



## Psychological Distress and Resilience among Persons Deprived of Liberty in a Jail Facility of Western Visayas, Philippines

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### Abstract

Persons Deprived of Liberty's (PDL) psychological health is a serious issue because of the various stressors they encounter in the jail facility, yet it is not adequately examined in many local contexts. This study aims to assess the levels and relationship between psychological distress and resilience among PDLs in one of the jails in Western Visayas, Philippines, and to examine whether fostering resilience can help reduce psychological challenges in correctional settings. This study utilized a descriptive-correlational method to assess the levels of psychological distress and resilience among 100 PDLs in a jail facility in Western Visayas. Results show that PDLs experienced mild psychological disorders and demonstrated normal levels of resilience. However, no statistically significant relationship was found between the two. These findings show the complex and unique nature of psychological functioning within the jail environment and emphasize the importance of understanding how PDLs cope and adapt in such an environment. The study contributes valuable insights about the psychological needs of PDLs and supports the call for a more comprehensive approach to mental health care and the creation of programs within jail facilities, particularly in Western Visayas. Policy and rehabilitation program makers and mental health professionals may use this study to guide the development of targeted therapeutic interventions and psycho-educational efforts that strengthen protective factors and psychosocial support within jail populations.

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### 1. Introduction

Research on resilience has gained significant attention in global research, with studies mainly conducted in developed countries across Europe and America <sup>[1]</sup>. It is often seen as a protective factor against stress, which helps individuals to function amidst adversity and lessens their vulnerability to psychological distress <sup>[2]</sup>. Research further highlights its role in mental well-being <sup>[3]</sup>, as individuals who tend to experience high levels of depression and anxiety have higher resilience <sup>[4]</sup>. In prison populations worldwide, interventions aimed at increasing resilience, such as cognitive-behavioral therapy and structured rehabilitation programs, are effective ways to improve their emotional regulation and problem-solving skills <sup>[5]</sup>. In many Asian correctional facilities, studies suggest that incarcerated populations are especially susceptible to many mental health challenges due to the harsh conditions of detention <sup>[6-8]</sup>. Across Asia, research has increasingly focused on resilience, emphasizing the role of social, cultural, and environmental factors that reflect a more collective approach <sup>[9]</sup>. Unlike the more individualistic approach seen in Western contexts <sup>[9,10]</sup>, Asian studies show that family support, community connection, and spirituality are important resilience factors within correctional facilities <sup>[11-14]</sup> and are considered key elements in rehabilitation within Asian settings <sup>[15]</sup>.

In the Philippines, research on the Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) has mostly focused on psychological distress and challenges, which emphasized the negative and harsh realities observed within the jail facilities. Studies reveal that overcrowding, poor infrastructure, difficult living conditions, and limited access to services contribute to heightened levels of stress and depression among PDLs <sup>[16,17]</sup>. Moreover, even though rehabilitation programs are implemented to reform behaviors, studies show that there remains an important need to improve mental health services and rehabilitation programs offered in the jail facility <sup>[18–20]</sup>. These findings emphasize not only the importance of improving the living conditions within jail facilities but also the need to strengthen mental health services and develop rehabilitation programs that promote psychological well-being and resilience among PDLs.

In jail facilities in Western Visayas, psychological distress remains a visible concern among PDLs. The researchers observed that many PDLs experience emotional struggles that often come from frustration towards the criminal justice system due to prolonged confinement, limited family interaction, and difficult living conditions. Despite these existing challenges, some PDLs show signs of resilience, which are often reflected in their participation in various jail activities, social connections, and personal coping efforts. This observation inspired the researchers to explore the level of psychological distress and resilience among PDLs in the local context, to provide valuable insight into their mental health situation and identify possible areas for adding psychosocial support within the jail setting.

The relationship between resilience and psychological distress among incarcerated individuals has been studied internationally <sup>[4,21]</sup>, but research on this topic remains scarce, especially in the Philippines. Most local studies focus on the difficulties faced by PDLs inside jail facilities <sup>[17]</sup>, and there are no empirical studies conducted in Western Visayas that assess both the level of psychological distress and resilience of PDLs, not even their mental health. Thus, this study aims to bridge this gap by examining the relationship between psychological distress and resilience among PDLs, providing valuable insights for future mental health interventions and rehabilitation efforts within the local correctional settings.

Therefore, this study aims to assess the levels and relationship between psychological distress and resilience among PDLs in one of the jails in Western Visayas, Philippines, and to examine whether fostering resilience can help reduce psychological challenges in correctional settings. The findings may offer a deeper understanding of how resilience can affect the emotional well-being of PDLs and offer general implications for the administration, policy makers, and mental health professionals in improving mental health programs that promote resilience as a way to support the rehabilitation processes of PDLs in Western Visayas.

### 1.1 Framework of the Study

This study assumes that resilience plays a role in mitigating psychological distress, anchored on Michael Rutter's Resilience Theory. Rutter defines resilience as a dynamic process that is developed through the interaction of risk factors and protective factors <sup>[22]</sup>. In the context of this study, PDLs may develop resilience as they face stressors that may come from overcrowding, difficult living conditions, and conflicts within the jail facility, provided they have access to protective factors. These protective factors may include

intervention programs and support networks provided by the jail facility. Thus, PDLs with higher levels of resilience are presumed to cope more effectively with jail-related stressors, potentially lowering their psychological distress.

## 2. Methods

### 2.1 Research Design

This study utilized a quantitative research design, particularly a descriptive-correlational method. The descriptive approach assessed the level of psychological distress and resilience of the PDL respondents. Meanwhile, the correlational approach determined the relationship between psychological distress and resilience among PDLs.

### 2.2 Respondents

Using the Raosoft sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level and 9.20% margin of error, 100 respondents were chosen through simple random sampling from the total population of 830 male PDLs. The sample was determined based on practical considerations while maintaining adequate representation.

### 2.3 Instrument

This study utilized standardized questionnaires to measure the variables being studied. The level of psychological distress was measured through the Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) with 10 questions about anxiety and depressive symptoms experienced in the past four weeks <sup>[23]</sup>. The K10 has shown good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.83 with a two-factor structure that captures anxiety and depression symptoms. Scores on the K10 range from 10 to 50, and higher scores indicate higher psychological distress. Specifically, scores between 10 and 19 suggest that an individual is likely to be well; 20 to 24 indicate the likelihood of a mild disorder; 25 to 29 indicate the likelihood of moderate disorder; and 30 to 50 suggest the presence of a severe disorder <sup>[24]</sup>.

To measure the level of resilience, the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) was used. The BRS is a 6-item questionnaire designed to assess an individual's ability to recover from stress. The internal consistency reliability was satisfactory, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from .80 to .91. The BRS also showed good convergent, discriminant, and concurrent validity when correlated with other resilience measures. Scores on the BRS range from 1.00 to 5.00, with higher scores indicating greater resilience. Specifically, scores between 1.00 and 2.99 indicate low resilience, 3.00 to 4.30 indicate normal resilience, and 4.31 to 5.00 for high resilience <sup>[25]</sup>.

### 2.4 Data Analysis

The data gathered were encoded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive-correlational analyses. The descriptive analysis assessed the level of psychological distress and resilience among the PDL. The normality of psychological distress and resilience scores among PDLs was evaluated using the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test. The impressions from psychological distress were reported statistically significant in the analysis (Statistic=0.100, df=100, p=0.016), while the other variables of resilience are also significant (Statistic=0.119, df=100, p=0.001). Because the values of both p were lower than the level of significance of 0.05, it interpreted that the data on psychological distress as well as resilience differed highly from the norm. The findings

indicate that the non-parametric statistical analysis is ideal for further analyses of these variables. Spearman rank-order correlation was used to determine the relationship between psychological distress and resilience among PDLs.

### 2.5 Data Collection Procedure

Before the data collection, the researcher obtained a formal approval from the Regional Director of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), as well as the jail warden of the chosen facility. Informed consent was obtained from the respondents and data collection was conducted in a designated area within the facility to ensure privacy and confidentiality. After data collection, the survey questionnaires were securely stored and the researcher ensured that no identifiable personal information was recorded. Lastly, general ethical principles of confidentiality, justice, and beneficence were upheld during the entire conduct of the study.

### 3. Results and Discussion

This section presents the findings of the study, exploring the world of PDLs in Western Visayas Jail Facility in terms of their psychological distress and resilience. By incorporating previous research into this study's findings, this discussion deepens our understanding of how PDLs cope with incarceration.

#### 3.1 Level of Psychological Distress Among PDLs

Table 1 shows the level of psychological distress that PDLs experienced in the past four weeks. With an overall mean score of 22.67 (SD=8.76), respondents can be understood to manifest mild psychological disorder. Among these ten indicators of psychological distress, the highest levels were manifested for being "depressed" (M=2.86, SD=1.39) and for having "everything being an effort" (M=2.75, SD=1.48); thus, emotional exhaustion and motivational difficulties are now strongly evident among the participants. Nevertheless, the lowest mean scores are seen in feelings -"so nervous that nothing could calm you down" (M=1.66, SD=1.11) and "nervous" (M=1.79, SD=1.14)-indicating that even though symptoms of depression appear to be somewhat elevated, severe anxiety symptoms may, in fact, be less pronounced.

The results indicate that PDLs in this study experience mild psychological disorder as reflected by the overall mean score of 22.67 (SD=8.76). This finding is consistent with a study in Ghana, which found that most of the inmates were moderately or highly stressed [26]. Environmental factors in prison, such as overcrowding, poor sanitation, and increased risk of disease transmission, may be one of the reasons why PDLs experience stress as they threaten the individuals' physical and mental health [8]. Moreover, stress among prison populations is even more heightened due to limited access to basic necessities, like food and water [7]. A study in Canada highlighted the symbolic and practical meaning of food in prison, where it represents control and power. Food can become a source of conflict rather than comfort among inmates especially for prisons where resources and privileges are scarce [27]. These findings support research among prisons in the United States, which shows that stress also manifests psychosocially [28]. Similarly, a study in Cambodia found that lack of space in jail settings contributes to disputes, agitation, and violence, adding emotional burden among prisoners [7]. In addition to the environmental and psychosocial factors, the elevated scores for depressive indicators may be attributed to

prolonged detention cases and limited social interaction. Unresolved legal cases can lead to a prolonged sense of uncertainty, which can increase feelings of hopelessness and depression among incarcerated individuals [29]. Similarly, limited contact with family and friends deprives them of essential emotional support, further contributing to developing depressive symptoms [30].

Conversely, the lower scores in anxiety-related items may reflect the PDLs' gradual adaptation to incarceration that is shaped by their personal and social backgrounds, such as peer attachments and neighborhood cohesion [31]. These support systems and coping mechanisms may have contributed to reduced anxiety among PDLs. This supports findings from a study in Flemish prisons, which indicated that distress is highest during the early stages of incarceration and tends to stabilize over time as individuals adapt to the prison environment [32]. Judging from the findings, interventions that focus on emotional regulation and psychological support for depressive symptoms can significantly aid this population.

**Table 1:** Level of Psychological Distress among PDLs

In the past 4 weeks, about how often did you feel	M	SD
Tired out for no good reason?	2.74	1.26
Nervous?	1.79	1.14
So nervous that nothing could calm you down?	1.66	1.11
Hopeless?	1.96	1.18
Restless or fidgety?	2.25	1.27
So restless you could not sit still?	2.21	1.27
Depressed?	2.86	1.39
That everything was an effort?	2.75	1.48
So sad that nothing could cheer you up?	2.59	1.34
Worthless?	1.86	1.25
Psychological Distress	22.67	8.76
Interpretation	Likely to have a mild disorder	

#### 3.2 Level of Resilience Among PDLs

The resilience levels of the PDLs were measured by means of a Brief Resilience Scale. The grand mean scores of 3.25 (SD=0.60) indicate that the respondents had a normal level of resilience toward what they have come across. Among the six items, the predictive mean scores were recorded with the highest score on the item "I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times" (M=3.84, SD=1.26) followed by "It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event" (M=3.52, SD=1.33), implying a good number of PDLs think that they can recover when faced with hardships. On the contrary, observed mean scores were the lowest for "I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life" (M=2.72, SD=1.47) and "It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens" (M=2.94, SD=1.56), indicating that some people may still struggle with emotional recovery.

The normal level of resilience among PDLs in this study may be attributed to the psychological and rehabilitation programs offered in the jail facility. This is supported by a study conducted in the Philippines that highlighted how rehabilitation programs, such as vocational and recreational activities, contribute to the PDLs' physical health, personal growth, and resilience [18]. Another Philippine-based study also found that PDLs are motivated to participate in physical activities as these help them relieve stress and maintain their



physical fitness [33]. Similarly, respondents from a study in Malaysian prisons also reported that vocational programs helped improve their self-confidence and personal development [34]. In addition, research in Nigeria suggests that detainees who actively participate in rehabilitation programs with religious components allow them to adjust better to the prison environment [14].

**Table 2:** Level of Resilience among PDLs

Item	M	SD
I tend to bounce back quickly after hard times.	3.84	1.26
I have a hard time making it through stressful events.	3.06	1.45
It does not take me long to recover from a stressful event.	3.52	1.33
It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.	2.94	1.56
I usually come through difficult times with little trouble.	3.39	1.41
I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life.	2.72	1.47
Resilience	3.25	0.60
Interpretation	Normal Resilience	

Despite this level of resilience, some PDLs still struggle with recovery as shown by the lowest mean scores on items, "I tend to take a long time to get over setbacks in my life" and "It is hard for me to snap back when something bad happens.". This could be explained by the coping skills used by the PDLs, which affect their resilience. A study among prisoners in Italy supports this, showing that while positive coping enables better adaptation to the prison environment, negative coping hinders resilience among inmates [5]. This implies that although resilience is generally present, targeted interventions may improve coping mechanisms, especially for those facing prolonged or repeated stressors such as PDLs.

### 3.3 Relationship between Psychological Distress and Resilience among PDLs

The relationship between psychological distress and resilience among PDLs is shown in Table 3. The results of the Spearman rank-order correlation indicate that these two variables are negatively correlated, but no significant correlation was found [ $r_s(98)=-0.115$ ,  $p=0.253$ ]. Hence, these results indicate that there is no statistically significant relationship between psychological distress and resilience among the respondents. In other words, changes in levels of psychological distress among respondents in this sample were not associated with higher or lower levels of resilience. This finding may be attributed to the complex and multifaceted nature of both constructs. Although resilience is usually seen as protection against psychological distress, several factors such as coping style and availability of support may affect its effectiveness. One study shows that resilience and coping are closely connected, as how people deal with stress affects how well they can bounce back from challenges [35]. Additionally, one study confirmed that social support increases resilience among prisoners as it provides emotional resources that help them rise from adversity [36].

These factors may contribute to the inconsistent findings in previous studies on resilience and psychological distress among incarcerated individuals. A study in Indonesia found that prisoners with high resilience reported lower levels of

psychological distress, proving that resilience can buffer psychological distress [21]. However, another study in Australia found that even though prisoners experienced high levels of distress, they could also have high levels of resilience [4]. It is therefore possible that in the context of incarceration, resilience does not uniformly buffer distress for all individuals, as some PDLs may rely on emotional suppression rather than on adaptive coping strategies [5].

**Table 3:** Relationship between Psychological Distress and Resilience among PDLs

Variable	$r_s$	df	p
Psychological Distress and Resilience	-0.115	98	0.253
Note: correlation is significant when $p \leq 0.05$			

This study, grounded on Michael Rutter's Resilience Theory [22], theorized that PDLs with higher resilience experience lower psychological distress. The results showed that PDLs suffer from mild psychological distress and have normal resilience levels. However, the results also showed that there is no statistically significant relationship between the two. That means changes in levels of psychological distress were not associated with the levels of resilience. As a result, this study did not support the hypothesis that psychological distress and resilience are related among PDLs. This suggests that the expected buffering effect of resilience may not consistently manifest among all individuals, especially in incarcerated populations.

### 4. Conclusion

This study offers valuable insights into the unique situation and psychological state of PDLs. The results show that PDLs demonstrated a normal level of resilience and generally experience mild psychological distress. Despite these observations, no statistically significant relationship was found between the two. These findings show not just the complex and multifaceted nature of both constructs, but also the unique nature of psychological functioning within the jail environment. In addition, the study contributes valuable insights about the psychological needs of PDLs and supports the call for a more comprehensive approach to mental health care and the creation of programs within jail facilities, particularly in Western Visayas.

### 5. Limitation of the Findings

This study used a quantitative, descriptive-correlational design. The respondents were limited to 100 PDLs in a single male dormitory jail facility in Western Visayas. The data were gathered through standardized instruments to assess the level and relationship of psychological distress and resilience. Although the instruments used in this study are widely used in general populations, they may not fully represent the cultural and situational factors that incarcerated individuals experience, which may affect this study's findings. Furthermore, the study did not consider other variables such as demographic factors, social support, or institutional environment that may potentially influence the relationship between psychological distress and resilience.

### 6. Practical Value of the Paper

The study provides valuable insights that would improve the psychological well-being and coping abilities of PDLs, not only in the selected jail in Western Visayas, Philippines, but

also in other correctional facilities facing similar challenges. The jail administration may utilize this study as a reference in designing quality mental health initiatives that enhance psychological well-being and resilience among PDLs. Policy and rehabilitation program makers, including both local and national government agencies, as well as non-government organizations, may draw from this study to improve evidence-based programs that address psychological distress in jail settings. Likewise, mental health professionals may use this study to guide the development of targeted therapeutic interventions and psychoeducational efforts that strengthen protective factors and psychosocial support within jail populations.

## 7. Directions for Future Research

Future research may consider employing a mixed-methods approach. Incorporating quantitative and qualitative insights may help gain a deeper understanding of the psychological state of PDLs. The generalizability of this study may also be improved by including data from other jail facilities within Western Visayas that detain both male and female PDLs. Other variables such as age, length of detention, and nature of case may help achieve a more comprehensive view of how psychological distress and resilience of PDLs are influenced. Future research may also investigate the effectiveness of specific mental health interventions and rehabilitation programs offered in jail facilities to establish evidence-based practices for supporting PDLs' mental health.

## 8. Declaration of Conflict of Interest

The researcher declares no conflict of interest in the conduct of this study

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