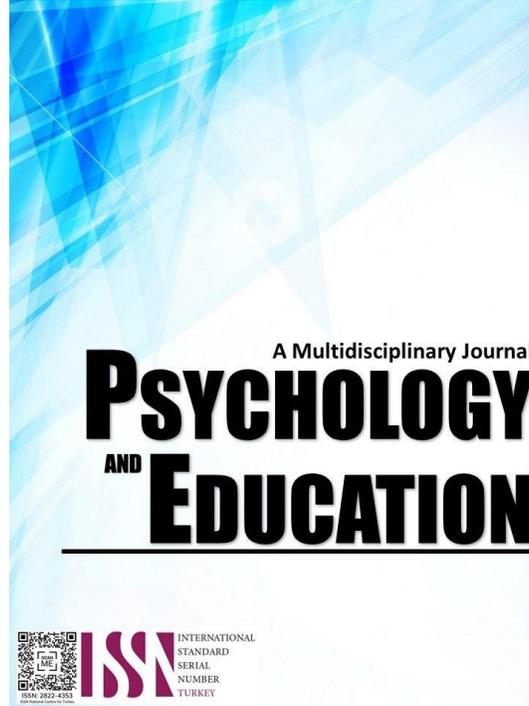


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PSYCHOLOGY AND EDUCATION: A MULTIDISCIPLINARY JOURNAL

Volume: 50

Issue 7

Pages: 784-804

Document ID: 2025PEMJ4899

DOI: 10.70838/pemj.500703

Manuscript Accepted: 11-12-2025

Unveiling the Stories Behind Commission of Heinous Crimes: A Multiple Case Study

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Abstract

Heinous crime in low-resource settings is deeply intertwined with poverty, disrupted education, and unstable family conditions that limit individuals' choices and increase vulnerability to deviant circumstances. This qualitative multiple-case study explored the experiences of five individuals awaiting final judgment for heinous crimes, who shared their life stories while in detention. Descriptive within-case and cross-case analyses were utilized to examine their interview responses. Findings revealed that the participants' lived experiences were characterized by socioeconomic constraints within their families, pre-offense challenges and pressures, and relational and social dynamics after conviction. The antecedents and circumstances leading to their involvement in crime were defined by ambivalent misjudgment and false association, as well as economic and familial vulnerability. Despite differences in personal context, all participants demonstrated coping mechanisms, including spiritual and acceptance-based practices, social and familial support systems, and personal growth and rehabilitation efforts. Similarities included poverty, limited schooling, and reliance on prayer and family ties, while differences lay like accusations, some arising from provocation, others from misinterpretation or domestic conflict. The study highlights the importance of humane correctional approaches that nurture faith, education, emotional regulation, and family engagement. It further emphasizes the need for community-based and legal support systems that prevent wrongful implication, strengthen moral rehabilitation, and equip inmates for reintegration into society as reflective, reformed, and hopeful individuals.

Keywords: *antecedents, circumstances, commission of heinous crimes, coping mechanisms, lived experiences, multiple case study, pathway to crime*

Introduction

A solemn and horrifying act of violence, frequently distinguished by its brutality, cruelty, or depravity, is referred to as a heinous crime. The problematic components of horrific crimes studies persistently associate childhood trauma, abuse, and neglect with aggressive conduct in adulthood; nevertheless, there is a deficiency of comprehensive programs that address children who are at risk. Research indicates that a considerable number of violent offenders have undergone severe childhood trauma. Studies regularly show a high correlation between maltreatment as a child and criminal behavior as an adult. Research study by Widom and Osborn (2021), girls who are mistreated and neglected have a higher chance of growing up to commit violent crimes. Similar findings were made by Boateng and Campbell (2021), who found that there was a strong association between adult offending and childhood victimization, with individual factors acting as mediators.

Furthermore, if this problem had not been addressed correctly, it would have become more adopted by the young ones in the next generation. Society suffered severe and complex repercussions because these systemic issues were not resolved. Untreated mental illness, social alienation, systemic inequality, and a lack of preventative interventions resulted in a cycle of violence, increased victimization, and a decline in public trust in institutions (Smith, 2023). These problems worsened over time when left unaddressed, leading to increased social instability, more horrific crimes, and a more terrified and divided community.

Targeted interventions to stop these crimes can be developed by understanding the underlying causes, including psychological problems, social influences, and environmental factors. To lessen violence in young adults with early psychosis, early intervention services (EIS) are investigating therapies based on cognitive behavioral therapy (Rolin et al., 2024). Prevention and intervention: Knowing the underlying causes of violent behavior, such as psychological disorders, social influences, and environmental factors, can aid in the development of focused interventions to stop these crimes. Recent research highlights the significance of early intervention programs in mitigating violent behavior in at-risk individuals. In addition to raising public awareness and improving safety by researching these crimes, society is better equipped to recognize warning indicators, protect victims, and implement community-based preventive strategies. Increased public awareness may lead to more community-based approaches to crime prevention (Murray & Griffin, 2023).

Research Questions

The primary purpose of this study was to explore the stories behind the commission of heinous crimes. It sought to comprehend the intricate elements that influence people to carry out serious crimes. Interviews, document reviews, and psychological testing, it investigated environmental, social, and personal variables using a qualitative multiple-case study methodology. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants involved in heinous crimes?
2. What are the antecedents and circumstances in the pathway to crime involvement of the participants?

3. What are the coping mechanisms of participants involved in heinous crimes?

Methodology

Research design

The research design employed in this study was a qualitative multiple-case study. The authors argued that qualitative research tools, including individual and focus-group interviews, visual elicitation, co-creative approaches, and video interviews, enabled people to frame their lived realities in complementary ways, as shown in their study of young migrants (Wojnicka & Nowicka, 2024). By providing insights into intricate social phenomena and systemic challenges that quantitative approaches alone might not fully capture, these studies highlighted the importance of qualitative case studies in criminal justice research (Basseches et al., 2024).

Furthermore, qualitative research often requires significant time, primarily because it requires gathering data through extended human interaction. The case study's data collection was comprehensive and drew on a variety of sources, including participant or direct observations, interviews, archival records and documents, tangible objects, and audiovisual materials, as well as analyses of professional identity and role negotiation (Oranga & Matere, 2023). Researchers were able to investigate viewpoints on leadership and policy proposals (Pangandoyon et al., 2024). The effectiveness of restorative justice in establishing legal certainty in the criminal justice system was assessed through several case studies (Meliala et al., 2024). Interviews, observations, and document analysis were the common techniques used to gather data. Therefore, interviews—especially semi-structured ones—were commonly used to obtain detailed information from participants (Mannan, 2024).

Participants

The target participants of this study were individuals who had committed serious crimes such as murder, homicide, parricide, rape, human trafficking, and drug-related offenses. The participants underwent an in-depth interview (IDI) following the researcher's interview guide to elicit common ideas about the commission of heinous crimes. Purposive sampling was used to select participants according to predetermined criteria to gather pertinent data (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024).

The participants in the study shared personal knowledge of the factors that drove the commission of heinous acts. Participants were chosen based on objective criteria relevant to the study's purpose. To ensure an open selection process that respected moral principles and encouraged participant diversity, the researcher collaborated closely with the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology. Through proper coordination with the BJMP, qualified offenders were identified as participants in the study, individuals who had firsthand knowledge of heinous crimes. Their viewpoints provided insightful data that external analysis alone could not offer, thereby contributing to a more thorough understanding of the causes of crime.

Their involvement was crucial in generating thorough, fact-based results that could guide security plans and criminological research, thanks to their distinct experiences. The researcher focused on developing validity and reliability measures, with special emphasis on improving data reliability. To improve the methodology, a rigorous research approach was applied to examine the complex phenomena in the given situations.

The specific inclusion requirements of this study ensured that the target participants had committed a heinous crime. They were also overrepresented in violent crime rates and provided critical insights into influencing factors. Participants had to be formally charged and awaiting judgment to ensure that the study examined active cases within the criminal justice system. Most importantly, participants provided informed consent, confirming that they understood the study's goals, procedures, and potential risks. The study excluded individuals who had committed minor offenses.

The researcher provided participants with an emotional support plan, in coordination with the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, to ensure their well-being during the research procedure. Before, during, and after the study, participants had access to confidential counseling services to help them deal with any emotional pain that might have resulted from discussing their prior offenses. Additionally, qualified psychologists or counselors were requested to lead structured debriefing sessions to help process challenging emotions. Services for crisis intervention were offered immediately in cases of severe psychological distress. Participation was entirely voluntary, with participants free to discontinue at any time without consequences. To safeguard their well-being, participants who suffered from severe physical or mental health conditions that interfered with their ability to participate in the study were removed.

A thorough explanation of the study's goals, methods, possible hazards, and participant rights was given to those who expressed interest. To aid comprehension, the application documents were provided in plain language, avoiding complex legal or technical terms. Participants were required to read and sign an informed consent document prior to their participation, which highlighted their voluntary involvement and the freedom to discontinue at any time without facing repercussions. Before selecting participants, the researcher ensured that all required permissions from institutional or penal authorities were obtained. To maintain the integrity of the study and the participants' well-being, individuals were invited to withdraw if they were unable to express their experiences or provide essential information due to emotional discomfort or other circumstances. This ensured that all participants took part voluntarily.

Therefore, the research participants in this study were individuals awaiting final judgment who had committed heinous crimes and were currently detained at Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) facilities in Region XI. Additionally, the selection of

participants was coordinated by the BJMP Offices in the Province and the Regional Office, provided that they met the minimum criteria of having committed a heinous crime as recorded in their official records. A total of five (5) participants were selected to undergo in-depth interviews (IDIs) to provide valuable insights into the study. Five (5) cases are used for comparison in multiple-case research, which is likely the most cases that can be handled in a realistic manner (Schoch, 2020). This pattern demonstrates the growing awareness of the benefits of integrating multiple approaches to enhance the validity and breadth of research. Furthermore, qualitative information from several cases can enhance the story and contextual knowledge of the topic, making it very useful in the field of criminology.

Instrument

In this study, the data collection was guided by the research questions. The researcher chose the types of questions to ask during the interviews based on the study's topics. To ascertain the factors influencing the commission of heinous crimes, the researcher employed semi-structured interview questions during in-depth interviews (IDI). The interview guide questions were examined and validated by the expert panel members of the Professional School of the University of Mindanao and the ethics committee before the study was conducted. The comments and suggestions provided by the experts during the validation process were strictly followed. In-depth interviews were used as a robust qualitative research technique, frequently employed in the social sciences, to obtain comprehensive data on participants' experiences and viewpoints. Because they were semi-structured, these interviews allowed flexibility in topic exploration while maintaining a focus on the main study questions (Knott et al., 2022).

The purpose of the interview was to collect information by asking participants to make statements. Additionally, during the in-depth interview (IDI), the researcher used semi-structured questions to elicit more detailed responses and more profound reflections on the topics. To obtain precise and reliable data, the researcher used a smartphone recording program. The recorded data were transcribed and analyzed. By implementing secure data management procedures, the researcher ensured rigorous privacy and confidentiality throughout the investigation. Only the researcher had access to the secure digital storage and the locked physical files containing all interview recordings, transcripts, and other collected data. All personal identifiers were removed or anonymized to protect participant identities, particularly in case studies where specific details might have revealed their identities. The researcher followed stringent data protection procedures, ensuring that private information was handled appropriately and kept confidential, especially when access to prison records was required. No information was disclosed in a way that jeopardized participants' security or privacy. Moreover, notes were taken during the interview process. Finally, a copy of the interview transcripts was presented to each interviewee for confirmation.

Procedure

In collecting the data, the researcher asked permission from the Professional School Research Office, the Dean of the Graduate School, and the Head of the Regional Office of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology to conduct the study. Additionally, after receiving approval, the researcher obtained informed consent from the participants. The researcher politely requested the volunteers' cooperation in conducting the study after confirming their genuine willingness to participate in the specific research inquiry. During data collection, participants were provided with information about the study's nature, importance, purpose, and objectives.

To ensure that participants understood the interview guide questions, they were thoroughly discussed, and each participant was expected to affirm and commit to maintaining the strictest confidentiality regarding any information disclosed during the focus group discussions with other members. To ensure everyone was aware of their obligation to respect fellow participants' privacy, this expectation was clearly communicated prior to participation. The researcher recognized the importance of maintaining a respectful and safe environment where conversations could take place without fear of deceit or unauthorized disclosure of private information outside the study. Participants were reminded of the potential repercussions of violating confidentiality, including the impact on others' welfare and the integrity of the study, to reinforce this commitment.

They were guaranteed their privacy and confidentiality rights, as well as the assurance that the information gathered would be used solely for the study. If the interview was conducted in a manner that seemed misleading or potentially harmful, participants were free to decline to participate. After the agreement, the participants were asked about their availability for the interview.

To ensure that any potential conflicts of interest were identified early, the researcher in this study formally disclosed any personal relationships with the participants. To prevent any undue influence on data collection and interpretation, independent monitoring was established to oversee interactions and decision-making. Data were anonymized and securely handled to eliminate bias, and interviews and assessments were conducted in the presence of impartial third parties to ensure objectivity further.

While upholding ethical standards to safeguard their rights and confidentiality, the researcher worked closely with participants, whose perspectives and experiences were crucial to the study. Participants' contributions were appreciated correctly, even though they were not named as authors. In appreciation of their vital role in guiding the study's methodology, analysis, and overall academic rigor, the research adviser was listed as a co-author. Before submission, the final manuscript was carefully reviewed by the adviser, the researcher, and everyone who received authorship credit. This preserved the accuracy and integrity of the published work by ensuring that all authors agreed with the study's findings, interpretations, and conclusions. Transferability, like external validity, was achieved by providing readers with thorough, in-depth descriptions of each case, enabling them to assess how well the results translated to other settings.



All ethical standards mandated by the UMERC were strictly observed and followed by the researcher. The researcher conducted the study in accordance with the research protocols, guidelines, and standards, paying particular attention to data management and collection. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and the researcher ensured that no form of coercion, direct or indirect, was used, particularly given that participants were sentenced prisoners. The researcher made it clear that declining to participate or withdrawing from the study at any point did not affect participants' legal status, treatment, or privileges in detention. The participants' willingness to get involved was always a priority and was respected throughout the study.

The questionnaire used in the Informed Consent Process was free of technical jargon and easy for study participants to understand. The professional schools had given their approval and assistance in administering the surveys. No research surveys were disseminated without the consent of the offices and authorized personnel. All respondents were also free to participate without any punishment or pressure. Additionally, the respondents' personal information required for the study was kept confidential. Ultimately, the researcher obtained a certificate from the same office after complying with all UMERC standards.

Results and Discussion

Profile of the Participants

The five participants in this study are individuals under trial for various offenses of heinous crimes who willingly shared their personal backgrounds, life experiences, and coping mechanisms while awaiting judgment. The following table summarizes their demographic and socioeconomic characteristics.

Table 1. Profile of the Participant Cases

Case	Pseudonym	Gender	Civil Status	Age	Facing Charges	Educational Attainment	Pre-Incarceration Work
1	Juan	Male	Single	25	Rape and Theft	Uneducated	Farmer/ Laborer
2	Pedro	Male	Married	36	Murder	Uneducated	Farmer
3	Maria	Female	Married	32	Human Trafficking, Cybercrime, and Child Abuse	Elementary Level	Ex-OFW / House-Wife
4	Lito	Male	Widow	73	Rape Murder,	Elementary Level	Fish Vendor
5	Tonyo	Male	Married	33	Frustrated Murder, and 2 counts of Attempted Murder	High School Level	Motorcycle mechanic

Case 1 – Juan. A 25-year-old single male is currently detained for charges of rape and theft. He is uneducated, having never received formal schooling, which has significantly limited his opportunities for stable employment. Prior to incarceration, Juan worked as a farmer and laborer, performing strenuous manual tasks that provided only minimal income. His young age, combined with his low educational attainment and economic hardship, may have contributed to a life marked by struggle and social vulnerability. The lack of educational exposure possibly affected his understanding of lawful behavior and decision-making, leaving him more susceptible to deviant influences within his community. Juan's case illustrates the link between poverty, lack of education, and limited livelihood options, which often intersect as predisposing factors for criminal involvement among young males from rural backgrounds.

Case 2 – Pedro. Aged 36, he is a married male detainee facing a murder charge. Like Juan, he is uneducated, having not completed any level of formal schooling. Before his arrest, Pedro was engaged in farming, his primary means of supporting his family. This type of work indicates a dependence on seasonal income and physically demanding labor typical of the agricultural sector. Pedro's situation reflects the challenges of sustaining a household amid unstable income and limited opportunities for upward mobility. His socioeconomic status and lack of access to education may have fostered frustration or social pressure, which, in turn, can contribute to involvement in violent acts. His case underscores how economic deprivation and social isolation may increase vulnerability to conflict and unlawful behavior.

Case 3 – Maria. A 32-year-old married female is facing multiple and severe criminal charges, including human trafficking, cybercrime, and child abuse. She attained an elementary level of education, indicating partial completion of basic schooling. Before incarceration, Maria worked abroad as an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) and later became a housewife after returning to the Philippines. Her prior overseas employment reflects a pursuit of better economic opportunities to support her family. However, her eventual involvement in complex crimes suggests exposure to high-risk environments and possibly exploitative networks. Maria's case highlights the vulnerabilities of returned migrant workers, particularly women who face reintegration difficulties, limited job prospects, and family pressures upon returning home. Her situation embodies the intersection of gender, migration, and socioeconomic strain, showing how these factors can sometimes lead to criminal entanglement.

Case 4 – Lito. A 73-year-old widower is charged with rape and represents the eldest participant in the study. He reached the elementary level of education but did not proceed further due to financial limitations. Before his incarceration, Lito earned a living as a fish vendor, selling seafood in local markets—a small-scale trade that required long hours but yielded modest income. His advanced age and

widowhood suggest emotional loneliness and social disconnection, which may have influenced his psychological and behavioral state prior to the offense. Lito's case illustrates how aging individuals in poverty, particularly those without strong family or social support, may experience emotional vulnerability that contributes to deviant behavior.

Case 5 – Tonyo. A 33-year-old married male is charged with multiple serious offenses, including murder, frustrated murder, and two counts of attempted murder. He reached the high school level, which is higher than that of most other participants, indicating a moderate educational background. Prior to detention, he worked as a motorcycle mechanic, performing technical and repair-related tasks that required mechanical skills and hands-on expertise. Despite possessing employable skills, Tonyo's involvement in violent crimes suggests deeper social or emotional struggles, such as unresolved conflicts, aggression, or external pressures. His case demonstrates that education alone does not guarantee immunity from criminal behavior, as personal disposition, peer influence, and situational triggers also play significant roles. Tonyo's profile reflects the complexity of crime causation among individuals with vocational competence who experience social or emotional instability.

Case 1 - Juan

Lived Experiences of the Participants Involved in Heinous Crimes

Juan's life story reflects the harsh realities of poverty and the deprivation of education that shaped his early years. Born into financial hardship, he was forced to work at a young age, setting aside his dreams of going to school. His decision to prioritize earning over learning was not a matter of choice but of necessity, a reflection of a life driven by survival rather than ambition. The absence of education limited his understanding of opportunities and left him trapped in a cycle of economic struggle. His experience represents how systemic poverty, when combined with a lack of education, can lead individuals to vulnerability and poor life outcomes.

“Wa ko naka-eskwela sir tungod sa kalisod...trabaho aron lang makakwarta.” (I wasn't able to study because of poverty... I worked just to earn money.)

Before the offense, Juan's life revolved around survival. He labored daily to meet his most basic needs, often feeling that life was merely about getting through one day at a time. The exhaustion in his words reveals a man trapped in hardship, doing whatever it takes to sustain himself. His situation underscores how economic struggle and the pressure to survive can narrow moral and legal options. Poverty became both his motivation and his prison—pushing him to persist but also exposing him to the edge of desperation.

“Lisod gyud para nako ang kahintang...trabaho aron lang makapalit sa among panginahanglanon.” (Life is really difficult for me... I work only to buy our necessities.)

Juan also admitted that his environment played a significant role in influencing his actions. Living in a community surrounded by temptation and negative influences, he found it difficult to resist what was happening around him. The absence of strong moral guidance and positive role models made him susceptible to the behaviors of others. His reflection suggests remorse and awareness that his choices were partly shaped by the environment he grew up in, which is an environment that normalized shortcuts and blurred the lines between right and wrong.

“Mga tentasyon ra gyud sa palibot ang naka apekto...dali ra pud ko maapektohan.” (It was the temptations around me that affected me... I easily get influenced.)

Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Juan's account reveals a life marked by limited awareness and misunderstanding, where his lack of life balance and exposure to poor decisions led to his misjudgment. He admitted that he had not learned how to manage life's pressures and was easily swayed by impulsive choices. This lack of discernment and guidance shaped how others perceived his actions, often mistaking his confusion or naiveté for guilt. His story shows how a person's unawareness and inability to navigate complex situations can become the root of false association and wrongful suspicion.

“Wala ko nakakat-on unsaon pagbalansi sa kinabuhi... dali ra pud ko nadala sa mga sayop nga desisyon.” (I never learned how to balance life... I was easily influenced by wrong decisions.)

Juan also revealed how family ties contributed to his false implication in the case. He admitted that he had no peers influencing him negatively; rather, his brother's involvement unintentionally drew him into the situation. This misplaced loyalty and unawareness of the full circumstances led him to be associated with a wrongdoing he did not commit. His statement mirrors how familial connections, which are deeply valued in Filipino culture, can sometimes become a source of vulnerability, especially when blind trust replaces caution.

“Wala gyud koy barkada nga naka apekto, pamilya ra gyud, labi na akong igsoon, ang naka impluwensya nako... dali ra ko madala sa mga sitwasyon nga wala nako masabti.” (I didn't have friends who influenced me; it was really my family, especially my brother, who influenced me... I easily get drawn into situations I don't fully understand.)

“Ang akung igsoon gyud ang involved ato sir...Tungod ato, naapil hinuon ko ug nadamay sa kaso bisan wala gyud koy labot.” (It was really my brother who was involved in that, sir... Because of that, I got dragged into the case even though I truly had nothing to do

with it.)

Coping Mechanisms of Participants Involved in Heinous Crimes

Juan's story reveals how spirituality and acceptance became his foundation for coping with life behind bars. Instead of denying his situation, he learned to accept his reality with humility, turning to prayer and faith as his constant companions. Through reflection and repentance, he found peace amid his confinement. His daily routine now includes prayer and study, demonstrating that he draws on spiritual renewal to transform despair into hope. Juan's faith-based coping illustrates how embracing one's mistakes and entrusting everything to God can lead to personal peace and moral restoration even in the most challenging circumstances.

"Ginadawat na lang gyud nako sir kay naa naman ni... pag-ampo, pagtuon sa sulod, ug pagdawat sa tanan." (I've just learned to accept everything, sir, since it's already here... I pray, study inside, and accept it all.)

"Nangayo kog kapasayloan sa Diyos... siya gyud naka pabag-o naku." (I asked forgiveness from God... He is the one who truly changed me.)

Despite feeling isolated, Juan continued to draw emotional strength from his family. He admitted seeking help from them, though they had little to offer financially. Still, their concern provided emotional comfort and reminded him that he was not entirely alone. This genuine yet straightforward connection gave him hope and a reason to endure. His story highlights the vital role of family presence, however limited, in sustaining emotional resilience among persons deprived of liberty.

"Gapangayo kog tabang sa pamilya peru walang-wala pud..." (I ask help from my family, but they also have nothing to give.)

In his time inside the facility, Juan also benefited from the guidance of correctional personnel. The lessons and moral teachings he received helped him reflect on his past actions and rebuild his sense of discipline. Learning to respect the jail officers and following their advice became part of his transformation, allowing him to see life from a different perspective. Such institutional support reinforced his desire to reform and live meaningfully despite his circumstances.

"Mga pagtulon-an gikan sa mga personnel kung unsaon pagbaton ug maayong pamatasan." (Teachings from the personnel on how to have good behavior.)

Juan's time in confinement also became an opportunity for self-development. He proudly shared that he learned how to read and write through the educational programs available inside the jail. These learning experiences not only equipped him with skills but also restored his self-worth. By embracing education, he began to see imprisonment not only as punishment but as a chance for renewal and growth.

"Naka kat-on ko magsulat ug mabasa... ginatudloan me unsaon pag skwela." (I learned how to read and write... they teach us how to study.)

Finally, Juan's reflections reveal profound self-awareness and a sense of change. He expressed deep regret for his past mistakes and recognized that every hardship carried a lesson that transformed his outlook on life. His narrative reflects humility and growth, and he now values discipline, faith, and inner peace. From resistance to repentance, Juan's journey symbolizes moral reawakening and hope for reintegration into society.

"Mas naa koy disiplina... ug mas kabalo ko nga usbon ang sayop nga agianan." (I have more discipline now, and I know better than to repeat the wrong path.)

"Daku gyud kaayog kausaban sir, naka pangutana gyud ko sa akung kaugalingon nganong mali akung nahimong disisyon, ulahi gyud ang pagmahay tungod gyud siguro sa mga pagsulay. Tungod gyud sa pang hitabo nabag'o gyud akung panglantaw kung unsay mayo, katang mga nangagi nga nahimo di na gyud siya dapat usabon." (There's been a big change in me, sir. I asked myself why I made the wrong decision—regret always comes late, but maybe that's part of God's test. Because of what happened, my outlook on what is good has changed; the things I did before should never be repeated.)

Case 2 - Pedro

Lived Experiences of the Participants Involved in Heinous Crimes

Pedro's life was shaped by poverty and limited schooling, which led him to the fields as a farmer instead of a classroom as a student. The decision to work rather than study was driven by necessity, not choice; it reflects a rural reality where labor becomes the default path to survival. His account shows how early educational disruption narrows future options and anchors a person to subsistence work.

"Wala ko kahuman ug skwela tungod sa kawad-on, manguma ra akung trabaho sa bukid." (I wasn't able to finish school because of poverty; I work as a farmer in the fields.)

Before the offense, Pedro's days revolved around getting food on the table, nothing more, nothing less. His routine was simple and pragmatic: work so the family could eat. This survival-focused rhythm kept his aspirations modest and his attention fixed on immediate needs, illustrating how poverty compresses life into daily endurance.

“Simple ra ang among kinabuhi...trabaho ra gyud aron makakaon.” (Our life is simple... we really just work so we can eat.)

He also emphasized that he did not experience intense external pressure to commit wrongdoing. Instead, he maintained a plain, untroubled existence, suggesting that his entanglement in the case stemmed more from circumstance than intent. This sense of ordinariness and lack of coercion frames his stance of innocence and highlights the gap between his quiet life and the gravity of the accusation.

“Wala koy dagkong pressure...simple ra ang among kinabuhi.” (I didn’t experience much pressure... our life was just simple.)

After conviction, distance strained his ties with family; visits were rare simply because of how far away he was. The physical separation added emotional weight to an already difficult situation, underscoring how incarceration can deepen isolation for rural families with limited means for travel.

“Wala lang ko nila nabisita diri ky tungod sa kalayu.” (They just haven’t visited me here because it’s far.)

Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Pedro’s story centers on confusion, fear, and misjudgment that led to his wrongful implication in a crime he insists he did not commit. He recounted how he was accused without clear evidence, his fear and shock during the incident mistaken for guilt. His words show that he had no intent or motivation to commit any offense but was overwhelmed by a sudden, chaotic situation he could not emotionally manage. This experience illustrates how misunderstanding and panic can be misread as indicators of wrongdoing, particularly when one cannot assert innocence under pressure.

“Wala man gyud koy motivation sir, pasangil ra gyud to nga gibutang sa akoo... Nadala ra gyud ko sa kahadlok ug sa kalit-kalit nga sitwasyon... Wala nako na-manage ang akong emosyon ug nadala ra ko sa sitwasyon.” (I really didn’t have any motivation, sir; the accusation was just placed on me... I was carried away by fear and by the sudden situation... I couldn’t manage my emotions and was just caught in it.)

“Akoy napasanginlan nga nagpatay.” (I was the one accused of killing.)

He further explained that his life before the accusation was quiet and focused solely on work. He had no conflicts or personal grudges, nor any social influences that could have pushed him toward crime. His calm, uneventful routine was disrupted only by false accusations. Pedro’s reflection emphasizes how people living ordinary lives can become victims of circumstantial blame, particularly in communities where quick judgments replace thorough understanding.

“Wala koy mga panghitabo nga naka-impluwensya sa akoo...trabaho ra ang ginahuna-huna.” (There were no events that influenced me... work was the only thing on my mind.)

Coping Mechanisms of Participants Involved in Heinous Crimes

Pedro’s story illustrates how faith and acceptance guided him through the struggles of confinement. Instead of succumbing to hopelessness, he found strength in prayer and devotion, constantly relying on God for comfort. He shared that he never lost hope, believing that even behind bars, God’s mercy could still bring change. Through worship and prayer, Pedro transformed fear into peace and learned to face his situation with humility and trust in divine grace. His spirituality became his anchor—a steady light amid the darkness of imprisonment.

“Wala ko nawad-an ug paglaom... kanunay mag madasigon gyud nga kaluya’an sa Ginoo.” (I never lost hope... I always stay encouraged and rely on God’s mercy.)

“Nag sige kog simba ug ampo... mao nalang gyud akong saligan.” (I always go to church and pray... that’s the only thing I hold on to.)

The support of his religious community further strengthened his faith. Members from his church occasionally visited, offering small tokens like soap and checking in on his well-being. These simple acts of kindness provided emotional relief and reminded him that he was still part of a caring community outside the jail’s walls. This spiritual fellowship not only sustained his faith but also reassured him that redemption and compassion still existed beyond judgment.

“Kauban sa simbahan naa may nangumusta usahay, tagaan kog sabon...” (Some members from the church visit and check on me sometimes; they even give me soap.)

Pedro also drew emotional strength from his family. Although their help was limited, their occasional messages and gestures of concern became his source of motivation. Knowing that his loved ones still remembered him helped him cope with loneliness and isolation. Family support, even in its simplest form, reassured him that love could persist despite distance and hardship.

“Naa man noon sa pamilya ginagmay ra pud, naa may mangumusta usahay.” (There’s a bit of support from my family; sometimes, someone checks in on me.)

Inside the facility, Pedro found companionship and solidarity among his peers and the prison staff. He shared that he managed to survive emotionally because of the support and camaraderie among fellow inmates and the encouragement of the personnel who treated them humanely. Their mutual understanding and shared experiences created a sense of community that helped ease his burdens. The laughter, shared stories, and everyday cooperation inside the facility allowed him to endure with resilience and hope.

“Nakaya nako tungod sa mga kauban diri sulod ug sa mga trabahante.” (I was able to get through it because of my companions here inside and the workers.)

Through time, Pedro also benefited from the guidance of jail officers who taught moral lessons, discipline, and respect. These values helped him rebuild his character and redirect his focus toward self-improvement. He eventually joined educational programs where he learned good behavior, discipline, and the value of perseverance. Pedro’s story embodies quiet transformation—a man who entered with fear and confusion but learned faith, patience, and responsibility within the walls that confined him.

“Gina tudloan me diri unsay maayong buhaton ug respito sa Jail Officers.” (They teach us here what good deeds to do and how to respect the jail officers.)

“Ni-skwela ko diri para makat-on, ginatudloan me unsay maayong buhaton.” (I go to school here to learn; they teach us what’s right to do.)

“Ginasultihan me diri nga di mag-apil sa kagubot, respito sa mga jail officers.” (They tell us here not to join trouble and to respect the jail officers.)

“Wa ko nawad-an ug paglaom... Di lang gyud mawad’an paglaom ky bata paman ko basi maka gawas pa.” (I never lost hope... I just won’t lose hope because I’m still young, and maybe I’ll get out someday.)

Case 3 - Maria

Lived Experiences of the Participants Involved in Heinous Crimes

Maria’s story reflects the sacrifices and struggles of a mother burdened by poverty and the responsibilities of motherhood. With an unemployed husband and children to feed, she carried the full weight of providing for her family. Her life revolved around ensuring her children’s survival, even if it meant making difficult and desperate decisions. Poverty, coupled with the emotional strain of motherhood, became the driving force behind her involvement in the offense. Her actions were not born from malice, but from the painful urgency of a mother’s instinct to protect and provide.

“Akung bana sir walay trabaho...nadakpan me sa NBI ug gikasohan...” (My husband had no job... we were arrested by the NBI and charged.)

Life, as she described it, was defined by hardship and endless struggle just to survive. Her repeated expressions of difficulty show how constant deprivation slowly cornered her into choices she never imagined making. Poverty, not malice, became the silent force that shaped her decisions.

“Kalisud ra gyud sa kinabuhi sir...” (Life is really difficult, sir...)

Maria’s reflections reveal the emotional toll of separation from her children after her conviction. The absence of her family weighed heavily on her, and the thought of her children’s struggles consumed her daily. She explained that her decision to commit the act was driven by her desire to meet her children’s basic needs. This shows the internal conflict of a mother torn between moral choices and the desperation to fulfill her role as a parent. Her experience underscores how love and poverty can intertwine, pushing individuals to cross boundaries for the sake of family.

“Naka-apekto gyud kaayo sa akoo ang kahintang sa mga bata...nakadesisyon ko ani aron lang matubag ang ilang mga panginahanglan.” (The situation of my children deeply affected me... I made this decision just to meet their needs.)

Even behind bars, Maria’s longing for her family remained constant. The physical distance from her children left her emotionally wounded, highlighting the painful consequences of her choices. Her words reflect guilt, sadness, and an enduring love that refuses to fade despite her situation. Maria’s story is a portrait of a mother’s strength and vulnerability, caught between survival and conscience, love and loss.

“Nag-lagyo me sa mga bata.” (We became distant from the children.)

Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Maria’s story reveals how poverty and the weight of family responsibility became the driving forces behind her involvement in crime. As a mother burdened with caring for her children and an unemployed husband, she faced constant pressure to meet her family’s needs despite having no steady income. Her actions, as she explained, were not motivated by greed or ill intent but by desperation, a painful choice made under the heavy strain of survival. Her account highlights how economic hardship and maternal instinct can intertwine, leading to decisions driven by necessity rather than moral disregard.

“Tungod gyud sa mga bata... panginahanglan sa pamilya.”

(It was really because of the children... the needs of the family.)

“Wala gyud income akung bana... mao nga mao to ang nagtulak nga nakapahimo nako sa desisyon.” (My husband really had no income... that’s what pushed me to make that decision.)

Maria’s reflection deepens when she recounts how poverty not only limited her options but also exposed her to influences that shaped her decision-making. The constant exposure to social media and the images of comfort and success she could not attain intensified her dissatisfaction and longing for a better life. This inner conflict between aspiration and deprivation led to a breaking point, a moment of weakness where need overpowered judgment.

“Tungod sa kalisud sa panginabuhì sir maong nisulod ko ana nga kremin. Sabay me sa akung bana nadakpan ani sir.” (Because of the difficulty of life, sir, I got into that crime. My husband and I were arrested together.)

“Ang kalisud ra gyud sa among panginabuhì ug ang mga butang nga makita nako pirmi sa social media mao ray nakapahimo nako sa desisyon.” (It was really our hardship and the things I always saw on social media that made me decide.)

Coping Mechanisms of Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

Maria’s story highlights how faith, family, and personal renewal became her anchors in coping with the consequences of her actions. Inside confinement, she learned to surrender her situation to God through prayer and acceptance. Instead of dwelling on guilt, she focused on seeking forgiveness and trusting in divine mercy. Her faith gave her strength to endure isolation and to face the outcome of her decisions with humility.

Through constant prayer and reflection, she found peace in accepting that everything happens for a reason, and that repentance is the first step toward change.

“I-ampo nalang gyud naku ni sir... atubangon nalang ang consequence.” (I just pray about it, sir... I’ll face the consequence.)

“Ang pag-ampo nalang gyud ang strategy para ma-manage ang tanan.” (Prayer is really the strategy to manage everything.)

Beyond spiritual surrender, Maria drew emotional strength from her family’s continued love and presence. She shared that her sadness fades whenever her family visits her, even just occasionally. Their support reminds her that forgiveness and hope still exist beyond her mistake.

The thought of being remembered by her loved ones fuels her desire to become better, serving as her emotional lifeline during times of loneliness. Her story shows that the love of family can soften even the hardest burdens of confinement.

“Naga suporta gihapon akung pamilya... mawala akung kagool kung mo anhi sila diri.” (My family still supports me... my sadness goes away whenever they visit me here.)

Inside the facility, Maria found comfort in the structured guidance and counseling provided by the jail personnel. She shared that these sessions taught her how to manage emotions and develop good behavior. By listening to advice and participating in activities aimed at moral improvement, she slowly rebuilt her sense of discipline and learned to handle stress more positively. These interactions helped her understand that personal growth is possible even in confinement, as long as one is open to learning and reflection.

“Naga paminaw me sa counseling nga ginahatag diri sa sulod.” (We listen to the counseling sessions given here inside.)

Maria’s faith in education also became a crucial part of her coping and rehabilitation. She decided to continue learning through the Alternative Learning System (ALS), believing that knowledge would open new opportunities for her and her family once she is released. For her, education is not just about gaining skills but reclaiming dignity and self-worth. It gave her a renewed sense of purpose and reminded her one’s past does not limit that change.

“Naga ALS ko para makahuman... ni skwela ko dinhi sir kay malay nato makagawas ko.” (I’m taking ALS to finish school... I study here, sir, because who knows, I might get out someday.)

Her reflections reveal that, for her, coping means transformation. Maria now channels her emotions into motivation for change. She has learned to endure pain for the sake of her children and to regulate her feelings rather than letting them control her.

Her growth is evident in her acceptance of responsibility, management of emotions, and nurturing of hope. With every prayer and every lesson learned, Maria rebuilds herself piece by piece, believing that redemption is possible through faith, love, and perseverance.

“Kayahon gyud naku tanan emotional para sa akung mga bata. Sa akung panghuna-huna makaya paman ug manage.” (I really endure everything emotionally for my children. In my mind, I can still manage it.)

“Kung naa may change maka gawas pa sir ako gyud ibuhos akung panahon sa akung pamilya.” (If given the chance to change and get out, sir, I’ll devote all my time to my family.)

Case 4 – Lito***Lived Experiences of the Participants involved in Heinous Crimes***

Lito's story depicts the everyday struggle of a hardworking man who lived a simple but honest life. He once earned his living in the fish market, selling fish to provide for his family. His life was marked by dedication and perseverance, qualities that defined many ordinary laborers striving to survive amid limited opportunities. Alongside his work, he shared that his wife had once been an overseas worker and that he had several children from two marriages. This detail reveals a complex family life, one that required balancing responsibility, separation, and the emotional strain of supporting loved ones from afar. His reflections show a man who, despite hardship, carried his duties with quiet strength and acceptance of life's weight.

“Akung trabaho sauna sa isdaan sa palingke naga pamaligya ko.” (My work before was in the fish market, where I sold fish.)

“Akung asawa sauna ky OFW...naa koy anak lima sa unang asawa ug tulo sa ikaduhang asawa.” (My wife before was an OFW... I have five children with my first wife and three with my second.)

Before the offense, Lito emphasized that he lived peacefully and did not feel pressured or coerced into wrongdoing. His words reflect a calm acceptance and a clear conscience, suggesting that he may have been caught in circumstances beyond his control. This sense of innocence points to a man whose intentions were simple: to work, to live, and to care for his family.

“Wala may nag-pressure sa akoa ky wala man naku nahimo.” (No one pressured me because I didn't do anything wrong.)

After his conviction, Lito found comfort in his family's continued care and concern. Their constant worry for his well-being, especially as he grows older, became his source of strength and hope. Despite the barriers of incarceration, their love reminded him that family ties endure even amid life's lowest moments. This steadfast support reflects the Filipino value of pagmamahal at malasakit, unwavering compassion for family members regardless of their faults.

“Okay raman akung pamilya...nabalalaka pud sila ky tigulang naku.” (My family is okay... they still worry about me because I'm already old.)

Lito also recognized his neighbors' concern, which they expressed by sympathizing with his situation. Their shared worry speaks to the strong sense of community and interconnectedness among Filipinos. Even in shame and misfortune, Lito remained part of a collective circle that chose empathy over judgment, a testament to pakikipagkapwa-tao that defines the heart of local communities.

“Pati akung mga silingan nabalalaka pud.” (Even my neighbors were worried, too.)

Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Lito's story reveals how a simple domestic misunderstanding escalated into a serious accusation that changed the course of his life. He shared that the root of the issue was not criminal intent but a personal conflict involving a woman's complaint, which eventually led to his case. His words reflect frustration and disbelief where he insists that what happened was a result of exaggerated claims and emotional disputes rather than deliberate wrongdoing. This situation highlights how minor domestic issues, when misunderstood or misreported, can spiral into legal troubles, especially for individuals without the means or awareness to defend themselves.

“Wala man talaga, ang problema raman gyud kanang sumbong-sumbong sa babaye maong naabot sa ing-ani... Sa ngayon, nagalit gyud ko sa babaye...” (There was really nothing; the problem was just the woman's constant reporting, that's why it reached this point... Now, I've grown angry at the woman.)

He further emphasized that the case against him was fabricated in which are stories were made up and accusations were imposed despite his innocence. Lito's experience shows how vulnerable individuals can become victims of false narratives, particularly when they lack the resources, education, or social influence to counter them. His tone reveals both exhaustion and pain, knowing that his good name and reputation in the community were tarnished by baseless claims.

“Gi himo-himoan lang kog storya aning kaso naku wa naku ni nahimo.” (They just made up stories about my case; I didn't do it.)

“Wala gyud, sir...Pasangil ra gyud tanan.” (There's really nothing, sir... It was all just accusation.)

Lito also expressed how deeply the accusation affected his sense of identity. Once known as a respected man in his community, he struggled to cope with the shame and sleepless nights caused by the false charges against him. His narrative reflects the social and emotional toll of being misjudged, a man's dignity stripped away by rumors and fear.

This experience underscores how the justice system can sometimes mistake assumption for truth, and how an innocent person can bear the weight of a crime he never committed.

“Sa amoa ilado ko unya tinahod pa gyud ko, mao nang di naku na mahimo nang gi rape daw naku..... Mao nang sukad pagkahitabo ani di na gyud kaayu ko katulog.” (In our place, I was known and respected, so I couldn't have done that alleged rape... Since that incident, I really haven't been able to sleep well.)

Coping Mechanisms of Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

Lito's story reflects how faith, gratitude, and family love became his foundation for coping with life inside the correctional facility. Despite his situation, he found peace by holding on to prayer and faith in God. His belief in divine purpose gave him the courage to face each day with acceptance rather than bitterness. Through repentance and hope, he learned to see his confinement as both a trial and an opportunity to reflect on his life and decisions. His growing spirituality became a source of emotional stability, helping him endure hardship while nurturing hope for forgiveness and renewal.

“Naay uban kauban sa simbahan naga bisita diri, maghatag ug advice... Islam man ko.” (There are some members of our faith who visit here and give advice... I am a Muslim.)

Lito also drew immense emotional strength from his children, whose continued support reminded him that love and forgiveness are stronger than judgment. He expressed deep gratitude for their unwavering concern, saying that their presence and acceptance gave him peace of mind. For Lito, knowing that his children still stand by him despite his mistakes was proof that redemption can begin with the unconditional love of family. This support became his daily motivation to keep striving for improvement and to maintain hope for eventual reconciliation.

“Pasalamat ko sa mga bata ky ginasuportahan gihapon ko nila.” (I'm thankful to my children because they still support me.)

His personal growth was also strengthened by the moral guidance of the personnel inside the facility. He expressed appreciation for their efforts in helping inmates develop better behavior and discipline. Through their mentorship, he learned how to control his emotions, show respect, and maintain a positive attitude toward others. Their teachings reinforced his belief that change is possible through humility and cooperation.

“Naga paningkamot ko nga maka recover tungod sa tabang sa mga personnel diri sa sulod.” (I'm striving to recover because of the help of the personnel here inside.)

Although confinement weighed heavily on him, Lito committed himself to emotional discipline and perseverance. He admitted that even when he felt sadness and guilt, he constantly reminded himself that life must go on and that every day offers a chance to improve. He drew strength from self-control and prayer, slowly transforming his pain into acceptance and resilience.

“Bisan bug-at kayu sa akung paminaw naga paningkamot ko nga maka recover...” (Even though it's very heavy on my heart, I'm doing my best to recover.)

Finally, Lito's reflections show that his coping is deeply rooted in love and hope. Everything he does is for his children which is his reason to change and live better. He looks forward to the day they can be together again, believing that his personal transformation will bring pride instead of pain to his family. His story embodies the essence of redemption: that even behind bars, a person can find peace, forgiveness, and a renewed sense of purpose through faith, humility, and love.

“Para nalang sa akung mga anak... malipay ko kung magkuyog pami.” (It's all for my children... I'll be happy if we can be together again.)

Case 5 - Tony

Lived Experiences of the Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

Tonyo's story reflects the life of a hardworking man whose circumstances were shaped by poverty, limited education, and the heavy responsibilities of family life. He worked as a mechanic, a job that required skill and persistence, yet his opportunities remained constrained because he only reached first year in high school. His narrative reveals the plight of many Filipinos who rely on manual labor to sustain their families while battling financial instability. Despite his efforts, the demands of life and the pressures of providing for a large household became an ongoing struggle.

“Akung trabaho ky mekaniko... 1st year high school ra akung nahuman.” (My job is as a mechanic... I only reached first year in high school.)

Before the offense, Tonyo experienced the harsh realities of survival. He endured poverty, raising nine siblings in his youth and starting a family at an early age. The weight of his responsibilities, compounded by economic struggle, shaped his worldview and his reactions to conflict. When provoked, his frustration and anger boiled over, leading to an impulsive act that would change the course of his life. His story shows how prolonged hardship, emotional strain, and the lack of coping mechanisms can push a person toward regrettable decisions.

“Nine me kabook mag-igsoon... namenyko ko sa edad nga 17 anyos.” (There are nine of us siblings... I got married at the age of 17.)

“Katong nakalaban mi ato, sir, nakapamulong ko ug bahad nila... mao nga ako gyud ang nadut-an.” (When we fought before, sir, I uttered threats against them... that's why I became the target.)

After his conviction, Tonyo's personal life fell apart, leaving behind a trail of broken family ties. His wife eventually found another

partner, and his children were left to live alternately with his mother and estranged spouse. The disintegration of his family became the most painful consequence of his imprisonment, more than the punishment itself. His reflection reveals deep remorse and longing for reconciliation, showing how crime not only affects the offender but also tears apart the very fabric of family relationships.

“Pamilyado ko sir... akung asawa ni tambling napud ug lain.” (I have a family, sir... but my wife went with another man.)

“Among anak mag-tabok-tabok lang sa akung mama ug asawa.” (Our children now move back and forth between my mother and my wife.)

Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Tonyo’s story reveals how anger, rivalry, and misunderstanding were misinterpreted as proof of guilt, ultimately leading to his implication in a serious crime. He recounted that everything began from a conflict rooted in competition and pride, describing it as a “drug race” that escalated beyond his control. Upon returning home, he was shocked to learn that someone had died, and that he and his companions were immediately blamed. His experience shows how mere association and timing can be mistaken for criminal intent, especially when tempers and rivalries cloud perception.

“Sa drug-race gyud ni nag-sugod ang istorya... Mao tong pag-uli, naa nay namatay unya kami man dayun ang gitodlo.” (It really started from the drug race... When we got home, someone had already died, and we were immediately blamed.)

Tonyo also shared that his anger over a stolen motorcycle was used as supposed evidence against him. His resentment toward the incident was twisted into an accusation, painting him as vengeful and capable of violence. He reflected on how unresolved anger and personal disputes can easily be misinterpreted by others, especially when they become intertwined with community rumors and prejudice. His story exposes how emotions, once magnified by suspicion, can turn an innocent grievance into supposed motive.

“Ang akong pagbati nga na-agrabyado ko sa motor nga gicarnap sauna... maoy gihimo nilang basehan... Kasuko gyud sir ang pinakadako... naguba na among relasyon tungod sa motor.” (The feeling of being wronged over the motorcycle that was stolen from me became their basis... Anger was really the biggest factor, sir... our relationship was destroyed because of that.)

He further explained that he and his companions were immediately accused by the people in their community without investigation or proof. The collective assumption of guilt, fueled by fear and gossip, erased any chance of being heard. His words reveal the pain of being condemned by perception rather than fact, a victim not only of rivalry but also of social judgment.

“Kami man dayun ang gitodlo sa mga tao nga miingon nga kami daw nagpatay.” (We were immediately pointed out by the people, saying we were the ones who killed.)

Coping Mechanisms of Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

Tonyo’s story illustrates how prayer, reflection, and faith became his main coping strategies in enduring confinement. He found peace through moments of quiet communication with God, lifting his worries and regrets in prayer. Inside the facility, he constantly thought of his family, especially his children, and prayed for their safety and well-being. For Tonyo, faith is more than a spiritual refuge; it is his way of maintaining hope and emotional strength in the face of isolation and guilt. His belief in God’s mercy allows him to endure hardship with patience and find meaning in repentance.

“Nagaampo ko ug naga-huna-huna sa pamilya...” (I pray and think about my family...)

Beyond faith, Tonyo also drew comfort from the companionship of fellow inmates. The friendships and mutual support they shared became a vital source of emotional relief inside the facility. Through conversations, laughter, and sharing stories, they helped one another endure the weight of their experiences. This sense of brotherhood lessened the loneliness of imprisonment and reminded Tonyo that even within confinement, solidarity and understanding can bring healing.

“Magtinabangay mi ug share sa among kasinatian... magpalingaw-lingaw para dili magpabilin ang problema.” (We help each other and share our experiences... we try to have fun so the problems don’t stay with us.)

Spiritual activities and Bible-sharing sessions also helped Tonyo rediscover his faith and the possibility of moral renewal. He expressed that the sessions conducted inside their cell gave him time to reflect on his mistakes and understand the importance of change. These gatherings allowed him to rebuild his faith and find strength in forgiveness, both from God and himself. His transformation was rooted in the belief that redemption is always possible for those willing to open their hearts to change.

“Naay mosulod sa selda para mag-Bible sharing, didto nako narealize nga kinahanglan magbag-o.” (There are people who come into the cell for Bible sharing, and that’s where I realized I needed to change.)

Tonyo’s growth was further strengthened by emotional regulation and personal insight. He learned to manage his thoughts and feelings, drawing lessons from the mistakes of the past. The counseling and advice he received from personnel guided him in maintaining discipline and patience, replacing anger with self-control. His reflections reveal that change does not only happen through punishment but through self-awareness and moral awakening.



“Mas nakasabot ko sa kinabuhi, daghan tambag nakatabang nga mausab.” (I’ve come to understand life better; many pieces of advice have helped me change.)

Cross-Case Analysis

Lived Experiences of the Participants Involved in Heinous Crimes

The first objective of this study is to explore the lived experiences of the participants involved in heinous crimes, focusing on how their life circumstances shaped their paths before, during, and after the offense. From their accounts, three major themes emerged: (1) Socioeconomic Family Constraints, (2) Pre-Offense Challenges and Pressures, and (3) Relational and Social Dynamics After Conviction. These themes encapsulate the shared realities of hardship, moral conflict, and resilience that defined the participants’ life trajectories.

Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on the Lived Experiences of the Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

<i>Emerging Themes</i>	<i>Core Ideas</i>
Socioeconomic Family Constraints	Poverty and limited education Large or dependent family burden Poverty and survival hardship
Pre-Offense Challenges and Pressures	Environmental temptation and confusion Provocation or direct threat Absence of pressure/innocence claim Family care and emotional support
Relational and Social Dynamics	Community concern Strained and distant family relationships

Socioeconomic Family Constraints. This theme captures how poverty, limited education, and large family responsibilities shaped the early lives of participants, directly influencing their vulnerability to crime involvement. As shown in Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, most participants were unable to complete formal education due to financial hardship, leading them to take manual or low-paying jobs at a young age. Their narratives reveal a shared reality of survival-driven choices rather than deliberate deviance. Based on the empirical study examining adolescents in Choloma, the authors report that youths from families with low socioeconomic resources (limited access to quality education, unstable income, and few community supports) were disproportionately represented among those involved in delinquent behaviors. They highlight how family constraints—material deprivation, weak educational resources, and lack of positive supports—create conditions conducive to youth crime (Sousa et al., 2023).

Pre-Offense Challenges and Pressures. This theme illustrates the pre-crime circumstances that heightened participants’ emotional and psychological tension. As seen in Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, poverty, misunderstanding, and emotional distress emerged as critical stressors that shaped their pre-offense experiences. For Juan (Case 1) and Tonyo (Case 5), hardship, provocation, and anger triggered impulsive reactions; for Maria (Case 3), maternal desperation under poverty fueled difficult choices; while Pedro (Case 2) experienced confusion and wrongful accusation amid fear. In the case of Lito (Case 4), the tension stemmed from a domestic misunderstanding that escalated into false accusation—a situation driven more by interpersonal conflict and emotional strain than criminal intent. His experience reveals how unaddressed conflicts within the home can escalate into legal entanglements when communication breaks down or emotions overpower reason.

Collectively, these narratives highlight how contextual stress, such as economic, emotional, and relational, interacts with limited coping and decision-making capacities, influencing judgment and behavior. A research study examined how perceived benefits of crime, proactive criminal thinking, and sanction-avoidance strategies contribute to future offending among a sample of experienced drug dealers. The authors found that pre-offense cognitive pressures—namely, the perception that crime yields benefits and the belief in one’s criminal self-efficacy—were mediated by proactive criminal thinking, which, in turn, predicted offending and arrest-avoidant behaviors. This model suggests that individuals under pre-offense pressure (e.g., economic incentives, low opportunity cost, normative subculture) adopt a deliberate thinking style that anticipates crime and strategizes around detection (Guan, X., & Lo, T. W., 2022).

Relational and Social Dynamics. This theme centers on how relationships with family and community shape the participants’ emotional adjustment following conviction. As observed in Cases 2, 3, 4, and 5, family connections—whether through visits, support, or absence—play a crucial role in sustaining psychological stability inside confinement, for some, like Case 4 (Lito), family and community concern offered reassurance and belonging. In contrast, for others, such as Case 3 (Maria) and Case 5 (Tonyo), strained relationships brought pain, isolation, and guilt. These experiences reflect the dual reality of imprisonment: it can strengthen bonds through empathy or sever them through shame and distance.

Moreover, the recent study underscores how relational dynamics, such as who one is connected to, how strong and dense those connections are, can amplify or suppress offending tendencies. In research on crime, this underscores the importance of moving beyond individual-level risk factors to consider the social embeddedness of those at risk (Chen et al., 2024).



Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

The second objective of this study is to explore the antecedents and circumstances that led participants to engage in heinous crimes. Two central themes emerged from their accounts: (1) Ambivalent Misjudgment and False Association, and (2) Economic and Familial Vulnerability. These themes illuminate the blurred boundaries between guilt and circumstance, highlighting the role of poverty, fear, and social perception in shaping their criminal trajectories.

Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on the Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Ambivalent Misjudgment and False Association	Limited awareness misread as wrongdoing
	Fear and confusion mistaken for guilt
	Domestic misunderstanding seen as intent
	Anger and rivalry taken as proof of crime
	Family ties linked to false implication
Economic and Familial Vulnerability	Poverty and parental duty seen as motive
	Desperation from lack of income

Ambivalent Misjudgment and False Association. This theme captures how several participants were implicated in crimes due to misunderstanding, mistaken association, or misinterpreted behavior. As reflected in Cases 1, 2, 4, and 5, others perceived their limited awareness, fear, or emotional reactions as signs of guilt. Juan (Case 1) and Pedro (Case 2) described being carried by circumstances they did not fully understand, one influenced by familial involvement and the other by confusion and fear that led to wrongful accusation. Lito (Case 4) experienced a domestic misunderstanding that escalated into legal charges, while Tonyo (Case 5) was accused amid community rumors linking anger and rivalry to intent. These experiences show how false associations and emotional expressions are often interpreted as criminal evidence, especially in marginalized communities where social biases and limited legal literacy prevail. Additionally, Ta-Nehisi Coates's book "Between the World and Me" delves into the misjudgments and false associations made about the Black community in America, highlighting the systemic racism and biases that lead to these misconceptions. These authors all address the complexities of ambivalent misjudgment and false association in their respective works, shedding light on these issues in society (Rautenberg, 2024).

Economic and Familial Vulnerability. This theme underscores how poverty, parental obligation, and economic desperation drove some participants to decisions that eventually led to crime involvement. As described in Case 3 (Maria), her pressing need to provide for her children amid her husband's unemployment led her to take desperate actions that were later criminalized. Her testimony reveals how maternal responsibility, when compounded by poverty, can blur moral boundaries between survival and legality. Similarly, in other cases, financial instability and lack of income served as underlying motives for decisions that escalated into criminal circumstances. Furthermore, in the article "Intergenerational educational mobility and family economic vulnerability: Evidence based on the CHFS study", Ma and Ma use data from China's Household Finance Survey (CHFS) to show that families with higher intergenerational educational mobility (i.e., children achieving higher education relative to parents) tend to have significantly lower levels of economic vulnerability. They also find that this effect is more potent in higher-marketization regions and among lower-income families, pointing to how family background, education, and economic vulnerability interact in familial settings (Ma, X., & Ma, T., 2024).

Coping Mechanisms of Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

The third objective of this study is to examine the coping mechanisms adopted by the participants as they navigate life during incarceration. From their accounts, three major themes emerged: (1) Spiritual and Acceptance-Based Coping, (2) Social and Familial Support Mechanisms, and (3) Personal Growth and Rehabilitation Efforts. These themes illustrate the multifaceted nature of coping that sustained the participants' resilience while serving their sentences.

Table 4. Themes and Core Ideas on the Coping Mechanisms of Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas
Spiritual and Acceptance-Based Coping	Prayer, repentance, and moral reflection
	Religious fellowship and faith community involvement
	Family presence as emotional lifeline
Social and Familial Support Mechanisms	Peer interaction and mutual support inside the facility
	Counselor and personnel guidance as source of hope
	Education and skill learning for self-renewal
Personal Growth and Rehabilitation Efforts	Emotional regulation and self-discipline
	Reflection and behavioral change for reintegration

Spiritual and Acceptance-Based Coping. This theme underscores how participants relied on spirituality, prayer, and moral reflection as their primary means of coping with confinement and guilt. As reflected in Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, prayer and faith became central to their emotional and psychological survival. Participants like Juan (Case 1) and Maria (Case 3) turned to prayer and repentance, viewing their incarceration as both a test and an opportunity for renewal. Pedro (Case 2) and Lito (Case 4) also drew strength from religious



communities, finding comfort in fellowship and faith-based counseling within the facility. Furthermore, Jang and Johnson (2022) found that religion and spirituality aid offender rehabilitation by fostering identity transformation, moral development, and acceptance of past wrongs. Their study showed that participation in faith-based prison programs improved self-identity and reduced aggression, highlighting spiritual coping as a key factor in positive behavioral change.

Social and Familial Support Mechanisms. This theme highlights the crucial role of interpersonal and familial relationships in helping participants endure the emotional toll of imprisonment. As observed in Cases 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5, family visits, even if infrequent, served as emotional lifelines that restored hope and belonging. Maria (Case 3) and Lito (Case 4) found motivation in their children’s continued love. In contrast, Pedro (Case 2) and Tonyo (Case 5) emphasized the importance of camaraderie and mutual support among inmates and facility personnel. These social interactions mitigated feelings of isolation and provided a sense of shared humanity within the carceral setting. Also, in the article of “The Importance of Social Support for Individuals on Specialized Probation: A Gender Comparison of Relapse and Revocation,” this study examined probationers who had substance-use, mental-health or co-occurring disorders and look at how social support (from family, friends, intimate partners) relates to relapse and revocation of probation. This is directly relevant because it shows how social support networks outside prison and their structure matter for offender outcomes (Alarid & Matz, 2024).

Personal Growth and Rehabilitation Efforts. This theme reflects how participants transformed confinement into an opportunity for self-improvement and reinvention. Through education, discipline, and self-reflection, they sought to reclaim control over their lives. Juan (Case 1) and Maria (Case 3) pursued literacy and Alternative Learning System (ALS) programs, while Tonyo (Case 5) engaged in Bible-sharing sessions and reflection groups that strengthened his sense of accountability. Their testimonies show that rehabilitation, for them, is both cognitive and emotional, which are anchored in learning and self-discipline. Case 4 (Lito) emphasized the importance of emotional regulation and recovery through the guidance of correctional personnel, demonstrating the positive impact of structured moral instruction. For Pedro (Case 2), personal growth was grounded in humility and openness to institutional guidance. He regarded his incarceration as a turning point, learning from jail officers and correctional personnel about respect, patience, and emotional regulation. Likewise, in the study of “Correctional Education and Reintegration: A Qualitative Study of Young Ex-Offenders in Cape Flats”, Chauke interviewed young ex-offenders in South Africa and found that participation in correctional-education programs (including life-skills, mental-health support, vocational elements) contributed substantially to their personal development, improved self-efficacy, and helped in their reintegration into society (Chauke, 2025).

Similarities and Differences Across Cases

The cross-case analysis highlights both the shared and distinct experiences of the five participants regarding their socioeconomic backgrounds, pre-offense pressures, and post-conviction relationships. While common patterns of poverty, limited education, and family strain emerged, each case revealed unique emotional contexts and interpersonal dynamics that shaped their pathways to crime and adaptation during imprisonment.

Lived Experiences of the Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

Socioeconomic Family Constraints. Across all cases, poverty and lack of formal education consistently surfaced as the root of hardship and limited life opportunities. This shared deprivation forced early entry into manual labor and survival-driven routines, reinforcing economic vulnerability. However, the degree of family responsibility varied. Cases 3 (Maria), 4 (Lito), and 5 (Tonyo) bore the heaviest family burdens, managing multiple dependents or broken households that intensified their financial pressure. In contrast, Cases 1 (Juan) and 2 (Pedro) experienced poverty more individually, without the added weight of dependents, suggesting that structural deprivation, when combined with familial obligations, amplifies desperation and risk exposure. In addition, the research study investigated the multilevel interaction between childhood family socioeconomic position—measured through income and parental education—and neighborhood socioeconomic indices in relation to later risks of self-harm and violent criminality. Likewise, findings revealed that individuals from disadvantaged families who grew up in deprived neighborhoods had significantly higher incidence rates of violent offending compared with similarly disadvantaged peers residing in more affluent neighborhoods (Ejlskov, et al., 2023).

Table 5. Cross-Case Analysis on the Lived Experiences and Circumstances of the Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

<i>Emerging Themes</i>	<i>Core Ideas</i>	<i>Case 1</i>	<i>Case 2</i>	<i>Case 3</i>	<i>Case 4</i>	<i>Case 5</i>	<i>Interpretation</i>
Socioeconomic Family Constraints	Poverty and limited education	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	All cases revealed that chronic poverty and limited education restricted opportunities, heightening economic vulnerability and exposure to risky circumstances.
	Large or dependent family burden			✓	✓	✓	Cases 3, 4, and 5 showed that managing large families or dependents intensified financial strain



Pre-Offense Challenges and Pressures	Poverty and survival hardship	✓	✓	✓			and survival pressure. Cases 1–3 reflected persistent poverty shaping daily hardship and creating conditions for desperation. Case 1 described being easily influenced by surroundings and lacking moral direction. Case 5 illustrated how confrontation and community conflict triggered accusation and tension.
	Environmental temptation and confusion	✓					Cases 2 and 4 emphasized narratives of innocence, denying coercion or wrongdoing. Case 4 showed how family concern, especially from children, became a source of comfort during incarceration.
	Provocation or direct threat					✓	Case 4 indicated that some community members expressed sympathy despite lingering stigma.
	Absence of pressure / innocence claim		✓		✓		Cases 2, 3, and 5 revealed emotional isolation due to family distance, separation, and marital breakdown.
	Family care and emotional support					✓	
Relational and Social Dynamics After Conviction	Community concern				✓		
	Strained and distant family relationships		✓	✓		✓	

Pre-Offense Challenges and Pressures. Poverty-induced hardship was a recurring pre-offense condition in Cases 1–3, where daily survival shaped their decisions and emotional exhaustion. Case 1 (Juan) portrayed environmental temptation and moral confusion, reflecting the influence of external surroundings and weak moral guidance. Meanwhile, Case 5 (Tonyo) demonstrated how provocation, anger, and community rivalry led to reactive behavior and false implication. On the other hand, Cases 2 (Pedro) and 4 (Lito) emphasized innocence, claiming that misunderstanding, fear, or domestic conflict—not intent—led to their incarceration. This contrast suggests that while economic strain predisposes some individuals to desperate acts, others are entangled in crime through misjudgment, emotional misinterpretation, or wrongful accusation. Furthermore, the research study highlights how pre-offense challenges—family economic strain, weak supervision, peer influence, and educational access limitations—combine to push youth toward theft, vandalism, and other delinquent acts. The study situates these pressures within the broader family and economic environment, thereby supporting strain-based models of crime (Islam et al., 2024).

Relational and Social Dynamics. Family and social relationships emerged as crucial emotional anchors post-conviction, though their effects varied across cases. Case 4 (Lito) experienced strong family and community concern, which provided comfort and reinforced his self-worth despite imprisonment. In contrast, Cases 2 (Pedro), 3 (Maria), and 5 (Tonyo) reported strained or broken family ties due to distance, separation, or shame, deepening their isolation. These differences illustrate the dual nature of imprisonment: it can either strengthen bonds through empathy and forgiveness or fracture them through stigma and detachment. Likewise, in the study using social network analysis of over 2,000 chronically violent offenders, this empirical report mapped co-offending networks. It showed that high-risk individuals are often embedded in dense co-offending networks where relational ties (friends, intimate co-offenders) facilitate escalation to repeated and sometimes more violent offenses. The study links relational dynamics directly to patterns of chronic violent offending and argues that network-targeted strategies (disrupting key ties, focused deterrence) can reduce occurrences of severe violent crime (Shelfer, D., & Zhang, Y., 2024).

Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Table 6. Cross-Case Analysis on the Antecedents and Circumstances in the Pathway to Crime Involvement of the Participants

Emerging Themes	Core Ideas	Case 1	Case 2	Case 3	Case 4	Case 5	Interpretation
Ambivalent Misjudgment and False Association	Limited awareness misread as	✓					Case 1 shows how poor moral guidance and limited awareness were misjudged as criminal



	wrongdoing			intent.
	Fear and confusion mistaken for guilt	✓		Case 2 illustrates that fear and confusion during arrest were perceived as admission of guilt.
	Domestic misunderstanding seen as intent		✓	Case 4 reveals how household conflict and anger were interpreted as deliberate offense.
	Anger and rivalry taken as proof of crime			Case 5 indicates that anger and rivalry were misconstrued as evidence of criminal act.
	Family ties linked to false implication	✓		Case 1 reflects how kinship ties, especially with a sibling, resulted in false implication.
	Poverty and parental duty seen as motive		✓	Case 3 demonstrates that parental duty and financial struggle were reasons of criminal motive.
Economic and Familial Vulnerability	Desperation from lack of income		✓	Case 3 further shows that economic deprivation was viewed as the reason for the offense.

Ambivalent Misjudgment and False Association. Across the cases, misinterpretation of actions, emotions, or relationships emerged as a recurring factor in participants’ involvement in crime. Case 1 (Juan) demonstrated limited awareness and moral immaturity, which were misread as deliberate wrongdoing, while his kinship ties further drew him into a false association with his brother’s offense. Case 2 (Pedro) described fear and confusion during his arrest, which authorities perceived as signs of guilt rather than anxiety. Case 4 (Lito) reflected on how a domestic misunderstanding, which was sparked by a woman’s complaint, was misinterpreted as criminal intent. In contrast, Case 5 (Tonyo) was accused due to prior anger and rivalry that were mistaken as proof of murder. These accounts collectively show that weak communication, emotional impulsivity, and social stereotyping contributed to misjudgment and wrongful implication. Moreover, the work on trait and state ambivalence shows that people who experience mixed feelings about objects or people process information differently. State ambivalence can reduce simple biased judgments and shift attention to contradictory information, with implications for how ambiguous cues are misjudged or misassociated with attitudes or sources (Hohnsbehn et al., 2022).

Economic and Familial Vulnerability. Meanwhile, Case 3 (Maria) stood out for demonstrating how economic desperation and parental duty became the underlying motives behind her offense. Her maternal responsibility and lack of household income drove her to make morally conflicting decisions. In contrast, the other participants’ narratives revealed indirect links between economic stress and involvement in crime, showing how financial instability set the conditions for desperation or accusation. Collectively, the theme underscores how poverty and familial obligation function as structural stressors that shape moral decision-making. In addition, the review article “Studies on Household Financial Vulnerability Literature Review” analyzes how household financial vulnerability is defined, measured, and influenced by factors such as household composition, income instability, and family resources. They highlight that family-level structural factors (e.g., the number of dependents and the household head’s educational level) are key determinants of financial vulnerability. This is relevant because it frames familial vulnerability in terms of family resource management and how vulnerability is not just individual but anchored in the family unit (Shi, L., & Lim, T., 2024).

Coping Mechanisms of Participants involved in Heinous Crimes

Spiritual and Acceptance-Based Coping. Faith emerged as the dominant coping mechanism among Cases 1, 2, 3, and 5, where prayer, repentance, and moral reflection provided comfort and inner strength. Their spiritual surrender signified acceptance of responsibility and trust in divine forgiveness as a pathway to peace. Meanwhile, Cases 2, 4, and 5 highlighted active involvement in religious fellowships, such as Bible-sharing or Islamic counseling, which offered community, hope, and moral redirection. These spiritual practices reaffirmed the role of religion as a psychological anchor in prison life. Similarly, in their qualitative study “Coping Strategies and Self-Actualization among the Rehabilitated Drug-Users: A Case Study,” survey rehabilitated drug-users (which often overlaps with offender populations) and identify “recovered through spirituality” as a strong theme. They show that spirituality, self-control, and discipline were part of how these individuals accepted their condition, redirected their lives, and managed relapse risk. While not strictly “criminal offenders in prison,” the population overlaps significantly with justice-involved individuals (Torres, et al., 2023).

Social and Familial Support Mechanisms. All five participants emphasized family as a vital source of emotional survival. Whether through visits, prayers, or moral support, familial presence reinforced their motivation to endure incarceration and pursue reform. Cases 2 and 5 also benefited from peer companionship within the facility, such as sharing reflections, humor, and empathy, which eased loneliness and fostered a sense of belonging. Furthermore, Cases 1 to 4 acknowledged the influence of correctional officers and counselors in guiding moral discipline and promoting positive behavior. Similarly, “The Influence of Juvenile Psychopathy Traits on

Recidivism Rates: The Moderating Role of Family Support,” in the study of incarcerated youth, finds that while higher psychopathy traits are associated with increased recidivism, family support moderates that risk: youth with high psychopathic traits but stronger family support had reduced recidivism. This shows that familial support can act as a buffer even in high-risk juvenile offender populations (Yaqoob et al., 2024).

Personal Growth and Rehabilitation Efforts. Rehabilitation was marked by self-directed change through learning and reflection. Cases 1 to 3 actively participated in educational and literacy programs such as ALS, viewing education as a symbol of renewal and dignity. All five cases showed progress in emotional regulation and self-discipline, learning to manage anger, accept consequences, and rebuild moral awareness. Similarly, every participant expressed remorse and envisioned reintegration with their families, demonstrating reflective growth and renewed purpose. On the other hand, in the narrative case study “Life After Bars: A Narrative-Case Study of Ex-convicts” presents the lived experiences of ex-offenders in the Philippines navigating reintegration, stigma, employment barriers, but also personal growth: finding a positive outlook, aiming to reconcile with family, and striving for a new life despite hardship. This links personal growth to rehabilitation by showing how individuals exercise agency to change their stories post-incarceration (Bidola et al., 2024).

Conclusions

The findings of this study carry vital implications for correctional institutions, policymakers, and rehabilitation practitioners. First, the recurring theme of socioeconomic and familial vulnerability underscores the need for early intervention programs that target poverty, family instability, and educational deprivation, factors that commonly set the stage for criminal involvement. Social service agencies and local government units should strengthen livelihood initiatives, family counseling, and community-based educational programs that build resilience among at-risk individuals. Second, the pre-offense challenges and misjudgment experiences point to the importance of legal literacy and mental health awareness in marginalized communities. Providing access to community-based legal aid and conflict mediation mechanisms can help prevent misunderstandings from escalating into criminal charges. Within correctional settings, spiritual and acceptance-based coping highlights the transformative role of faith and moral education. Correctional administrators should sustain and institutionalize faith-based, psychological, and counseling programs that encourage self-reflection, accountability, and forgiveness. Likewise, the significance of social and familial support mechanisms suggests the need for family-centered rehabilitation models, facilitating consistent visitation programs, family therapy sessions, and reintegration planning that involve both inmates and their families. Finally, the participants’ engagement in personal growth and rehabilitation efforts implies that rehabilitation must go beyond discipline and punishment; it should integrate education, skills training, and emotional development as core components of correctional reform. By addressing both the structural and personal dimensions of offending, practitioners can foster genuine transformation, reduce recidivism, and promote the humane reintegration of individuals who have been involved in heinous crimes.

This study provides a strong foundation for future research aimed at deepening understanding of the social, psychological, and structural factors influencing individuals involved in heinous crimes. Future researchers may extend this work by examining larger and more diverse samples across regions, genders, and types of offenses to validate the recurring themes identified in this study. Employing longitudinal and mixed-method designs can also offer richer insights into post-release reintegration, emotional adjustment, and desistance from criminal behavior over time.

Moreover, future researchers are encouraged to evaluate the impact of rehabilitation, faith-based, and educational programs on offender transformation and reintegration. Researchers may also explore community-based and policy-oriented approaches that strengthen social support, mental health assistance, and restorative justice practices. Such efforts can contribute to evidence-based reforms that humanize correctional systems and support the researcher’s advocacy for a more rehabilitative and inclusive approach to addressing criminal behavior.

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