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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### RESTORATIVE JUSTICE: IN THE EYE OF THE OFFENDER

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#### ABSTRACT

Restorative justice focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for their actions. This study explored the lived experiences and insights of male offenders undergoing restorative justice in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental. The study was participated by five offenders undergoing restorative justice. The participants were chosen through purposive sampling. Interview and guide questions were used in gathering the data. The study used the qualitative approach using the phenomenological design. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used in analyzing the data and came up with three meaningful themes, namely: 1) unfortunate situation and presence of vices, 2) refining attitude for better living, and 3) opportunity for forgiveness and self-renewal. The study concludes that the Restorative Justice Program is an effective method in allowing offenders to ask for forgiveness, improving offender satisfaction, increasing offender compliance with restitution, and decreasing the recidivism of offenders. The study recommends to continually conduct monitoring of the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of offenders because they too need emotional support and care to assure that they are guided with in the program.

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## INTRODUCTION

Restorative justice is an approach to justice that focuses on addressing the harm caused by crime while holding the offender responsible for their actions by providing an opportunity for the parties directly affected by the crime – victims, offenders, and communities – to identify and address their needs in the aftermath of a crime (Department of Justice, 2018). Restorative justice is a mechanism in which the victim and the perpetrator, and, if applicable, any other person or community member affected by the crime, engage actively in the resolution of the crime, usually with the assistance of the facilitator (Halsey, Goldsmith, & Bamford, 2015). The three main restorative justice players are victims, perpetrators, and their treatment families, whose needs are for reparation, transparency, and reconciliation. (Wachtel, 2016). Benefits identified include the ability to meet the needs of both victims and offenders due to its goal of helping the offender acknowledge the harm they have done, aiding in reducing future harm, and reducing prison overcrowding (Beckett & Kartman, 2016). Probation persons found guilty of committing a crime considered not serious enough for incarceration may be ordered to complete their sentences under the community's supervision (probation).

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Probation inmates normally have to comply with certain requirements and regularly consult with their probation officers. Violating these requirements or failure to appear before probation officers can lead to more criminal penalties, including incarceration. In certain cases, criminals can be sentenced to a mixed term of imprisonment and probation (Nathan, 2015). The Parole and Probation Administration is the Philippine government agency under the Department of Justice responsible for offering a less expensive alternative to the detention of first-time offenders expected to respond to individualized community-based treatment services (Johnson, 2015). Republic Act no. 10707, an act amending Presidential Decree no. 968, otherwise known as the "Probation Law of 1976", as amended under Section 16 - Termination of Probation. After the probation period, and upon consideration of the report and recommendation of the probation officer, the court may order the final discharge of the probation officer upon finding that the probation officer has complied with the terms and conditions of the probation and that the case is deemed to have been terminated. The final discharge of the probationer shall operate to restore to him all civil rights lost or suspended as a result of his conviction and to extinguish his criminal liability as to the offense for which probation was granted (Philippine Laws & Jurisprudence Databank, 2015). We pay close attention to the psychological and emotional needs of victims, and yet we do not recognize the psychological and emotional needs of the offenders (Rogers, 2018). Often we find that offenders are victims themselves in many ways.

They are victims of violence, aggression, neglect, and many lack emotional support and care networks, which create psychological and emotional needs of their own (Lauwaert, & Aertsen, 2015). Other needs for offenders include the need for empowerment and the need to have their behaviors challenged (Sellors, 2015), and to share in the market for emotional and psychological needs to be addressed (Shuttleworth, 2018). Many offenders desire someone to listen to their truth. They, too, need emotional support and care. They may desire forgiveness, acceptance, and to know that they are not bad people but simply made bad decisions (Terrill, 2018). It is in the premise that the researchers conducted this study. Restorative justice is often community-based, which means that the programs work with victims and offenders. It has been the hope of policymakers that restorative justice will reduce court and prison overcrowding. It may contribute to that if the people sent to restorative programs would otherwise have gone to prison. Thus this study was conducted.

**Theoretical Framework:** This study was anchored on two theories: Reintegrative Shaming Theory by John Braithwaite (1989) and Cognitive Dissonance Theory by Leon Festinger (1957). Reintegrative Shaming Theory emphasizes the importance of shame in criminal punishment. This theory holds that punishments should focus on the offender's behavior rather than the offender's characteristics. Reintegrative shaming communicates shame to a wrongdoer in a way that encourages him or her to desist. According to Braithwaite (1989), Restorative Justice seeks to reintegrate the offender by acknowledging the shame of wrongdoing and offering ways to expiate that shame. Braithwaite believes that shaming is the key to controlling all types of crime. In particular, he distinguishes two kinds of shame. The first is, what he calls, stigmatizing shame, as it disintegrates the moral bonds between the offender and the community. The second is the reintegrative shame, which strengthens the moral bonds between the offender and the community. Stigmatization (bad shaming) increases crime, but reintegrative shaming decreases it. Braithwaite embraces the idea of 'hating the sin but loving the sinner,' claiming that offenders should be allowed to re-join their community as law-abiding citizens. However, to earn this 'right to a fresh start,' offenders must express remorse for their past conduct, apologize to their victims, and repair the harm caused by the crime (Braithwaite, 1989).

Moreover, restorative Justice focuses on repairing relationships that have been violated due to a crime. Therefore, an offender taking responsibility and providing the victim with a sincere apology becomes essential. Providing a nurturing environment of high support can make the mediation process more successful in both the victim and offender's growth. Because self-forgiveness involves admitting one's wrongdoing, it entails self-condemnation, which subsequently produces negative emotions, such as shame and guilt (Woodyatt *et al.*, 2017). This theory predicts that restorative justice processes will be more effective than criminal trials in reducing crime because by putting the problem rather than the person in the center, direct denunciation by someone you do not respect (e.g., a judge, the police) is avoided (Braithwaite, 1989). Another theory is the Cognitive Dissonance Theory. Theoretically, people feel anxious when experiencing cognitive dissonance and are therefore driven to recover an optimal state.

The extent of the current dissonance depends on the importance and intensity of the cognitions involved. Experience a higher degree of dissonance causes pressure and incentive to minimize dissonance. Findings from several studies show that dissonance occurs when people do not act by their act attitude (e.g., writing supportive arguments in favor of a topic that they do not agree upon; performing a task they disapprove) considered three ways to cope with cognitive dissonance: (a) changing one or several involved elements in the dissonance relationship (e.g., moving an opinion to fit a behavior), (b) adding new elements to reduce the inconsistency (e.g., adopting opinions which fit a behavior), and (c) reducing the importance of the involved elements (Festinger, 1962). However, studies have found that due to the cognitive dissonance that occurs during a face to face mediation, the offender grows empathy and acknowledges responsibility (Armour & Silva, 2018). The perspective of their crime and themselves changes, resulting in wanting to change one's behavior to reduce cognitive dissonance, potentially resulting in not returning to crime (Armour *et al.*, 2008). In general, these theories are the lens in this study as they provide a theoretical basis that supports the need for the participants for encountering unfortunate situation and the presence of vices, refining attitude for better living, and opportunity for forgiveness and self-renewal as a probationer of Restorative Justice.

### **Conceptual Framework**

**Restorative justice:** Is a method of healing and is used as an alternative to procedural justice. It is a form of social justice that addresses the person's needs by restoring the damage done to the victim or group. It is based on values that encourage reconciliation, building partnerships, and restoring relationships between victims and perpetrators, for the good of all those involved in the process (Gavrielides & Artinopoulou, 2014; Kurki, 2000; Gerkin, 2009). Restorative justice is a healing mechanism that is seen as an alternative to procedural justice. It is a form of social justice that addresses the person's needs by restoring the damage done to the victim or the community. It is based on values that encourage reconciliation, building partnerships, and restoring relationships between victims and perpetrators for the good of all those involved in the process (Gavrielides & Artinopoulou, 2014; Kurki, 2000; Gerkin, 2009).

In addition, restorative justice is a process of rehabilitation that is used as an alternative to procedural justice. It is a form of social justice that addresses the needs of the individual by repairing the damage done to the victim or society and is focused on values that encourage healing, building relationships, and restoring relationships between victims and perpetrators to the good of all those involved in the process (Gavrielides & Artinopoulou, 2014; Kurki, 2000; Gerkin, 2009). It plays an important role in today's criminal justice. Sherman (2003) mentioned that RJ is the prime but not the only example of the recent trend towards a more - emotionally intelligent approach to criminal justice. Moreover, restorative justice seeks to repair the harm done by the crime. Whenever practicable, the repair should be performed by the individuals responsible for the damage. That is why restorative justice values the attempts of perpetrators to make amendments. There tend to be four components or aspects of amendment: apology,

behavioral improvement, restitution, and generosity. Each element has the potential for helping the victim to heal and the offender to become a productive part of the community. In general, however, more than one may be involved in a remedial result. In individual cases, it is the victim and the perpetrator who determines which ones are necessary and feasible. That's why remedial experiences are critical (Center for Justice and Reconciliation, 2018).

**Unfortunate Situation and Presence of Vices:** The causes of crime are complex and have a multi-factor contribution, such as poverty, parental neglect, low self-esteem, alcohol, and substance addiction, which can explain why people commit crimes. Some people are at greater risk of becoming criminals due to the conditions in which they are born. People prefer to concentrate on personal vulnerability as a justification for committing a crime. If anyone tries to offend, it is their fault, and if they are caught, they should face the consequences (British Broadcasting Corporation, 2019).

**Refining Attitude for Better Living:** With persistence and practice, even the most extreme criminals will learn to improve their thinking about themselves and others. We understand that each criminal can decide whether to take the opportunity to reform or continue to break the law. Offenders know that they still possess the power to think freely, individual freedom to choose their way of life, whether or not the rest of us like it. By recognizing this freedom, we don't owe them something they don't already have. We clearly express regard for them as human beings (Wiley & Jack, 2016). Mostly, it is in everyone's interest to provide criminals with an opportunity to improve their thinking, their lives, and their place in society. This would not affect our application of the law. But it needs improvements in our thinking: to see criminals as fellow human beings and create meaningful opportunities for ex-offenders to engage in society (Wiley & Jack, 2016).

**Opportunity for forgiveness and self-renewal:** Offenders are allowed to be held accountable for the harm they have caused to the victims. In contrast, victims are allowed to express the harm they experienced due to the offender's actions. Ideally, it is in this bilateral process of Restorative Justice that forgiveness may occur (Umbreit *et al.*, 2015). Perpetrators of crime often suffer significant painful and destructive after-effects due to their actions, such as shame, guilt, and self-condemnation (Jenkins, 2018). Self-forgiveness may be important in terms of helping offenders address and perhaps heal from these self-created harms. The process of self-forgiveness may be the catalyst for personal growth' because those who self-forgive are more likely to feel, act and think constructively towards the self and see themselves as worthy (Jenkins, 2018). More so, this may still be the case even when offenders receive support and care from their family members and friends present in Restorative Justice or complete the agreement plan for victims because accepting full responsibility needs to be the first step towards genuine self-forgiveness (Woodyatt *et al.*, 2017). Self-forgiveness is also different from interpersonal forgiveness in terms of whether it requires reconciliation. Whereas interpersonal forgiveness does not indicate reconciliation between victims and offenders, self-forgiveness requires the offenders to reconcile with themselves. To forgive themselves, offenders need to face what they have done to the victims (Kim and Enright, 2014).

On the study of Berndsen *et al.* 727 Early work has provided evidence that victimized group members are more willing to extend intergroup forgiveness when the offending group offers an apology. For example, Canadians were more likely to forgive Americans for a friendly fire incident if they were led to believe American officials had apologized for the incident (Brown, Wohl, & Exline, 2008), and students insulted in an open letter by their university executive were more forgiving if they were led to believe the executive had apologized (Leonard, Mackie, & Smith, 2011). However, other experimental research (e.g., Philpot & Hornsey, 2008; Wohl, Hornsey, & Bennett, 2012; Wohl *et al.*, 2015) and examinations of real-world apologies (e.g., Chapman, 2007; Philpot & Hornsey, 2011; Wohl, Matheson, Branscombe, & Anisman, 2013) send a more pessimistic sign, it is important to recall that forgiveness starts from acknowledging resentment (thus, admitting that it is neither irrational nor immoral) and working through that to prevent hurting others via continuous desire for retribution (Enright & Fitzgibbons 2000, 2015). It is important to recall that forgiveness starts from acknowledging resentment (thus, admitting that it is neither irrational nor immoral) and working through that to prevent hurting others via continuous desire for retribution (Enright & Fitzgibbons 2000, 2015).

**Objectives of the Study:** This study explored the experiences and insights of male offenders undergoing Restorative Justice in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental.

## METHODS

**Research Design:** This study used the qualitative approach using the phenomenological design. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used in analyzing the data to come up with meaningful themes. Following this approach focuses on the wholeness of experiences and search for the essence of the experience. It attempts to eliminate everything that represents a prejudgment or presupposition. It requires looking at things openly, undisturbed by the habits of the natural world. The researcher forces the challenge to describe things as they are, to understand meanings and essences in the lights of intuition and self-reflection (Simon & Goes, 2011; Moustakas, 1994). This research design was considered in exploring the experiences of offenders undergoing restorative justice in Tangub City.

**Research Setting:** The study was conducted in Tangub City, a 4th class component city in Misamis Occidental. It is located in the southern part of the province of Misamis Occidental, forming a D-shape. It is bounded by Mt. Malindang in the north, Ozamiz City in the east, Panguil Bay in the south, and the municipality of Bonifacio in the west, and it consists of 55 barangays. Tangub City is touted to be the "Christmas Symbols Capital of the Philippines" because it is illuminated by different Christmas installations every year. Tangub City is a peaceful and safe place to visit. It has a crime index of 21.75 (low), which indicates that less crime happens in the area, and a safe index of 79.25 (high), which indicates that the place is safe to live and visit.

**Research Participants:** This study was participated by five male probationers who had undergone Restorative Justice. Snowball method was used in identifying the participants, and only those who met the following criteria were selected: 1) male probationers who had undergone Restorative Justice from the date of the gathering of data; 2) male probationers ages 18 years old and above, and 3) offender who expressed the willingness to participate in the study.

**Research Instruments:** The study utilized researcher-made interview guide questions in uncovering the insights of male offenders on restorative justice. The interview questions underwent a pilot testing before the actual gathering of data. This process ensured that the questions were suitable to solicit relevant information from the participants. For better understanding, the interview guide questions were translated into the vernacular. This method guaranteed the understandability of the questions and effective communication among the participants. The questions consisted of opening questions, core questions, and closing statements. Since the study utilized the transcendental phenomenology approach, the interview process used open-ended questions and narrative type of answers to solicit the insights of offenders on restorative justice exhaustively.

**Data Collection:** Before the actual interviews, the researcher first secured permission from the Dean of the Graduate School and the Head of Parole and Probation Administration for the study's conduct. Upon approval, the researcher proceeded to the identification of her potential informants. Before the actual interviews, all potential participants were identified based on the inclusion criteria set for this study. In ensuring the voluntary participation of all participants, they were required to sign the informed consent forms. The researcher guaranteed to protect their rights at all times by explaining to them that if they felt any discomfort during the interviews, they had the right not to answer the questions, or they could withdraw their participation without any penalty. The researcher ensured them that she valued their participation and their welfare was her highest priority during and after the study. After obtaining their voluntary participation, the researcher read the questions in a loud and clear manner to them. She also entertained clarifications related to the interview guide questions and the research process as a whole. After explaining the ethical protocol, the researcher arranged the place and schedule of each interview. She gave the participants a copy of my interview questions to help them recall their experiences. It was necessary to have a conducive atmosphere to interview with less noise coming from the vehicles or people. During the interviews, she was mindful of the gestures and the words used to prevent distraction and uncomfortable situations. The collection of data was conducted several times as necessary to acquire vital and relevant information. The use of face-to-face interviews through semi-structured, open-ended questions to explore the views, understanding, and even beliefs of the participants to cultivate their lived experiences as an offender under restorative justice. As cited by Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick (2008), the semi-structured interviews comprise key questions as a guide in interviews. The interview for every participant lasted approximately 10 to 20 minutes. Based on the responses, questions were used altered to foster more detailed and thoughtful answers. The researcher took notes at the interviews, made notes of the participant's behavior observed,

and added the memos to her journal. Moreover, a voice recorder was used to ensure the details of what had transpired during the interviews. Moreover the participants were notified that the files recorded were to be deleted after two years. Due to the threat of the Covid-19 virus, minimum health protocols were followed. Before conducting the actual interview, wearing of face mask and face shield and a two meters distance were strictly being followed to ensure that health protocol set by the local IATF has been followed and to avoid as well with the virus.

**Ethical Considerations:** Before the conduct of the study, approval from proper authorities was secured. The purpose of the research was clearly explained to the offenders before getting their full consent as participants. It was further explained that this research can cause no harm in any way and that the respondents can withdraw anytime if felt threatened. Protection of life's privacy and confidentiality, such as keeping the names of those involved and not exposing them in public, was secured. Respect for the dignity of research participants was a priority. Generally, this research ensured that there will be no deception or exaggeration about its aims and objectives.

**Data Analysis:** In this study, Moustakas (1994) data reduction technique of phenomenological reduction was used. The transcripts of all participants gathered from the interviews were analyzed using the methods of Moustakas. The following are the steps in the phenomenological reduction which serves as guide in analyzing the data gathered: (1) Bracketing, (2) Horizontalization, (3) Clustering into Themes, (4) Textural Description, (5) Structural Description, and (6) Textural-Structural Synthesis.

*Bracketing* is an approach used to mitigate the effects of preconceived notions and perceptions held before the study has started. It is a process of suspending judgments and biases, or 'epoche.' Consequently, the researcher reached a deep level of inquiry from topic and population selection, interview design, collection and interpretation, and dissemination of research findings.

*Horizontalization* is technically referring to the listing of all the verbatim expressions that have bearing in the study. Initially, I look into each statement with equal value. Then, statements which are found irrelevant, repetitive, overlapping, and outside the scope of the study, was ignored. Horizons, which are the remaining sections after the data has been polished, are considered as the constituent and meaningful parts of the phenomenon. According to Moustakas, "horizons are unlimited, and horizontalization is a never-ending process" (Moustakas, 1994).

*Clustering* is the third step in obtaining inferences from the study. It involves reduction of experiences to invariant horizons, creating core themes, and validation of the invariant horizons using multiple data sources. In reducing the statements into horizons, I clustered it into themes and ensure that each theme is implied with only one meaning. This is considered as placing the phenomenon into a "textural language." To validate the invariant horizons obtained from the study, I review findings of research studies using other methods other than the data-gathering methods being used in the study like observation, field note-taking, focus group

interviews and related literature. This validation process is crucial to the accuracy and clarity of the representations.

*Textural description*, or 'what occurred,' refers to an account that describes the perception of the phenomenon. In obtaining the textural description of the experience of the participants, I used the verbatim excerpts in the interview, and provide a narration of the meaning units which were derived from the themes. Structural description, or how it occurred', is the integration of imaginative variation, which is an ingenious outlook and insights, to the textural description. An imaginative variation is considered as the mental experiment on analyzing the details and structures of the participants' experience by being detached from natural inclination through *epoché*. It is appended in each paragraph of textural descriptions to generate a structural description.

In *textural-structural synthesis* process, collated the meaning units of each of the participants and develops from it a composite of textural and structural descriptions that are common to them. A narrative or synthesis represents all of the participants written in a third person perspective. The primary goal of this final step of Moustakas' method is to obtain the essence of the experience of the phenomenon. The researcher utilized the NVivo software to validate and check the themes. The software was intended solely to analyze data in qualitative research. It identified the codes that emerged from the statement of the participants.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the themes extracted from the transcripts of the interviews. The transcripts were subjected to reduction, coding, and extraction of emerging themes before developing the final themes. The themes represented the meanings of their experiences and insights of male offenders undergoing Restorative Justice. The participants of this study were all male offenders who undergone Restorative Justice. Participant 1 is forty-four years old, married, committed homicide, and undergoing Restorative Justice for one year and two months. Participant 2 is thirty-nine years old, married, committed acts of lasciviousness, and undergoing Restorative Justice for eight months. Participant 3 is thirty-three years old, single, committed robbery, and undergoing Restorative Justice for one year and seven months. Participant 4 is twenty-nine years old, single, committed illegal possession of firearms, and undergoing Restorative Justice for five months. Participant 5 is twenty-five years old, single, committed R.A 9165, and undergoing Restorative Justice for two years and three months. There are three emerging themes based on the participants' responses, namely: 1) unfortunate situation and presence of vices, 2) refining attitude for better living, and; 3) opportunity for forgiveness and self-renewal.

**Unfortunate Situation and Presence of Vices:** People with pro-criminal attitudes believe that crime is part of life or beyond their influence, and they prefer to make excuses for why they do it. People with non-criminal behaviors understand the challenges of crime and want to live a different lifestyle. People also commit crimes because they believe it's going to benefit them rather than hurt them. Criminal conduct is learned from receiving rewards for crime and anticipating positive things to happen.

But, since the cost of crime is more than benefits, people have more to lose. They committed crimes because of some factors that push them to do it.

The unfortunate situation of the participants and their vices such as poverty, peer pressure, anger, alcohol, and drug abuse lead them to commit criminal acts. This is why control mechanisms are so important. The following are the statements given by the participants.

*"There was a time that my neighbor and I have conflict, but I just ignored it once. He says something which I do not agree with, and this made me felt like I'm being insulted. For the second time around, he repeatedly did this kind of action towards me, and this time I'm drunk. My patience towards that person has already been filled off, and this makes me more want to kill him (P1)."*

*"I'm drunk during that time, and I been watching this woman for a long time because of her sexy body and the way she dresses. I'm just a man that every time she passed by, I immediately whistle. I wasn't able to control my emotions, and bad thoughts took over my mind to do those bad actions (P2)."*

The relationship between anger and violence makes perfect sense when you realize that anger, particularly when it escalates into a rage, is an active emotion fuelled by adrenaline. Anger demands action, and aggression offers a cathartic relief or response to the adrenaline-driven demands of anger. Significantly, a criminal offender who attacks in blind rage is often unable to justify his aggressive actions. Such acts of violence committed in a blind rage are also referred to as passion crimes (Scott, 2017). Alcohol plays a large role in criminal activities and violence. Excessive drinking can lower inhibitions, impair a person's judgment, and increase the risk of aggressive behaviors. Researchers looked at the relationship between alcohol, drugs, and crime. Data show that engaging in prolonged drinking or binge drinking dramatically raises the likelihood of violent offenses. Giving in to the negative effects of alcohol will change your life in a moment. Not only jeopardizing the future but also putting others in danger. (Carol, 2019).

In most of the situation, poverty is one of the aspects ever thought to be related to criminal activity because it is an opportunity for the poor to acquire materials that they could otherwise not afford. Another is peer pressure that can be defined as the influence placed on us by others in our peer group to commit or engage in an act that we normally would not consider. Friends exert a considerable influence on people's behavior. They can stimulate positive but also negative behaviors. The people we spend much of our time with would significantly affect our criminal behavior and our acts. It's important to have a good relationship with non-criminals. These are supported by the following answers of the participants:

*"I am so problematic that time in financial. I told my friends about my situation because I wanted to borrow some money from them, but they wanted me to come with them to conduct illegal operations. I don't want to come, but they told me that we could get a lot of money as our share, and that's the reason why I did it (P3)."*

*"I am encouraged to sold prohibited drugs because I saw how quick to get the money since many are buying of these and my friends encourage me as well to do it (P5)."*

*"I always bring my firearms because if there will be unnecessary situations occurred, I can defend myself. I'm about to go to Ozamis City for a cockfight, and of course, I bring my firearms just for my self-defense in case something will happen, but unfortunately, there was a checkpoint, and that leads me to be arrested (P4)."*

Depending on the circumstances and the law in a state, the fact that you possessed, carried, or used a gun illegally may not prevent you from defending yourself against criminal charges by claiming that you needed it for self-defense. Even if you're allowed to use that defense, illegal gun possession could cast you in a suspicious light with law enforcement or complicate an already potentially complicated case if you have to use the weapon in self-defense (Nolo, 2019).

**Refining Attitude for Better Living:** This theme emerged from the male offenders' claim of how effective the Restorative Justice program to them and how this helps them become better people. One approach that will help people move away from crime is to do something called "Change of Identity." This means beginning to see yourself as a non-criminal rather than a criminal. It's important to know which behaviors will make your life easier and lead to acts that will take you down the wrong road. The following were the statements given by the participants.

*"This helps me to ask an apology to my victim and his family. Though they don't forgive me, at least a little guilt was removed from me. The program enlightened me to become a good citizen in society, and the activities influenced me to become a religious person (P1)."*

*"It's effective to me in the sense that if not because of this program, I am still stuck in jail now. It's very effective to me since I'm afraid now to do bad things, and it allows me also to ask for an apology to my victim (P2)."*

*"Very effective in the sense that because of this program I quit all my vices, and now I'm doing my best to avoid committing bad acts because if I do so, I may be back in the jail (P3)."*

*"Before, I stroll everywhere. My parents were so worried about me because I have all the vices and it makes me thin and unhealthy, but now I don't have any vices, though I drink it's just occasionally and I also gained weight. Before, I'm ugly, but now I look better. Before, when my friends encourage me to go with them to steal something, I easily said yes, but now I'm already the one who encourages them to change for the better so that they will not end up like me (P4)."*

*"It is way better if we do not engage in any vices because it makes our body healthy and, of course, makes me more handsome. No matter how hard life is, do not engage in doing bad actions. Instead, I will pray that God will not leave me alone (P5)."*

Studies have found that due to the cognitive dissonance that occurs during a face to face mediation, the offender grows in

empathy and acknowledges responsibility (Armour & Silva, 2018). The perspective of their crime and themselves changes, resulting in changing one's behavior to reduce cognitive dissonance, potentially resulting in not returning to crime (Armour, 2017).

#### **Opportunity for Forgiveness and Self-Renewal:**

The participants see the opportunity to forgive and renew themselves as they engaged to Restorative Justice. As a result of taking responsibility, the participants experienced various negative emotions, including guilt and shame. When you did anything wrong, it's perfectly natural to feel bad about it. These feelings of guilt and regret served as a springboard for positive behavioral change. The following were the statements given by the participants.

*"I applied restorative justice because I regret a lot that I let myself carried away by my bad thoughts. I wanted to ask forgiveness from my victim and as well as with his entire family because I know that I made a big mistake. I'm just a human who carried out by anger (P1)."*

*"I engaged in this kind of program because I am so ashamed to my victim and to my family for what I have done. I wanted to ask for forgiveness to my victim and her entire family and as well as to my family (P2)."*

*"I applied Restorative Justice because I regretted what I have done. I wanted to ask for forgiveness from my victim and as well as to my family. I want to change for myself to become a better person (P3)."*

*"I applied Restorative Justice because I want to ask for forgiveness for what I have done and to be able to change how they look at me. Since I still have a chance to change my mindset, I'm going to make sure to change it to be able to bring back the trust of the people and as well as my family (P4)."*

*"I applied Restorative Justice because I want to ask for forgiveness to our God and to the families that I have ruined the dreams of their family members because they become addicted. I wanted them to forgive me because I am one reason why their future has been ruined. I always wanted to change for myself and my family, but I always carried away with temptations. But now I am so determined to change myself, and that it's why I engaged in this program (P5)."*

One way to move your guilt is to take action that would rectify your mistakes. Apologize if it's asked for, and look for ways to make it happen to those you've been upset. It might seem like this aspect of the process helps only the person you have hurt, but there's something in it for you as well. Fixing your mistake means you're never going to have to wonder if you should have done more (Whited *et al.*, 2015). The process of self-forgiveness may be the catalyst for personal growth' because those who self-forgive are more likely to feel, act, and think constructively towards the self and see themselves as worthy. This benefit is evident in a recent study of criminal offenders' perceptions of offense-related effects and the meaningfulness of forgiveness (Jenkins, 2018).

## Summary

This study explored the experiences and insights of male offenders who have undergone restorative justice. The study used the qualitative approach using the phenomenological design. Moustakas' transcendental phenomenology was used in analyzing the data to come up with meaningful themes. The Snowball method was used in identifying the participants, and only those who met the following criteria were selected. The study was conducted in Tangub City, Misamis Occidental, from November – December 2020. Ten participants were interviewed during the formulation of significant statements and the formulated meanings, but only five participants' statements were included in data saturation.

## Findings

Based on the phenomenological study, three central themes were identified: unfortunate situation and presence of vices, refining attitude for better living, and opportunity for forgiveness and self-renewal. These participants commit a crime because of various factors and life experiences. All the participants shared that they engaged and actively participate in the process of restorative justice because they wanted to ask forgiveness from their victims and families and to renew themselves to become a better version of themselves and to have a brighter future. The five participants revealed that restorative justice gives them a life-changing opportunity to refine their attitude for a better living with the fear of the laws of the state and God.

## CONCLUSION

Restorative Justice is effective in the eye of the offenders in Tangub City. These offenders experienced an unfortunate situation that leads them to become a criminal. Still, because of restorative justice, they experienced a life-changing opportunity to ask forgiveness from their victims and families, refining their attitude for a better living away from criminality and an opportunity for forgiveness and self-renewal. Restorative Justice Program is an effective method in allowing offenders to ask forgiveness, improving offender satisfaction, increasing offender compliance with restitution, and decreasing the recidivism of offenders. It gives them the chance to change for the better and live a happy and contented life with their family.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion of the study, it is highly recommended that offenders should be encouraged to engage in Restorative Justice by creating programs or drives that will enlighten them to accept the responsibilities of their violence that they have committed and accept the challenge to change and become a better version of their self. Second, encourage the society to be open-minded about the offenders who have undergone Restorative Justice by creating community drives to be able to inform the society that this group of offenders decided to change their path for the better. Third, continually constant monitoring with the physical, mental, and emotional aspects of offenders because they too need emotional support and care to assure that they are guided with the program. Lastly, implement informal programs like work or job

placement/referrals wherein probationer is referred for work or job placement through the officer's efforts, contact, or information.

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