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# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS ON MANAGING HIGH-RISK INMATES

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## ABSTRACT

*This study explored the lived experiences of correctional officers in managing high-risk inmates at the Maximum-Security Compound of New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa City, Philippines. Specifically, it examined their experiences, the insights they gained, and the implications of these experiences for correctional management. The study employed a descriptive phenomenological research design involving seven (7) purposively selected correctional officers with direct experience in managing high-risk Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs). Data were gathered through semi-structured, in-depth interviews and analyzed using Moustakas' Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method. The results have shown that working within the correctional environment can be very challenging, requiring constant alertness, good judgement, communication skills, teamwork and emotional control. The participants stressed the need to achieve a balance between maintaining security and discipline within the institution, while being fair and respectful towards others. It was evident that participants had made many personal and professional sacrifices, such as missing out on time with their families, worries about finances and pressure at work. However, they found that they had many strengths within their role through training, guidance, belief, family support and teamwork. This study has highlighted the importance of continuing professional development, sufficient resources, staff support, ethical practice and effective risk management to improve the correctional environment and to ensure that PDLs are treated with dignity and respect.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Correctional Officers, Correctional Management, Coping Strategies, Descriptive Phenomenology, High-Risk Inmates, Humane Treatment, Lived Experiences, Persons Deprived of Liberty, Professional Judgment, Security*

## INTRODUCTION

Correctional facilities are an essential part of the criminal justice system. It plays a big role in ensuring public safety, preventing violence and ensuring secure and humane detention of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs). Managing high risk inmates is a difficult task to do as they can be unpredictable, could become aggressive and poses a threat to security. Correctional officers need to ensure security within the facility but also respect the human rights of the individuals.

The Philippines has many policies, procedures and training within the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor), however correctional officers still face various challenges. Correctional officers require a great deal of awareness, good communication skills, working as a team and making the right decisions. Correctional officers may also face stress, sacrifices and have difficulty balancing their personal lives.

This study will look at the challenges correctional officers face when managing high risk inmates and how they manage security and order within the facility. This study will look at how correctional officers make sense of their experiences using phenomenology. The findings may help improve training for personnel, security procedures, risk management and support. This will help promote ethical correctional practices and humane treatment. This study supports Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions).

### Literature Review

CORRECTIONAL OFFICERS AND THE NATURE OF THEIR ROLES

Correctional officers have many roles including ensuring security of the institution, managing PDLs, enforcing rules, managing conflicts and dealing with unpredictable situations.

Concerns that correctional officers face include; perceived threat, institutional policies, lack of autonomy, social isolation and lack of rewards (Champion, 2022). Correctional officers face many challenges based on the correctional environment, management and their pay (Mack, 2023). Managing violent adult males in maximum security environments are a challenge for correctional officers (Nordman, 2024). Management issues, staff retention, training and mental health all impact on correctional officer wellbeing (Ricciardelli et al., 2024). In the Philippines, correctional officers face challenges such as managing contraband, staff shortages, diverse behaviours of PDLs and limited resources (Ponce et al., 2023). In overcrowded environments, jail officers face concerns relating to health, safety and justice (Claveria et al., 2024). Overall, correctional officers face challenges which require them to be flexible, have professional judgement and have institutional support.

## CHALLENGES AND RISKS IN THE OCCUPATION

There are many challenges correctional officers face within their occupation. This can impact on their mental wellbeing, relationships within their families and their professional performance. Mental health issues are experienced by correctional workers due to the constant demands of the occupation (Moghimi et al., 2022). Complex behaviours of inmates and perceived lack of knowledge or skills to manage mental health issues can result in mental health issues for correctional officers (Jung, 2023). Stressful working conditions, long hours and threats all impact on the relationships correctional officers have with their families and cause mental exhaustion (Açar and Duran, 2025). Correctional officers often face a challenge between ensuring security and caring for, rehabilitating and addressing mental health issues for those in incarceration.

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This causes concern around training, culture and expectations of correctional officers and their wellbeing (Botticelli-Pohl, 2025).

A study was conducted with 15 correctional officers in Korea who had dealt with self-harming inmates. Correctional officers experienced feelings of fear, responsibility and emotional distress which could still be present after the event. Correctional officers tried to make sense of what happened, reflect and recover from their emotions (Lee and Park, 2025). Correctional officers in Nigeria faced challenges when managing inmates with mental health issues. This included cultural beliefs, lack of knowledge about mental health and limited access to correct services (Ofobrukweta, 2025).

Overall, correctional officers face challenges of mental exhaustion, critical incidents, physical threats, role conflict and limited resources. Therefore they need to receive proper training, mental health support and effective responses from the institution.

## MANAGING HIGH RISK INMATES

Correctional officers will manage high risk inmates using security protocols and professional judgement. A study showed correctional officers follow security protocols however their response is dependent on the changing social dynamics and behaviour of inmates (Midtlyng, 2022). Force policies and guidance from managers are important when managing inmates (Schultz, 2023). There are differences in how force policies are interpreted (Dodd et al., 2024). Correctional officers have professional discretion when deciding whether or not to turn cameras on (Dodd et al., 2024).

Building relationships with inmates can help manage inmates. A study showed correctional officers with good relationships with inmates can create positive interactions and encourage rehabilitation whilst still ensuring security (Abdel-Salam et al., 2023). However, inmates in incarceration can feel disrespected, uncared for, abuse of power and feel dehumanised (Antonio et al., 2024). This shows it is important to have the correct approach when interacting with others.

Support from peers, feeling like you belong, self-care, work life balance and positive attitude can create resilience in correctional officers (Gist et al., 2023). Overall, correctional officers need to be aware of situations, manage their emotions, communicate effectively and follow security protocols consistently. They can also benefit from positive relationships within the workplace.

## COPING STRATEGIES, PROFESSIONAL INSIGHT AND ADAPTATION

Correctional officers will use different strategies to manage their performance. Correctional officers have adapted their practice to overcome issues caused by overcrowding (Asis, 2022). Coping strategies used by correctional officers in Sri Lanka include; seeking support, positive thinking, distraction, avoidance and problem solving (Wijegoonewardene and Vidanapathirana, 2022).

Correctional officers can have increased coping strategies if they have reflective practice and support from peers. Emotion management, self-management and seeking support from peers can help when feeling overwhelmed (Konyk et al., 2025). Supervision, peer support and wellbeing training can support correctional officers (Forsyth et al., 2025). However, having support systems does not always mean they are seen as helpful.

Overall, correctional officers adapt to their occupation by using coping strategies, reflective practice and peer support. Knowing this helps us understand how they cope with stress.

## DECISION MAKING AND PROFESSIONAL JUDGEMENT

Decision making and professional judgement are key when managing high risk PDLs. Security, safe keeping, ethical behaviour and knowing the boundaries of their role is important (BuCor, 2024). Correctional officers must follow protocols and consult with their direct supervisor (BuCor, 2024). This means they must think about situations and decide on the best course of action.

A study conducted in the Philippines looked at factors impacting behaviours of PDLs. These included limited mental health services, no family support, jail environment, gang associations and logistical issues (Cabrera et al., 2025). This suggests correctional officers must think about situations when managing inmates taking into account their behaviours and the environment.

Professional judgement is used to manage high risk inmates. Correctional officers have professional discretion when deciding on managing risks. It is important to think about situations, communicate, de-escalate and document (Ricciardelli, 2022).

Overall, professional judgement is influenced by institutional protocols, behaviours of inmates, environment, training and situations. Although there are protocols and studies which give insight into the role of correctional officers, we need to explore more to understand how they personally make decisions. This supports the current phenomenological study looking at correctional officers lived experiences when managing high risk inmates, considering threats, resistance and ensuring security and humane treatment.

## ETHICAL RESPONSIBILITIES AND HUMANE TREATMENT OF PDLs

Ethical responsibilities and humane treatment are vital when managing correctional officers in the Philippines. The Bureau of Corrections Act of 2013 (Republic Act No. 10575) states correctional officers must ensure safe keeping and rehabilitation of PDLs. Guidance is provided in the Bureau of Corrections Manual (2024) to help correctional officers perform their role correctly. This shows correctional officers must ensure security, discipline, accountability, professionalism and respect.

The Anti-Torture Act of 2009 (Republic Act No. 9745) means correctional officers cannot torture inmates or cause them physical/psychological harm. The Nelson Mandela Rules (United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners) state correctional officers must respect the dignity of inmates. The Department of Justice (2024) emphasised humane treatment and respect for PDLs during searches and their visitors. This means correctional officers must make sure they use their power responsibly and keep security within ethical boundaries.

The Commission on Human Rights (2025) reported ongoing concerns within the Philippines regarding correctional officers. This includes concerns regarding the conditions, access to healthcare and more humane and inclusive approaches. This shows correctional officers must ensure they have a balance between ensuring security and providing humane treatment.

However, legal requirements and institutional protocols cannot fully explain how correctional officers manage ethical dilemmas when dealing with high risk inmates. The current phenomenological study looks at how correctional officers understand their ethical duties, balance security and humane treatment and how they understand the challenges of using their power. Their lived experiences can help improve professional accountability and humane correctional practices.

### Objectives of the Study

This study explores the lived experiences of correctional officers in managing high-risk inmates. It sought answer to the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants in managing high-risk inmates?
2. What insights do the participants gain from these experiences?
3. What are the implications of these experiences and insights for managing high-risk inmates?

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## METHODOLOGY

A descriptive phenomenological approach was utilized in this study to describe correctional officers' lived experiences with high risk inmates. The main goal of phenomenology is to describe lived human experiences relating to a phenomenon and the meanings they place (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2022). This approach has been chosen to help understand the difficulties correctional officers face, how they cope with difficult situations, how they exercise their professional judgement and what they have learned from their experiences. This study took place at Maximum Security Compound, New Bilibid Prison, Muntinlupa City, Philippines. It aimed to understand correctional officers' lived experiences from the first-hand accounts given. This study was not looking to assess the effectiveness of practises or to identify any relationships between variables but instead to describe the experiences and find commonalities between the meanings.

Seven (7) correctional officers working within the Maximum Security Compound, New Bilibid Prison were included in this study. They had first-hand experience of managing high-risk inmates. A purposive sampling technique was used to ensure participants fit the inclusion criteria. Participants needed to be current correctional officers within the research site, have first-hand experience of managing high-risk inmates and agree to take part in a semi-structured interview. Correctional officers who did not have any relevant experience or did not agree to take part were excluded. This allowed the researchers to look into each individual's experiences and find commonalities between them. All participants consented to take part voluntarily with proper measures in place to ensure their privacy, confidentiality and professional interests.

Prior to collecting any data, participants completed an informed consent form. The form explained the aims of the study, how the interview would be administered, how long it would take, if it would be recorded, how the data would be handled and what their rights are within the study. The participants were given ample time to read through the form and ask any questions. All participants agreed to take part voluntarily. They also had the right to refuse to answer any questions. The interviews were only recorded with the participants explicit permission. As the study was looking to understand correctional officers' sensitive experiences, care was taken to ensure no information that could identify the participants, inmates or security incident would be revealed. Any identifying information and sensitive operational information was removed or anonymised where necessary. The study ensured that all participants' personal information was protected by following the relevant sections of Republic Act No. 10173 (Data Privacy Act of 2012).

### Scope and Delimitations

The focus of this study was to understand correctional officers' lived experiences in managing high risk inmates in FY2026. This looked into the difficulties they faced, how they managed to keep security and order, how they coped with the pressures of the job and what they have learned. This study also looked at how the lived experiences could help improve correctional management, staff training, security and risk management. The participants included correctional officers who were selected and had real experience of managing high risk inmates within a correctional facility in the Philippines. A phenomenological approach was used to understand how correctional officers described, made sense of and interpreted their personal and professional experiences. However, this study was limited to the experiences of the selected correctional officers. High risk inmates, correctional administration and other criminal justice staff were not included. This study did not aim to assess the overall performance of the correctional institution or whether specific security policies were effective. Confidential inmate information, classified security and case details were also not included to protect confidentiality.

### Data Gathering Tool

A semi-structured interview guide was used as the main data gathering tool in this study. It contained open-ended questions which helped to elicit the experiences of the correctional officers about dealing with high risk inmates. These questions matched the aims and objectives of the research. The guide was also used to elicit responses which provided insight into what difficulties correctional officers encounter, what strategies they use, what decisions they make and what they have learned. The guide also included follow-up questions to obtain more information from participants.

An informed consent form was provided to each participant to ensure they understood the study. This form described what the research was looking at, how long the interview would take place for, how the interview would be recorded using audio, how the information gathered would be used, and their rights. Participants were able to ask questions and were made aware that they could choose to participate in the study. They also knew that they could choose not to answer any questions and they could also withdraw from the study without any repercussions. The interviews were recorded using audio only if they gave consent. As the area of correctional officers can be sensitive, the researchers also took steps to ensure that participants remained anonymous and that no sensitive information would be revealed.

### Data Gathering Process

The researchers collected data from seven (7) correctional officers working within the Maximum-Security Compound of the New Bilibid Prison in Muntinlupa City, Philippines. The researchers followed a systematic process to ensure the data collected was relevant, accurate and consistent with the design of the study.

### Preparing the Interview Guide

The researchers prepared a semi-structured interview guide containing open-ended questions. These questions were developed following the research questions and relevant concepts found in the literature review. This allowed the participants to talk about their experiences. These questions aimed to find out what their actual experiences were, what difficulties they faced, what strategies they used, what decisions they made, what ethical responsibilities they had and what they have learnt from dealing with high-risk inmates. The interview guide also included follow-up questions to obtain more information.

### Obtaining Permission

Permission was gained from the relevant authorities. The researchers made the authorities aware of what the study was looking at, who would be taking part and what data would be collected. Once they had permission, they could begin recruiting participants.

### Identifying Participants

The researchers identified the seven (7) participants using purposeful sampling. Each potential participant was considered against the inclusion criteria. They ensured they were currently working as correctional officers and had dealt with high-risk inmates. The researchers made the participants aware of what the study was looking at, what they would be doing, what the interview would involve and what steps would be taken to ensure their confidentiality. An informed consent was obtained. The participants were made aware that they could choose to participate and that they could choose not to answer any questions.

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**Arranging Interviews**

The interviews were arranged at suitable times. The interviews were held at a location approved by the correctional institution. The interviews were one-to-one to allow the participants to talk about their experiences. Questions were asked following the interview guide but were flexible so that any relevant experiences could be discussed. General questions were asked first to gain an overview of their experiences. Then specific questions were asked to gain insight into what difficulties they face, how they deal with challenging situations, what decisions they make, what ethical responsibilities they have and what they have learnt from dealing with high-risk inmates. Further probing questions were asked to gain more detail.

**Recording Interviews**

With the participants consent, the interviews were recorded using audio. Notes were also taken whilst and after the interviews. This helped to capture any relevant information seen. This was done to complement the interviews. The researchers ensured that they did not record any unnecessary information and ensured the interviews were handled securely.

**Transcribing Interviews**

Once the interviews had been completed, the interviews were transcribed verbatim. This ensured that what the participants said was accurately represented. The transcripts were then checked against the audio to ensure there were no errors. The transcripts and notes were organised and the participants' experiences were gained an understanding of. This helped to prepare the data for analysis. The researchers focused on what the participants said about their experiences, what they meant by what they said and what similarities and differences there were.

**Keeping Data Secure**

The recordings, transcripts, informed consents and notes were kept securely according to the approved processes. Pseudonyms or codes were used in the transcripts to ensure the participants remained anonymous. As the research could be sensitive, the researchers took care to ensure no operational information was revealed.

These processes ensured that the data was collected in an organised manner and that the participants' genuine experiences were captured. The transcripts were used as the main data for analysis.

**Data Analysis**

The data from the interviews will be analysed using Moustakas' Modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen Method. This is appropriate as it fits the descriptive phenomenological design of the study.

**The data will be analysed using the following stages:**

**Bracketing/Epoche**

Prior to analysing the participants' experiences, the researchers engaged in bracketing/epoche. This involved recognising what assumptions, experiences, expectations and ideas they had about correctional officers and high-risk inmates and putting them aside.

**Collecting and Transcribing Data**

The researchers conduct semi-structured in-depth interviews with the chosen correctional officers. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded using audio. They were then transcribed verbatim.

**Identifying Significant Statements**

The transcripts were read multiple times to identify what statements were relevant to their experiences of high-risk inmates. Particular focus was placed on what difficult situations they faced, what feelings they had, how they responded, how they coped, what decisions they make and what they have learnt professionally. Statements which provided a meaningful description of the phenomenon were noted.

**Creating Meaning Units**

Statements which had similar or related ideas were grouped into meaning units. These were then compared between participants to identify what common experiences they had.

**Textural Description**

This stage describes what the correctional officers experienced when dealing with high-risk inmates. This includes what situations they faced, what they felt and perceived, what difficulties they faced and how they responded.

**Structural Description**

The researchers looked at how the experiences happened. This involved creating a structural description. Focus was placed on what conditions were present. This could include the institutional environment, security requirements, relationships with inmates and colleagues, organisational practices, resources and other factors.

**Synthesising the Essence**

The final stage involves combining the textural and structural descriptions to create a composite description of the essence. This was done to capture the core meaning of the participants' experiences whilst acknowledging that the phenomenon may have been experienced differently by each officer.

These processes will help to capture the common meaning and essence of dealing with high-risk inmates. This can highlight areas where there may be differences in the experiences or perceptions of the different groups. These may require targeted interventions or further research.

Ethical Considerations

Throughout the study, the researchers followed ethical considerations such as respecting the participants, ensuring they were willing to participate, keeping information confidential, ensuring privacy and preventing harm. This is important as participants may discuss difficult situations, difficulties at work and sensitive correctional information.

The participants' identities will not be revealed throughout the transcripts, analysis, presentation and final research report. Pseudonyms will be used such as Participant 1 etc. The recordings, transcripts, informed consents and other research documents will be kept secure. Only the researchers and relevant people will have access to this information. Digital files will be kept on password protected devices or secure digital storage. The information will only be used for the reasons outlined in the informed consent and for the academic requirements of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This theme highlights that whilst the officers are aware that they are working in a high risk environment, they rarely face actual acts of violence. They are always mindful of the dangers that could arise and therefore always remain vigilant, prepared and not complacent.

1. "I always feel like you need to be prepared. I think being physically and mentally prepared is important because emergencies can happen at any time." (A) This quote shows that Participant A feels that they need to always be prepared as a part of their job as a correctional officer.
2. "I always feel very vigilant due to the unpredictable nature of my role. I always feel like nothing is ever really safe as emergencies can happen at any time." (B) This quote shows that Participant B feels that even in normal or peaceful situations they need to remain cautious as emergencies could happen without any signs.

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3. "You still need to be vigilant. Even though you know what you're doing you still need to be careful." (C) This quote shows that Participant C feels that even though they know what they're doing they still need to remain vigilant to the potential dangers
4. "I would never take a calm environment for granted. I always need to remain vigilant." (D) This quote shows that Participant D feels that they need to always remain vigilant as just because there are no signs of danger doesn't mean there won't be an incident.
5. "I understand that things can be unpredictable." (E) This quote shows that Participant E feels that as things can be unpredictable they need to remain alert.
6. "It's important to stay prepared to prevent danger." (F) This quote shows that Participant F feels that it is better to be prepared rather than reactive. It also shows that they have become more vigilant in carrying out their duties.

Finding a Balance between Being Authoritative and Respectful

This theme shows that the officers have learnt that they don't necessarily need to be authoritative and intimidating towards PDLs in order to keep things in order and safe. Through regular interaction with PDLs, the participants have realised that PDLs are people with feelings and needs and have learnt to be authoritative but also communicate, empathise and be fair.

1. "I find it difficult to find a balance between being too strict and too lenient." (A) This quote shows that Participant A feels that their job requires them to constantly find the right balance between being too strict and too lenient. This shows that in order to be successful in their role as a correctional officer they need to be authoritative but also treat PDLs correctly.
2. "I usually find it easy to interact with PDLs but I still need to remain professionally cautious." (B) This shows that Participant B feels that even though they can have good relationships with PDLs they still need to remain professionally cautious.
3. "Through interacting with them I have realised that they are people. However, I wouldn't let them get away with anything." (C) This shows that Participant C has learnt that PDLs are people. However, they make it clear that they won't let them get away with anything.
4. "I need to avoid making snap judgements based on their situation." (D) This shows that Participant D feels that in order to be successful in their correctional role, a balance between relationships and enforcing rules needs to be found. Rather than seeing these as opposing factors, they have realised that this is their responsibility.
5. "It's important to treat them with dignity." (E) This shows that Participant E understands that just because they have done something in the past, it shouldn't define how they are treated. They feel that it is important to treat them with dignity and respect.
6. "Respect shouldn't be seen as a weakness in security." (F) This shows that Participant F feels that you can remain respectful but still keep things secure. They feel that in order to be a professional correctional officer they need to be disciplined and keep things secure but treat PDLs correctly.

From their experiences the officers have learnt that in order to find a balance between being in control they need to find the right balance between being authoritative but also respectful. Whilst they realise that they have a responsibility to enforce rules they also recognise that they need to treat PDLs as people with feelings, needs and backgrounds. However, throughout their responses they have made it clear that they don't see respect as a sign of being lenient. From their experiences it appears that they have learnt to be professional in their authoritative nature. They will be firm but not overly harsh and respectful but still remain disciplined.

**Training, Mentorship, and Accumulated Experience**

This theme highlights how participants felt they had built up their skills and confidence throughout their career by using training, observing senior officers and getting hands-on experience.

1. Participant A commented on how hands-on experience and learning from more experienced officers was important. They said: 'I think it is important to have hands-on experience and learning from senior officers.' This shows how important Participant A thought hands-on experience was in helping them develop professionally. Participant A also recognised that senior officers were great sources of knowledge which suggests that they feel they have developed their competence through observing others.
2. Participant B explained how training helped them to feel more confident and less uncertain in challenging situations. They said: 'Training gives you knowledge and makes you feel like you know what you're doing. It gives you a bit of direction.' This shows how training can give officers knowledge and make them feel like they know what they're doing. Whilst it does not guarantee they won't be fearful, it gives them a foundation to act appropriately.
3. Participant C mentioned how having experience helps them to stay calm under pressure. They said: 'Having experience means I can stay calm under pressure.' This shows how experience can help officers develop their skills and control their emotions. As officers gain more experience they will become more familiar with staying calm under pressure.
4. Participant D explained how preparation and discipline are important when preparing for an operation. They said: 'Preparation is key to keeping safe whilst on operations. I feel like I am competent because I am well prepared and disciplined.' This shows how Participant D feels that being well prepared and disciplined shows their competence. They do not feel that they are competent because they are brave or capable but because they are prepared.
5. Participant E mentioned how having knowledge and being prepared helps with difficult situations. They said: 'Having knowledge and being prepared gives me direction in difficult situations.' This shows that Participant E recognise that having one training experience will not be enough for them to be competent in correctional work. They need to keep developing their knowledge.
6. Participant F explained how having the correct training and knowing how to do things helps them to stay calm under pressure. They said: 'Having the right training and knowing how to do things helps me to stay calm under pressure.' This shows how having training can help officers to have a structure to follow. Knowing exactly what to do will make them feel less uncertain and less likely to get into a panic.

Overall, participants have shown that they have developed their professional competence throughout their career by using training, experience, mentoring, preparation and ongoing development. They do not feel they have automatic competence because they are an officer. Instead they have developed their confidence and ability to perform well by gaining hands on experience and learning from others. Having training provides them with the knowledge and processes needed. Gaining experience has helped them to improve their decision making, staying calm under pressure and control their emotions. This means that they have developed a competence as a professional which allows them to have a clearer idea of how to act in high risk correctional situations with more confidence.

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**Carrying the Personal and Moral Weight of Responsibility**

This theme refers to the worries of family, financial issues, knowing the mistakes could cause issues, and having faith to keep their emotions stable.

1. Participant A said "I miss my family whilst working so there is a financial issue. (“Malayo iyon sa pamilya ko. May malaking financial burden din dahil kailangan kong gumastos para sa sarili ko roon habang may gastos din ang pamilya ko rito... Mahirap ma-displace mula sa lugar na nakasanayan mo, lalo na kapag malayo sa pamilya.”)" This shows that they are worried about the emotional aspect of their work role and financial issues. They are missing out on their usual environment and have extra costs.
2. Participant B said "A lot of responsibility towards keeping the PDL safe, me and everyone else in the unit safe. (“Ang iniisip ko talaga ay yung safety ng PDL, safety ng unit, at safety ko rin. Kapag may nangyari sa PDL dahil sa kapabayaan ko, ako ang unang maaapektuhan at kasunod noon ang unit.”)" This shows that they understand they have a responsibility to others within the PDL and unit. They know that their choices and actions can affect the PDL and whole team so it is important to do their job well.
3. Participant C said "I know there are risks involved with my job however I have a responsibility and faith. (“Habang nasa trabaho ka, alam mong may panganib na kasama sa ginagawa mo... Pero iniisip ko rin na ito ang tungkulin na pinili ko. Kaya kailangan kong maging matatag, magtiwala sa Diyos, at magtiwala rin sa sarili kong training at kakayahan.”)" This shows that they have a responsibility to do their job. They know that they are putting themselves in risky situations but they are using their faith, training and belief in their abilities to help them.
4. Participant D said "Sometimes you can get worried about what could happen whilst doing your job. (“Minsan naiisip mo pa rin yung mga panganib na maaaring mangyari at kung ano ang puwedeng mangyari habang ginagawa mo ang trabaho mo... Malaking tulong ang suporta ng pamilya at pananampalataya dahil nagbibigay sila ng lakas para magpatuloy.”)" This shows that they are struggling with the emotional aspect of their work. They have support from their family and faith to give them strength.
5. Participant E said "I worry about those who rely on me but I try to stay strong emotionally. (“May mga pangamba lalo na kapag naiisip mo ang mga taong umaasa sa iyo... Pero natutunan kong huwag magpadala sa takot. Kailangan mong maging matatag dahil bahagi iyon ng pagiging officer.”)" This shows that they are scared. Particularly due to the responsibilities they have. However they have learnt that you need to be able to control your fears when being an officer.
6. Participant F said "One of the biggest emotional burdens I have is worrying about my family. (“Ang pinakamabigat minsan ay yung iniisip mo yung pamilya mo... Hindi mo maiwasang isipin kung ano ang maaaring mangyari sa iyo at kung paano maaapektuhan ang pamilya mo. Kailangan mong maging matatag at magtiwala sa Diyos at sa sarili mo.”)" This shows that they are aware of the risks involved with being a correctional officer and how it could affect their family. They have taken on the approach of staying strong, having faith and believing in themselves.

Overall the participants have shown that they are struggling with the high risk nature of being a correctional officer. They are worried about their family, safety, financial commitments and the possible mistakes they could make. They have shown that being an officer isn’t just physically risky but also emotionally responsible. However they have mentioned different ways they have found strength. Particularly from their family, faith, training and a strong sense of responsibility. This suggests they have built up resilience by accepting the risks but still completing their responsibilities with stability and commitment.

**Integrity as a Professional Anchor**

This theme shows that the officers have a common belief that having good integrity and refusing bribes, bias and inappropriate behaviour when not being watched is a key attribute of a trustworthy correctional officer, especially as PDLs often try to bribe them.

1. "Having a good sense of integrity no matter if you’re being watched. You have to do the right thing even if no-one is watching. “Kailangan mataas ang personal integrity ng isang correctional officer. Hindi puwedeng kapag walang nakakakita ay gagawa ka ng mali... Kailangan maramdaman ng PDL na hindi ka kayang bilhin ng pera.” This means that you have a good sense of integrity because you do the right thing even when no-one is watching. A also says that they have to show that they cannot be bribed.
2. "I always do the right thing even if no-one is watching. “At higit sa lahat, laging gawin ang tama kahit walang nakakakita.” This means they have a good sense of integrity because they have high standards for themselves. C mentions that they don’t need to be professional because they are doing the right thing even if no-one is watching.
3. "It can be challenging at times but you still need to do the right thing. “Laging piliin ang tama kahit mahirap at kahit walang nakakakita.” This shows that they have a good sense of integrity because they emphasise that it is very important to do the right thing. They mention that they should still make the right decisions even if they aren’t being watched.
4. "It is a key part of being a correctional officer. “Sasabihin kong integridad. Kailangan marunong kang gumawa ng tama kahit walang nakatingin. Hindi dapat nakadepende sa kung may nakakakita sa iyo o wala ang pagiging honest at professional mo.” E emphasises that they must be honest and professional from within. They see integrity as a key personal attribute.
5. "We should be professional and responsible no matter if there are people around. “Laging gawin ang tama kahit walang nakakakita dahil ang pagiging professional at pagiging responsible ay hindi dapat nakadepende sa presensya ng ibang tao.” F links integrity to being professional and responsible. They say that a real professional will act the same way no matter if they are being watched.

There is a lot of agreement between the participants and they all see integrity as a key internal attribute that they have as professionals. The officers know that there may be situations that they could be tempted to not act professionally whilst working in corrections. All of the statements show that they believe that they should act ethically no matter if they are being watched, rewarded, punished or pressured. They therefore see integrity as a personal commitment to doing the right thing and this defines how professional they are. Integrity is therefore seen as a moral attribute and a key part of building trust with the public.

**Teamwork and Institutional Support**

This theme shows that the participants felt that due to the high risk nature of their role they could rely on their trustworthy colleagues, teamwork and support from the organisation to help them.

1. "We have a good bond within our unit. “Sa SWAT Unit naman, malaking bagay ang samahan ng bawat isa. Sinisikap namin na parang magkakapatid ang pakikitungo namin sa isa't isa... Para kaming isang buong unit na sabay-sabay kumikilos.” This shows that A sees teamwork as a key part of having a good bond within the unit. They mention it is like family so they have trust, unity and teamwork.
2. "It is great to learn from those with experience working with other agencies. “Malaking advantage din na nakapag-collaborate

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sila noon with other agencies tulad ng PNP... Malaking tulong sa akin ang pag-share nila ng kanilang experience dahil natututo ako kahit hindi ko pa mismo naranasan ang lahat ng situations na iyon." This shows that knowledge can be passed on by colleagues. B can benefit from others experiences.

3. "You just can't do it on your own. "Sa ganitong trabaho, hindi ka puwedeng mag-isa. Nagbibigay kami ng payo sa isa't isa, nagbabahagi ng mga karanasan, at nagtutulungan kapag may problema. Yung teamwork talaga ang isa sa pinakamalaking sandalan namin." C clearly states that teamwork is a key part of support. They have colleagues to advise, share experiences and offer support.

4. "It is important to have colleagues and support from the organisation. "Hindi mo kakayanin lahat nang mag-isa... Malaking bagay din kapag nararamdaman mong sinusuportahan ka ng institution. Kapag may tamang equipment at resources, mas nagagawa namin nang maayos ang aming tungkulin." This shows that they need support from others and the organisation to perform well. Having the right equipment and resources helps them perform their role better.

5. "Having a good bond within my team gives me strength and having support from the organisation helps me perform well. "Ang pagkakaisa ng team ang nagbibigay ng lakas dahil alam mong hindi mo kailangang harapin ang lahat nang mag-isa... Mahalaga ang support ng organization dahil malaking bahagi ito ng pagiging effective ng serbisyo." This shows that E sees teamwork and organisational support as a compliment. They have support from their team and organisation.\

6. "It is important to have trustworthy colleagues to offer support. "At higit sa lahat, laging gawin ang tama kahit walang nakakakita."0__. This shows that they feel the job is easier because they have trust in their colleagues. Knowing there are people to offer support takes away the pressure of having to deal with difficult situations alone.

The officers rely heavily on having trust, teamwork, shared experiences and working together as a team. However, they also recognise that without support from the organisation such as having the right equipment, resources and learning opportunities, teamwork isn't enough. The experiences highlight that there is a link between individual confidence, teamwork and organisational support. Knowing that they can rely on their colleagues and organisation makes the unpredictable and challenging nature of their role easier. Teamwork is therefore seen as an important source of confidence.

From Custodial Guarding to Responsible Service

The participants have developed a clearer understanding of the role they play within their profession by looking at the bigger picture.

1. Participant A has developed a clear understanding that the role of a correctional officer goes beyond just physical and tactical ability. Participant A said, ***"A correctional officer does not just need to be physical and tactical, they need to have good values, be honest, disciplined and trustworthy. ("Ang pagiging correctional officer ay hindi lamang tungkol sa physical strength, firearms skills, o ability na humarap sa gulo. Mas mahalaga pa rin ang moral character, integrity, discipline, at pagiging trustworthy.")".*** Participant A sees the role of a correctional officer to be based around having good values, honesty and being trustworthy and disciplined.
2. Participant B had developed a clearer understanding of how serious their role was and the responsibility they carry. Participant B said, ***"I have learnt how serious my role is. ("Doon ko naramdaman yung gravity ng pagiging correctional officer... Dito ko nakita kung gaano kaseryoso ang responsibility ng isang security group, lalo na kapag high-risk situations ang hinaharap.")"***. Participant B has developed a clearer understanding of the profession through their practical experience. Having been exposed to high risk situations, Participant B can see how much responsibility they carry.
3. Participant C has had a huge shift in understanding what correctional work involves. Participant C said, ***"I have had a huge shift in understanding what correctional work involves. I used to think it was just about keeping the PDLs safe but now I know it is about keeping them safe, understanding them and being fair. ("Dati, iniisip ko na ang trabaho namin ay bantayan lang ang mga PDL. Pero habang tumatagal, nakita ko na kasama pala dito ang pagprotekta, pag-unawa, at pagiging patas.")"***. Participant C has realised that the role of a correctional officer goes beyond just keeping the PDLs safe.
4. Participant D had a similar shift in understanding. Participant D said, "I have learnt that correctional work is more than just keeping them safe. I now know that we should act appropriately with people. ***("Dati, akala ko ang pangunahing trabaho namin ay siguraduhin lamang na hindi makakatakas ang mga PDL. Pero ngayon naiintindihan ko na kasama rin dito ang tamang pakikitungo at pagpapanatili ng kaayusan.")"***. Participant D has developed a clearer understanding of what the role involves. Whilst keeping them safe is an important part of the role, Participant D now knows they need to act appropriately with people.
5. Participant E had realised through experience that there is more to the role of a correctional officer. Participant E said, "Through experience I have realised there is more to being a correctional officer. It is not just about keeping them safe but understanding, giving up and caring. ***("Dati, ang tingin ko sa trabaho ay puro security at pagbabantay lamang. Pero habang lumalim ang experience ko, nakita ko na mas malawak pala ang papel namin. May kasama itong pang-unawa, sakripisyo, at malasakit.")".*** Participant E has developed their professional identity through experience. They have realised that there is more to correctional work than just keeping them safe but also understanding, giving up and caring.
6. Participant F had the biggest shift in understanding the role of correctional work. Participant F said, ***"I have realised that correctional work is a form of service. ("Noong bago pa ako, akala ko trabaho lang ito na bantayan ang mga nakakulong. Pero ngayon, naiintindihan ko na mas malawak pala ang responsibility... Hindi lang ito trabaho, isa rin itong serbisyo.")".*** Participant F has realised that correctional work is not just a basic job of looking after people but a larger responsibility and a form of service. Participant F has developed their understanding of their role and professional identity.

Overall the experiences of the participants show that they have developed their professional identity. Initially many of the participants saw correctional work as just about keeping them safe, stopping them escaping and having physical control. However throughout their career they have been exposed to PDLs, high risk situations, colleagues and realised that correctional work also involves being fair, respectful, understanding, keeping them safe, being disciplined, giving up, honest and compassionate. The experiences of the participants show that your professional identity will develop through your experiences. Ultimately the role of a correctional officer is not just about keeping them safe but is a profession with a larger responsibility to keep them safe whilst showing humanity, fairness and responsible service.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The following conclusions were reached based on the findings of the study:

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1. This section discusses the implications of the participants' experiences in managing high-risk PDLs.
2. Readiness to manage high-risk PDLs is not simply an issue that correctional officers need to be prepared for during emergencies. Because of the risk involved in managing these individuals, officers must constantly be prepared. Training exercises and drills will become more meaningful due to being frequent and realistic.
3. Authority in correctional work involves effective communication, emotional control, and fair treatment when dealing with PDLs.
4. There is much personal pressure involved in being a correctional officer. Officers may worry about their families, money, safety and making a big mistake. Having a good support network from family, faith and reliable colleagues helped them manage this pressure. This suggests that having more support from the institution will help correctional officers manage the pressures they face.
5. Skills are gained overtime. Although training is provided, most of the knowledge gained is from experience. Officers gain knowledge through experiencing, observing, and getting advice from senior staff. This means it is important to have mentors to assist in building a skilled workforce.
6. Integrity is a key factor. The emphasis on doing the right thing even when no one is watching suggests that correctional officers cannot solely rely on monitoring to ensure they are behaving ethically. Policies within the institution are important, but they should be backed up with a strong professional culture so correctional officers feel personally responsible for being honest, taking accountability and not being influenced by anything improper.
7. The experiences of the officers highlight that high-risk correctional work is rarely done by individual officers alone. Building trust between colleagues, teamwork, proper equipment, resources and reliable support from the institution will help officers to deal with challenging situations. Improving these areas will help increase effectiveness and make officers feel confident.
8. The experiences indicate that correctional officers develop their professional identity overtime. Officers who may have felt their role was mainly to protect and control PDLs have learnt that their role is about protecting, being fair, making rational decisions, being honest and providing a service. This has implications for the training, support, assessment and development of correctional officers. Correctional officers should be trained to provide authority whilst still considering the human aspect of those in their care.

Recommendations

1. Correctional officers should regularly practice scenario-based training to prepare them for emergencies, de-escalating situations, communication and making quick decisions. Regular peer mentoring and experience sharing should be carried out within units.
2. Correctional institutions should provide regular high risk simulations, post incident reviews and a mentoring programme to pair less experienced officers with senior staff. Administrators should provide proper equipment, resources, peer support and proper channels for officers to manage personal and emotional issues relating to their work.
3. The Bureau of Corrections should create a uniform CPD programme to train officers who manage high risk and high profile PDLs. This should include training in being prepared, being ethical, managing conflict, communication, emotional control and treating PDLs humanely. Officers should be assessed regularly to ensure they have the necessary skills and there should be monitoring of training requirements within correctional facilities.
4. Criminology Professors should use real life correctional scenarios within their courses. This can be done using case studies, role play, simulations and ethical dilemmas. Activities should be used to improve students' skills in assessing risks, communicating, managing conflict, being ethical, working in a team and ensuring security whilst respecting human dignity.
5. Criminology students should improve their skills in communication, managing conflict, making ethical decisions, emotional control and working in a team to prepare for possible work in correctional services. Students should look for opportunities to get immersed in correctional work, interviews, fieldwork or supervised learning.
6. Future researchers should investigate whether the current training, mentoring, psychological support and resources provided to correctional officers who manage high risk and high profile PDLs is effective. Further research could be carried out to compare officers in different correctional facilities or with differing levels of experience to see what factors most contribute to correctional officers feeling prepared, being ethical, and performing effectively.

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