# Journey from Studies to Employment among Criminology Working Students: An Appreciative Inquiry

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**ABSTRACT**

In recent years, the transition from academic life to professional careers has posed unique challenges for criminology students, especially those who juggled work and studies. This study explored the lived experiences, strengths, and aspirations of former criminology students who balanced academic responsibilities with employment. Guided by Appreciative Inquiry and the 4D model—Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny—this qualitative research highlighted the positive traits and coping strategies that contributed to their success. Ten participants were selected through purposive and snowball sampling, and data were gathered using an interview guide developed by the researcher. Thematic analysis revealed core strengths such as discipline, time management, resilience, and a strong sense of purpose fueled by a desire to serve. Support from family, mentors, and institutional systems played a critical role in sustaining motivation. Participants envisioned meaningful careers rooted in their academic growth and personal perseverance. Their stories reflected how strategic planning, prioritization, and self-improvement helped them overcome the demands of dual roles. The following key themes emerged: Discipline and Time Management as Cornerstones of Success; Working Students Embody Resilience Fueled by Purpose and a Passion to Serve; Discipline, Perseverance, and Support as Key Drivers; The Transformative Power of Hard Work and Discipline; and Meaningful Careers Shaped by Humble Beginnings. The findings underscore the need for academic institutions to provide flexible learning options, embed career development in the curriculum, and foster partnerships with law enforcement agencies to support student success.

**Keywords:** Career Development; Criminology Students; Discipline; Dual Roles; Mentorship; Perseverance; Resilience; Student Success; Support Systems; Time Management; Transition; Working Students.

## 1. Introduction

Education remains financially inaccessible for many individuals, driving students to seek part-time work to meet financial and academic demands (Norazlan et al., 2020). A significant number of students, particularly those from lower-income families, depend on part-time jobs to offset rising tuition and living costs. This financial strain has been exacerbated by increased expenses for housing, transportation, and other necessities, making full-time academic attendance challenging without supplemental income (Verulava & Jorbenadze, 2022).

For criminology students, the transition from academic study to employment is particularly critical, especially for those balancing work and education. Studies have highlighted how financial pressures often push students to work while studying, with part-time jobs serving as a common means of managing tuition and living expenses (Kocsis & Pusztai, 2020). However, such roles frequently fall outside their field of study, requiring them to juggle academic responsibilities with unrelated work (Delos et al., 2024; Summer et al., 2023).

While this dual role can foster valuable skills, it also presents challenges, including heightened stress and difficulty integrating academic learning with workplace demands (Faizuddin, 2020). On the other hand, it could eventually be advantageous. The primary benefits of working while in school, aside from financial gain, are the acquisition of work experience, which enhances a resume and gives students a better grasp of the labor market's structure, which may help them once they graduate (Kocsis & Puszta, 2019).

Despite these struggles, term-time work can provide long-term benefits such as skill development and better career opportunities after graduation (Clynes et al., 2020). Work experience equips students with essential "hard" and "soft" skills, including technical competencies, teamwork, communication, and problem-solving, which are critical for career advancement (Douglas & Attewell, 2019). Criminology education prepares graduates to address complex social challenges and contribute to fields such as law enforcement, social work, and legislation (Nayoyos-Refugia, 2021). Work-based learning, including part-time employment, has been shown to bridge the gap between academic knowledge and practical application, providing students with insights into real-world challenges (Bramford & Eason, 2020).

The employment outcomes of Bachelor of Science in Criminology graduates from the 2019–2023 academic years were evaluated in tracer research by Procurato et al. (2024) at the Kapalong College of Agriculture, Sciences and Technology (KCAST) in Davao del Norte, Region 11. According to the survey, 35% of graduates are employed, and most of them work in regular or job-order roles. Notably, many of these graduates made between ₱11,000 and ₱30,000 per month, and a sizable percentage stated that their present positions were related to their college degrees. According to the report, many of these graduates found work in law enforcement organizations, such as the Philippine National Police and the Bureau of Fire Protection. The study found that graduates' readiness for their professional jobs was enhanced by their mix of part-time work experience and academic instruction. However, juggling academic and work commitments often requires significant resilience and time management, highlighting the need for better support systems for working students (Procurato, 2024).

Many students are drawn to criminology to better understand societal challenges and improve social equity, often motivated by personal values or experiences (Trebilcock & Griffiths, 2021). Skills acquired during criminology studies, such as analytical reasoning and ethical decision-making, enhance employability and enable graduates to align their careers with personal and professional goals (Stockdale et al., 2021). By preparing students for careers in criminology, educational institutions play a vital role in fostering professionals dedicated to creating safer and more equitable societies (Pardiñas et al., 2023; Camal, 2022).

This study addresses both a theoretical and an empirical gap in existing literature. The theoretical gap pertains to the limited application of an Appreciative Inquiry framework in examining the experiences of criminology working students, as prior research has predominantly focused on their challenges and hardships rather than on their strengths, resilience, and career development. The empirical gap concerns the absence of localized tracer studies in Iligan City and Region X that specifically investigate the educational and professional trajectories of criminology working students. By shifting the focus from barriers to opportunities, this study seeks to contribute to the body of knowledge by providing qualitative insights into the positive experiences that shape the academic and career pathways of these students.

This study is significant because it shifts the narrative from highlighting the challenges faced by criminology-working students to recognizing their strengths, strategies, and achievements. By doing so, it addresses gaps in both theory and practice, offering a more holistic understanding of their educational and professional journeys. The insights generated can inform institutional policies, support services, and program

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development that are more responsive to the needs of working students. Furthermore, it contributes to local literature by focusing on former criminology students in Iligan City and Region X, providing a regional perspective that has been largely underexplored.

## 1.1. Study Objectives

This study explored the transition from academics to employment among criminology working students through the lens of Appreciative Inquiry. It aimed to understand how they balanced school and work, highlighting the strengths, goals, and strategies that shaped their journey. Specifically, it addressed the following objectives:

1. Identify the key strengths developed by criminology working students in managing both academic and work responsibilities.

2. Explore the career aspirations of working criminology students and how they pursued professional success.

3. Examine the strategies used by these students to achieve their academic and career goals.

4. Assess how former criminology working students have sustained their academic and professional success after graduation.

5. Generate insights that can inform institutional practices and support systems for working students in criminology programs.

## 2. Method

This qualitative study used Appreciative Inquiry (AI) and was based on the 4D model—Discover, Dream, Design, and Destiny—to analyze the lived experiences, strengths, and objectives of former Criminology students who balanced academic responsibilities with professional commitments. The study was conducted in one of the cities in Region 10, Northern Mindanao, Philippines, and included ten participants chosen using purposive and snowball sampling procedures. A researcher-created interview guide was utilized to collect insights, and interviews were performed utilizing open-ended questions in vernacular language to allow for rich narrative replies. Ethical factors, such as voluntary participation and data confidentiality, were scrupulously followed throughout the study. The thematic analysis found that participants' primary strengths were discipline, time management, and resilience, which allowed them to successfully negotiate their dual roles. A strong sense of purpose, a love for service, and institutional and familial support all played important roles in defining their academic and professional lives.

The study discovered that former working students maintained their success after graduation by practicing self-discipline, strategic planning, adaptability, and continual professional growth. Participants' academic achievements and professional experience inspired them to pursue careers in law enforcement and public service. Based on the findings, the study suggests that academic institutions provide flexible learning options, career counseling, and personal development seminars to help working students. Furthermore, creating mentorship programs with law enforcement organizations and supporting lifelong learning can help criminology graduates advance their careers. These projects aim to help students transition into professional practice and develop future criminology leaders.

## 3. Results and Discussions

Ten participants, four girls and six males, volunteered for this study. Five overarching themes emerged from the analysis of their responses: discipline and time management as cornerstones of success; working students embody resilience fueled by purpose and a passion for serving; discipline, perseverance, and support as key drivers; the transformative power of hard work and discipline; and meaningful careers shaped by humble beginnings. Each primary theme contains several subthemes, shedding light on the depth and diversity of participants' opinions.

### 3.1. Discipline and Time Management as Cornerstones of Success

This theme emphasizes how important time management and discipline are to working criminology students, who frequently strike a difficult balance between their career and school commitments. Time management and discipline emerged as an essential component of success. These reflections show that success was not just a result of intelligence or opportunity, but of intentional effort and structured living. Working students' academic performance and time management abilities are strongly positively correlated, indicating that developing these abilities might greatly improve their academic results (Mariano et al., 2022).

This main theme was developed from two subthemes: the *difficulties and time management as key survival skills* and the *resilience through adversity and stress management.* The two subthemes emerged from the participants' responses as they journey from studies to employment.

**3.1.1. Difficulties and Time Management as key Survival Skills:** This theme emerged from the necessity for working criminology students to balance academic responsibilities with part-time employment. Due to the demands of their dual roles, they must develop and maintain good time management and discipline abilities. These characteristics are important because they allow students to prioritize assignments, create successful study plans, and set realistic goals despite limited time due to financial constraints (Grace, 2025). Discipline helps them cope with academic stress, stay focused, and consistently achieve deadlines (Darvi et al., 2025). According to research, students who learn these abilities have better academic performance and higher emotional resilience, which contributes to their entire personal and professional development (Monteza, 2025). This subtheme emphasizes how discipline and time management are not just survival tools but also critical success factors for working criminology students. As a result, institutional support such as structured time management programs, flexible class schedules, and mental health services is critical in developing these skills (Saloma et al., 2024).

These are the shared statements of participants:

*"Those years taught me perseverance, self-discipline, and time management." (P5)*

*"Flexible schedules, time management, and discipline helped me survive." (P6)*

*"Having self-discipline, setting priorities, and managing time were my keys to surviving college while working." (P7)*

*"Balancing work and studies taught me discipline, time management, and perseverance." (P9)*

*"Discipline, determination, and time management helped me succeed." (P10)*

Participants frequently mentioned difficulties in efficiently managing time when juggling educational and employment duties. Participant 4 mentioned that juggling employment and school helped him acquire discipline and perseverance. Similarly, Participant 5 underlined the importance of persistence and self-discipline in meeting both expectations. Participant 6 stated that adaptation, time management, and flexibility in scheduling were critical for survival. Participant 7 emphasized the need to prioritize duties and maintain self-control to manage both responsibilities successfully. Participant 9 discussed how juggling these tasks instilled tenacity and self-control, whereas Participant 10 credited time management, discipline, and dedication with their academic performance.

It emphasizes the ongoing issue that criminology students confront in balancing academic commitments with part-time work. Participants stressed that juggling these two tasks needed discipline, persistence, and efficient time management. Many students reported feeling exhausted and under academic pressure because of competing schedules, but with constant effort, they learned coping skills such as prioritization, goal planning, and rigid scheduling (Delos et al., 2024).

These abilities became necessary not only for achieving academic deadlines, but also for completing professional obligations. According to research, effective time management skills are favorably associated with academic success among working students (Mariano et al., 2022). Finally, this subtheme illustrates how juggling work and school responsibilities fosters the self-control, adaptability, and resilience required for future professional development.

Their stories collectively demonstrate how discipline and time management influenced their academic journey and prepared them for the regimented, high-pressure setting of the criminology profession. Without these survival skills, participants might not have been able to handle the stress of their dual roles.

**3.1.2. Resilience through Adversity and Stress Management:** Resilience through adversity and effective stress management are vital for individuals facing challenging life circumstances, allowing them to adapt, recover, and even grow stronger from difficult experiences. According to recent research, resilience helps students better control their emotions, cope with worry, and bounce back from setbacks, therefore protecting them from the detrimental consequences of academic stress (Ansari & Iqbal, 2024). It has been demonstrated that stress management techniques, such as coping mechanisms like mindfulness, cognitive reframing, and social support, improve resilience and lessen anxiety and depressive symptoms in college students (Mittal et al., 2023).

Participants who overcame mental and physical weariness and performed well demonstrated resilience. Their experiences demonstrated the significance of sustaining discipline, timeliness, and a positive attitude in dealing with obligations despite exhaustion, illness, and busy schedules. Constant exposure to academic and work-related stress taught them how to adapt, focus, and thrive in stressful situations. These stories demonstrate that resilience entails more than just overcoming suffering; it also entails growing stronger through challenges and becoming more equipped for the emotional demands of law enforcement. Research, particularly in high-stress disciplines such as criminology, supports the incorporation of stress management training and resilience-building programs into educational environments to assist students in succeeding in the face of adversity (Fang et al., 2024).

These are their responses during the interview:

*"Despite the fatigue, I stayed disciplined, punctual, and focused—earning good grades and even praise from coworkers for always being on time."* (P1)

*"Those long nights, challenging shifts, and academic pressures shaped me into someone who can perform under stress and adapt quickly."* (P3)

*"Discipline, setting priorities, and staying positive helped me juggle everything despite getting sick and barely having rest."* (P8)

Resilience, discipline, and a positive mindset are not just outcomes but necessary tools for working criminology students to thrive academically and professionally. Participants' ability to perform under pressure, manage time effectively, and maintain motivation despite fatigue suggests that these competencies should be intentionally cultivated in academic settings. Institutions should consider implementing structured support systems—such as flexible course schedules, mental health services, and resilience training workshops—to assist working students in navigating dual responsibilities. These results imply that resilience is a talent that can be developed via focused treatments, enhancing stress management and general wellbeing, in addition to being a personal characteristic (Mansuroğlu, 2025).

This theme incorporates real-life stress simulations and emotional coping skills into criminology programs. Furthermore, it increases self-efficacy and adaptive coping abilities, both of which are critical for students balancing work, school, and personal responsibilities and are significantly connected with the development of psychological resilience (Amalianita et al., 2025). It better prepares students for the challenges of law enforcement jobs, resulting in more adaptable, stress-resistant professionals.

### 3.2. Working Students Embody Resilience, Fueled by Purpose and a Passion to Serve

Working students often demonstrate remarkable resilience, navigating the demanding balance between academic responsibilities and the necessity of financial support. A strong sense of purpose and an unrelenting desire to serve—whether it is their families, communities, or personal goals—fuel their journey. This theme developed from the following themes that emerged from the responses of the participants; these are: *from hardship to service, working students transform challenges into community impact, and from dream to badge: law enforcement as a lifelong aspiration and choosing purpose over comfort: working students driven by values and a desire to serve, and resilience redefined: from struggles to success through grit and growth*. This purpose-driven passion acts as a psychological resource, promoting engagement and wellbeing amid obstacles (Bagdžiūnienė et al., 2025).

Resilience serves as a mediator between students' self-efficacy and available support resources and favorable academic and psychological outcomes, demonstrating how inner motivation and external factors work together to preserve their tenacity. Students frequently draw strength from their commitment to serving others, which supports their determination and capacity to manage work-study challenges (Vallerand & Paquette, 2024). Resilience is not only a personal ability to adapt to stress and adversity, but it is also profoundly linked to their ambition to contribute meaningfully to society through their chosen disciplines (Park et al., 2025).

**3.2.1. From hardship to Service: Working Students Transform Challenges into Community Impact:** Many working students show incredible perseverance and dedication in the face of such hardship, turning their setbacks into chances for personal development and community service (Summer et al., 2023). These students demonstrate how adversity can serve as a spark for significant social involvement and empowerment by using their experiences to create good effects for themselves and their communities through community service and related activities. Serving others gives them opportunities to grow as leaders, improve their relationships with others, and discover a purpose that goes beyond merely surviving financially and academically (Afzal & Hussain, 2020). These observations show how working students are not only enduring their challenging situations but also leveraging them to forge professions based on empathy, volunteerism, and a strong dedication to improving their communities.

These are the responses of the participants:

*"Found meaning in community work within the BFP and wants to lead safety outreach programs." (P6)*

*"Aims to educate communities about rights and safety, driven by personal advocacy." (P7)*

*"Enjoys community outreach via PCR and seeks to continue serving and possibly shift roles to grow." (P8)*

These shared statements emphasize how students found meaning and fulfillment in service-oriented roles, transforming personal challenges into meaningful action. P6 talked about how their time at the Bureau of Fire Protection helped them see the importance of community service and motivated them to spearhead safety education initiatives in the future. Also, P7 turned personal struggles into a purpose for empowerment by expressing a strong desire to educate communities about their rights and safety, driven by personal advocacy. They also enjoyed taking part in community engagement through Police Community Relations (PCR) projects. Students may translate personal adversity into empowerment and influence via community service, which promotes both individual development and the wellbeing of the community (Nichol et al., 2023).

The difficulties they encountered as working students served as the impetus for greater dedication to public service for many criminology students. These students demonstrate how adversity can serve as a spark for significant social involvement and empowerment by using their experiences to create good effects for themselves and their communities through community service and related activities. Their adversity not only made them more resilient but also made them want to give back to the community (Cox et al., 2022).

These findings emphasize the transforming potential of hardship in producing socially active and purpose-driven criminology students. Their experiences demonstrate how personal challenges may spark community-centered action, with service serving as both a coping strategy and a valuable avenue for advocacy. Students demonstrate how immersion in institutions like the Bureau of Fire Protection and Police Community Relations initiatives can strengthen their commitment to public service, transforming adversity into inspiration to educate and protect others. This suggests that students driven by a desire to serve the public are more likely to find alignment between their personal values and their chosen profession (White et al., 2024).

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**3.2.2. From Dream to Badge: Law Enforcement as a Lifelong Aspiration:** Becoming a law enforcement officer is the realization of a longtime desire, not just a career decision. Despite the difficulties of being a working student, this subtheme captures the ingrained ambitions and sense of pride that motivate many people to seek positions in the uniformed service. People are drawn to police not just because of the competitive pay and perks but also because they enjoy helping people and promoting public safety, which shows a dedication that frequently lasts throughout their careers (Gibbs et al., 2025). However, the profession confronts many obstacles because of changing public opinions, generational transitions, and rising demands, which have made it harder for agencies across the country to attract and retain employees (Fueston et al., 2024). This theme shows how these students have overcome hardships by following their dreams of justice, service, and honor. Their commitment and steadfast concentration on their objectives demonstrate a strong internal drive, demonstrating that for many, the badge represents more than simply authority but also a legacy and a mission realized.

These are the shared statements of the participants with positive outlook:

*"Always dreamed of joining the Tri-Bureau, proud to be the first officer in the family." (P9)*

*"Lifelong dream to be a police officer, now aiming for field/intelligence roles." (P10)*

The responses from the participant all emphasizes about their long-held goal of joining the Tri-Bureau and how proud they were to be the first officer in their family, which was a significant milestone for their home as well as a personal accomplishment. Motivations for entering the law enforcement force are many, including employment stability, a sense of responsibility, and the influence of significant people (Elntib & Milincic, 2020).

These intrinsic motives are critical because they not only motivate people to enter the industry but also help them stay committed despite the hardships of law enforcement. Understanding these elements is crucial for creating recruitment techniques that align with aspiring officers' ideals and objectives. Participants' experiences demonstrate how personal challenges may spark community-centered action, with service serving as both a coping strategy and a valuable avenue for advocacy (Scism, 2022).

The implications of these responses are that intrinsic motivations—such as pride, purpose, and familial legacy—play an important role in defining the career pathways of prospective criminology students. By investigating how personal and family-oriented goals influence the decision to join the Tri-Bureau, this study can help us gain a better understanding of what keeps people committed in the face of the physical, emotional, and institutional pressures of law enforcement. Therefore, even if the road from dream to badge is becoming more complicated, maintaining law enforcement as a rewarding lifetime profession depends on a thorough approach to career development and support.

**3.2.3. Choosing Purpose Over Comfort: Working Students Driven by Values and a Desire to Serve:** Working Students Driven by Values and a Desire to Serve. Working students who are motivated by their own ideals and a deep desire to help others are known for prioritizing purpose over comfort. This subtheme emphasizes how their careers were shaped by their ideals and a deep-seated desire to change the world, even at the expense of more secure or lucrative chances. According to research, Filipino working students who choose to pursue service-

oriented fields like teaching and criminology are driven more by a desire to improve their communities and advance social wellbeing than by financial rewards (Llenares et al., 2021).

These are the responses of the participants:

*"Chose BFP over a fast-food managerial track to pursue a more meaningful life in public service." (P6)*

*"Transitioned from carinderia work to law enforcement with a purpose, tying past experiences to advocacy." (P7)*

Driven by fundamental beliefs and a strong desire to help their communities and themselves via meaningful job experiences, working students are increasingly exhibiting a preference for purpose above comfort. For example, participants talked about how she made the crucial choice to join the law enforcement agencies rather than pursue a possible managerial position in the fast-food industry because she felt that public service had more significance and influence. Like this, they left their job at a carinderia to pursue a career in law enforcement, drawing on their prior hardships to support advocacy efforts and forge closer links with the populations they seek to assist. Despite the difficulties of juggling work and school, recent studies show that many working students place a higher priority on skill development, personal growth, and matching their jobs with long-term career aspirations than just meeting their financial needs.

This shows a dedication to service and self-efficacy (Tumin Tumin et al., 2020). Students find motivation in jobs that contribute to their social identity as learners and contributors, which ultimately promotes their perseverance and holistic growth. This intentional participation builds resilience and improves academic wellbeing (Rožman et al., 2025). This focus on meaningful work emphasizes how crucial it is for institutions to recognize and support students' dual responsibilities and ideals so they may succeed in both without compromising their wellbeing.

These implications imply that working criminology students are actively pursuing occupations that reflect their values, identity, and long-term professional ambitions rather than simply looking for work to survive. Their choice of purpose over comfort reflects a strong feeling of agency and an increasing tendency towards purposeful career development, in which job experiences are considered opportunities for learning, contribution, and self-improvement. This approach not only fosters resilience and academic success but also strengthens their dedication to service-oriented vocations like law enforcement. By doing so, they enable students to excel in both their academic and professional lives without jeopardizing their mental health or personal development.

**3.2.4. Resilience Redefined: From Struggles to Success through Grit and Growth:** For many working criminology students, resilience is more than just the ability to endure adversity; it is a transforming force that transforms personal hardships into opportunities for development and success. This subtheme demonstrates how individuals overcame adversity and succeeded in their pursuit of law enforcement careers via tenacity, persistence, and a strong sense of purpose. Through the development of grit and a growth mindset, criminology students demonstrate resilience by turning setbacks into victories. Recent studies highlight that resilience in these students involves more than just overcoming obstacles in their academic and personal lives; it also entails actively practicing tenacity, flexibility, and ongoing self-improvement to reach their objectives (Woodward et al., 2024). Their ability to handle the emotional and psychological demands specific to criminology, such as exposure to

trauma and complex social issues, depends heavily on their ability to develop grit, which is defined as sustained passion and perseverance toward long-term objectives (Royle & Connolly, 2023).

These are the shared statements of the participants with positive outlook:

*"Overcame illness, exhaustion, and misunderstandings to serve in law enforcement." (P8)*

*"Battled health challenges but remained committed to his PNP dream." (P9)*

*"Came from a humble background and worked as a houseboy but used that experience to build his discipline and rise in the ranks." (P10)*

The participants statements described how they persevered in their dedication to serving despite illness, fatigue, and even miscommunications regarding their reasons. Like this, P9 showed steadfast determination by battling persistent health issues while never losing sight of its goal of joining the Philippine National Police. P10, who was raised in poverty and worked as a houseboy, attributed his development of discipline and perseverance to that experience, which helped him rise up the ranks.

Cultivating a growth mindset helps criminology students see obstacles as chances to learn and advance their skills, which is crucial for success in their careers and helps to prevent academic fatigue (Serafica & Muria, 2023). By improving students' ability to self-regulate, cope, and interact ethically, this dynamic process of resilience not only promotes academic success but also gets them ready for future responsibilities in criminal justice (Li et al., 2024). These findings suggest that purpose-driven motivation not only sustains working students through challenges but also enhances their overall wellbeing and commitment to their chosen fields.

### 3.3. Discipline, Perseverance, and Support: Key Drivers

This theme centers on the idea of discipline, perseverance, and support as key drivers of success for working students. The main theme was developed from the emerged sub-themes, namely: *thriving through time mastery and discipline, and pushing through with purpose and grit, and fueling success through support and optimism.* Despite the challenges of balancing work and academic responsibilities, many can thrive through a combination of these three crucial elements. Discipline allows them to manage their time effectively, stay focused, and remain committed to both their professional and academic duties. Perseverance gives them the strength to push through fatigue, stress, and setbacks—enduring long nights, early mornings, and moments of uncertainty (Claver et al., 2020). Support, whether from family, peers, or institutions, provides the emotional and logistical foundation that sustains their efforts. Together, these factors empower working students to overcome obstacles and pursue their goals with clarity and determination. In fact, perseverance is often a more reliable predictor of success than talent or intelligence alone (Katharina, 2020).

**3.3.1. Thriving through Time Mastery and Discipline:** This subtheme illustrates how self-discipline and efficient time management enabled working students to maintain focus, fulfill their responsibilities, and thrive in both their academic and professional lives. By effectively allocating their time to balance work, school, and other obligations, students can prioritize tasks, lower stress levels, and boost productivity (Galaviz, 2025). This is

enhanced by discipline, which cultivates self-control, consistency, and dedication to objectives, all of which help students stay focused and achieve deadlines (Ahmad et al., 2019). The necessity for educational programs to encourage the development of time management and self-discipline competencies is highlighted by research showing that children who master these skills exhibit improved academic accomplishment, lower anxiety, and increased overall wellbeing (Khan et al., 2020). These attributes not only improve academic outcomes but also build resilience and prepare students for future professional challenges.

These are the statements of the participants:

*"Despite the fatigue, I stayed disciplined, punctual, and focused—earning good grades and even praise from coworkers for always being on time." (P1)*

*"Flexible schedules, time management, and discipline helped me survive." (P6)*

*"Having self-discipline, setting priorities, and managing time were my keys to surviving college while working." (P7)*

*"Discipline, determination, and time management helped me succeed." (P10)*

The responses from all the participants emphasize how crucial time management and discipline are to juggling work and school obligations. Several stated that being disciplined and on time, even when physically worn out, resulted in both professional and academic achievement. Others underlined the importance of flexible time management techniques and efficient scheduling as essential tools for juggling the demands of work and school. To survive college life while making a living, it was also mentioned that setting clear priorities, practicing self-control, and being dedicated was crucial. These experiences show that, in addition to tenacity, working students gained a strong sense of control and accountability, which helped them finish their coursework and equipped them for the hard and regimented nature of a law enforcement career.

The participants highlight that managing the dual responsibilities of the job and hard academic courses takes conscious planning, prioritization, and self-regulation, which are crucial qualities that improve success and reduce stress for working criminology students, for students aiming for academic success, time management, and discipline are crucial, especially in challenging subjects like criminology (Pagente, 2023). According to research by Sugito et al. (2025), organized time management greatly improves learning discipline by encouraging dependable study habits and academic accountability.

Students who develop these abilities not only get better academic results but also get ready for the rigorous requirements of careers in the criminal justice system. The experiences of the participants indicate that for working criminology students, time management and self-discipline are not only personal tactics but also critical academic and professional skills. Furthermore, self-regulated learning—which encompasses goal setting, planning, and self-discipline—is a powerful indicator of student achievement in challenging domains. These results suggest that to better assist students in juggling their academic and professional obligations and to develop competencies that are in accordance with the structured nature of law enforcement employment; criminology schools ought to incorporate time management and self-regulation training into their curricula.

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**3.3.2. Pushing through with Purpose and Grit:** Working criminology students show that perseverance and a clear sense of purpose are more important for success than just surviving adversity. This subtheme demonstrates how their capacity for tenacity was firmly anchored in individual objectives and an innate will to achieve in the face of insurmountable obstacles. The major impact of non-cognitive attributes such as grit, psychological capital, and good time management is boosting these students' academic persistence and personal wellbeing (Amadi et al., 2022). Studies reveal that despite financial constraints, physical tiredness, and limited time, students who exhibit high levels of grit and purpose are likely to retain academic performance and continue trying toward their goals (Solis et al., 2024).

Below are the given statements of the participants:

*"I learned to manage my time and stay committed to my goals." (P3)*

*"Balancing school and work taught me resilience, discipline, and time management." (P4)*

*"Those years taught me perseverance, self-discipline, and time management." (P5)*

*"Balancing work and studies taught me discipline, time management, and perseverance." (P9)*

The participants emphasized how juggling employment and education helped to mold their personalities and equipped them for the demands of law enforcement. They developed a strong work ethic, self-control, and perseverance, which they now carry into their professional life. They viewed these difficulties as chances for development rather than as obstacles, which strengthened their resolve and mental toughness. Therefore, developing intentional grit is essential to succeeding in learning and work settings (Li & Li, 2021).

Grit and purposeful perseverance characterize working students' daily lives. When faced with daunting obligations, they endure not only out of need but also because they have a strong desire to improve their own and their loved ones' lives and have well-defined objectives (Chen et al., 2024). Grit—the confluence of bravery, determination, and moral fortitude—allows people to withstand long hours, financial hardship, and scholastic pressure, while purpose gives their sacrifices meaning. They trust in the worth of perseverance and the possibility of advancement, which is why they consistently come up, even when they are worn out. Together with their inner strength, their persistent drive shows that they are dedicated to using every obstacle as a springboard to achieve their goals (Caposey, 2024).

Additionally, the researcher presented a triarchic model of grit that included flexibility in addition to passion and tenacity, and this model was associated with improved student wellbeing (Datu et al., 2021). These findings suggest that cultivating grit helps students thrive academically and enhances their capacity to overcome challenges, therefore preparing them for future responsibilities in their chosen fields of employment (Alfonso, 2021).

**3.3.3. Fueling Success through Support and Optimism:** Working criminology students' journey is supported by optimism and the existence of robust support networks in addition to their own personal grit. This subtheme emphasizes how social support, and an optimistic outlook become essential in assisting students in juggling the

demands of both employment and school. Fueling success through support and optimism is increasingly recognized as a powerful combination that enhances resilience, motivation, and achievement in both educational and professional contexts (Robinson, 2025). Mentoring, peer networks, and organizational support are examples of support systems that offer vital resources and emotional support to reduce stress and help people deal with challenges more skillfully (Radu, 2023).

These are their statements:

*"Hard work, discipline, and a strong support system can make anything possible." (P2)*

*"Discipline, setting priorities, and staying positive helped me juggle everything despite getting sick and barely having rest." (P8)*

The participants stressed that the keys to their success were self-control, perseverance, and external support. During tough times, support from family, friends, and mentors gave me strength. Additionally, optimism was important—not only as a way of thinking but also as a conscious tactic to deal with demanding obligations, especially in the face of mental or physical difficulties (Wen & Li, 2022). Collectively, these experiences demonstrate that a nurturing atmosphere and a resilient mindset serve as strong growth pillars, enabling people to not only overcome obstacles but also flourish and change because of them.

Collectively, optimism and support help people maintain a positive outlook and actively engage in goal-achieving and problem-solving (You, 2025). In addition to encouraging personal achievement, this link strengthens the importance of cultivating optimism and support for long-term success by promoting stronger corporate cultures and closer community ties. Furthermore, optimism has been shown to be a strong predictor of both subjective wellbeing and academic success, suggesting that students with an optimistic outlook are better equipped to handle the demands of the classroom (Zhang & Qian, 2024). By cultivating support networks and maintaining an optimistic mindset, students can enhance their academic experiences and outcomes (Rand et al., 2020).

### 3.4. Transformative Power of Hard Work and Discipline

This theme is particularly evident in the lives of working students, as the transformational influence of discipline and hard effort is visible. The main theme was developed from the emerged sub-themes, namely, *Discipline and Determination as Tools for Professional Success and Resilience through Physical Labor and Time Management.* They change not just their situation but also their character by exerting constant effort and exercising self-control. Students' intellectual and psychological development, especially those who balance work and school, demonstrates the transformational potential of discipline and hard effort. Discipline and persistent effort are key factors in student success, according to research, especially for students who are struggling financially (Amadi et al., 2022). Real-life testimonials, such as those from criminology students working as delivery riders or security officers, illustrate that hard labor, mixed with a strong dedication to study, builds resilience and self-improvement (Rafols, 2024).

**3.4.1. Discipline and Determination as Tools for Professional Success:** Discipline and determination are not just academic virtues—they are foundational tools that have propelled them into meaningful careers in public

service. This subtheme demonstrates how the principles they formed while working as students were transferred into tangible career success. By promoting regular efforts and eschewing short-term rewards in favor of long-term successes, discipline helps professionals develop habits of tenacity and constant improvement, which in turn fosters sustained productivity (Tekin, 2024). Research shows that people with high levels of discipline and determination are more likely to succeed professionally, receive praise for their efforts, and get promoted. Resilient and determined people also have a 45% higher chance of reaching their career goals (Dodds, 2024).

These are the responses of the participants:

*"Working while studying taught me discipline and resilience, and those values helped me pass the board exam on my first try, join the PNP, and now serve with integrity as a patrolwoman." (P1)*

*"Working long hours while supporting my siblings and balancing studies taught me discipline and faith—key values that led me to pass the board exam and find purpose in serving with the BFP." (P6)*

*"Balancing life as a kitchen crew and student instilled in me time management and perseverance, which helped me recover from setbacks and succeed in joining the PNP as my family's first police officer." (P9)*

The participants talked about how their discipline, persistence, and core beliefs helped them succeed both personally and professionally. Achieving professional success requires discipline and perseverance, especially in demanding disciplines like criminology. After passing the board exam on her first attempt, one became a patrolwoman in the PNP, attributing her perseverance to juggling employment and education. Another worked long hours and provided for her family, driven by discipline and religion, which helped her do well on the board exam and in her position with the BFP.

This implies that students' resolve and discipline can be strengthened by creating an atmosphere that prioritizes goal-setting and personal development (Sylvia & Avance, 2024). Furthermore, self-discipline has been found to be a mediating factor in the association between academic accomplishment and social media addiction, underscoring its importance in sustaining focus and accomplishing long-term objectives. When taken as a whole, these results show that perseverance and discipline not only help students succeed academically but also give them the fortitude and work ethic needed to succeed professionally in the criminal justice system (Claver et al., 2020).

**3.4.2. Resilience through Physical Labor and Time Management:** Resilience was developed not just in educational settings but also through physically challenging jobs that demanded determination, sacrifice, and rigorous time management. This subtheme highlights how experiences in labor-intensive roles contributed to forming the character, focus, and endurance essential for success in law enforcement careers. Engaging in physical labor boosts both physical and mental resilience by improving psychological wellbeing and the ability to cope with work-related stress, while effective time management encourages independence, concentration, and adaptability by allowing individuals to prioritize their tasks and mitigate burnout (Zhang et al., 2024). Moreover, resilience encompasses cognitive control, emotional wellbeing, and goal-oriented efficiency, with time management and physical activity being vital elements of conative efficiency that promote goal-driven behavior and emotional regulation (Au et al., 2023).

These are the answers from the participants:

*"Years of juggling night shifts and school built my mental toughness and time management, preparing me to thrive under pressure as a fire investigator and now inspiring me to pursue law." (P3)*

*"Laboring in construction while studying criminology taught me hard work and focus, which helped me break into law enforcement and steadily build toward becoming a criminal investigator." (P5)*

*"Serving as a houseboy while studying taught me humility, discipline, and hard work—values that powered my rise through the ranks to become a Police Master Sergeant dedicated to service and leadership." (P10)*

The participants highlighted how juggling demanding jobs with school-built resilience shaped their careers in public service. One developed mental strength from night shifts, now serving as a fire investigator with aspirations to study law. Another learned to focus and hard work from construction work led to a role in a criminal investigation. A third credited his humble beginnings as a houseboy for the discipline that helped him become a Police Master Sergeant. Their experiences show that manual labor served as a foundation for growth, leadership, and a strong commitment to public service.

Discipline and perseverance are essential assets for attaining professional success, especially in demanding areas such as criminology. Current research highlights the crucial importance of academic discipline in boosting students' capacity to meet deadlines and follow schedules, which in turn enhances their overall academic performance (Libago et al., 2024). Furthermore, research indicates that a task-oriented, motivated atmosphere promotes self-motivation, which in turn results in students' disciplined behavior and improved academic achievement (Claver et al., 2020).

This suggests that students' motivation and self-discipline can be improved by creating an environment that places a high value on goal-setting and personal growth. likewise, self-discipline has been identified as a critical component in the relationship between social media addiction and academic achievement, highlighting its significance in maintaining focus and achieving long-term goals (Tekin, 2024). In conclusion, our findings show that motivation and discipline are critical for academic performance and for equipping students with the tenacity and strong work ethic needed for success in the criminal justice industry.

### 3.5. Meaningful Careers Shaped by Humble Beginnings

Significant careers are frequently influenced by modest beginnings, particularly for students in the workforce who embark on their paths with scarce resources yet plentiful determination. This theme developed from the following themes that emerged from the responses of the participants: *Humble Jobs as Foundation for Public Service and Early Life Struggles Inspiring Compassionate Leadership*. With each obstacle they face, they acquire not just skills and knowledge but also a profound appreciation for the importance of opportunity and service. Their modest origins become a solid base for careers that focus not solely on achievement but also on making a positive impact (Cohen & Duberley, 2021).

Consequently, this experience transforms them into professionals who lead with kindness, serve with honesty, and motivate others by exemplifying that greatness can emerge from even the most unassuming beginnings. Whether

they choose to work in public service, education, healthcare, or other sectors, their backgrounds anchor them in purpose and serve as a reminder of their roots (Herbert et al., 2020).

**3.5.1. Humble Jobs as Foundation for Public Service:** For numerous criminology students in the workforce, what may seem like modest or low-wage positions turned into valuable training grounds for the values that now shape their roles in public service. This subtheme explores how their early employment experiences gave them the discipline, tenacity, and sense of purpose needed to succeed in law enforcement, even though they may have been physically demanding and often underappreciated. These roles frequently foster vital traits like empathy, fortitude, and a thorough awareness of the needs of the society.

In public service sectors, intrinsic motivation—which is fostered by meaningful work experiences—plays a major role in fostering dedication and job satisfaction (Xu, 2022). Furthermore, these humble positions are essential starting places for succession planning in the public sector, guaranteeing a steady flow of driven people who are aware of the difficulties faced at the local level of public service (Min et al., 2021).

Below is the response of the participants:

*"From transporting rice to becoming a fingerprint examiner, my journey taught me perseverance and purpose—every humble job prepared me to succeed in forensic investigation." (P4)*

*"From guarding gas stations to joining community outreach as a patrolman, my journey taught me that perseverance, discipline, and a heart for service can turn struggle into strength." (P8)*

The participants shared how humble beginnings shaped their careers in law enforcement. One progressed from carrying rice sacks to becoming a fingerprint examiner, driven by determination and purpose. Another reflected on his time as a gas station guard, which laid the foundation for his role as a patrolman involved in community outreach. Their stories show how early challenges and hard work built the humility and character essential for meaningful service in law enforcement.

Building robust and successful public service organizations that can adapt to changing societal needs requires this basis (Tecotzky et al., 2025). By appreciating and investing in these modest origins, we guarantee the development of devoted professionals who are committed to serving the public interest. Studies on humble leadership styles suggest that leaders who exhibit humility frequently inspire and involve their employees by acknowledging their input and fostering a collaborative atmosphere, thereby emphasizing the importance of beginning from modest positions (Levinson, 2024).

By fostering a sense of purpose and community connection, beginning in basic jobs can promote mental health, self-worth, and social inclusion. This, in turn, can enhance long-term professional involvement and fulfillment in public service employment (Drake & Wallach, 2020). In conclusion, it is critical to begin with small positions in public service to develop a resilient, capable, and driven workforce—all of which are essential for effective governance and community involvement. These jobs serve as stepping stones to careers as well as crucial stages in leadership development and personal growth.

**3.5.2. Early Life Struggles Inspiring Compassionate Leadership:** The initial challenges encountered by criminology students in the workforce not only fostered resilience but also developed compassion, empathy, and a leadership approach grounded in personal experiences. This subtheme highlights how individual struggles have ignited a stronger commitment to service and crafted leaders who enforce laws while also recognizing the humanity behind them. Challenges faced in early life, such as childhood hardships and trauma, have been shown to encourage the emergence of compassionate leadership by cultivating empathy, resilience, and a strong dedication to supporting others. Studies indicate that early trauma and challenges often result in adults exhibiting increased empathy and compassion (Staples & Massey-Abernathy, 2023). For example, research suggests that undergoing traumatic experiences in childhood correlates with heightened affective empathy, which can foster prosocial behaviors and a caring leadership approach (Mahon et al., 2021).

These are the response from the participants:

*"Balancing fatherhood, work, and studies shaped my determination and grit—skills that now fuel my service as an Intelligence Officer committed to growth and public safety." (P2)*

*"Years of working in a carinderia and helping my mother shaped my resilience and empathy—qualities I now apply in protecting women and children while pursuing law to serve justice more deeply." (P7)*

The resilience gained from overcoming early life difficulties also prepares leaders to handle adversity successfully while upholding compassionate leadership practices (Gloria et al., 2022). Experiencing challenges in childhood is linked to greater resilience in relationships and enhanced emotional intelligence, both essential qualities for leaders who embody servant and compassionate leadership. These leaders often cultivate self-awareness, social perception, and the ability to manage relationships rooted in their own histories of hardship, which serve as driving forces for genuine and empathetic leadership (Staples & Massey-Abernathy, 2023).

Emotional intelligence, self-kindness, and the ability to build trust are strengthened by experiencing difficulties in life (Frullo & Mattone, 2024). The responses indicate that early life difficulties and personal hardship are important factors in assisting criminology professionals in developing compassionate, service-oriented leadership. These interactions appear to foster empathy, emotional intelligence, and a greater feeling of responsibility—all of which are critical for jobs in public safety and justice. These foundational experiences—juggling low-wage employment with academic responsibilities—cultivate qualities such as empathy, thankfulness, perseverance, and a strong work ethic (Krejčová et al., 2024).

### 4. Conclusion and Recommendations

This study explored the experiences of working criminology students and identified the key competencies they developed while managing academic and work-related responsibilities. It revealed that these students honed critical skills such as discipline, effective time management, and resilience, which proved essential in navigating the pressures of dual roles. Their strong commitment to careers in law enforcement and public service reflected a deep sense of purpose and drive, underpinned by personal dedication and long-term goals. Strategic actions such as planning, prioritization, and seeking support systems were instrumental in enabling them to persist and succeed.

Moreover, their continued pursuit of professional development after graduation highlighted the enduring value of the habits and mindsets formed during their academic journey. These findings underscore the transformative potential of perseverance, structured planning, and inner motivation in achieving both academic and career success.

Building upon these insights into the experiences and developed competencies of working criminology students, future research can explore several promising avenues. A critical next step involves conducting longitudinal studies to track the career trajectories and long-term professional impact of working during their academic years, providing a clearer picture of how these early experiences influence later success and job satisfaction. Furthermore, comparative analyses could shed light on whether the challenges faced and skills acquired are unique to criminology students or shared across different disciplines, helping to identify field-specific support needs. Additionally, investigating the role of employer support and workplace flexibility would be valuable, examining how it influences students' academic performance and overall well-being. Deeper qualitative explorations into the development and practical application of key competencies like discipline, time management, and resilience could provide richer insights into the mechanisms through which these skills are honed. Finally, these findings could directly inform the development and evaluation of targeted interventions and support systems designed to assist working criminology students in effectively balancing their academic and professional commitments.

Based on the study's findings, several recommendations are proposed to enhance the support for working criminology students. Academic institutions should consider implementing flexible learning arrangements, such as modular classes and evening schedules, along with strengthened student support services to alleviate the pressure of balancing work and school. Embedding career-oriented initiatives—such as counseling sessions, law enforcement career seminars, and internship programs—within the criminology curriculum can help students align their studies with professional goals.

Additionally, workshops focusing on personal development skills like time management, self-discipline, and resilience should be held regularly to equip students with practical tools for coping with academic and workplace challenges. Mentorship programs led by alumni or professionals in the law enforcement sector may offer valuable guidance and foster networking opportunities for students and recent graduates. Finally, both educational institutions and law enforcement agencies are encouraged to support continuing education through scholarships, seminars, and professional certification programs, thereby promoting lifelong learning and sustained career advancement.

For future research, it is recommended to explore the long-term career outcomes of criminology graduates who worked during college to determine the impact of early employment on professional growth. Studies may also examine gender-specific experiences among working students to uncover potential differences in coping mechanisms and opportunities. Another valuable direction is to investigate the role of family and peer support systems in students' academic persistence and success. Researchers may also consider comparative studies between working and non-working criminology students to assess how employment affects academic performance, motivation, and career alignment. Lastly, qualitative studies focusing on the perspectives of

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employers and faculty members could help deepen understanding of how institutions and workplaces can jointly support working students more effectively.

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