

Probing the Social Reintegration Experiences of Recovering Drug Dependents

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Abstract

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the social reintegration experiences of five recovering drug dependents who completed the Aftercare and Follow-up Program at the DOH-Camarines Sur Treatment and Rehabilitation Center in the Philippines. Using Husserl's transcendental phenomenology, data were collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis. Four major themes emerged: (1) social reintegration as a gradual, multidimensional process involving rebuilding self-identity, restoring family relationships, adjusting to community life, and cultivating hope; (2) societal influence through family/peer support, community acceptance, reintegration opportunities, and institutional support; (3) challenges including stigma, exposure to triggers, limited opportunities, and strained relationships; and (4) coping strategies such as self-discipline, social support seeking, engagement in positive activities, and emotional regulation. Findings underscore that recovery is a socially mediated, continuous process requiring holistic support systems. The study recommends strengthening aftercare programs, community-based reintegration support, family involvement, and livelihood opportunities to sustain long-term recovery.

Keywords: *social reintegration, recovering drug dependents, aftercare program, substance use disorder, phenomenological study, coping strategies, stigma, family support, community acceptance, Philippines*



I. INTRODUCTION

The state of drug misuse and abuse has been a predominantly emerging concern worldwide. The change of perspective in seeing drug misuse as health concern instead of a criminal one has elevated its intervention in public health sphere. However, this global concern is as much as a social issue affecting both the rich and poor communities. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) World Drug Report accounts over 296 million people have used drugs globally in 2021; of which, those who suffer from drug-use disorders rise to 35.9 million. Accordingly, these numbers are increasing significantly over the years with people engaging to “cheap and easy” synthetic alternatives that deliver more fatal results (UNOCHA, 2023). The predicament of drug misuse cuts across global and national efforts. This is due to their significant impact on the economy, the person, the family, and social consequences including crime, social exclusion, overdose or suicide deaths.

Inevitably, intervention across various aspects of the human spectrum have been available to address its different effects at the micro, meso, and macro level. Although good evidence points to the effectiveness of residential facilities for rehabilitation against drug abuse, there remains some challenges to their full recovery one of which is their reintegration back to the community. Reintegrating back home has been revealed as one of the common challenges for individuals recovering from addiction (Extra Mile Recovery – Drug and Alcohol Detox Center, 2024).

In most societies across the world, the topic of social reintegration for drug addicts in recovery has not yet been settled. Encountering further the stigma of communities against those who use drugs and those recovering from it, the challenge is unavoidable both for the recovering drug dependents and their rehabilitation workers.

The same challenge of re-integration is faced by the country. Despite the notable 48% percent reported to have recovered according to the Department of Interior Local Government (DILG) (Caliwan, 2021), relapse still occurs and drug misuse and abuse are still happening in the country. At present there are seventy (70) treatment and rehabilitation facilities in the Philippines that are registered with the Treatment and Rehabilitation Admission Information System. Of these, eight (8) are out-patient and sixty-two (62) are residential (Dangerous Drugs Board, 2022).

Re-integration experience from the point of view of previous drug dependents help understand the dynamics of their adjustment back to the community. It is important as it allows rehabilitation workers and program managers improve treatment, and personalized care, prevent relapse, allocate resources efficiently, and enhance and promote evidence-based practice towards policy development. In essence, it will benefit both individuals in recovery and society as a whole by making addiction treatment more effective while reducing the broader negative impacts of substance abuse.

The Camarines Sur Treatment and Rehabilitation Center (CSTRC) under the Department of Health is one of the two drug treatment and rehabilitation centers in Bicol Region. It started in



2007 which accommodates a total of three hundred and twenty-six patients (326), one hundred eighteen (118) of those are from In-patient Treatment Program of the center, forty (40) are enrolled in the Outpatient Program while one hundred sixty-eight (168) are undergoing the Aftercare Program (Camarines Sur Treatment and Rehabilitation Center, 2025). The general objective of its Aftercare and Program is “to ensure smooth reintegration and independent functioning of the Recovering Drug Dependent (RDD) within his/her family and community, and to prevent the recurrence of relapse”. This program includes four (4) phases which are: (1) early integration which provides understanding of the Aftercare program and the patient’s adjustment to his environment; (2) the intensive which involves family reintegration, (3) maintenance, their community reintegration, and finally, (4) termination which highlights their commitment building (Camarines Sur Treatment and Rehabilitation Center, 2025). It is expected that successful completion of these phases shall mean that patients are equipped with skills to manage their recovery.

The researcher, as a social worker assigned at the said agency, has been directly involved in the implementation of rehabilitation and aftercare services for recovering drug dependents. Through professional engagement within the Center, the researcher observed that while clients demonstrate significant behavioral and psychological improvements during residential and aftercare treatment, challenges persist upon their transition back to their respective communities after completing the Aftercare Program. In particular, recurring issues such as social stigma, limited community acceptance, weakened support systems, and exposure to environmental triggers were noted to affect the continuity of recovery. These observations shows that a gap between program completion and the sustainability of reintegration outcomes in real-life settings. Anchored on these professional experiences, the researcher was motivated to undertake this study to systematically examine the social reintegration experiences of aftercare graduates, with the end in view of generating evidence-based insights that may contribute to the enhancement of aftercare interventions and support mechanisms for recovering drug dependents.

With this, the study aimed to bridge theoretical knowledge and practical solutions by providing concrete insights into effective addiction treatment and recovery practices. This knowledge empowered healthcare providers, social workers, policymakers, and stakeholders to make informed decisions, develop evidence-based interventions, and tailor treatment plans to the unique needs of recovering drug dependents. The completion of the study contributed to understanding reintegration experiences as lived by those who were part of the program. This was essential in evaluating the intervention and helping processes for individuals who would become future clientele.

Statement of the Problem

The study probed the social reintegration experiences of Recovering Drug Dependents after completing their Aftercare and Follow-up Program at DOH–Camarines Sur Treatment and Rehabilitation Center. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:



1. How do recovering drug dependents describe their social reintegration experiences after completing the Aftercare Program?
2. How does society influence their recovery and reintegration?
3. What challenges do they encounter, and what strategies do they use to overcome these and maintain their recovery?
4. What recommendations were proposed based on the findings of the study?

II. MATERIALS and METHODS

This contained the discussion of the methods and procedures that the researcher used in gathering data needed in the study. This also included the research design, participants of the study, data gathering procedures, narrative discussion and ethical consideration.

Research Design

The study used a qualitative method of research specifically the phenomenological design. This study focused on the phenomenological method wherein experiences, insights, and perceptions of the participants were explored to reveal the data for analysis. Particularly, the research utilized the Husserl's transcendental phenomenology that allows the highlight of human experience in understanding causality and human motivation. This design was considered appropriate for the study as it enabled the researcher to process the experiences of the participants along the factors of their successful reintegration as well as determine factors that may have influenced such success.

Participants of the Study

The primary source of data consisted of the responses of five (5) participants who were completers of the Department of Health (DOH) – Camarines Sur Treatment and Rehabilitation Center (CSTRC) Aftercare and Follow-up Program located in Pamukid, San Fernando, Camarines Sur. These participants were graduates of the program for the year 2023. They were four (4) males and one (1) female, at least 21 years old, and had undergone the Aftercare and Follow-up Program in the said center.

Despite the limited number of participants, the sample size is deemed appropriate for a phenomenological study, which prioritizes depth of understanding over quantity of respondents. Data saturation was achieved as participants' responses began to exhibit recurring patterns, shared meanings, and consistent themes related to their reintegration experiences, social influences, and coping strategies.

Participants were contacted personally and were informed about the nature and purpose of the study. Each participant provided informed consent, ensuring that the information gathered



would be used strictly for academic purposes. The analysis was drawn from the narratives of all participants who willingly took part in the data collection process.

Research Instrument

The study used an interview guide as a research instrument constructed by the researcher. This was divided into three (3) parts.

The first part focused on the participant's basic information which included their name, age, gender, years of stay in the Aftercare Program and date graduated in the said program. The second part focused on the participants' social reintegration experiences particularly their adjustment to their new environment after being temporarily discharged in the Center. It covered their experiences related to familial and community relationships, factors influencing their social reintegration, encountered challenges and their coping strategies they used to overcome them. The third part consisted of probing questions regarding their concrete examples.

Also, validation process of interview guide was conducted through consultation to a language expert to review the translated interview guide from English to Filipino to ensure accuracy and clarity in the data gathering process.

Data Gathering Procedures

Once all channels of coordination were completed, initial contact with the participants was made through text messages, phone call and social media communication. The purpose of the study and the waiver of consent form were presented and explained to the participants. It included a confidentiality clause stating that the gathered information would not be divulged, even after the completion of the interview. To ensure anonymity, codes were utilized to conceal the real identities of the participants.

Upon agreement of consent form, the actual interview schedule was arranged with them. Data gathering was conducted through face-to-face interviews and online video calls depending on availability and convenience of the participants. Upon completion of all interviews, the researcher consolidated the collected data. Follow-up interviews were conducted when deemed necessary to elicit further clarification and elaboration on the participants' responses.

More so, the participants were informed that an audio recorder was utilized during the interviews, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim for accuracy. The interview process was stopped once the participants expressed that they no longer had additional information to share before proceeding to the next question. After completing the data collection process, the researcher proceeded with the analysis of data.

Data Analysis



The information gathered was analyzed through coding and thematic development using an inductive approach. Specifically, the study employed open coding, defined as “an exploratory method in which new data codes and themes are generated through the review of qualitative data” (Dovetail Research, 2023).

The process began with the transcription of all recorded interviews, ensuring that participants’ responses were documented verbatim to preserve accuracy and meaning. Following this, the researcher engaged in data familiarization by repeatedly reading the transcripts to gain a deeper understanding of the participants’ narratives and to identify initial patterns and insights.

Subsequently, the researcher conducted initial coding or open coding, wherein significant statements, phrases, and meaningful units were identified and labeled. These codes represented key ideas and experiences expressed by the participants. As the coding process progressed, similar and related codes were compared and grouped, leading to the categorization of codes based on recurring patterns and shared meanings across participants.

From these categories, broader themes were developed to capture the essence of the participants’ lived experiences. These themes were carefully aligned, particularly those related to reintegration experiences, social influences, challenges and coping strategies. The researcher then undertook a review and refinement of themes, ensuring that each theme was clearly defined, internally consistent, and distinct from others.

Finally, the refined themes served as the foundation for the narrative construction of the findings, where participants’ experiences were organized and interpreted in a coherent and meaningful manner. Through this systematic process, the study was able to come up with a structured analysis of the participants’ lived experiences while maintaining the integrity and depth of the qualitative data.

III. RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This presents the cases of study’s participants with the purpose of shedding light of five (5) recovering drug dependents. The presented data indicate the participant’s experiences in their Aftercare Program. Thus, four major themes emerged from the data.

Social Reintegration Experiences after Completing Aftercare Program

The findings reveal that social reintegration among recovering drug dependents is a complex and multidimensional process shaped by internal transformation, relational dynamics, community experiences, and future aspirations. Participants described reintegration as a continuous journey rather than a singular event, emphasizing that recovery extends beyond abstinence and involves significant psychological, social, and emotional changes.

At the core of reintegration is the process of **rebuilding self and identity**, where individuals redefine themselves beyond their past experiences and develop a renewed sense of self-worth, confidence, and purpose. This internal transformation enables them to resist stigma, make intentional decisions, and sustain positive behavioral change. Alongside this, **restoring familial relationships** plays a crucial role in providing emotional support, trust, and stability.



The findings highlight that recovery is deeply relational, requiring mutual effort between the individual and their family.

Furthermore, participants' experiences **adjusting in community life** reveal that reintegration involves gradual re-engagement, social participation, and the negotiation of societal perceptions. Individuals actively redefine their roles within the community, demonstrating change through their actions and interactions. This process contributes to a sense of belonging and acceptance. Additionally, the **presence of hope and future aspirations** serves as a motivating force that guides participants toward long-term goals and stability.

The study demonstrates that social reintegration is an ongoing and dynamic process that requires continuous effort, resilience, and support. The interplay between personal growth, family relationships, community involvement, and future orientation highlights the holistic nature of recovery.

Societal Influence in their Recovery and Reintegration

The findings revealed that society plays a role in influencing the recovery and reintegration of recovering drug dependents through multiple interconnected social factors. **Positive influence of family and peers** emerged as primary sources of support, providing guidance, emotional stability, and accountability that help individuals sustain their recovery. Participants emphasized that strong interpersonal relationships enable them to remain motivated and consistent in their behavioral change, highlighting that recovery is reinforced through continuous interaction with supportive individuals.

Community acceptance was also identified as a significant factor that shapes participants' reintegration experiences. The findings indicate that positive changes in how individuals are perceived by others contribute to rebuilding trust and confidence. As participants actively demonstrate behavioral transformation, they gradually gain acceptance, respect, and recognition from their community. This process reinforces their commitment to recovery and encourages continued engagement in social activities, showing that acceptance functions as a validating mechanism that supports sustained change.

In addition, **opportunities for reintegration**, including employment, livelihood, and community roles, play a vital role in enabling individuals to actively participate in society. These opportunities allow participants to transition from being recipients of support to contributors within their communities. This highlights that functional participation is essential in translating recovery into long-term social integration.

Institutional support further strengthens the recovery process by providing structured guidance, accountability, and continuous monitoring. Rehabilitation and aftercare programs serve as formal systems that help individuals apply learned behaviors in real-life situations. These programs reinforce discipline and responsibility, enabling participants to maintain consistency in their recovery journey. Moreover, institutional support complements family, peer, and community influences, creating a comprehensive support system that addresses multiple dimensions of recovery.



The findings demonstrate that recovery and reintegration are socially mediated processes influenced by various layers of social interaction and support. The combined influence of interpersonal relationships, community acceptance, functional opportunities, and institutional guidance creates an environment that sustains behavioral change and promotes long-term recovery.

Challenges encountered

The findings reveal that recovering drug dependents encounter a range of interconnected challenges that significantly influence their reintegration into society. These challenges extend beyond individual efforts and are shaped by social, environmental, economic, and relational factors that collectively affect their recovery journey.

One of the prominent challenges identified is **social stigma and judgment**, wherein participants continue to experience rejection, negative labeling, and lack of trust from the community. Despite completing rehabilitation and aftercare programs, they are often still perceived based on their past behaviors. This persistent stigma affects their ability to rebuild social connections and gain acceptance, which are essential components of successful reintegration.

Another challenge involves **exposure to triggers and temptations**, particularly exposure to former peers and environments associated with substance use. Participants reported frequent encounters with individuals who encourage them to return to drug use, highlighting the ongoing influence of their previous social networks. These situations increase the risk of relapse and emphasize the importance of developing strong coping mechanisms and maintaining self-control in high-risk environments.

In addition, **limited opportunities** were identified as a major barrier to recovery. Participants experienced difficulties in securing employment, accessing financial resources, and attending aftercare programs due to logistical constraints such as distance and transportation costs. These structural limitations hinder their ability to achieve economic stability and may slow down their progress toward independence and long-term recovery.

Furthermore, **strained or broken relationships** continue to affect the emotional and social well-being of recovering individuals. Participants shared experiences of mistrust, unresolved conflicts, and emotional distance within their families. These relational challenges stem from past behaviors and require time, effort, and mutual understanding to repair. The lack of strong family support may also impact their recovery process and overall stability.

The findings suggest that recovery is a multidimensional and continuous process that requires support beyond the individual level. By addressing these interconnected challenges, recovering drug dependents are more likely to achieve sustainable reintegration and long-term recovery.

Strategies Applied to Overcome Challenges

The findings reveal that recovering drug dependents utilize a combination of internal and external strategies to overcome challenges and sustain their recovery. These strategies include



strengthening self-discipline, seeking social support, engaging in positive activities, and applying coping mechanisms. Together, these approaches form a comprehensive framework that supports long-term sobriety and successful reintegration.

Self-discipline serves as the foundation of recovery, enabling individuals to resist triggers, regulate their behavior, and make responsible decisions. It reflects a shift from impulsive actions to goal-oriented thinking, where participants prioritize long-term outcomes over short-term gratification. This internal strength allows them to maintain control even in the absence of external supervision.

At the same time, **social support** plays a role in reinforcing recovery efforts. Family members, peers, and recovery networks provide emotional encouragement, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging. These relationships help individuals navigate challenges, reduce feelings of isolation, and maintain accountability in their recovery journey.

Engagement in positive activities further supports recovery by providing structure, purpose, and opportunities for personal growth. Through employment, community involvement, and advocacy, participants are able to rebuild their identity and reintegrate into society. These activities not only prevent relapse but also empower individuals to become productive members of their communities.

Finally, **coping mechanisms** enable individuals to manage emotional and psychological challenges effectively. Strategies such as emotional regulation, acceptance, and self-reflection help participants respond constructively to stress and avoid relapse. These skills enhance resilience and support continuous self-improvement.



Figure 1. Social Reintegration Framework



IV. CONCLUSION

SOP #1

The findings of the study show that recovering drug dependents describe their social reintegration after completing the Aftercare Program as a gradual and ongoing process, rather than a one-time outcome. Their experiences highlight that recovery goes beyond abstinence and involves continuous personal growth, rebuilding relationships, and re-engaging with society.

Participants emphasized rebuilding self and identity, where they develop self-worth, confidence, and a renewed sense of purpose. At the same time, restoring familial relationships plays a crucial role, as trust, communication, and emotional support from family strengthen their recovery journey.

In terms of adjusting to community life, participants shared that acceptance is not immediate but is gradually achieved through active participation, employment, and consistent demonstration of change. They also learn to manage stigma and negative perceptions while finding their place in the community.

Lastly, establishing hope and future aspirations serves as a strong motivation for sustaining recovery. Their goals, plans, and desire for a better future provide direction and reinforce their commitment to remain drug-free.

With this, the study concludes that social reintegration is a holistic and evolving process shaped by personal transformation, family support, community engagement, and future orientation.

SOP #2

Society plays a significant and multidimensional role in influencing the recovery and reintegration of recovering drug dependents. Recovery is not solely an individual process but is largely shaped by social interactions, relationships, and the environment in which individuals are reintegrated.

The study highlights that family and peer support serve as primary sources of guidance, motivation, and accountability. These relationships provide emotional stability and reinforce positive behaviors, helping individuals remain committed to their recovery journey.

At the community level, acceptance and support greatly influence participants' confidence and willingness to engage socially. When individuals experience trust and inclusion, they are more likely to participate in community activities and sustain positive change. However, stigma and negative perceptions may hinder reintegration, making acceptance a crucial factor in recovery.

Furthermore, opportunities for reintegration, such as employment, livelihood, and community roles, enable individuals to become productive members of society. These opportunities strengthen their sense of purpose, responsibility, and self-worth, reinforcing their recovery and social identity.



Institutional support, particularly through rehabilitation and aftercare programs, provides structure, guidance, and continuity of care. These programs help individuals apply learned behaviors in real-life situations and maintain consistency in their recovery.

The study concludes that societal influence—through support systems, acceptance, opportunities, and institutional guidance—plays a role in sustaining recovery and promoting successful reintegration, highlighting that recovery is a shared social responsibility.

SOP #3

The study revealed that recovering drug dependents encounter various social, emotional, and economic challenges during their reintegration, including stigma and social rejection, exposure to environmental triggers, emotional distress, and financial instability. These challenges highlight that recovery is a complex process that extends beyond treatment and requires continuous effort and resilience in real-life situations.

Despite these difficulties, participants demonstrated the use of various adaptive coping strategies to overcome these challenges and maintain their recovery. One key strategy is applying coping mechanisms, such as emotional regulation, self-reflection, and cognitive reframing, which enable them to manage negative emotions and avoid relapse. These strategies reflect increased self-awareness and personal control developed during rehabilitation and aftercare.

Another important strategy is engaging in positive and structured activities, such as employment, community involvement, and daily routines. These activities help individuals stay productive, avoid triggers, and reinforce a sense of purpose and responsibility.

In addition, participants emphasized the importance of seeking support from family, peers, and recovery networks, which provide guidance, encouragement, and accountability. This support system serves as a protective factor that strengthens their commitment to recovery.

The study concludes that while recovering individuals face significant challenges during reintegration, they are able to overcome these through a combination of personal coping strategies, active engagement in meaningful activities, and strong social support systems, enabling them to sustain recovery and continue their reintegration into society.

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