

Navigating the lives of persons deprived of liberty: Narratives of engagement in correctional and rehabilitation programs

Jame Boy B. Demegillo

Philippine Studies Graduate Program
College of Social Sciences and Humanities
Mindanao State University - General Santos City
City of General Santos
jameboy.demegillo@msugensan.edu.ph

Abstract: This study explores the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in General Santos City Jail, focusing on their engagement in correctional and rehabilitation programs. It examines the nature of these programs, how PDLs participate, and the perceived impact on their behavior, personal development, and overall well-being. Guided by three central research questions, the study investigates the types of programs offered, the manner of PDL engagement, and their reflections on the effectiveness of such interventions. Using a qualitative phenomenological research design, the study collected data through in-depth interviews with purposively selected PDLs who had been incarcerated for at least five years. Anchored in an interpretive-constructivist framework, the inquiry captured the emotional, cognitive, and social aspects of the participants' experiences. Thematic analysis was employed to uncover recurring patterns and emergent insights. Findings reveal that PDLs actively engage in vocational training, values formation, educational programs, and spiritual development. Their participation is often driven by a desire for self-improvement, moral renewal, and societal reintegration. Respondents reported improvements in emotional regulation, ethical awareness, and a restored sense of dignity. The study concludes that correctional and rehabilitation programs play a vital role in supporting the psychosocial well-being and reintegration of PDLs. It recommends enhancing these efforts through adequate resources, mental health support, strengthened family engagement, and post-release interventions to reduce recidivism and foster long-term rehabilitation.

Keywords: Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), rehabilitation, correctional programs, lived experiences, reintegration.

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INTRODUCTION

Persons Deprived of Liberty or PDLs are those supervised by detention centers and other institutions. This status refers to those detained after being charged with a crime or for breaking other laws. Even if incarcerated, PDLs have the right to be considered free and law-abiding (Republic Act No. 10592).

The PDL handling system, one of the significant components of the country's judicial system, is vital in rehabilitating and dealing with offenders behind bars. According to Republic Act No. 10575, prisons should offer rehabilitation and reintegration programs for inmates while maintaining security. The facilities' management status and caliber are often at the center of much debate and public criticism.

The country's human rights laws must be given significant consideration, and the rights and situations of the PDLs must be considered. Prison policies and reformation must also meet the

needs and dignity of all and serve security (Republic Act No. 9745). Transparent rules and enough support from PDLs should uphold an equal and expedient legal system in the Philippines.

The most common issue concerning the detention of PDLs in the Philippines involves socio-legal implications, particularly rehabilitation and reintegration into society. As an institution of the correctional system, the General Santos City Jail plays an essential role in shaping and helping PDLs to be productive members of society.

People deprived of Liberty experiences and engagement in the different correctional programs contribute to the positive perspectives of their lives and lead them to experience personal development. The correctional programs aim to offer education, vocational training, and psychological support. The correctional programs drive positive changes in every PDL life perspective. Focusing on the lived experiences of PDLs and their engagement in correctional programs helps us better understand the situations and needs for better and more effective interventions (Ramos, 2023).

More importantly, training and support within the detention center will focus on their physical situations and raise their emotional and mental aspects in rehabilitating every PDL; therefore, a holistic approach must be emphasized. Consequently, Gabriel and Santos proved that correctional programs intended to offer personal development and changes to every PDL will be more effective if proper government assistance, detention personnel, and community participation exist. In addition, it is essential to focus on the experiences of the PDLs in General Santos City Jail to measure the quality and effect of implementing the said correctional programs.

The correctional program of the General Santos City jail is expected to give better opportunities for every PDL to achieve their personal development and contribute to PDLs' reintegration into society. The programs consist of education, vocational training, and psychological support. However, despite the perseverance and efforts of the detention personnel in achieving their goal to implement the said programs for PDLs better, there are still reports stating that the shortage of resources, inadequate training of the detention personnel, and lack of support from different sectors hinder the successful implementation of the program. (Delos Reyes 2024).

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of PDLs in the General Santos City Jail and their engagement in correctional programs. Through systematic inquiry into the experiences of PDLs, the study gives opportunities to identify different aspects that need to be improved and to give recommendations to implement correctional programs effectively. The study will primarily focus on the education, vocational training, and psychological support given to PDLs within the detention center of General Santos City Jail, leading to personal development.

Problem Statement

This research study aims to explore the relationship between detention and development by examining how correctional and rehabilitation programs contribute to improving the quality of life for Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in the General Santos City Jail. Specifically, it investigates the types of programs offered and implemented, how PDLs engage with these initiatives, and how they perceive the impact of such programs on their behavior, personal growth, and overall well-being. The findings are expected to inform the development of more effective correctional strategies that support the reintegration of PDLs into society.

Specifically, the study sought answers to the following questions:

1. What correctional and rehabilitation programs are offered and implemented in General Santos City Jail?

2. In what ways do Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) engage in the correctional and rehabilitation programs?
3. How do Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) describe the impact of the correctional and rehabilitation programs on their behavior, development, and personal well-being?

METHODOLOGY

Research design

Qualitative research investigates a specific issue by collecting participants' detailed narratives through text or imagery (Creswell, 2014). It emphasizes understanding events or phenomena from the perspective of those who have directly experienced them. This approach focuses on human interaction and is particularly effective in eliciting rich, in-depth insights from participants. Through qualitative inquiry, researchers can examine not only what people experience but also how they make sense of those experiences, capturing their inner thoughts, emotions, and interpretations. This depth of understanding provides a comprehensive view of the phenomenon being studied.

Qualitative research is ideal when the aim is to explore complex social realities, especially when participants' perspectives are central to the inquiry. By prioritizing subjective meaning and context, it becomes possible to uncover insights that might be overlooked through quantitative means. This method proves especially useful when studying populations in vulnerable or marginalized conditions, as it allows for their voices to be authentically represented.

Phenomenology is a specific qualitative approach that explores the lived experiences of individuals. It seeks to understand how people perceive and make meaning of particular experiences, capturing the essence of what it is like to live through a certain phenomenon. As Creswell (2014) explains, phenomenological research culminates in rich descriptions that reveal the significance individuals attach to their experiences. It focuses on identifying shared experiences among a group of people to understand the nature of the phenomenon from their collective viewpoint.

According to Creswell and Poth (2013) and Neubauer et al. (2019), phenomenology allows researchers to explore the subjective experiences of individuals, uncovering patterns and meanings that emerge through their direct engagement with a specific phenomenon. Creswell (2007) further defines phenomenology as a research method aimed at revealing the essence and significance of individuals' lived experiences. This approach serves as a powerful tool for understanding how people make sense of meaningful life events, particularly in complex and deeply personal contexts such as incarceration and rehabilitation.

This research adopts a phenomenological approach to examine the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in a correctional facility. The goal is to understand how PDLs interpret and respond to their incarceration and rehabilitation. By closely analyzing their accounts, the study aims to explore how they cope with the realities of confinement, how they engage with correctional programs, and how they find meaning in their daily experiences. This approach ensures that the perspectives of PDLs remain central, offering a deeper and more empathetic understanding of their lives within the correctional environment.

Locale of Study

The research locale for investigating the lived experiences of PDLs in General Santos City Jail entails a thorough inquiry into the jail's environment and the inmates' diverse experiences. By

studying the physical environment and the social interactions, deep insights can be gained into what life is like for Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs).

Respondents of the study

The study's participants are persons deprived of liberty in General Santos City Jail who are willing to share their experiences and engagement in correctional programs that contribute to addressing the study's problem statement. The researcher will interview ten (10) participants for the study, using purposive snowball sampling to select participants. These participants will be chosen based on their capacity to provide the needed data for this study.

Data Gathering Instruments

The researcher used the following tools to gather the necessary data: Books, library materials, articles, and internet resources were employed to evaluate related literature. Guided questions and letters of authorization were used for the interview. Various devices and tools, such as paper and pen, a cellphone, a laptop, a video recorder, and a sound recorder, were utilized to ensure thorough data recording and documentation.

Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher began the data-gathering process by designing a semi-structured interview guide specifically aimed at exploring the challenges encountered by Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in the General Santos City Jail and understanding their coping mechanisms. This interview guide consisted of open-ended questions to encourage detailed and thoughtful responses, with the flexibility to probe further into emerging themes. To ensure its clarity, relevance, and effectiveness, the guide was tested in a pilot phase, if feasible, involving a small sample of individuals who shared similar characteristics with the primary participants. Feedback from this pilot phase informed any necessary revisions to the questions or format before the data collection began.

The researcher then took the necessary steps to secure the required permissions to conduct the study. This process involved personally visiting the General Santos City Jail to establish communication with the jail authorities and formally request approval from the Warden. This request was supported by an official endorsement letter from the Director of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) Region 12, which outlined the study's objectives, its significance, and the ethical considerations to be followed, such as ensuring the confidentiality and voluntary participation of the inmates. The researcher prepared and submitted this letter well in advance, anticipating a processing period of approximately two to three weeks before permissions were granted.

Once the necessary approvals were secured, the data collection phase was conducted within the General Santos City Jail. As approved by the Warden, the interviews took place in a designated, secure location within the facility, such as a private meeting room. This setting ensured a safe and confidential environment conducive to open and honest discussions while also adhering to the security protocols of the jail. The researcher worked closely with jail personnel to schedule the interviews at times that minimized disruptions, such as during non-peak hours of daily jail operations, ensuring both the convenience and comfort of the participants.

The data collection spanned two to three weeks, depending on the availability of the participants and logistical considerations within the facility. During this time, the researcher conducted one-on-one interviews, beginning each session by reiterating the study's purpose,

addressing any concerns, and obtaining informed consent from the participants. The interviews were audio-recorded, with the participants' permission, to ensure the accuracy of the data, and supplementary field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual details.

To facilitate an in-depth exploration of the participants' experiences, the researcher used audio-video recordings during the interviews. This approach enabled the accurate capture of both verbal responses and non-verbal cues, such as gestures, facial expressions, and tone, enriching the interpretation of participants' narratives. The recordings allowed for repeated review and detailed transcription, ensuring a thorough analysis of the data. This method also helped strengthen the validity and credibility of the study by minimizing potential biases and memory-related errors during data collection. Overall, the use of audio-video recordings ensured a more authentic and comprehensive representation of participants' lived experiences.

Data Analysis Procedure

This study employed thematic analysis to analyze the qualitative data collected from participants. Thematic analysis is a widely used method in qualitative research, as it focuses on identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning or themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This approach allows the researcher to explore recurring ideas and experiences expressed by participants. In this study, the analysis involved systematically summarizing, organizing, and coding the data to highlight the most significant features. Through this process, meaningful themes were generated, providing a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experiences and perspectives relevant to the research focus.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

Implemented Correctional and Rehabilitation Programs

The delivery of correctional and rehabilitative programs within correctional institutions is a vital strategy aimed at addressing the multifaceted needs of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), reducing recidivism, and supporting their reintegration into society. These programs encompass various dimensions—educational and vocational training, psychosocial and emotional support, spiritual growth, recreation, and values formation—all working in synergy to promote behavioral transformation and restore the dignity and potential of individuals within the penal system.

One of the core pillars of rehabilitation is empowerment through education and skills development. Programs such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS) and TESDA-accredited technical-vocational courses offer PDLs access to formal and non-formal education, as well as livelihood training. These initiatives help build self-worth, discipline, and practical competencies that can be used both within and beyond prison walls. Narratives from inmates reveal a strong appreciation for the opportunity to pursue academic and skill-based learning while incarcerated. Many see this as a productive use of their time that not only enriches them intellectually but also positions them for future employment. The chance to earn certificates and participate in peer teaching fosters a sense of accomplishment and social contribution, reinforcing the rehabilitative aim of education as a human right and a transformational tool.

Another significant theme that emerged is psychosocial support and spiritual well-being, particularly through the Spiritual Development Program. Incarceration often brings about emotional isolation, regret, and a loss of self-identity. Through regular religious services, prayer groups, and interfaith activities, inmates find avenues for reflection, healing, and moral realignment. Participants emphasized that these faith-based programs serve as emotional anchors

that promote peace of mind, relieve internal burdens, and instill values of empathy, forgiveness, and hope. In the Philippine context—where spirituality is deeply woven into the cultural fabric—these programs are especially resonant. They provide inmates not only with spiritual comfort but also with a framework for rebuilding moral integrity and making amends with themselves and others.

The Recreation and Sports Program complements cognitive and emotional rehabilitation by providing structured physical activities that improve health, reduce stress, and foster social skills. Sports like basketball and volleyball offer outlets for positive energy and instill values such as teamwork, discipline, and perseverance. Inmates consistently reported that participation in physical recreation helped maintain their mental well-being and fostered camaraderie among peers. The call for more diverse sports activities also reflects the PDLs' desire for personal development and productive engagement, further contributing to their holistic rehabilitation.

A critical rehabilitative approach is found in the Values Formation and Drug Awareness Program, particularly through initiatives like the *Katatagan Kontra Droga sa Komunidad (KKDK)* and the *Therapeutic Community Modality Program*. These programs address the root causes of criminal behavior, such as substance abuse and poor decision-making, through structured, reflective, and participatory modules. Inmates learn about the consequences of drug use, develop coping strategies, and work on moral recovery. The therapeutic community model, in particular, emphasizes responsible behavior, internal discipline, and readiness for reintegration. Participants underscored how these programs helped them reassess life choices and instilled a renewed commitment to personal growth and social responsibility.

Lastly, the success of these rehabilitative efforts hinges on the presence of relational and institutional support systems. The role of correctional staff, educators, spiritual leaders, and external stakeholders is crucial in ensuring that PDLs have access to continuous, meaningful, and well-structured programs. Additionally, mechanisms such as the Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA) serve as incentives for inmates to participate in programs actively, reinforcing motivation and behavioral accountability.

In sum, the findings affirm that holistic, multi-dimensional rehabilitation—rooted in education, spirituality, emotional healing, structured activity, and moral transformation—provides PDLs with meaningful opportunities for self-renewal. These programs not only improve life within correctional facilities but also lay the groundwork for successful reintegration into society. Through sustained commitment from institutions, government agencies, and civil society, correctional rehabilitation becomes a powerful avenue for upholding human dignity, reducing recidivism, and transforming incarceration into a journey of healing, learning, and renewal.

Ways of Engaging in Correctional and Rehabilitation Programs

Engagement in correctional and rehabilitation programs plays a vital role in the holistic transformation of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), with participation driven by a combination of self-motivation, institutional incentives, and personal reflection. These programs, designed to foster personal growth, emotional healing, and societal reintegration, offer inmates opportunities to acquire life skills, education, and coping mechanisms—key factors in reducing the likelihood of reoffending and promoting meaningful behavioral reform.

One of the most compelling findings is that many PDLs engage in these programs out of personal initiative. Self-driven participation is anchored in a genuine desire for change, rooted in the recognition of one's past mistakes and a conscious decision to improve. Inmates often describe participation as a personal responsibility—an effort to maximize time behind bars and better

prepare for reintegration. Peer encouragement, voluntary engagement, and a sense of community further enhance participation, creating an environment where motivation is organically nurtured. This mirrors the findings of Deci and Ryan (2020), who emphasize the importance of intrinsic motivation in sustaining positive behavioral change. Supported participation, such as peer-led models and inmate leadership roles, provides additional empowerment, making the rehabilitative process more authentic and engaging.

Complementing this intrinsic drive are external motivators—most notably, the Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA). As institutional incentives, programs like GCTA link good behavior and program attendance to tangible benefits such as sentence reduction or early release. For many inmates, especially those initially hesitant to engage, the potential for early freedom becomes a strong motivator for sustained participation. Studies by Elbers et al. (2022) and Mears and Cochran (2020) support the effectiveness of incentive-based rehabilitation models, noting that these programs not only increase compliance but also promote structured engagement and institutional harmony. However, the continued success of these systems depends on transparency, consistent implementation, and alignment with meaningful rehabilitative activities.

Beyond self-interest and institutional reward, a deeper level of participation emerges through personal reflection and transformative resolve. Many inmates find inspiration in the desire to reunite with family, reclaim a sense of self-worth, or seek forgiveness and spiritual renewal. Engagement in religious programs, in particular, provides inmates with emotional solace, moral recalibration, and a strengthened sense of purpose. Through acts of prayer, worship, and service, participants report feeling inner peace, emotional healing, and increased spiritual maturity. These findings align with the research of Trinidad (2020), who noted that spiritual involvement fosters self-awareness, accountability, and moral development—factors that are critical in long-term behavioral change.

The narratives affirm that transformative engagement is most successful when driven by the inmate's volition, reinforced by supportive peers and correctional staff, and recognized by institutional reward systems. Inmates who actively participate in programs are more likely to gain a renewed sense of purpose, develop a moral framework for living, and attain practical skills that aid reintegration. Consequently, correctional programs not only support individual reform but also contribute to institutional order, emotional well-being, and public safety by reducing recidivism.

In summary, the engagement of PDLs in correctional and rehabilitation programs is shaped by a triad of forces: self-driven reform, incentive-based motivation, and personal reflection. These dimensions are interdependent, collectively empowering PDLs to rebuild their lives and pursue transformation beyond incarceration. By creating correctional environments that honor autonomy, offer structured incentives, and foster spiritual and emotional renewal, institutions can turn confinement into a constructive journey of healing, accountability, and hope.

Impact of the Correctional and Rehabilitation Programs

Correctional and rehabilitation programs serve as transformative forces in the lives of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), fostering not only emotional healing and behavioral change but also preparing them for successful reintegration into society. Within the correctional setting, these programs help create a safer, more structured environment by reducing incidents of violence and promoting discipline. Through participation in activities such as education, livelihood training, counseling, and spiritual programs, PDLs find meaning and purpose, cultivating a sense of responsibility and hope. These interventions not only equip inmates with essential life skills but also foster introspection, emotional regulation, and the rebuilding of self-esteem.

The study revealed three key themes reflecting the positive impacts of these programs: emotional development and reconnection, transformation of values and behavior, and preparation for reintegration and self-sufficiency. First, emotional growth was a notable outcome, with many PDLs expressing a renewed appreciation for family relationships and a desire to make amends for lost time. Experiences inside the facility, often strengthened by spiritual practices, allowed them to reflect deeply on their priorities, develop patience, and reconnect with their personal identities and values. The importance of family emerged as a powerful motivator, with many PDLs resolving to rebuild bonds and fulfill their roles as parents, partners, or children upon release.

Second, a significant transformation in behavior and values was observed. PDLs shared that their time in incarceration helped them adopt discipline, humility, and mutual respect—qualities often absent in their lives prior to imprisonment. Programs emphasizing emotional intelligence, conflict resolution, and spiritual development encouraged inmates to shift away from impulsive and aggressive behaviors and towards more constructive, cooperative ones. For many, prayer and religious reflection became key tools in promoting accountability and internal peace, enabling them to let go of pride and embrace a mindset of change.

Third, the programs provided critical support in preparing PDLs for reintegration into society. Education initiatives such as the Alternative Learning System (ALS), livelihood programs, and vocational training equipped inmates with new skills, helping them envision a productive life after release. The desire to return to their families, find employment, and live responsibly was repeatedly emphasized in participant narratives. Despite facing systemic limitations such as overcrowding, limited access to water, and communication barriers, PDLs showed resilience by maintaining routines, engaging in spiritual practices, and forming peer support systems to cope with daily challenges.

Overall, the study underscores the importance of a holistic approach to rehabilitation—one that combines emotional, spiritual, educational, and relational components. Rehabilitative efforts that emphasize family reconnection, moral transformation, and life skills training not only contribute to the well-being of inmates but also enhance their chances of successful reintegration. As PDLs grow in self-awareness, self-discipline, and empathy, they become better prepared to live with dignity and purpose beyond the confines of prison. These changes are vital not only for individual reformation but also for broader societal benefits, including reduced recidivism and enhanced community safety.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions derived from the narrative analysis emphasize that Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) exhibit genuine and voluntary participation in correctional and rehabilitation programs, reflecting a strong internal commitment to self-improvement and transformation. This active engagement is influenced by various factors, such as personal aspirations for change, support and encouragement from fellow inmates and correctional staff, and institutional incentives like the Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA). The willingness of PDLs to take part in these programs underscores their recognition of the opportunities provided for rehabilitation and personal growth, as well as the importance of institutional environments that nurture motivation, learning, and behavioral reform.

Participants consistently reported that the correctional programs offered within the facility had a meaningful and transformative impact on their lives. They experienced improvements in self-regulation, moral awareness, and decision-making. Many described becoming more

emotionally mature, spiritually grounded, and socially adept. These changes suggest that the correctional initiatives effectively support the rehabilitative process, helping PDLs reflect on their behavior, reshape their values, and develop the psychological and emotional skills necessary for positive change.

Furthermore, correctional and rehabilitative programs are pivotal in equipping PDLs for successful reintegration into society. Through education, vocational training, and livelihood projects, participants are given practical tools that not only enhance their competencies but also instill a renewed sense of self-worth and direction. A recurring theme among PDLs was a deep desire to transform and reintegrate into their families and communities as responsible, law-abiding citizens. These findings affirm that with sustained institutional support and meaningful engagement, rehabilitation efforts can significantly contribute to reducing recidivism and promoting long-term reintegration.

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