

Conditions of Correctional Facilities in the Philippines: Jail Wardens' Perspectives and Experiences

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Abstract

The study explored the perspective and experiences of jail wardens in managing jail facilities in the Philippines for the calendar year 2019. A qualitative study with a transcendental phenomenological research design was used. The study focused on 10 jail wardens from correctional facilities in the provinces of Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. The themes reflect the participants' experiences on the conditions of correctional facilities and their viewpoint on quality correction such as erosion in conformity with the rules, scarcity of resources critical to jail services, the perils of poor staffing, freedom from congestion, infrastructure development, technology in correction, lifelong attempt for improvement and character development. This study concluded that the problems and challenges encountered by the correctional wardens in handling persons deprived of liberty (inmates) and in managing the jail facilities affected their roles and responsibilities in improving the conditions in the correctional facilities such as in the implementation of the reformation process of the PDLs, peace, and order within the facility, and in securing the safety of the personnel and the community. Thus, it is high time for the government and the legislative body of the Philippine government to improve the quality of correctional facilities, the following may be considered: the installation of high technology, construction of new and standard correctional facilities, and quick rehabilitation of old, outdated, or destroyed jails, allocation of budget or appropriations to enable the employment of more staff/personnel, and limiting the number of inmates in a prison cell.

Keywords: Jail Wardens Experiences; Correctional Facility; Quality Jail

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INTRODUCTION

Correctional wardens are responsible for ensuring that their prison is safe for both personnel and inmates. This entails defining training requirements for correctional officers and other personnel. Prison wardens must be prepared to lead a diverse group as the breadth of their duties expands. According to Mufarreh, Waitkus, & Booker (2021), with the increasing number of offenders populating the criminal justice system and the imposed responsibilities placed on correctional and community supervision agencies, effectively identifying and training leaders for success is now more critical than ever (Mufarreh, Waitkus, & Booker, 2021).

Atkin-Plunk & Armstrong (2013) provide that prison wardens' administrative and correctional obligations are extensive. In addition to carrying out the goal of the prison wardens of the state, federal or corporate entities also oversee the order, security, and prevention of escapes and riots in a facility. The priorities of a warden may include administering security and security activities, managing human resources, handling critical events, managing the budget, promoting an excellent organizational climate, presiding over a physical facility, administering public relations, retaining professional expertise, implementing strategic planning, and supervising other duties.

According to research conducted by Liebling et al. (2021), the correctional staff is aware of the threats they confront. Even low-level security and juvenile detention facility officials expressed concern for their safety and well-being. Across a range of facilities, officers reported that they think they were (or are) at higher risk for injury and other negative outcomes as a result of their jobs. These perceptions could also contribute to consequences such as stress, burnout, and turnover. Moreover, various policies and pro-

grams have been introduced across prison facilities with the specific purpose of enhancing officer well-being. However, few of these programs have been subjected to rigorous scientific evaluation, thus limiting the understanding of their effectiveness (Ferdik & Smith, 2017).

A report on the situation of the Philippine Penitentiaries revealed that prison wardens often face problems such as pollution or overcrowding, food supplies are inadequate for ordinary human demands daily (De Guzman, Ibarrola, Idolog, & Ignacio, 2020). Also, the lack of appropriate spousal visitation spaces, particularly for out-of-town conjugal visits, sanitation, particularly for toilet/water supply, adequate beds/bedding/mosquito nets, insufficient medical facilities, and poorly equipped facilities are also present in most of the jails. These problems are real in jails in the provinces due to the insufficiency of the budget and inadequate facilities (C. R. Jones & Narag, 2021).

Narag & Jones (2017) reported that prison conditions in the Philippines are overcrowded, understaffed, and under-resourced, leading to the construction of multi-occupancy cells, which house 100 offenders in a cell built for ten. Overcrowding usually entails a significant decrease in the quantity and quality of resources available for day-to-day existence, such as healthy food and safe drinking water. The scarcity of resources raises the likelihood of competition and conflict over their acquisition and retention. Even though inmates may react to overcrowding in different ways, suggests that overcrowding usually hurts inmate conduct (C. Jones, Narag, & Morales, 2015).

While many studies had been conducted already to look into the experiences of correctional wardens and inmates, as well as the various policies and programs in enhancing their well-being, there was a limited study conducted to look into their specific conditions in terms of infrastructure, programs, health, and

opportunities, particularly in Southern Mindanao. Moreover, despite the programs and services implemented under the mandate of BJMP, studies conducted continue to show that in its extremely overcrowded prisons and jails, the country suffers catastrophic public health problems.

It is for the above reasons that this study was conducted to explore the jail warden's perspective and experiences in managing correctional facilities in the provinces of Zamboanga Del Norte and Zamboanga Del Sur, the Philippines for the calendar year 2019. Specifically, this study sought an answer to the experiences of the jail wardens in managing the affairs of a correctional facility, how the jail wardens addressed the challenges encountered in managing correctional facilities, and to determine the needs of the jail wardens for a quality correctional facility. The findings may provide insights to the government officials of the Philippine government to allocate a budget in improving the conditions of the correctional facilities which will result in the improvement of living conditions of the Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL).

RESEARCH METHODS

A qualitative-descriptive phenomenological research design was used in this study to explore the life stories of jail wardens in managing jail facilities in Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur. This design is the most appropriate for the investigation since it explored the direct experiences of the correctional wardens in managing jail facilities in the Province of Zamboanga del Norte and Zamboanga del Sur, Philippines. It is in this context that the purpose of the phenomenological approach agrees with the idea of Lester to illuminate the specific and identify the phenomena through the perspective of the research key informants (Patalinghug, 2021).

This phenomenological qualitative

study was conducted in the Philippines. 10 jail wardens in different jail facilities in the Province of Zamboanga Del Norte and Zamboanga Del Sur, such as Dipolog City, Dapitan City, and Municipality of Manukan, were the key informants.

There were 6 key informants in the focus group discussion (FGD) and 4 key informants in an in-depth interview (IDI). Purposive sampling was utilized in selecting the participants for this study. The main criterion for selecting the participants was the phenomenon of correctional wardens who have rendered at least three years of experience as jail warden or deputy or have management experience with a jail facility.

An interview guide with open-ended questions was used. The interview guide was self-created, but it was thoroughly validated. It reflects the main points of the sub-problems in particular. The research instrument is divided into three sections: the first focuses on the informants' experiences in managing jail facilities; the second on the problems encountered by the informants in managing the affairs of the jail facilities; and the third on the professional and personal needs to achieve a quality jail facility. Permission to conduct this study was obtained from the National Headquarters' Directorate for Program and Development through the Regional Director Region 9 of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology. Before the interview, the key informants signed a consent form indicating their willingness to participate in the interview. The goal of the study was presented to the informants before the interview and focus group discussion. The IDI and the FGD were taped using a voice recorder to document the interview and with the agreement that their identities would not be revealed. The information gathered was kept in strict confidence. Their hometowns, names, and offices are not published to maintain their anonymity. Pseudonyms were used in place of the in-

dividuals' real names.

The quality criteria for ensuring that the study is trustworthy were considered following the criteria introduced by Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba (2011) to include (a) credibility, (b) dependability, (c) generalizability, and (d) confirmability to strictly adhere to the standards in doing this qualitative research. The procedure of bracketing is done by fine-tuning the data formulation and analysis using notes to avoid biases in the study's results. The confusing data in the transcript was referred to the informants for clarification throughout data collection and processing. Furthermore, it was presented and assessed for verification of the topic created throughout the data analysis, and emergent themes were recognized and acknowledged by the informants. For transcribing, data analysis, conclusions, and interpretation, the ethics committee was also consulted. The exploratory review on the authenticity of the study's results included a debate and exchange of ideas with the committee to achieve dependability. The experiences of the shared informants were thoroughly discussed and adequately depicted depending on the informant's point of view of the events. After the study was completed, all of the data acquired was destroyed.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The table 1 depicts the emerging themes derived from the informants' statements about their perspectives and experiences in managing jails. From the transcripts of the informants, 370 significant statements were obtained, all of which were directly related to the informants' experiences, problems, and needs. These key statements were grouped into seven emergent themes, and formulated meanings were generated from them. The following section delves into these topics.

Erosion in Conformity with the Rules

This theme explains the negative experiences of the jail wardens on PDLs who deliberately disregard the policies, rules, and regulations. More often than not, jail wardens are confronted with PDLs violating the jail's rules and regulations despite the possible punishments imposed upon them.

One of the informants argued that PDLs consciously violate rules because they think their life is hopeless being inside jail. The violations may result in injury, breach of security, or jail disorder that is injurious to the actual objective of the jail facility, which is reformation.

This implies that such violation of rules and regulations inside the jail indi-

Table 1. Emergent Themes and Subthemes
 Source: Processed by the Author (2021)

Cluster Themes/Subthemes	
Negative Experiences	: Erosion in Conformity with the Rules : Scarcity of Resources Critical to Jail Services
Problems Encountered by the Informants	: The Perils of Poor Staffing : Freedom from Congestion
Needs of the Informants	: Infrastructure Upgrade and Development : Technology in Correction : Lifelong Attempt for Improvement and Character Development

cates that the PDLs were not reformed from their nonconforming behavior. Findings from the study of scholars suggest that crowding is positively related to levels of misconduct (Steiner, Butler, & Ellison, 2014; Steiner & Wooldredge, 2014). Population turnover, for example, may affect the level of disorder by creating instability in the social system of a prison. Moreover, the reformation theory conforms to this theme, where the objective of correctional facilities today is directed toward changing the behavior of the PDLs. Thus, the government and bureau may consider making a policy that correctional facilities should limit the number of inmates, and convicts may receive training, advice, resocialization, awareness, and leadership as better citizens.

Scarcity of Resources Critical to Jail Services

This theme focuses on the insufficiency of resources of the jail facility to provide the standard needs of the PDLs. Like health-compliant accommodation, proper lighting, ventilation, decent foods, standard fences, space for recreation, spiritual, and reformatory programs. All of these must be adequately provided to the PDLs to give respect as human beings and help them in their process of transformation. In the survey of 213 jail administrators conducted by Ruddell & Mays (2007), small facilities found that underfunding, overcrowding, and retention and recruitment of officers were the most significant challenges.

According to one informant, their facility is outdated and dilapidated, which could lead to inmate escape. Preventing escapes from custody is a critical function of prisons, jails, and the individuals who run these correctional facilities. According to St. John, Blount-Hill, Evans, Ayers, & Allard (2019), the architecture of the facilities can influence the behavior of occupants.

Other informants provided that they

need a building itself to address the congestion problem of the jail. The construction of the building will also address the standard accommodation issue to improve the PDL's health concerns.

Informant asserts that the facility is vital for the development and safekeeping of the PDLs. According to him, without the facility, they cannot correctly implement the programs and activities designed to reform the PDLs. He further stated that the facility is necessary to improve the livelihood training and spiritual activities of the PDLs.

PDLs also hold the same fundamental human rights inherent in the life of any person without them, he cannot exist as a human being (Reichstein, 2022). By human standards, accommodation that should be provided to the PDLs should meet all requirements of health with due regard to climatic conditions. Jail wardens are often confronted with old, dilapidated, and congested buildings that are no longer suited for human existence.

Since, both people in custody and officer perspectives and attitudes are similarly affected, reevaluating the dilapidated facility should be reevaluated and restructured. Molleman & van der Broek (2014) demonstrate that a positive work environment for prison employees is a prerequisite for using an active approach to convicts. In addition, if the various treatment types are thoroughly used, inmates are more content with their jail conditions. It appears that striking a balance between giving support and structure for inmates is important. Inmates' satisfaction with jail conditions is highly connected with motivational treatment.

The Perils of Poor Staffing

This aspect delves into one of the most common problems in a jail facility, which is the lack of human resources or jail personnel. The implementation of correctional practices and the increasing number of PDLs require additional jail

personnel for jail supervision and operations. Additional jail personnel is an appropriate way to cope with the increasing number of inmates. This also discusses the problems of the wardens on their staff like work ethics and discipline. Work ethics is necessary in places like jail because they will adversely affect the entire operations and order of the jail facility.

One of the informants narrated that there is a security problem due to instances of sick human resources. To aggravate the situation in provincial jails, the number of jail personnel is far from the ideal ratio of one human resource to seven PDLs. Moreover, in other jail facilities, they experience the insufficiency of jail personnel due to the new approach to personnel distribution, which is based on the size of the facility.

Maintaining an acceptable level of services and operations due to the increasing number of inmates is needed to have an efficient staff performance.

The study by Bernard Nkala & Phaello Olivia Malataliana (2021) revealed that the style of management, low salaries and allowances, flawed legislation, lack of appropriate human resource policies, and limited development opportunities affect staff performance.

Correctional Service staff remains key for any national correctional agency thus issues affecting staff performance ought to be identified and attended to reduce staff turnover which tends to be very costly for correctional organizations. Once employee satisfaction is achieved, there is a strong effect that such correctional staff will be engaged hence helping in attaining correctional services and rehabilitation program goals. As a result, the Philippine government and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology should prioritize any additional funding that may be allotted for personnel recruitment and training.

Freedom from Congestion

This theme explains how wardens deal with the problem of overcrowding in jails. One jail warden claims that submitting letters to trial courts urging rapid adjudication of cases is one approach to alleviating overcrowding in his facility. He further noted that the plea-bargaining mechanism resulted in the release of certain PDLs.

According to Informant 6, the national government has a nationwide program of building new buildings to remedy the current congestion problem. Similarly, informant 8 of the focus group discussion noted that if the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) succeeds in its agenda of building new jails throughout the Philippines, jail congestion will be solved.

During the interview, some of the informants said that their way of reducing the number of PDLs in jail is to submit a letter to the court asking for a faster disposition of cases. They further stated that some PDLs were released due to the plea-bargaining system, which resulted in the early release of the PDLs. Plea bargaining occurs when the person charged with an offense pleads guilty to a lesser offense. Furthermore, all of the informants contended that the present government already initiated the construction of new buildings to address the congestion problem.

Since the jail has limited capacity, it might create issues among the inmates in the jail such as quarreling, riots, the creation of gangs, and others. Safety is a common responsibility for jail and prison authorities, given the closeness of motivated offenders and environments susceptible to violence (Ellison & Gainey, 2020).

According to Robinson (2018), for the past several decades, the county jail in a large metropolitan city in the southeast United States has been overcrowded, which has resulted in violence within the

jail. This finding affirmed the results of Western (2021), in which it was found that overcrowding gave birth to various problems such as prisons rioting, no classification of the prisoners, and the spread of chronic diseases.

Jail overcrowding is often reported as the source of ill health, abuse of inmates, and reoffending behavior. The claim is supported by MacDonald (2018), that overcrowding is a critical factor that continues to affect the safety and well-being of inmates and their living conditions. Overcrowded prisons can contribute to dangerous, unsanitary conditions for prisoners' physical and mental well-being. Thus, this should be looked into by the government, and top officials of the bureau to prioritize the expansion of jail facilities, fast resolution of cases and additional construction of buildings to cater to the increasing number of inmates may be considered.

Infrastructure Upgrade and Development

The facet embodies the need for the jail wardens to provide the PDLs a proper accommodation in the jail facilities. The facilities refer to generic fences and buildings for a sufficient number of rooms.

The law requires jails to educate and teach offenders as part of their rehabilitation process so that when they are released after their sentence, they will be productive members of their communities. However, due to the lack of areas where programs and activities were conducted, the wardens experienced some challenges. This is reinforced by a comment made by one of the respondents, who stated that most of the time, livelihood activities are conducted in open places, resulting in devastation, a lack of attention, and dangers to our security and safety.

Another informant asserts that the facility is vital for the development and safekeeping of the PDLs. According to him, without the facility, they cannot cor-

rectly implement the programs and activities designed to reform the PDLs. He further stated that the facility is necessary to improve the livelihood training and spiritual activities of the PDLs.

The prison institution is legally mandated to educate and train the prisoners to make them fertile in their respective communities after their rehabilitation at the end of the sentence. The conduct of religious activities is part of the rehabilitation process of the PDLs so that they may continue their religious practice, which paves the way for the restoration of their law-infringing faith (Parsons & Warner-Robbins, 2002).

Although the national headquarters were not able to meet all the PDL's needs, the informants have tried to establish a relationship with the local government for support, especially on the rehabilitative responsibility of the facility. The national government has an ongoing national program for the construction of new prisons to enhance the facilities' infrastructure to address the needs of the PDLs. The accommodation in which the PDLs reside must meet specific basic standards. International standards make it clear that inmates should have ample space to live in, with exposure to sufficient air and light to preserve their well-being.

Pogrebin (1982) revealed that jails situated in rural areas face more rural-specific problems than urban facilities. Jail is usually the worst to suffer when there are cuts to public services and funding. Although there are increasing demands for corrections to be strengthened, the government is generally very unwilling to spend money on facility development. Thus, the government officials may look into strategic planning on allocating funds for the upgrading or construction of facilities for the implementation of reform, health, and livelihood programs.

Technology in Correction

This theme explores the typical technological desires of the informants for a jail facility. While some existing technologies can meet the correction needs, methods need to resolve the nuances, sensitivities, and legal concerns in social and jail settings. There is a need to embrace the advent of technology to improve the quality and services of the jail facility.

Most of the informants asserted that to improve the quality of the jail facility in terms of security, the installation of a CCTV camera is needed.

Allard, Wortley, & Stewart (2006) established that CCTV was being held in prison as an identifier for remote access controls and improved coordination of responses to events, gathering evidence, improving security, and tracking highly specific conducts such as contraband entry, self-harm, and suicide.

On the other hand, some of the informants assert that there is a need for the installation of an x-ray machine to prevent the possible entry of contraband inside the jail facility. Contraband involves illegal items such as narcotics, cold guns, firearms, or things banned in the region under surveillance, such as mobile telephones, within correctional facilities. Snaking things into the prison is quick. Articles may be concealed in the anal tongue and, if all other things fail, in the abdomen. To prevent abuse of drugs, violence, and the commission of other crimes, prison workers must quickly be able to detect and confiscate contraband.

Technology implementation can reduce the number of influential prisoners from infractions of prison rules and regulations (Vachiradath, 2013). He further suggests that in having a technology control system, an inmate will not make any error again because it is considered a shameful move to be caught doing anything wrong in CCTV footage. The study has shown that the control system has a direct effect on stopping inmates from es-

caping.

According to Bernard Nkala & Phaello Olivia Malataliana (2021), running a correctional facility in the twenty-first century calls for expertise in information technology due to the sophistication of crime. It became impossible to run professional correction services with the limited building of capacities to induce high performance. Thus, the Philippine government may look into upgrading the facilities by installing CCTV, hiring IT experts, and purchase of inmate trackers if funds warrant.

Lifelong Attempt for Improvement and Character Development

This theme discusses the need for the jail warden on his character development and the human resources of a jail facility. The aspect includes the ongoing development of the prison warden and their staff to strengthen skills and the ability to manage PDLs. Training and workshops were usually held by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology to promote work and morale among jail staff. Most of the accounts of the informants said that they need additional training or review new National Headquarters policies and memoranda for further performance enhancement. They revealed that the training and seminars would increase the knowledge and skills in handling the PDLs and security aspect of the jail facility correctly.

Scholarly consensuses indicate lack of development opportunities affects morale as employees feel overwhelmed by responsibilities (Wood, Van Veldhoven, Croon, & de Menezes, 2012). Targeted interviews with the Commissioner level respondent confirmed the department lacks availing development opportunities for staff thus, in turn, affecting the way they perform their duties. Only induction training is provided to employees on arrival and no other development opportunities are availed thereafter (Bernard Nkala

& Phaello Olivia Malataliana, 2021).

Vickovic & Morrow (2020) said that by empowering their subordinates, correctional officials improve the quality of the service by their institutions. Learning and identifying motivation as it relates to job success in the correctional officer sense helps to increase efficiency, safety, and security of the institution, and recruitment and retention of employees.

Thus, the bureau needs to provide training and development to wardens to enhance smooth work relations and equip them with the latest strategies and approaches in handling PDLs and fulfilling their roles and responsibilities in managing correctional facilities.

CONCLUSION

This study concluded that the correctional wardens experienced some problems and challenges in handling persons deprived of liberty (inmates) and in managing the jail facilities. These problems affected their roles and responsibilities in improving the conditions in the correctional facilities such as in the implementation of the reformation process of the PDLs, peace, and order within the facility, and securing the safety of the personnel and the community. Thus, to improve the quality of correctional facilities, the following may be considered by the Philippine government and the bureau in charge of the management of correctional facilities, to wit: the installation of high technology; construction of a new correctional facility; quick rehabilitation of old, outdated, or destroyed jails; allocation of budget or appropriations to enable the employment of more staff/personnel; and limiting the number of inmates in a prison cell.

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