

From Resilience to Success: An Appreciative Inquiry into the Experiences of Criminologist Licensure Examination Passers

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Publication Date: 2025/08/05

Abstract: Academic achievements stand as pivotal milestones in professional development, reflecting the intricate connection between diligent study habits and academic success. This study delved into the success stories of Criminologist Licensure Examination Passers in Cagayan de Oro, Northern Mindanao, Philippines, aiming to uncover the multifaceted factors that influenced their triumphs and the challenges they encountered along the way. Employing a qualitative approach through Appreciative Inquiry, ten participants, strategically selected *via* purposive sampling, were subjected to in-depth interviews guided by a meticulously crafted interview schedule. The collected data were analyzed using the 4D Model: Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny. Results revealed the following themes: The Role of Support, Resilience, and Determination in Achieving success; diverse career aspirations: academic, law enforcement, and community impact; holistic preparation for success: strategic study, self-care, and support; and personal and professional transformation through achieving the licensure. ultimately, the successful navigation of the licensure examination is a testament to the synergistic interplay of personal attributes, external resources, and strategic preparation. Based on these findings, it is recommended that aspiring criminologists prioritize the cultivation of robust support networks, personal resilience, and holistic preparation strategies to enhance their chances of success.

Keywords: Board Passers, Career Aspirations, Determination, Holistic Preparation, Resilience, Support, Transformation.

How to Cite: Remart C. Salon; Edmar R. Daniel (2025) From Resilience to Success: An Appreciative Inquiry into the Experiences of Criminologist Licensure Examination Passers. *International Journal of Innovative Science and Research Technology*, 10(5), 4798-4814. <https://doi.org/10.38124/ijisrt/25may681>

I. INTRODUCTION

Professional board examinations like the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE) are essential in ensuring the competence and readiness of future criminologists (Pueblo et al., 2024). These standardized assessments uphold the profession's integrity, particularly vital in criminology, where expertise influences public safety and justice (Ridgeway, 2019; Shipley & McAfee, 2023). Criminologists play key roles in crime prevention, investigations, rehabilitation, and policy (Airout, 2024), applying scientific methods to support safer communities and improve justice systems (Kraska et al., 2020; Rotter & Compton, 2022).

Passing the CLE not only grants professional credentials (Moriarty & Parsons, 2024) but also reflects a commitment to excellence and mastery of core competencies like forensic science and criminal law (Hartley et al., 2020). Licensure opens diverse career paths—from law enforcement to academia—and strengthens ethical and evidence-based practices in the justice system (Gunnison & Helfgott, 2021). It also advances criminology as a respected discipline through

rigorous screening and continuous learning (Hillyard et al., 2021; Rappaport, 2020; Elisha et al., 2023).

However, CLE passers often overcome financial hardships, especially those from low-income backgrounds who juggle academic and work responsibilities (Colanggo et al., 2024; Alampay et al., 2019; Tatsi et al., 2024). Academically, students face demanding subjects and emotional stress tied to high expectations and the fear of failure (Montoya, 2021; Kraska et al., 2020; Sangeetha, 2024). Societal pressure also plays a role, as communities place prestige and hope on the criminology profession (de Graaf & Wiertz, 2019; Batton & Wright, 2019; Reeve, 2024).

Amid these challenges, success stories offer hope, showcasing how resilience and preparation can overcome adversity (Russ-Eft et al., 2024; Hale, 2023; Shirvani et al., 2024). Yet, existing literature often overlooks these positive narratives (Pueblo et al., 2024), focusing instead on barriers rather than the strategies and support systems that foster success (Alarilla, 2024; McNair et al., 2022).

This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the lived experiences of CLE passers from Southern De Oro Philippines College (Basa et al., 2024). It highlights key lessons, study strategies, and support networks that enabled students to navigate challenges, emphasizing perseverance and adaptive coping in a regional context (Abas et al., 2024). It also underscores their personal and professional growth, offering a source of inspiration for future criminologists and contributing to broader improvements in criminology education (Chin, 2024).

II. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The Role of Support, Resilience, and Determination in Achieving Success. Passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination involves a dynamic blend of external support, personal resilience, and unwavering determination. Participants emphasized the importance of Support and Guidance, particularly from study groups and mentors, in clarifying concepts and maintaining focus, consistent with social learning and social support theories (De Felice et al., 2023; Yin et al., 2024). Alongside this, Personal Growth and Resilience emerged as crucial—manifested through self-discipline, time management, and mental fortitude amid financial and emotional hardships (Salerno & Margolies, 2022). Motivation and Persistence—both intrinsic and extrinsic—fueled sustained effort, reinforcing the significance of grit in overcoming obstacles (Ryan & Deci, 2024; Hoskeri, 2024). Participants also credited Confidence and Reflection, noting that self-belief and regular self-assessment enhanced exam readiness and reduced anxiety, with personal faith often serving as emotional reinforcement (Green et al., 2022).

Diverse Career Aspirations: Academic, Law Enforcement, and Community Impact. Participants aspired to varied roles, with career goals acting as both motivation and envisioned outcomes of licensure. Academic and Educational Pursuits reflected a desire to advance criminology through teaching and scholarship, aligned with goals of discipline

development and societal perception (Smith, 2024; Sansone & Tang, 2021). Law Enforcement and Government Roles were seen as traditional paths driven by public service motivations, with licensure a key requirement (Akmal & Ramadhan, 2023; Brandstätter & Bernecker, 2022). Others focused on Community Impact and Service, seeing criminologists as agents of change in rehabilitation, policy, and crime prevention—roles where licensure bolsters credibility (King, 2022).

Holistic Preparation for Success: Strategic Study, Self-Care, and Support. Preparation for the CLE requires more than academic diligence. Structured and Effective Study Practices, such as time-bound schedules, mastery of concepts, and the use of practice tests, supported effective learning (Nilson & Goodson, 2021; Yan, Z., Brown et al., 2020). Personalization and Self-Care strategies like aligning study habits with cognitive peaks and prioritizing rest reinforced the connection between wellness and performance (Anghel, 2024; Alsharif et al., 2024). Comprehension and Critical Thinking were key, with deep learning and problem-solving abilities essential for success (Fries et al., 2021; Tarasova et al., 2025). Finally, Support and Motivation, from peer networks to personal affirmations, sustained emotional well-being and motivation (Kobe, 2023; Nilson & Zimmerman, 2023).

Personal and Professional Transformation through Achieving Licensure. Passing the CLE catalyzed meaningful transformation. Personal Growth and Confidence were heightened, as participants experienced stronger self-efficacy and readiness for future challenges (Bandura, 2023). Professional Growth and Purpose followed, with licensure marking a shift toward professional identity and a readiness to uphold criminology's values (Richards & Malomo, 2025; Tidmarsh, 2022). Yet, a Reality Check also emerged—participants realized that success in exams doesn't immediately equate to career stability, highlighting the importance of career guidance post-licensure (Valizade et al., 2023).

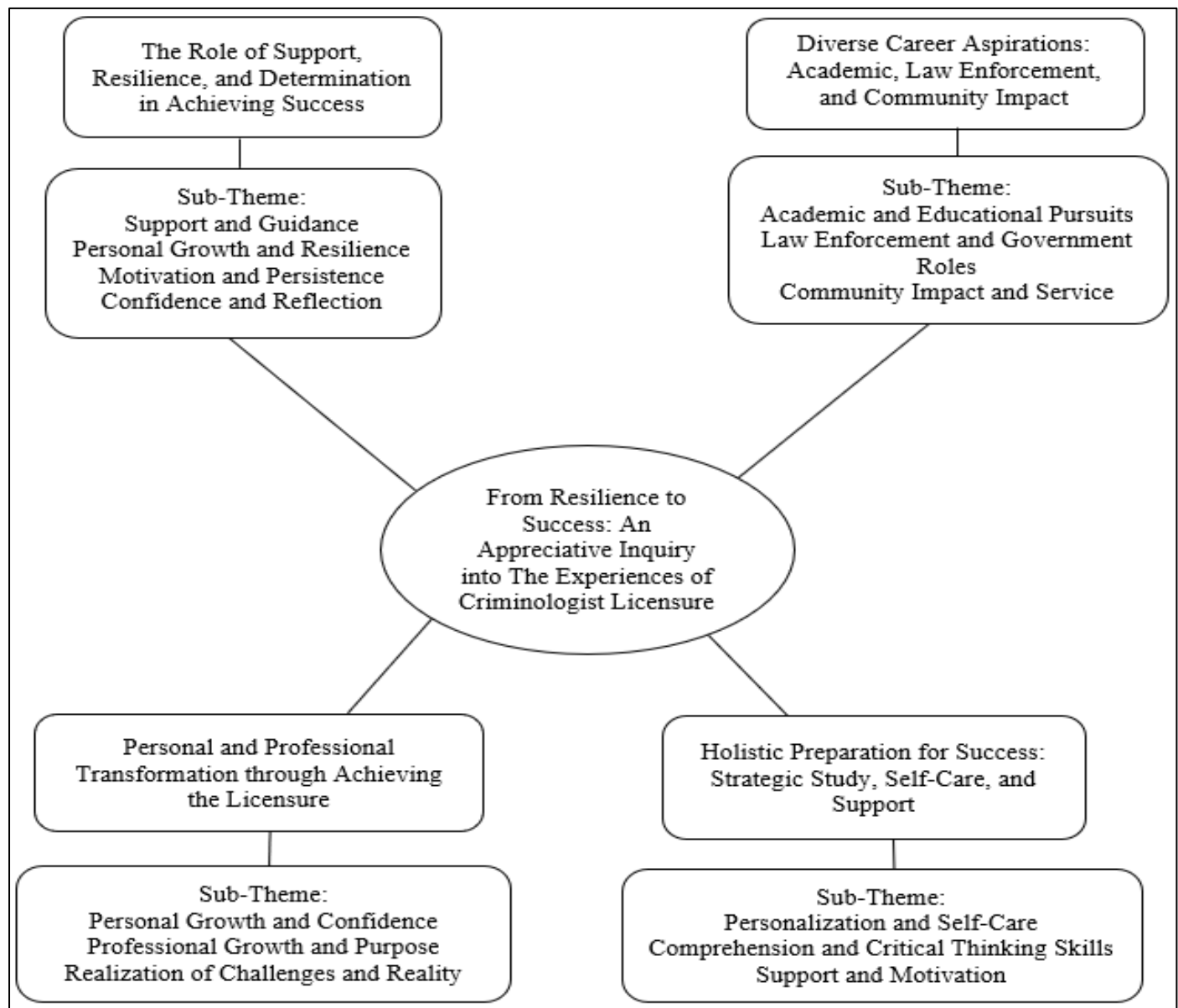


Fig 1 Schematic Diagram of the Study

➤ Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the experiences of criminology board passers who faced multiple attempts before successfully passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination (CLE), using the 4D Model of Appreciative Inquiry as a framework. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

- What positive experiences and strengths did the participants identify in their journey toward passing the licensure examination?
- What is the vision of the participants for their careers as criminologists?
- What specific strategies or practices do participants recommend to others preparing for the licensure examination?
- How has passing the board exam changed the participants' outlook on life and their profession?

III. METHOD

The study employed a qualitative research design using Appreciative Inquiry (AI), a strength-based approach focusing on positive experiences and successful outcomes (Trainor et al., 2021; Stavros et al., 2021; Lewis, 2024). Conducted at a CHED-accredited HEI in Cagayan de Oro City with a long-standing criminology program, the research involved ten purposively selected first-time Criminologist Licensure Examination passers. Participants shared their success journeys through in-depth, semi-structured interviews guided by a translated questionnaire, structured around the AI framework (Cockell & McArthur, 2009). Ethical standards were strictly followed, including informed consent, confidentiality, and participant respect, with approval from the Misamis University Research Ethics Committee (MUREC). Data collection involved audio recordings, note-taking, and observations, analyzed thematically through AI's 4D cycle—discovering strengths, envisioning success, designing strategies, and committing to

positive outcomes (Cooperrider, 2005)—to identify resilience, support systems, and transformative learning experiences among successful criminology graduates.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study involved ten licensed criminologists who graduated from a private Higher Education Institution in Cagayan de Oro City. Selected through purposive sampling, they shared diverse experiences with the Criminologist Licensure Examination—ranging from first-time passers to those who overcame setbacks. Through in-depth interviews, participants offered insights into the challenges faced, support systems used, coping strategies, and factors influencing their success.

Using the 4D model of Appreciative Inquiry, four key themes emerged: the importance of support, resilience, and determination; varied career goals in academia, law enforcement, and community service; holistic preparation through study, self-care, and support; and the personal and professional transformation brought by licensure. These themes highlight the essential elements behind their achievements.

V. THE ROLE OF SUPPORT, RESILIENCE, AND DETERMINATION IN ACHIEVING SUCCESS

The role of support, resilience, and determination in achieving success highlights the interconnected roles of social support, resilience, and determination as essential in helping individuals overcome challenges and pass the Criminologist Licensure Examination. In this study, *support* refers to encouragement from family, friends, mentors, and peers; *resilience* is the capacity to adapt and recover from setbacks; and *determination* is the persistent commitment to one's goal.

Three key sub-themes emerged: Support and Guidance Systems, Motivation and Persistence, and Confidence and Reflection. Participants emphasized the vital role of social support in sustaining motivation during periods of self-doubt and fatigue. This support formed a foundation of trust and shared purpose that enabled them to persist. Resilience was evident in their ability to transform pressure and setbacks into opportunities for growth, demonstrating adaptability and inner strength. Determination, rooted in a deep sense of purpose and responsibility, empowered participants to remain focused and driven throughout their preparation.

Their collective experiences show that success is not achieved in isolation but through consistent effort, resilient mindset, and strong social connections. These findings align with research in social psychology, which underscores the role of support networks in reducing stress and enhancing goal achievement (Jolly et al., 2021). Resilience, as a dynamic process of adaptation amid adversity, is well-documented in psychological literature (Rachmad, 2022). Motivation and goal-setting theories also support the link between strong purpose, sustained effort, and success (Swann

et al., 2021). Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory further explains how self-efficacy and social support influence behavior, determination, and resilience.

➤ Support and Guidance

Support and guidance were crucial in the participants' journey to passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination. Encouragement from study groups, mentors, family, and friends provided emotional strength, strategic direction, and a sense of belonging. These support systems helped manage stress, boost confidence, and maintain focus throughout the preparation process.

Beyond academic aid, participants described receiving emotional, psychological, and even spiritual reinforcement. For example, Participant 2 credited their study group and mentors with offering structure and helping target weak areas, while Participant 6 highlighted the role of faith and the encouragement of loved ones, viewing success as both a personal and collective achievement.

• The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:

"Having a supportive study group and mentors provided guidance, motivation, and clarity on difficult topics. Practice tests and mock exams helped identify my weak areas, allowing me to focus my study time more effectively." (P2)

"Always pray and trust in what you are praying for, then those who have supported you since day 1 will be your strength." (P6)

The participants' experiences reveal that support systems played a critical dual role in both academic preparation and emotional resilience. Mentors provided clarity and strategic guidance, simplifying complex topics and offering motivation, while peers in study groups fostered collaboration and mutual encouragement (Zachary & Fain 2022). Family and friends offered unconditional emotional backing, affirming the participants' worth even during setbacks (Windley 2025). These combined sources of support strengthened the participants' determination and helped sustain their focus and morale throughout the licensure journey (Trehwella 2024).

The importance of support and guidance is deeply woven into the participants' narratives of success. Their achievements were not individual feats but collective triumphs shaped by networks of encouragement and belief (Kreager et al. 2025). Mentorship, peer collaboration, family reassurance, and spiritual faith collectively provided a foundation that made the demanding process more manageable and meaningful (Deniro 2025; Becker 2023). These testimonies highlight that behind academic success lies a web of relationships that cultivate perseverance and transform challenges into empowering experiences.

• The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:

"Personal growth and discipline. By this, I learnt how to manage my time effectively, especially as I am studying again as a career, and I am also reviewing for the upcoming board exam."

Next is resilience and mental strength. Because of this, I learnt how to stay calm under pressure and keep moving forward despite setbacks.” (P9)

“In passing my board examination, I’ve gone through a lot of hardship financially and also how I be able to get my focus upon reviewing. For me, my positive experiences are I learned how to stay persistent during tough times and also stay positive since everything will be alright as long you work to make it happen.” (P10)

The experiences of Participants 10 and 9 reveal how personal resilience shaped their journey toward licensure success. Participant 10 emphasized time management and mental fortitude, showing that discipline involves not just structure but emotional regulation under stress. Meanwhile, Participant 9 faced financial hardship and personal struggles that tested their focus but ultimately deepened their perseverance and optimism. Their stories suggest that adversity, when met with determination and a positive mindset, can foster significant personal growth (Preller et al. 2023; Chernis & Adler 2023; Ibarra 2023). Both participants highlighted persistence—not just enduring hardship, but believing that sustained effort would lead to success.

These reflections illustrate that passing the licensure exam was part of a broader journey of transformation. Participants developed the capacity to manage stress, juggle responsibilities, and stay focused despite emotional and financial challenges (Donahue 2024; Lopez 2024). Their growth in resilience and self-mastery will continue to serve them as future criminologists, reinforcing the importance of cultivating these traits early. Educational institutions and review centers can support this by integrating programs that build time management, emotional regulation, and a growth mindset, helping students prepare not only for exams but for long-term professional success (Cabanias 2024).

➤ *Motivation and Persistence*

Throughout the participants’ journeys to passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination, motivation and persistence emerged as driving forces that sustained them through trials, fatigue, and uncertainty. Their reflections show that the path to success was neither smooth nor easy; it required an enduring commitment to their goals even when circumstances made it difficult to continue. The participants’ motivations were often deeply personal, rooted in a sense of responsibility, a desire to honor their sacrifices, and an unshakable determination to achieve what they had set out to accomplish. Persistence, in their stories, was not simply about refusing to give up—it was about consistently finding reasons to push forward, even when external conditions were unfavorable or progress was slow. Motivation fueled their vision, while persistence fortified their actions, creating a powerful synergy that ultimately led to their success.

• *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“For me, it is my experience as a working student for almost 7 years, I promise that one day there will be a positive result of my sacrifices. Trials and challenges give me so much motivation and dedication to fight and make it worth it.” (P4)

“I think the aspect that really strengthens my ability to pass is my persistence attitude. I know myself that once I want something, I’ll do things to have it whatever it takes. I think that I might pass or fail the exam but the only I’m certain for is to do it over and over again but fortunately, I have it in my first attempt. Alhamdulillah.” (P7)

“All hard work pays off.” (P5)

Participant accounts highlight how sustained motivation and persistence were central to their success. Participant 4’s story illustrates motivation built over years of balancing work and study, transforming sacrifices into purpose-driven effort. Participant 7 emphasized persistence, showing that setbacks were met not with defeat but with determination to try again—“do it over and over again.” Participant 5’s statement, “All hard work pays off,” echoes the collective mindset of the group: success stems from long-term dedication. Motivation served as the emotional anchor, while persistence powered daily effort, creating a dynamic where purpose and discipline worked hand in hand (Cunningham 2021; Dantzer 2024).

These narratives show that success in the Criminologist Licensure Examination depended less on exceptional talent and more on the resolve to continue despite challenges. Motivation gave meaning to their efforts, while persistence ensured progress, even in uncertainty. Their stories offer a compelling reminder that true achievement is built on consistent, determined action grounded in belief and purpose—where a persistent heart, fueled by deep motivation, becomes the key to overcoming adversity (Pennings et al. 2020; Fathi et al. 2024).

➤ *Confidence and Reflection*

Confidence and reflection emerged as essential factors in the participants’ success in the Criminologist Licensure Examination. Confidence was described not as arrogance, but as the result of thorough preparation, prayer, and belief in one’s efforts. Participant 8 shared how answering with seriousness and confidence contributed to their success, while Participant 3 simply stated, “I Pray and Study,” underscoring a balance between academic effort and spiritual grounding. These experiences reflect a disciplined approach where confidence was built through consistent study, self-assessment, and spiritual reinforcement (Cunningham 2021; Dantzer 2024; Pennings et al. 2020). The synergy of preparation and reflection helped participants manage pressure, remain focused, and perform effectively during the exam.

The findings emphasize that success was not solely attributed to intelligence, but to a holistic process involving the mind, heart, and spirit. Incorporating reflective practices—such as prayer or mindfulness—supported a calm and focused mindset during high-stress moments (Fathi et al. 2024; Kinsella et al. 2025). Educators and review centers are encouraged to promote both academic rigor and mental-spiritual well-being through strategies like self-assessment and reflective activities (Driscoll 2024). This integrative approach highlights how confidence and reflection together

create a resilient foundation for overcoming academic challenges.

➤ *Academic and Educational Pursuits*

Many participants expressed a strong desire to pursue academic careers, seeing education not just as a job but as a way to make lasting contributions to criminology. Their commitment to teaching, research, and advanced studies reflects a drive to develop future criminologists and elevate the profession. For them, academia offers a platform to grow personally while shaping minds, challenging misconceptions, and promoting excellence in the field.

• *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“My vision is that, even if I will not be part of the Tri-bureau, I know that I can contribute to the academe. I can see myself finishing a doctorate degree.” (P1)

“As to me, my vision in my career as a criminologist is in academia. I would like to pursue a career in teaching and becoming a professor.” (P2)

“I have a vision to exercise my profession in the academe realm to help and address the negative stigma for the criminologist and the criminology profession.” (P7)

Participants 1, 2, and 7 express a strong appreciation for education as a catalyst for societal progress. Participant 1’s aspiration to contribute to academia despite not joining the Tri-bureau reflects a belief in impactful service beyond traditional roles, with their goal of earning a doctorate showing commitment to academic excellence. Participant 2 views teaching as a personal calling, aiming to shape future criminologists, while Participant 7 emphasizes using education to challenge negative stereotypes about the profession, signaling a form of social advocacy (Zambrano 2024).

Their shared interest in academia points to a belief in education’s transformative power for both individuals and the broader criminology field. Through teaching, research, and leadership, they aim to raise educational standards and promote deeper understandings of justice and public safety (Tietjen 2025). Their visions underscore the role of academia in fostering growth and systemic change (Magolda 2023).

These future-oriented, service-driven goals affirm their commitment to lifelong learning, excellence, and societal contribution (Edwards 2022; Nylander et al. 2022). By engaging in the academe, they position themselves as mentors and reformers shaping criminology’s future (Tietjen 2025).

➤ *Law Enforcement and Government Roles*

A major vision shared by the participants is serving in law enforcement and government roles, reflecting a strong commitment to justice, order, and security. For many, joining uniformed services or government institutions is both a professional goal and a fulfillment of duty and patriotism. They aspire to apply their criminology knowledge by working in the Tri-bureau—particularly the PNP, BJMP, or BFP—or in other public service roles. These aspirations demonstrate a

desire to actively contribute to societal protection and the implementation of justice.

• *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“To work as uniform personnel or to work in any government agency.” (P3)

“For me, it is to finish studies and become a law enforcement officer someday.” (P4)

“I really want to go to the tri-bureau, especially in the PNP, but because I’m currently working in the private sector, which is not aligned with my profession, I can only save for my goal.” (P6)

Participants 3, 4, and 6 demonstrate a strong alignment between their criminology education and career aspirations. Participant 3’s broad vision for public service, either in law enforcement or government agencies, shows flexibility and readiness to serve wherever needed. Participant 4’s specific focus on law enforcement illustrates a clear, step-by-step commitment to their career. Participant 6’s temporary shift to the private sector, while saving to join the PNP, reflects the reality many graduates face—strategic planning and perseverance toward long-term goals (Castillo 2023). These responses highlight a deep respect for public service, with law enforcement seen as a calling that requires preparation, sacrifice, and dedication (Bataille, et. al. 2023; Yu, et. al. 2024).

Their aspirations for law enforcement and government roles reflect a strong commitment to justice and public service (Zambrano 2024). These goals affirm the connection between academic preparation and societal contribution, with participants aiming to serve as protectors, leaders, and role models (Ibarra 2023). This strong interest in public service underscores the need for clear recruitment pathways, competitive benefits, and a culture that values criminology graduates. Educational institutions can support this by aligning curricula with the demands of law enforcement and public service roles, preparing graduates for these vital sectors.

➤ *Community Impact and Service*

Several participants shared a profound vision of using their criminology backgrounds to create meaningful change in their communities. Beyond personal success, they are committed to uplifting, protecting, and empowering their communities through social responsibility, justice promotion, and preventive action. They see themselves not just as law enforcers but as active contributors to community growth, resilience, and well-being. Through roles in law enforcement, corrections, and research, they aim to address social issues and foster safer environments, demonstrating the transformative impact criminologists can have in the public sphere.

- *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“Help in the improvement of our community.” (P5)

“To make a meaningful impact in preventing crime, upholding justice, and serving the community through various roles like law enforcement, corrections, and research.” (P10)

Participant 5 emphasizes the essential role criminologists play in shaping safer communities through proactive and compassionate engagement. Participant 10 expands on this by highlighting a comprehensive approach to service, including crime prevention, upholding justice, and contributing through various sectors, with a strong focus on addressing root causes and influencing systems (Trainor, et. al. 2020). These reflections suggest that community impact is central to their careers, recognizing that crime prevention and justice require a holistic approach involving collaboration, education, advocacy, and enforcement (Ibarra 2023; Kappeler, et. al. 2020). Additionally, their commitment to research shows a forward-thinking perspective for sustainable community improvement.

The participants' visions align with their values and professional aspirations, demonstrating that true success in criminology lies in making lasting, positive societal changes (Kipasika 2024; Chouhy, et. al. 2020). Their commitment to using their skills for the betterment of others embodies the ideals of the criminology profession—advocating for justice, safety, and hope in the communities they serve (Antojado & McPhee 2024). This focus on community impact suggests that educational institutions can further support this vision by incorporating service-learning opportunities, while local governments can engage criminology graduates in crime prevention, restorative justice, and community development efforts.

➤ *Personal Success and Fulfillment*

Many participants view their careers in criminology as a path to both professional success and personal fulfillment. For them, becoming a criminologist is not just about societal contributions, but about realizing their dreams, overcoming challenges, and validating their sacrifices. While they acknowledge the difficulties of the profession, they remain hopeful and determined, believing that perseverance will ultimately lead to personal satisfaction, stability, and the achievement of their lifelong goals.

- *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“My vision is I will be successful in this career and to attain my greatest goal.” (P9)

“I think it's hard, but all in all, based on my experience, it is very hard.” (P8)

Participant 9's statement reflects a deep, personal commitment to succeeding in criminology, where success is tied to the realization of one's fullest potential rather than mere titles or recognition (Williams 2023). Meanwhile, Participant 8 offers a grounded perspective, acknowledging

the inherent challenges of this career path (Johnston, et. al. 2022). Together, their insights suggest that personal fulfillment comes from balancing ambition with resilience. The awareness of difficulties strengthens their determination, showing that meaningful achievements require perseverance and ongoing effort (Smith 2024). Their mindset reflects emotional maturity and a commitment to long-term growth, where success is not just an end goal but a continuous journey shaped by challenges.

These participants' visions underscore that individual aspirations are a powerful motivator, driven not only by a desire to serve others but also by the need to fulfill personal goals (Islam, et. al. 2020). Their resilience, alongside their ambition, paints a picture of criminologists who are deeply connected to their personal missions, highlighting that success is rooted in overcoming adversity and achieving dreams (Chance 2022; Celestin 2025). Educational institutions and organizations can support this by emphasizing diverse career paths and the personal growth achievable within criminology, helping future criminologists maintain motivation while recognizing both the challenges and rewards of the field.

VI. HOLISTIC PREPARATION FOR SUCCESS: STRATEGIC STUDY, SELF-CARE, AND SUPPORT

The participants emphasized a holistic approach to preparing for the Criminologist Licensure Examination, integrating academic strategies with mental, emotional, and physical well-being. They stressed the importance of structured study techniques, such as targeted review, mock exams, and focusing on weak areas, alongside self-care practices like rest, mindfulness, and emotional support (Lawson, et. al. 2021; Broderick 2021). They also highlighted the value of support from peers, mentors, and family in maintaining motivation and resilience (Oddone, et. al. 2021).

Their insights reflect the importance of balancing discipline, well-being, and support systems to ensure sustained preparation, as well as managing stress and maintaining a healthy mindset. This approach, supported by Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus & Folkman) and Social Support Theory, underscores that success is not just about passing the exam but cultivating a resilient, balanced approach to life's challenges.

➤ *Structured and Effective Study Practices*

Participants emphasized the importance of structured, effective study practices for Criminologist Licensure Exam preparation. Their advice included strategic time management, mastering core concepts, continuous self-assessment, and using updated study materials. A disciplined and organized approach helps examinees efficiently cover the required material, build confidence, and avoid becoming overwhelmed. By focusing on a steady, manageable study routine instead of last-minute cramming, participants highlighted the value of a clear, systematic plan for successful preparation.

- *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“Create a study schedule, for you to maximize the time in every area to study or you will be having enough time to understand it well in your own pace and convenience.” (P2)

“Focus and understand the topic and avoid jumping to other areas if the first area is not finished and mastered yet. Master the basics because this is your foundation.” (P4)

“I recommend that they should prepare questions for them to answer and assess themselves on what areas they need to improve. Reading can really exercise our mind, so it is better to repeatedly read your review materials and take note of every necessary lesson.” (P1)

“Find updated materials to study, rely on materials that relate to the latest exam, previous exam materials could be a big help. Take practice tests, like mock boards, to test your knowledge and where should you give your time to study more.” (P2)

Participants emphasized the importance of intentional, structured study over passive reading. Participant 2 stressed creating a study schedule that ensures comprehensive coverage of topics at a manageable pace, while Participant 4 advocated for mastering one topic at a time to build a strong foundation (Kubiszyn & Borich 2024). Participant 1 recommended self-assessing through question-making and repeated reading to reinforce memory and comprehension. Additionally, Participant 2 suggested using updated review materials to align with current exam trends and avoid outdated information (Stone, et al. 2020). Practice tests, such as mock boards, were also highlighted as crucial tools for measuring readiness and targeting areas for improvement (Aaker & Moorman 2023).

The advice underscores the need for working smarter, not just harder (Cottrell 2024). A structured study plan, active engagement with materials, and updated resources ensure that preparation is focused and effective. Educational institutions should support this approach by incorporating these strategies into their programs, helping students build foundational knowledge, engage actively with study materials, and utilize practice tests for continuous improvement (Burns & Sinfield 2022; Colanggo, et al. 2024).

➤ *Personalization and Self-Care*

In preparing for the Criminologist Licensure Examination, the participants stressed the importance of personalization and self-care as crucial strategies often overlooked by many candidates. Their experiences revealed that understanding one's own rhythm of productivity, maintaining physical health, and allowing time for mental and emotional recovery were vital for sustaining long-term preparation. Studying hard is important, but without taking care of the mind and body, even the most diligent efforts can lead to burnout and diminishing returns. Personalizing study habits to fit individual peak performance times and integrating regular self-care routines enable candidates to

study more efficiently, retain information better, and approach the exam with a healthy, resilient mindset.

- *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“You should know the times when your brain is active, like for me it feels good if I study from 4 pm to 8 pm.” (P3)

“Practice self-care, get also enough sleep or time to rest, get balance between studying and relaxation.” (P2)

“Read 30-40 mins then answer the Q&A, should be correct. Sleep minimum 8hrs.” (P6)

Participants emphasized the importance of tailoring study routines to individual needs and maintaining a balance between study and self-care. Participant 3 highlighted that studying during peak productivity times enhances focus and retention (Makepeace & Craig 2024). Participant 2 stressed the value of balancing study with relaxation to ensure cognitive and emotional stability (Wadi, et al. 2024). Participant 6 recommended short, structured study sessions followed by active engagement, while also prioritizing adequate sleep (Barkley & Major 2020; Frankl 2024). Their insights suggest that effective preparation is not only about academic focus but also about maintaining well-being throughout the process.

This emphasis on personalization and self-care underscores the need for a holistic approach to licensure preparation. Educational institutions should encourage students to be mindful of their learning styles, productivity peaks, and the importance of self-care. By promoting balanced routines, stress management, and adequate rest, institutions can help prevent burnout and foster a sustainable approach to academic and professional success.

➤ *Comprehension and Critical Thinking*

Participants emphasized the importance of comprehension and critical thinking over memorization, advising future examinees to focus on truly understanding the material and developing the ability to reason through problems. This approach highlights that the Criminologist Licensure Examination requires more than fact recall—it tests the ability to apply knowledge to complex, real-world scenarios. By honing higher-order thinking skills, examinees can navigate unfamiliar questions and apply learned principles flexibly, making comprehension and critical thinking crucial for success in the exam.

- *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“Always read even though it is repeated don't memorize just understand.” (P8)

“To know the mechanics of the board exam, enhance their critical thinking and analogy. PRC Board exams encompass a vast topic to cover but you could answer it with the right approach without having interaction with the topic.” (P7)

Participant 8 emphasizes the importance of understanding over rote memorization, highlighting that continuous reading and internalizing material improves the ability to apply knowledge flexibly, ensuring better performance under unexpected circumstances (Sasson Lazovsky, et. al. 2025). Participant 7 expands on this by stressing the need for critical thinking and analytical skills, acknowledging that the exam tests more than surface knowledge, challenging examinees to think logically and reason through unfamiliar scenarios (Barnard, et. al. 2021; Frost, et. al. 2021).

These insights suggest that effective preparation focuses on developing a deep understanding and the ability to reason and adapt knowledge to different contexts. This approach, combining critical thinking with foundational knowledge, better equips examinees to tackle challenging questions with confidence and adaptability. The emphasis on comprehension and critical thinking suggests that criminology education and review programs should prioritize these higher-order cognitive skills (Biringan, et. al. 2025). Curricula should include case studies, problem-solving activities, and opportunities for analytical reasoning to prepare students for the licensure exam and their future professional roles (Al-Omari, et. al. 2024; Vaghela & Parsana 2024).

➤ *Support and Motivation*

Participants emphasized that emotional support and personal motivation are just as crucial as study techniques in preparing for the Criminologist Licensure Examination. They recognized that success is sustained not only by individual effort but by surrounding oneself with positive influences, maintaining self-belief, and staying focused on goals. The psychological aspects of preparation—staying motivated, seeking encouragement, and staying focused—were seen as vital components of success. Their experiences highlight that a strong support system and internal drive create the resilience needed to overcome doubt, fatigue, and discouragement.

• *The Participants Shared the Following in Their Interview:*

“Stay positive and seek for support, believe in yourself, keep your goals in your mind, and surround yourself with encouraging people.” (P2)

“For me, it is to find the best way of studying to find your focus and more effective review.” (P9)

“Joining study groups, practicing with sample tests, and taking notes.” (P10)

Participant 2 emphasizes the importance of maintaining a positive mindset and seeking emotional reinforcement from others, acknowledging that motivation can fluctuate during rigorous preparation (Dorji, 2024). Support from peers, family, or mentors can reignite determination, while staying focused on personal goals provides stability (Banay, 2024). Participant 9 highlights the value of personalized study methods, which help prevent burnout by aligning effort with

natural learning styles (Christina & Fort, 2020). Additionally, Participant 10 stresses the power of community learning, recommending study groups, practice tests, and disciplined note-taking to build morale and reinforce knowledge. Together, these insights emphasize that motivation and support are essential for sustained preparation.

The participants' reflections underline the significance of community, emotional strength, and personalized strategies in achieving licensure success (Felten & Lambert, 2020). They suggest that success is not only about hard work but also about resilience, positivity, and a supportive environment (Reeve, 2024). To foster this, educational institutions and review centers should encourage study groups, mentorship, and resources that promote self-belief and focus on personal goals. By creating a nurturing, supportive environment, these institutions can enhance students' motivation and help them navigate the challenges of licensure preparation (Menon et al., 2025).

VII. HOW HAS PASSING THE BOARD EXAM CHANGED THE PARTICIPANTS' OUTLOOK ON LIFE AND THEIR PROFESSION?

The fourth problem of this study focuses on the qualitative assessment of how has passing the board exam changed the participants' outlook on life and their profession, and the results are as follows.

➤ *Personal and Professional Transformation Through Achieving the Licensure*

This theme highlights the profound personal and professional transformations experienced by individuals after passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination. Personally, it reshaped their self-perception, confidence, and maturity, while professionally, it expanded career opportunities, deepened their sense of responsibility, and strengthened their commitment to ethics (Sabouripour et al., 2021; Smith, 2022). The participants' journey revealed three sub-themes: Personal Growth and Confidence, Professional Growth and Purpose, and Realization of Challenges and Reality Check. Achieving licensure marked a critical turning point, validating years of effort and sacrifice, and transitioning them from students to professionals capable of impacting society (Nayoyos-Refugia et al., 2024).

This accomplishment also aligned with Erikson's theory of psychosocial development, supporting their identity formation, sense of competence, and readiness for adult responsibilities. Professionally, it opened doors in law enforcement, education, and community service, while fostering a strong ethical foundation. Personally, the process instilled greater optimism, independence, and resilience, affirming their ability to overcome adversity and pursue ambitious goals with confidence and purpose.

➤ *Personal Growth and Confidence*

Passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination brought deep personal growth and lasting confidence to the participants. Successfully overcoming the challenges of exam preparation affirmed their inner strength, discipline, and

potential, transforming self-doubt into self-assurance. For many, the achievement marked more than a professional milestone—it was a turning point in how they viewed themselves, reinforcing their identity as capable and goal-driven individuals.

- *The Participants Shared the Following in their Interview:*

“Passing the board exam completely changed how I see both my life and my profession. It gave me a deep sense of accomplishment and proved that all the late nights, sacrifices, and doubts were worth it. It made me believe in myself more and reminded me that I’m capable of achieving big goals with hard work and faith.” (P2)

“It gives overwhelming feelings and motivates you so much that you can do everything by yourself.” (P4)

“I gained a positive outlook in life and also to look for a bigger picture in everything.” (P9)

Participant 2’s reflection captures the emotional transformation many experienced post-exams, where perseverance through adversity led to meaningful, lasting confidence (Harold 2024). This inner strength was echoed by Participant 4, who described the empowering realization of their ability to face life’s challenges independently, gaining motivation to pursue greater goals (Fowler 2023). Participant 9 added that this success broadened their outlook on life’s possibilities. These reflections show that passing the licensure exam fostered not just academic or career progress, but also deep personal growth—instilling resilience, belief in one’s capabilities, and a mindset shift from surviving to thriving (Celestin 2025).

This personal growth represents a transformative rite of passage, as the licensure journey redefined participants' self-perception and potential (Villacé-Molinero et al. 2023). By overcoming fear, doubt, and exhaustion, they emerged stronger and more self-assured, viewing their success as a foundation for future personal and professional endeavors (Nwaogu 2023; Taya 2025). These findings highlight the need for educational institutions and mentorship programs to emphasize not only professional qualifications but also the development of resilience and confidence as key outcomes of exam preparation. Promoting this holistic growth can inspire aspiring criminologists to view licensure as a journey of personal transformation.

➤ *Professional Growth and Purpose*

Passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination did not merely signify a professional credential for the participants; it was a transformative experience that deeply enriched their sense of professional purpose and responsibility. Achieving licensure provided validation for their years of study and sacrifice, but more importantly, it instilled a deeper commitment to embody the values and ethical standards of their chosen field. The participants reflected on how passing the exam broadened their understanding of what it truly means to serve as a criminologist—not simply holding a title, but carrying the responsibility to uphold justice, advocate for the community,

and make a lasting positive impact. This transformation marks their transition from academic achievers to professionals driven by mission and service.

- *The participants shared the following in their interview:*

“Professionally, it opened doors I had only dreamed of before. I now feel more confident and ready to serve not just as someone with a title, but as someone with a purpose. It also strengthened my passion for criminology and made me more committed to using what I’ve learned to make a positive impact on others.” (P2)

“It changes my ability to think to move in the community like the way I serve and respect others to follow professional and ethical standards given by my profession.” (P8)

Participant 2’s account illustrates how licensure transformed their professional identity, instilling a strong sense of duty to serve with integrity and purpose (Hong 2022). This shift extended beyond career goals to a deeper commitment to using criminology for societal good. Participant 8 similarly noted a change in mindset, where professional standards and ethics now shape their behavior and interactions (Maynard-Moody & Musheno 2022).

Their reflections reveal that licensure sparked a newfound professionalism grounded in justice, service, and ethical leadership (Goulart et al. 2022). No longer mere aspirants, they now view themselves as stewards of criminology’s values. Their experiences affirm that true professional success lies not just in passing an exam but in using one’s skills for the greater good (Fitzgerald 2020; Westheimer & Ladson-Billings 2024).

This transformation into purposeful, community-focused professionals underscores the need for criminology education to emphasize ethics and societal impact from the start (Kioupi & Voulvoulis 2022). Academic institutions and professional organizations should promote this growth by integrating real-world applications and mentorship to cultivate criminologists as agents of positive change.

Realization of Challenges and Reality Check

Passing the Criminologist Licensure Examination was a proud milestone for participants, but it also revealed that licensure alone doesn't ensure immediate entry into ideal careers. Many faced unexpected challenges in finding jobs aligned with their skills and goals. While their achievement remained meaningful, it brought a more realistic view of the professional world—one that requires continued perseverance, patience, and adaptability beyond academic success.

- *The Participants Shared the Following in their Interview:*

“Maybe I thought that life would be easy once I became a board passer, but it wasn’t. It’s really hard to apply for a job, especially in a private company.” (P3)

“In reality, it's not as easy as you think you'll land your dream job or even land one that aligns with your profession.”
(P6)

Participant 3's experience reflects the initial optimism many licensure passers hold—the expectation that certification will naturally lead to employment—yet this was tempered by the competitive job market, particularly in private institutions with limited roles for criminologists (Steger & Roy, 2021). Participant 6 similarly noted that academic success doesn't guarantee immediate career stability, echoing broader challenges faced by graduates (Magolda, 2023).

These accounts illustrate a shared reality: while passing the licensure exam is a vital achievement, it is only the beginning of a more complex journey (Mora, 2024), often marked by limited job opportunities, high competition, and the need for experience. As Simmons (2024) asserts, success is both a triumph and a starting point, while Seibert (2021) emphasizes that licensure equips individuals with confidence to face future hurdles. Ibarra (2023) supports this view, noting that the resilience developed during exam preparation can empower professionals to adapt and grow despite challenges.

These insights call for enhanced institutional support that extends beyond licensure, including career services, realistic job market guidance, and alumni mentoring to help new criminologists transition successfully into their fields.

VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that success in the Criminologist Licensure Examination hinges on personal resilience, strategic preparation, and strong support systems, with emotional strength and sustained commitment playing key roles. Passers envision careers across law enforcement, education, advocacy, and public service, driven by ambition and civic dedication. Effective exam preparation involves balancing academic discipline with well-being and individualized learning strategies that promote adaptability. Ultimately, licensure fosters both personal and professional transformation, instilling purpose and ethics while presenting challenges that require continued perseverance.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future licensure examinees are encouraged to prepare holistically by integrating academic study with self-care, critical thinking, and support networks, while maintaining a long-term perspective on career growth. Criminology educators and review centers should focus on enhancing instruction with critical thinking and real-world application, while promoting student wellness and providing current exam materials. Academic institutions should strengthen career readiness through value-based education, seminars, and networking to guide students toward employment. Policymakers and professional bodies are urged to broaden employment opportunities for criminologists and support continuous development through training, scholarships, and certification programs.

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