



Incarcerated Realities: A Qualitative Explorations of Persons Deprived of Liberty in Selected District 1 and 2 in BJMP Laguna

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in selected Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) facilities in district 1 and 2 in Laguna, Philippines, using an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach. Anchored in Cognitive Appraisal Theory and Resilience Theory, the research aimed to uncover challenges faced, coping mechanisms employed, and transformations experienced during incarceration. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews and participant observations with ten male PDLs. The findings identified emotional isolation, lack of family support, and financial struggles as key challenges. Coping mechanisms included engagement in structured programs, recreational activities, faith practices, and peer support. Transformations emphasized personal growth, the development of self-discipline, and shifts in perspective facilitated by correctional routines. This study highlights the critical roles of family involvement, peer networks, and well-designed rehabilitation programs in fostering resilience and facilitating reintegration. It provides valuable insights for developing more compassionate and effective policies to support the well-being of incarcerated individuals and address systemic issues in correctional facilities.

Keywords: Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), Rehabilitation Programs, Family Involvement, Peer Support, Correctional Facilities.

1. Introduction

Incarceration is one of the most widespread phenomena that largely influences people and societies worldwide. Unlike what is depicted in fictional stories where PDLs can masterfully craft tools, forge their escape, and slip through the fences seamlessly inside correctional facilities, the reality is significantly more complicated and challenging. Incarceration is detaining PDLs in correctional facilities to serve their destined penalties. These people are known as persons deprived of Liberty, or PDL for short, and they are forced to stay in those facilities and follow all kinds of rules and regulations. Hence, they have limited freedoms. Imagine the life of a person deprived of Liberty; they have no control over who they speak to, where they go, or even what they eat. They are locked up every day, not in a home but in a correctional facility for as long as it is possible to imagine. There is always a tiny amount of danger, possibly in every moment. It's hard to make friends, even to shake hands or give a hug to your fellow Person deprived of Liberty (PDL). And their friends and family are far away, and they feel like they're missing them daily. This is the reality for many people, and it can make life in correctional facilities even more challenging than one may think. The focus of this study was the selected BJMP in Laguna, Philippines. Since it concentrated on this specific topic, the study helped provide in-depth details about the lived experiences of PDLs in the selected BJMP in Laguna. The researchers were able to support the PDL community while also aiming to change the perception of people affected by the adverse effects of incarceration. By describing their experiences, this study aimed to close a significant knowledge gap about the experiences of PDLs in incarceration and provided data that could help shape the development of more effective social and correctional policies. The primary objective was to study the lived experiences of PDLs within the selected BJMP in Laguna, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and personal transformations.

2. Methods

This study uses a qualitative approach with an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. The instruments used were semi-structured interviews and overt participant observations conducted by the researchers. The participants were ten Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) from selected Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) facilities in District 1 and 2 of Laguna, Philippines. Data collected were considered primary sources based on firsthand narratives and interactions with participants. The procedure for this study is as follows:

1. Focus Determination

The purpose of the research was made clear by the researchers: to serve as an eye-opener and give voice to those who are deprived of their freedom. The goal was not to address a specific problem but rather to provide a more thorough understanding of the challenges, coping mechanism, and personal transformation that they experienced while incarcerated by describing their lived experiences inside particular BJMP in Laguna.

2. Participant selection

The researchers submitted a letter of request to the BJMP in Laguna to obtain formal permission. The jail officers assisted in selecting eligible participants PDLs who were in pretrial detention, incarcerated for at least two years, not scheduled for release within the year, and who voluntarily consented to participate.

3. Data collection

The researchers used face-to-face, semi-structured interviews and participant observations. Interviews were audio-recorded with consent, and researchers also documented nonverbal cues, facial expressions, and behaviors through field notes. Researchers participated in correctional programs to gain firsthand insight into participants' interactions and daily routines. Interview questions underwent expert validation, and researchers were trained in Psychological First Aid. A psychologist was on standby during the data collection to provide immediate support if needed.

4. Data analysis and interpretation

After data collection, interview recordings were transcribed verbatim. A follow-up session with participants was conducted to confirm that their responses were accurately captured. The researchers reviewed each transcript to ensure consistency and authenticity of the data. Themes and subthemes were derived to portray the lived experiences of the PDL participants.

3. Results and Discussion

1. Results

This chapter provides the results of the data analysis and interpretation carried out as part of the phenomenological study that examined the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in relation to their challenges, coping mechanisms, and personal transformation in correctional facilities. The findings revealed ten (10) superordinate themes, each with constituent subthemes, that reflect the essence of PDLs' experiences. These themes are:

Table 1: Superordinate themes and Constituent Subthemes

Superordinate Themes	Subordinate Themes
Psychosocial Challenges of Incarceration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Absence and Isolation Grief in Confinement
Character Development and Interpersonal Skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Growth and Responsibility Respect and Humility
Holistic Rehabilitation and Personal Transformation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-Reflection and Behavior Change Awareness of Consequences Focus on Family and Future Goals
Holistic Rehabilitation and Well-being in Incarceration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Social Interaction and Bonding Spirituality and Prayer Engagement in Structured Programs
External: Support Systems and Structured Engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Support Peer Inspiration and Support Programs and Activities Self-Reflection and Personal Growth
Internal: Inner Development and Spiritual Well-being	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mentorship and Guidance Community Engagement Spiritual Reflection
Holistic Development and Community Integration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community and Respect Faith and Spiritual Positivity and Hope Conflict and Avoidance
Transformative Realization and Personal Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reflection and Awareness Promise of Change Spiritual Growth
Holistic Personal Transformation and Resilience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Faith and Prayer Adaptation and Acceptance
Personal Transformation and Inner Strength	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Personal Change Acceptance of incarceration as trial Faith and Prayer

2. Discussion

- The study aimed to describe and explore the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in selected correctional facilities, focusing on their challenges, coping mechanisms, and transformations using Cognitive Appraisal Theory and Resilience Theory as a lens. Through interviews, transcription, reading, and data analysis, superordinate themes emerged to portray the lived experiences of the PDL participants. Significant findings were as follows:
- The Psychosocial Challenges of Incarceration theme highlighted the emotional and psychological difficulties experienced by PDLs. Subthemes included Family Absence and Isolation and Grief Confinement. Participants emphasized the profound sense of loneliness and loss caused by the absence of family visits and support, compounded by the restrictive environment of incarceration. These challenges underscored the importance of external connections and interventions to mitigate emotional distress.
- The Character Development and Interpersonal Skills theme focused on the positive behavioral changes and improved relationships among PDLs. Subthemes were Personal Growth and Responsibility and Respect and Humility. Participants shared how they learned accountability for their actions and developed respectful interactions within the facility, fostering a harmonious community.
- Holistic Rehabilitation and Personal Transformation revealed how self-reflection and future-focused goals drove personal improvement. Sub Themes included Self-Reflection and Behavior Change, Awareness of Consequences, and Focus on Family and Future Goals. Participants became more aware of the impact of their actions on their families and society, motivating them to embrace personal transformation and set meaningful goals for the future.
- The Holistic Rehabilitation and Well-Being in Incarceration theme emphasized the importance of social connections and structured activities in maintaining emotional and spiritual well-being. Sub Themes included Social Interaction and Bonding, Spirituality and Prayer, and Engagement in Structured Programs. Participants highlighted how faith, community interactions, and participation in programs like the Therapeutic Community Modality Program (TCMP) helped them cope with the stress of incarceration.
- The External Support Systems and Structured Engagement theme underscored the vital role of external and institutional support. Subthemes were Family Support, Peer Inspiration and Support, and Programs and Activities. Family visits provided emotional strength, while peer relationships and institutional activities fostered a supportive and motivating environment for PDLs.
- The Inner Development and Spiritual Well-Being theme reflected the role of faith and personal growth in building resilience. Sub Themes included Self-Reflection and Personal Growth and Spiritual Well-Being. Participants shared how introspection and spiritual practices enabled them to maintain hope and endure challenges.
- The Holistic Development and Community Integration theme emphasized preparation for reintegration into

society. Subthemes were Mentorship and Guidance, Community Engagement, Spiritual Reflection, and Resilience and Hope. Participants expressed gratitude for mentorship programs and group activities that instilled teamwork skills and hope for a productive life post-incarceration.

- The Holistic Well-Being and Harmonious Living highlights the significant aspects of life within the correctional facilities that contributed to participants' pursuit of balance and peace. The sub-themes included Community and Respect, Faith and Spirituality, Positivity and Hope, and Conflict and Avoidance. Participants shared how building respectful relationships within the community, nurturing their spiritual beliefs, fostering optimism, and avoiding conflicts played a crucial role in shaping their daily experiences and overall well-being, allowing them to find meaning and purpose even in challenging circumstances.
- Holistic Personal Transformation and Resilience and Inner Strength captured the adaptive and resilient mindset developed by PDLs. Subthemes were Adaptation and Acceptance and Faith and Prayer. Participants highlighted how they accepted their circumstances and used faith as a source of strength to endure hardships.
- The Personal Transformation and Inner Strength theme described the profound moral and emotional changes participants experienced. Sub Themes included Personal Change and Acceptance of Incarceration as Trial. Many reframed their incarceration as an opportunity to grow and drew strength from their spirituality to embrace a purposeful life.
- These findings emphasize the significant impact of incarceration on PDLs' psychosocial, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. Challenges like isolation and grief were mitigated by faith, structured programs, and external support systems. Self-reflection and resilience emerged as central themes, enabling PDLs to transform their perspectives and embrace personal growth.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) within selected BJMP facilities in District 1 and 2 in Laguna, focusing on the challenges they face, their coping mechanisms, and their personal transformations. The findings reveal that PDLs endure significant emotional and social challenges, primarily driven by separation from loved ones, limited family visits, and the inability to grieve lost relationships. These factors intensify feelings of isolation and abandonment, underscoring the profound impact of incarceration on their emotional well-being.

Despite these adversities, PDLs demonstrated remarkable resilience through various coping mechanisms. Structured programs such as educational courses, vocational training, and religious activities provided emotional stability and a sense of purpose. Spiritual practices, particularly prayer and religious study, offered hope and inner strength, while peer interactions fostered a supportive community that alleviated feelings of isolation.

Personal transformation among PDLs was primarily driven by self-reflection, enabling them to reassess their values, take accountability for past actions, and set meaningful goals for

the future. These transformations were further supported by emotional growth, such as developing self-discipline, improving anger management, and fostering resilience. Participants also highlighted a newfound ability to navigate interpersonal relationships with respect and harmony, showcasing their growth in social adaptability. Family played a vital role in PDLs' emotional resilience and motivation for transformation. The desire to rebuild relationships and reintegrate with loved ones served as a key source of inspiration, encouraging active participation in rehabilitation and self-improvement activities. Community outreach and mentorship programs further supported their reintegration efforts, highlighting the importance of external resources in shaping successful outcomes.

The study underscores the need for a holistic rehabilitation approach that integrates coping mechanisms, self-reflection, and transformative programs. A comprehensive framework that includes skill development, spiritual enrichment, and family engagement can empower PDLs to rebuild their lives and reduce recidivism. By addressing the multifaceted needs of PDLs, correctional facilities can become transformative spaces that prepare individuals for reintegration into society. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers and administrators in designing evidence-based strategies to promote personal development, emotional resilience, and successful societal reintegration.

6. Thank-You Note

The authors sincerely acknowledge the contributions of past researchers whose studies on incarceration, rehabilitation, and the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) have informed and guided the direction of this work. Their efforts provided essential background and helped deepen our understanding of the subject, serving as a meaningful reference for exploring the voices of those often unheard in correctional settings.

We also express our gratitude to the BJMP Laguna and the selected district jails for allowing this research to be conducted, and to the PDL participants who courageously shared their stories. Their voices were essential in giving depth and meaning to this study.

It is our hope that the results of this research will provide a broader understanding of the realities faced by PDLs and serve as a meaningful contribution to future studies and interventions aimed at rehabilitation and reintegration.

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