

Multi-dimensional Impacts of Reintegration Programs on the Lives and Aspirations of Returnees

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Abstract- The study evaluates the extent of experiences of reintegration programs and their overall impact on the quality of life and aspirations of returnees. In doing this, various dimensions are examined, including economic, social, psychological, cultural, political, sense of safety and security aspects of their lives, in order to ascertain which variables are predictors for the returnees' successful transition to back to society. The methodology employed in this study is a descriptive-correlational research design, utilizing a validated structured survey instrument, administered through stratified sampling, ensuring that the voices of returnees are represented correctly through statistical processing. This allows us to calculate the frequency and means in descriptive analysis, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient for relationship analysis, and the Multiple Linear Regression for determining the most influential predictors of quality of life and aspirations. The major findings of this study reveal a significant gap in program delivery (Mean = 2.17), particularly regarding essential needs like housing and mental health care. While programs have been effective in instilling a sense of security and pride in terms of their cultural heritage, their overall impact on their economic lives is low or negligible, leaving them in a state of vulnerability. The statistical analysis also revealed that there is a significant moderate relationship ($r = 0.562$) between support received and quality of life and aspirations for a returnee's future, where Socio-economic Development Support ($\beta = 0.308$) and Mental Health Support ($\beta = 0.249$) are the two most vital predictors for a successful reintegration. The novelty of this study is that it establishes a direct statistical link between "cognitive readiness" fostered through "mental health care" and future economic stability, creating a "survival vs. stability" gap that moves beyond generalities into offering a predictive model that advocates for asset-based welfare instead of relief measures, which is a shift in perspective that is necessary to advance knowledge in this area in a way that encourages reintegration programs not

just as a means of compliance but also as a means of restoration for individuals.

Keywords: Reintegration Programs, Peace and Development, Multidimensional Peace Process, Socioeconomic Development, Mental Health Support, Community Involvement, Returnees

I. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background of the Study

Reintegration of returnees into mainstream society is a critical aspect of peace-building and conflict resolution. These initiatives aim to dismantle insurgent ideologies, reintegrate combatants, and restore peace to affected communities (Aspilan, 2023). The reintegration into civilian society marks the end of conflict yet creates new layers of challenges for their successful transformation. The process of reintegration goes beyond basic provision of material needs because it involves a profound human process of rebuilding personal identities along with social connections and future aspirations.

Globally, Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration (DDR) programs have produced conflicting results across different countries. Although transitional peace has benefited from these programs they have received criticism for neglecting psychosocial and cultural needs in favor of economic reintegration (Sharif, 2021; Schmitt et al., 2021). Multiple programs receive funding from Global North donors who enforce external frameworks which might conflict with local cultural practices and conflict root causes (Majidi et al., 2022). The programs establish

new social inequalities which result in social exclusion because they fail to achieve sustainable outcomes.

The Philippine situation demonstrates these worldwide trends together with its own unique regional characteristics. For several decades the Philippines has faced enduring conflicts between government forces and both communist insurgent and Moro separatist groups. The Enhanced Comprehensive Local Integration Program (E-CLIP) under End Local Communist Armed Conflict (ELCAC), offers assistance with livelihoods as well as psychosocial services and community support (Task Force Balik-Loob, 2024). However, several difficulties exist during their implementation. According to Yuson (2021), insufficient state backing and dysfunctional institutional coordination, together with leadership problems in the Philippine government explain why insurgent movements persist while undermining reintegration programs. Returnees, especially those coming from areas which experienced prolonged armed conflicts like in Mindanao, particularly in SOCCSKSARGEN and BARMM, face exclusion from basic social services, negative public perceptions and insufficient physical and mental healthcare (Godefroidt & Langer, 2023; McFee & Roders, 2023). The present circumstances increase the probability of their return to violence and make it difficult to establish lasting reintegration.

Despite the scale and value of reintegration efforts, scholarly attention in the Philippine context remains limited. The majority of current research studies focus on specific aspects like economic stability and political alignment but fails to demonstrate how these elements affect the personal growth of returnees (Vivares, 2023; Arreola et al., 2024). The research of cultural reintegration along with political participation and psycho-social transformation remains neglected in existing studies. Researches into the personal conflicts of returnees and their changing aspirations and identity transformations as they face reintegration policies that frequently differ from their actual experiences were not yet explored.

To address the gaps in existing literature and other issues surrounding this topic, the current study examines how reintegration processes impact the

quality of life and aspirations of returnees across six core dimensions including economic, social, psychological, cultural, political, and sense of safety and security. With the use of descriptive-correlational survey design, the study evaluates the extent of returnees' experiences of reintegration programs and assess the quality of life and aspirations of the returnees after years of being reintegrated. Statistical tools such as Pearson Correlation Coefficient (PCC) were used to determine if their experiences of reintegration programs have a significant relationship with the quality of life and aspirations. While, Multi-level Linear Regression was utilized to determine which specific variables serve as key predictors of quality of life and aspirations.

Ultimately, the current study aims to highlight and illuminate the realities of the reintegration process in the Philippines and hopes to contribute to the overall discourse of the often-overlooked population of returnees in the country. By situating the realities of the Philippines in relation to the global discourse of Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR), it aims to highlight key areas of convergence and divergence in relation to international standards and highlight the importance of having better socio-economic support systems in place.

1.2. Theoretical Framework

The study utilizes five theoretical frameworks including Capability Approach and Negative Peace Theory and Human Security Framework and Disarmament, Demobilization & Reintegration (DDR) Framework and Conflict Transformation Theory to develop a comprehensive framework for analyzing Mindanao reintegration and peacebuilding. The Capability Approach (Sen, 1993) defines successful reintegration as enabling people to live lives they value by shifting away from material provisions alone toward real freedom enhancement and agency development for returnees. Negative Peace Theory (Galtung, as cited in Bashir, 2024) shows that conflicts persist through unresolved issues like exclusion and inequality even when there is no active violence. These theories demonstrate that peace requires deeper interventions which must tackle fundamental socio-political and economic factors. The Human Security Framework

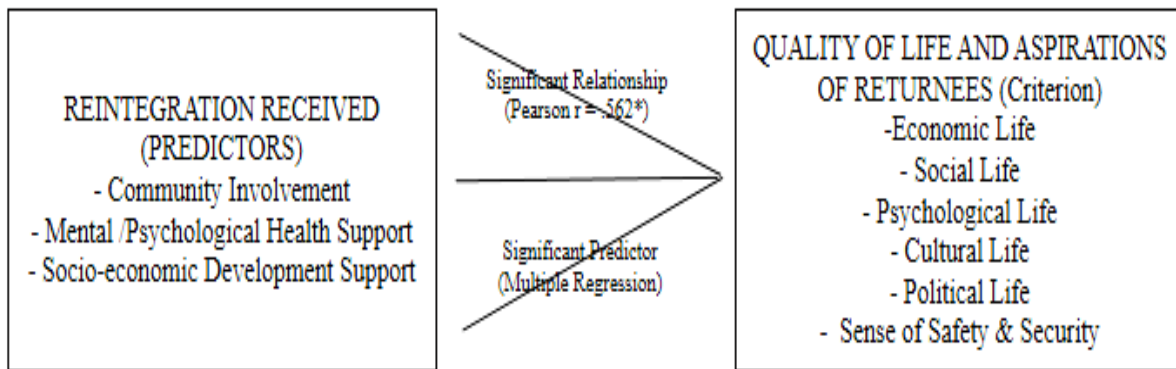
(Biswas & Murai, 2024) broadens the peace agenda by focusing on daily threats of poverty marginalization and rights deprivation that expose communities to conflict and insurgency.

The DDR Framework supports these theories by offering a systematic framework for studying reintegration program implementation through state-run initiatives such as E-CLIP in the Philippines (Alcantara & Castro, 2023). The conventional linear model needs to be strengthened through the people-centered holistic perspectives which the Capability and Human Security approaches provide. Conflict

Transformation Theory (Lederach, 1997) delivers the necessary long-term relational perspective for reintegration to create healing effects alongside social cohesion and institutional reform. Grassroots dialogue along with reconciliation and participatory governance form essential components for reshaping institutions and relationships which previously supported violence according to this approach. These theories when taken together, form an interconnected analytical framework allows this study to determine if reintegration efforts in Mindanao are merely technical procedures or serve as authentic peacebuilding mechanisms which truly tackle the roots of insurgencies.

1.3. Conceptual Framework of the Study

Figure 1. Diagram of Relationship of Experiences of Reintegration Programs and the Quality of Life and Aspirations of Returnees



As shown in Figure 1, the conceptual framework of the study demonstrates the link between the reintegration program domains (Independent Variables) and the quality of life outcomes of the returnees (Dependent Variables). The model establishes that specific interventions, particularly in community involvement, mental health/psychological support and socio-economic development support, serve as primary drivers for the successful transition of returnees. The validity of this framework is supported by the study's statistical findings, which utilized Pearson's *r* to establish relationships and Multiple Linear Regression to identify the most significant predictors of the returnees' aspirations.

The research method for the study was based on a descriptive-correlational survey research design with a causal-comparative component to determine the efficacy of reintegration programs and the impact thereof on returnees. This research design went beyond mere descriptive research to identify specific domains in reintegration programs, which are significant predictors for successful reintegration. Using descriptive statistics tools, the extent of experiences of reintegration programs by the returnees were identified and the quality of lives and aspirations of the returnees were assessed according to the six (6) dimensions of reintegration. While inferential statistical tools such as Pearson Correlation Coefficient (PCC) determined the significant relationship between the reintegration programs received and the life and aspirations of the

II. RESEARCH METHOD

returnees. In addition, the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis determined which among the reintegration variables are predictors of the life and aspirations of returnees.

This research process started with the identification of the target population and the necessary clearances required for the research (ethics clearance and Free Prior and Informed Consent). In the instrumentation phase, a survey instrument was developed and validated by experts and then underwent a reliability test and achieved a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.989 and all other established metrics for reintegration. This was to ensure the scientific reliability of the research. Data acquisition was carried out based on a stratified sample method, ensuring that the data acquired was representative for the returnee population. The data acquisition phase was the core aspect of the research,

where structured questionnaires were administered to the participants based on two primary dimensions, namely, "Extent of Experiences of Reintegration Programs" and "Impact on Quality Life and Aspirations." These dimensions were evaluated by the participants based on a Likert Scale, and the data was analyzed based on Mean Distribution. In order to ascertain the scientific validity of the research findings, the association between variables was examined using a regression analysis wherein the association between variables Y (quality of life and aspirations of returnees) and X (specific program domains—socio-economic and mental health support) was examined. This statistical analysis was conducted in order to ascertain the critical predictors of transformation that could be compared against the literature to draw scholarly inferences.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Experiences of Reintegration Programs by the Returnees

Table 1. Summary of Results for Reintegration Received by the Returnees

Indicators	Total Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description	Qualitative Interpretation
Community Involvement	2.23	1.12	Slightly Received	Low Extent
Mental/ Psychological Support	2.12	1.07	Slightly Received	Low Extent
Socio-economic Development Support	2.15	1.04	Slightly Received	Low Extent
Overall Mean	2.17	0.95	Slightly Received	Low Extent

Table 1 shows the general views of the respondents on the reintegration programs they received across all three major categories: Community Involvement, Mental Health, and Socioeconomic Support wherein the reintegration services received are being felt at a “Low Extent.” The overall mean is 2.17 which

indicates that the essential services that should be present in reintegration programs are being delivered only "Slightly Received."

The results show that there are uneven experiences in how the programs are actually received by the

returnees. With an overall average of 2.17 (Slightly Received), it is clear that the move from being a rebel to joining a community is not getting enough support. One of the most concerning findings is Housing Support, which scored only 1.76 (Not Received). Without a stable place to live and very little help finding a job (2.04), it is hard to see how these reintegration efforts can last in the long run.

These findings match a study by Borja-Dekit (2025), which found that even when the government promises help, staying stable is difficult because jobs and housing are often missing. Moreover, the support for mental health, as shown in the results, received low scores. This indicates that the emotional stress returnees face is not being addressed. This makes things even harder, especially since many returnees still face judgment or stigma from their neighbors (Sambo et al., 2024).

As Bautista (2025) points out, many people join rebel groups in the first place because of poverty and a lack of government services. If the government does not follow through on its promises, there is a high risk that people might return to their old ways. While returnees are thankful for quick help like food or cash (which had the highest score of 2.57), they really need a long-term plan and steady support to truly start a new, peaceful life.

Moreover, the fact that Mental/Psychological Support (2.12) received the lowest score is particularly telling. In many reintegration models, psychological stability is considered the foundation for successful community re-entry. The "Low Extent" of support in this area implies that returnees may be struggling with trauma, isolation, or the stress of readjustment without professional intervention. This lack of support can create a dangerous cycle where the returnee fails to reintegrate due to unaddressed mental health barriers.

To dig deeper on the issue, the low extent of mental and psychological support (2.12) observed in this

Table 3.2.1. Economic Life and Aspirations of Returnees

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description	Qualitative Interpretation
Employment Opportunities	2.40	1.09	Disagree	Low/Negligible

study aligns with the findings of Ozola-Cīrule and Martinsone (2025), who argue that 'return shock' is common but often neglected component of the reintegration journey. Furthermore, as highlighted by Borja-Dekit (2025), the mediocre assessment of psychosocial services in government programs typically stems from a focus on immediate socio-economic needs while ignoring the deep-seated stigma and social anxiety returnees face. This lack of robust psychological intervention creates a fragile foundation for reintegration, as mental well-being is a primary driver of social and economic stability (WHO, 2025).

3.2 The Lives and Aspirations of the Returnees in terms of: Economic, Social, Psychological, Cultural, Political and Safety and Security

This section explores the current situation and future goals of the returnees across six key dimensions of their lives. By examining their economic, social, psychological, cultural, political, and safety and security conditions, the study provides a holistic view of their transition back into society. The following data highlights not only the practical challenges they face, such as financial stability and physical safety, but also their internal experiences and aspirations for a peaceful life. This multidimensional approach is essential for identifying which areas of their lives are most vulnerable and where they feel most empowered as they rebuild their identities within the community.

3.2.1 Impact of Reintegration Programs on the Economic Life and Aspirations of Returnees

The successful transition of returnees from conflict to civilian life is fundamentally anchored in their ability to achieve economic independence and long-term financial security. This section presents the empirical findings regarding the economic dimensions of the reintegration process, focusing on three critical pillars: Employment Opportunities, Income Generation, and Financial Stability.

Income Generation	2.52	1.13	Disagree	Low/Negligible
Financial Stability	2.65	1.17	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Overall Mean	2.52	1.05	Disagree	Low/Negligible

Table 3.2.1. presents returnees’ economic life and aspirations after years of being reintegrated in the community. The overall mean is 2.52 which means that, on the average, the respondents disagree with the assertion that their economic life and aspirations have been improved by the program. This therefore indicates that the reintegration programs, so far, have “Low or Negligible” qualitative impact on their lives and aspirations.

In the economic indicator Employment Opportunities, it is observable that there is a gap between the readiness of the returnees and the opportunities available for them. Although participants seem to have benefited from a noticeable improvement in their level of motivation and readiness to work through this program, it seems that the job market has not yet opened up to enable them to gain meaningful paid employment. Thus, this indicator gained a sub-mean of 2.40 which indicates that they “disagree” on the positive impact of the reintegration program in terms of employment opportunities.

In the second indicator, the general assessment for Income Generation is 2.52 , which indicates that the returnees disagree to the positive or meaningful impact of the reintegration programs. The lowest score in this category was in relation to the lack of resources and no access to physical equipment or tools for income generation (2.09) which also correlates with the respondents’ disagreement on the statement pertaining to the “increase in income” (2.50) since they were reintegrated. Although the Reintegration program seems to have reached the desired impact in relation to “Awareness on that business and income generation opportunities exist in the community” (2.77), most of the returnees may not have the means or resources to seize them.

Finally, in terms of Financial Stability, the submean is 2.65, which means that, in general, the returnees feel that there is a moderate or inconsistent impact in this aspect of economic life. This section shows the highest scores among all sub- indicators particularly in their capacity to support their families (2.85) and their confidence of being able to sustain economic stability in the future (2.80). Despite having some personal resilience, respondents still believes that the current levels of cash aid are not enough (2.45). Overall, returnees are currently able to survive but have not yet reached a point where they are able to thrive and live independently without external aid.

The findings from Table 3.2.1 reveal a critical disconnect between the "soft" components of reintegration (confidence, awareness) and the "hard" components (jobs, tools, capital). One of the major barriers to the reintegration process is the lack of material resources. This is evidenced by the low mean score for the category of material resources (2.09). While the provision of vocational training (2.34) has long been part of post-conflict recovery processes, it often fails to yield results if it is not combined with a starter kit or capital. Although returnees are aware of these opportunities, they are not able to take full advantage of them due to barriers that prevent them from enrolling in training programs as well as due to the irrelevance of the knowledge acquired, due to changes in the national market. (Borja-Dekit, 2025; World Bank, 2021).

These results manifest clearly the significant correlation of social reintegration and economic reintegration. Most of the returnees have been in the movement for so long and have been alienated from society for quite sometime, that a lot of demands and requirements of the job market have changed and leveled up already. This reality makes it even harder for them to compete for paying jobs (McFee & Röders, 2023). Access to education and vocational training is

critical for developing skills necessary for sustainable livelihoods. However, conflict-affected settings often lack the infrastructure to support these needs effectively (Mayengo et al., 2025).

According to Moreno (2023), although the program is currently working, its sustainability is not certain and therefore requires a continuing development programme to prevent those who have returned to the ranks of the rebel groups from reverting to violence again. The failure of delivery of Reintegration Program benefits translate into actual problems for individuals and communities, affecting social cohesion, security, and the stabilization goals of DDR efforts.

3.2.2 Impact of Reintegration Programs on the Social Life and Aspirations of Returnees

This section explores how reintegration programs have influenced the returnees' personal relationships and their ability to fit back into society. It focuses on the Social Life and Aspirations of the participants, specifically looking at how they interact with their families, how they are treated by their neighbors, and whether they feel they have a reliable support system. By shifting the focus from physical assistance to emotional and social outcomes, this part of the study aims to identify if returnees are truly beginning to feel like members of the community again or if they still feel like outsiders.

Table 3.2.2. Assessing Social Life and Aspirations

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description	Qualitative
Family Relationships	3.50	1.46	Agree	High/ Positive
Community Acceptance and Integration	3.39	1.41	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Social Support and Networks	3.17	1.31	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Overall Mean	3.37	1.34	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent

The data in Table 3.2.2. evaluates the social reintegration of participants across three primary dimensions: Family Relationships, Community Acceptance, and Social Support Networks.

The sub-indicator Family Relationships (3.50) comes to be the strongest area of the reintegration process. Participants consistently reported "High/Positive" outcomes, with the highest individual score (Mean: 3.56) regarding the strengthening of family bonds. This suggests the program is most effective at mending domestic ties and rebuilding internal trust.

While the qualitative interpretation for the second sub-indicator, Community Acceptance and Integration (Submean: 3.39), is "Moderate/Inconsistent," the scores is nearly on the edge of "Agree." This is manifested by the respondents' feeling they are respected (3.48) and believing that people's acceptance grows over time (3.41). However, active involvement in community events remains lower

(3.30), indicating that generally, they still have a social uncertainty and lingering social distance.

Meanwhile, sub-indicator Social Support and Networks garnered a sub-mean of 3.17 which is the lowest-scoring category for the Social Dimension of reintegration. Participants remain Neutral regarding their connection to new mentors or supportive groups. Although they do not necessarily feel isolated, they do not yet feel fully integrated into an active and supportive social network.

In general, social reintegration of returnees is steadily progressing, although not consistently, with the average score being 3.37. This implies that, although the majority of the returnees feel they were easily accepted by their families, being reintegrated into society and having active roles in it still pose as a major challenge.

The results indicate a "familial-centric" success pattern. The high mean in family relationships (3.50)

reinforces the idea that the family unit serves as the primary "shock absorber" during the initial phases of reintegration. This aligns with recent findings that suggest family support is the single most critical factor in preventing immediate recidivism, as it provides a safe psychological harbor that the broader community may not yet offer (Altier et al., 2021).

As Baumann (2025) argues in her forthcoming work on countering violent extremism, the success of such programs is often measured by the absence of violence (short-term success), but true sustainability requires a transition from mere "security-led" oversight to "social-led" inclusion. The "Moderate/Inconsistent" qualitative interpretation for Community Acceptance (Submean: 3.39) reflects Baumann's concern that returnees often remain in a state of "conditional citizenship." While they are no longer viewed as immediate threats, they are not yet fully trusted as community peers.

However, the drop in scores regarding community involvement and social networks (3.17) highlights the phenomenon of social stigma that often follows extremist-returnees. Even if a program is successful in changing the individual, it cannot immediately change the collective memory of the community. Research by Jensen (2024) emphasizes that social reintegration works both ways; if the community remains hesitant or neutral, the returnee's sense of belonging remains fragile. The "Moderate/Inconsistent" interpretation for community acceptance suggests that while formal hostility may be absent, active inclusion is not yet realized.

Furthermore, the neutral scores in social support networks suggest a gap in the program's long-term "social capital" building. Flexible reintegration strategies require multi-sectoral involvement with community support because they need to address diverse combatant experiences and complex return environments (Jabour & Kawley 2024). Moreno (2023) argued Reintegration is often successful in the short term through financial aid, but argues that sustainability depends on moving beyond the supporting family and creating "bridging" social capital but rather establishing connections with people outside the immediate circle who can provide jobs,

mentorship, and a new identity. Without these broader networks, returnees may remain unsettled, which increases the risk of future recidivism if the current development assistance package is not sustained.

More generally, the large number of neutral responses in terms of Social Support Networks, indicates gap of the reintegration programs in establishing and enhancing social capital that could provide a long-term stability for returnees. Reintegration of returnees will always have to take account of the individual combatants' experiences and of the particular circumstances of the region to which they are returning; therefore, a successful intervention will need to be flexible, multi-sectoral and socially-based (Jabour & Kawley, 2024). Economic assistance can bring immediate benefits, but according to Moreno (2023) supporting returnees until they are reintegrated in robust social networks or 'bridging' social capital that links them to people other than their close family, such as coaches, as well as job providers - is necessary in order to assure their stability and to prevent them from reverting to armed activities in case the aid comes to an end.

The need for a structure to expand the social space of former inmates is corroborated by plenty of practical evidence. For example, in his research paper Noor (2023) found that programs that are facilitated by de-radicated members of terrorist organisations have far reaching and long term effects on reintegration of former prisoners, in terms of that the former prisoners are able to connect and feel part of a social group. These foundations serves several purposes. Firstly, it provides a network of support for the former prisoners. Secondly, it provides a bridge between the former prisoners and the state. This communication bridge is crucial in ensuring the safety of the community, and in our view, provides the "bridging capital" required for a former inmate to reintegrate permanently.

3.2.3 Impact of Reintegration Programs on the Psychological Life and Aspirations of Returnees

This section focuses on the internal transition of the returnees, moving from the social aspects of their lives to their mental and emotional states. It explores their Psychological Life and Aspirations by looking at how

the programs have affected their self-confidence, their ability to handle stress, and their overall mental resilience. By looking at these personal indicators, this part of the study aims to understand if the returnees are

feeling more optimistic and mentally prepared to handle the challenges of starting over, or if they are still struggling with the emotional weight of their past experiences.

Table 3.2.3. Examining Psychological Life and Aspirations

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description	Qualitative Interpretation
Confidence and Self-Esteem	3.27	1.38	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Emotional Well-Being	3.29	1.36	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Coping Skills and Resilience	3.26	1.35	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Overall Mean	3.27	1.33	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent

The data in Table 3.2.3. reflects the respondents' perceptions of their psychological well-being and future outlook following the reintegration program. The study measured three key indicators: Confidence and Self-Esteem, Emotional Well-Being, and Coping Skills and Resilience. The Overall Mean of 3.27 indicates that the reintegration program currently has a "Moderate or Inconsistent" impact on the psychological lives and aspirations of the participants.

The reintegration programs for former rebels exhibit polarized impacts on their psychological lives and aspirations, influenced by various socio-cultural contexts. These programs often aim to facilitate the transition from combatant to civilian life, yet the experiences of individuals can vary significantly based on their backgrounds and the communities they return to.

Based on results, the psychological life and aspirations of the returnees got an overall mean 3.27 with a "Moderate or Inconsistent" impact or change over the course of their reintegration. It appears that the basic support offered by the rehabilitation program has succeeded in moving the returnees away from any negative or failed impacts, however, no significant milestones have yet been reached that may be considered as "High" or "Significant" transformative impact. It is observable that the moderate mean result is caused by the high degree of variance in the standard deviation which frequently exceed 1.50. Such statistical dispersion reveals that the program's impact is not uniform; rather, it is experiencing a polarized success rate where some returnees are improving and thriving while others remain stagnant, leading to a "Neutral" collective average that hides individual struggles.

According to Kiconco (2024), many former combatants face stigma, leading to feelings of isolation and mistrust within their communities. While many returnees have already fully integrated back to their community and have experienced the sense of belonging and acceptance by the people, a significant number of the respondents claims to still be living in fear, mistrust and shame.

It was repeatedly emphasized in researches that all returnees have unique circumstances as individuals, and therefore suggesting a need for more flexible reintegration strategies that consider personal histories and community dynamics (McFee, 2023). Furthermore, psychological recovery alongside social harmony requires psychosocial support to help returnees overcome war-related trauma through counseling and therapy as well as community-based healing initiatives (Sakib, 2022).

3.2.4 Impact of Reintegration Programs on the Cultural Life and Aspirations of Returnees

This section shifts the focus to the returnees' sense of identity and their place within the traditions of their community. It looks at their Cultural Life and Aspirations by exploring how they connect with their heritage, how well they have adapted to local customs,

and their role in promoting peace and harmony through cultural understanding. This part of the study helps determine if the programs are helping returnees move beyond just "living" in a community to truly "belonging" to it by sharing its values and traditions. It explores three indicators such as Cultural Identity & Belonging; Cultural Integration and Cultural Harmony and Peace-building.

Table 2.4. Examining Cultural Life and Aspirations

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description	Qualitative Interpretation
Cultural Identity and Belonging	3.40	1.37	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Cultural Reintegration	3.40	1.36	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Cultural Harmony and Peace-building	3.45	1.38	Agree	High/ Positive
Overall Mean	3.42	1.32	Agree	High/ Positive

The participants' cultural life and aspirations, as detailed in Table 3.2.4, reveals an overall positive trajectory in the reintegration process. With an overall mean of 3.42, the findings indicate a “High/Positive” Impact, suggesting that the program has been a driving force in promoting shared cultural understanding and participation in community life. This Cultural dimension is divided into three categories: Cultural Identity and Belonging, Cultural Reintegration, and Cultural Harmony and Peace-building, each contributing to the participants' holistic social recovery.

The reintegration program was seen as an instrument for promoting community integration and the rebuilding of one’s identity within a cultural framework. According to Suarez & Baines (2021) cultural environments produce different levels of social restoration and forgiveness and acceptance between people. The mean of 3.42 reveals that the reintegration programme has gone beyond the stage of purely stabilizing a person’s psychological state, and that participants are returning to a cultural role as effective agents. The change from the ‘Neutral’ scores of the psychological section to the ‘Agree’ scores of

the cultural section suggest that it may be easier to restore identity and participate in community reconciliation activities than to resolve more internal and psychological issues. This may be explained with the fact that a great number of the respondents belong Indigenous Peoples’ groups which shows that there is strength of collective pride over need for individual engagement.

This idea is supported by the recent study of Gumela (2025) on Project “Libongkid”, a reintegration program of the 56th Infantry Battalion of the Philippine Army that draws on the rich culture of the Talaingod Manobo. The study revealed that ethnicity and culture significantly influence reintegration by leveraging kinship ties and respect for elders. This approach enhanced trust between returnees and the government (Gumela, 2025).

Coming back to the data, pride towards one’s culture comes out as a dominant theme – participants had strong feelings of pride towards their culture on average (3.55) belonging also scored high, 3.47 and were relatively modest in their assumptions of how they would influence their cultural heritage (3.30).

This data is interpreted to mean that the reintegration programs do not create a cultural identity but give a space for people to find their collective pride of culture. The high standard deviation on all items was another theme coming through – perhaps people had highly diverse experiences of cultural reintegration (and hence the notion of “High Impact” only applied to specific case studies of communities that were well-prepared to reintegrate).

The most significant impact of the programs was found in the area of Cultural Harmony and Peace-building. While Moderate barriers to personal prejudice and stereotypes were observed in the Reintegration section, the consistent “Agree” ratings in this section attest to the fact that the participants felt empowered and not merely as passive aid recipients. Thus, while 3.49 for “cooperation between people” and 3.48 for “respect for diversity” confirm the participants’ sense of empowerment, the achievement that had the greatest impact on the participants’ sense of empowerment was their ability to “feel that they are doing their bit to preserve cultural peace” (3.46).

Cultural engagement is a unifying theme because focusing on common values and community harmony

helped participants to transcend the “Moderate” barriers they had experienced due to their own prejudice and stereotypes. As highlighted in the study Dávila and Röders (2024), the reintegrated returnees play crucial roles in ensuring that peace prevails in their communities for good. The study finds that the returnees are implementing various community projects in their respective states and local government areas, enhance local ownership of the peace process, contribute to rebuilding and recovery of economic and social infrastructure in their communities and, therefore, increase the resilience of communities.

3.2.5 Impact of Reintegration Programs on the Political Life and Aspirations of Returnees

This section examines the returnees' relationship with the state and their roles as citizens. It explores their Political Life and Aspirations by measuring their trust in government institutions, their willingness to participate in civic activities like voting, and their understanding of their legal rights and duties. This part of the study is crucial for determining if returnees feel like they are becoming part of the formal "system" or if they still feel disconnected from the authorities they once opposed.

Table 3.2.5. Assessing Political Life and Aspirations

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description	Qualitative Interpretation
Trust in Government Institutions	3.48	1.37	Agree	High/ Positive
Civic Participation	3.40	1.34	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Awareness of Rights and Responsibilities	3.40	1.37	Neutral	Moderate/ Inconsistent
Overall Mean	3.42	1.33	Agree	High/ Positive

Table 3.2.5 shows the perceived impact of the reintegration programs to the Political life and aspirations of returnees. As revealed, the overall mean was 3.42, which was categorized as “Agree” and was therefore interpreted as being of high/positive impact. The evaluation items were categorized into three sub-

items: “Trust in the government institution”, “Civic engagement”, and “Citizens’ awareness of freedom and obligations”.

The findings reveal a that the reintegration program for returnees positively impact their political life

especially on the aspect of restoration of their trust in the government. The high level of trust in institutions (3.48) is a major success for the reintegration program. Trust in government and other formal institutions is a cornerstone of successful reintegration because it replaces feelings of alienation with a sense of security. Effective security and justice provision by former rebels can enhance perceptions of government reliability, thus fostering a more conducive environment for reintegration (Breslawski, 2022). When returnees believe that government policies are fair, they are more likely to follow the law and seek help through official channels rather than returning to old, potentially harmful patterns. This is also confirmed in the study of Röders (2023) where he argued that implementing fair and transparent processes in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) programs is essential for building trust and preventing a relapse into violence.

However, there is a noticeable gap between symbolic citizenship and active participation. The high score for voting (3.65) compared to the low score for attending community meetings (3.25) suggests that participants want to be recognized as citizens but are hesitant to be "seen" or "heard" in their local neighborhoods. McFee (2023) pointed out in her research that in some cases, the complexities of reintegration may lead to skepticism about the effectiveness of trust-building measures, especially if former combatants feel marginalized or if their experiences during conflict are not adequately acknowledged. This is what they call "political shyness" which often stems from a fear of social stigma or being judged by neighbors. This

suggests that the program has successfully convinced participants they belong to the nation, but more work is needed to help them feel comfortable in their local community governance.

Finally, the results show that participants are more aware of their "responsibilities" than their "rights." This indicates a "compliance-based" model of reintegration. While understanding the rule of law is vital, true political empowerment requires an equal understanding of legal rights and the ability to access legal assistance. Without knowing how to defend their rights, returnees remain vulnerable. Therefore, the program's next step should be moving from teaching "how to obey" to teaching "how to participate" and "how to seek protection" under the law (Robinson-Pant, 2023).

3.2.6 Impact of Reintegration Programs on the Political Life and Aspirations of Returnees

Table 3.2.6 presents the assessment of the "Sense of Security and Personal Safety" dimension as a critical component of the participants' life and aspirations. This dimension is evaluated through three sub-categories: the feeling of safety within the community, perceptions of vulnerability to threats, and confidence in law enforcement and security forces. The data reflects the extent to which the reintegration program has fostered a secure environment for former offenders, measuring their trust in both social structures and formal justice systems.

Table 3.2.6. Assessing Sense of Security & Personal Safety Dimension of Life and Aspirations

Statements	Mean	Standard Deviation	Verbal Description	Qualitative Interpretation
Feeling of Safety in the Community	3.66	1.47	Agree	High/ Positive
Perceptions of Vulnerability to Threats	3.53	1.38	Agree	High/ Positive
Confidence in Law Enforcement Protection and Security Forces	3.69	1.48	Agree	High/ Positive

Overall Mean	3.76	1.54	Agree	High/ Positive
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The results in Table 2.6 demonstrate a robust and statistically positive perception of safety among participants, yielding an Overall Mean of 3.76 with a corresponding qualitative interpretation of "High/Positive." This suggests that the reintegration program has been highly effective in fostering a secure environment for returnees.

The findings for Sense of Security and Personal Safety suggest that the reintegration program has successfully established a secured environment for returnees. The overall mean of 3.76—the highest among the various life dimensions—indicates that physical and environmental safety are the program's strongest outcomes. This is a critical prerequisite for all other forms of development; as noted by Sharif and Zuluaga (2026), especially that without a perceived sense of safety, individuals cannot successfully engage in the psychological or economic aspects of reintegrated life. They also emphasized that in order to prevent violent revenge attacks to the former combatants, the government must provide physical protection and security provision.

A significant highlight in this dimension are the freedom of movement (3.78) and the trust in security forces (3.71). For returnees who may have previously viewed the police or military as adversaries, this shift represents a profound transformation in their worldview. This idea is reflected on the concept of Restorative diplomacy which emphasizes promise-keeping and learning from Indigenous wisdom, which can transform perceptions of the state among former adversaries. By ritualizing peace agreements and fostering regular commemorations, states can build trust and mutual respect (Braithwaite, 2024). Aspilan (2023) as shared as a result of his study among returnees in the Cordilleras, reintegration programs also reduces discrimination among returnees, keep them dignified and trust the government more. and When former combatants or marginalized individuals begin to view security forces as protectors rather than threats, it signals a successful "re-alignment" with the

state. This confidence allows participants to participate in community life without the paralyzing fear of surveillance or arrest.

Finally, the results regarding vulnerability to threats (3.53) indicate that while participants feel safe now, there is a lingering, subtle concern about the future. The lower score regarding the "risk of returning to armed conflict" (3.50) compared to "moving freely" (3.78) suggests that security is currently viewed as a result of the program's protection rather than a permanent change in the social environment. To move toward long-term peace, Lopez (2024) argues that programs must transition from "providing security" to "building community resilience," ensuring that safety is maintained by social bonds rather than just the presence of authorities.

In relation to this, the Human Security Framework argues that security goes beyond merely state security or physical protection from harm, rather, it more complex and interrelated needs that stems from socio-economic & political issues that constantly threat the overall well-being of the people (Biswas & Murai, 2024).

3.3 Influence of Reintegration Programs to the Lives and Aspiration of Returnees

A critical objective of this study is to determine whether the specific interventions provided (ranging from community involvement to mental health and socio-economic support), actually translate into measurable improvements in the returnees' life and aspirations. By applying a Pearson Correlation analysis, this section evaluates the strength and direction of these relationships. This statistical test serves to validate reintegration framework and identifies which program components are the most influential in shaping the future prospects of the returnees.

3.3.1 Test of Correlation between the Reintegration Programs Received and the Life and

Aspirations of Returnees (According to each Dimension)

involvement, mental health support, and socio-economic development—and the multifaceted life domains of the respondents. These correlations are interpreted based on the guidelines by Cohen et al. (2013) to assess the strength of the relationships, while the p-values determine the statistical significance required to test the first null hypothesis (H_{01}).

Table 3.3.1 utilize the Pearson Correlation Coefficient to determine the degree of association between the various types of support received—community

Table 3.3.1. Test of Correlation between the reintegration Programs Received and the Life and Aspirations of returnees (According to each Dimension)

Variables	Community Involvement	Mental health/ Ppsychological support	Socio-economic Ddevelopment support
Economic life and aspiration	0.574**	0.738**	0.771**
Social life and aspiration	0.392**	0.468**	0.490**
Psychological life and aspiration	0.391**	0.488**	0.474**
Cultural life and aspiration	0.397**	0.434**	0.429**
Political life and aspiration	0.356**	0.458**	0.471**
Safety and security	0.284**	0.388**	0.406**
Reintegration Programs and life and aspirations of returnees			0.537**

Note. The strength of a correlation coefficient can be interpreted using general guidelines based on the absolute value of r: values from 0.00–0.19 indicate a very weak relationship, 0.20–0.39 a weak relationship, 0.40–0.59 a moderate relationship, 0.60–0.79 a strong relationship, and 0.80–1.00 a very strong relationship (Cohen et al., 2013). Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Table 3.3.1 presents the Pearson correlation coefficients (r) assessing the relationship between the types of reintegration programs received and the various life dimensions of returnees. The data reveals that all correlations are positive and significant at the 0.05 level, with an overall correlation of 0.537, indicating a moderate relationship between the programs received and the returnees' overall life and aspirations.

0.771) and Mental Health/Psychological Support (r = 0.738). Community Involvement also shows a moderate relationship (r = 0.574) with economic aspirations.

The strongest correlations are observed in Economic Life and Aspiration, which shows a strong relationship with both Socioeconomic Development Support (r =

In contrast, other life dimensions, such as Social, Psychological, Cultural, and Political life, exhibit moderate relationships with both Mental Health and Socioeconomic supports, generally ranging between 0.429 and 0.490. The weakest correlations in the study are found within the Safety and Security dimension, which has only a weak relationship with Community Involvement (r = 0.284) and Mental Health support (r

= 0.388), barely reaching the moderate threshold with Socioeconomic support ($r = 0.406$).

The results provide a definitive answer to the research problem: there is a significant and positive influence between the programs received and the aspirations of returnees. However, the varying strengths of these correlations offer deeper insight into the mechanics of the reintegration process. The strong link between Socioeconomic support and Economic aspirations (0.771) proves that tangible aid, such as livelihood assistance and skills training, is the most effective driver of a returnee's sense of a viable future. As Aspilan (2023) notes, socioeconomic support has significantly decreased social discrimination on returnees and have restored the faith of returnees to the government. And so, we may say that, economic support serves the as the "anchor" of the reintegration process; when a returnee perceives a path to financial independence, their commitment to a civilian life is solidified.

A critical finding is the high correlation between Mental Health support and Economic life (0.738). This suggests a cross-domain impact where the benefits of psychological support extend beyond emotional stability into the realm of economic functionality. According to (Kumar & Willman, 2016) returnees who receive mental health interventions often possess a higher degree of "cognitive readiness," which is

essential for managing small businesses or maintaining steady employment. This validates the study's holistic approach, demonstrating that psychological stability is a foundational asset for economic recovery.

The moderate influence found in the Cultural and Political dimensions suggests that while programs are beneficial, these areas are also governed by the "social permeability" of the community. Lyu & Qian (2024) explains that while a program can educate a returnee on their civic rights, the community's actual willingness to accept their participation is an external factor that institutional support can only influence to a certain degree. This explains why these correlations, though significant, do not reach the "strong" threshold.

Finally, the weak correlation with Safety and Security indicates that a returnee's sense of safety is the least dependent on the specific programs received. This implies that while the program offers a protective framework, the returnee's actual sense of security is largely dictated by the objective peace and order of their immediate environment. As Moreno (2023) argues, reintegration programs can empower the individual, but they cannot entirely substitute for the broader state-level security apparatus. In summary, while the program is a powerful catalyst for change—particularly in economic and psychological terms—its influence is maximized when paired with a supportive social and secure environment.

Table 3.3.1.1. Summary of Results for Test of Correlation between the Reintegration Programs Received and the Life and Aspirations of Returnees

Variables	Correlation Coefficient	p-value	Interpretation	Decision
Reintegration Programs Received and Life and Aspirations of the Returnees	0.562	0.001	Moderate positive correlation	Reject H_{01}

Note: The strength of a correlation coefficient can be interpreted using general guidelines based on the absolute value of r: values from 0.00–0.19 indicate a very weak relationship, 0.20–0.39 a weak relationship, 0.40–0.59 a moderate relationship, 0.60–0.79 a strong relationship, and 0.80–1.00 a very strong relationship (Cohen et al., 2013); Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The summary of results in Table 3.3.1.1 reveals a Pearson correlation coefficient (r) of 0.562 with a p-value of 0.001, indicating a statistically significant, moderate positive correlation, between the Reintegration Programs Received and Quality of life

and Aspirations of returnees. Because the p-value is well below the 0.05 alpha level, the null hypothesis (H_{01}) is rejected. This result suggests that as the Reintegration received improve, there is a corresponding and predictable increase in the

returnees' overall quality of life and their aspirations for the future.

The rejection of the null hypothesis confirms that reintegration programs are not merely administrative requirements but are functional cause for human development. The moderate positive correlation ($r = 0.562$) aligns with the Sustainable Livelihood Model discussed by Pratama et al. (2024), which posits that institutional support directly enhances a returnee's adaptive capacity and future aspirations. This relationship is further elucidated by the UNDP (2024) guidance on community-based reintegration, which suggests that the "experience" of the process—how a returnee is treated and supported—dictates their long-term social and economic absorption. When returnees perceive their reintegration journey as supportive and fair, it reinforces the "procedural justice" described by Tyler (2026), wherein trust in formal systems leads to higher life satisfaction and more ambitious personal aspirations.

Furthermore, the strength of this correlation highlights the interconnectedness of program domains; for instance, the strong links between socio-economic support and economic aspirations ($r = 0.771$) previously noted in Table 3.3.1 provide the granular

evidence for this overall summary. As Ozola-Cīrule and Martinsone (2025) argue, addressing the psychological and material "stress factors" during the return process is what ultimately shifts the correlation from weak to moderate or strong. By providing a structured pathway, these programs reduce the perceived vulnerability of returnees, allowing them to pivot from survival-based thinking to long-term life planning. This statistical significance underscores that the holistic nature of the program—incorporating mental health, community, and economic support—is the primary driver in improving the lived experience of those returning to society.

3.3.2 Domains of Reintegration Processes as Predictors of Life and Aspirations of the Returnees

This section transition from identifying simple associations to determining which specific dimensions of the reintegration programs serve as significant predictors of the returnees' life and aspirations. While the previous correlational analysis established that a relationship exists, it does not account for the relative influence of each program component when they are considered simultaneously.

Table 3.3.2. Domains of Reintegration Processes as Predictors of Life and Aspirations of the Returnees

Measures	B	Beta	t	p	Decision
Community Involvement	0.084	0.079	1.344	0.180	Reject H_{02}
Mental Health/ Psychological Support	0.280	0.249	3.612	0.001	
Socio-economic Development Support	0.357	0.308	4.7463	0.001	

Model Fit Statistics $R = 0.574$

$R^2 = 0.330$

Adjusted $R^2 = 0.324$

$F = 58.71$

$p = 0.001$

Note: B = unstandardized regression coefficient; Beta = standardized regression coefficient.

Table 3.3.2 presents the results of the Multiple Linear Regression Analysis used to determine which domains of the Reintegration Programs significantly predict the Life and Aspirations of the Returnees. The model yielded a Multiple Correlation Coefficient (R) of 0.574, with a Coefficient of Determination (R^2) of 0.330. This indicates that approximately 33% of the

variance in the returnees' life and aspirations can be explained by the three reintegration domains included in the model. The overall model is statistically significant, as evidenced by an F-value of 58.71 ($p = 0.001$), providing sufficient empirical evidence to reject the second null hypothesis (H_{02}).

Among the individual predictors, Socio-economic Development Support emerged as the most influential factor, with the highest standardized coefficient ($\beta = 0.308$, $t = 4.746$, $p = 0.001$). This is followed by Mental Health/Psychological Support, which also significantly predicts positive life outcomes ($\beta = 0.249$, $t = 3.612$, $p = 0.001$).

Conversely, while Community Involvement has a positive unstandardized coefficient ($B = 0.084$), it failed to reach statistical significance in this specific model ($p = 0.180$), suggesting that it does not act as a primary individual predictor when the other two factors are held constant.

The results of the regression analysis show a clear hierarchy of influence on how the reintegration program affects the lives and aspirations of returnees. Essentially, while all parts of the program are helpful, Socio-economic Development Support is the most significant predictor ($\beta = 0.308$). However, this finding goes beyond just giving people money or jobs. As Arango (2020) explains, when returnees get technical or vocational training, they are not just looking for material gain; rather, they are looking for a "moral transformation." They want to earn respect, gain independence, and set a better example for their children.

This means that the economic side of the program acts as a foundation for a new identity. Barrios Sabogal (2024) adds that for these economic benefits to gain long-term stability, returnees need a sense of "permanence"—knowing they have a secure place to live and work. When they feel settled and have a way to provide for themselves, they can finally stop worrying about survival and start aspiring for a better future.

Furthermore, the fact that Mental Health and Psychological Support is also a significant predictor ($\beta = 0.249$) shows that reintegration is a journey of the mind as much as the economic aspect of it. Raets (2024) points out that the "mechanisms of change"—like learning new skills and changing how you see yourself—are the same for almost anyone trying to turn their life around. However, coming from a high-risk or conflict-heavy background requires extra

mental and emotional process of finding one's way through a major life transition. As Tizazu et al. (2021) added, that previous models of reintegration often omit the "environmental and social factors" that contribute to psychological well-being. The results show that psychological support acts like a stabilizer, helping returnees process their past so they can actually use the tools the program gives them to build a new life.

Finally, the non-significant result for Community Involvement as an individual predictor ($p = .180$) offers a critical insight into the mechanics of social capital. While community acceptance is a necessary backdrop, Barrios-Sabogal (2024) suggests that the "rebuilding of social fabric" is often a slow, collective outcome that depends heavily on the success of individual economic and security gains. Raets (2024) echoes this, suggesting that while the "social context" affects how reintegration takes shape, the most direct way to improve a returnee's life right now is to ensure they are mentally resilient and economically secure. This suggests that while community involvement provides the environment for success, the drivers of life aspirations remain rooted in psychological resilience and socio-economic security.

IV. CONCLUSION

This Descriptive-Correlational Research examined the impact of reintegration programs on the lives and aspirations of returnees from armed groups in Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN) based on both quantitative findings. The results show that although reintegration programs contribute to the transition of returnees into civilian life, the level of support provided remains generally limited and uneven across program areas.

The findings reveal that current reintegration efforts are largely focused on short-term humanitarian assistance, while long-term structural support such as sustainable livelihood opportunities, housing assistance, and continuous psychosocial care remains insufficient. This imbalance indicates that reintegration programs address immediate survival needs but fall short in providing the structural foundations necessary for lasting reintegration.

Across the six life dimensions examined, the study found uneven outcomes. Economic reintegration remains the most fragile aspect, while social and psychological dimensions show moderate progress, particularly within the family sphere. In contrast, cultural harmony, trust in government institutions, and the sense of safety and security demonstrate more positive outcomes. However, returnees often remain passive participants in civic life, reflecting limited community and political engagement.

Statistical analyses confirmed that reintegration programs significantly influence the life and aspirations of returnees, with socio-economic development support and mental health support emerging as the strongest predictors of positive outcomes. These findings highlight that sustainable reintegration requires not only security and compliance but also economic independence and psychological resilience. Strengthening these dimensions is essential for transforming reintegration programs into effective mechanisms for long-term peacebuilding.

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