

## **Exploring the Lives of the Families of Ex-offenders**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This phenomenological study focused on the exploration on the lives of the families of ex-offenders in terms of their social and emotional context towards society. The data gathered for this study was done through in-depth interviews. Results indicated that in exploring their lives, most of them were still living their social lives normally and still have a close family relationship with the ex-offender. In the context of socialization, the families were able to socialize well within their society. In emotional context, some of the family members felt pain and shame, while others were emotionally stable. The individuals have come up with subjective statements of their experiences in socializing. The Attachment Theory and Family Systems Theory strongly support this claim. These theories claimed that the emotional and physical attachment to a person may help in branching out in a sense of connection of every family member.*

*Keywords: exploration, socialization, family, ex-offender, Attachment Theory, Family Systems Theory*

### **INTRODUCTION**

According to the latest research or information from the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (2017), since January 2017, there were 131, 923 people who have been incarcerated in the country. Survey says that Philippines is one among the countries which has a lot of detainees in the world. In fact, Philippines is the 12<sup>th</sup> among other countries.

There is level of socialization with respect to the ex-offenders after they have served their penalty or sentence inside jail. But what is the definition of “socialization”? And who really are considered as “ex-offenders”? Socialization is how people interact with two or more persons. It is the process by which individuals acquire knowledge, social skills, and value to conform to the norms and roles required for the integration into a group or community. Having labeled as an “ex-offender” might be hard for a person because of the thought of being discriminated by those around him or her. As an ex-offender, it is hard to re-enter into the outside world, where all things and people had changed. It is not easy to enter to a new environment, thinking that people are there ready to discriminate and push him or her away because of being labeled as ex-offender. Socializing and interacting is one of the challenges that an ex-offender needs to overcome once he or she gets released in prison. However, this is really hard for an ex-offender to do if people around him or her do not show acceptance or do not welcome him or her into the society.

There are ex-offenders who belong in some families. According to Murray Bowen’s Family Systems Theory, it is the nature of a family that its members are connected emotionally. Sometimes, their own family cannot accept the fact that instead of understanding the ex-offenders, they would rather judge them and worst of all, could not show trust, care and love but this must be changed. Every ex-offender deserves acceptance; first in the family, the community, and the society. Each has the obligation to help them understand their past experiences in life. This has something to do in the future but certainly they deserve to be loved and respected. This is only one way of supporting them change their lives for the better. Family members should not treat them as if they are insignificant persons that will provoke them to do the same mistakes or crimes again. They also need to support them in all aspect of achieving renewed life.

Ex-offenders experienced to be an outcast in their community. People let them feel that they are not accepted in the society. There are some who are not treating them well, that they also experienced negative attitudes from those people around them (Rade, Desmarais, & Mitchell, 2016). There are only few researches about this topic (Chong, 2016). The researchers wanted to pursue this study to contribute for further studies. Its aim is to discuss to people, to the readers, that it is not only the society which experiences hardships, but the ex-offenders as well as their families.

## **Review of literature**

### *The number of prisoners in the Philippines*

According to the data provided by the World Prison Brief (2017), the Philippines had 178,661 prisoners during the past year. There were 74.4% of the total population of prisoners who just returned to prison. Out of the total population of prisoners, 8.9% are female, 0.4% are minors, and 0.4% are foreigners. The number of prisoners that will be arrested and freed will keep on rising each year in the Philippines.

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) released the official number of prisoners in each region in the Philippines last January 31, 2017. In the NCR region, there are 31,0431 prisoners. Regions I, II, and III have 21,376 prisoners while Regions IVA, IVB, V, and VI have 29,285 prisoners. There are 33,562 prisoners in Regions VII, VIII, IX, X, and NIR; 16,657 prisoners are in Regions XI, XII, XIII, CAR, and ARMM. When these numbers are combined, the total number of prisoners in the Philippines is 131,923. These data imply that most of the prisoners are located in the NCR region in the month of January 2017.

One of the greatest challenges of the Public Policy is how can prisoners return to living a normal life in the community. Seven percent (7%) of prisoners die inside the prison due to lifetime imprisonment; which means that the remaining 93% can be set free. However, the percentage of prisoners that are being set free is decreasing while the rate of criminals being caught is steadily increasing (Grommon, Rydberg, & Byrum, 2012).

According to BJMP (2017), Region IV-A had the most number of prisoners. Most of these prisoners are sentenced to a 3 or more-year imprisonment. The number of years is affected by the type of crime they committed.

### *Challenges faced by ex-offenders*

Ex-offenders are people who served a long time in jail because of the crimes they have committed (Larsen, 2017). Male or female ex-offenders both have shortcomings in terms of education which is why they find it hard to find a job outside jail. This may also be a reason why other people do not give much attention to these ex-offenders who they think cannot help in their respective communities. This results to limited actions of the ex-convicts.

According to Yeager (2016), one social worker and some older co-workers served time inside the prison for a long period of time. This situation was a perfect example that shows a problem that ex-offenders have faced. They have limited social skills that they can use to communicate with the people around them, especially to those who served for a long time in the prisons because there are strict guidelines that need to be followed. There are those who have recently gained their freedom, confused on the sudden change of surrounding. Even though they have returned to their respective families, these prisoners have trouble in socializing with other people.

Alabama had the most number of prisoners with more than 25,000. About 97% of them have been set free and are now living in their proper communities. One of the hardest challenges that these prisoners had faced is going back to the society (Lindley, 2014). They faced different kinds of challenges in work, finding a new place to live, and socializing with the society (Baptiste, 2016).

Being a prisoner brought a great change in the prisoners' lives. Even after they were freed from imprisonment, even though there are people who gave them second chance to start over, there are still some prisoners who are old and ill. Others are too afraid to start over, which is why even though they persevere and have sufficient skills needed for their second chance, they are unsure if they have really changed their ways and will be given an equal opportunity in life (The Community Times Team, 2015).

According to the research of Morenoff and Harding (2014), most of the people who became prisoners had a large loss in the aspects of education, economics, and socializing with other people. The continuous rising of the number of people who are going in and out of prisons contribute to the inequality of people. People who were once a prisoner have problems with socializing with others because they are afraid of them, even though they are already reformed.

In the study made by Chong (2013), there is a minimum amount of research that focuses on the socialization of prisoners because the location of the prison is far away from society where there is little

or no kind of communication that can occur and because it is difficult for the prisoners and ex-offenders to communicate with the outside world, relationships tend to be formed in between themselves.

According to Plante (2015), the length of time of imprisonment would depend on how grave the crime was committed. It is certain that there would be a lot of changes that they are bound to discover. They will not be easily accepted by society because their crimes are recorded. Society can never forget that as an ex-offender has committed a crime and will cause him or her to have a hard time fitting into society. As shared by Tapp who spent 20 years inside the prison, he faced a great challenge after he was set free. He had a hard time adjusting to a society with the availability of new technology (Clark, 2017).

According to Rolston and Artz (2014), ex-offenders can feel great fear because they think that a lot has changed since the time of their imprisonment. They would have a hard time to socialize with other people because they do not feel welcomed by the society but because of the program that was launched in South Africa and Northern Ireland in 2 years, ex-offenders can live like a modernized citizen.

In a study conducted by Laird (2013) to an ex-offender, his life was not easy after he got out of prison. Nobody wants to take him in because he was an ex-offender. At the time, he wanted to apply for an addiction counseling license, his application was not accepted. Moreover, because he was an ex-offender, he had a hard time finding a job. But because of the support he received from his family and the money he earned, he was able to accomplish every challenge he faced.

An ex-offender named Farall (2013) shared his story of the events that happened after he got out of prison. He never expected that once a person was labeled as an “ex-offender”, this name can be used against him. It has been instilled to the people’s mind and heart that because he is an ex-offender, they should not be allowed to have a job and his resume should be thrown out. But Farall (2013) believes that everyone, ex-offender or not, should treat each other with proper respect. He felt that having a permanent label of “ex-offender” because of one small crime is insulting to the feelings of that person.

In an article of Zoukis in 2013, he said that the life of prisoners is hard. They would need to get by through the day inside the prison cell. An institution like the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology is a place where prisoners are being taught basic skills for life that they can bring outside prison.

There is lack of communication between the community and the Department of Correction Services (DCS) regarding the return of a prisoner back to society that he belongs (Zond, 2012). The DCS helps with the rehabilitation of ex-offenders before they go back to society. The importance of having the family accept the ex-offender is also the job of the DCS because there might be a chance that the ex-offender in question might do the same crime again in the future (Khwela, 2014).

It is expected that an ex-offender, after being released from prison, would leave the life of a criminal to live a normal life as a citizen of the society. Prisoners are always undergoing many challenges inside the prison. There are prisoners who are excited to be released from prison, but there are also some who are worried because they do not know what kind of life is waiting for them after their time in imprisonment. Some of the obstacles that they might face are the following: being homeless, unemployed, health problems, and socializing with others (Awolugtu, 2013).

A study of Harding, Wyse, Dobson, and Morenoff (2014) investigates the processes of how ex-offenders achieve environmental securities, providing their everyday needs, and obtain the facilities needed for increasing their upward mobility as time passes. According to this study, even though they can achieve environmental security and stability, there is still some who still have a hard time providing even the smallest of their everyday need. Even so, there are some who can get material support, objects and facilities that can help them increase their upward mobility, and economical freedom.

According to the Community Correlational Officers (CCOs), the ex-offenders have a large distance between them and the society. The CCOs are the ones who show the ex-offenders the way back to the society (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2011).

Building and making relationships between prisoners and social workers are important in preparation for re-entry into the society (Schmitt (2014). It is a great practice for them to be able to socialize with people in the outside world. Giving support to ex-prisoners is really important when they get released because it gives ex-prisoners the stability that they need.

*Life experiences after being released from prison*

In the study conducted by Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell (2016), the ex-offenders experienced being outcasts in their communities or that they feel that society does not accept them. They also feel the negative attitude of the public and the people they interact with toward them. Western, Braga, Davis, and Sirois (2014) stated that it is hard for an ex-offender to interact with others after being released from prison. Before, when they are inside the prison, the ex-offenders do not have any kind of communication with the people and their families in the outside world. It is also hard for them to find a decent job and a home because of their criminal records.

One study discussed how ex-offenders will face their new life. The acceptance of the community plays a huge role in helping the ex-offender to socialize better. It is also important that their family can express their heartfelt love to the ex-offenders to help them have a better life (Sapelka, 2015). Prisoners who were released from imprisonment had a mixed feeling of happiness and doubt. They are happy because they are free and they can be with their loved ones once again. However, they are doubting because they do not know if there is still a family they can go back to (Ferrer, 2015).

According to an article by Kubrin (2013), Bruce is one of the 4.8 million prisoners who was given another chance in life when he was set free from imprisonment. His story had numerous challenges. For him and his family, “re-entry is a complex transition”. Ex-offenders face the challenge of having a lack of education, finding a job, and finding a place to live.

In 2016, Brown had an interview with ex-offenders from all around United Kingdom. These ex-offenders had different experiences after they were released from imprisonment. One of them had a difficulty with the fast-paced evolution of technology. Another had a difficulty with the sudden change of his feelings towards his wife. When that ex-offender’s wife fetched him from prison, he realized that his attraction towards his wife has weakened due to his 12-year imprisonment. Another one noticed that because of his label as an “ex-offender”, he has a difficulty in finding a job, as well as socializing with the community. It cannot be helped that the way people see changes because of the said label.

Dominik, 24 years old, learned that he can change his life even though it is hard. He wants to live a normal life and he does not want to return to a life of crime. He made sure that he will not be affected by his previous life and he wanted to use his freedom to do what would be the best for him. Creating a relationship between ex-offenders and the community is hard. This process is called transition management (Schmitt, 2014).

*Perspective of the society towards ex-offenders*

According to Zoukis (2013), it is hard for the people of the society to mingle with prisoners and ex-offenders because in their mind, the whole community cannot accept them. The ex-offenders are also afraid because they know that the people of the community would keep their distances from them. They experience isolation and judgement from the community. Experts should train and teach ex-offenders that they should not think negatively because it can lower their self-esteem and pride. That is why there are programs that can help them correct their wrong doings and that can guide them to the right path.

As stated by Cornwall (2015), the prisoners that have been set free have an increased chance to go back to prison if the people surrounding them in the community are also ex-offenders who committed the same crime as them. In his study, the people surrounding the ex-offenders would have an effect on their personalities.

*Treatment towards ex-offenders*

According to the Journal of Section X (n.d), the needs of ex-offenders are to be considered if they would be freed from prison. This includes shelter, clothes, and food for their everyday life. Most ex-offenders, especially those with family, wish to fix their relationships with their own families. The time spent in prison causes the ex-offenders to feel that they have a broken relationship with their families. They feel uncomfortable moving outside jail because they are afraid to be judged by other people based on their actions.

Yarwood’s research (2012) in England has an understanding that the Criminal Justice System (CJS) is not as strict to the female offenders compared to the males. In terms of jail sentences, male

offenders have longer jail time usually 18 months while the female offenders often receive a 12 month sentence to jail depending on the crime committed.

#### *Relationship between ex-offenders and their family*

After the imprisonment of a detainee, they always face bundle of problems in returning to society. There are prisons who come home to find their family members that no longer trust them. As one family, there is a need to reunify and to create a good environment and common language they can share. In easing the burdens of re-entry, it improves the lives of ex-prisoners and the lives of their family members (Madison Peace, 2016).

Family members play an important role in the re-entry of those ex-prisoners. They are the ones who provide support such as shelter, food, clothing, and guidance from avoiding criminal behaviors. Families affect position outcomes that can help them make a successful transition from prison to community (Michigan Department of Corrections, 2018).

One of the important factors to be considered in desistance from crime is having a strong and supportive family relationship. It is also important as protective factors to have a stable relationship with parents who model positive social behavior. Helping the offenders to develop social bonds, it avoids them to do criminal behavior (Barnardos, 2015).

#### *Close family ties in the Philippines*

Filipinos are characterized as being family-oriented people (Marie, 2018). They believe to have strong family values that make them closer to one another. Being around with each other gives them strength to go on with their lives, through thick and thin, failures and disappointment. They believe that as long as they have one another, everything will pass on and will go back to the way it was. According to Teresita of Christian Filipina (2013), one trait of Filipino that is rarely seen with other culture is their strong family ties. Families and relatives support one another if one needs a helping hand, emotionally, physically, or even financially.

Young Jr. (2009) said that there is always close family tie or relationship between families. When there are family emergencies, Filipinos can always seek help from relatives, even if they are living to different places. Relatives, in either bad or good times, are always there ready to come and rescue one another, may it be in someone's birthday, finding a job, paying bills or paying for a relative's bail. Having close family ties is what makes the Filipino families happy and together.

Stated in an article in Travel to the Philippines (n.d.), Filipinos have this trait that no other countries have, which is close family tie. Filipinos have this intact relationship between families and their relatives. Unlike other countries, like the U.S., children at the age of 18 move out and are independently living by themselves. This usually happens when they get to start going to college. But in the Philippines, Filipinos choose not to follow this kind of practice.

#### **Objectives of the study**

For this study, the researchers aimed to gather different perspectives and the adjustments made by the families of ex-offenders towards the society in a social and emotional context. With the help of Bowen's Family Systems Theory, the researchers inquired about the coping strategies done by the families of these individuals. Along with the Attachment Theory, the researchers wanted to know and explore more about the dynamics of the relationship between the family members and the ex-offender.

#### **Theoretical framework**

The researchers have taken some theories that would guide the study. These theories are Bowen's Family Systems Theory and Attachment Theory.

Family System Theory was developed by a psychiatrist, Dr. Murray Brown. It is a theory on human behavior which sees the family as an emotional component and used this component to make interactions with others. He observed that family members have that special bond within them though some families feel distant from their families. Because of this special bond within the family, when something does not feel right, family members usually sense this kind of feelings, thought, or actions.



Attachment is an intense emotional relationship or bond that connects with oneself to the other on a specific time spent together. They said that attachment is mostly on children or happens during childhood when one is seeking an attachment model when being threatened or in a tight situation. According to the theory of John Bowlby, one's distress is usually caused when someone is away to the person he or she was comfortable with. When in distress, a person usually gets anxious because of the new surroundings. According to David (2016), Bowlby's Attachment Theory also focused on the importance of security and trust in mother-infant, parent-child or family-family bond and relationship on the development, growth, and their well-being. Attachment was defined as a long-term psychological connection with a person that gives pleasure to relieve stress by the means of interacting. The development gives a critical effect with the quality of attachment towards that person and can be linked to many aspects of positive functioning.

### **METHODOLOGY**

For this study, the researchers used a qualitative type of research. In this type of research, it can give a deeper understanding of behaviors, attitudes, thoughts, feelings, and social interactions with people or the respondents and this type of research can easily be changed or it is flexible to change depending on the topic that the researchers are discussing during the interview. The researchers conducted narrative interviews and in-depth interviews in collecting the needed data. The interview was guided by a set of unstructured questions that the researchers had prepared which emphasized the respondents' insights, perspectives, life experiences on socializing, and the coping strategies they made. In-depth interviews were also used by the researchers. The researchers used thematic analysis to analyze and interpret the information and data they have gathered from the interviews that were conducted. After the transcription was written by the researchers, thematic analysis was used and applied to sort and group statements and themes that are common from each transcription of the respondents. From each analysis, interpretation was made to answer the exploration and cause of the phenomena. Thematic analysis was applied to gain deeper understanding on the experiences and challenges that the respondents had encountered. This will also allow the researchers to associate different factors that would correlate with the phenomena.

The researchers interviewed eight (8) participants. For the first family, the researchers got to interview two (2) family members. The first participant named Charina, is a 42-year-old housewife. The ex-offender is her brother and now lives with her in Sta. Rosa, Laguna. Hilda, 61 years old, is the mother of Charina and the ex-offender, Hilman. She now lives in Caloocan, Quezon City and oftentimes visits her children in Laguna when there are occasions. For the rest of the cases, the researchers had interviewed one (1) family member in each family. In the second family, the ex-offender was accused of drug addiction. Nessa, a 54-year old housewife and lives in Binan, Laguna, and the ex-offender was her brother. In the third family of ex-offender, the researchers got to only interview the wife of the ex-offender. Con, a 51-year-old was the wife of the ex-offender. She currently lives in Calamba, Laguna and works as government employee. For the next case, the researchers got an interview with the father of the ex-offender. Marcelino is a 62-year-old tricycle driver in a subdivision in Cavite. The ex-offender is his son, who was arrested for carjacking a tricycle. According to him, his son was caught taking a tricycle without permission from its owner. Nette, the daughter of the next ex-offender, is a 32-year-old call center agent. She shared that the ex-offender is her father who was in jail for almost 13 years. His father was sentenced to jail for being a drug pusher. The next participant is JD. She is a 56-year-old government employee and the ex-offender is her sister-in-law. And lastly, Aimee, a 48-year-old sari sari store vendor in Sirang Lupa, Batangas City. The ex-offender is her live-in partner.

All of the chosen participants are residents of the province of Laguna. Based on the statistics from Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (2017), it has shown that Region IV-A, or CALABARZON, had the most number of people being imprisoned. Most of them were imprisoned for at least three (3) or more years depending on the crime that they had committed.

Finally, the researchers followed the ethical standards so no harm would be done during the process of making this study. The researchers have also assured confidentiality among their participants, debriefed them and provided them enough information about the study.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the results of the data gathered, analysis, and interpretation by the researchers. The results include the similarities and the differences among the participants based on the objectives of the study: (a) exploration of the lives of the families of ex-offenders, (b) different perspectives and socialization made of the families of ex-offenders towards the society in terms of social and emotional context, and (c) coping strategies of the family of the ex-offenders.

*How was the life of the family members living with an ex-offender?*

Domain 1: Life and the family members and ex-offender

The theme spans on the exploration on the lives of the family members living with an ex-offender. This theme is divided into four parts: close family relationship, casual communication of the ex-offender and their family, feelings and emotions felt, and changes in the ex-offenders' life, and answers the question, "How was the life of the family members living with an ex-offender?"

*Close family relationship*

Based on the interviews conducted, one of the themes identified was the close relationship with the ex-offender which answers one of the questions made by the researchers, how was the life of the family member/s living with an ex-offender? Based on the transcription, it shows that the ex-offenders have close relationship with their family. According to Charina, no matter what happens in their family, she and her brother, the ex-offender, maintain a close relationship with one another.

Most family members' bond, especially in the Filipino setting, is strong and intact, this is what they call close family ties. Whatever trouble comes into a person's life, if family sticks together, anything is possible. It goes with the saying "blood is thicker than water". One's own relationship within the family is the most important and strongest of them all. Even if one member is separated from one another, if he or she has access to communication, he or she will always find a way to be able to talk or bond with one another, like what Charina and her brother are doing. Even before the ex-offender was kept in prison, the relationship between them was already been that way.

Charina still has her close relationship with her father, nothing changed from the treatment they have from each other and their family as well. They let him feel that he is still accepted and loved even though he was sentenced to jail for a long time. Another account coming from Nessa states that no matter what happens, they maintain a close relationship between siblings.

On the other hand, after all that happened to her brother's life, Nessa still accepted her brother. They could not stop him from doing his vices anymore because of what he was doing when there are no drugs in his body. Nessa still loves her brother despite him on being a drug addict, and this shows how close their relationship is. Even one of their loved ones has vices, they still show that they care for that person. Nessa showed that she truly cares for her brother by always reminding him of the things he must do. But because of the influence of drugs, it was seen that it was hard for Nessa to keep on reminding her brother. However, not all families have close family relationship with each other. In the case of Marcelino, for instance, it was not hard on his part that his son was detained in jail and he did not feel ashamed. He believed that there were reasons behind that is why his son did it. He stayed strong to their problems, for his son and for his family.

*Communication between family and the ex-offender*

Communication is a key factor which keeps the relationship strong between two people. It makes a person know one's whereabouts, as well as preferences and dislikes. Without constant communication, the relationship of two people would not grow and develop. The researchers' interview with Charina showed that communication between her and the ex-offender is somewhat casual. This may be because of the close relationship that she has with the ex-offender. Even though something bad happened, their relationship remained as it is after the ex-offender got released from prison. This also goes the same between Nessa and her brother.

Though there are differences in Charina's and Nessa's statement, despite Nessa's brother having vices, it is seen that she still loves and accepts her brother. According to her, her brother was sent to prison numerous times because of drugs. Because of this, she wanted her brother to change his

life because taking drugs will not get him anywhere. But because of her brother's stubbornness, they cannot do anything and just let him do whatever he wants. Another similar response is from Hilda who stated that even though they are not always with him, the ex-offender still finds ways to communicate with his mother. Their family maintains the communication with the ex-offender even when he is still in prison. The ex-offender writes a letter for them because mobile phones or any other gadgets are prohibited inside the jail. Still, after being released, they maintain a good communication just like before.

According to Con, she is willing to fix her relationship with her husband and her family. Even when they have miscommunication, she still chooses to discuss it with him and open up everything they wanted to say to each other. But when it comes to their children, she is the one who always approaches them because her husband is afraid that they would not understand him.

#### *Feelings and emotions*

Every family is different. Each reacts differently in every situation. According to Charina, their family was happy that the ex-offender had been finally released from prison and reunited with their mother especially that the ex-offender is their mother's favorite child. This time, they will no longer fabricate stories about the whereabouts of her brother. There is nothing more to hide and no more excuses when relatives invite them with his brother in family gatherings.

Meanwhile, Con also shared that she became worried as her husband might again do something wrong and worst if he comes back to his vices. But just the same, she is happy with the comeback of her husband for his presence completes their family. The participants also shared the pain and hardships that they encountered. Nessa shared that she wanted to bail her brother but cannot do so because of financial incapability. Since she is not financially stable, she was not able to help in the release of her brother. So, she felt guilty about it. She has to do something to help but she could not due to financial constraint. It is hard for the family to see their loved ones having vices, but it is more painful to see them being detained. They cannot do anything but cry.

Marcelino, a father who loves his children and grandchildren, was also worried, yet, he chooses not to give up for his son and for his grandchildren who live with him. He still supported his son in such a way. Even though his child was detained, he does not want his grandchildren to suffer because of what happened to their father.

JD's answers were full of anger. Of course, she got involved for what her sister-in-law has done. As her life has been affected because of what happened. But, just the same, they have forgiven her, considering the children's welfare. They got separated for quite some time and she needs to fix things with the children.

#### *Changes in the ex-offender's life*

##### *Turning into a new leaf*

According to one family member, Hilda, the mother of Hilman, her son started to change his way of living when he was released from prison. After being held inside the prison, Hilda made a decision to let her son live with her daughter, Charina, in Laguna instead of bringing him back to where he used to live. Their family thought that this is the only way for the ex-offender to live peacefully again without the influence of the people he used to be with. Promises were made, that it will not happen again. Mistakes are natural to people. Humans commit mistakes. In the case of Hilman, people must change their mind that he will die as a bad person.

Marcelino, on the other hand, supported his son in such a way that he advised him that he can no longer sustain him. What he can do is just pray. Every person has the capacity to change. Change is not constant. A bad person today can be good tomorrow. Instead of judging a person from prison, guide them to change for the better version of themselves.

#### *Negative changes*

Not all people who came out of prison decided to change their lifestyle once they are released. Some do change for the better, but there will always be people who will remain just the same as they were before being arrested or worse, choose to do whatever they want.



Nessa and her brother's family tend to just ignore him to avoid conflict in the family. They got tired of reminding him to change or to get rid of his vices; however, nothing changed. Aimee shared the same experience. According to her, it is not easy when her husband has been released, because he went back to his old bad ways such as vices, womanizing and worst, physical violence -- things that she could no longer bear.

#### Domain 2: Socialization of the ex-offenders and their family towards the society

The theme spans on how the ex-offender affect their family members' living and their socialization towards others. It is divided into three parts: environmental factor, fear from rumors and sense of belongingness to the society. This highlights how the families associate and feel whenever they socialize with the society.

##### *Environmental factor*

One's environment has a great influence in shaping one's self, one's life, what a person is now and what will that person be in the future. From the answers of Nessa, her family experienced discrimination. People would think that just because one of their family members uses drugs, all of them are also using it.

It is really hard for Nessa being judged by people surrounding them. It does not only affect her but also her children. People cannot really avoid being discriminated, especially if those people know something that can ruin someone's reputation with it. But she only ignores what other people say. Her family did not find it hard to socialize knowing on what their status are because people in their community were all the same.

Contrary to what Nessa shared, according to Charina, she and her family did not experience being discriminated. From her answers, it was easy for her and for her family to socialize. They live in rural areas where the people around them are also using drugs that is why they have normal treatment for each other. This is the reason why she normally socializes with others. The same goes with Hilda. It is a huge advantage when the people around know the person very well. It is a big help if the people around do not judge for what somebody was accused of. The people around are not making the issue a big deal, it is nothing to them. Both stated that everything is happening depending on the environment one lives in.

An account from JD contradicts the response of Hilda. Naturally, she got angry and at the same time, sympathize to her for what her sister-in-law did. She experienced being outcast because other officemates were victimized in the situation. This is so because of shame, too. Con was confused of her feelings. According to her, it is difficult to have a good relationship with the people in their community. Some do not welcome her husband, some are not convinced that an ex-offender may change. Although there are some who are ready to give her husband another chance.

##### *Fear from rumors*

To avoid any rumors, a respondent shared that there were only limited people who knew about the ex-offender's case. Charina's family wanted to forget all the sufferings they had experienced. They do not want others question them further. Most of the time, she tends to ignore the questions being asked of her with regard to the ex-offender because for her, not everyone understands what happened, the reason why it happened. They just could not easily accept the presence of her brother again. Con has the same response. She does not tell others about the real situation and she does not respond to questions being asked of her. She does not heed to relatives' invitations to avoid further issues about their situation. She wants privacy for her and her family as well.

##### *Sense of belongingness to the society*

The respondents had shared that the community around them accepted them even if one of their family member is an ex-offender. People around them often ask how they are like nothing happened at all. According to Charina, the people who live near them do not discriminate them because residents in their place know them very well. Their family welcomed the ex-offender more when he got released from prison. Hilda shared the same response, according to her, people in their community actually

support them. They even extend help by giving them what they need. They accepted them as they are and never felt that they are discriminated in their place despite what happened.

On the other hand, Marcelino tried to motivate his son by showing him his untiring support despite what he has done in the past. A different account from Nette was acknowledged, for her, though her father has done something wrong and committed a crime, she still considers the good things that the ex-offender had done before the latter has been incarcerated. She tried to understand the reason why he did wrong so as to give them a comfortable life.

#### *Comfort given by the society*

The feeling of comfort from others can really lift the spirits of those who are suffering. Words of encouragement can get a long way who is experiencing difficult times. One respondent shared, based from experience, the people in their neighborhood would give her comforting words or would give her food for his son who was in prison. Hilda stated that she appreciates the people in their community who extend their help to make their situation and daily life easier. The people around them accepted them even though they are facing difficult situation. Charina has the same response. She was grateful for those who continuously support them despite their situation. She is also grateful for all the people who understand them and do not discriminate them and whatever happens, there are some who would support them.

#### *Knows the ex-offender and family members' background*

There is a big difference in socialization when a person knows everything or at least the background of someone. As a saying goes, "Do not judge a book by its cover", which means that one should not prejudge the worth of something or someone's outside appearance. One should also know the person's true attitude, behavior, and characteristic to know the true worth or identity of that person. According to Charina, as a sister, she has forgiven her brother. When he was released, she accepted his brother with all the love and support. She thinks that her brother was a victim of set-up. According to Hilda, the people in their community understand the predicament of the ex-offender because they know for a fact that her son is not a bad person. As a mother, she does not think that her son can do the thing that was accused to him. Nette stated that they were able to socialize well with others even though the people around them know their situation. They also know the reason that her brother was able to do that in order to provide his family's needs.

### Domain 3: Coping strategies when being discriminated by the society

The theme spans from the observed different coping strategies made by the family members when criticized by people surrounding them. The theme was divided into two: the social adjustments and emotional adjustment which were made by the respondents and ex-offender. Under social adjustments, there are three categories identified: rejecting gatherings, financial matters, and new environment. For the emotional adjustment, the researchers had formed an overall category which is acceptance.

#### *Social adjustments*

##### *Rejecting gatherings*

According to some of the respondents, they wanted to escape from the queries of their relatives about the issue. Most of the respondents ignore gatherings as their coping mechanism. Charina stated that it was uncomfortable for her to attend gatherings because her relatives always ask where her brother is. She does not want to talk about it anymore because it was really hard on her part to tell stories that were not true. Charina also added that when her brother was released, almost everything went back to normal. Her brother could attend family gatherings and gets to socialize with other people like nothing happened.

Con shared the same response. According to her, their family does not attend gatherings of relatives because she also wants to escape from the questions about her husband. According to her, one huge social adjustment and decision she had done was by not attending family gatherings. She wants to

avoid being questioned repeatedly. It was also noted during the interview that Con is uncomfortable whenever asked about her husband.

#### *Financial matters*

Another social adjustment mentioned by the respondents is financial difficulties. It was seen, during the interview, the pain Nessa had gone through, especially that her brother, the ex-offender, died in the prison. Being financially incapable can really change one's life. Money is important to everyone. It can be used to help someone who is in need. But it is not that easy to earn money. Though there are many ways for a person to earn money. Take for example, in the case of Hilda, she needed money and thought for a way how to earn it. She shared it was a very hard decision for her. But because of her love for her son, the ex-offender, she is willing to do anything just to be with him again.

#### *New environment*

The last category under social adjustment is placing the ex-offender to another environment. The respondents considered relocating the ex-offender for his/her sake and also for the family. They explained that by doing this, the ex-offender and their family will have a better life than staying at the same place they used to live in. According to Charina, relocating her brother is one of the adjustments she and her mother made. She wanted her brother to live in a rumor-free environment. She wanted her brother to start a new life again, as if he was not imprisoned. This also goes to another respondent, Charina's mother, Hilda. She said that it might be hard for her to decide on this, but she thought that this will be the best solution. Moving to another place will surely be hard for the ex-offender. But in due time, the ex-offender will be able to adjust in the new environment.

#### *Emotional adjustments*

##### Acceptance

Majority of the answers from the respondents show that the emotional adjustment that they made, even by the people around, was acceptance. A respondent mentioned that acceptance is a one of the factors to be able to cope. A family member must accept to make the ex-offender feel that he or she is not alone. Charina narrated that she and her family gradually accepted her brother. They wanted to make him feel that they were not ashamed to have him as part of the family and they were happy being with him again. One reason is that they know the real story that it was not him who started the incident. According to Charina, her brother was only tasked by someone to deliver the firearm to someone and did not know that it was unlicensed.

According to Con, she had her emotional adjustments in overcoming her fears. The researchers then conclude that Con feared that her husband might do the same thing again and might go back to prison. But then, she chose to trust her husband again. In Con's case, the researchers can really tell that she is trying very hard to keep their family complete again because of the fear that she is feeling. Of course, for one, her husband is now labeled as an ex-offender. She is afraid that other people might say something bad to them for accepting her husband again. Second is the relationship between her husband and their kids. Her children have not known their father for years. It is also hard for the kids to adjust into a new lifestyle, living with their father who was gone for a very long time. But still, she chose to make her family complete and start all over again.

Table 1: Data extracts and themes derived from the participant's narratives

Themes	Quotations supporting the themes
Domain 1: Life of the family members and ex-offender	<i>"Before the incident... Ano, ah close kami ng brother ko kasi siya 'yung youngest eh. Ako yung eldest tapos tatlo kaming magkakapatid. So, kahit ahh close naman kami. Although hindi kami lumaki kasing magkasama dahil separated 'yung parents namin. He's living with my mom sa ano... tapos ako lumaki ako sa papa ko. Pero kahit ganoon meron namang ano,.. lagi naman kaming nagkikita close</i>

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Close family relationship	<p><i>naman kami... ‘Yung after mas naging close... Uhhh okay naman. Uhhh... ano close kami. Close naman kami. Actually, after that nga, inilayo ko na siya dun sa lugar ni mama. Kinuha ko siya’</i> (Charina)</p> <p><i>“Super close talaga kami. Oo before. Talagang ano eh ako nga uhh sabi nila daddy’s girl basta lahat kaming anak close talaga...Pagkalabas? Ganun din. Oo parang ganun pa rin eh diba para kasing walang nagbago kasi nga kapag pagpupunta naman kami sa kanya, ganun pa rin.”</i> (Nette)</p> <p><i>“Yes, me and my sibling live in one compound. When my brother comes home, he always use drugs and we just let him use it because he just stays there for 2 months. That is why, that my brother of mine, the one who’s dead, we always tell him what to do, he’s always under the influence of drugs, and always shouts at everyone. If he has drugs in his system, he just stays at a corner. That is why you need to be flexible when you’re with him... My relationship is good, especially because we are siblings. When we were young, we are like fiends or buddies. I might even say that he was the first one that I loved than my husband.”</i> (Nessa)</p> <p><i>“For me, as a parent, it is not hard for me. I know that it is just a personal reason why he was imprisoned, nothing more. That is why I am not weak, I mean, I am not ashamed why my son was put to jail.”</i> (Marcelino)</p> <p><i>“We’re okay.. there is no awkwardness... But after he got out... none... we were casual.. We were back to normal because we know that... it’s like we know the truth. We know that we was not involved. That it was not his.”</i> (Charina)</p>
Communication between family and the ex-offender	<p><i>“Our relationship is close... The place where we usually stay, there’s this only one. Only one rule for us, and that is to listen to the elderly. I am the eldest here, because the eldest among us siblings is in Kuwait that is why I am the one who they listen to. Now, because of what happened, he doesn’t follow me anymore, it’s his own and I don’t know what to do, I wanted him to change but I can’t do anything. He was already told countless of times by his children and his wife, but still hasn’t change. If he wants to do it, no one can stop him and just let him be.”</i> (Nessa)</p> <p><i>“Yes, and today the technology is better even sometimes it is prohibited inside, we have communication or sometimes he is writing a letter to us. It seems like we used to see him in jail and think that she was just in his vacation.”</i> (Nette)</p> <p><i>“Well, nobody is perfect. There are times that we are still having miscommunication about the issues at home every day. But because we need to fix our relationship and to maintain our family, we are open to communication. We can open up what we want to tell to each other, so with the children, we are not telling them directly because I think, he is afraid that our children would answer him back. That is why he let me tell them his comments when they have done something wrong.”</i> (Con)</p>
Feelings and emotions	<p><i>“When he (ex-offender) was released from prison, of course we felt very happy. Happy, because we can finally get together again with our mother. He will be with my mother again for they are very close with each other because I was not able to live with them when I was young. We were really happy. The way... the way my mother see what life is different because she was able to be with her favorite son again.”</i> (Charina)</p> <p><i>“It’s a mixed emotion. I felt happy because he is now free and we could be together once more together with our children and at the same time, a little bit confused because now that he is free again, he might do the same thing that caused him to be incarcerated.”</i> (Con)</p> <p><i>“Of course it was painful, it was hard that I can’t do anything to bail him.”</i> (Nessa)</p> <p><i>“As a father, of course, I was worried. There are so many thoughts and worries because he left his two children.”</i> (Marcelino)</p> <p><i>“We are not that close because uhhh I am pissed. My life got affected; time heals all wounds, right? But of course, we forgive her in a way that uhh, we knew how</i></p>

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many years she was imprisoned. She paid back for everything she had done. We surrender everything that had happened to her to the Lord. We are still happy for her that she is now with her children, even they have their own lives already, at least it is not too late.” (Nette)

Turning into a new leaf

Changes in the  
ex-offender’ life

“... of course there are promises made that he will not do it again... that you need to be careful when choosing people you want to be friends with, they just want to be with you if you have money, if they could use you... Like that. So he enjoys himself here, he became fat already haha.. And maybe I thought that he already forgot what happened to him in the past. That is why every time he goes to Caloocan, he just strolls over there. Then, after visiting, he’ll immediately go back here (in Laguna). He stays here in Laguna more often than in Caloocan. It is like that when there are occasions.” (Hilda)

“Yes. I told him to just pray, that it is Lord’s plan for him.” (Marcelino)

Negative changes

“We already told him many times, his children, his wife, nothing changed. If he really wants, we can’t do anything but to let him be.” (Nessa)

“Ah, it’s hard. Ehh, when he was imprisoned, he started to drink alcohol, living with another woman, and I became battered wife.” (Aimee)

Domain 2: Socialization of the ex-offenders and their family towards the society

“Well, of course, in the first place, like us that don’t use drug, my children oh, and to me, they think that all people are like that, but we can’t do it.” (Nessa)

“... In their part, in my mother’s part uhhh it wasn’t hard socializing because the place they lived in there is uhhh a rural area. So, you already know the thing that people do in there. That someone is shocked that he was caught. Or he was arrested, like that. And also in a barangay where people know you, it wasn’t that hard because of that.” (Charina)

Environmental  
factor

“Nothing, everything’s okay. We’re okay, yes, actually, some people there says that “Oh it’s nothing”. It’s like that. Some even gave me money for my transportation or says “Here.. a little something for you”... like bread, chips, medicines, and the like- they are like that. Uhhh they don’t mock you there...No nothing, because they actually understand everything, and besides, if they know that the person who was caught was someone innocent, they won’t scoff you off or tell you something like “good for him”, some people are like that.” (Hilda)

“When he was imprisoned, as an officemate, of course I get mad, but as a relative, I sympathize her and at the same time I’m pissed. I even experienced being an outcast because of her. Almost all of them doubted and all they were saying made me feel guilty even though I am not the one who is accused. They thought that their money was in our family and we are using it. We do not know and they do not where it went.” (JD)

“Yes, it is difficult, I tell you. Not all the people in the community where we live in understand the situation and a person like him, an ex-offender. There are some that instead of giving their support are spreading rumors behind our back. You know that, when they are in front of you, they are nice. But when they turn their heads back, they have many comments that are not helpful.” (Con)

“Yes, I don’t want them to know because it is shameful if they know, of course there’ll be many questions.” (Charina)

Fear from  
rumors

“We are not accepting the invitations even of our relatives because of the situation. I will just escape from the questions that cannot be avoided.” (Con)

“I can’t remember anything... my mother also did not tell me anything. Maybe we just say hello, greet each other, or “How are you? How were you when you were

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Sense of belongingness to the society	<p><i>inside?” Then, they will say that we should listen to what the elders say. There is no discrimination. And it seemed like our family even welcomed him even more.” (Charina)</i></p> <p><i>“It’s fine. Actually, some of them would say “it’s nothing”. They give money for the transportation or even “ate oh... something” like bread, snacks, medicines. They are like that. They are not the ones who would discriminate you.” (Hilda)</i></p> <p><i>“No. In his case, being a drug pusher, although we all know that it is wrong but it is his way to provide our needs since we were young. He let us experienced a good life before.” (Nette)</i></p>
Comfort given by the society	<p><i>“Nothing, everything’s okay. We’re okay, yes, actually, some people there says that “Oh it’s nothing”. It’s like that. Some even gave me money for my transportation or says “Here.. a little something for you”... like bread, chips, medicines, and the like- they are like that. Uhhh they don’t mock you there...No nothing, because they actually understand everything, and besides, if they know that the person who was caught was someone innocent, they won’t scoff you off or tell you something like “good for him”, some people are like that.” (Hilda)</i></p>
Knows the ex-offender and family members' background	<p><i>“When my mother needs something, of course weekly and it’s too far where my brother is detained. We have neighbors and the friends of my brother who lend something and share what they can give.” (Charina)</i></p> <p><i>“...he just got involved to something that it’s not his fault. We don’t know if maybe it’s planted..? Because what happened... uhhh he also has fault. It’s like that someone let him to sell the gun.” (Charina)</i></p> <p><i>“No...no (didn’t abandoned), because they understand the situation, and another thing, if they know that the person who went to prison is a nice person, then it’s not for them to mock that person and say “it serves you right”, it’s like that with others. Some also say “No, even though he is not my son, I know he is innocent... maybe it was because of the circle of friends he’s been with.”. That’s what they said, may be he chose the wrong type of people to be with.” (Hilda)</i></p> <p><i>“No. In his case being a drug pusher - although we all know that it is wrong – this was - but this was his way to provide our needs – our daily needs, the things we need since we were young and he really wants us experience a good life.” (Nette)</i></p>
Domain 3: Coping strategies when being discriminated by the society	

Social adjustments	<p><b>Rejecting gatherings</b></p> <p><i>“Then on my part, it’s hard because our family is looking for him. His absence always catch the attention of other relatives. They would ask, “oh why is Gilman not around?” “where is Gilman?” I make-up some stories and alibis especially during family reunions or gatherings.” (Charina)</i></p> <p><i>“Even when we get invited by our relatives, we don’t attend to any of it, because of the situation we’re in, we can’t avoid the questions they tend to ask us and sometimes answer them like we don’t know the answer or didn’t hear the question for us not to feel ashamed.” (Con)</i></p>
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Financial matters

*“The ex-offender really wanted us to bail him out of prison but unfortunately we don’t have enough money for that, until he died in prison. It still hurts whenever I think about it.” (Nessa)*

*“We have a field... it was given to us by our parents. It came into my mind, then I talked to one of my siblings... that may part in the inheritance, I want to sell it because I need the cash immediately... So, instead of taking up a loan, I thought that it was better to sell my part of the land for me to have the money.” (Hilda)*

New Environment

*“Actually after my brother got out of prison, we decided to let him live in another place. I let him live with me instead.”* (Charina)

*“Now, I am thankful with the help of God and of my daughter because she let him live here (in Laguna). That he was moved here to avoid rumors... like that. He likes it here, and now he looks happy and healthy again haha.. And maybe I thought that he'll forget on the things that happened to him. That's why whenever he goes to Caloocan, he just visits me there”* (Hilda)

Acceptance

Emotional  
adjustments

*“It was more like the family welcomed him more... to make him feel that no one abandoned him or was embarrassed by him, like that. None... nothing at all. There were also other family and relatives that time when he got released. Ahh and also, I remember my mother was very happy that time because it was also her 60<sup>th</sup> birthday that time.”* (Charina)

*“There's still the feeling of fear for my life and my children. I really do not know what is going to happen soon, because something bad might happen again because of him. Well, I've chosen to accept him again to our family so as to have a complete family, so, I did my best to overcome my fear. This time I promised myself to be strong enough to like him again and our children. Since we've lived our respective lives separately, it's really a back to zero relationship between us, there's a lot of adjustments I have to take, not only to him but also to our children because he's been separated from us, our kids were so young and when he gets back they're both grown-ups.”* (Con)

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The study was conducted to understand and explore the lives of the families of ex-offenders. This provides a framework on the exploration of the families of ex-offenders, how their lives were, their perspectives and experiences in socializing with other people after living with an ex-offender, and the coping strategies they did when they were discriminated or felt that they were judged by other people. From the categories given by the researchers, the respondents showed similar responses.

One sub theme that stands out is the close relationship of the families with the ex-offender. A very important saying goes like “blood is thicker than water” is related to the respondents' answers, which means that close family relationship is something important to people, especially in the Filipino setting. In an article made by Marie (2018), she said that Filipinos are characterized as being family-oriented people. They believe to have strong family values that make them have close relationship to one another. Being around with each other, gives them strength to go on with their lives, through thick and thin, failures and disappointments.

They believe that as long as they have one another, everything will pass on and will go to the way it was. According to an article from Michigan Department of Corrections (2018), one of the important factors to be considered in desistance from crime is having a strong and supportive family relationship. Helping the offenders to develop social bonds can make them avoid in doing criminal behavior. Another factor that plays an important role to an ex-offender is acceptance. Sapelka (2015) indicated that the acceptance of the community plays a huge role in helping the ex-offender to socialize better. It is also important that their family can express their heartfelt love to the ex-offender to help them have a better life.

In the study conducted by Rade, Desmarais, and Mitchell (2016), the ex-offenders experience being an outcast in their communities or that they feel that society does not accept them. They also feel the negative attitude of the public and the people they interact with towards them. Contrary to this claim, most of the ex-offenders and their family did not receive any criticisms or discrimination from people around them. Two out of three of the ex-offenders and their families had avoided being discriminated. As stated by Western, Braga, Davis, and Sirois (2014), it is hard for an ex-offender to interact with others after being released from prison. Because ex-offenders hardly have any kind of communication with the people and their families in the outside world, they have a very hard time having

communication from people outside. However, according to the respondents, the ex-offenders were able to adjust and socialize again with the people around them. Their friends and families, even their neighbors, accepted them for who they are, which made the ex-offenders feel welcomed again from prison.

According to Zoukis (2013), it is hard for the people of the society to mingle with prisoners and ex-offenders because in their mind, the whole community cannot accept them. The ex-offenders are also afraid because they know that the people of the community would keep their distances from them. They experience isolation and judgement from the community. Experts should train and teach ex-offenders that they should not think negatively because it can lower their self-esteem and pride. That is why there are programs that can help them correct their wrong doings and that can guide them to the right path. Having proper coping strategies should be exhibited to the ex-offenders and to their families who are suffering from harsh discrimination from the society. However, according to the respondents, minimal adjustments were made for they did not receive any criticisms at all from the public.

### **CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

The study was conducted through in-depth interviews to the family members of the ex-offenders who are being accepted as part of the community again. Thus, socializing with other people in their place is no longer an issue. This tackled about the different experiences of the families of ex-offenders. From the Attachment Theory of Bowlby, the respondents experienced different hardships when they were apart from the ex-offender. Most of them felt pain and loneliness because of the situation of their loved one. They also experienced hardships in socializing with other people and their family when the ex-offender lived again with them but they come to get along with it, while some can socialize well because of their community that was open when it comes to the issue and accepted by the society.

This study provides more understanding about the different ways of socializing of other people towards them to other families of the ex-offenders. They do understand situations of the ex-offenders as well as their family. Results show that there are people who have difficulty in giving their trust and just forget what had happened. With regards to their emotional capacity that relates to the Family Systems Theory of Dr. Brown, the family members of the ex-offenders are experiencing pain, embarrassment and other negative emotions but they were able to overcome all of these. There are also positive emotions they have experienced like the support and understanding of people around them.

This study also gives new ideas on how they can handle hardships in socializing. Some if not all, believes for a second chance. They find ways on how to deal with other people to have a peaceful life with their own family.

Not all families and the people around them share the same level of acceptance to ex-offenders. Some families experienced being discriminated by the society though there were some who were accepted.

The researchers would like to recommend with the help of the government to make a program especially for the ex-offenders. A program to teach the ex-offenders on how to be able to re-enter in the real world again after prison. People in the society, whenever they hear or know someone who has been to prison, are scared of them and label them as criminals. The researchers would also like to recommend or seek help from the government about the ex-offenders. People need to know that they are not the ones who are suffering from all the discrimination and hateful comments but their families as well. It would be a big help if the government could make a move about this.

For those families who have a hard time coping and socializing with the society, the researchers recommend that they could seek professional help from counselors or by joining programs that would help them build their confidence.

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