

Perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts

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Abstract

Small- and medium-sized business owners consider the qualifications and backgrounds of individuals before hiring them, as they want to ensure the quality of work and minimize the risks of employing unqualified personnel. Therefore, it is essential to understand business owners' perceptions of hiring ex-convicts, both to identify the criteria they prioritize when selecting employees and to provide ex-convicts with opportunities to be reasonably assessed for job suitability. This study aimed to assess business owners' perceptions of hiring ex-convicts, analyzing responses collectively and separately according to age, sex, educational attainment, and type of business, as well as in relation to work competence, character, and evidence of reformation. The respondents consisted of 100 business owners, and the study was conducted in Bacolod City, Philippines. Additionally, the study sought to determine whether there were significant differences in perceptions when respondents were grouped according to their profile variables. The study employed a descriptive comparative research design and the Mann–Whitney U test. Results indicated that business owners' perceptions of hiring ex-convicts were generally positive, regardless of profile variables or area of focus. However, disparities were observed in perceptions based on the highest educational attainment of the business owners. Consequently, the researcher strongly recommends that policymakers and local officials establish a city ordinance that sets standards for qualifying ex-convicts, enabling them to reapply for jobs under clear requirements and qualifications, thereby helping to restore trust and demonstrate positive moral character to potential employers.

Keywords: *business owners, ex-convicts, character, perception reformation, stigma, work competence*

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1. Introduction

Employment is a fundamental necessity for individuals within any community, serving not only as a means to meet basic needs but also as a cornerstone for sustaining livelihoods and participating meaningfully in society. Securing employment typically depends on an individual's credibility, skills, and prior experiences, which collectively signal their reliability and competence to potential employers. However, human behavior is inherently complex, and past actions, particularly legal transgressions, can compromise an individual's perceived trustworthiness in the labor market. Individuals who have committed offenses and are later reintegrated into society often face social stigma, prejudice, and doubt about their ability to contribute responsibly in a workplace setting (Moore et al., 2018; Overton et al., 2024). This societal skepticism reflects broader tensions between the ideals of rehabilitation and the persistent caution exercised by communities when evaluating the employability of ex-offenders (Clarke & Allen-McCombs, 2025; Moore et al., 2016).

Reinforcing the importance of this issue, employment is not merely an economic activity but a critical factor in social reintegration (Villman & Saarikkomäki, 2025; Ramakers et al., 2017; Munive, 2014). Denying work opportunities to ex-convicts may perpetuate cycles of marginalization, economic insecurity, and recidivism (Ramakers et al., 2017; Keene et al., 2018; Smith, 2021), while providing meaningful employment can foster rehabilitation, self-sufficiency, and community stability. Thus, the hesitancy of society and employers to fully accept reformed individuals presents a practical and moral dilemma: how to balance societal protection and organizational interests with the rights of individuals to rebuild their lives. This tension underscores the need to critically examine the assumptions and biases that shape hiring practices, as well as the mechanisms through which communities either facilitate or hinder successful reintegration.

Ultimately, understanding the dynamics of credibility, trust, and societal perception is essential for addressing the broader challenges of reintegration. While ex-convicts may carry the burden of past mistakes, they also represent a group capable of transformation and contribution if given structured opportunities. By acknowledging both the legitimate concerns of employers and the rehabilitative potential of individuals, communities can develop frameworks for employment that promote fairness, social cohesion, and economic inclusion. Addressing these challenges requires deliberate policy, awareness, and research to bridge the gap between social apprehension and the transformative potential of second chances.

This study focused on local scenarios in Bacolod City, examining how business owners perceive ex-convicts as potential employees. While much of the existing literature emphasizes the challenges ex-convicts face in seeking employment, there is limited research exploring the perspectives and concerns of business owners when hiring these individuals. Understanding these perceptions is crucial, as it enables researchers to propose standard operating procedures for screening ex-convicts that balance their right to employment with the considerations of employers. Furthermore, the findings of this study may inform recommendations for policies or city ordinances that protect ex-convicts from employment discrimination while ensuring that business owners' legitimate concerns are addressed.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Reintegration Challenges and Strategies for Ex-Convict Employment

Ex-convicts continue to face substantial stigma when seeking stable employment, as employers are often reluctant to hire individuals with serious offenses, particularly among racial or ethnic minority groups (Morzenti et al., 2021). In the United States, data reveal that 33% of over 50,000 people released from federal prisons in 2020 remained unemployed four years post-release, with many cycling through low-paying, insecure jobs (Wang & Bertram, 2022). Employers' concerns about supervision challenges and potential workplace disruptions further reinforce this stigma (Khasni et al., 2025; Giguere & Dundes, 2002), despite the availability of incentives and training programs designed to support hiring ex-offenders (Cudjoe-Mensah & Kumi, 2025). Industries such as waste management, construction, and food services reflect similar trends, where long-term stability and upward mobility for ex-offenders remain rare, undermining the broader goals of rehabilitation (Harding et al., 2014). These patterns highlight how structural and perceptual barriers intersect to constrain opportunities for reintegration, perpetuating cycles of economic vulnerability.

In the Philippines, the situation mirrors global trends, with ex-convicts experiencing financial hardship and unemployment post-release (Amurao et al., 2025). Only a minority manage to secure low-paying, short-term positions due to limited education, work experience, and discrimination. Incarceration further heightens unemployment risk, compounded by low literacy, health challenges, and social stigma that impede reintegration and contribute to mental health struggles such as depression (Williams & Williams, 2025; Martin et al., 2020; Ackerman et al., 2024; Cunha et al., 2023; Megari & Argyriadou, 2025). The widespread use

of background checks that emphasize character and reputation often narrows employment prospects even further. Ex-offenders also frequently face strained family relationships, particularly in cases involving drug offenses, which can exacerbate social and emotional challenges post-release (Mowen et al., 2020; Curib et al., 2023). Despite these barriers, a 2019 ILO-PH survey indicated that 43% of employers were open to hiring ex-offenders, reflecting ongoing efforts by government agencies and NGOs to facilitate rehabilitation (ILO, 2020). Long-term discrimination against ex-offenders often intersects with racial, economic, and mental health factors, while systemic issues such as overcrowded prison conditions underscore the need for comprehensive reform (Turney et al., 2013; Tyler & Brockmann, 2017).

Research consistently shows that employers' primary concerns regarding ex-offender hires center on risk and reliability (Obatusin & Ritter-Williams, 2019; Haslewood-Pócsik et al., 2008; Morzenti & Gringeri, 2021; Ahmed & Lång, 2017), with candidates often perceived as less trustworthy, which directly impacts both employability and wage prospects. Strategies to address these challenges include reentry support programs and life-skills training or educational initiatives that prepare ex-offenders for workplace demands. The Theory of Planned Behavior has also been applied to illustrate how belief-driven hiring attitudes shape employer decision-making (Khasni et al., 2023).

2.2. Theoretical Framework

Festinger's theory of cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957) provides a useful lens for understanding the psychological tension business owners experience when reconciling moral reservations about hiring ex-convicts with the practical necessity of staffing their organizations. This dissonance compels owners to navigate a complex balancing act, weighing personal ethical values against operational demands and organizational interests. Complementing this perspective, the Cognitive-Affective Processing System (CAPS) theory by Mischel and Shoda (1995) explains that owners' hiring decisions are influenced by an interplay of rational risk assessments and emotional responses to social stigma, shaping their attitudes and behaviors toward ex-offender employment. Additionally, the risk perception and benefit management framework (Paek & Hove, 2017) underscores the multifaceted considerations that inform these decisions, including concerns about workplace safety, legal liability, and reputational consequences, alongside potential advantages such as accessing motivated labor, promoting corporate social responsibility, and realizing cost efficiencies from

an underutilized workforce. Together, these theoretical perspectives illuminate the cognitive and emotional processes that underpin business owners' decision-making, highlighting both the barriers and opportunities associated with the employment of ex-offenders.

3. Methodology

This study used a descriptive, comparative, quantitative design to assess business owners' perceptions of hiring ex-convicts. This approach observes a large population to conclude variables, allowing researchers to identify relationships between variables without manipulation.

The participants of the study were business owners from Barangays Alangilan, Estefania, Villamonte, Bata, and Mansilingan in Bacolod City, Philippines selected using a random sampling technique. These barangays were chosen due to their high concentration of businesses and establishments. The demographic characteristics of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Table 2

Demographic characteristics

Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Age		
Younger (below 42 years old)	50	50
Older (42 years old and above)	50	50
Sex		
Male	34	34
Female	66	66
Highest educational attainment		
Lower (Elementary and High School Level)	25	25
Highest (College Level)	75	75
Type of business		
Apartment and boarding house	14	14
Construction business	5	5
Food and Beverages	34	34
Market and Grocery	26	26
Vegetables and Livestock	21	21
Total	100	100

The participants in this study were business owners whose profiles were examined in terms of age, sex, highest educational attainment, and type of business. Data indicate an equal distribution between younger and older respondents, suggesting balanced representation across age groups. In terms of sex, the majority of participants were female, accounting for 66% of

the respondents, while males comprised 34%, reflecting the increasing role of women in entrepreneurship and business leadership. With regard to educational attainment, 75% of the business owners had attained higher levels of education, indicating that most respondents possessed the academic background associated with informed and cautious decision-making in business operations and hiring practices. In terms of business type, the largest proportion of respondents operated in the food and beverage sector (34%), followed by market and grocery businesses (26%), vegetables and livestock enterprises (21%), apartment and boarding house operations (14%), and construction-related businesses (5%). The dominance of food and beverage and essential retail sectors highlights the relevance of these industries in employment generation and community sustainability, particularly in contexts where labor reliability and trust are critical considerations for employers.

The study used a researcher-made survey questionnaire with two parts: a respondent profile (age, sex, education, and type of business) and 10 items on work competence, character, and reformation rated on a 5-point Likert scale. The instrument was validated using Good and Scates' criteria, yielding a mean of 3.47 ("good") and confirmed as highly reliable with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.948. Data were analyzed and treated with frequency, mean, and Mann-Whitney U-test.

A letter of consent, endorsed by the research adviser and noted by the dean, was presented to participating business owners, and permission was secured from selected barangays in Bacolod City. Informed consent was obtained from respondents, ensuring voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. The researchers ensured adherence to the University's ethical standards. Upon completion, all data-gathering materials were discarded appropriately.

4. Findings and Discussion

Table 2 shows the perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts across three areas: work competence, reformation, and character, with results showing an overall high level of perception in all areas (work competence: 4.33, reformation: 4.32, character: 4.39).

In work competence, trustworthiness rated highest (4.43), while maintaining good working relationships rated lowest (4.21), suggesting skepticism about ex-convicts' interpersonal skills, a view contradicted by Wiafe (2021), who highlights that reformed ex-convicts can foster collaboration and productivity.

Table 2*Level of perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts*

Indicators	Mean	Interpretation
Work Competence	4.33	High
Reformation	4.32	High
Character	4.39	High

In the area of reformation, being negative in a drug test rated highest (4.41), while acquittal status rated lowest (4.21), indicating a need for stronger indicators of trust and reformation. In the area of character, determination and self-motivation rated highest (4.49), while vigilance rated lowest (4.22), implying that employers may perceive alertness as a risk for potential misconduct despite the rehabilitative role of vocational and educational training.

Table 3*Level of perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts according to demographic characteristics*

Indicators	Younger Mean Interpretation		Older Mean Interpretation	
Age				
Work Competence	4.28	High	4.38	High
Reformation	4.26	High	4.38	High
Character	4.35	High	4.43	High
Sex				
Work Competence	4.31	High	4.34	High
Reformation	4.25	High	4.36	High
Character	4.35	High	4.41	High
Highest Educational Attainment				
Work Competence	3.94	High Level	4.46	High
Reformation	3.98	High	4.43	High
Character	4.08	High	4.49	Very High

Table 3 and Table 4 present the perceptions of business owners toward hiring ex-convicts when grouped according to demographic characteristics and type of business, revealing notable variations across groups. The findings indicate that both younger and older business owners generally rated ex-convicts favorably in terms of work competence, reformation, and character, suggesting a shared recognition of the potential for rehabilitation and productive employment. However, differences in emphasis emerged between age groups:

younger owners placed greater importance on learning ability and humanitarian considerations, reflecting a more progressive and inclusive outlook toward second-chance employment. In contrast, older owners prioritized indicators of trustworthiness and concrete safeguards, such as drug test results, highlighting a more cautious and experience-driven approach to risk management in hiring decisions.

Table 4

Level of perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts according to type of business

Categories	Apartment and Boarding House		Construction Business		Food and Beverages Business		Market Grocery		Vegetables and Livestock	
	WM		WM		WM		WM		WM	
Work Competence	4.41	High	4.78	Very High	4.19	High	4.33	High	4.39	High
Reformation	4.34	High	4.66	Very High	4.33	High	4.26	High	4.28	High
Character	4.46	High	4.68	Very High	4.36	High	4.34	High	4.39	High

Gender-based differences in perception were also evident. Male business owners tended to focus more on trust, ethics, and compliance with workplace norms, indicating concern for maintaining organizational integrity and minimizing potential risks. Female business owners, on the other hand, placed higher value on indicators of reformation, such as behavioral change and willingness to improve, which may reflect a more empathetic and socially oriented perspective on employment and rehabilitation. These differences suggest that gender influences how business owners balance organizational protection with social responsibility when evaluating ex-convicts as potential employees.

Educational attainment further shaped perceptions, as business owners with higher levels of education rated ex-convicts more positively in terms of reformation and character. This finding aligns with the view that education enhances awareness of rehabilitation processes and supports the belief that ex-convicts can be transformed into productive and responsible members of society. In contrast, business owners with lower educational attainment tended to be more cautious, potentially due to limited exposure to reintegration programs or greater reliance on traditional risk-based judgments.

Variations were also observed across business types. Construction businesses consistently rated ex-convicts highest in work competence, reformation, and character,

suggesting stronger trust in their capabilities and a greater openness to employing individuals with criminal records. This may be attributed to the labor-intensive nature of the industry, where physical skills, productivity, and work output are prioritized over customer interaction. Conversely, food and beverage, market, and grocery businesses demonstrated more cautious perceptions, largely due to concerns related to security, customer trust, and financial investment. Overall, these findings underscore the complexity of employer perceptions and highlight the importance of assessing ex-convicts' competencies and evidence of reformation in relation to the demographic background of business owners and the operational demands of different industries when considering them for employment.

Tables 5, 6 and 7 display the test of difference on the perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts in the areas of work competence, reformation and character.

The statistical results reveal that age, sex, and type of business do not have a significant influence on business owners' perceptions of hiring ex-convicts when grouped and compared across the dimensions of work competence, reformation, and character, as indicated by p values exceeding the 0.05 alpha level.

Table 5

Difference in the level of perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts in the area of work competence

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis H	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	50	46.58	4.208	1054.000	0.175	0.05	Not Significant
	Older	50	54.42					
Sex	Male	34	46.91	4.208	1000.000	0.373	0.05	Not Significant
	Female	66	52.35					
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	25	34.88	4.208	547.000	0.002	0.05	Significant
	Higher	75	55.71					
	Apartment and Boarding House	14	54.04					
Type of Business	Construction Business	5	74.30	4.208	547.000	0.002	0.05	Significant
	Food and Beverages Business	34	46.79					
	Market and Grocery	26	49.31					
	Vegetables and Livestock	21	49.95					

Table 6*Difference in the level of perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts in the area of reformation*

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis H	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	50	48.56		1153.000	0.502		Not Significant
	Older	50	52.44					
Sex	Male	34	46.38		982.000	0.306		Not Significant
	Female	66	52.62					
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	25	35.10		552.500	0.002		Significant
	Higher	75	55.63					
Type of Business	Apartment and Boarding House	14	50.11	2.526		0.640	0.05	Not Significant
	Construction Business	5	65.90					
	Food and Beverages Business	34	53.34					
	Market and Grocery	26	46.04					
	Vegetables and Livestock	21	48.02					

Table 7*Difference in the level of perception of business owners on hiring ex-convicts in the area of character*

Variable	Category	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal Wallis H	Mann Whitney U	p-value	Sig. level	Interpretation
Age	Younger	50	48.88		1169.000	0.575		Not Significant
	Older	50	52.12					
Sex	Male	34	48.06		1039.000	0.544		Not Significant
	Female	66	51.76					
Highest Educational Attainment	Lower	25	37.58		614.500	0.010		Significant
	Higher	75	54.81					
Type of Business	Apartment and Boarding House	14	49.00	1.676		0.795	0.05	Not Significant
	Construction Business	5	63.80					
	Food and Beverages Business	34	52.53					
	Market and Grocery	26	47.04					
	Vegetables and Livestock	21	49.33					

This suggests that, regardless of demographic background or industry, business owners tend to hold broadly similar views toward ex-convicts in these key areas. In contrast, a statistically significant difference was observed when perceptions were analyzed according to the highest educational attainment of the business owners. This finding indicates that education plays a pivotal role in shaping how employers assess ex-convicts' capabilities, moral reform, and trustworthiness. Business owners with higher educational attainment may possess greater awareness of rehabilitation processes, labor policies, and the social benefits of inclusive hiring, leading to more nuanced and informed evaluations. This result is consistent with the findings of Smith (2021), Giguere and Dundes (2002), Cudjoe-Mensah and Kumi (2025) and Amurao et al. (2025), emphasizing that employer perceptions, particularly those shaped by knowledge and understanding, are critical to the successful reintegration of ex-offenders into the workforce.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to assess the perceptions of business owners in Bacolod City toward hiring ex-convicts, both overall and when grouped according to demographic characteristics such as age, sex, highest educational attainment, and type of business. It further examined these perceptions across three critical dimensions relevant to employability: work competence, reformation, and character. The investigation was grounded in established theoretical frameworks, including Festinger's cognitive dissonance theory, the Cognitive-Affective Process Theory (CAPT), and the Risk Perception and Benefit Management framework. Together, these theories explain how attitudes and decisions are shaped through the interaction of moral beliefs, emotional responses, rational risk assessments, and perceived benefits, particularly in contexts involving potential uncertainty, such as the employment of ex-convicts.

The findings revealed that business owners in Bacolod City generally held a high level of perception toward hiring ex-convicts. This positive perception was consistently observed across age groups, sex, and types of business, as well as across the three areas of work competence, reformation, and character. Among these dimensions, work competence received the highest overall mean score, indicating that business owners place strong emphasis on an ex-convict's skills, productivity, and ability to perform job-related tasks effectively. This suggests that practical job performance may outweigh stigma-related concerns when employers evaluate potential hires. However, some nuanced perceptions emerged within

specific indicators. For instance, the ability of ex-convicts to maintain positive relationships with colleagues was rated lowest under work competence, possibly reflecting lingering concerns about workplace harmony and interpersonal trust. Within the dimension of reformation, hiring based solely on case acquittal received the lowest mean score, indicating that business owners may require more concrete evidence of behavioral change beyond legal outcomes. Similarly, optimism was the lowest-rated trait under character, implying that employers may prioritize observable behavior and accountability over attitudinal traits when making hiring decisions.

When perceptions were analyzed according to demographic groupings, statistical tests, including the Mann-Whitney U-test and the Kruskal-Wallis Test, revealed that perceptions did not significantly differ based on age, sex, or type of business. However, a significant difference was found when perceptions were grouped according to the highest educational attainment of business owners across all three dimensions. As a result, the null hypothesis was rejected with respect to educational attainment but accepted for age, sex, and type of business. This finding underscores the pivotal role of education in shaping employer attitudes, suggesting that higher educational attainment may be associated with greater awareness of rehabilitation, inclusivity, and evidence-based decision-making in hiring ex-convicts.

Based on these findings, the study offers several recommendations for research, policy, and practice. Future studies are encouraged to examine in greater depth how business owners assess applicants' current competencies, skills, and qualifications rather than focusing predominantly on past criminal records. For policymakers and local government officials, the study strongly recommends the formulation of a City Ordinance that establishes clear standards and qualifications for ex-convicts seeking employment, thereby helping to rebuild employer trust while promoting fair hiring practices. Business owners are advised to conduct background checks that are legally compliant and directly relevant to job requirements, ensuring that hiring decisions remain fair, transparent, and non-discriminatory. Additionally, organizations are encouraged to implement internal support mechanisms, such as mentorship programs or employee assistance initiatives, to facilitate smoother workplace integration. Establishing clear performance expectations and obtaining references from credible individuals who can attest to an ex-convict's rehabilitation and law-abiding lifestyle are also recommended practices.

Despite its contributions, the study acknowledges certain limitations. The researchers were unable to survey all business owners in Bacolod City due to security concerns and the

possible reluctance of some owners to participate, which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Furthermore, the study did not explore in detail the specific methods used by business owners to evaluate candidates' present skills and capabilities independent of their criminal history. Addressing these limitations in future research would provide a more comprehensive understanding of hiring practices and further strengthen efforts toward inclusive and evidence-based employment of ex-convicts.

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This study was conducted in accordance with the ethical guidelines set by STI West Negros University. The conduct of this study has been approved and given relative clearance(s) by STI West Negros University.

Declaration

The author declares the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) in writing this paper. In particular, the author used AI tools, such as ChatGPT for correcting sentence construction, grammar, and syntax, and Grammarly for thorough grammar checks, which have been employed to ensure the accuracy and clarity of the context. The author takes full responsibility for ensuring proper review and editing of content generated using AI.

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