

Lost Freedom: An Exploration on the Life of Sentenced Offenders Inside the Correctional Facility

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Abstract— This phenomenological study aimed to delve into the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) at Davao Prison and Penal Farm. The study utilized a qualitative research design with 17 PDLs as its participants who have served a minimum of ten years' imprisonment chosen through purposive sampling. Results revealed that PDLs felt secluded and lonely, especially those who lost connectedness since their family no longer visits them either due to financial difficulties or for reasons not known to the participants. To cope with the difficulties, the participants sought God's providence, engaged in recreational activities, focused on daily tasks and livelihood programs, and conversed with fellow inmates to divert attention. Through their challenging journey, the PDLs reflected on past behaviors with remorse and committed to change, cultivating divine intimacy. They practiced calmness over anger when dealing with life situations to avoid further problems. The correction administration is committed to the reformation and rehabilitation of sentenced offenders; being the primary agency responsible for taking custody of the respondents, they will be able to understand the sentenced offenders' struggles in general as well as use this study in the updating and or formulation of rehabilitative programs suited to them.

Keywords— criminology, impact of incarceration, Person Deprived of Liberty, prison experience, phenomenology, Philippines.

I. INTRODUCTION

When an accused has been proven guilty by a court of law, incarceration will be a punishment. While we can all agree that the convicted offender deserves imprisonment, we should not just focus our eyes on punishing them but also treat them as a sick person who needs help. Although it has yet to garner as much attention, we should consider both the suitable and appropriate forms of punishment. We may object to some punishments not because of their severity but because we think the type of punishment is unsuitable in some way (Hoskins, 2017). Conducting this study is of great importance in evaluating and assessing the effectiveness of rehabilitative programs to ensure that the intervention given to them is suited to their needs. In addition, failure to conduct similar studies will only result in ineffectively exhausting the government finances. Research examining the impacts of incarceration on behavior is surprisingly limited despite the economic and social importance of crime reduction and the rehabilitation of prisoners (Balafoutas et al., 2020).

Several studies have already related to this matter; some have already pointed out the causes of stress. There have been studies that focused on the effects of prison conditions on the mental health of the convict, where the study concluded that the unwholesome conditions of the prison environment, such as overcrowding and a lack of

space, foul odor, and airless cells, unhealthy food, an inactive lifestyle, and residing with intimidating and violent people, including correctional officers, were more likely to cause symptoms of depression than specific mental disorders (Convocar et al., 2020).

The primary objective of this study is to explore and discover the experiences of sentenced offenders while serving sentences inside the correction facility using the following research questions: 1) What are the lived experiences/challenges encountered by the sentenced offenders inside a correctional facility? 2) How study participants cope with their experience. Moreover, 3) What insights/lessons were learned by the offenders that they can share with the community?

In this study, the researcher will be using the constructive paradigm philosophy. Constructivism is a hypothesis about how people learn based on observation and research. It asserts that humans build their knowledge and understanding of the universe via personal experience and reflection (Sarita, 2017). This greatly supports my study, which intends to delve into the experience of sentenced offenders who have served long prison time.

This study is anchored on the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, which Lazarus and Folkman developed in 1984. This theory posits that stress results

from specific interactions between a person and their environment that they see as exhausting or exceeding their resources and jeopardizing their well-being. On the other hand, a person develops coping strategies through available resources such as emotional support from family and friends or prior experiences (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

As stress is identified as one of the everyday experiences inside the prison facility, it is said that sentenced offenders tend to develop Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Inmates have higher prevalence rates of serious mental diseases than the general public: More than 10% of male and female inmates and 4% of those in jails and prisons are thought to have psychotic illnesses, respectively. Major depression is said to affect 14% of female convicts (Baranyi et al., 2018).

Additionally, it has been discovered that the prevalence of personality disorders and substance use disorders in prisoners is significantly higher than it is in the general community. He also added that untreated PTSD raises the risk of self-harm and suicide while reducing daily functioning and treatment compliance. The loss of a loved one is a crucial factor in depression in some PDLs, as well as the loss of contact with friends and relatives outside the institution (Flores-Baloro & Vicente, 2019).

Furthermore, it was argued that the encounters with correctional officers, interactions with medical professionals, and fear of other inmates were the most often mentioned primary stressors (i.e., stresses experienced while jailed). Employment issues following release became the secondary stressor most frequently mentioned. Surprisingly, few people mentioned experiencing stigma after their incarceration. The results have implications for the long-term health and well-being of those who are incarcerated and highlight the need for more studies on the effects of stress on correctional populations, both quantitative and qualitative (Porter, 2019).

On the other hand, coping is described as the ideas and actions used to control stressful conditions both internally and externally. It is a phrase used specifically for the mobilization of acts that are aware and voluntary. Coping styles, which are a collection of broadly consistent features that influence an individual's behavior in reaction to stress, are the various ways in which people choose to respond to stressors. These hold true over time and in various contexts. Reactive coping

(a response to the stressor) and proactive coping are the two main categories of coping (aiming to neutralize future stressors). Because they are more regimented, inflexible, and less reactive to stimuli, proactive people function better in stable circumstances, while reactive people do better in more unpredictable ones. Because they are more regimented, inflexible, and less reactive to stimuli, proactive people function better in stable circumstances, while reactive people do better in more unpredictable ones (Algorani & Gupta, 2021).

Moreover, coping techniques like obtaining emotional support, coping through religion, and Finding meaning anticipated posttraumatic progress favorably. Higher degrees of posttraumatic growth were linked to psychotherapy and chaplaincy. Disengagement from behavior negatively predicted posttraumatic growth (Vanhooren et al., 2018).

Recently, a study described how such criminals adjust to life in jail for an extended period. They have demonstrated how different coping mechanisms may be used at various phases of the sentences. Second, they can pick up where they left off with their lives when their imprisonment is over if they so choose. The results of both qualitative and quantitative studies support the notion that long-term inmates develop coping mechanisms that help them deal with the challenges of imprisonment over time (Crewe et al., 2017).

Correspondingly, one study looked at how policymakers, courts, and prison administrations should be concerned about long-term incarceration that is not statutorily designated as a life sentence because they all have an interest in knowing the true prevalence of long-term incarceration and its effects. It is difficult to determine a cut-off for the duration of a virtual life sentence because its likelihood of survival depends on the offense's duration and severity. The study argued further that we must take into consideration that a maximum sentence of at least 50 years before release is equivalent to life in prison, given that the average age of entrance to prison for people convicted of major crimes is in their mid-to-late thirties. The study discovered that 44,311 people are incarcerated on such sentences (Nellis, 2017).

Sentenced Offenders are individuals who have committed a crime and have been found guilty by the court. They are committed in a prison facility as a form of punishment as well as for rehabilitative purposes. In

connection with this, Lost Freedom is a term used in this study to express the result of incarceration, which is the deprivation of liberty. Further, the term Correctional Facility refers to a prison institution designed to house and rehabilitate convicted offenders while serving their sentence.

Most research about the life experiences of sentenced offenders inside the prison facility focused mainly on discussing the encounters of newly committed prisoners who are still in a state of adjustment from their lives outside while they still have the freedom to do whatever they want to being incapacitated to such things. Limited family visitation, no contact with their friends and loved ones outside, bounded recreational activities, and the like. In this regard, it is essential to conduct this study because we have to look and shed light on the experiences of those who have already served long years of imprisonment. Like how they survived for the past ten years, how did they manage to maintain their coping mechanisms to survive the grueling years of incarceration?

This research study can be used as a comparison tool to comprehend various correctional systems worldwide since it explores the real-life experiences of convicts inside a correctional facility.

It is possible to get essential insights by analyzing different techniques and their results, which can lead to advancements in the treatment and reintegration of offenders and impact global conversations regarding the future of criminal justice systems. This research study has an indicator of UN Sustainable

Development Goal (SDG) 16 that promotes peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provides access to justice for all, and builds effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions at all levels.

This is to look at the experiences of the inmates inside the prison facility while facing the consequences of their actions and at the same time trying to keep their sanity despite the stress that they come up against and to look at the sentenced offender's response towards the programs offered by the agencies.

Through this, we can assess whether the programs given to them had an impact or none or whether the strategy is effective (Convocar et al., 2020).

II. METHODS

A. Study Participants

The participants of this research study are seventeen (17) sentenced offenders, also known as Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL) from Davao Prison and Penal Farm (DPPF). Ten of seventeen are for In-depth Interviews (IDI), and the remaining seven are for Focus Group Discussion (FGD). A systematic review to determine the appropriate sample size for a qualitative study revealed that 9-17 participants for IDI and 4-8 participants for FGD is an adequate sample size applicable to a homogenous study population (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022).

These participants are chosen through purposive sampling. In the study conducted by Campbell et al. (2020), a relatively small and purposefully chosen sample may be used in a qualitative study. Furthermore, purposive sampling is a technique for finding and choosing cases that will most use a few research resources. In order to strategically sample research participants and ensure that those chosen are pertinent to the research questions being posed, the researcher, using the purposive sampling technique, does not attempt to sample research participants at random (Bekele & Ago, 2022).

The selection of the research participants was made possible through the inclusion and exclusion technique, and these are the following criteria being used: First, he must be a sentenced offender. It must be established that the respondent has received a verdict from the court of law and is currently serving his prison sentence inside the correction facility. Second, he must have served at least ten (10) years of prison time, as this study focuses on revealing the experiences of offenders with lengthy prison time. Lastly, the crimes committed should be murder, homicide, rape, and the like provided that the punishment received by the interviewee is more than ten years and has already served the said ten years qualification.

B. Materials and Instrument

To ensure that the sentenced offenders' perspectives regarding their prison life experience are explored intensively, the researcher utilized a validated semi-structured interview guide. The semi-structured questions will be used as a guide during the interview process but will not dictate the flow (SmithBattle, 2014; Oerther, 2021). The researcher prepared and developed questions based on rigor, ethics, and artistry. Aside from

the three research questions, another three main interview questions were designed, and fourteen (14) probing questions were formulated and validated. Probing obtains an additional degree of depth and information by verbally prompting a participant to expound, clarify, exemplify, or explain a previous response to an interview question that they have already provided (Robinson, 2023).

C. Design and Procedure

A phenomenological qualitative approach is used in this study. A phenomenological method of qualitative research explains what a phenomenon means to multiple people based on their lived experiences (Hall et al., 2016), which is the live experiences of sentenced offenders inside the correctional facility. It has been concluded that researchers may only obtain process-based, narrated, story-based data via qualitative research, which is more closely tied to the human experience (Stahl & King, 2020). To manifest the uniqueness of the study, the researcher conducted an in-depth interview (IDI) with ten (10) key participants and seven (7) participants for the focus group discussion (FGD). An in-depth interview is an excellent qualitative technique for encouraging people to discuss their innermost thoughts, feelings, and experiences. It is also a chance to learn more about how individuals understand the world or a certain phenomenon. Focus group discussions, on the other hand, is a technique that involves discussions in groups to ascertain the opinions, views, and thoughts of a chosen group of individuals about a particular research issue. Participants should view discussions as non-threatening and feel free to voice any viewpoint, regardless of whether other participants agree with them (Milena et al., 2008).

The data collection happened on June 10, 2023, at the Davao Prison and Penal Farm (DPPF) – Minimum Security Compound located at Braulio E. Dujali, Davao del Norte. Before the data gathering, the researcher communicated her intent to conduct the study in the facility through an official letter. The letter was emailed at the Davao Prison and Penal Farm (DPPF), specifically at the office of Communications/Tactical Operations Section (CTOS) Norte. Once approved by the CTOS, the researcher handed out translated copies (in the preferred language known by the participants) of the Informed Consent Form (ICF) to the projected participants. The ICF was discussed in detail, explaining the nature of the study, its purpose, risk, methods, and potential benefits to the participants. It was emphasized

that the participation of the projected participants was purely voluntary.

The researcher has summarized the data using Reflexive Thematic Analysis and Coding. Reflexive thematic analysis is a conceptually flexible and generally accessible interpretative method for analyzing qualitative data that makes it easier to find and analyze patterns or themes within a given data set (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Qualitative researchers must document, systematize, and disclose the techniques of analysis in sufficient detail to allow the reader to assess the process' credibility if they want to believe that the data analysis was carried out in a precise, consistent, and thorough manner. Although there are many examples of qualitative research, researchers have access to few sophisticated tools for conducting a thorough and pertinent thematic analysis (Nowell et al., 2017).

The researcher ensured that the study subjects knew their participation was entirely voluntary. The choice to accept or reject the invitation and to participate in the interview was up to the potential interviewees. They should have the right to withdraw from the study without consequences, and their participation and non-participation will not affect them or their case. When the responders accepted the terms, they signed the consent annexed to the letter, which officially declared both parties' acceptance.

After the respondents agreed to participate in the research, the interview started using the questions in the validated interview guide. Once the respondents agreed, recordings like audio or video were made using technological devices such as audio recorders, cellphones, or cameras in order to prevent unintentionally omitting some crucial information. The interview was a discussion about personal opinions and experiences for the entire time. Thus, there were no correct or incorrect responses, and it was underlined to all respondents during this step. To mitigate possible emotional or psychological risks, the researcher conducted the study in the presence of a practicing psychologist to ensure that participants can process their emotions, as this may divulge sensitive topics.

Lastly, the interviews were conducted in a location where the participants were able to express their thoughts or opinions confidently, which means that they must be free from distraction, provided that the organization consented. Once the researcher had

finished the interview with all identified respondents, transcription followed.

The researcher has acquired approval from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) to conduct a study and was given an approved UMEREC Certificate on June 20, 2023, with a UMEREC Protocol Number: UMEREC-2023-203.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This part presents the study's findings in three categories: the lived experiences of the Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL), the participants' coping strategies, and the lessons and insights that they have learned while serving sentences that they can share with the community.

Experiences of Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL) While Serving Sentence

Seclusion and Loneliness- As I asked them about their lived experiences while serving a sentence, most of the informants expressed seclusion and loneliness as some of the struggles they experienced while serving their sentence in prison. However, they adjusted to their prison. The first theme divulged that PDLs experience "seclusion and loneliness" while serving sentences. In his words, he said:

"Since no one was allowed to visit. It was saddening, and we felt lonely. The restriction on visitations did not affect me much since it has been so long since the last time someone came to see me. I remember it was the year 1997 when my Lola came to visit. All my family are living now afar. My grandchild is in Manila, and my daughter is working abroad. However, it was still saddening, and I always felt blue at that time because although no one visited me, I felt happy whenever I saw people come and visit their families. (IDI6-F_RQ1_PQ5)"

According to some studies, incarceration in a correction institution frequently leads to isolation and loneliness due to no contact or limited interaction with their family outside. Most of the time, incarcerated individuals find it challenging to establish relationships with others due to their differences when it comes to interests, as it is hard to find people who can relate their life experiences or people who share the same preferences, such as in music, sports, culture and belief. Some also tend to shut down while facing others and choose to isolate themselves because they do not want to listen and get

burdened with the problems of others (Haney, 2019). He uttered:

"Adjusting took work for me. At first, I was in isolation. I do not mingle or even talk with others. Whenever they would call me, I do not respond. I was in so much regret at that time. Nevertheless, I am feeling better now." (IDI5-E_RQ1_PQ3)

Further, many find solace in seclusion as they process their situation and give their selves time to understand and accept their fate. As Armstrong (2018) explained, imprisonment is an excellent representation of being stuck in a place and time. So, no matter how much they want to see their loved ones, they are glued behind the prison walls, and that contributes to their loneliness.

Loss of Social Connection - Some key informants lost social connection since most had no regular visitors. As we all know, social ties are essential in a person's life and give us a sense of belongingness. However, due to the imposed mandatory restrictions inside the correctional facility, many lost connections with the people they love. The participants revealed that they can no longer interact with their family and friends regularly due to their situation. Here are their shared experiences:

"I miss my family and cannot talk to them; it makes me sadder. I want to see and meet them so badly, but they seem to have forgotten about me already. It has been years, fifteen (15) years to be exact, since the last time that they visited me." (FGD5-P_RQ1_PQ3)

They also said:

"Having no idea about how my family has done all these years makes me uncomfortable. I always thought that maybe the reason they do not make any effort to visit or even communicate with me is the reality that there's nothing I can do for them outside. I cannot even provide for my own needs here." (IDI7-E_RQ1_PQ3)

Solitude During Illness - The third generated theme under the lived experiences of PDLs is Solitude during Illness. As I continued with my interview, several participants shared that while serving sentences, they have experienced getting sick, which intensifies the struggle behind bars. According to the study, specific commonly reported symptoms of failing health may be psychological stress brought on by being isolated in prison (Pękala-Wojciechowska, 2021).

“When I get sick and there is no one I can call to help, that is when I struggle. However, how do the employees run the bureau? There is nothing wrong so far.” (IDI1-A_RQ1_PQ1)

They also mentioned that when they get sick, they find it difficult to tend to their selves since they are too shy to ask for assistance and cannot oblige their cellmates to care for them, so they are left with no choice but to endure. The following were their statements:

“When I am not feeling good. There were times that I could not even get up since my joints felt weak, and I could not oblige my co-PDLs since I did not have anything to pay for them if they would take care of me. I do not want to burden them.” (FGD6-Q_RQ1_PQ3)

Adjusting to Prison Norms - Some key informants expressed that adjusting to prison norms contributed to the difficulty that the participants, the sentenced offenders, experienced while serving their sentence.

“I kind of adjusted since it has been twenty-five years already. But my first few years were unimaginable. It was difficult for me to accept how things turned out for me. Things here are far too different compared to the norms we followed in the society as a free man. In here, we have no option but to just follow the rules.” (IDI4-D_RQ1_PQ1)

In every correctional facility, prison rules are always imposed that everyone needs to adhere to. These are regulations to be followed to help maintain harmony inside the facility. Most of these are implemented to instill discipline inside a corrective environment. McKendy and Ricciardelli (2018) explain that formal and informal prison norms shape prison life and serve as a behavioral guide to inmates. The participants also added that since they have served for quite some time already, they are more obliged and pressured to adhere to prison rules because they are expected to be role models for others. They shared:

“Well, I’m okay now but that doesn’t mean that I did not experience difficulties. Maybe because I have stayed here for more than three decades now, I kind of adjusted already that’s why I can say that life here is good but I’d say it was not easy. We still have to be mindful with our actions since we are expected to be the role model of everyone.” (FGD5-P_RQ1_PQ1)

Coping Strategies of Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL) while Serving Sentence

The following are the major themes and core ideas on the coping strategies of sentenced offenders while serving sentences inside prison. According to the participants, whenever they feel troubled while inside prison, they cope through different strategies such as seeking spiritual intervention, engaging their selves in recreational activities to divert their attention, spending time talking with fellow inmates, performing incarcerated duties, and attending to their livelihood initiatives to keep them occupied.

Yearn for Spiritual Intervention - As sentenced offenders frequently experience struggles while inside prison, the majority of them expressed how their belief in “higher” power helped them cope with the difficulties they have experienced. Their belief in “higher” power has helped them acclimate to the difficult experiences they go through inside the correction facility that affects their mental, psychological, and spiritual well-being. As cited by Ndung’u, (2021) in his study “The Role of Religious Strategies in Coping with Stress and Enhancement of The Psychological Well-Being of Life Sentenced Inmates in Maximum Prisons in Kenya,” spiritual approach is probably one of the essential ways to manage stress for they believed that difficult situation could only be solved and directed by God since it is beyond human control.

“Looking back, I can say that it was my prayers and faith in God that kept me going and deal with life here. I read and listen to His words. God made it seem easy.” (IDI3-C_RQ2_MQ2)

The participants also shared that they beg for God's pardon when they pray. Through their religious belief, they redeem themselves from being flawed to being faithful (Ellis, 2020). Connecting to God is made possible through a faith-based approach to rehabilitation where different religious denominations are allowed to visit and hold bible studies, prayer meetings, and mass. As spiritual belief can create social capital and permeate people's minds, it may be linked to promoting resistance.

“Some days here feels good, but when days are tough, I talk to God and communicate with Him by reading the bible and after I will meditate. It helped me. It helped a lot of us ... I spend most of my time praying.” (IDI8-H_RQ2_MQ2)

They also mentioned how prayers, worship songs, reading the bible, and attending to mass service helped them to cope. They shared:

“I make sure to attend mass every Sunday. We sing our hearts out through praise and worship songs. It made me have something to look forward to every week. So far, it is an effective way for me to deal with difficulties.” (IDI2-B_RQ2_PQ1)

Further, they shared:

“Same with what they do. I pray to God and read his gospel as well ... Yes, I also cope thru prayers. I surrendered myself to Him. Whenever I feel sad or feel guilty, I will just think about how merciful God and I know he forgives sinners like me.” (FGD2-M_RQ2_PQ3)

Engage in Recreational Activities - The participants also shared that engaging in recreational activities is one of the keys to diverting one’s attention. Participants expressed that playing ball games is a suitable means to divert attention. In his words:

“I engage myself to recreational activities such as basketball and boardgames or anything that is allowed to enjoy. Aside from that, I am grateful for being chosen as one of the PDLs to work as a kitchen staff because it made me busy all day. I enjoy preparing foods to be shared by all of us and after preparing food and serving them to our co-PDLs, we will clean the used dishes and other kitchen utensils. Aside from making me busy, it is also a good exercise for me since I move a lot in the kitchen.” (IDI9-I_RQ2_PQ1)

Recreational activities are an integral part of jail and prison facilities, and they are an excellent way to improve and promote the PDL’s healthy well-being. As mentioned by (Martinez-Merino et al., 2019), participating in sports and physical exercise assisted individuals in coping with their sentences. Additionally, by engaging in sports and physical exercise, inmates created areas of freedom inside the restrictive prison setting. Moreover, these recreational activities are not just there to divert one’s attention but also promote a healthy lifestyle and social connection with others. Recreational sports also offer chances for personal growth in goal-setting, discipline, teamwork, and persistence, which can improve results after release and facilitate reintegration into society (Fadare et al., 2023).

Talk with Fellow Inmates - For the third theme, coping strategies, the participants shared how talking and communicating with their fellow inmates helped them cope with their current situation. The third theme under coping strategies stressed the importance of dialogue with others inside prison. The participants revealed how “talking and communicating” with others made them forget their current situation, emphasizing how co-inmates can be a great source of peer support since they are aware of what you go through, and they might offer helpful advice to assist you in getting by daily.

“Most of the days, I spend my free time talking with my co-inmates or watch tv. Taking to my cellmates makes me sometimes forget my current situation.” (IDI1-A_RQ2)

Ideally, inmates should stay alone in a cell, but under certain circumstances, such as temporary overcrowding, two or more will stay in one cell, which has a positive effect on their mental well-being as it may lessen anxiety, and prison life will become more bearable having a companion (Marco et al., 2020).

“I make ways to enjoy myself. Most of the time, I socialize with others and talk to them for me not to feel sad and forget the difficulty of living inside prison. Because honestly, life here is really boring and to cope with that I keep on talking with my co-PDLs.” (IDI1-A_RQ2_PQ3)

Additionally, expressing our emotions through talking will lessen our burden, change our mood, and make us feel better. According to a recent study, finding someone who has dealt with similar issues and, ideally, has found a solution if you need specialized guidance on a particular situation will help you cope with stress. Further, if you require a lot of speaking time, consider conversing with several people. A comprehensive social network allows you to share the workload because one individual can become exhausted (Ravenscraft, 2020). These were their words:

“I usually spend my free time with my co-PDLs who I treat like a family. I really don’t allow these negative emotions to take over me so I like having meaningful dialogue with my cellmates.” (FGD5-P_RQ2_PQ1)

Perform Incarcerated Duties - While serving a sentence, the participants are given work assignments and daily tasks that they need to finish before the day ends. As the

participants testified, performing these tasks has helped them cope. They would opt to perform their daily tasks and assignments as a way to shift their focus.

“In order to divert my attention, I do my work assignments.” (IDI8-H_RQ2_PQ3)

Incarcerated duties are normally given to inmates to encourage their active participation, promote positive emotional and behavioral impact on inmate behavior, and prevent idleness, which obviously has a negative impact on their well-being. Prisons frequently offer "work programs" wherein inmates work and carry out tasks like cleaning the facility, gardening, kitchen assistance, laundry, and maintenance. Since most of my participants are admitted to a minimum-security compound, they are more accessible and can do more things to occupy them, such as gardening. These tasks exhaust them, so they retire to bed early and escape temporarily from the reality of being in prison (Vuk & Doležal, 2020). These were their statements:

“I just put my attention to work. Because accomplishing your daily tasks can make you occupied and at least forget your situation.” (IDI9-H_RQ2_PQ3)

They also recalled moments where they resorted to directing their focus on their incarcerated duties so that when they got tired, they would retire to bed early. In their words, they shared:

“Finishing my jail tasks exhausts me, allowing for earlier sleep and temporary escape from the reality of being incarcerated.” (FGD6-Q_RQ2_PQ3)

“Same with Quinn (pseudonym), I also do not allow myself to focus on the negative emotions because it can only cause me emotional turmoil, instead, what I do shift my focus, is I engage in tasks assigned at me here in the prison facility. (FGD2-M_RQ2_PQ3)

Attend Livelihood Initiatives - The last theme under the coping strategies of sentenced offenders while serving a sentence is Attending to Livelihood initiatives. Jails and Prisons offer Livelihood Programs to convicted offenders through skills training and seminars. Through these initiatives, inmates may learn new vocational skills that would help them earn money even while inside prison. Furthermore, through this, they may be able to support their family outside. One of the most notable aspects of these programs is that they help to

positively modify the offenders' demeanor (Verma & Sharma, 2022).

“I just focus in making handicrafts here to forget the struggles and difficulties that I encounter from time to time. Since there is no means for me to turn back time, there is no sense in dwelling with the past so I seize the opportunity here inside to improve my livelihood skills through active program participation.” (FGD3-N_RQ2_PQ1)

These initiatives provide opportunities to inmates and prepare them for the transition to work life. As cited by Mugisha (2019), engaging inmates in meaningful activities such as vocational programs will help reduce recidivism in the long run. These were their statements:

“I work on craft since participating in the vocational programs helps me temporarily forget my confinement. Usually I'd make picture frame made up of carved woods. I try hard to be productive with our livelihood. Aside from it is a good diversion, I can earn money from it.” (IDI6-F_RQ2_PQ1)

Insights and Lessons Learned by Sentenced Offenders Which They Can Share to The Community
Remorseful of Past Actions - As I was approaching the end of my interview, I asked the participants for their insights and lessons learned throughout their journey. They expressed how remorseful they were of their past actions that led to their imprisonment.

“That bad deeds will not give us pleasure but will only cause us sufferings.” (FGD-M_RQ3)

As cited by the study of van Herpen and Kruizinga (2022), most people refer to guilt as a self-conscious emotion. It is anticipated that this self-conscious feeling influences moral behavior and moral decision-making. Moreover, when a person finally acknowledges that he is at fault and has caused distress to the victim, he will feel guilty. It is believed that guilt feelings play a crucial role in an offender's recovery because they enable the offender to accept responsibility for their actions and make amends for the harm they have caused.

“To be honest, my years of stay and experience made me realize how bad and inappropriate my lifestyle was. And that lifestyle brought me here. I only I could do something to turn back time.” (IDI5-E_RQ3)

Getting a prison sentence could be among the most stressful and unpleasant things that can happen to an inmate. Offenders often relive the moments of their crimes while incarcerated. They might feel regretful and guilty about this (Gales et al., 2023).

“I have learned about acceptance. It is not easy to be here especially to be taken away from your family but I know that these things happened because of what I did. Since I cannot turn back time, I have to accept and face the consequence.” (IDI1-A_RQ3)

Cultivated Divine Intimacy - The second generated theme under the research question, “Insights and lessons learned by the sentenced offenders which they can share with the community,” is the Cultivation of Divine Intimacy. Participants revealed that their prison experience has humbled and brought them closer to God.

“I have learned how prayer can save a person. I became a better person after knowing Jesus so I can say that somehow, it’s a blessing in disguise.” (IDI2-B_RQ3_PQ1)

“Same with what I said a while ago, I consider it important that thru my experience, after my years of stay here inside, I was able to know who God is.” (IDI7-G_RQ3_PQ1)

It is not uncommon to hear theories on how certain seasoned criminals have transformed into spiritual entities while incarcerated. Nevertheless, it is hard to argue that these prisoners will behave well after being released from custody (Jang et al., 2020).

“To seek guidance from God in everything that we do. If we really want to change for the better, we must seek for God’s protection for us to sustain and for us to be able to achieve the change that we wish to do.” (IDI5-E_RQ3_PQ1)

In the Philippines, where 90% of people practice Christianity, it is no surprise to hear revelations from the participants sharing how their belief in Him has helped them to overcome their struggles and agonizing experiences while in prison. According to research, religion has been linked to numerous positive impacts, such as improved mood, elevated sentiments of optimism, more altruistic behavior, improved coping

skills, and a decrease in people's engagement in criminal and delinquent behavior (Blagden et al., 2020).

Practice Calmness over Anger - One of the most important lessons the participants have learned in their journey inside the four-walled prison is the importance of tranquility – being calm instead of being impulsive.

“I have learned that we should not act on our impulses especially if we know that it will not do us any good ... Also, the ability control myself. I no longer act and react on things impulsively.” (IDI3-C_RQ3_PQ1)

According to the participants, it is genuinely inevitable to have misunderstandings with your co-inmates; you will disagree and will have different opinions about things that might anger them. Anger arises as a response to circumstances that trigger our emotions. These triggers can be unmet expectations, undesirable conditions, conflicting personalities, and one’s temperament. As cited by (Jang, 2019) in his research study about the relationship between temperament and anger response of prisoners, affective stimuli may cause impulsive and dangerous behavior.

“I’ll advise them to always be mindful of their actions. To calculate first the cost and benefit before making decisions. To share to them that reacting immediately to situations would cause them harm and most importantly is to learn to control emotions.” (FGD7-Q_RQ3_PQ3)

Everyone experiences anger when they feel mistreated or abused, which is indeed a universal emotion. However, we can always respond calmly if we can manage this emotion (Bulut, 2023). Through experience, the participants divulged that they made significant progress in managing their behaviors after years spent inside prison. Realizing that responding impulsively to situations will only cause them harm, they believed that practicing calmness would help them maintain harmonious relationships with others and may even open doors of opportunities.

“My only advise to them is to never engage in fights and always maintain good relationship with others. If you can befriend everyone then that is good! Always be mindful over your actions so you will only leave good impressions to your co-PDLs. Being kind will open doors of opportunities such as given the chance to go outside the compound and be included in the “Labas Bureau”.” (IDI6-F_RQ3_PQ3)

We may make wiser judgments, deal with challenging circumstances, take care of ourselves, and experience greater joy in life when we remain calm. As cited by (Lennarz, 2019), Effective emotion regulation is essential to psychosocial functioning and has advantages for mental health

IV. IMPLICATIONS

A. *Implications for Practice*

As a criminologist, I believe correction is as vital as the other pillars of the Philippine Criminal Justice System (PCJS). The correction pillar may be known to many as the weakest link in the PCJS, but it is an essential tool to help the government achieve a crime-free environment. Although it is almost impossible to prevent the existence of felonies and offenses, the correction, through its successful rehabilitative and reformatory approach, will prevent recidivism. That is why the government is doing its best with the concerned government agencies and NGOs to deliver what is expected of them. As a researcher, I would like you to permit me to provide modest suggestions to aid our PDLs' predicament while serving sentences. The correctional facility may consider this suggestion while creating policies and implementing programs.

The problem in this situation is always the need for appropriate rehabilitative measures but the failure to consistently implement them. The Bureau has already laid down programs to address the emotional, psychological, spiritual, and even educational aspects. However, what is written needs to be followed more regularly. Thus, they should be given more support to reduce recidivism and for the successful reintegration of these people. In general, giving sentenced offenders greater support benefits society and the inmates by encouraging rehabilitation, lowering crime, and creating a more just and compassionate system.

B. *Implications for Future Research*

As a researcher, based on the limitations and delimitations of my study, here are my suggestions: First, given that the results of this study can only be applied to the seventeen persons who were the subjects of this study, future further research involving a different participant group could be undertaken to enhance the validity of the study's conclusions such as to PDLs committed in a Medium or Maximum Security Compound since my participants are all from the Minimum Security.

Second, as the study is limited to one national penitentiary only, comparable research may be carried out outside of Region XI or in other national penitentiaries located in the different regions of the Philippines to supplement the data and get further understanding from other people's experiences. Furthermore, future research may be conducted using quantitative methods to compare the lived experiences of PDLs in the different security compounds or a similar qualitative method to explore their journey behind bars.

V. CONCLUSIONS

Conducting a study on a Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL) has been challenging. My nine months of experience as a contractual provincial jail employee ignited my interest in exploring and discovering the reality of the life of those behind bars. As I set foot in the facility, I was feeling nervous and hesitant, knowing that these people had committed crimes, but as I got to know and hear their stories, I couldn't help but feel sorry for them. Nevertheless, what amazed me was these people's sense of acceptance. Every time I get to ask them about their story, their face would light up while answering questions. These people have already forgiven themselves for the mistakes they have made. It is an essential key to moving forward.

As to the conduct of the study, my greatest realization is that, as a Teacher and as a Registered Criminologist, I can make contributions to improve their situation. Thus, I can refer the result of my study to the University of Mindanao Tagum College—Department of Criminal Justice Education for a possible research-based Community Extension Program. Through the program, we may be able to provide hygiene kits and laundry detergents to our sentenced offenders. This may be small, but surely enough to make a difference.

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