Life After Rehab: Experiences of Discharged Youth Offenders with Crime Desistance

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This study explored the experiences of former youth offenders regarding crime desistance. Guided by the life story method in research, the researcher interviewed ten male youth offenders who had been discharged from the Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth (RRCY) in Eastern Visayas. The narratives of the research participants revealed that desistance from crime is a long and difficult process influenced by various factors such as family support, condition of one's community, intervention of significant persons, having a job, getting married, and having children. Implications for crime desistance studies are discussed and the challenges and opportunities for researchers and professionals who deal with youth offenders are likewise examined.

Keywords: youth offenders, juvenile delinquency, crime desistance, children-in-conflict-with-the-law, life story method

INTRODUCTION

How does one live a life after committing a criminal offense? Stories about former offenders often revolve around themes of hope, recovery, and renewal. These stories, especially those by youth offenders, easily become the center of our attention because of their redemptive quality. However, not all youth offenders share the same theme in their post-rehabilitation stories. This paper thus seeks to deepen our understanding of youth offenders' lives after undergoing rehabilitation by presenting and analyzing their life stories.

The extant literature on juvenile delinquency reveals the many issues and concerns surrounding the life of the youth offender. Most of these studies focus on the types of youth offenders (Maki, 1998; Simourd, Hoge, Andrews, & Leschied, 1994), substance-use initiation (Prinz & Kerns, 2003), attributions toward violence (Daley & Onwuegbuzie, 2004), moral reasoning (Chen & Howitt, 2007), and factors affecting recidivism (Carr & Vandiver, 2001; Hanson, 2000; Taylor, Kemper, Loney, & Kistner, 2009; Tinklenberg, Steiner, Huckaby, & Tinklenberg, 1996) among others.

Juvenile delinquency has also become a contentious issue in our society. There is the perennial question of whether youth offenders should be held less accountable for their crimes due to their age (Steinberg & Scott, 2003) and whether the age of culpability for youth offenders should be lowered (Villanueva, 2014) presumably to address the growing number of youth offending cases.

Local Studies on Youth Offenders

In the Philippines, studies on juvenile delinquency are usually conducted among youth offenders who are still inside rehabilitation centers. Examples of such studies explore the youth offender's self-concept (Miguel, 1984), life goals (Vispo, 2006), and level of optimism (Concepcion, 2007); while others evaluate the services in rehabilitation centers (Cabilao, 1998; Pinlac, 1999). Some narrative studies attempt to describe the unique life circumstances, thought processes, feelings, emotions, and perceptions of children-in-conflict-with-the-law (CICL) (Araneta-De Leon, 2002). On the other hand, other researchers use an intersectionality lens to investigate the link between a CICL's sexual orientation and his experiences in a rehabilitation facility (Villafuerte, 2013).

A large-scale study on youth offenders was conducted in 2001, when Save the Children-UK Philippines Programme embarked on research studies that looked into the profile of CICLs and their situation and experiences in the justice administration process. The study was done in three main urban centers in the country—Metro Manila, Cebu, and Davao—representing the country's three main island groupings of Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao (Bañaga, 2004). This consolidated research deserves mention as it is probably the most comprehensive local study conducted on the subject of juvenile delinquency to date.

While it is clear that a number of researchers have already investigated several aspects of juvenile delinquency in the country, a survey of the local literature exposes the dearth of studies conducted among youth offenders who have been released from detention. This paper therefore seeks to fill this gap in the local literature by focusing on the life experiences of discharged youth offenders.

Life after Rehabilitation

The ultimate goal of rehabilitation centers is to reform youth offenders, thereby preventing recidivism or relapse into criminal behavior. But what really happens when youth offenders eventually get discharged from these facilities? Abrams (2006) noted three notable findings after exploring how youth offenders understand their time in residential care and how the center's programs influence offenders' motivations to desist from crime. First, youth offenders in treatment often feel confused as they grapple with therapeutic or "adult" understandings of their delinquent conduct. Second, secure confinement may not have a significant deterrence effect, particularly for offenders who are accustomed to chaotic lives or institutional living. Finally, youth offenders remain uncertain about their ability to change until they are able to apply their new skills and training to real-world situations. The most significant barrier to lasting behavior change appeared to be the disconnect between lessons learned "inside" the institution and the realities of life "on the outs."

Discharged youth offenders have to cope with a number of changes once they go back to the outside world. For example, Champion and Clare (2006) found that as youth offenders returned to the community, many felt a sense of disconnection from their previous environments and lifestyles, and a consequent felt need to reconnect in some way. These youth offenders also attempted to implement necessary life changes subsequent to release by taking on new roles and lifestyles as well as avoiding old roles and lifestyles.

Sullivan (2004) has observed that there are a number of ways in which problems of reentry have special characteristics for youth returning from secure confinement. Compared to older ex-offenders, youth offenders are especially likely to return to their parents, to be expected to enroll in school, to find criminally active peers more involved in expressive and status-oriented crime, to have little employment experience, and to have less serious

histories of criminal involvement. At the same time, the experience of incarceration itself is likely to hasten the end of adolescence by precipitating school-leaving, separation from parents and prosocial peers, the need for an independent income, and social involvement with older people more deeply involved in criminal lifestyles. The process of reentry for youth offenders is thus intertwined with a whole series of developmental transitions that are more rigidly sequenced than developmental transitions during the adult life course.

The Challenge of Crime Desistance

In an ideal setting, youth offenders who have gone through the process of rehabilitation are expected to desist from crime once they return to their communities. However, results of numerous studies show that the process of desistance is fraught with challenges that the recovering youth has to face every step of the way. What, then, are the factors that influence desistance from crime?

Laub, Nagin, and Sampson (1998) found that childhood and juvenile characteristics are insufficient for predicting the patterns of future offending in a high-rate group of juvenile offenders. This seems to suggest that many of the classic predictors of the onset and frequency of delinquency (e.g., being a difficult child, low IQ, living in poverty, poor parental supervision) may not explain desistance. An interesting finding concerned the timing and quality of marriage by the youth offenders. Early marriages characterized by social cohesiveness led to a growing preventive effect. The data support the investment-quality character of good marriages; that is, the effect of a good marriage takes time to appear, and it grows slowly over time until it inhibits crime. This particular conclusion is a curious one vis-à-vis the sample of participants in the present study, half of whom were married.

Another significant factor in desistance from crime is age. Toch (2010) claimed that the best established fact about criminal recidivism is that the risk of reoffending decreases across the board with age. This is in part because some prisoners experience significant maturation and undergo substantial and relevant personality change.

Maruna (2004) offered a fresh perspective on crime desistance by explaining that active offenders and desisting ex-offenders differ in terms

of explanatory style. Compared to desisting ex-offenders, active offenders tend to interpret negative events in their lives as being the product of internal, stable, and global forces. On the other hand, desisting ex-offenders are more likely to believe that the good events in their lives are the product of external, unstable, and specific causes.

Further studies on the life stories of discharged youth offenders and ex-convicts focus on overcoming adversity and attempts at reform (Mallon, 1998; Maruna, 1997; Todis, Bullis, Waintrup, Schultz, & D'Ambrosio, 2001). To a large extent, these studies point to themes of resiliency in adolescents who have been through a difficult life event and are now living their life back in the so-called straight world. Todis and colleagues (2001) examined the life stories of formerly incarcerated adolescents and reported that postcorrection supports were insufficient to allow many of the youth offenders to transition smoothly back to their communities. For example, most of the respondents had to return to the same homes that they lived in when they were breaking the law. Unfortunately, the structure provided by their families was inadequate to keep them from reoffending, just as it had been inadequate to keep them from getting into trouble in the first place.

Some discharged youth offenders do transition away from delinquent behavior, a phenomenon labeled colloquially as "going straight." In a related study on the published autobiographies of 20 ex-convicts, Maruna (1997) identified a prototypical reform narrative that was shared by virtually all of the accounts he examined. This reform narrative starts with early scenes of passive victimization leading to a delinquent quest and repeated scenes of "bottoming out." The negative cycle is not broken until the protagonist experiences a "second chance" for agency and/or communion, often through the intervention of a good friend or a potential lover. The final life story chapters consolidate reform through the protagonist's generative efforts to "give something back" to the world as he attempts to help other actual or would-be criminals develop their own reform stories.

These aforementioned studies attempt to illuminate the construct of resiliency in people who have experienced difficult life situations. However, not all discharged youth offenders end up going and remaining straight. Thus, it is important to explore other life paths taken by youth offenders after being discharged from the rehabilitation center and as they face the challenge of reintegration into their families and communities.

The Present Study

This paper explores the significant life experiences of youth offenders after being discharged from a rehabilitation center. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How would discharged youth offenders describe the process of reintegration with their families and communities?
2. What factors enable and impede crime desistance among discharged youth offenders?

METHOD

Participants

Ten discharged male youth offenders from the Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth (RRCY) in Eastern Visayas were purposively selected to participate in this study. Their ages ranged from 19-27 years (M = 23, SD = 3) at the time of the interview. As for their educational attainment, seven out of ten had some elementary education; two were able to finish elementary level while one reached secondary school. Most of them held low-income jobs such as being a pedicab driver or a construction worker. Exactly half of the participants were single; four were married while one was separated. Of those who had been married, only three had children; one of the single participants, however, had a child with a former classmate.

Table 1 shows that the most common offense that had been committed by the discharged youth offenders was theft while the rest had been apprehended either for substance abuse, robbery/holdup, or frustrated murder. With regard to their incarceration history, all but one of the ten participants spent time—ranging from 18 days to 4 years with an average of 10 months—either in lock-up or the city jail before they were transferred to RRCY. Their length of stay in RRCY ranged from 2 to 24 months (median = 9.5 months) while their length of period since being discharged from RRCY at the time of the interview ranged from two-and-a-half to eight years, with an average of about five years. Interestingly, only three out of 10 had no history of incarceration prior to RRCY, but they were nevertheless previously involved in delinquent behaviors and criminal acts.

The Life Story Method

The life story was used both as subject matter and method in this study. As a subject matter in research, life stories are said to reside at the third level or standpoint in terms of studying the person (McAdams, 2001). At this level, individuals make sense of themselves by constructing evolving life stories that organize their reconstructed past, perceived present, and anticipated future into a coherent whole. McAdams (2001) also believes that it is through life stories that individuals make sense of events in their lives and, ultimately, of themselves.

As a method in research, life stories of the ten participants were collected through a semi-structured interview guide in *Waray.* The life story method is particularly relevant to the participants who, given their low educational background, might not have been able to express their sentiments had they been asked to complete self-report inventories or other quantitative measures. By being asked to tell stories instead, they were able to share the meaning of their various experiences, reconstruct their past, anticipate future events, make sense of who they are, and elaborate on their answers to the interview questions.

Procedure

Data were gathered by first asking for permission from the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to track those who have already been discharged from RRCY. The participants were located with the help of barangay officials and community members; in some instances, the participants themselves referred the author to other discharged youth offenders they knew. Among the ten participants, half required just one initial visit before the actual interview; the rest were visited a number of times before the interview was conducted. The recorded interviews lasted from about one to two hours. After transcribing the interviews, a matrix was created for the participants' responses to the major questions.

The content coding system used in data analysis was frequency coding, which involved developing criteria for meaningful units of the response and recording the number of instances of these units in the data (Woike, 2007). Themes were then developed out of the codes generated and were validated by rereading the matrix of responses, ensuring that they captured the

narratives of the participants. The study followed basic ethical considerations such as informed consent and assuring the participants anonymity and confidentiality. Pseudonyms were also used in the presentation of their narratives.

RESULTS

Reintegration with the Family

All ten participants were discharged into the care of their families. Practically everyone said that they experienced positive treatment from their families upon coming back from RRCY. For example, Matt and Josh felt happy because their families were once again complete. Josh recounted asking for his parents' forgiveness on his first day back home; his parents in turn told him to just forget about the past and to try not to repeat his negative behaviors.

Tommy, Ariel, and Rick reported that their relationship with their families significantly improved compared to their pre-RRCY lives. Tommy explained that his family treated him well because he made it a point to show them that he had changed for the better. Rick mentioned that he now got along well with his mother and attributed this to the fact that his mother now had a new partner (his second stepfather) who was not violent like his previous stepfather.

Reintegration with the Community

Majority of the discharged youth offenders did not experience negative treatment from their neighbors upon going back to their communities. Matt felt welcomed in their barangay while Tommy and Dolph noted that their neighbors treated them better than they did before. According to Tommy, he was no longer the center of gossip in their barangay. Similarly, Dolph noticed that his neighbors now seemed to trust him more than they did in the past.

The most common reaction of their neighbors upon their return to their community was to ask them whether they would now change or go back to their old ways. This was usually said in jest as a form of welcoming back the discharged youth offender. Matt said that he definitely no longer

wanted to slip back into his past behaviors, let alone return to jail, but he also expressed uncertainty since nobody could predict the future. He added, "*… it tukso kun kaya likayan, likayan.*" (We should resist temptations while we can.)

Notably, only one respondent shared experiencing stigma after his release. Ariel disclosed that people still see him the same way even today. Some of his neighbors would talk behind his back and call him *"kawatan"* (thief); sometimes he would answer back and admit that he was indeed once a thief but he has already changed. He also felt uncomfortable going to public places he used to frequent: *"Makuri pag nakadto ak ha merkado damo nakilala ha ak, natamod nala ako, makaarawod labi na kun upod ko tak uyab, danay ginpapa-una ko nala, nasunod nala ako."* (It's hard when I have to go to the market where a lot of people know me. I just bow my head down. It's embarrassing especially if I'm with my girlfriend. Sometimes I tell her to go ahead of me, then I just follow her.)

Going Straight vs. Going Back to Old Ways

With regard to their experiences with crime desistance, six participants claimed that they no longer went back to their past antisocial behaviors after leaving RRCY. Many of them were kept busy by their jobs. Ethan joined his father in construction projects; Josh helped his older sister finish high school out of his earnings; and Todd assisted his parents in selling fish at the market.

Tim was very careful about staying away from trouble; he no longer joined his friends whenever they would engage in petty theft such as stealing chickens from their neighbors. According to him, *"Nadiri na ako nga bisan guti mahugawan tak ngaran."* (I no longer want to besmirch my name even just one bit.) Some of the participants still joined their friends in drinking sessions but they said they no longer abused alcohol and other drugs like they did before. Ariel said his friends influenced him to smoke and drink (the latter he learned only after his stay in RRCY) but he no longer went back to stealing.

Only three participants admitted to going back to their old ways immediately after being discharged from RRCY. This is true in the case of Matt who shared, *"Pagkuhaa ha akon, nag-promise na ako nga di nak mautro. Pag-gawas ko, dinhi amo manla gihap masamok; damo man an nagtitinda hin shabu dinhi. Nadara na liwat ako; paspasay ak shabu dinhi."* (When

they [parents] fetched me from RRCY, I promised them that I would no longer go back to my old ways. But when I went back to our community, I found that it was still the same—many were still selling shabu. I got hooked on drugs again. I became a heavy user of shabu.) Rick also went back to sniffing rugby, although he asserted that he no longer used it as much as he did before and that he now hides from people whenever he uses it.

Ion probably had the worst case of relapse into criminal behavior. He went back to shoplifting after being discharged and would usually come back to their barangay when he finally had enough money to sustain his gambling habit. Aside from this, Ion and some of his friends got involved in large-scale shoplifting in Metro Manila. They would usually leave Tacloban in groups of ten and stay in a city in Metro Manila for a couple of months going around malls and large drugstores to steal expensive infant formula which they sold to a buyer who bought them for a significantly lesser price. He was arrested thrice but he was always freed after his friends negotiated with the police and paid for his release. About three years after leaving RRCY, he was again jailed in Tacloban for stealing a cellphone. Ion claimed that he was forced to steal due to his financial difficulties. He already had a wife and three children during that time.

Tommy seemed to have gone straight for the first two years after being discharged from RRCY. He concentrated his energies on working either in construction projects or driving their pedicab but was eventually jailed for frustrated murder. He stabbed his Japanese employer because he was not compensated for his work at a construction project. He spent 11 months behind bars and was out on probation at the time of the interview with the help of their barangay chairman who applied for his custody.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to examine the life stories of discharged youth offenders, particularly their experiences of reintegration with their families and communities, in order to understand the factors that enable and impede the process of crime desistance. A critical examination of these factors is important in two ways: first, it can help concerned parties improve their efforts at assisting ex-offenders in their desistance process, and second, it can make us appreciate the oft-neglected fact that the path to the straight world is not that straight at all.

Factors in Crime Desistance

The narratives of the participants revealed several factors that influenced their process of desistance from, or relapse into, crime. These factors are discussed in the following subsections.

Family support. The support extended by one's family plays a critical role in the desistance process because discharged youth offenders usually have no one to turn to except their families. Although the participants' narratives do not give the impression that the positive treatment of their families was strongly related to their desistance from crime, it was still a significant improvement from their relationship with their families during their pre-RRCY days.

Community condition. Majority of the participants also reported being treated positively by their neighbors upon their return. However, their stories revealed that the communities they went back to still had the same problems as when they left them. This is consistent with some studies that report various challenges for the youth offender in terms of transitioning into their communities (Todis et al., 2001). For some participants, the community played a role in their relapse into crime. Such is true in the case of Matt who went back to his barangay and found that it was still full of drug pushers; he eventually got hooked on shabu not long after being discharged from RRCY.

Unfortunately, the problem of going back to the proverbial "same old community with the same old problems" could not be dealt with that easily because relocating to a better community was not a viable option for the participants. In fact, not one of them mentioned the possibility of moving to a different place because it was assumed that they would all go back to their families in their original communities, which still had the same conditions that predisposed them into offending in the first place.

It also did not help that some participants experienced being looked down on or talked about by their neighbors who knew of their past behaviors. This was indeed a challenge for those who said that they were still viewed by their neighbors as the delinquent youth that they once were despite their current efforts at reform.

Intervention of significant others. Another factor found to have facilitated crime desistance for some participants was the intervention of significant persons, which is consistent with Maruna's (1997) prototypical reform narrative in which the youth offender gets a second chance at life with

the help of someone else. This usually took the form of being adopted by a concerned neighbor in an attempt to help the youth desist from his old ways. Matt, Ariel, and Rick all experienced being adopted by a couple from their neighborhood who knew about their past antisocial behavior and wanted to help them reform their lives. These interventions benefited the participants because their new guardians proved to be better providers than their biological families and afforded them opportunities to stay away from getting into trouble with the law.

Employment. One of the stronger factors that facilitated the desistance process for most of the discharged youth offenders was having a job. Working for a living consumed most of the participants' time, which meant that they had less time to spend in antisocial activities. Despite their meager income, earning money through their respective jobs made the discharged youth offenders feel productive because they were able to support their families. This, in turn, made them feel good about themselves and encouraged them to do better in their work so they could fulfill their family obligations.

Marriage and children. Getting married and having children was yet another significant factor that influenced the participants' desistance process. Now that many of them had to support their families through their work, being involved in criminal activities became much less rewarding presumably because of the associated possibility of incarceration. Going back to jail meant that the married participants would have to endure being separated from their families; worse still, it also meant that their wives and children would have to suffer the consequence of losing their sole source of support. Having children seemed to be an additional reason not to go back to one's old ways as reflected in some of the participants' desire to do the best that they can so their children could live comfortable lives.

In relation to this, Sampson and Laub (1993; cited in Laub, Nagin, & Sampson, 1998) found that individuals who desist from crime are significantly more likely to have entered into stable marriages and steady employment. They claimed that marriage and work act as "turning points" in the life course and are crucial in understanding the processes of change. Although the participants in this study currently hold jobs that are far from being steady, the experience of working to support their families nevertheless acts as a potent factor that restrains them from re-offending.

Moreover, Laub, Nagin, and Sampson (1998) emphasized that the preventive effect of marriage emanates from the quality of the marriage

bond and not from the existence of marriage itself. This argument becomes more relevant if we compare the experiences of Matt and Josh with their respective marriages. Between the two, Josh is arguably at an advantage in terms of family support and quality of marriage and is thus at lesser risk of reoffending. In fact, Josh had never had any trouble with the law since he was discharged from RRCY years ago.

On the other hand, Matt went through two unsuccessful marriages already—he left his first wife after forcing her to abort their baby, whereas he was separated from his second wife on account of her infidelity. Matt almost relapsed into criminal behavior because he attempted to kill his wife and her lover. Whether Matt is in danger of reoffending at present is still uncertain; after all, he still has two children who motivate him to work harder to support their needs. What is clear, however, is that Josh seems to be at lesser risk of reoffending than Matt because the former has more positive experiences with his marriage.

Interestingly, the case of Ion offers what seems to be a paradoxical effect of marriage and family life on his desistance process. Ion admitted that he still engages in occasional shoplifting, especially when he is out of work, in order to support his wife and three children. Then again, he also claimed that marriage was a great help in his efforts to reform his life. Upon closer analysis, however, it becomes apparent that Ion's occasional forays into unlawful activities is really the effect of poverty and not of having a family per se. His reoffending should therefore be viewed as a desperate response to difficult times, made even more difficult by the pressure to support his family.

The Not-so-Straight Path to the Straight World

The experiences shared by the discharged youth offenders regarding life in the outside world reveal that desistance from crime is not just a simple matter of no longer having a criminal record after incarceration and/or rehabilitation. Indeed, the path to the straight world is not so straight at all—crime desistance is a long and difficult journey filled with roadblocks and U-turns, and the ex-offender needs more than just sheer determination to succeed in his efforts at maintaining a straight life in the outside world.

This difficult process is evident in the stories of those who went back to their old ways immediately after their release. Despite their resolve to

change their lives once they left RRCY, Matt, Rick, and Ion found that the communities they went back to were still the same disruptive places that they had left, and that the lure of their old ways was too hard to resist given that they had no other preoccupations and received very weak social support. Tommy was also determined to make good in the outside world and was actually enjoying a life free from trouble during the first two years after being discharged; however, he nearly killed his employer for a work-related disagreement and was thus incarcerated again.

The complicated process of crime desistance becomes even more apparent if we compare the experiences of the ten discharged youth offenders in terms of the nature of their offending and the length of their stay in RRCY. A closer examination of the participants' incarceration histories and offending trajectories (see Table 1) reveal that all ten participants are long-term, habitual offenders. This is evidenced by the fact that all but three of them had previous histories of incarceration, while the three individuals who were not previously incarcerated still had past involvement in delinquent behaviors and criminal activities. In spite of this, only four participants—Matt, Tommy, Rick, and Ion—relapsed into antisocial behavior after being discharged from RRCY. Similarly, seven participants were once chronic drug users (Matt, Tommy, Josh, Rick, Todd, Dolph, and Ion), but only Matt and Rick went back to using drugs after leaving the Center.

The participants' length of stay in the RRCY may be classified into long term (11 months and above), medium term (five to 10 months), and short term (below five months). Following this scheme, half of the participants were long-term residents (Tommy, Josh, Rick, Tim, and Dolph), three were medium-term (Matt, Ariel, and Ion), and the other two were short-term (Ethan and Todd). If we assume that the length of stay in the RRCY is a factor in crime desistance, it is intriguing to note that the four individuals who relapsed into delinquency and criminal behavior actually came from both the long- and medium-term groups. The picture gets even more complicated if we factor in the participants' stay in lock-up or in the city jail prior to being committed to RRCY.

The point in the foregoing discussion is that the process of crime desistance is a complex process influenced by various factors. Therefore, these factors should not be examined separately but should instead be viewed as interacting with each other to direct the course of the youth offender's post-rehabilitation life.

Furthermore, the real-life examples of the ten discharged youth offenders should make us rethink our notion of crime desistance. For Maruna (2004), desistance does not refer to a simple termination event that takes place at the time of a last offense. Instead, desistance is the process of refraining or abstaining from illegal behavior. He therefore prefers to categorize some ex-offenders as actively desisting if they are strongly engaged in this ongoing process of self-restraint and self-definition. Operationally defined, these actively desisting individuals were once long-term, habitual offenders, but who at the time of the interview had been crime-free and drug-free for more than a year apart from having no plans of future involvement in criminal behavior. On the other hand, another group might be more appropriately called as persisting ex-offenders because they are still active in their criminal careers and admit to explicit plans of maintaining their illegal behaviors.

Following Maruna (2004), only Ion falls under the category of persisting ex-offender because he still engages in occasional shoplifting when he is out of money and he sees himself doing it again because of his financial difficulties. The rest of the participants may be classified as actively desisting, including the three who relapsed into crime, because just like the others, Matt, Tommy, and Rick had been free from drugs and criminal activities for at least a year at the time of the interview, apart from having expressed their desire to no longer go back to their old ways.

Based on Maruna's (2004) classification scheme and the experiences of the ten discharged youth offenders, it seems misleading to simply categorize discharged youth offenders into those who have either desisted from or relapsed into crime. After all, there is no assurance that those who maintained a clean record post-RRCY will continue to live straight lives; these individuals are faced with daily struggles (e.g. poverty and criminal activity in the community) that could still put them at risk of reoffending. Correspondingly, some of the participants who experienced relapse are now back on track, while some still continue to engage in antisocial behaviors every once in a while.

For these reasons, it is more appropriate to classify discharged youth offenders using a continuum for risk of reoffending. Based on significant factors that influence the desistance process, they could be assigned to different points in the continuum ranging from being less- to more-at-risk of reoffending; such a classification scheme more accurately reflects their status vis-à-vis crime desistance and could thus help us identify who is in greater need for intervention. Admittedly, we have yet to come up with a good model

that is capable of both evaluating the discharged youth offender's status based on the factors discussed earlier and placing him at a point in the hypothesized "risk of reoffending continuum" to predict the probability of either desistance from, or relapse into, crime.

IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This study showed how multifaceted the process of crime desistance is. To be sure, there are other factors that play a role in whether a discharged youth offender goes straight in the outside world or relapses back into criminal activity. Future studies may examine possible internal or dispositional factors in delinquency (e.g., self-control, susceptibility to influence, attributional style, moral reasoning, cognitive ability, emotional maturity, etc.) to complement the external factors discussed in this study. The role of the community may also be elaborated by taking on an ecological systems perspective, specifically focusing on the social dynamics of the community and how this predisposes the youth to delinquency.

Future researchers may also be interested in sketching a prototypical life narrative of the Filipino discharged youth offender such as the one proposed by Maruna (1997). Collecting life stories will prove to be of value in this kind of research as it will highlight the similarities in the trajectories of post-rehabilitation life by discharged youth offenders.

Beyond narrative studies of former youth offenders, it is likewise important to come up with quantitative investigations such as coming up with a model that would predict the youth offender's risk of reoffending given certain factors. This kind of research will have important implications both for research and policy on juvenile delinquency.

Implications for Practice

The RRCY no longer has responsibility over the former youth offenders once they get discharged because the provision of aftercare services now rests upon the concerned local Social Welfare Development Office (DSWD, 2007). Unfortunately, aftercare services for discharged youth offenders are either weak or nonexistent. It is alarming to note that only one out of the ten participants in this study mentioned receiving some form of aftercare support from the DSWD after leaving RRCY.

In light of this sad reality, the DSWD is encouraged to strengthen its aftercare program and closely supervise its implementation. The discharged youth offenders who express interest in pursuing their education outside the RRCY should be assisted in securing enrolment, especially because of the possibility that they might lack certain school requirements. Perhaps the DSWD could assign at least one individual to monitor the progress of the discharged youth offenders' education, and see to it that they get all the possible assistance they need in order to graduate.

The families and communities also need to be educated in terms of dealing with the reintegration process of former youth offenders. Because both family and community support are deemed to be significant factors that could either facilitate or hamper crime desistance, these two institutions need to be aware of their important role in the reintegration process and should thus be duly trained and assisted in dealing with youth offenders who are ready to return to their homes and communities to start new lives.

Drawing on the stories of the participants, the DSWD should likewise focus on assisting the discharged youth offenders in securing employment that not only fits their capabilities but also pays them well enough to support their families. For example, the DSWD can link with other government agencies such as the Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) in training and endorsing the discharged youth offenders for suitable employment. The discharged youth offenders' need for employment cannot be overemphasized because most of them now have families to support.

SUMMARY

This study sought to fill a gap in the local literature on youth offenders, who have always been studied while they are still inside rehabilitation facilities. Cognizant of the fact that these facilities serve as temporary shelters for youth offenders, the author focused on those who have already been discharged from a local rehabilitation center and investigated their experiences with reintegration into the outside world and the challenges of crime desistance. The participants' narratives revealed the complex and multifaceted nature of life after rehabilitation. Results highlight the need for more systematic and holistic approaches to dealing with the issue on youth offenders to ensure that the resources allotted for rehabilitation facilities do serve their intended purposes.

AUTHOR NOTE

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Table 1 Incarceration History of Research Participants

Name	Age upon entry to RRCY (in years)	Offense	Length of stay in City Jail/Lock-up prior to RRCY	Length of stay in RRCY	No. of years since discharge from RRCY (as of interview)	Previous experience with incarceration
Ethan	16	Theft	4 months	2 months	4	Theft (29 days); mother applied for custody/ probation
Matt	19	Frustrated murder & 3 counts robbery	48 months	7 months	6	Twice incarcerated for theft (3 months) and rugby use (6 months)
Tommy	20	Robbery/Holdup	18 days	24 months	3	Possession of deadly weapon (7 months)
Ariel	14	Theft	6 months	6 months	4	Incarcerated about 6 times in lock-up ranging from 2 days to 1 week for various cases
Josh	16	Substance abuse (rugby use)	4 months	11 months	8	No history of incarceration, but with past history of criminal activity
Rick	15	Substance abuse (rugby use) & illegal gambling	12 months	24 months	5	Had been in and out of lock-up about 20 times for rugby use; detention ranging from 1 day to 1 week

Name	Age upon entry to RRCY (in years)	Offense	Length of stay in City Jail/Lock-up prior to RRCY	Length of stay in RRCY	No. of years since discharge from RRCY (as of interview)	Previous experience with incarceration
Todd	16	Theft	1 month	2 months	5	No history of incarceration, but with past history of delinquent behavior
Tim	17	Qualified theft	NA	14 months	2.5	No history of incarceration, but with past history of delinquent behavior
Dolph	17	Theft	3 months	12 months	7	Had been in and out of DSWD detention about 7 times; had been detained at lock-up 3 times for shoplifting
Ion	20	Theft	8 months	8 months	6	Incarcerated at least 10 times at lock-up for shoplifting