they will visit me without money, it could be possible that the person I was with in jail (before) may point to them as another accused.”—Participant 7*

Quandt and Jones (2021) indicate that individuals released from incarceration often struggle to gain social acceptance due to limited community and family support. In contrast, stable, loving romantic relationships can foster positive change by providing emotional stability, a sense of belonging, and a sense of being valued.

Interview Guide Question No. 4. Spiritual Well-Being: How has your faith or belief helped you cope with life since the judgment of your case?

#### *Theme D: Ambivalence in Spiritual Coping*

In the fourth guide question, the theme **Ambivalence in Spiritual Coping** emerged. This theme refers to the presence of mixed or conflicting emotions and thoughts related to spirituality or religion experienced by criminally labeled individuals. It captures how faith becomes both a source of comfort and inner struggle following conviction, reflecting the complex emotional responses tied to stress, trauma, and hardship.

The subtheme **Divine Comfort** captures the deep sense of peace, reassurance, and strength that individuals derive from their faith in God or a higher power, especially during times of uncertainty following their conviction. This is reflected in Participant 3's response, in which they shared that faith became a vital source of emotional relief and resilience amid hardship. Beyond comfort, the participant expressed a profound sense of strength rooted in spiritual belief, which allowed him to endure and find meaning despite difficult circumstances. Moreover, he demonstrated trust in a divine plan, showing acceptance of his situation and faith in God's guidance as part of a greater purpose. In his own words, he stated:

*“I have accepted the Lord in my life to give me a chance to change, and I am not doing anything wrong — that is what I have proven to myself and to my family.” — Participant 3*

The fourth subtheme is **Lost Faith**. This refers to the experience of doubt, disillusionment, or disconnection from one's spiritual beliefs, religious practices, or trust in a higher power. This is shown by the response of Participant 4 when he said:

*“It is like I can only rely on myself here. Of course, there is nothing to eat inside, and sometimes you do not even get any money. You even have to pay for a place to sleep — if you cannot pay within a week, you are done.” —Participant 4.*

The Exline (n.d.) demonstrates that spirituality among individuals with a criminal label can function as both a source of healing and harm, as positive religious coping or Divine Comfort fosters hope, resilience, and meaning. In contrast, negative coping or Lost Faith contributes to emotional

distress, hopelessness, and depression.

Faith, as the Khai and Medina (2024) similarly show, can inspire moral and personal transformation through religious practices and belief in God, enabling individuals to rebuild their identities and gain the strength to desist from crime; however, when faith diminishes, motivation and emotional stability weaken as well. Together, these studies underscore that economic exclusion is not merely a financial concern but a significant barrier to redemption and reintegration, making survival and self-sufficiency an ongoing struggle for individuals rebuilding life after incarceration.

Interview Guide Question No. 5. Economic Well-Being: How has your livelihood or financial situation been since the judgment of your case?

#### *Theme E: Survival Amid Economic Exclusion*

In the fifth guide question, the theme **Survival Amid Economic Exclusion** emerged. This theme refers to how criminally labeled individuals strive to live, adapt, and endure despite being marginalized or denied access to economic resources and opportunities that others freely enjoy. It captures the financial hardships and work-related stress they encounter as they attempt to reintegrate into society.

One subtheme, **Employment Difficulties**, highlights the numerous challenges and barriers these individuals face in finding, securing, or maintaining meaningful and stable work. This is evidenced by Participant 1's statement when he said:

*"...Because I lost my job, and now, whenever I apply, I do not get accepted because I have a record."— Participant 1.*

The second subtheme, **Self-Sufficient**, means being able to meet your own needs independently, without relying heavily on others for support — whether that is emotionally, financially, or practically. This is shown by the response of Participant 2 when he said:

*"I did not really struggle with my financial situation; it was just enough." — Participant 2.*

The next subtheme, **Liquidating Assets for Survival**, refers to selling or converting personal property or resources into cash to meet immediate, basic needs — such as food, shelter, medical care, or legal expenses — especially during financial crises or hardship. This is shown in the response of Participant 4 when he stated:

*"At that time, I was really down — completely defeated. My only chance was to sell my motorcycle if I got convicted."— Participant 4.*

Lastly, **Self-Sufficient** refers to being able to meet one's own needs independently, without relying heavily on others for support, and to take care of oneself, make one's own decisions, and manage life's responsibilities with confidence and stability. Evidenced by Participant 6's statement when he said:

*"For now, I am doing fine." — Participant 6.*

This exclusion keeps individuals at the margins of economic survival. It limits their reintegration into society, as Economic Stability is the Anchor. Rhoden et al (2022) demonstrate that steady employment is central to desistance and rehabilitation by providing structure, identity,

and dignity. In contrast, the absence of financial stability creates intense pressure that may lead to hopelessness or a return to crime, illustrating how economic exclusion traps former offenders in cycles of poverty and rejection, while access to fair employment and economic stability offers a pathway toward reintegration and meaningful change.

Interview Question No. 6. Criminal Labels: How do you feel about how other people see or treat you after your conviction?

*Theme F: Weight of Criminal Label*

The theme **Weight of Criminal Label** encapsulates the deep psychological and social burden carried by individuals who have been criminally labeled. It reflects how stigma, judgment, and self-perception shape their relationships, emotions, and sense of identity after conviction.

One subtheme, **Discrimination**, describes how participants experience social distance and exclusion, feeling alienated from their friends and even their own families. It was evidenced by Participant 2's response when he stated:

*"My relationship with my in-laws and wife changed since my parents asked me to keep a distance from them."—Participant 2.*

Another subtheme, **Inferior Feelings**, captures the participants' perception of being "smaller" or less valuable than others, rooted in internalized shame and societal judgment. This is shown in the response of Participant 3 when he stated:

*"I really feel small at that time, I am just trying to push through, I can do this, I can face people."—Participant 3.*

**Emotional Detachment** further illustrates their coping mechanism of withdrawing emotionally and ignoring societal noise to protect themselves from hurtful reminders of their past. This is seen in the response of Participant 5 when he stated:

*"... I am not letting the people who know it affect me; whatever happened to me, I will proceed with life."—Participant 5*

Lastly, **Conditions of Worth** highlight how one participant clings to memories of helping others as a source of self-value, using these past acts as an anchor to resist discrimination and maintain a sense of dignity amid stigma. This is evidenced by the response of Participant 6 when he stated:

*"I think that even if I pushed for drugs before, they may think that I have helped them greatly in the past."—Participant 6*

Former offenders often face rejection not because of a lack of skills, but due to discrimination and fear from employers. Moreover, Akilith (2023) stated that the criminal label often triggers negative societal reactions, leading to social marginalization. Such exclusion limits access to conventional, non-criminal opportunities, including employment and education, which serves as a key mechanism of Labeling Theory and may consequently increase the likelihood of re-offending.

**Purpose Statement No. 4: Based on the Findings of the Study, What Intervention Programs Could Be Proposed?**

**Table 5. Recommendation for Individuals with a Criminal Label**

<b>Goals and Objectives</b>	<b>Activities</b>	<b>Person Responsible</b>	<b>Time Frame</b>	<b>Expected Outcome</b>
To properly reintegrate individuals based on restorative justice and community acceptance.	<b>Community Support Group</b> ( <i>Includes: Psycho-social support, livelihood training referrals, and regular peer-sharing sessions</i> )	Local Government Unit (Barangay) in partnership with NGOs/CSOs and Local Police	A month after release, with structured meetings every three months for two years.	Individuals with a criminal label could have a support group that meets in a single location. This makes them feel that they are not alone and reduces the risk of reoffending.
To enable individuals to generate income without engaging in criminal activities through proper employment	<b>Job Fair</b> ( <i>Specific to individuals with criminal labels</i> )	Public Employment and Services Office (PESO)	Semi-annually (twice a year)	Individuals with a criminal label are matched with partner employers that offer non-discriminatory, suitable work, leading to a measurable increase in employment rates and financial self-sufficiency, a critical factor in preventing reoffending.
To properly reintegrate individuals based on restorative justice and community acceptance.	<b>Psychoeducation</b> ( <i>Specific to the individual and their family member</i> )	City Social Welfare and Development Office/ NGOs/ Parole and Probation Offices	Within the first 3 months of community supervision or after release.	Individuals with a criminal label and their families gain understanding of the psychological effects of incarceration and stigma, developing healthy coping mechanisms and strengthening family support to facilitate successful reintegration.

This table presents three (3) key recommendations for the reintegration of individuals with

criminal labels through a multifaceted approach that addresses social, economic, and psychological support, aligned with the goals of restorative justice and community acceptance to reduce reoffending. First, a Community Support Group, led by the local government in partnership with relevant organizations, is recommended to provide psychosocial support and peer sharing during the first two years post-release ([Public Safety Canada, 2022](#)).

Second, the Public Employment and Services Office (PESO) should conduct semi-annual job fairs tailored to this population, prioritizing non-discriminatory employment opportunities to enhance financial self-sufficiency and reduce the risk of criminal recourse ([Brophy et al., 2024](#)). Third, the City Social Welfare and Development Office, in collaboration with NGOs and the Parole and Probation Office, should deliver targeted psycho-education to individuals with criminal labels and their families within the first three (3) months of release to strengthen coping mechanisms and family support systems, to provide emotional, psychological, and practical assistance to support reintegration and relationship rebuilding.

## CONCLUSIONS

In conclusion, the quantitative phase showed that among 115 individuals with a criminal label, perceived social support was highest from friends ( $M = 6.13$ ,  $SD = 1.63$ ) and significant others ( $M = 6.09$ ,  $SD = 1.70$ ), while family support was lower and more variable ( $M = 5.30$ ,  $SD = 2.04$ ). Overall Psychological Well-being was moderate ( $M = 29.49$ ,  $SD = 1.98$ ), with the highest scores in Purpose in Life ( $M = 31.37$ ,  $SD = 1.92$ ), Self-Acceptance ( $M = 30.29$ ,  $SD = 1.91$ ), and Personal Growth ( $M = 30.17$ ,  $SD = 1.94$ ), and the lowest in Positive Relations with Others ( $M = 27.42$ ,  $SD = 2.03$ ). These findings confirm prior research showing that relational domains are the most vulnerable aspects of post-incarceration adjustment ([Fahmy, 2021](#); [Hidayati et al., 2021](#)) and that non-familial social support plays a critical role in resilience and reintegration ([LaBarbera et al., 2025](#)), while highlighting variability in family support and the importance of social context in Philippine-based reintegration studies.

The qualitative findings deepened these insights by identifying six themes—Complex Physical Stress, Adaptive Psychological Transitions, Social Reintegration, Ambivalence in Spiritual Coping, Survival Amid Economic Exclusion, and Weight of the Criminal Label—which illustrate the lived and culturally embedded experiences of criminally labeled individuals in the Philippines ([Emprechtinger et al., 2024](#)).

Although quantitative results showed lower family support and weaker Positive Relations with Others, qualitative narratives emphasized unconditional family acceptance, active community engagement, and compensatory social efforts, underscoring participants' resilience. Viewed through the lens of Kaginghawaan Theory and Labeling Theory, these findings demonstrate that both structural and psychosocial factors must be addressed to promote material sufficiency, relational security, inner peace, holistic well-being, reduced recidivism, and sustainable social belonging among formerly incarcerated individuals.

## LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

The present study has several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. The sample was relatively small and drawn exclusively from individuals labeled criminally in the Province of Laguna, which may limit its broader applicability. The use of convenience sampling introduces potential bias by favoring participants who were more accessible or willing to participate.

The study design also precludes definitive conclusions regarding causal or correlational relationships between social support and Psychological well-being. At the same time, reliance on self-reported measures raises the possibility of social desirability bias given the sensitive context

of criminal labeling. In addition, the qualitative narratives reflect subjective perspectives that may not fully capture objective experiences, and factors such as offense type, length of incarceration, and time since release were not examined despite their potential influence on well-being and social reintegration.

Future research may address these limitations by using larger and more diverse samples across multiple regions to improve generalizability and reduce selection bias. Longitudinal designs could provide deeper insight into changes in psychological well-being and social support over time and allow for stronger causal inferences. Further studies may also examine the role of rehabilitative programs, mentorship, and community-based interventions as protective factors that support adjustment and reduce stigma. At the same time, qualitative approaches remain valuable for deepening understanding of coping processes and resilience amid the social, economic, and spiritual challenges associated with criminal labeling.

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