

ORIGINAL RESEARCH ARTICLES

“Exploring Client Experiences, Challenges, and Personal Development of Parolees and Probationers in a Philippine Therapeutic Community Program: A Qualitative Study”

ABSTRACT

Substance use and criminal behavior present persistent challenges in correctional and community supervision systems in the Philippines, often compounded by peer influence, economic hardship, and limited coping skills. Therapeutic Community (TC) programs are structured interventions designed to promote behavioral change, personal reflection, spiritual growth, and social reintegration among individuals under custody or parole and probation supervision. This small-scale, exploratory qualitative study examined the experiences, challenges, and personal development of five clients (three probationers and two parolees) enrolled in a TC program under the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA) Regional Office 10. Participants were purposively selected and interviewed using semi-structured questionnaires. Data were thematically analyzed following Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework to identify patterns in behavioral change, adjustment, spiritual engagement, and skill acquisition. Five main themes emerged: peer influence and prior risky lifestyles, adjustment to TC discipline, personal reflection and behavioral insight, engagement in spiritual activities, and vocational and skills development. Findings indicate that the TC program facilitated self-control, moral development, resilience, and readiness for social reintegration, despite challenges such as economic hardship. These results are exploratory and not generalizable beyond the sample. The study offers practical implications for designing evidence-based rehabilitation programs and guiding policy interventions to support holistic development and reduce recidivism.

Keywords: Therapeutic Community, rehabilitation, parole, probation, behavioral change, social reintegration

1. INTRODUCTION

Substance use and criminal behavior continue to pose significant challenges for correctional systems and community supervision frameworks worldwide. Individuals involved in substance-related offenses frequently encounter complex interplays of personal, social, and economic factors that contribute to criminal trajectories and recidivism (Visher et al., 2017). The consequences of these behaviors are multidimensional, affecting not only the individuals themselves but also families, communities, and the broader criminal justice system. In response, rehabilitation programs have been implemented to facilitate behavioral transformation, reduce recidivism, and promote social reintegration. Among these interventions, Therapeutic Communities (TCs) have emerged as structured, evidence-based approaches that integrate psychosocial, vocational, and spiritual components to foster holistic personal development and sustainable behavioral change (De Leon, 2000; Taxman & Belenko, 2011).

TC programs are distinguished by their highly structured environments that emphasize discipline, accountability, and adherence to clear routines, coupled with a strong reliance on peer feedback and communal responsibility. This framework is theorized to facilitate self-regulation, improve decision-making, and reduce engagement in criminal and high-risk behaviors. Empirical research supports the efficacy of TCs in correctional contexts, showing improvements in inmates' self-control, reduced misconduct, and enhanced readiness for reintegration into society (Rogers, Davies, & Shank, 2024; Monteron & Daniel, 2025).

In the Philippine context, TCMP participation has been shown to significantly reduce re-offending rates among PDLs, demonstrating its effectiveness in promoting behavioral change and successful reintegration into society (Marquez, 2025; Sarmiento, 2025). Studies further reveal that engagement in TCMP facilitates meaningful personal growth, moral reflection, and coping skill development among former inmates (Empinado et al., 2023; Teves, 2023).

Despite these positive outcomes, participants continue to face challenges such as social stigma, economic barriers, and institutional limitations, which may hinder long-term reintegration (Paclauna, 2024; Sunico, 2024). **Family involvement and social support networks have been identified as critical factors for sustaining behavioral change and enhancing successful reintegration post-release (Arcipe, 2022; Sarenas et al., 2024). Engagement in interfaith and structured spiritual programs within TCMP has also been reported to foster moral development, resilience, and ethical reasoning (Cerbania & Magbojos, 2022).**

Critically, while these studies affirm the benefits of TCMP, they highlight limitations such as geographic focus on select cities (Lucena City, Dipolog, and Laguna), reliance on self-reported experiences, and limited longitudinal analysis to assess sustained behavioral outcomes (Marquez, 2025; Sarmiento, 2025; Teves, 2023; Sarenas et al., 2024; Sunico, 2024). **These gaps suggest the need for more comprehensive, multi-site, and long-term studies to fully understand the impact of TCMP in diverse Philippine correctional settings.**

Despite documented benefits, gaps remain in understanding the lived experiences of clients within TCs under community-based corrections, such as parole and probation. While quantitative evaluations have shown reductions in recidivism and misconduct (Visher et al., 2017; Duwe & Clark, 2014), they often fail to capture nuanced psychosocial processes underpinning behavioral change, including peer influence, self-reflection, and spiritual growth. Peer networks, for instance, are widely recognized as significant determinants of substance use and criminal conduct prior to incarceration. The normalization of risky behaviors within peer groups can reinforce deviant identities, reduce perceptions of personal risk, and increase susceptibility to criminal activity (Stritzel, 2022; Torrejón-Guirado et al., 2023). Understanding how individuals negotiate these influences before and during engagement with structured interventions is therefore critical to designing tailored rehabilitation strategies.

Moreover, while participation in vocational and educational programs has been associated with improved employability and reduced likelihood of reoffending (Pompoco et al., 2017; Visher et al., 2017), structural challenges such as economic instability, inadequate support networks, and psychological adjustment to strict institutional routines can impede the successful translation of program learning into long-term behavioral change (Bing et al., 2022). Research indicates that failure to address these systemic and individual barriers may undermine rehabilitation outcomes, highlighting the need for comprehensive, person-centered approaches that extend beyond mere program participation (Duwe & Clark, 2014).

In addition, spiritual engagement has emerged as a key, yet underexplored, factor in promoting moral development and resilience within correctional settings. Studies suggest that

faith-based interventions and structured spiritual activities can reinforce self-discipline, ethical reasoning, and personal accountability, which in turn support sustained behavioral change (Duwe et al., 2015; Haviv et al., 2020). However, limited qualitative research examines how individuals perceive and internalize these spiritual experiences, particularly in TC programs managed under community supervision frameworks.

Taken together, these gaps highlight the need for a qualitative, phenomenological exploration of the client experiences of clients in Therapeutic Community (TC) programs, with particular attention to the factors that facilitate or hinder rehabilitation. **By examining the perspectives of probationers and parolees under the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA), this study seeks to provide insights into the effectiveness of TCMP in the Philippine context, particularly on behavioral change, self-control, and social reintegration, while addressing the limitations identified in prior local studies.** Understanding these experiences is essential for identifying both the challenges and enablers of successful rehabilitation, informing evidence-based program design, and guiding policy interventions that promote holistic development while reducing the risk of recidivism.

In essence, this research addresses a pivotal gap in correctional literature by connecting theoretical frameworks of social learning, moral development, and behavioral adjustment with the lived realities of TC clients, thereby contributing to the development of more responsive, client-centered rehabilitation programs in the Philippine context.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a small-scale qualitative exploratory design using thematic analysis to examine the perspectives, challenges, and personal development of clients enrolled in the Therapeutic Community (TC) program under the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA) Regional Office 10. The qualitative approach was appropriate because it facilitated in-depth exploration of participants' subjective insights, capturing nuanced psychosocial, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions of rehabilitation (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Data collection emphasized open-ended, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences and provide suggestions freely. Consistent with exploratory research principles, the study prioritizes interpretive depth and thematic richness over statistical generalizability, providing insight into the processes and mechanisms underlying client transformation within the TC framework.

2.2 Research Instrument

Data were collected using a semi-structured interview protocol, carefully designed to align with the study's objectives and elicit comprehensive accounts of participants' experiences. The instrument was organized into three key domains: (1) pre-program exposure, including personal, social, and behavioral risk factors; (2) program engagement, encompassing participation in educational, vocational, and religious interventions, as well as adaptation to structured routines and peer dynamics; and (3) perceived outcomes, highlighting behavioral change, resilience, coping strategies, and reintegration challenges. Open-ended questions facilitated rich narrative responses, while probing questions ensured clarity and depth. The instrument underwent expert review for content validity, ensuring alignment with the study's research objectives and methodological rigor. Interviews were conducted by the principal investigator, audio-recorded with participants' consent, and supplemented with field notes to preserve contextual and non-verbal cues.

2.3 Research Setting

The study was conducted at Jofelmor Building, 3rd Floor, Room Nos. 6 & 7, J.R. Borja-Mortola Street, Cagayan de Oro City. This commercial building, located near Ororama Shopping Center and the Pag-IBIG Fund Cogon Branch, provided a secure and private environment conducive to in-depth, confidential interviews. The location was selected to minimize external disruptions and create a safe space for participants to share sensitive experiences, consistent with ethical standards for qualitative inquiry.

2.4 Participants

Five clients of the TC program under PPA Regional Office 10 (three probationers, two parolees) participated. Purposive sampling selected participants with relevant experience, and snowball sampling allowed referrals of additional eligible participants. Inclusion criteria required active enrollment in the TC program and willingness to participate; program duration was not restricted. Recruitment continued until thematic saturation was achieved, defined as the point at which no new patterns or insights emerged from the data, ensuring comprehensive representation of the participants' lived experiences. This sample size reflects qualitative research principles, prioritizing depth, context, and interpretive richness over generalizability.

2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Dean of the College and the PPA Regional Director. Data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews conducted in a private setting at Jofelmor Building, 3rd Floor, Room Nos. 6 & 7, Cagayan de Oro City, ensuring confidentiality and minimal distractions. Interviews were conducted in Cebuano and Filipino, the participants' preferred languages, and audio-recorded with consent. Each interview lasted 45–60 minutes, allowing participants to elaborate freely on their experiences, perceptions, and suggestions for program improvement.

Interviews were transcribed verbatim, and any non-English responses were translated into English by the researcher and cross-checked by a bilingual expert to ensure accuracy. This procedure ensured the authenticity and reliability of the data. All participants provided written informed consent, and ethical protocols approved by the College Dean and PPA Regional Director were strictly followed.

2.6 Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis following the six-phase framework of Braun and Clarke (2006). An inductive approach was employed, allowing codes and themes to emerge directly from participants' narratives rather than imposing preconceived categories. The analytic process began with familiarization, where all audio-recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim and cross-checked against field notes to ensure accuracy. Researchers repeatedly read the transcripts to identify patterns and preliminary insights.

Initial coding was conducted manually by the primary researcher, generating open codes that captured meaningful units of data. A coding framework was developed iteratively: codes were refined, merged, or split as analysis progressed. To enhance analytic rigor and reliability, a second researcher independently coded a subset of transcripts. Discrepancies in coding were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached, ensuring that interpretations reflected the participants' intended meaning.

Once coding was finalized, related codes were grouped to form themes that captured the multidimensional experiences, challenges, and personal development of TC program clients. Themes were reviewed and refined to ensure internal coherence, distinctiveness, and alignment with the research objectives. Field notes and participant quotations were used to validate themes, maintaining authenticity and transparency. The final thematic structure provides an interpretive lens on the psychosocial, behavioral, and spiritual dimensions of rehabilitation, consistent with COREQ reporting standards (Tong, Sainsbury, & Craig, 2007).

2.7 Trustworthiness

Qualitative rigour was ensured by operationalizing credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability:

- **Credibility:** Achieved through member checking and prolonged engagement with participants to ensure findings reflected their lived experiences accurately.
- **Dependability:** Maintained via a detailed audit trail documenting research decisions, coding iterations, and theme refinements.
- **Transferability:** Supported through thick contextual descriptions of participants, TC program components, and the physical setting, allowing readers to assess applicability to similar contexts.
- **Confirmability:** Ensured through reflexive journaling and independent coding checks to mitigate researcher bias.

The research team consisted of faculty members with experience in criminal justice and rehabilitation programs. The primary researcher had prior engagement with the PPA, providing contextual familiarity. Reflexive strategies included journaling, transparent disclosure of the researcher's professional background, independent coding, peer debriefing, and field note documentation, enhancing transparency and reducing potential bias

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Client Transformation through the TC Program

The Therapeutic Community (TC) program facilitates client transformation through a combination of structured routines, social influence, personal reflection, spiritual growth, and skill development.

3.1.1 Peer Influence and Risky Lifestyle Before TC

The theme Peer Influence and Risky Lifestyle Before TC highlights how individuals involved in substance use often develop such behaviors within social environments where drug use, alcohol consumption, and unstructured social activities are normalized. Peer groups frequently shape behavioral patterns, particularly when individuals spend significant time with friends who engage in similar activities. Within these social contexts, behaviors such as drinking, drug experimentation, and other risky actions can become normalized and even encouraged, influencing individuals to adopt similar practices as part of group acceptance and belonging.

Participants described how their frequent association with peers who drank, roamed public spaces, and used drugs influenced their own lifestyle decisions. These accounts illustrate the mechanisms through which peer exposure and prolonged interaction with deviant networks can increase the likelihood of adopting similar behaviors. The participants' experiences suggest that the need for acceptance and identity validation within peer groups contributed to behavioral conformity, consistent with principles of social learning theory (Bandura & Walters, 1977).

“Nubuhat rapud nako to tungod sa barkada palahubog man gyud kaayo ko sauna mao tong naapil sad ko ug sikop atong panahuna”. I did those things because of my friends. I used to drink heavily before, and that was the time I got arrested during that incident (P1).

“Sauna sige ra ug inom, dili makapuyo suyop dire, suyop didto, ngitag tarok. Halos tanan naman siguro sige laag sa divisoria unya wala nakoy time sa kaugalingon nahulog na tanan sa barkada”. Before, I was always drinking. I couldn't stay still—smoking here and there and always looking for a drink. Almost all the time we were roaming around Divisoria, and I no longer had time for myself because everything revolved around my friends (P3).

“Kani laging tambay ta sir ba, apilan pas kapait sa kinabuhi mao nang nisulod ko ug drugs sauna. Pero kato ra hinoon possession ang kaso sa akua.” You know, when you just hang around, sir, and life also feels difficult—that's when I got involved in drugs before. But my case was only for possession (P4).

These narratives align with empirical evidence indicating that peer influence is a robust predictor of substance use and deviant behaviors. Adolescents and young adults embedded in networks where substance use is prevalent are more likely to initiate and maintain such behaviors due to social reinforcement and perceived group norms (Stritzel, 2022). Moreover, studies on peer social networks demonstrate that substance use patterns are transmitted through relational mechanisms, whereby individuals emulate behaviors that are common and socially rewarded within their peer group (Torrejón-Guirado et al., 2023). Peer dynamics also significantly affect alcohol and tobacco consumption patterns, underscoring the influence of social environments in shaping risk-taking behaviors (DeLay et al., 2023).

Interpretively, these findings highlight that pre-TC behavioral patterns were not merely the result of individual choice but reflected socially mediated processes of behavioral learning, conformity, and identity formation. Understanding these mechanisms provides insight into how the Therapeutic Community (TC) program can leverage positive peer modeling and structured social interactions to disrupt maladaptive networks and foster prosocial behavioral change.

3.1.2 Adjustment to the Discipline and Structure of the TC Program

A central theme that emerged from participants' narratives was the challenge of adjusting to the structured discipline inherent in the Therapeutic Community (TC) program. TC programs operate on the principle that behavioral change is facilitated through a highly organized environment emphasizing accountability, clearly defined routines, and peer-monitored activities (De Leon, 2000). Clients entering the program must navigate a regimen of rules, corrective measures, and communal responsibilities, which requires both cognitive and behavioral adaptation.

“Sa sulod grabi ka strikto kayo kinahanglan gyud ka magsunod sa ilang ginapadumala kung dili ka gusto ma disiplina dadto.” Inside the program, it is very strict. You really have to follow the rules they implement if you do not want to be disciplined or sanctioned there (P1).

“Sa therapeutic gaapil man ko pero wala gyud nako giseryoso ug maayo ang kuan kay daghan kaayo ug balaod ang therapeutic. Bawal mag sigarilyo, bawal basta dagahan bawal, wala gyud kaayo nako gi kuan gi serious, pero ga attend ko.” In the therapeutic program, I participated, but I did not really take it seriously because there

were so many rules. Smoking is not allowed, and many other things are prohibited. I did not take it very seriously before, although I still attended the sessions (P2).

“Kung sa TC noon daghan gyud kay ma kurat gyud kas ilang mga pamaagi sa pagdisiplina sa mga isig ka kauban”. In the therapeutic program, I participated, but I did not really take it seriously because there were so many rules. Smoking is not allowed, and many other things are prohibited. I did not take it very seriously before, although I still attended the sessions. (P4).

These narratives illustrate that initial resistance and adjustment stress are common, reflecting the psychological demands of transitioning into a highly structured rehabilitation environment. Consistent with prior research on correctional adaptation, participants' experiences reveal that structured routines can initially challenge autonomy and provoke frustration but ultimately provide a framework for behavior regulation and skill development (Rogers et al., 2024; Monteron & Daniel, 2025).

From a theoretical perspective, the adjustment process aligns with social learning theory, which posits that behavior is shaped through observation, reinforcement, and structured social interactions (Bandura & Walters, 1977). In the TC context, adherence to rules and participation in scheduled activities exposes clients to normative behaviors reinforced by peers and staff, fostering internalization of pro-social conduct. Moreover, the findings resonate with strengths-based rehabilitation frameworks, highlighting that structured discipline, while initially restrictive, can enhance self-regulation, resilience, and engagement in positive social roles (Ward & Maruna, 2007).

The study also demonstrates the dynamic interaction between program structure and individual coping mechanisms. Participants' adaptation was mediated by internal factors such as motivation and resilience, and external factors including peer support and clarity of program expectations. Over time, the structured environment facilitated not only compliance but also the development of personal responsibility and self-discipline, key elements in desistance from prior risky behaviors (Pape & Johnsen, 2026).

Collectively, these insights indicate that while the TC program's discipline may initially challenge clients, it provides a critical scaffolding for behavioral adjustment, supporting the transition from risky lifestyles toward structured, prosocial engagement.

3. 1.3 Personal Realizations and Behavioral Reflection

Participation in rehabilitation programs often encourages individuals to reflect on their past behaviors and recognize the consequences of their actions. Personal reflection and self-realization are important elements in the rehabilitation process because they allow individuals to acknowledge mistakes, understand the impact of their behavior on themselves and their families, and develop motivation to change.

“Kanang kuan sir wala gyud lain biktima kundili ako kaugalingon, unya nalooy ko kay naapil ako pamilya ug narealize nako nga grabi diay ang epekto sa akong duatan nga nabuhat, unya karon narealize nako na tanan”. That mistake really affected only me, and I felt sorry because my family was also involved. I realized how serious the consequences of my wrong actions were, and now I understand everything (P4).

“Oh na konsisensya ko sa akoa nabuhat sauna, kay kung wala ko nag buhat ug daotan sauna padayon unta akong kinabuhi nga hapsay”. Oh, I feel guilty about what

I did before, because if I hadn't done those bad things, my life would have continued smoothly (P3).

"Ang ako nalang is pagbasol nalang nga sa akong nabuhat, wala raman to tungod sa hinubg nga lihok sa inom munang nabuhat nako to na sala". All I can do now is regret what I did. It wasn't really because of bad influence from alcohol, but I recognize that it was wrong (P5).

"Nagmahay lang gyud ko ato nga nag apil-apil ko, kung wala ko nasubraan sa barkada dimanko ma apil pero di naman mausab". I really regret joining those activities. If I hadn't been too influenced by my friends, I wouldn't have joined, but it cannot be changed now (P1).

The narratives of participants reflect a deliberate and meaningful process of introspection, highlighting how incarceration and structured rehabilitation can catalyze personal insight and moral accountability. Participants articulated regret and a deeper understanding of how their actions negatively affected themselves and their families, illustrating a cognitive and emotional shift toward acknowledging personal responsibility (P1, P3, P4, P5).

This aligns with prior research showing that the prison environment can prompt individuals to engage in reflective processes that support personal growth and behavioral transformation. For instance, qualitative studies on persons deprived of liberty indicate that incarceration can lead to self-reflection, identity reassessment, and recognition of past behavior as catalysts for change (Flores-Barolo, 2019). Furthermore, research examining prisoners' narratives of change suggests that incarceration often fosters identity transformation, enhanced self-awareness, and reflective learning, which are crucial mechanisms for desistance from crime (Maier & Ricciardelli, 2022).

Taken together, these insights suggest that the participants' reflective experiences are not merely descriptive accounts of past behavior but represent interpretative engagement with their life trajectories, demonstrating how rehabilitation programs can facilitate internalization of responsibility and motivation for meaningful behavioral change.

3.2 Sustaining Rehabilitation Amid Economic and Behavioral Challenges

This theme focuses on how clients manage the dual pressures of financial difficulties and the effort to maintain positive behavioral change. It highlights the struggle to balance meeting daily needs while consistently applying lessons from the TC program to support personal growth and successful reintegration.

3.2.1 Economic and Livelihood Challenges

Economic instability and limited livelihood opportunities are common challenges faced by individuals undergoing rehabilitation for substance use. Financial hardship can affect access to basic needs such as food, employment, and stable living conditions, which may influence an individual's capacity to sustain recovery and reintegrate into society. Limited income sources and unstable employment often create additional pressures for individuals attempting to rebuild their lives after involvement in substance use and criminal behavior.

"Sakto lang pobre man mi sauna hangtod karon igo-igo ragyud pud makakaon sa ikatulo sa isa ka adlaw. Pero nanarbaho hinoon ko sauna puro sideline kanang mag labor ba sa construction." We were really poor back then, and even now, we barely

have enough to eat three times a day. But I did work back then, doing side jobs like laboring in construction (P1).

“Naay ginansya akong gigamit sa pagkaon, gitigum unya nahurot ra gihapon kay pambayad sa utang.” I used whatever earnings I had for food, saved some, but it still ran out because I had to pay off debts (P5).

“Lisud gihapon sir, kanang igo lang sa pang adlaw-adlaw ang abot, kay nanarbaho raman gihapon ko sauna sir unya pila rato akoa sweldo gamay ra.” It's still difficult, sir. What I earn is just enough for daily needs because I was still working back then, but my salary was very small (P4)

Participants in this study described economic hardship and limited livelihood opportunities as major challenges both before and during rehabilitation (P1, P4, P5). Many reported that their earnings were insufficient for basic daily needs, forcing them to prioritize food and debt repayment over other necessities. Such financial constraints can undermine efforts to sustain recovery and reintegrate into society, highlighting the role of economic stability in successful rehabilitation.

Interpretation and theoretical framing: These findings can be understood through strengths-based rehabilitation models and social learning theory, which emphasize the importance of supportive structures and positive reinforcement for behavior change (Ward & Maruna, 2007). Limited economic resources may restrict opportunities for skill development and pro-social engagement, thereby hindering desistance from substance-related and criminal behaviors (Maruna, 2001; Farrall & Calverley, 2006). Economic pressures can exacerbate stress and reduce individuals' capacity to internalize rehabilitative programming, making livelihood support a key mechanism for promoting sustained behavioral change.

Research confirms that justice-involved individuals often face structural economic disadvantages that hinder access to stable employment and resources essential for reintegration (Bing et al., 2022). Economic inequality magnifies the barriers these individuals encounter, making financial survival a critical factor in their post-release adjustment. Studies on prisoner reentry also emphasize the importance of addressing livelihood challenges to reduce recidivism. Visher et al. (2017) found that programs providing employment support and vocational training significantly improved reentry outcomes by helping individuals achieve financial stability and reintegrate into society. Without such support, former inmates remain vulnerable to economic pressures that can increase the likelihood of reoffending.

These findings converge with existing literature on rehabilitation and desistance, illustrating that addressing economic instability is not just a practical concern but a theoretically grounded strategy to support long-term recovery. Integrating livelihood programs within rehabilitation interventions may strengthen participants' resilience, enhance pro-social identity formation, and improve reintegration outcomes, consistent with desistance-oriented and strengths-based approaches (Maruna, 2001; Ward & Maruna, 2007).

3.2.2 Maintaining Behavioral Change

Sustaining behavioral change is another important challenge experienced by individuals undergoing rehabilitation in therapeutic community programs. Maintaining positive behavioral patterns requires continuous effort, personal commitment, and the ability to apply lessons learned during the rehabilitation process in everyday life situations.

“Kinahanglan imo gyud buhaton kana ilang gina lecture sa TC kay useless kung mu-attend ka unya wala ra gihapon.” You really have to do what they lecture about in the TC, because it’s useless if you attend but don’t apply it (P2)

“Ako nag lisod jd ko sa akung pag bag-o pero na kaya raman naku kay gi kat onan jd nku ang gi tudlo sa sulod.” I really struggled with changing myself, but I managed because I truly applied what I was taught inside (P5)

“Magdepende gihapon kay naay uban gitun-an lang pero inig gawas wala gyud.” It also depends because some people only learn while inside, but once they get out, it doesn’t really stick (P3)

Participants emphasized that behavioral change is not automatic; it requires intentional practice, reflection, and consistent application of program principles both inside and outside the therapeutic setting. Maintaining behavioral change after participation in rehabilitation programs remains a significant challenge for incarcerated individuals and those under community supervision, such as parole and probation.

The participants’ experiences can be explained using the Transtheoretical Model of Change (Prochaska & DiClemente, 1983), which views behavioral change as a process through stages: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance. Most participants in TC programs are in the action stage, actively applying new skills and behaviors, and the goal is to reach the maintenance stage, where these behaviors become sustained over time. Statements such as “I truly applied what I was taught inside” (P5) reflect successful progression through the action stage, whereas “Some people only learn while inside, but once they get out, it doesn’t really stick” (P3) indicates challenges in maintaining the behavior after leaving the structured environment.

Research on correctional rehabilitation emphasizes that sustained behavioral change depends not only on skills acquired but also on continuous practice, personal commitment, and environmental support (Visher & Mallik-Kane, 2007; Duwe & Clark, 2014). Without ongoing reinforcement, participants may relapse to previous behaviors, highlighting the importance of post-release support programs, mentorship, and pro-social networks to facilitate the maintenance stage.

Integrating TTM with rehabilitation practice suggests that programs should not treat change as a one-time event. Instead, interventions should provide strategies to support participants in progressing through the maintenance stage, including goal setting, coping mechanisms, and reinforcement of learned behaviors. These strategies align with findings that sustained application of program principles—such as self-discipline, responsibility, and pro-social decision-making—enhances long-term recovery and reduces recidivism (Taxman & Belenko, 2011).

3.3 Holistic Personal Development

This theme captures the comprehensive growth of clients in the TC program, including improvements in self-control, spiritual awareness, and practical skills. It reflects how structured routines, reflective practices, and skill-building activities collectively foster behavioral transformation, moral development, and readiness for social reintegration.

3.3.1 Behavioral Change and Self-Control

Sustaining behavioral change is another important challenge experienced by individuals undergoing rehabilitation in therapeutic community programs. Maintaining positive behavioral patterns requires continuous effort, personal commitment, and the ability to apply lessons learned during the rehabilitation process in everyday life situations.

"Pagsulod nakos TC ako nagyud siya nakontrol". When I entered the TC, I was really able to control myself (P5).

"Karon nabag-o ko kay wala naman gyud ko ana, hapsay na akong panghuna-huna". Now I've changed because I no longer do those things, and my thinking is more orderly (P3).

"Naa juy kalainan karon hinoon kay medyo nabootan jud biya ko, kabalo nako maminaw kung unsay iistorya sa akoo". There is really a difference now because I've become more disciplined; I know how to listen to what is being told to me (P1).

Participants' experiences can be explained through Self-Control Theory (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990), which posits that individuals with higher self-control are better able to regulate impulses, delay gratification, and sustain pro-social behaviors. Therapeutic community programs and correctional interventions aim to enhance self-control by teaching skills, coping strategies, and behavioral regulation techniques. Statements like "I was really able to control myself" (P5) illustrate the development of self-regulatory capacities that reduce impulsive and harmful behaviors.

Research confirms that structured rehabilitation programs contribute to improved self-control and pro-social behavior among participants (Taxman & Belenko, 2011). Cognitive-behavioral interventions within these programs encourage individuals to recognize harmful behaviors, develop strategies to regulate actions, and build self-discipline (Duwe & Clark, 2014). By strengthening self-control, participants are better equipped to maintain behavioral change and navigate challenges during reintegration into society, reducing the likelihood of recidivism.

3.3.2 Spiritual growth

Spiritual development is another component often integrated into therapeutic community programs. Spiritual activities such as prayer, reflection, and faith-based discussions are used to encourage individuals to develop inner strength, moral guidance, and hope during the recovery process.

"Before na siya mag start ang TC naa gyud na siyang pag-ampo una gyud na siya. Then gina tudluan gyud mo nga sa panahon nga naam o sa kalisod, Ginoo gyud ang inyung doolan dili mo mag kuan nga kamo-kamo lang". Before he started the TC, he always prayed first. Then they really teach you that in times of joy or hardship, God should be your guide; you shouldn't rely only on yourselves (P2).

"Kuan sir kanang, tungod sa mga bible study, bible sharing, nadool ko sa Ginoo unya miskan ginagmay lang na pamaagi sa pagkaon kinahanglan gyud sir dumdumon ang Ginoo". Because of the Bible study and Bible sharing, I became closer to God, and even in small ways, like during meals, we are reminded to think of God (P4).

"Kada sugod sa session kinahanglan gyud mag-ampo, inig human ug miskan katong naa pako sa sulod mao man gihapon amoa ginabuhat. Dili gyud mi makalimot sap ag-ampo ba". At the start of every session, we must pray, and even at the end, and even when I was still inside, we always did it. We never forget to pray (P1).

Participants reported that spiritual activities helped them develop inner strength, moral guidance, and discipline, reinforcing their commitment to positive behavioral change. These experiences can be explained using Frankl's Existential Theory (Frankl, 1984), which emphasizes that individuals are motivated by the search for meaning and purpose in life. Spiritual engagement helps participants reflect on their actions, understand the consequences, and find purpose beyond themselves, supporting resilience and sustaining behavioral change during rehabilitation.

Research supports the role of spiritual engagement in correctional settings. Haviv et al. (2020) found that spiritual practices serve as coping mechanisms, enhancing personal reflection and promoting moral development. Similarly, studies on faith-based educational programs show that structured participation in Bible studies or prison-based religious programs significantly reduces misconduct and encourages pro-social behaviors (Duwe et al., 2015). These programs provide moral instruction, spiritual mentoring, and ethical guidance, which help participants strengthen self-control, ethical reasoning, and personal accountability.

The participants' experiences align with this literature, suggesting that integrating spiritual growth into rehabilitation programs can enhance moral values, strengthen self-discipline, and support sustainable behavioral change. Spiritual engagement offers both intrinsic motivation and a framework for reflection, allowing individuals to navigate challenges during rehabilitation with a sense of purpose and ethical direction, consistent with existential theory.

3.3.3 Skills Development and Social Reintegration

Skill development and preparation for social reintegration are essential components of rehabilitation programs. Therapeutic communities often provide vocational training, educational activities, and livelihood programs that aim to equip individuals with practical skills for employment and independent living after completing treatment.

"Didtos sulod daghan gyud pamaagi maka kwarta dadto kay tudluan mangyud mi ug buhi sa amoa kaugalingon parehas anang gabuha mi ug parol before pa ber months". Inside, there were many ways to earn money because they really taught us how to support ourselves, like when we made lanterns before December (P1)

"Sapagka karon sir puro ragyud mi seminar parehas anang sa TESDA basta kay mga basic lang, ako karon naa man koy training kanang tahi-tahi ba, ginagmay ragyud makawarta biya pud ko sir". Nowadays, sir, we mostly attend seminars like those offered by TESDA for basic skills. I now have training in sewing, and even small amounts I earn are helpful (P4).

"Daghan kaayog mga kuan ang Vocational dadto sa sulod pero mao lagi dili sila makapugos sa tawo pud didto kung interested katong interesado pero gina offer na nila kung kinsay willing nga magkua ug vocational course". There are many vocational programs inside, but they cannot force anyone to join. Those who are interested can take them, but they offer them only to those willing to enroll in a vocational course (P2).

Participants highlighted that practical skill-building enhances both confidence and economic self-sufficiency, supporting their ability to reintegrate successfully into society. These experiences can be interpreted through Human Capital Theory (Becker, 1964), which posits that investments in skills, knowledge, and training increase an individual's productivity and social value. By acquiring vocational skills, participants enhance their employability, improve

self-efficacy, and increase opportunities for stable livelihoods, which are essential for successful social reintegration and long-term behavioral change.

Research confirms that correctional education and vocational programs reduce inmate misconduct and improve post-release adjustment. Pompoco et al. (2017) found that facility-based education programs not only improved behavior within prison but also reduced the likelihood of returning to custody, highlighting the dual benefits of skill development for personal growth and institutional order. Likewise, Visher et al. (2017) reported that inmates who participated in educational and vocational programs during incarceration were more likely to secure employment and maintain stability after release. Targeted reentry services, including skills training, significantly reduced recidivism, especially when paired with community support.

The participants' experiences align with these findings, showing that voluntary engagement in vocational activities equips individuals with tools and confidence necessary for adaptation, while simultaneously reinforcing pro-social behaviors and long-term rehabilitation. Skill acquisition, coupled with practical application, strengthens human capital and promotes sustainable reintegration into society.

Conclusion

The findings of this study underscore the complex interplay between personal, social, and structural factors in the rehabilitation of clients within a Therapeutic Community (TC) program. Peer influence and pre-incarceration risky lifestyles were identified as significant contributors to substance use and criminal behavior before program entry, highlighting the role of social networks in shaping behavioral patterns. Adjustment to the structured environment of the TC program was initially challenging for participants, but the combination of discipline, accountability, and peer monitoring facilitated gradual behavioral change and self-regulation.

Participants' narratives further reveal that personal reflection and spiritual engagement were pivotal in fostering self-awareness, moral guidance, and emotional resilience. Skills development and vocational training provided practical tools for economic empowerment, promoting readiness for social reintegration and reducing vulnerability to recidivism. Despite these gains, challenges such as economic hardship and sustaining behavioral change after program completion remain critical considerations for the long-term success of rehabilitation efforts.

Overall, the study demonstrates that TC programs offer a multifaceted approach to rehabilitation, integrating behavioral, cognitive, spiritual, and vocational components to support holistic personal development. These findings reinforce the need for comprehensive, evidence-based strategies that address both individual and environmental factors to enhance the effectiveness of correctional rehabilitation and facilitate successful reintegration into society.

DISCLAIMER

Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools were utilized in this study to assist in language editing, grammar checking, and improving the clarity of the manuscript. The use of AI was limited to supporting the writing process and did not influence the research design, data collection, data analysis,

or interpretation of findings. All ideas, analyses, and conclusions presented in this study remain the sole responsibility of the researcher.

CONSENT

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before they participated in this study. Each participant was provided with an informed consent form explaining the purpose of the research, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants, including the right to refuse or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and anonymous, and that the information collected would be used solely for academic and research purposes. All participants voluntarily agreed and signed the informed consent form before the interviews were conducted.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

This study adhered to established ethical principles in conducting research involving human participants. Before data collection, permission was obtained from the appropriate authorities of the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA). Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and their rights as participants. Informed consent was obtained in writing from all participants, ensuring that their participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any negative consequences.

Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained throughout the research process. Participants' identities were protected by using codes or pseudonyms, and all information gathered was used solely for academic and research purposes. Data storage and handling followed strict security protocols to prevent unauthorized access, ensuring the integrity of the collected data.

The researchers also ensured that participants were treated with respect, dignity, and fairness, and that no harm, coercion, or undue pressure was imposed during the conduct of the study. Additionally, the study adhered to relevant national and institutional ethical guidelines, and the research design was reviewed to ensure minimal risk to participants.

COMPETING INTERESTS DISCLAIMER:

Authors have declared that they have no known competing financial interests OR non-financial interests, or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Disclaimer (Artificial intelligence)

The author (s) hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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