



ENTERING THE WORLD OF CRIMINOLOGY: ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES OF FIRST-YEAR STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

This study, conducted from February 2026 to May 2026 during School Year 2025-2026, aimed to explore the lived experiences of first-year criminology students in relation to their adjustment during their transition into college life. It sought to understand how students cope with academic demands, social changes, emotional challenges, and the structured environment of the criminology program. The researchers employed a qualitative phenomenological approach, utilizing Colaizzi's method to analyze the narratives about their adjustment experiences. The findings revealed three main themes: (1) Motivation and Adjustment in Entering Criminology, which reflects students' motivation in choosing the program alongside the initial difficulties they encountered in adapting to the demands of criminology education; (2) Social and Academic Adaptation in Criminology, which highlights the challenges students experience in balancing academic workload, strict requirements, and social relationships within the college environment; and (3) Personal Growth and Positive Adjustment, which shows how students gradually adapt by developing discipline, resilience, time management, and a more positive outlook toward their academic journey. The participants demonstrated continuous growth and improvement in their adjustment process. The study concluded that first-year criminology students undergo a dynamic adjustment experience characterized by initial challenges, ongoing adaptation, and eventual personal and academic growth.

Keywords: *Adjustment Experiences, Criminology Students, First-Year Students, Phenomenology, Academic Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Student Growth*

INTRODUCTION

Entering college is a significant transition, especially for students who choose to pursue criminology, a field that demands discipline, critical thinking, and emotional resilience. First-year criminology students often face challenges that go beyond academic

adjustment. The shift from high school to higher education introduces new expectations, heavier academic workloads, and a more structured learning environment. Studies show that first-year college students commonly experience stress, anxiety, and uncertainty as they adapt to academic and social demands (Schaeper, 2020). In criminology programs, these challenges are often intensified by subjects related to law enforcement, criminal behavior, and justice systems, which require both intellectual rigor and emotional maturity.

Criminology education in the Philippines plays a vital role in preparing future professionals for careers in law enforcement, public safety, and criminal justice. The program follows the standards set by the Commission on Higher Education (CHED) and aligns with Republic Act No. 11131, also known as the Philippine Criminology Profession Act of 2018, which regulates the practice of criminology in the country. First-year students are expected to develop not only academic competence but also discipline, integrity, and physical preparedness. However, despite the structured nature of the program, many students struggle with adjusting to strict routines, uniform requirements, physical training, and high-performance expectations. Recent studies emphasize that academic pressure, institutional demands, and adjustment difficulties significantly affect criminology students' motivation and performance (Barrot et al., 2021; Guadamor, 2021).

Most studies on criminology education focus on academic performance, licensure examination results, and career readiness. While these areas are essential, there is limited research that explores the personal, social, and emotional adjustment experiences of first-year criminology students. According to Purnamasari et al. (2022), college adjustment plays a major role in shaping students' emotional wellbeing and academic success. Likewise, Gause et al. (2024) found that first-year students often struggle with identity formation and coping mechanisms during their transition to higher education. In addition, (Lacanilao, 2024) emphasized that criminology students experience unique stressors due to the strict and discipline-oriented nature of their program. The early stage of college life is critical because students are still developing their identity, motivation, and commitment to their chosen profession. Without proper support systems, first-year students may experience isolation, pressure, and self-doubt, which can affect their academic engagement and overall development.

The researchers aimed to pursue this study examining the adjustment experiences of first-year criminology students as they enter the world of criminal justice education. It seeks to understand how they cope with academic demands, social changes, and the disciplined culture of the program. By highlighting their struggles, coping mechanisms, and personal insights, the study aims to present a clearer picture of their lived experiences during this critical transition period. Ultimately, this research aspired to provide valuable information that can help educators, institutions, and program administrators design stronger academic guidance, mentorship programs, and emotional support systems to help students successfully navigate their first year in criminology education.

Research Question

This phenomenological study aims to explore the lived experiences of first-year criminology students as they adjust to the academic, social, physical, and personal demands of entering the criminology program. It is guided by one central research question: "What are the lived adjustment experiences of first-year criminology students as they enter the world of criminology?"

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study is a qualitative research method popularized by Edmund Husserl's transcendental phenomenology which utilized interview guide questions in exploring the lived experiences of first-year criminology students regarding their adjustment to the academic, social, and emotional demands of their chosen field. A questionnaire with carefully constructed and reflective questions was used in gathering relevant data, supplemented by follow-up questions to clarify and deepen the participants' responses. The transcendental qualitative research allowed the researchers to obtain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon. Hence, the emphasis of qualitative research is to use thick, rich description to uncover patterns in data generously provided and give voice to participants while maintaining flexibility as the research develops (Creswell, 2007).

Research Locale

The interviews were conducted face-to-face with selected first-year students from the College of Criminology at Foundation University in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental. After securing the necessary permission from the institution and obtaining informed consent from the participants, the researchers scheduled the semi-structured interviews at a convenient time and appropriate location within the university. This setting allowed the participants to comfortably share their lived experiences, challenges, and adjustments as first-year criminology students.

Research Participants

In this study, the participants select 10 cadets were first-year criminology students enrolled in the program. Their firsthand are essential for understanding the academic, social, and emotional dimensions of transitioning into higher education and criminology as a field of study. The participants will be first-year criminology students aged 17–25 who have completed at least one semester. They must be willing to openly share their initial adjustment experiences during the interview.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured interview as the primary tool for data collection, with journals and reflective notes serving as supplementary tools. The interview questions were open-ended and designed to elicit in-depth insights into the participants' academic, social, and emotional adjustment experiences as first-year criminology students. The

interviews were conducted using a voice recorder and transcription application to capture the full conversation between the interviewer and the participant. All audio recordings were kept strictly confidential and were accessible only to the research team. The journals and reflective notes were used to collect additional personal reflections, thoughts, and experiences from the participants. These supplementary tools enriched the interview data by providing a deeper understanding of the students' internal experiences, coping mechanisms, and perceptions regarding their transition into criminology studies.

Data Gathering Procedure

The study followed a systematic process designed to ensure accurate and ethical data collection. First, first-year criminology students who met the study's inclusion criteria were identified through purposive sampling and approached directly for participation. Before each interview, the researchers explained the study's objectives and obtained informed consent from the participants. A formal consent letter was provided, which participants read and signed to verify their voluntary agreement to take part in the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted at times and locations convenient for the participants to ensure privacy and comfort. With participants' permission, the interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes. After the interviews, all audio recordings were transcribed verbatim and reviewed for accuracy. The data were then organized, coded, and analyzed using a phenomenological approach to identify themes that reflect the students' lived adjustment experiences. Throughout the research process, ethical principles such as confidentiality, voluntary participation, and safeguarding participant welfare were strictly upheld.

RESULTS

After the researcher's thorough analysis of the interview transcripts and coding with a total of three emergent themes were identified: A) Motivation and Adjustment in Entering Criminology, B) Social and Academic Adaptation in Criminology and C) Personal Growth and Positive Adjustment. This major theme covers seven subthemes, namely, 1) Pre-Entry Motivation Shaping Adjustment, 2) Initial Shock and Adjustment Difficulties, 3) Social Adjustment and Sense of Belonging, 4) Academic and Physical Adaptation, 5) Coping Mechanisms and Adaptation Strategies, 6) Development of Discipline and Personal Growth and 7) Positive Adjustment and Satisfaction.

Emergent Theme 1: Entering Criminology with Purpose and Facing Initial Adjustment Challenges

First-year criminology students enter the program with strong motivation rooted in personal aspirations, long-term dreams, and a clear desire to pursue a career in law enforcement. This sense of purpose serves as a guiding force that encourages them to take on the challenges of the course. However, upon entering the criminology environment, students are immediately confronted with various adjustment difficulties. These include exposure to strict rules and discipline, fear of failure, physical and mental demands, and personal concerns such as health and self-doubt. The transition from their previous academic experiences to the structured and demanding nature of criminology creates a sense of shock and pressure. Students begin to realize that the

program requires not only interest and passion but also resilience, commitment, and adaptability. As a result, the early stage of their journey is marked by a struggle to balance their expectations with reality. Despite these challenges, their strong motivation plays a crucial role in helping them endure this initial phase. This theme highlights that entering criminology is both an intentional and challenging process, where students must first confront difficulties before they can successfully adjust to the demands of the program. Under this third emergent theme are four sub-themes, namely: a) (Theme 1) Pre-Entry Motivation Shaping Adjustment; b) (Theme 2) Initial Shock and Adjustment Difficulties.

Theme 1: Pre-Entry Motivation Shaping Adjustment.

Before entering the criminology program, first-year students bring personal motivations that shape how they adjust to their new academic environment. Some are inspired by a desire to pursue justice, serve the community, or achieve career goals, while others are guided by curiosity about the field. These pre-entry motivations influence how students respond to challenges, engage with coursework, and interact with peers. For many, having a clear purpose provides direction and resilience during the initial adjustment period, highlighting the important role that personal drive plays in shaping early experiences in the world of criminology.

For instance, Participant 2 shared, *Ganahan jud ko mo kuha ani nga course kay kuan man mao jud ni akoang dream course sukad sukad sa pagkagamay nako ba* (Trans: I really wanted to take this course because this has been my dream course ever since I was young.)

This reflects a motivation that has been nurtured from early childhood. Similarly, Participant 5 stated, Since *katong bata pako* I've always dreamt of being a cop... Because I want to be a cop in the future. (Trans: Since I was a child, I've always dreamt of being a cop... Because I want to be a cop in the future.)

This shows a clear focus on a future career in law enforcement. Participant 1 added:

Okay, ah kuan decision jud nako siya because it also it also my passion and, ah, from gamay palang ko lahi nga course ilang gi pa kuan nako but ah ni insist jud ko nga mas ganahan ko mag criminology kay na dira akong heart.

(Trans: Okay, ah, it was really my own decision because it is also my passion. Since I was young, they wanted me to take a different course, but I insisted that I like criminology more because my heart is in it. I want to become a policeman someday. If not, I will still pursue something related to the field of criminology.)

Theme 2: Initial Shock and Adjustment Difficulties.

Entering the world of criminology, many first-year students described a sense of overwhelming shock as they transitioned from their familiar environments into the

structured yet demanding setting of the criminology program. What they anticipated as an exciting step toward their dreams quickly became a mixture of anxiety, confusion, and self-doubt. The sudden shift in expectations both academically and socially triggered a challenging period of adjustment. For instance,

Participant 4 shared, *kay for me ma'am ako man pd laman ma'y last card sa among familia jd kay sila may ga purse ani nga course what if kuan ma failed ka ani mao rana akoo.* (Trans: Because I feel like this is my last chance in my family since they really want me to pursue this course. I'm afraid of failing.)

This fear of failure reflected the pressure that students felt as they confronted the reality of the program, realizing that their previous assumptions might not prepare them for the demands ahead.

Participant 4 added, *Ahm... Like normal ra like walay mga strict nga rules jud and ga aim rpd ko nga abi private maka pasar raka through kuan.* (Trans: I expected it to be normal, like not too strict, and I thought since it's a private school, you could just pass by paying tuition.)

The expectation that payment alone could guarantee success was quickly replaced by the realization that hard work, discipline, and personal resilience were necessary.

Participant 2 shared, *Oh naa jud kay kanang naa koy kuan sa sakit sa kasing-kasing ba nya kuan ka kung makaya ba na ko padayun.* (Trans: Yes, I had thoughts like that. I have a heart condition, so I wondered if I could continue.)

Here, the fear was not just academic but also deeply personal, showing how the program's demands triggered self-reflection about their own limits and endurance. Similarly,

Participant 8 described the challenge of adjusting to the structured training schedule, *Lisud siya jud iadjust specially kuan interms of training...nia moy call time nga sayo kaayo I'm not use to that...Para nako disiplina raman pud ni Pero lisud sya, lisud especially wala kaayo kay kakuyog.* (Trans: Then it's hard to adjust, especially in terms of training. Like that you have very early call times. I'm not used to that for me, it's just discipline. But it's hard, especially when you don't have much company.)

Emergent Theme 2: Navigating Social and Academic Demands in the Adjustment Process.

As first-year criminology students move past their initial shock, they begin to face the dual challenge of managing academic responsibilities and social adjustments. The increasing workload and expectations require them to develop better study habits, time management, and self-discipline. At the same time, they must build new relationships, communicate with peers and instructors, and adapt to a more structured environment. Balancing these demands is often difficult, creating stress and pressure. However, this process also helps students grow, as they become more resilient, responsible, and

confident. Over time, they learn to manage both academic and social aspects of their lives, making adjustment an ongoing but meaningful part of their journey.

Under this second emergent theme are four sub-themes, namely: a) (Theme3) Social Adjustment and Sense of Belonging; b) (Theme 4) Academic and Physical Adaptation. (Theme 5) Coping Mechanisms and Adaptation Strategies.

Theme 3: Social Adjustment and Sense of Belonging.

First-year criminology students initially feel unfamiliar and disconnected in their new environment. However, through interaction with classmates and shared experiences, they gradually build friendships and feel accepted. This sense of belonging helps reduce isolation, boosts confidence, and motivates them to engage more in school. Over time, they develop strong support systems and begin to feel part of the criminology community. Similarly,

Participant 1 described the positive emotions associated with forming new relationships, *kaning nakahalubilo kag mga strangers then nahimo na ko silang friends* (Trans: I met strangers who became my friends.)

This reflects how initial social uncertainty gradually evolved into meaningful connections, highlighting the importance of openness in adapting to a new environment. Similarly,

Participant 2 described the positive emotions associated with forming new relationships, *Exciting tas happy kay kuan naka-meet ko ba nga bagong barkada... mga buotan ra sad ba* (Trans: It's exciting and makes me happy because I met new friends. are kind, and we get along well.)

The excitement and happiness of gaining a new circle of friends contributed to a more enjoyable and supportive academic journey, reinforcing the idea that peer relationships can ease the transition into college life.

Participant 9 shared, *First sem wa koy amigo, kay gikan man ko kay kuan taga Cebu man ko.* (Trans: during the first semester, I didn't have any friends because I came from Cebu.)

Coming from a different place creates sense of disconnection, making it difficult to establish friendships early on. Over time, this shifted into positively. Participant 9 explained, *Second sem nia nay amigo didto nagkachada na. like sa first sem ganahan kayo ko mo absent ba kay walay mga amigo, pero karon naa nay mga motivation para mo eskwela.* (Trans: During the second semester, I already had friends there, and things became better. In the first semester, I really felt like skipping classes because I had no friends, but now I am motivated to go to school.)

Theme 4: Academic and Physical Adaptation

First-year criminology students experience a period of adjustment as they navigate both academic demands and physical challenges. They gradually adapt to new learning environments, increased workloads, and unfamiliar subjects that require

discipline and critical thinking. At the same time, they face physical changes such as fatigue from long hours, participation in drills, and maintaining proper posture and fitness standards. Despite these challenges, students develop resilience and time management skills, allowing them to balance their academic responsibilities with the physical expectations of their chosen field.

Participant 1 shared, *sa exam ma bag ohan ko kay situational then nay kay mga ma bantayan nga mga small words nga gamay ra sayop nimo pwede makasayop.* (Trans: During exams, I was surprised because they were situational, and small details matter one small mistake can affect your answer.)

This reflects the difficulty of adapting to unfamiliar exam formats and the need for careful attention to detail. Coming from a different place also contributed to a sense of physical and social adjustment, making it difficult to establish friendships early on. Despite these challenges, Participant 5 explained,

Oh Yes naakoy mga challenges pod since usahay ma mental exhausted ko kay naay mga exam naay kanang daghan jud kaayong mga exam na ipang stock up jud sa isa rajud ka adlaw so mag study kag kuan multiple subjects sa isa ka adlaw so mag stress jud ka ana kay sometimes di jud nimo ma meet imuna expectation bisag naa kay tarong kayo nga time management since naapoy times na mga most unexpected jud nga maing ana nga time.

(Trans: Yes, I also experience mental exhaustion, especially when multiple exams are scheduled in one day. It becomes stressful because you must study many subjects at once, and sometimes you can't meet your expectations.)

This highlights the difficulty of handling multiple exams scheduled within a single day. This situation required studying several subjects at once, which often led to stress and fatigue. Despite practicing proper time management, Participant 5 noted that there were still unexpected instances where expectations were not met, as academic demands became overwhelming.

Participant 3 shared the same thoughts, *una jud like akong kuan nga na experience pinaka kapoy kato jud acceptance* (Trans: The most tiring experience was during the acceptance.)

Emphasizing that the early stage of adaptation was marked by extreme physical exhaustion, particularly during the acceptance phase. Similarly,

Participant 6 expressed initial doubts about their physical capacity, stating, *at first, I thought nga dili kaya sa akong lawas kay naay training but time to time nag-adjust ra akong kuan body and not just physically but mentally.* (Trans: At first, I thought my body wouldn't be able to handle it because of the training. But over time, my body adjusted not just physically but also mentally.)

Theme 5: Coping Mechanisms and Adaptation Strategies.

Faced with academic pressure, physical training, and emotional stress, they learn to adjust by building routines, managing their time effectively, and maintaining a positive mindset. Many rely on support systems such as friends, classmates, and family members, while others draw strength from personal faith and self-motivation. Over time, these students become more resilient, learning how to balance challenges and gradually adapt both mentally and physically to the expectations of their chosen field.

Participant 1 shared, *kuan ah especially time management ra gud siya. Then kuan nang adjust ra sa situation. Muray ako depende sa situation mag adjust sad. (Trans: Mainly time management and adjusting depending on the situation.)*

Highlighting the need to be flexible and responsive to different academic demands. Similarly, Participant 2 emphasized balance, sharing, *Gibahin jud nako akong kuan ato time sa academics, family, ta's kuan friends. (Trans: I divided my time for academics, family, and friends.)*

Showing how managing different aspects of life became essential in the adjustment process. Participant 7 described gradual efforts in maintaining balance, sharing,

Kuan lang jud ginagmay lang gyud. I tried to manage my time better. If naa koy free time, mag-review ko or magpahuway Importante pud ana support system akong friends ug classmates. Magtinabangay mi, especially sa assignment ug review. Sa tinuod lang, naa pud times nga gusto na ko mo give up kay kapoy na kaayo. Pero akong gi remind akong self nganong nag sugod ko ani. Mao to nga padayun lang gyud.

(Trans: Slowly, step by step. I tried to manage my time better. If I have free time, I review or rest. A support system is also important for my friends and classmates. We help each other, especially with assignments and reviews. Honestly, there were times I wanted to give up because it was so tiring. But I reminded myself why I started, so I just kept going.)

Which reflects both persistence and the role of motivation and peer support. In the same way, Participant 5 shared,

Well first of all katong kuan jud time management and the help of my friends since usahay mag group study me so mao jud nay most effective since kuan one is better than kuan kanang it's better to have more people working on something than being alone since mag lisod kag ikaw ra usa.

(Trans: Through time management and the help of my friends. We do group study, which is more effective than studying alone it's better to have more people working on something than being alone since it's going to be difficult when you're the only one.

Emergent Theme 3: Developing Discipline, Growth, and Positive Adjustment Outcomes.

Through consistent exposure to structured routines, training, and academic responsibilities, they learn the value of time management, perseverance, and self-control. Despite initial struggles, students begin to adapt positively, showing improvements not only in their physical endurance but also in their mindset and emotional resilience. These experiences shape them into more responsible and determined individuals, highlighting how their adjustment journey leads to meaningful growth and favorable outcomes in both their personal and academic lives. Under this second emergent theme are four sub-themes, namely: a) (Theme 6) Development of Discipline and Personal Growth; b) (Theme 7) Positive Adjustment and Satisfaction.

Theme 6: Development of Discipline and Personal Growth.

Through strict routines, academic pressures, and physical training, they learn to become more organized, responsible, and self-aware. Challenges they encounter help them strengthen their character, build resilience, and improve their decision-making skills. Over time, these experiences shape their behavior and mindset, leading to greater maturity and a stronger commitment to their chosen profession.

Participant 1 also shared,

Kuan Kanang daily routine nako is mo mata og udto. So sa amoa kuan jud ko ng pulokawon. Bisan nay klase sa high school, pulokawon kayko pero pag abot diri is kuan diri na ko nakita akong kaugalingon nausob pag ayo akong routine. mo matag alas kuwatro, then magdali-dali kay langayan jud ko. Pero kanang especially pag abot na sa formation kay kaning mahadlok kog kuan ah masi-masi. So kuan nausub siya. Ning dali na ko makamata mag una pakos akong alarm.

(Trans: My daily routine before was waking up at noon. At home, I was lazy. Even when I had classes in high school, I would wake up late. But now, I've seen changes in myself. I wake up at 4 a.m. and rush because I tend to be slow. Especially during training, I'm afraid of getting scolded. So, I've changed. I woke up earlier, even before my alarm.)

A significant change in daily routine, sharing that from being used to waking up late, they developed the discipline to wake up as early as four in the morning to meet training and formation requirements. This shift shows how academic demands influenced not only study habits but also physical routines and discipline.

Participant 3 shared: *matulog og sayo dili na mag ML ma kadlawon kay sayo naman mo matag alas 7 then mo matag 5 kay mag paangay.* (Trans: I sleep early now and don't stay up late playing Mobile Legends anymore because I must wake up early sometimes at 5 a.m. to prepare.)

Participant 5 also shared,

well akong kuan jung noticeable jud is kato akong gi sulti kanina kanang disiplined since back then did jud ko disiplinado kayo bisag kuan future cop since naa japon koy times times masayop karon i have become more disciplined willing to listen and kuan willing to learn mao rana siya

(Trans: Well, what is noticeable for me is what I mentioned earlier that I've become disciplined. Since before, I wasn't really that disciplined, even though I wanted to become a future cop. But there were still times when I made mistakes. Now, I have become more disciplined, more willing to listen, and willing to learn. That's all.)

Emphasizing a clear improvement in personal discipline over time. This reflects how exposure to academic and training demands contributed to becoming more receptive to guidance and correction. The participant further highlighted a shift from previous habits of inconsistency to a more disciplined and learning-oriented attitude.

Participant 7 also shared,

Kanang daghan kaayo. Una, discipline is very important. Dili lang sa school, but also sa personal life. Ikaduha, kinahanglan gyud ka mahimong strong not physically but mentally. The kuan pud nakat-on pud ko nga dili tanan easy. Naay tanan naay times nga lisod, pero part na siya sa growth. And pinaka importante, kinahanglan kabalo ka mo adjust sa different situations.

(Trans: There are many. First, discipline is very important not just in school, but also in personal life. Second, you really need to be strong, not physically but mentally. I also learned that not everything is easy. There are times when things are difficult, but that is part of growth. And most importantly, you need to know how to adjust to different situations.)

Emphasized that discipline plays a crucial role not only in academic life but also in personal development. The participant highlighted the importance of becoming mentally strong and accepting that not everything comes easily.

Theme 7: Positive Adjustment and Satisfaction.

The participants expressed that through their experiences, they gradually learned how to adjust to different challenges in their academic and personal lives. They developed discipline, mental strength, and adaptability, which helped them cope with difficulties along the way. Although they encountered struggles, they viewed these as part of their growth and learning process. Over time, they became more resilient and better at handling various situations, leading to a sense of satisfaction and personal fulfillment with their progress and development. various situations, leading to a sense of satisfaction and personal fulfillment with their progress and development.

Participant 1 shared,

Ah para nako ah enjoy ra siya enjoy siya and ah walay wala siya'y makita ni mga sayup. Even though na may kanang ma kuan nimo sila nga naglisod ang mga ga organized, but still na do nila ilang best just to kuan nga ma perfect nila ang kanang mga activities mga ingana

(Trans: For me, it's enjoyable. It's enjoyable, and I don't see anything wrong with it. Even though there are times when organizers struggle, they still do their best to make activities successful.)

Development of discipline and personal growth was also reflected in Participant 1's positive outlook and appreciation of effort and improvement. indicating a generally positive perception of experiences and activities. This reflects a developing mindset that focuses on appreciation rather than criticism, which is part of personal growth.

Participant 3 initially described their experience as, *so far so good*

This highlights a process of positive adjustment, where initial difficulties gradually lead to a growing sense of satisfaction and comfort in their new environment. Participant 5 also shared, *I well first of all i feel well um my sense oh well i feel great kanang kuan being a criminology student and i am i'm expecting to improve more in the future pod.* (Trans: I well, first: I feel good. I mean, I feel great being a criminology student, and I'm expecting to improve more in the future as well.)

This response shows a growing sense of satisfaction and optimism, as the student begins to feel more confident and motivated in their academic journey.

Participant 8 shared a similar positive adjustment, stating,

kuan kani ra gurong school nga dili minggaw imohang college life kay kuan halos kada month niay celebration, activities, mga events. Nya ma apil pud ka ba. Malinggaw pud k aba. Gara kaayo. Garaon kaayo ning skwelahana, mag pa fireworks. In ana. Nia pa dyod dj dj in an aba. Pa disco2. Sadyaan rako aris FU.

(Trans: Well, this is probably the only school where your college life doesn't feel lonely because almost every month there are celebrations, activities, and events. You also get to participate, so you don't feel bored. It's lively this school is very energetic. They even have fireworks, things like that. There are also DJs and disco parties. I'm happy here at FU.")

DISCUSSION

Within the first emergent theme, "Entering Criminology with Purpose and Facing Initial Adjustment Challenges," the participants articulated that their decision to pursue criminology was strongly influenced by personal aspirations, long-term goals, and their desire to establish a career in law enforcement. Their pre-entry motivation served

as a guiding force that encouraged them to remain committed despite encountering strict discipline, academic pressure, physical and mental demands, fear of failure, and self-doubt. The participants described their transition into the criminology program as a challenging experience, as they had to adjust from their previous academic environment to the structured and demanding nature of the course. Despite experiencing initial shock and difficulties, their strong sense of purpose helped them persevere, gradually develop resilience and adaptability, and reconcile their expectations with the realities of criminology education.

The first sub-theme, “Pre-Entry Motivation Shaping Adjustment,” captured the participants’ strong personal aspirations, passion, and career-oriented motivations that influenced their decision to pursue criminology. Their narratives revealed that some had dreamed of becoming police officers since childhood, while others viewed criminology as a pathway toward achieving their future goals in law enforcement. This sense of purpose provided them with direction and strengthened their commitment to the program, particularly as they encountered the challenges associated with adjusting to a demanding academic environment. The participants’ experiences suggest that having a clear reason for choosing criminology can foster persistence, resilience, and greater engagement during the early stages of their academic journey. Their pre-entry motivations therefore served not only as reasons for entering the program but also as important factors that shaped how they approached and adjusted to their new environment.

The second sub-theme, “Initial Shock and Adjustment Difficulties,” revealed that participants confronted feelings of fear, uncertainty, self-doubt, and pressure as they encountered the realities of the criminology program. Mao et al. (2022) emphasized that students’ motivations evolve as they encounter actual academic experiences, with clear goals and intrinsic motivation helping students develop persistence and adaptability when facing challenges. Griep et al. (2020) explained that when individuals’ expectations before entering an institution do not correspond with their actual experiences, they are more likely to experience dissatisfaction and difficulty adjusting. Similarly, Teng-Calleja et al. (2020) found that transitions into new environments may involve uncertainty, emotional strain, and difficulties in adapting to unfamiliar roles and expectations. These studies support the participants’ experiences, demonstrating that the transition into criminology can be marked by an initial period of shock as students learn to cope with academic pressure, strict discipline, physical demands, and the gap between their expectations and the realities of the program.

The second emergent theme, “Navigating Social and Academic Demands in the Adjustment Process,” elucidated that first-year criminology students gradually learned to manage the interconnected demands of academic responsibilities and social relationships as they transitioned into college life. The students described how developing a sense of belonging, adapting to academic and physical demands, and utilizing effective coping mechanisms enabled them to become more disciplined, responsible, and resilient. Their experiences revealed that adjustment was not merely about overcoming difficulties but also about learning how to balance school requirements, relationships, personal well-being, and the expectations of a more structured academic environment. Through these experiences, students gradually

developed confidence and independence, allowing them to navigate the challenges of college life while building a stronger sense of competence and belonging.

The third sub-theme, "Social Adjustment and Sense of Belonging," showed how developing friendships and positive peer relationships helped first-year criminology students overcome feelings of isolation and become more comfortable in their new academic environment. The participants described how strangers gradually became friends, bringing feelings of excitement, happiness, and acceptance. For students who initially had no friends, particularly those who came from different places, the lack of social connections made them feel disconnected and even reduced their motivation to attend classes. However, as they formed new friendships, they became more motivated to go to school and participate in their academic journey. This finding is supported by Allen et al. (2021), who emphasized that students' sense of belonging is strongly associated with their academic engagement, motivation, and overall adjustment to university life. Similarly, Kahu and Picton (2022) found that positive relationships and a sense of belonging can strengthen students' engagement and help them feel more connected to their educational environment. These findings suggest that meaningful peer relationships serve as an important source of emotional and social support, allowing first-year students to overcome loneliness, gain confidence, and gradually develop a stronger sense of belonging within the criminology community.

The fourth sub-theme, "Academic and Physical Adaptation," showed that first-year criminology students gradually developed resilience and discipline as they adjusted to the demanding academic and physical requirements of their chosen field. The participants described difficulties with situational examinations, multiple exams in a single day, mental exhaustion, and physically demanding training, which initially tested their ability to cope with the program. Credé and Niehorster (2012) found that successful college adjustment is associated with students' academic, personal-emotional, and social adaptation to the demands of university life. Similarly, van Rooij et al. (2018) emphasized that developing self-regulation and effective learning strategies helps students manage academic demands and remain engaged in their studies. These findings suggest that although the students initially experienced stress, fatigue, and uncertainty about their capabilities, continued exposure to academic and physical challenges allowed them to gradually adjust both mentally and physically, strengthening their time management, resilience, and readiness for the demands of criminology education.

Moreover, the fifth sub-theme, "Coping Mechanisms and Adaptation Strategies," showed that first-year criminology students gradually learned to manage the pressures of college life through time management, flexibility, social support, and personal motivation. The students described how dividing their time among academics, family, friends, study, and rest helped them maintain balance despite demanding schedules. The support of friends and classmates, particularly through group study and shared academic tasks, also made difficult responsibilities more manageable and reduced the feeling of facing challenges alone. When exhaustion and discouragement emerged, students relied on self-motivation by reminding themselves of their goals and the reasons they chose to pursue criminology. These experiences demonstrated that coping was not simply about enduring difficulties but about developing practical

strategies and supportive relationships that enabled students to remain persistent, adaptable, and committed to their academic journey.

The third emergent theme, Overall, the experiences of the participants demonstrate that coping and adaptation are essential components of the first-year adjustment process. Through effective time management, social support, collaboration, and personal motivation, students gradually learn to respond to challenges rather than become overwhelmed by them. These coping experiences serve as a foundation for the development of greater discipline, resilience, self-control, and personal growth. As students become more capable of managing academic, physical, and social demands, their adjustment begins to produce positive changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and overall outlook. Thus, the coping strategies developed during the adjustment process contribute to the emergence of “Developing Discipline, Growth, and Positive Adjustment Outcomes,” which reflects how students transform their challenges into opportunities for personal and academic development.

The sixth sub-theme, “Development of Discipline and Personal Growth,” showed how structured routines, academic demands, and physical training gradually transformed first-year criminology students into more disciplined, responsible, and mentally resilient individuals. The participants described how they changed from having irregular routines and staying up late to waking up early, following schedules, listening to instructions, and becoming more willing to learn from their mistakes. Martin et al. (2021) found that adaptability plays an important role in helping students manage challenging and unfamiliar environments, while Credé and Niehorster (2012) emphasized that successful college adjustment involves developing behaviors that support academic and personal functioning. These findings suggest that the challenges experienced by first-year criminology students served as opportunities for personal growth, helping them develop self-discipline, resilience, adaptability, and a stronger sense of responsibility toward their future profession.

Lastly, the seventh sub-theme, “Positive Adjustment and Satisfaction,” captured the participants’ growing sense of enjoyment, fulfillment, and optimism as they became more comfortable with the demands of college and their chosen profession. The participants described their experiences as enjoyable and satisfying, particularly when they were able to participate in school activities, appreciate the efforts of others, and recognize their own personal progress. Ajayi and Chemagosi (2023) found that overcoming academic challenges can strengthen students’ coping abilities, resilience, and self-management, contributing to more positive adjustment experiences. Martin et al. (2021) further highlighted that adaptability promotes persistence, goal setting, and independence, helping students respond positively to challenging academic environments. In the Philippine context, Obiena and Tenorio (2024) emphasized that social support significantly contributes to students’ adjustment and satisfaction. These findings suggest that the participants’ satisfaction was shaped not only by the absence of difficulties but also by their ability to overcome challenges, participate actively in their school community, and recognize their own growth. Through these experiences, first-year criminology students developed a more positive outlook toward their college journey and gained greater confidence in their ability to continue growing within their chosen profession.

Conclusions

In light of the findings, the study concludes that the First, first-year criminology students enter the program with strong motivation driven by personal passion, career aspirations, and external influences. This motivation plays a crucial role in helping them endure initial adjustment challenges. Second, students experience significant academic, social, and physical difficulties during their early transition. These challenges include strict discipline, heavy workloads, social adjustment issues, and physical demands, which contribute to stress and pressure. Third, the adjustment process is gradual and requires effective coping strategies. Time management, peer support, and self-motivation are essential factors that help students adapt to the demands of the criminology program. Fourth, as student progress, they develop discipline, resilience, and personal growth. Their experiences shape their character, improve their habits, and strengthen their commitment to their chosen field. Lastly, despite initial struggles, students eventually achieve positive adjustment outcomes. They gain confidence, satisfaction, and a deeper appreciation of their academic journey in criminology.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusions of this study, several recommendations are hereby offered:

Academic Institutions

1. Academic institutions offering criminology programs may integrate structured transition programs that focus on the adjustment experiences of first-year students, including orientation on academic expectations, discipline, and criminology culture.
2. Universities may incorporate activities that address adjustment difficulties such as adapting to new learning environments, managing academic workload, and understanding the demands of criminology education.

First-Year Criminology Students

1. First-year students may use the findings of this study to better understand their adjustment experiences, particularly in coping with academic pressure, new routines, and unfamiliar environments.
2. Students are encouraged to develop effective adjustment strategies such as time management, active classroom participation, and seeking help from peers and instructors when difficulties arise.
3. They may also build resilience and adaptability to successfully cope with emotional stress, social changes, and the disciplined nature of criminology programs.

Faculty Members

1. Faculty members may utilize the findings to better understand the adjustment challenges of first-year students and adopt teaching approaches that are supportive and responsive to their needs.

2. Instructors are encouraged to guide students in their transition by providing clear instructions, approachable communication, and encouragement to help ease academic adjustment.

Guidance Counselors and Student Support Services

1. Guidance counselors may design programs specifically focused on helping first-year criminology students adjust to college life, including stress management, emotional support, and coping mechanisms.
2. Student support services may strengthen initiatives that address anxiety, pressure, and social adjustment issues commonly experienced during the first year.

Parents and Guardians

1. Parents and guardians may better understand the adjustment experiences of first-year students and provide continuous emotional and motivational support.
2. They are encouraged to maintain open communication to help students cope with challenges during their transition to college life.

School Administration

1. School administrators may develop and implement policies and programs that directly support first-year adjustment, such as mentoring programs, academic advising, and structured onboarding activities.
2. Institutions may also create a supportive environment that promotes student engagement, belongingness, and smooth transition into criminology education.

Future Researchers

1. Future researchers may use this study as a reference in examining adjustment experiences among students in different academic programs or year levels.
2. Further studies may explore specific factors affecting adjustment such as academic stress, social environment, or institutional support to provide deeper insights.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study adhered to ethical standards in conducting qualitative research involving first-year criminology students. Guided by the principles of autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, and justice, the researchers ensured the protection, dignity, privacy, and well-being of all participants throughout the research process. Participation was entirely voluntary, and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. The participants were clearly informed about the purpose and nature of the study, the procedures involved, their right to refuse to answer any question, and their right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or negative consequences. To protect their privacy and confidentiality, participant names and other identifying information were excluded from the presentation of the findings, and codes such as "Participant 1" and "Participant 2" were used instead. All interview responses and personal information were treated with strict confidentiality and were used solely for academic purposes. Since the study explored students' personal experiences

involving academic pressure, physical training, social adjustment, and emotional challenges, the interviews were conducted in a respectful and participant-centered manner, allowing participants to share only what they were comfortable disclosing.

To maintain the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the researchers employed systematic practices throughout the data collection and analysis process. Interview responses were carefully documented, translated when necessary, and reviewed to preserve the original meaning of the participants' experiences. The researchers also engaged in team discussions, comparison of interpretations, and reflexive reflection to identify and minimize personal assumptions or biases that could influence the findings. Consistent with qualitative and phenomenological approaches, the researchers practiced bracketing and reflexivity by consciously setting aside preconceived ideas and remaining focused on the lived experiences of first-year criminology students. Member checking was also utilized, when applicable, to confirm the accuracy and authenticity of the participants' accounts and the researchers' interpretations. These measures strengthened the credibility and dependability of the findings while ensuring that the experiences of the participants were represented accurately and respectfully. Overall, these ethical practices upheld the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, respect, research integrity, and protection of participants, ensuring that the lived experiences of first-year criminology students were documented and presented responsibly.

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