



LIFE BEHIND BARS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL EXPLORATION ON THE ADJUSTMENT EXPERIENCES OF PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY

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ABSTRACT

This phenomenological study explored the adjustment experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in Negros Oriental Detention and Rehabilitation Center on May 25, 2026. The researchers examined how incarceration influences their emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual well-being. Using a qualitative research design, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected participants who had firsthand experiences of incarceration, and the data were analyzed through thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and significant meanings in their narratives. Findings revealed that incarceration was associated with profound emotional distress, including fear, regret, helplessness, isolation, and a diminished sense of identity. Participants also reported difficulties adjusting to prison life due to separation from family, loss of freedom, challenging environmental conditions, and perceived injustice. Over time, however, many developed coping strategies such as adaptability, self-discipline, conflict avoidance, and reliance on spirituality and faith in God. Prison culture, peer relationships, and informal systems of discipline were likewise found to influence the adjustment process. The study concludes that adjustment to incarceration is a complex and highly personal experience shaped by emotional distress, social relationships, environmental conditions, and spiritual coping. These findings underscore the need for strengthened psychosocial support, rehabilitation programs, spiritual guidance, and reintegration initiatives to promote the well-being, personal growth, and successful reintegration of PDLs, while also informing the development of more humane and responsive correctional interventions.

Keywords: *Person deprived of liberty, phenomenology*

INTRODUCTION

Prisons are places where global debates about punishment, rehabilitation, and human dignity meet the everyday realities of confinement. Around the world, scholars have documented how incarceration affects mental health, identity, and social ties, and how overcrowding, limited programming, and under-resourced mental health services make adjustment to prison life difficult for many inmates (Solbakken et al., 2022; Brine et al., 2021). Yet much of the policy conversation focuses on rates, capacities, and recidivism statistics rather than on the lived, moment-to-moment experience of arriving in and learning to live inside a prison: the small rituals that preserve dignity, the tiny bargains prisoners make to stay safe, and the quiet strategies that sustain hope. This study is conducted because those interior, human experiences matter they are the ground from which rehabilitation, coping, and ultimately reintegration grow or wither (Solbakken et al., 2022; Brine et al., 2021).

In the Philippines, those global pressures are amplified by chronic overcrowding, resource shortages, and ongoing reforms aimed at humane treatment and decongestion (Prison-Insider, 2024; UNODC, 2024). Recent local qualitative work has started naming what it feels like to be a person deprived of liberty in Philippine facilities: anxiety on admission, the stress of extreme congestion, the rupture of family ties, and the daily negotiation of safety, belonging, and shame (Gales, 2023; Palabrica & Nabe, 2024). These are not abstract problems they shape how a person eats, sleeps, seeks help, asks for mercy, or decides whether to participate in a rehabilitation program. Paying careful attention to how inmates make sense of these daily realities is essential for humane policy and for designing interventions that meet people where they are (UNODC, 2024; Prison-Insider, 2024).

Several recent studies (2019–2025) have advanced our knowledge: Solbakken et al. (2022) examined social support and mental health in prison contexts; Brine et al. (2021) explored factors linked to post-release success; and Philippine phenomenological inquiries (Gales, 2023; Palabrica & Nabe, 2024) have sought to surface inmates' voices about life inside particular facilities. While valuable, much of this work either focuses on particular policy outcomes (e.g., recidivism, program efficacy) or on descriptive accounts of conditions. What remains underexplored and is the focus of this study is the process of adjustment as lived time: how new inmates experience the first weeks and months (the temporal unfolding), how identity and "self" are renegotiated under confinement, and how small everyday practices (rituals, relationships, moral decisions) constitute the work of surviving psychologically and morally inside.

This phenomenological study therefore centers first-person narratives of adjustment, seeking the essential structures of meaning that prior research has only hinted at (Solbakken et al., 2022; Gales, 2023). Grounded in phenomenological method, the objectives of this study are: (1) to describe and interpret the lived experiences of inmates as they adjust to prison life; (2) to identify the temporal phases, coping strategies, and sense-making processes involved in that adjustment; (3) to examine how social support, institutional conditions, and personal history shape inmates' emotional and moral

experiences; and (4) to offer practice-relevant recommendations for correctional programming and policy that are grounded in inmates' own accounts. The researchers undertake this research because humane and effective prison policy must be informed not only by statistics and institutional reports but also by an understanding of the experiences and circumstances of people who live behind bars. Their experiences can provide important insights into the conditions of imprisonment and the types of interventions that may support humane treatment, rehabilitation, and meaningful criminal justice reform (Haney, 2020).

Research Question

This qualitative inquiry, which utilized the descriptive phenomenological approach, sought to answer the universal question: "How do the PDL described their adjustment experiences inside jail?"

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore and understand the lived experiences of inmates as they adjust to prison life. The phenomenological approach is appropriate because the study seeks to examine how inmates perceive, interpret, and make meaning of their experiences within the prison environment, rather than to measure variables or test hypotheses.

Research Locale

The study was conducted in Negros Oriental Detention and Rehabilitation Center that individuals serving various types of sentences.

The facility operates under established correctional policies and provides a structured environment characterized by regulated routines, restricted movement, and controlled social interactions. This setting serves as an appropriate environment for exploring inmates lived experiences as they adjust to prison life. The correctional facility includes designated living quarters, common areas, and administrative offices that shape inmates' daily experiences. The environment exposes inmates to institutional rules, security measures, and interpersonal dynamics that influence their emotional, psychological, and social adjustment. These conditions provide a relevant context for understanding how inmates perceive and respond to incarceration. Data collection is conducted within the premises of the correctional facility in a private and secure area approved by prison authorities. This arrangement ensures that participants can openly share their experiences without fear of interruption or breach of confidentiality. The setting is chosen to minimize external distractions and to promote a safe and respectful atmosphere during the interviews. The research environment reflects the real-life conditions in which inmates experience adjustment, allowing the study to capture authentic and meaningful insights into their lived realities. The findings derived from this

environment are context-specific and aim to provide a deeper understanding of inmate adjustment within a correctional setting.

Research Participants

The participants of this study consist of selected inmates currently confined in Negros Oriental Detention and Rehabilitation Center. They are chosen to provide rich and meaningful descriptions of their lived experiences as they adjust to prison life. Consistent with the phenomenological approach, participants are selected based on their direct experience with the phenomenon under study rather than on representatives.

Research Instrument

The primary research instrument used in the study is a researcher-developed interview guide composed of open-ended questions. These questions focus on the participants' initial experiences upon entering prison, the emotional and psychological challenges they faced during the adjustment period, their coping mechanisms and available support systems, their social interactions within the prison environment, and the personal meanings they attach to their incarceration and adjustment process.

Data Gathering Procedure

In this study, Colaizzi's method was employed for data analysis. This method is recognized for its systematic approach to extracting, organizing, and analyzing significant statements from participants, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the studied phenomenon. Abalos et al. (2016) highlighted that Colaizzi's method promotes objectivity in data analysis while maintaining fidelity to the phenomenon being investigated. They emphasized its refusal to impose preconceived notions on the data, instead advocating for respectful listening to what the phenomenon revealed about itself. The study employed phenomenological analysis to systematically examine and interpret recurring themes and patterns in the participants' responses, specifically focusing on the constraints they face as parents of juvenile delinquents. This qualitative approach allowed for an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty including how they adjust inside the jail.

The first phase of analysis involved data transcription and initial coding. All recorded interviews were transcribed verbatim to ensure precision and maintain the authenticity of the participants' responses. The transcripts were reviewed multiple times for familiarity with the data. Significant statements and key phrases related to adjustment challenges, emotional responses, coping mechanisms, and external factors influencing parenting were identified and coded based on emerging themes. The coding process enabled the researchers to systematically classify complex information, making it more manageable for further analysis.

Once the initial codes were generated, the next step involved categorization and theme development. Coded data were grouped into broader, interconnected categories

to facilitate a structured interpretation. Emerging themes—such as the initial shock and psychological disorientation, loss of freedom and identity, spiritual awakening and making meaning, coping mechanism and survival strategies and hope, change and personal transformation were analyzed to identify significant patterns in how PDL adjust inside the jail. This phase ensured that the study remained focused on its objectives while providing a detailed portrayal of how Persons Deprived of Liberty adjust inside the jail.

RESULTS

The adjustment experiences of persons deprived of liberty revealed a difficult yet transformative journey shaped by emotional struggles, identity conflicts, spirituality, coping strategies, and personal growth. The first emergent theme, Initial Shock and Psychological Disorientation, reflected the participants' intense emotional turmoil during the early stage of imprisonment. Feelings of fear, confusion, loneliness, hopelessness, disbelief, and denial were commonly experienced as they struggled to accept their sudden loss of freedom and separation from their families. Many participants described sleepless nights, overthinking, and emotional suffering caused by uncertainty about their future.

The second emergent theme, Loss of Freedom and Identity, highlighted the pain of losing social roles, responsibilities, and personal identity. Participants expressed guilt and sadness because they could no longer fulfill their duties as parents, children, workers, or providers. This created an internal conflict between their past identity outside prison and their present life inside the correctional facility. The third emergent theme, Spiritual Awakening and Meaning-Making, showed that many participants turned to faith and prayer as sources of comfort, hope, and strength. Spiritual practices helped them gradually accept their circumstances and gave meaning to their suffering.

The fourth emergent theme, Coping Mechanisms and Survival Strategies, revealed the importance of patience, humility, respect, self-discipline, and emotional control in adapting to prison life peacefully. Lastly, Hope, Change, and Personal Transformation demonstrated that imprisonment became a learning experience that encouraged reflection, behavioral change, renewed appreciation for family, and hope for redemption and a better future.

Emergent Theme 1: Initial Shock and Psychological Disorientation

The theme Initial Shock and Psychological Disorientation emerged as a foundational phase in the lived experiences of the participants, representing their immediate psychological and emotional response upon entering incarceration. This stage is characterized by intense confusion, fear, and instability as individuals are abruptly removed from their familiar environment and placed into a highly controlled and unfamiliar setting. The transition from freedom to confinement created a profound disruption in their sense of reality, often leaving participants overwhelmed and unable to process their situation fully.

A dominant element within this theme is the experience of disbelief and denial, wherein participants initially struggled to accept the reality of their incarceration. Many described their situation as unreal or dreamlike, expressing difficulty in comprehending that they were already inside a detention facility. This mental resistance reflects an early coping response, as the mind attempts to protect itself from the overwhelming impact of sudden confinement. The inability to immediately accept one's circumstances contributed to delayed psychological adjustment and prolonged emotional distress.

Closely associated with this is the fear of the unknown, which significantly shaped participants' early experiences. Participants reported feelings of anxiety and apprehension regarding the prison environment, including concerns about safety, interactions with other inmates, and unfamiliar institutional rules. The absence of prior knowledge about prison life intensified their fear, as they were uncertain about what to expect and how to behave. This uncertainty created a heightened sense of vulnerability, particularly during the initial days of confinement.

The findings also reveal a state of confusion and mental overload, where participants experienced difficulty thinking clearly or making sense of their situation. The sudden influx of new information, combined with emotional distress, led to cognitive disorganization. Participants described being unable to focus, constantly overthinking, and feeling mentally overwhelmed. This cognitive strain hindered their ability to adapt quickly and contributed to a sense of disorientation within the new environment.

Another significant aspect is the loss of control and feelings of helplessness. Participants became acutely aware that they no longer had control over their daily lives, as decisions regarding movement, routine, and basic needs were dictated by institutional authority. This shift from autonomy to dependence created a strong sense of powerlessness, reinforcing their vulnerability and emotional distress. The realization that their freedom and decision-making capacity were restricted marked a critical turning point in their adjustment process.

The theme further encompasses emotional turmoil, characterized by a mixture of fear, sadness, anger, and anxiety. Participants reported experiencing sudden emotional fluctuations, including episodes of crying, withdrawal, or heightened irritability. These emotional responses were often intensified by the abrupt separation from family and the uncertainty of their situation. This period represents one of the most emotionally intense phases of incarceration, as individuals confront both internal and external stressors simultaneously.

In addition, participants described disorientation in time and space, reflecting their difficulty in adjusting to the physical and temporal structure of prison life. The unfamiliar environment, combined with strict routines, created a sense of being lost or out of place. Participants reported confusion regarding schedules, surroundings, and expectations, further contributing to their overall sense of instability. This spatial and temporal disorientation highlights the extent to which incarceration disrupts an individual's perception of normalcy.

Another notable finding is the emergence of hyperawareness and survival alertness. During the initial stage, participants became highly observant of their surroundings, carefully monitoring the behavior of others and assessing potential threats. This heightened vigilance reflects an instinctive survival response, as individuals attempt to protect themselves in an unfamiliar and potentially risky environment. Such alertness marks the beginning of adaptive behavior, as participants gradually learn to navigate the social dynamics of prison life.

Overall, the theme of Initial Shock and Psychological Disorientation illustrates the profound psychological impact of entering incarceration. It represents a critical stage in the adjustment process, where individuals confront the reality of confinement through a combination of disbelief, fear, confusion, and emotional instability. These early experiences set the foundation for subsequent coping mechanisms and adaptation strategies. The intensity of this phase underscores the need for psychological support and structured orientation during the initial period of incarceration, as it significantly influences the trajectory of an individual's adjustment and overall well-being.

Theme 1: Emotional Turmoil

Emotional Turmoil emerged as a central and deeply felt component of the participants' initial experiences of incarceration. It captures the intense and often overwhelming emotional reactions that individuals undergo upon entering a correctional environment. Participants described a state of heightened emotional vulnerability characterized by a complex interplay of fear, sadness, anger, anxiety, and internal distress. These emotions were not experienced in isolation but often occurred simultaneously, creating a sense of instability and emotional overload during the early stages of confinement.

A predominant aspect of emotional turmoil is the experience of fear and anxiety, particularly in relation to the unfamiliarity of the prison environment. Participants reported feeling constantly uneasy and uncertain about their safety.

Participant 1 shared

Sa wala pako na priso naa koy trabaho sa gawas kanang maka survive rapud sa pamilya pud ba, nya karon na priso ko luoy kaayo ang nahabilin, baling lisura jud kaayo ning ma priso ka, nya okay ra unta ug ma priso ka ug tinuod ngaaa sala nimo ang nabuhat kay madawat pa, perting pung paita nga nasulod ta dayong wa paguy tinuod nga isturya.

(Trans: Before I was imprisoned, I had a job outside that was enough for my family to survive. But now that I'm in prison, I really pity the ones I left behind. It's truly very difficult to be imprisoned. It would have been okay somehow if you were imprisoned because you were really guilty, because you could at least accept it. But it's extremely painful to end up here when the

accusations against you are not even true.)

Participant 2 also expressed similar anxiety:

Doble ang sakit ba, dayon ang gibati nako byaan pag pamilya plus ma priso paka ug dili tinuod, madawat ra unta nako ug ma tinuod di pagud tinuod, monang ako nalang gi salig sa kahitas an ang tanan basig naa syay plano nako ba.

(Trans: "It hurts twice as much, you know. What I felt was being abandoned by my family, and on top of that, being imprisoned for something that isn't true. I could have accepted it if it were true, but it's not even true. That's why I just entrusted everything to God above, maybe He has a plan for me.)

The findings also reveal the presence of anger and frustration, directed both internally and externally. Some participants blamed themselves for their situation, while others struggled with their circumstances.

Emotional Turmoil underscores the depth and complexity of the emotional challenges faced by individuals during the initial phase of incarceration. The integration of participants' narratives reveals how fear, sadness, anger, and internal conflict converge to create a state of emotional instability that significantly affects the adjustment process. These findings highlight the critical need for emotional support systems and mental health interventions, particularly during the early stages of confinement, to help individuals process and manage their emotional experiences effectively.

In line with the transaction's theory of prisoners' adjustment, environmental characteristics, in interaction with individual ones, may act as a source of pressure for prisoners' behavior. Prisoners seem to import trauma's negative and detrimental effects into prison – importation – but when imprisoned, it is common for prisoners to experience additional traumas (e.g., violence) – deprivation. Trauma adverse effects are cumulative; thus, prisoners are at-risk for developing or aggravating mental illness. In this sense, mental illness in prison could be attributable to importation and deprivation. Incarceration can also lead to post-incarceration syndrome, a syndrome like posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD); even after serving the prison sentence, many individuals continue to suffer its mental effects. Some effects may include institutionalized personality traits, such as distrusting others or difficulty maintaining relationships, social-sensory disorientation, and social-temporal alienation (Cunha et al., 2023). The impact of imprisonment on individuals' mental health and well-being: A systematic review. *BMC Psychology*, 11, 252.

Theme 2: Disbelief and Denial

Disbelief and Denial emerged as a critical psychological response during the initial stage of incarceration. It reflects the participants' difficulty in accepting the reality of their confinement, often characterized by feelings of unreality, shock, and mental resistance. Upon entering the correctional facility, many participants described their experience as surreal, as if they were detached from the situation or unable to fully comprehend what

had happened. This reaction appears to function as an immediate psychological defense mechanism, allowing individuals to momentarily shield themselves from the overwhelming impact of sudden loss of freedom.

A prominent manifestation of this sub-theme is the sense of unreality or disbelief, wherein participants perceived their situation as dreamlike or temporary.

Participant 2 expressed, *koan mag sigi kog hinoktok na di nimo madawat, so makati ba nimo Ang kahadlok or nakuyawan , sugod pa gani nahadlok jud ko pero madugay ok ramn diay sa tv ramn diay nang mahadlok jud ka.* (Trans: You know, I kept overthinking because you really can't accept it. So, you end up feeling fear and anxiety. At first, I was really scared, but as time went by, I realized it was actually okay. The kind of extreme fear you see is mostly just in TV shows.)

Similarly, participant 6 shared, *Kuan kapait kamingaw pagmahay guba imong pamilya, Ang akua ra maingon katung wala pa nangapriso likayan ang mga dapat ika prisu ninyu, likays barkada mao nay usas makadaot.* (Trans: "It's painful, lonely, and full of regret. Your family gets destroyed. All I can say to those who haven't been imprisoned yet is to avoid the things that could lead you there. Stay away from bad influences and the wrong crowd, because that's one of the things that can really ruin you.)

These statements illustrate how participants struggled to cognitively process their new reality, often remaining in a state of disbelief during the early period of confinement.

These responses highlight how denial served as a temporary mental escape, helping participants cope with the sudden and drastic change in their circumstances. The findings also reveal a delay in emotional processing, where participants were unable to immediately feel or express the full impact of their situation. Instead of reacting intensely, some described a numb or detached state during the initial phase.

The sub-theme Disbelief and Denial highlight the initial psychological barrier that participants face in coming to terms with incarceration. It underscores how individuals instinctively resist and struggle to comprehend a sudden and life-altering event. While this response may delay emotional processing, it also serves as a protective mechanism that allows individuals to gradually adjust to their new reality. As participants move beyond this stage, the weakening of denial often gives way to more intense emotional reactions and the eventual development of coping strategies. Background Prisoners often experience psychological distress due to incarceration, legal uncertainty, and the disruption of social relationships. These conditions increase the risk of mental health problems, including anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Coping strategies are essential in helping individuals manage these stressors and are key to successful reintegration after release. Objective This study aims to systematically review the coping strategies employed by prisoners in response to psychological distress and to examine their impact on mental health and reintegration outcomes. Methods The research employs a scoping review with PRISMA-ScR (Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses extension for Scoping Reviews) guidelines. Literature searches were performed in Scopus, ProQuest, and ScienceDirect using the

keywords “coping strategy,” “reintegration,” and “prisoner.” Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed articles published between 2000 and 2025. Of the 559 articles identified, 20 studies were included in the final review. Results The findings indicate that prisoners utilize both adaptive and maladaptive coping strategies. Maladaptive strategies such as denial, withdrawal, aggression, and substance use were commonly associated with higher levels of psychological distress. In contrast, adaptive strategies such as problem-solving, cognitive reframing, spiritual coping, and seeking social support were linked to better psychological well-being and improved reintegration outcomes (Kusumastuti, 2026).

Emergent Theme 2: Loss of Freedom and Identity

The emergent theme Loss of Freedom and Identity capture the profound impact of incarceration on the participants’ sense of autonomy, self-concept, and social roles. Upon entering the correctional facility, participants experienced a sudden and overwhelming deprivation of personal freedom, which extended beyond physical confinement to include restrictions on decision-making, privacy, and self-expression. This loss significantly disrupted their perception of self, leading to feelings of diminished dignity, identity confusion, and internal conflict.

Theme 3: Loss of Social Roles and Responsibilities

The sub-theme Loss of Social Roles and Responsibilities emerged as a deeply significant aspect of the participants’ experiences, reflecting the emotional and psychological burden associated with being unable to fulfill their roles within the family and society. Incarceration not only restricted the participants’ physical freedom but also disrupted their capacity to perform essential social functions such as being a parent, partner, provider, or caregiver. This loss created a profound sense of guilt, inadequacy, and emotional distress, as participants became increasingly aware of the impact of their absence on their loved ones. A central finding under this sub-theme is the inability to fulfill familial roles, particularly among participants who identified strongly as providers or caregivers. Many expressed deep concern over their failure to support their families financially and emotionally.

Participant 8 shared:

Lisod jd ako pag adjust dres prisohan ky usa biya ko ka pastor sag awas, usa pd gulang naku, usahay mo taas ako blood pressure tungod sa ka init ug ka guot sa palibot. Una nakung na experience dre naguol ko ngano giing ani ko na usa mn ko ka pastor, pro kabalo ko sa ako hunahuna ug kasingsaking wala ko nag buhat atung salaa.

(Trans: It’s really hard for me to adjust here in prison because, outside, I was a pastor, and I’m already old as well. Sometimes my blood pressure rises because of the heat and the cramped environment. When I first experienced being here, I felt deeply troubled and kept asking why this

happened to me when I'm a pastor. But in my mind and in my conscience, I know I did not commit that sin.)

These narratives highlight how the disruption of parental roles contributes to feelings of helplessness and sorrow.

The findings also reveal a strong sense of guilt and self-blame, as participants reflected on the consequences of their absence. Many expressed regret not only for their actions but also for the hardship their families had to endure.

Participant 6 stated:

lisud jud kaayo lag rajud nang naa ta sa gawas na maka adto ta Bisag Asa, niya ug matulog ka aw dugay jud Kay maghunahuna ko sa gawas sigi ralog hinoktok niya always nako Gina hunahuna na Wla pako ni sulod ani na bisyo Kay Bisag Asa rako maabot sigi ug dula basketball hantud naabot kog siquijor Island ug dula basketball maka mingaw na panahon pero Karon ok nako.

(Trans: It's really very hard. It's different when you're outside and free to go anywhere you want. Then when you try to sleep here, it takes so long because I keep thinking about life outside. I keep overthinking. I always think that before I got into this situation, I never even got involved in vices because I could go anywhere freely. I used to keep playing basketball until I even reached Siquijor Island to play basketball there. I really miss those times. But now, I'm okay already.)

This internalization of responsibility intensified their emotional burden and affected their overall sense of self-worth. Another dimension of this sub-theme is the loss of social identity tied to roles, where participants felt that their value in society was diminished due to their inability to perform expected responsibilities. Being unable to act as a provider, employee, or community member led to a weakened sense of purpose.

The findings show a sense of powerlessness in providing support, as participants were unable to assist their families during times of need. This inability to act reinforced feelings of frustration and helplessness. Despite these challenges, some participants expressed a continued desire to regain and fulfill their roles in the future, indicating that their sense of responsibility remained intact. They viewed their current situation as temporary and expressed determination to make up for lost time once released.

The sub-theme Loss of Social Roles and Responsibilities underscore the significant emotional and psychological impact of being unable to fulfill expected roles within the family and society. It reveals how incarceration disrupts not only individual identity but also relational and social functioning. The participants' experiences highlight the importance of family connections and social roles in maintaining a sense of purpose, identity, and emotional well-being. These findings suggest the need for programs that

support family engagement and role restoration to aid in the adjustment and rehabilitation of persons deprived of liberty.

Theme 4: Internal Conflict Between Past and Present Identity

The sub-theme captures the participants' ongoing psychological struggle to reconcile who they were before incarceration with who they have become within the prison environment. This conflict reflects a deeper level of identity disruption, where individuals experience tension between their former roles, values, and self-perceptions and their current status as persons deprived of liberty. The transition into incarceration does not simply alter external circumstances; it initiates an internal process of questioning, reflection, and identity re-evaluation that can be both distressing and transformative.

A central aspect of this sub-theme is the struggle to reconcile past identity with present reality. Participants frequently expressed difficulty in accepting that their current situation does not align with the person they once perceived themselves to be.

Participant 2 shared:

Ang kinabuhi makos gawas paman pud ko na preso diri ga eskwela ragyud kos gawas nya, nagka bingkil bingkil mi atung akong barkada mao tung nag unay mig pusil mao na akong kaso na kuan, gi atubang. Ang pag adjust nako drew sulod kinahanglan nga antigo ka makisama sa imong mga kaibang priso mosunod sa balaod mao rana syay mga technique.

(Trans: Life outside was fine for me before I got imprisoned. I was just studying outside then. But there was a conflict between me and my group of friends, and it led to a shootout between us. That's the case I ended up facing. As for adjusting inside prison, you really need to learn how to get along with your fellow inmates and follow the rules. Those are basically the techniques for surviving and adapting here.)

These statements illustrate the dissonance between past and present identities, which contributes to emotional distress and confusion.

The findings also reveal feelings of regret and self-blame, as participants looked back on their past actions and acknowledged their role in their current circumstances. This reflection often led to internal conflict, where individuals struggled to come to terms with their mistakes.

Participant 3 stated:

Well, ang difference dako gyud kaayo kay syempre adto ta sa gawas, ang liberty nimo, unlimited. Compare anang masulod ka diri, uh...I mean ang epekto sa kaso, once ma convict pa gyud ka is halos tanan kabtangan nimo

mahurot, ang relasyon maguba.

(Trans: Well, the difference is really huge because, of course, when you're outside, your liberty is unlimited. Compared to being inside here... I mean, the effect of having a case against you especially once you get convicted is that almost everything you own can be lost, and relationships can fall apart.)

Participants also described a sense of internal struggle between change and continuity, wherein they questioned whether they should hold on to their former identity or fully adapt to their current condition. This tension often created emotional instability. In addition, there is evidence of emerging self-awareness and reflection, as participants began to critically examine their actions, values, and identity. While initially distressing, this reflective process also opened opportunities for personal growth. The sub-theme Internal Conflict Between Past and Present Identity highlights the complex psychological process through which individuals attempt to reconcile their past and present selves. It underscores the emotional burden of regret, confusion, and self-reflection, while also revealing the potential for growth and transformation. This internal struggle is a crucial component of the adjustment experience, as it influences how individuals interpret their situation, reconstruct their identity, and prepare for future reintegration. The findings suggest that providing opportunities for guided reflection and psychological support can help individuals navigate this conflict more effectively and facilitate a healthier process of identity reconstruction.

Emergent theme 3: Spiritual Awakening and Meaning-Making

The emergent theme Spiritual Awakening and Meaning-Making reflects a profound shift in the participants' inner lives as they navigated the challenges of incarceration. Faced with emotional distress, loss, and uncertainty, many participants turned to spirituality as a source of comfort, strength, and understanding. This process involved not only engaging in religious practices but also reinterpreting their experiences in a way that provided meaning, purpose, and direction. Through this lens, incarceration was no longer viewed solely as punishment but also as an opportunity for reflection, growth, and transformation. A central aspect of this theme is the turning to faith as a source of strength, where participants relied heavily on prayer and their belief in God to cope with the hardships of prison life. Faith served as an anchor during moments of emotional instability, offering reassurance and a sense of hope.

Theme 5: Turning to Faith as a Source of Strength

The theme Turning to Faith as a Source of Strength highlights the central role of spirituality in helping participants cope with the challenges of incarceration. Faced with emotional distress, uncertainty, and the loss of freedom, many participants turned to their faith as a primary source of comfort, guidance, and resilience. Faith provided not only emotional relief but also a sense of stability and inner strength, enabling individuals to endure the difficulties of prison life.

A key finding within this theme is the reliance on prayer as a coping mechanism. Participants consistently described prayer as a daily practice that helped them manage stress, regulate emotions, and find peace amidst hardship. Through prayer, they were able to express their fears, hopes, and struggles, creating a personal connection with a higher power.

Participant 1 shared, *Pag adjust nako kaning pagpaminaw sa mga pulong sa Ginoo mao rapoy nakalahutay nako ba. "Mao rapud akong gi saligan kay bisan tuod sa kuan kay akong mga pag ampo iya ramn pung gi dungog.* (Trans: My way of adjusting was by listening to the words of God because that was the only thing that truly kept me going. That's also the only thing I held on to, because even in this situation, I believe He still listened to my prayers.)

These statements reflect how prayer functions as both emotional release and psychological support.

The findings also reveal that faith served as a source of inner strength and endurance, enabling participants to cope with the daily struggles of incarceration. Rather than giving in to despair, participants drew strength from their spiritual beliefs to remain resilient.

Participant 2 stated:

Ampo rajud, ampo rajud sa Ginoo, Kinahanglan rajud nga naa kay respetar sa usag usa ba, kabalo bya ka lain lain ug kinaiya mga tawo diri, mao ng kuan rapud ka pa ubos sabton rajud na dayun lihay. Ang akong nakat onan jud nga bisag gabuhat ta og tinarung sulayan jud japon ta mintaha rajud nga magtinarung raka.

(Trans: Just prayers, really praying to God. You truly need to have respect for one another because, you know, people here have different personalities and attitudes. That's why you also need to humble yourself, be understanding, and avoid trouble whenever possible. What I've really learned is that even if we try to live righteously, we will still be tested. The important thing is to continue doing what is right.)

Another dimension of this theme is the development of trust in a higher plan, where participants believed that their situation had a purpose beyond immediate suffering. This belief allowed them to surrender control and accept their circumstances with less resistance. Participants also described faith as a source of hope, particularly in relation to their future and eventual release. Their belief in God reinforced optimism and gave them a sense of direction

The theme reflects emotional healing through spiritual connection, where participants found comfort in surrendering their burdens to God. This process helped reduce emotional pain and foster inner peace. Participants also highlighted participation

in religious activities as a source of encouragement and support. Engaging in group worship, Bible studies, and prayer meetings provided not only spiritual nourishment but also a sense of community within the prison environment. Participant 4 stated, *Mag-apil ko sa mga activity sa simbahan diri kay makahatag ug kusog ug inspirasyon.* (Trans: I join church activities here because they give me strength and inspiration.) This shows how collective faith practices enhance emotional well-being.

The theme Turning to Faith as a Source of Strength demonstrates that spirituality plays a vital role in helping individuals cope with incarceration. Faith provides emotional comfort, psychological resilience, and a framework for understanding their experiences. It allows participants to endure hardship, maintain hope, and develop a sense of purpose despite their circumstances. These findings underscore the importance of integrating spiritual support within correctional settings, as it significantly contributes to the well-being and rehabilitation of persons deprived of liberty.

Theme 6: Acceptance of Circumstances

The theme Acceptance of Circumstances reflects a significant stage in the adjustment process of the participants, where they gradually come to terms with their situation and begin to embrace the reality of incarceration. Unlike the earlier stages characterized by shock, denial, and emotional turmoil, this phase represents a shift toward psychological stability, where individuals reduce resistance and develop a mindset of acceptance. This process does not imply resignation or passivity, but rather a conscious effort to acknowledge reality and adapt in a way that promotes inner peace and emotional balance.

A key aspect of this theme is the gradual acceptance of reality, where participants described a transition from questioning and resisting their situation to acknowledging it as part of their life. This shift often occurred over time, as they became more familiar with the environment and their circumstances.

Participant 4 shared:

akoa nalaman gidawat ba. Ni-ana na laman ko na– Ah.. murag gisalig nalaman nako tanan sa Ginoo. “Lord ikaw nay bahala sa tanan.. Basta uh– maghulat rako sa tamang panahon kung kanus-a ko nimo pagawson”. Dayon karon medyo naka adses nagyud ko kay medyo dugay dugay naman ko. pero gud naa gyuy time na nga murag kanang– uh.. kuan maghinuktok ko... Akoa ra gihapong ibalik nganong– Nganong sa– sa kadaghang tawo.. Nganong.. nganong ako pajud ba. Daghang kriminal.. nya ako, dili ko kriminal. Uh.. kuan kaykos akoga kaugalingon,, ga amping kayko atong didto pako sa gawas na dili ko makasala ana ba. Nya ngano– nganong gitugot gyud sa panahon na... main-ani ko ba. Mao rajud.

(Trans: In the end, I just accepted it. I told myself, Ah... maybe I should just entrust everything to God. Lord, You take care of everything. I'll just

wait for the right time for You to let me out. And now, I've somehow adjusted because I've already been here for quite a long time. But there are still moments when I keep overthinking. I still ask myself, 'Out of all the people, why me? There are so many criminals, and yet I'm not a criminal. I was very careful with myself when I was still outside. I really tried to avoid committing any wrongdoing. So I keep wondering why life allowed this to happen to me. That's really all.)

Closely related to this is the letting go of resistance, where participants stopped questioning "why" and instead focused on how to move forward. This change in mindset reduced emotional distress and allowed them to cope more effectively. This indicates a cognitive shift that supports emotional adjustment.

Another important dimension is the development of inner peace, where acceptance led to a calmer and more stable emotional state. Participants reported that once they accepted their circumstances, they experienced less anxiety and mental distress.

Participant 7 stated:

Whatever the final judgement ready ko mo dawat ana pero dli mawala ang hope naku na someday maka gawas raj d ko. My advice to the fellow youth chooses your friends wisely ky sa barkada jd mag start ang tanan and always listen to your parents ky through ups and down sila ra jd ang naa magpa bilin sa imo tapad.

(Trans: Whatever the final judgment may be, I am ready to accept it. But my hope will never disappear that someday, I will still be able to get out. My advice to fellow youth is to choose your friends wisely because many problems really start with the wrong group of friends. And always listen to your parents because through all the ups and downs, they are the ones who will truly stay by your side.)

The findings also reveal a strong connection between acceptance and faith-based understanding, where participants viewed their situation as part of a higher purpose or divine plan. This perspective helped them find meaning in their experience and facilitated acceptance

The theme Acceptance of Circumstances highlights a crucial turning point in the adjustment experience of persons deprived of liberty. It reflects a transition from emotional resistance to psychological adaptation, where individuals develop inner peace, resilience, and a more constructive outlook. Acceptance enables participants to cope more effectively, reduce emotional distress, and prepare for personal growth and transformation. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering acceptance through psychological support and spiritual guidance within correctional settings, as it plays a vital role in promoting well-being and rehabilitation.

Coping, defined as the thoughts and behaviors used to manage the internal and external demands of situations that are appraised as stressful, has been a focus of research in the social sciences for more than three decades. The dramatic proliferation of coping research has spawned healthy debate and criticism and offered insight into the question of why some individuals fare better than others do when encountering stress in their lives. We briefly review the history of contemporary coping research with adults. We discuss three primary challenges for coping researchers (measurement, nomenclature, and effectiveness), and highlight recent developments in coping theory and research that hold promise for the field, including previously unaddressed aspects of coping, new measurement approaches, and focus on positive affective outcomes (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004).

The findings of the present study are supported by existing literature, which indicates that acceptance plays a crucial role in the adjustment process of incarcerated individuals. Studies have shown that inmates who accept their circumstances are better able to cope with stress and achieve emotional stability (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). Similarly, acceptance is recognized as an effective coping strategy in managing uncontrollable situations, leading to reduced psychological distress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). Furthermore, meaning-making processes enable individuals to interpret their experiences positively, facilitating acceptance and psychological well-being (Park, 2010). In the context of incarceration, acceptance has been identified as a key factor in adapting to institutional life and maintaining emotional balance (Haney, 2003; Liebling & Maruna, 2005).

Emergent Theme 4: Coping Mechanisms and Survival Strategies

The emergent theme Coping Mechanisms and Survival Strategies reflects the active and adaptive processes through which participants managed the psychological, emotional, and social challenges of incarceration. Beyond the initial stages of shock, denial, and emotional turmoil, participants gradually developed various strategies to endure their environment and maintain a sense of stability. These coping mechanisms were not uniform but varied depending on individual experiences, personality, and available support systems. Collectively, they demonstrate that adjustment to incarceration is not a passive process but an ongoing effort to survive and function within a restrictive and often stressful environment.

A key finding under this theme is the establishment of daily routines, which provided participants with a sense of structure and predictability. In an environment where autonomy is limited, creating personal routines helped restore a degree of control over daily life.

Theme 7: Spiritual Coping

The theme highlights the use of faith-based practices and beliefs as a practical and intentional strategy for managing the psychological and emotional challenges of incarceration. While spirituality in earlier themes reflects transformation and meaning-making, in this context it functions as an active coping mechanism—a way for participants

to regulate emotions, reduce stress, and maintain psychological stability in a highly restrictive environment. Participants consistently identified spirituality as one of the most accessible and effective means of coping with daily struggles inside the correctional facility.

A central aspect of this theme is the use of prayer as emotional release and regulation. Participants described prayer as a personal and immediate way to express their fears, frustrations, and hopes. It served as a safe outlet for emotions that could not be openly shared within the prison environment.

Participant 1 shared:

Pag adjust nako kaning pagpaminaw sa mga pulong sa Ginoo mao rapoy nakalahutay nako ba. Mao rapud akong gi saligan kay bisan tuod sa kuan kay akong mga pag ampo iya ramn pung gi dungog. Ampo rajud, ampo rajud sa Ginoo.

(Trans: My way of adjusting was by listening to the words of God because that was the only thing that helped me endure everything. That's also what I held on to because, even in this situation, I believe He still heard my prayers. Just prayers, really—prayers to God.)

Another key finding is the experience of inner peace and comfort through faith, where participants reported feeling calmer and more stable after engaging in spiritual practices. Faith provided reassurance and a sense of security despite the uncertainty of their situation.

The findings also reveal that spirituality served as a source of strength in facing daily challenges. Participants drew resilience from their belief in a higher power, which enabled them to endure difficult situations without losing hope.

Participant 3 shared:

Hana usahay is disiplina, pasensya nimo tapos in times of uh tawag nato nga solemn kaayo or mingaw kaayo ilabi na ma..matulog nami sa gabie...uh...makahinumdom gyud kag panampit sa Ginoo. Tapos diri nakat-on pud kog attend na sa kuan ang Santo Rosario kada adlaw, tapos ang misa kada domingo ug usahay mo attend ko usahay anang mga..kay Catholic man ko nga usahay maka attend pud ko usahay mga ministry diri sa mga grupo. So, ang relationship nimo sa Ginoo nagkaanam kaduol uh matingala nalang ka nga despite sa kakulangan nimo sulod sa prisohan, matingala na laman ka nga nganong abunda gihapon, dili kay ingon nga gipasagdaan sa Ginoo. Oo, tinuod na kung maka storya pako, matay, dako..dako kaayo kog ika share ninyo kung unsa may gigama sa..gibuhay sa Ginoo sa akoo.

(Trans: Sometimes, what really helps is discipline and patience. Then during very solemn or lonely moments, especially when we're about to sleep at night, you really find yourself calling out to God in prayer. Here, I also learned to attend the Holy Rosary every day, and the Mass every Sunday. Since I'm Catholic, I also sometimes attend different ministries and church groups here. Because of that, your relationship with God gradually becomes closer. You eventually realize that despite all the hardships and lack of comfort inside prison, God still provides abundantly. You begin to understand that He has not abandoned you. Honestly, if I could keep talking about it, I would have so much to share about what God has done in my life.)

The theme Spiritual Coping demonstrates that spirituality functions as a powerful and multidimensional coping strategy among persons deprived of liberty. It provides emotional relief, psychological stability, and a framework for managing stress and uncertainty. Through prayer, faith, and spiritual engagement, participants are able to regulate their emotions, maintain hope, and develop resilience in the face of adversity. These findings highlight the importance of integrating spiritual support and programs within correctional facilities, as they play a vital role in promoting well-being and facilitating positive adjustment among incarcerated individuals. Approximately 80% of research on R/S and health involves studies on mental health. One would expect stronger relationships between R/S and mental health since R/S involvement consists of psychological, social, and behavioral aspects that are more "proximally" related to mental health than to physical health. In fact, we would not expect any direct or immediate effects of R/S on physical health, other than indirectly through intermediary psychosocial and behavioral pathways. With regard to mental health, we would expect R/S to boost positive emotions and help neutralize negative emotions, hypothesizing that it serves as both a life-enhancing factor and as a coping resource. With regard to the latter, there is both qualitative and quantitative research suggesting that R/S helps people to deal better with adversity, either external adversity difficult environmental circumstances or internal adversity genetic predisposition or vulnerability to mental disorders.

The findings of the present study are supported by existing literature, which identifies spirituality as a significant coping mechanism among individuals experiencing stress. According to Pargament (1997), religious coping involves the use of faith, prayer, and belief in a higher power to manage emotional distress. Empirical studies further demonstrate that positive religious coping is associated with reduced anxiety and improved psychological well-being (Pargament et al., 1998). In the context of incarceration, religion has been shown to facilitate adjustment by providing meaning, emotional support, and behavioral stability among inmates (Clear & Sumter, 2002). Moreover, spirituality has been linked to better mental health outcomes, including reduced depression and enhanced resilience (Koenig, 2012). These findings affirm that spiritual coping plays a vital role in helping persons deprived of liberty manage the challenges of imprisonment.

Theme 8: Self-Discipline and Behavioral Adjustment

The theme reflects the participants' conscious efforts to regulate their behavior, conform to institutional expectations, and develop personal control as a means of coping with incarceration. Within the structured and rule-bound environment of the correctional facility, participants recognized the necessity of adapting their actions, attitudes, and decision-making processes in order to maintain safety, avoid conflict, and achieve a more stable daily life. This adjustment process highlights not only compliance with external rules but also the development of internal discipline and self-regulation.

A central aspect of this theme is the conscious adherence to institutional rules and regulations, where participants emphasized the importance of following guidelines to prevent punishment and maintain order. Compliance was often viewed as a practical strategy for survival.

Participant 1 shared:

Kinahanglan rajud nga naa kay respetar sa usag usa ba, kabalo bya ka lain lain ug kinaiya mga tawo diri, mao ng kuan rapud ka pa ubos sabton rajud na dayun lihay. Ang akong nakat onan jud nga bisag gabuhat ta og tinarung sulayan jud japon ta mintaha rajud nga magtinarung raka. Ang akong nakat onan jud nga bisag gabuhat ta og tinarung sulayan jud japon ta mintaha rajud nga magtinarung raka. Bilid rapud kos akong kinamagulangan kay bisan tuod sa una wapako na priso mo ingon sya sa akona "sauna pa kaon uli tulog kaon uli tulog" karon ang responsibilidad ta dili angay ma responsibilidad niya karon, munang gi kuan pud ko niya, ni bilib pud ko niya nga mao lage kuno sauna lage kuno kaon tulog laag hayahay mao pud iyang pagkakuan ba bintaha rapuds uban pud.

(Trans: You really need to have respect for one another because, as you know, people here have different personalities and attitudes. That's why you need to humble yourself, be understanding, and avoid trouble whenever possible. What I've truly learned is that even if we live righteously and do what is right, we will still be tested. The important thing is to continue choosing to live properly. I also learned a lot from my older sibling. Even before I was imprisoned, he used to tell me, 'Before, your life was just eaten, go home, sleep—eat, go home, sleep.' But now, the responsibilities that should have been mine ended up becoming his responsibility. That's why I came to admire and appreciate him more. He made me realize that before, I was living carelessly and comfortably, while now others are carrying burdens that should have been mine.)

The theme Self-Discipline and Behavioral Adjustment illustrates the active role of participants in shaping their behavior to adapt to the demands of incarceration. It highlights the development of self-control, responsibility, and awareness as essential components of survival and adjustment. These findings suggest that fostering discipline

and positive behavioral change within correctional settings can significantly contribute to rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society.

Participant 2 also stated

Ang pag adjust nako drew sulod kinahanglan nga antigo ka makisama sa imong mga kaibang priso mosunod sa balaod mao rana syay mga technique." Lisud jud matig relasyon sa kay lahi lahi man mog batasan nya ikaw sa gawas wala pud kay kabalo nga di diay gamiton, lahi lahi man gud tag rules sa gawas og sa sulod Kay og sa gawas pede Raman didto naay, naay mo buyag nimo didto pede ra nimog balewala ra nimo ireject ra nimo pag ari dre dre sa sulod naka dili pud pwede na dili ka mo sunod dili ka pede na Dili maminaw kinahanglan jud nimo nga unsay ibuyag nimo buhaton gud nimo.

(Trans: You really need to respect one another because people here have different personalities and attitudes. That's why you need to stay humble, be understanding, and avoid trouble whenever possible. What I've learned is that even if we try to live honestly and do what is right, life will still test us. The important thing is to keep choosing the right path. I also learned a lot from my older sibling. Even before I was imprisoned, he used to tell me that my life was just "eat, go home, sleep" without much responsibility. Now, the responsibilities that should have been mine have become his burden instead. Because of that, I came to admire and appreciate him more. I realized that before, I was living too comfortably and carefree, while now other people are carrying responsibilities that should have been mine.)

The findings of the present study are supported by existing literature, which emphasizes the importance of self-discipline and behavioral adjustment in the prison environment. Incarcerated individuals are required to regulate their behavior and conform to institutional rules in order to maintain stability and avoid conflict (Haney, 2003). Similarly, Zamble and Porporino (1988) found that inmates develop behavioral control and adaptive strategies as part of the adjustment process. The concept of self-control further explains that individuals who are able to regulate their actions are more likely to exhibit positive behavior and avoid negative consequences (Gottfredson & Hirschi, 1990). In addition, behavioral adjustment is influenced by environmental conditions and learned experiences, where individuals modify their actions based on observation and consequences (Bandura, 1977; Toch, 1992). These findings support the idea that self-discipline is both a survival strategy and a pathway toward personal development among persons deprived of liberty.

Emergent Theme 5: Hope, Change, and Personal Transformation

The emergent theme Hope, Change, and Personal Transformation capture the participants' progression from initial distress and adjustment toward a more positive and

future-oriented outlook. Despite the restrictive and challenging conditions of incarceration, many participants demonstrated the capacity to develop hope, reflect on their past actions, and pursue meaningful personal change. This theme highlights that imprisonment, while often associated with hardship, can also serve as a catalyst for self-reflection, growth, and transformation.

A central aspect of this theme is the renewed sense of hope, where participants expressed belief in the possibility of a better future. Hope served as a psychological anchor that enabled them to endure daily challenges and maintain emotional stability.

Theme 9: Learning from Experience

The theme Learning from Experience reflects the participants' ability to derive insight, meaning, and personal growth from their incarceration. Rather than viewing their situation solely as punishment, many participants interpreted their experiences as significant life lessons that shaped their perspectives, values, and future decisions. This theme highlights a critical shift from passive suffering to active reflection, where individuals begin to understand the consequences of their actions and use this understanding as a foundation for change.

A central aspect of this theme is the recognition of past mistakes, where participants demonstrated awareness of the actions that led to their incarceration. This recognition was often accompanied by a sense of accountability and responsibility. Participant 5 shared, *Follow the law properly. Do your duties the right way. Don't abuse power. Especially for those in authority like police, don't overuse your power. Always act justly and maintain peace. Also, stay away from bad influences and pray to God.*

Another important dimension is the understanding of consequences, where participants recognized the direct impact of their actions on themselves and others. This awareness reinforced their motivation to avoid repeating similar behavior.

Another key aspect is the development of better decision-making skills, where participants reported becoming more cautious and thoughtful in their choices. They emphasized the importance of thinking before acting. Participant 7, also noted, *my advice to the fellow youth chooses your friends wisely ky sa barkada jd mag start ang tanan and always listen to your parents ky through ups and down sila ra jd ang naa magpa bilin sa imong tapad.* (Trans: My advice to fellow youth is to choose your friends wisely because many problems begin with the wrong circle of friends. And always listen to your parents because through all the ups and downs in life, they are the ones who will truly remain by your side.) This indicates behavioral improvement based on learned experience.

Participants also demonstrated value reorientation, where their priorities and beliefs shifted as a result of their experiences. They began to appreciate family, freedom, and personal responsibility more deeply.

The theme Learning from Experience demonstrates that incarceration can serve

as a powerful context for reflection and personal development. Through recognizing mistakes, understanding consequences, and reframing their experiences, participants were able to gain valuable insights that shaped their behavior and outlook on life.

These findings emphasize the importance of reflective opportunities and rehabilitative programs within correctional settings, as they facilitate learning, accountability, and long-term behavioral change among persons deprived of liberty.

The findings of the present study are supported by existing literature, which emphasizes the role of experience and reflection in learning and behavioral change. According to Kolb (1984), experiential learning occurs when individuals reflect on their experiences and use them as a basis for personal development. In the context of incarceration, inmates learn from the consequences of their actions and adjust their behavior accordingly (Zamble & Porporino, 1988). Social Learning Theory further explains that individuals acquire new behaviors through observation and experience (Bandura, 1977). Moreover, Maruna (2001) highlights that personal transformation among offenders involves reflecting on past mistakes and reconstructing one's identity toward a more positive direction. Similarly, cognitive transformation theory suggests that behavioral change begins with recognizing one's past actions and developing a new perspective on life (Giordano et al., 2002). These studies affirm that learning from experience is a crucial component of personal growth and rehabilitation among persons deprived of liberty.

Theme 10: Behavioral change and Discipline

The theme reflects the participants deliberate efforts to modify their actions, regulate their behavior, and cultivate discipline as part of their adjustment and transformation during incarceration. This theme goes beyond mere compliance with institutional rules and highlights a deeper internal shift, where individuals develop self-control, responsibility, and a commitment to living differently. Through reflection and experience, participants recognized the importance of discipline not only for survival within the correctional facility but also as a foundation for personal growth and future reintegration into society.

A central aspect of this theme is the development of self-control, where participants learned to manage their impulses, emotions, and reactions. This was particularly evident in situations involving anger, frustration, or conflict.

Participant 3 shared:

naa tay ginatawag nga padler sa kuan sa selda and then way labot na uh sa selda. If ang usa ka violator is a member of a gang uh tulo man mi diri ka miyembro is ang Batman, bc fourthy five, ug uh bcj, ah naa pa diay ug bm. Batang Mindanao, batang Cebu, ug uh batang City Jail tapos Batman. So, kanang upat ana, kung kinsa ang tawo ana na naka violate, ang imong pangkat napud muoy mo takal napud nimo usob, usban napud ka kay

pakaulaw na sa pangkat nimo kay wa kay disiplina. So, moy..in-ana ang mahitabo diri...ang..ang ginatan-aw sa uban sa tawo nga bako basagulero ang mga piniriso, dili na sayop na na...nga panan-aw nila, wala sila kabalo ug unsa ang piniriso, kung giunsa mi diri pag disiplina, giunsa mi pagtudlo nga hatagag pinakataas nga pasensya. Ana tulisokon raka, usahay tiunan paka, so sulod sa [pinsan] nimo pareha ratag piniriso ngano mahadlok man ko nimo in-ana.

(Trans: We have what is called a ‘padler’ inside the cell, someone responsible for maintaining order within the group. If a violator belongs to a gang, there are four groups here: Batman, BC Forty-Five, BCJ, and BM—which stands for Batang Mindanao, Batang Cebu, Batang City Jail, and Batman. If a member of one of these groups commits a violation, their own group will also discipline or punish them because it brings shame to the group and shows a lack of discipline. That’s how things work here. People outside often think that prisoners are automatically troublemakers or violent people, but that perception is not entirely correct. They do not really know what life is like inside prison—how we are disciplined here, and how we are taught to have the highest level of patience. Sometimes people provoke you, insult you, or even threaten you, but since we are all prisoners inside anyway, you learn not to be intimidated easily.)

The findings also reveal the importance of discipline as a daily practice, where participants incorporated structured habits and responsible behavior into their routine. Discipline became a guiding principle in how they approached daily life.

Participant 2 noted:

diri sa NORDC, ma feel na nimo nga mura ug makita nato sa salida usahay naay mga binuang gyud ba, kanang pa isog isog, kanang [hulgahon] ka in-ana, but, all of a sudden, pag sulod nako diri is lahi. So, nasulod sa akong huna-huna nako pirmero is basi ma sumbatan ko ug basin makabalos pud ko, unya basig tabangan ko in-ana, ang proseso diay sa sulod sa selda is respetuhon gyapon ka kay pareha ramong nga piniriso, but not to the extent nga maghimo ka ug...over the kuan na kanang over the uh rules na nila nga magpasikil sa ka which is lahi na, makabatgyudkagsakit.Naayrulesangmgaselda.

(Trans: Here in Negros Oriental District Jail, you start to realize that what we usually see in movies people acting tough, threatening others, or bullying inmates—is not always true. When I first came here, those were also the thoughts in my mind. I thought maybe I would be hurt, that I might need to fight back, or that groups might gang up on me. But once I entered the cell, I realized it was different. People still respect you because all of you are prisoners living the same situation. However, that respect only remains as long as you also respect the rules. If you go beyond the rules

or try to act arrogant and disruptive, then you will really face consequences. There are rules inside the cells that everyone is expected to follow.)

This demonstrates how the prison environment can reinforce structured behavior, participants described learning from consequences, where past experiences of punishment or hardship influenced their decision to adopt disciplined behavior. This learning process reinforced their commitment to change.

The theme Behavioral Change and Discipline illustrate the participants' active role in reshaping their behavior and developing self-control as part of their transformation. It shows that discipline is not merely imposed by the institution but gradually internalized as a personal value. These findings emphasize the importance of fostering self-discipline and behavioral change within correctional settings, as they play a crucial role in rehabilitation and successful reintegration into society. The findings of the present study are supported by existing literature, which highlights the role of self-discipline and behavioral change in the adjustment process of incarcerated individuals. According to Gottfredson and Hirschi (1990), self-control is a key factor in regulating behavior and preventing deviant actions. Cognitive transformation theory further explains that behavioral change begins with self-reflection and the decision to adopt new patterns of thinking and action (Giordano et al., 2002). In the context of incarceration, inmates develop discipline as part of their adaptation to institutional rules and environmental demands (Zamble & Porporino, 1988; Toch, 1992). Moreover, behavioral change is reinforced through learning from consequences and observing others, as explained by social learning theory (Bandura, 1977). These studies affirm that discipline is not only externally imposed but can also be internally developed, contributing to personal transformation and rehabilitation among persons deprived of liberty.

DISCUSSION

Initial Shock and Psychological Disorientation, the participants on this study describes the immediate emotional and cognitive reaction experienced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) upon entering prison. It is characterized by overwhelming shock, confusion, fear, and disorientation as individuals transition abruptly from freedom to a highly controlled and unfamiliar environment.

Emotional Turmoil, this subtheme captures the intense and conflicting emotions experienced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) during the initial stage of incarceration. Emotional turmoil reflects a state of inner chaos, where individuals struggle to manage overwhelming feelings brought about by sudden confinement and separation from their previous lives.

Disbelief and Denial, this subtheme reflects the initial psychological defense response of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) upon incarceration, characterized by difficulty accepting the reality of their situation. Disbelief and denial serve as coping

mechanisms that temporarily protect individuals from the overwhelming emotional impact of confinement.

Loss of Freedom and Identity, this theme captures the profound sense of restriction and identity disruption experienced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) as they adjust to incarceration. It reflects how confinement not only limits physical movement but also reshapes an individual's sense of self, roles, and personal autonomy.

Loss of Social Roles and Responsibilities, this subtheme reflects the disruption and absence of meaningful roles experienced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) as a result of incarceration. It highlights how confinement separates individuals from their responsibilities as family members, providers, and active participants in society.

Internal Conflict Between Past and Present Identity, this subtheme reflects the psychological struggle experienced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) as they attempt to reconcile their former identity as free individuals with their current identity as prisoners. It highlights the inner tension that arises when individuals compare who they used to be with who they have become inside the prison environment.

Spiritual Awakening and Meaning-Making, this theme reflects the process by which persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) turn inward and upward, seeking spiritual connection, purpose, and understanding in response to the challenges of incarceration. It highlights how confinement becomes a catalyst for personal reflection, faith development, and reinterpretation of life experiences.

Turning to Faith as a Source of Strength, this subtheme reflects how persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) rely on faith and spirituality as a primary source of emotional strength, comfort, and resilience during incarceration. In the face of isolation, uncertainty, and distress, faith becomes a stabilizing force that helps individuals endure and cope with their situation.

Acceptance of Circumstances, this subtheme reflects the process by which persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) gradually come to acknowledge and accept their current situation. Acceptance marks a shift from resistance and emotional struggle toward a state of inner calm, understanding, and psychological adjustment within the prison environment.

Coping Mechanisms and Survival Strategies, this theme captures the various ways persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) adapt, manage stress, and survive within the prison environment. It highlights the practical and psychological strategies individuals develop to cope with the challenges of incarceration and maintain their well-being.

Spiritual Coping, this subtheme reflects how persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) utilize spiritual beliefs and practices as a means of coping with the emotional, psychological, and situational challenges of incarceration. Spiritual coping serves as an internal support system, helping individuals manage distress and maintain hope despite

difficult circumstances.

Self-Discipline and Behavioral Adjustment, this subtheme reflects how persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) develop self-control and modify their behavior in order to adapt to the structured and rule-bound environment of incarceration. It highlights the importance of discipline and compliance as essential strategies for maintaining order, avoiding conflict, and ensuring survival within the prison setting.

Hope, Change, and Personal Transformation, this theme reflects the positive psychological shift experienced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) as they move beyond initial distress and begin to rebuild their sense of self, develop hope, and pursue personal change. It highlights how incarceration, despite its challenges, can become an opportunity for growth, reflection, and transformation.

Learning from Experience, this subtheme reflects how persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) gain insights and lessons from their incarceration, leading to increased self-awareness, reflection, and personal growth. It highlights how individuals interpret their experiences as opportunities to learn from past mistakes and reshape their future decisions.

Behavioral Change and Discipline, this subtheme reflects the observable and intentional changes in behavior among persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) as they adapt to incarceration and commit to becoming better individuals. It highlights how discipline evolves from mere compliance with rules into a conscious effort toward personal reform and responsible living.

Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of persons deprived of liberty through a phenomenological approach, focusing on how they adjust to incarceration. The findings revealed that adjustment is a multi-stage and dynamic process, shaped by emotional, psychological, social, and spiritual factors.

At the onset of incarceration, participants experienced initial shock and psychological disorientation, characterized by disbelief, fear, confusion, and emotional turmoil. These early reactions reflect the abrupt disruption of their normal lives and the overwhelming nature of confinement. As individuals confronted the reality of their situation, they encountered a profound loss of freedom and identity, where autonomy, personal roles, and self-worth were significantly diminished. This loss extended beyond physical confinement and affected their sense of self and purpose.

Despite these challenges, participants actively developed coping mechanisms and survival strategies to manage their environment. These included emotional regulation, avoidance of conflict, establishing routines, forming social connections, and engaging in productive activities. Such strategies demonstrate that adjustment is not passive but involves conscious effort and adaptation.

A significant aspect of the findings is the role of spirituality in the adjustment process. Through spiritual awakening, meaning-making, and faith-based coping, participants were able to reinterpret their experiences, find comfort, and maintain hope. Themes such as turning to faith as a source of strength, acceptance of circumstances, and spiritual coping highlight how spirituality contributes to emotional stability and resilience.

Furthermore, the study revealed a transformative dimension of incarceration, where participants demonstrated hope, personal change, and growth. Through reflection, they learned from their experiences, recognized their mistakes, and developed a stronger sense of responsibility and discipline.

Themes such as learning from experience and behavioral change indicate that incarceration can serve as a turning point for self-improvement and identity reconstruction.

Overall, the findings suggest that the adjustment experiences of persons deprived of liberty follow a trajectory from initial distress and identity disruption toward adaptation, meaning-making, and potential transformation. While incarceration presents significant hardships, it also provides opportunities for reflection, growth, and behavioral change when supported by effective coping strategies and spiritual resources.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study on the adjustment experiences of persons deprived of liberty, the following recommendations are proposed to support their psychological well-being, rehabilitation, and successful reintegration into society:

1. For Correctional Facility Administrators

Correctional institutions should strengthen programs that address the initial psychological impact of incarceration, particularly during the early stages of confinement. Orientation programs, psychological debriefing, and mental health support services should be provided to help inmates manage shock, fear, and emotional turmoil. Creating a structured and supportive environment can ease the transition and reduce distress.

2. For Mental Health Professionals

Psychologists, counselors, and social workers should implement regular counseling sessions and emotional support interventions for persons deprived of liberty. Programs focusing on emotional regulation, stress management, and coping skills are essential in helping inmates deal with anxiety, depression, and identity loss. Special attention should be given to individuals in their early stage of incarceration.

3. For Spiritual and Religious Organizations

Given the significant role of spirituality in coping and transformation, religious

groups and chaplaincy services should continue and expand faith-based programs, such as prayer meetings, Bible studies, and spiritual counseling. These activities provide emotional comfort, promote hope, and support personal transformation among inmates.

4. For Rehabilitation Program Developers

Correctional facilities should enhance rehabilitation and skills development programs that promote personal growth, discipline, and responsibility. Educational programs, vocational training, and structured activities can help inmates develop productive habits and prepare for life after release. These programs also reinforce behavioral change and self-discipline.

5. For Family and Community Support Systems

Efforts should be made to strengthen family connections and communication between inmates and their loved ones. Regular visitation, communication programs, and family support initiatives can help reduce feelings of isolation and motivate inmates to pursue positive change. Families play a crucial role in reinforcing hope and transformation.

6. For Policy Makers

Government agencies should develop policies that prioritize holistic rehabilitation rather than punishment alone. This includes improving prison conditions, ensuring access to mental health services, and supporting reintegration programs. Policies should focus on reducing recidivism by addressing the root causes of criminal behavior and supporting personal development.

7. For Future Researchers

Future studies are encouraged to explore the long-term effects of incarceration on identity and mental health, as well as the role of family and community reintegration after release. Researchers may also conduct comparative studies between different correctional facilities and pursue quantitative validation of the themes identified in this study. These future investigations will further enrich the understanding of inmate experiences and contribute to the development of evidence-based interventions and support programs for persons deprived of liberty.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

This study strictly adhered to ethical principles in conducting research involving human participants, particularly considering the vulnerable status of inmates. Prior to data collection, ethical approval was obtained from the appropriate institutional review board or ethics committee. Permission is also secured from the concerned prison authorities to conduct the study within the correctional facility.

Informed consent was obtained from all participants before their involvement in the study. The researcher clearly explains the purpose of the study, data collection procedures, potential risks and benefits, and the voluntary nature of participation. Participants were informed that they have the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time without any form of penalty or consequence.

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