

Managing life behind the bars: A phenomenological inquiry

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Abstract

This study talked about the perception of the jail personnel and their insights in managing overcrowded jail. This also included the alternatives and procedures they made to cope up with the tasks delegated to them as a jail personnel. The purpose of this study was to uncover what are the different experiences of the jail personnel in management difficulty and to study how the personnel managed to keep going while having such experiences. There were 14 informants involved in the study, 7 in the In-depth interview (IDI) and another 7 from the focus group discussion (FGD). Furthermore, the study used the phenomenological approach of qualitative study. Records of the interviews were analysed using the themes with the help of an expert. Ten (10) themes emerged from the two main questions addressed. Moreover, this phenomenological study could enhance awareness in the real-life situations happening in our jails today. As more additional laws to be enacted and more law offenders will be imprisoned, thus contributes to the jail congestion.

Keywords: BS criminology, jail personnel, jail overcrowding, jail management difficulty, phenomenological inquiry, Philippines

1. Introduction

Prison overcrowding is indeed a serious problem and an elusive phenomenon although national and international actors have dealt with it for decades. Up until now it is still the major challenge for the criminal justice system and common problems among many countries (Albrecht, 2012). It cannot be denied that additional laws promulgated would somehow lead to additional law violators, and with the intensive campaign of the law enforcers against criminality, thus came the existence of prison congestion. However, it must be counteracted through proper management to prevent its adverse effects on persons deprived of liberty (Bautista, 2014). California's county jails have seen a population spike due to the sentencing change that allows some felons and parole violators to serve their terms in jail rather than prison.

In the first year following realignment, Los Angeles and Fresno's jail systems saw increases of 15-30% of their previous daily population (Janetta, 2013). In the Philippines, it is very difficult to run and manage more than 400 jails across the country. The simple task of getting consistent and accurate information about the problems facing each jail like breakdowns in the water systems and level of overcrowding often takes months. The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), charged with prison administration, would have to send engineers to conduct physical inspections and then do the paperwork. Engineers would have to document their findings by filling out various forms. In addition, BJMP data show that on the average, its detention centers are at 380% overcapacity. Among the most congested jails, the overcapacity reaches levels of more than 2,000%. According to Human Rights Watch (HRW), the Philippines has the highest number of pre-trial detainees in the Southeast Asia Region, a condition that is attributed to a diverse set of factors (Santos, 2016).

Evidently, the overcrowding situation in the different prison institutions gives extra burden on the part of the government. In food allowance alone, the allotted budget per inmate is PhP40.00. The present population of the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) in Muntinlupa City and all major penal institutions in the country reaches approximately 30,000 inmates which needs a daily budget of one million two hundred pesos (PhP1,200,000.00) or an annual budget of four hundred thirty eight million pesos (PhP438,000,000.00) more or less to feed them excluding the budgetary requirements for their other basic needs such as medicines, uniform, 32 beddings and other personal needs such as soap, toothpaste, slippers, etc (Bautista, 2014).

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP)-Davao has recorded a 599-percent average of total congestion rate in all its jail facilities in the region that triggers various illnesses among inmates. BJMP-Davao chief community relations service officer Jail Inspector Edo Lobenia admitted that the perennial problem of congestion

remains a problem in the region's jail facilities. The total capacity of jail facilities is just 1,049, but the present population is 6,913 (Revita, 2017). The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) is constructing jail facilities in Davao Region. In fact, the said bureau has already entered a memorandum of agreement with the Department of Public Works and Highways for the construction of seven penal facilities. One of those facilities will be constructed in Tagum City, this is to address jail congestion that already poses health risks to prisoners (Badian, 2017).

Jail overcrowding is indeed evident in some existing jails in our country today. Some scholars have already studied about ways in improving jail management, however they have not come across about the perceptions and some insights of the jail officers employed in a congested jail. Hence, it's the very reason why the researchers conducted this study.

1.1 Theoretical Lens

The foundation of this research is anchored on the statement of Howard (2000) who cited how miserable the conditions of the early prisons and that of its inmates. Even if the present corrections system has greatly improved, it is still struggling to find ways on how to improve the prison management. The increase in inmate populations with declines in correctional expenditures has resulted in congestion. Jail institution exceeds its maximum capacity. Many believed that overcrowding causes undignified conditions for prisoners and does not conform to the present rehabilitation programs intended for the prisoners.

Congestion stands out as the most severe dilemma afflicting the corrections pillar today. More likely, it will worsen the prison system and cause rehabilitation strenuous. It gives negative effects to its environment and on the manpower that will eventually affects the inmates as well. Prison facilities are in fact overcrowded that forces the inmates to sleep in turns (Aspiras, 2002).

Crowding affects more than a selected few inmate within the prison environment. Crowding has been described as an interactive variable, which can sometimes cause, result from, or exacerbate the impact of other conditions. No matter how the variable has been classified, it still produces a range of outcomes (Howard, 1996).

1.2 Research Questions

This study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges encountered by the jail personnel in managing overcrowded jail?
2. How do the jail personnel carry and cope up with the challenges?

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed the qualitative method of research, using the phenomenological approach. Phenomenological look into is a subjective approach in which the specialist investigates a consistent with life encounters of people, particularly those people who are being imprisoned in a drawn out stretch of time, with the utilization of itemized, intensive data gathering including a few wellsprings of realities, for example, perceptions, interviews, archives, reports, and create remarkable depiction and exceptional delineation (Creswell, 2009).

As discussed by Dr. Janet Waters, the goal of qualitative phenomenological research is to describe a "lived experience" of a phenomenon. As this is a qualitative analysis of narrative data, methods to analyze its data must be quite different from more traditional or quantitative methods of research. Essentially you are focused on meaning, the meaning of the experience, behavior, narrative, etc. (Waters, 2017). In relation above, this phenomenological study we conducted described the experiences of the jail officers in managing an overcrowded jail where they are working, the phenomenon under investigation. This study includes

interviews with jail officers working in congested jails and so we use phenomenology in this study because it is centered on people's lived experiences (Carpenter, 2007).

As suggested by Creswell, sources of qualitative data include interviews, personal observations, and reliable documents. Thus, in this study, we will use some specific strategies in obtaining relevant information such as interviews using video recorder, jotting down substantial notes, and focus group discussion. This is to create a significant output of this study (Creswell, 2012).

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

In phenomenological data collection, it is expected to collect data by various methods so to evaluate the extent of the conclusions from greater angle. As discussed by Angrosino, there are three modes of data collection: observation, interviewing and archival research. Information gathering will be converted from claiming gathering and measuring data once variables of interest, completed and establish deliberate manner that empowers one on address state look into inquiries, hypothesis, and assess conclusions (Sapsford and Juff, 2006).

Series of steps must be done to ensure that the expected information to be gathered will be recorded properly. The researchers must develop a rapport to the participants to ensure their cooperation in the interview. Participant observation includes jotting down notes or any other recordings, and unstructured interviews, making it an intricate data collection method. Before the data collection, we will prepare an interview guide approved by the panelist. Moreover, we will ask the approval of the school program head and the institution where our participants were employed to conduct the study (Asher & Miller, 2011).

Interviewing is a procedure of directing a discussion to collect information. The primary task in interviewing is to understand the meaning of what the interviewees say. Before the interview proper, the interviewee was once again oriented about the aim of the interview and made them understand the review questions to avoid confusion. (Angrosino, 2007; Kvale, 1996).

As we will start our interview, the assigned researcher in taking notes jots down substantial information which will be of great help in the study. If the participants will allow, audio and video recording will be employed to corroborate to the notes taken and to import some neglected details for instance. Most of the questions that we will prepare are about the perceptions of the jail officers working in an overcrowded jail. The researchers will be open to any further details and information that the participant may give that would be a great help in the study. After being satisfied by the collected data, we will give our gratitude and acknowledgement to the interviewees.

2.3 Data Analysis

The data analysis in this study will begin through choosing the right research approach. In this case, the phenomenology approach will be used since it involves interviews with the jail officers employed in an overcrowded jail. Qualitative data analysis is the hardest and crucial aspect of the qualitative research. It is the series of processes and procedures wherein the qualitative data that have been procured is turned into some form of explanation, understanding or interpretation of the people and situations being investigated (Bassit, 2003). Further, various systematic techniques provide an approach of drawing inductive conclusions starting with information. Furthermore, recognizing the sign (the wonder about interest), starting with the clamor (statistical changes) display in the data (Shamoo and Resnik, 2003).

Thematic analysis is one of the most common kinds of analysis in qualitative research. It emphasizes pinpointing, examining, and recording patterns (or "themes") within the data. Themes are patterns across the data sets that are essential to the type of a phenomenon and are consorted to a specific research question. Using thematic analysis in this study will be a great help because it is flexible and a useful research tool that can probably grant an important, complex, and rich account of the data. As suggested by Boyatzis (1998), we performed the following steps in analyzing the data as to mention: familiarize data, generate initial codes, search for themes, review the themes, define, and name themes, and construct the report. Following the steps

suggested by Boyatzis, we will first watch the videos or listen to the audio that will be recorded in the interview for us to transcribe the interview easily and to code the data after.

In this method, we will need the help of a data analyst in sorting the qualitative information gathered for us to easily understand and arrange the information. Drawing conclusions and verification is the last step of analyzing collected data. It is important to review the data many times to verify the existing conclusions. Information diminishment may be utilized in analyzing those data, omitting unnecessary information, and modifying them under a functional material (Atkinsol & Delamont, 2006).

3. Results

Table 2. Essential Themes and Core Ideas on the Challenges encountered by the jail personnel in managing overcrowded jail.

ESSENTIAL THEMES	CORE IDEAS
Discipline	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sometimes, in disciplining them. (FGD_1) • In disciplining them because some of them are stubborn sometimes. (FGD_4) • I think in disciplining them. (FGD_6) • In handling them because you must not be lenient. (FGD_7) • Our safety in handling the PDL and especially when attending them in times of some prisoner having sickness. (IDI_6)
Security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In dealing with them, even though they are kind, you must still not be too assured. (FGD_5) • The most challenging in my work is the strict security of the PDL because their safety is important. (FGD_2) • In securing them, so you must always be on the alert. (FGD_5) • It's very challenging when guarding and securing the PDL, you must always on the alert to avoid escapes especially in the gate area to avoid entering of contrabands. (IDI_4) • So far, the threat in security happened here even though it did not really happen. And to those who brings contrabands, it is very challenging especially to those who were assigned in the gate area. (IDI_7)
Physical Condition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The noise, hunger strike, and their demands about their cases because they are looking for speedy trial. (IDI_6) • Lack of facilities and simultaneous arrest due to drug campaign. (FGD_1) • First, my physical condition, then the funding here and above all the overpopulation. (IDI_5) • I think, in maintaining their health because it cannot be prevented that one of them will have sickness. (FGD_3) • The facility is not too big. (FGD_5)
Overcrowding	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You must be flexible because many PDL is complaining about their rooms, they are too crowded. (IDI_7) • Because of stubborn people and the facilities and building are not enough to accommodate the PDL. (IDI_1) • Not enough court, slow process of the case and the

least numbers of judges to attend the case. (IDI_5)

- Because of pending cases. Some of the PDL are always having their hearing postponed because of the absence of the judge and a lawyer to attend their case. And because of many cases yet there is not enough court to attend them. And because more arrests have made than release of PDL so there is no reduction of the number of the PDL here. (IDI_7)
- Most of the PDL here were detained because of drug-related cases. (FGD_7)
- It became overcrowded because of the pending cases of the PDL. (FGD_2)

Threat of escaping

- Always be observant in the surroundings and always on the alert because they are considered as high-risk person. (IDI_3)
- Must always be observant in your surroundings. (FGD_7)
- Vigilant always and at the time of duty. (IDI_1)
- Must always be observant in your surroundings. (FGD_7)
- Always be observant in your surroundings and always on the alert because they are considered as high-risk person.)
- In guarding them because we don't know they are planning to escape. (FGD_3)
- When there is a PDL who have escaped because you are too lenient, and you are too confident to the people that surround you. (IDI_2)

Table 3. Essential Themes and Core Ideas on the Challenges encountered by the jail personnel in managing overcrowded jail.

ESSENTIAL THEMES	CORE IDEAS
Dedication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Of course, you must have sincerity to your work and always think of your family whose leaning on you. (FGD_7) • My family. I always think of them especially my kids. (IDI_2) • My family because they are the reason why I work. (FGD_5) • Of course, number one is my family, because of them I work here. (IDI_7) • You must be dedicated and sincere to your work. (IDI_4) • I just love my work and my co-workers. (IDI_1) • Just always pray to God for guidance. (FGD_7) • Dedication to my work and my family. (FGD_4) • My family and dedication to my work. (FGD_2)
Faith	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Just work consistently and always be positive, and not to give up easily, then ask for advises from seniors. (IDI_4) • I try to inform and coordinate to my fellow officers or seniors for the common good. (FGD_2)
Adjustments	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It's part of the work to overcome challenges through controlling your emotions always to have a development of the

quality services of the facility and the bureau for the whole. (FGD_2)

- Just overcome tiredness and work diligently. (FGD_3)
- You must be patient especially when there's no other reliever except me because of the absent personnel so I have to render overtime. (IDI_1)
- My adjustment is just "go with the flow" but always don't forget to be cautious and have limitations in dealing with the PDL. (IDI_2)
- Just don't be overcome by the stress because it's part of the work. (FGD_5)
- Don't be overcome by the stressful experiences and don't be low morale. (IDI_4)
- Cope up pressure and firm regarding emotions. (IDI_5)
- My adjustment is I need to express my emotions. (IDI_1)

Coolness/calmness

- When you are off duty, enjoy life. (FGD_1)
- I just cool down myself. (FGD_3)
- Bonding with my family. (FGD_4)
- Bond with my family when off duty. (FGD_6)
- Sometimes I just sleep and every weekend, I went biking, sometimes with my family. (IDI_7)

4. Discussions

This phenomenological study was able to examine the perceptions of jail personnel on how they manage congested jail and overcome challenges that arises in their job. Phenomenological study is very much concern on the human perception of events or phenomena created from the concrete proceedings in the real world as emphasized by Creswell. These concrete proceedings are given "breath" based on the experiences of the participants involved in this study through lengthy discussions for phenomenological study describes the common meaning of the "lived experiences" for several individuals about a concept or phenomenon (Creswell, 2012).

The narratives described in the previous chapter along with the themes that have emerged from the experiences of the jail personnel who participated in sharing their stories bears the whole essence of the study. The results were based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion with the jail personnel. The manner of extracting information was through the utilization of the same set of prepared questions for conducting interview.

This phenomenological study is helpful in attaining the quality services by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology and Correctional Scheme goal by the Philippine Criminal Justice System (PCJS) and will give realization to the government to address the management problems of the jail personnel in an overcrowded jail. Thus, this study is a premeditated and strategic way of promoting quality services in correctional system in our country.

Based on the result of the study, jail personnel have various challenges in working in an overcrowded jail. With this, five (5) essential themes have emerged. Basically, discipline means the practice of training people to obey rules or a code of behavior, using punishment to correct disobedience. According to our interviewees, disciplining a PDL is one of the challenging things a jail personnel experience, the fact that they are already grownups the time they were detained, some of them are hardheaded and stubborn. Consistent with Fox (1959), the term, "discipline", has regularly been demented with some of the methods by which it is achieved. "Discipline" is group order. Traditionally, the prison is distinguished by exaggerated discipline. There are many techniques by which group order may be achieved. Applications depend widely on institution to institution, from philosophy to philosophy, and from administrator to administrator. In New York, they have two systems of prison discipline namely, the Auburn system and the Pennsylvania system. The Auburn system is also known as the social and silent system for it separates the inmates by night but making them suffer to work during the day together. The Pennsylvania system on the other hand, is also called as the separate or solitary system because it separates each convict from the presence of his fellows, encloses him in an apartment by himself where it was also his place to work, eat and sleeps, making him to suffer

night and day to see none from all the happenings in the outside (Blake, 1940).

Handling and securing inmates are something that cannot be thought of as an easy thing. Many of the personnel struggled about the security of the inmates as the former believe that even though they are kind, an inmate is an inmate, we cannot predict what's on their mind, they are erratic. Maybe some of them are planning to escape, so they are considered as high-risk person generally, thus there is always a threat of escaping. The escorting team is also having threat in security in transporting inmate, especially in attending court hearing. But to have a safe inmate transportation, elements essential for the safe transport of inmates must be determined, it is very important that best practices are followed to address security risks. Ringler presented four (4) tips for a safe transportation, and they are the following: Plan the trip, conduct searches before departing, properly apply restraint, and employ constant vigilance (Ringler, 2018). Intelligence sharing with good communication amongst Police officers, Prison service, escort contractors and the CPS is very vital to ensure that the PDL who attends courts proceeding or even they are just inside the jail, who pose a risk of escape or violence, are being managed properly and effectively.

It is also very advisable that enable to avoid risk of escape when the PDL is attending court hearing, prior notice in writing to the court will be sent pertaining to potentially violent prisoners or those who pose a risk of escape so that the escort contractors as well as the police and prison service will have arrangements with the court for additional security measures (McDonnell, 2010). There are principles of safety and security, they are the basis on which all operations in the jail must be established. Without continuous and effective safety and security practices, everyone, not only the jail personnel and the PDL, but also the community around, are very vulnerable to different risks. Thus, there must be programs and services pertaining to security to be employed for these are often part of a jail's mission, but these must be established on a strong foundation (Miller & Wetzel, 2008).

Physical condition of the jail and of the inmates is an issue as well. Although they are detainees, they also deserve a conducive atmosphere and a safe place away from sickness. Lack of facilities and a not too spacious building and environment are some of the factors that the jail is congested. Undersecretary Jesus Hinlo Jr. of the Department of Interior and Local Government (DILG) said it is a "national emergency" that they are gunning to build more jail facilities to address congestion problems in the country (Dalipe, 2016). Congress has set aside billions of pesos in the 2018 General Appropriations Act (GCAA) to address a continual problem of jail congestion, said the chairwoman of the Senate Finance committee, Sen. Loren Legarda. PDL with health issues is in some way very alarming as well. Maintaining the health of the PDL also arose as a problem since illness cannot be avoided. It is inevitable that anytime inmates could have it. It could add to the burden of the jail personnel, especially in the escorting division for they are the ones who will send the inmates to the hospital whenever it is needed. But when proper health care is administered, it would benefit not just the personnel but the inmates. As Macmadu stated that improving health care in prisons and jails will eventually benefits inmates, their home communities, and the nation (Macmadu, 2015).

It cannot be denied that overcrowding is really a problem that the personnel hardly perform their duty. Many methods and alternatives have been tried just to rectify the problem. Jail overcrowding has long been a problem in our correctional system and tries to address it through the annual budget, said Sen. Legarda (Casayuran, 2018). Congestion or prison overcrowding is not just a national issue but a global issue as well. In most part of the world, prisons are overcrowded where the prison cells accommodate the prisoners more than its true capacity. This condition does not seemingly contribute to the effective rehabilitation of the inmates (Bautista, 2014). That's why, it is not only the jail personnel who are affected on this issue but the PDL as well. Overcrowding of jails and prisons has serious consequences on detainees' living conditions and health. Legal and procedural problems, which delay the processing of cases, are the root cause of overcrowding. Bringing together those who can address these issues is essential to finding durable solutions (Laserna, 2010).

Workplace problems may be caused by any factors at the organization, management and individual levels that may have a negative impact on your health, performance and even your behavior. Thus, the stress we have in our workplace must be managed effectively (Jaffe, 2013). Stress is generally defined as the body's reaction to excessive demands that are placed upon it without corresponding control over those demands while productivity is the measure of an employee's output in relation to his/her input. Stress management can be described as a bundle of efforts and activities aimed at reducing stress if it can't be eliminated (Arasomwan, 2010).

Hence, faith in God has a big thing to do with our daily living. It is important to not to forget to pray every moment, every day. As the letter of Paul to the Thessalonians stated in the Bible says, "Pray without ceasing" (1

Thessalonians 5:17). Personnel place a great importance of praying, whenever they are stressed out, the first thing they do is to pray, asking for guidance. For them, it is really an effective way of coping challenges in jail management. Having an inspiration as well in everything you do makes your work a productive one. No matter how hard or tiring our job is, if we have someone or something that we can offer our dedication to, we have that motivating power to keep going. And that is what some of the personnel are doing, and the common thing they are dedicating their work is their family. Their simple dedication and love to their work is also has something to do in coping challenges. Some personnel said that they just love their work that's why it is not hard for them to overcome stress in their work. Engagement to work can be described as a positive and fulfilling work-related state of mind that is distinguished by toughness, dedication, and absorption. Dedication was supposed to be the prerequisite of vigor and absorption hence, it is the main element of work engagement. A dedicated employee is strongly involved in his or her work and experiences a sense of significance, enthusiasm, inspiration, pride, and challenge (Kuntsi, 2014).

Moreover, personnel were able to overcome challenges in the jail through seeking advice from their seniors. They cannot deny the fact that their seniors have more experiences in jail management that could help them in the performance of their duty. Whenever they have difficulty, they will not hesitate to ask for assistance and guidance from their seniors.

Personnel also resort to some adjustments so that they can cope up with the challenges they have encountered in the jail. Like controlling their emotions, it just simply means not to be easily blown by their feelings in response to the unfavorable experience. Permanently gaining control over your emotions and behavior is one of the most difficult endeavors humans can undertake. We have all attempted to limit the extent to which we overreact emotionally and exhibit counterproductive behavior when dealing with others. Yet, most of our attempts have been met with limited or short-term success (Maag, 2013). One personnel said that it is their "bread and butter" to overcome challenges, so they must overcome tiredness and work diligently. They must overcome stressful events because it is really part of their work and be optimistic. Some personnel said that they "just go with the flow", meaning whatever may come, just relax, and accept the situation, rather than trying to alter it. Dramatic changes in the ways that we work are raising new management challenges. But somehow it will also be an advantage for turning negative experiences to positive ones (Raghuram, 2000).

Relaxation and coolness/calmness are very important as well in the part of the personnel. Whenever they are really stressed, some just have a nap or a sleep just to cool down their selves. Some personnel also enjoy their off duty with their family or have some time with their selves through recreational activities. Some of the stress busters are going outside for a quick break, drink plenty of water and eat small healthy snacks and plan a reward for the end of your day (Short, 2006). Exercise and relaxation techniques can all help lower stress in your workplace. Whenever there is a leisure time, make it a time for you to relax and cool down (Wein, 2009).

5. Conclusions

This study shows vast details regarding the jail management challenges among jail personnel and how they cope up with such challenges. This investigation unfolded many opinions and facts about the jail personnel who experiences management difficulty in the BJMP-Tagum City Jail and Compostela Valley Provincial Rehabilitation Center. These challenges are dominantly viewed by the respondents as a big impact on their lives and in the performance of their duty. Its effects serve as positive on the part of the jail personnel as it made them to be more diligent in their work, develop their jail management skills and overcoming stressful events in their work. It also molds their agility and made them more vigilant.

The information gathered about the challenges encountered in jail management of the respondents were very useful in this study since the researchers aim to know the minute details about the experiences of them working in an overcrowded jail.

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