



Living Behind Bars: A Phenomenological Inquiry into the Lived Experiences and Adaptation of Persons Deprived of Liberty

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Abstract

This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), focusing on their sense of autonomy, adaptation, and coping within the prison environment. Specifically, it examined how PDLs perceived personal autonomy and control and how they adapted to institutional conditions, daily routines, and challenges during incarceration. The study was conducted at the Northern Samar Provincial Jail, Allen Sub-Provincial Jail, and Laoang Sub-Provincial Jail using a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design. Purposively selected PDLs participated in in-depth, semi-structured interviews, and the data were analyzed through descriptive phenomenological analysis. Findings revealed that despite significant institutional restrictions, PDLs maintained a meaningful sense of autonomy by exercising choice in self-care, religious practices, livelihood participation, and daily routines, enabling them to preserve dignity, identity, and hope. However, autonomy remained constrained by institutional regulations, with compliance often motivated by the desire to obtain Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA), facilitate early release, and avoid disciplinary sanctions. While disciplinary measures promoted institutional order, they appeared to encourage fear-based compliance rather than genuine behavioral transformation. Participants gradually adapted to prison life through acceptance of incarceration, adherence to structured routines, support from fellow inmates and correctional personnel, and hope for eventual reintegration into society. Nevertheless, adaptation was challenged by prolonged judicial proceedings, financial hardship, inadequate family support, and perceived inequities in healthcare access, which negatively affected their well-being. The findings indicate that meaningful rehabilitation requires balancing institutional discipline with opportunities for personal agency, equitable access to essential services, and supportive interventions that strengthen resilience and uphold human dignity. The study concludes that correctional institutions should adopt rehabilitative approaches that foster personal growth alongside institutional security to better prepare PDLs for successful reintegration into society. These findings served as the basis for the development of a proposed intervention program to enhance rehabilitation outcomes.

Keywords: Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), autonomy, prison adaptation, rehabilitation, phenomenology, correctional institutions.

Introduction

Deprivation of liberty results in significant emotional, psychological, physical, and social suffering among Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs). Beyond the loss of physical freedom, incarceration entails separation from family and community, loss of identity and social status, restricted access to the outside world, diminished security, and disruption of personal aspirations, all of which profoundly affect an individual's well-being (Morales *et al.*, 2025; Shammas, 2017). These hardships often lead to anxiety, depression, and emotional distress caused by the pressures of prison life and uncertainty about the future (Morin, 2025; Quandt & Jones, 2021). Prolonged imprisonment may also reshape a person's identity, weaken their sense of purpose, and hinder successful reintegration into society, particularly when adequate psychological support is lacking (Haney, 2021).

In the Philippines, correctional facilities, particularly in rural provinces such as Northern Samar, face distinct challenges compared with those in urban areas. Limited resources, overcrowding, and inadequate rehabilitation programs affect

the quality of prison life and the effectiveness of inmate rehabilitation (Marano, 2024). Despite growing literature on incarceration in the Philippines, existing studies have primarily focused on national penitentiaries and urban jails, leaving the experiences of PDLs in provincial jails largely underexplored. Since provincial jails are administered by local governments rather than the Bureau of Corrections, they may differ considerably in their management practices and inmate welfare.

This study addresses this gap by examining the lived experiences of PDLs in Northern Samar's provincial jails, focusing on prison conditions, access to basic services, psychological well-being, institutional treatment, rehabilitation programs, interpersonal relationships, daily routines, challenges, and coping mechanisms. The findings aim to contribute to localized criminal justice reforms, improve jail management, and promote humane treatment of PDLs.

The study highlights three correctional facilities in Northern Samar. The Northern Samar Provincial Jail (NSPJ) in Bobon

underwent a major facility upgrade in 2025, providing improved accommodation, sanitation, accessibility, security systems, and rehabilitation facilities that support health, vocational training, and inmate development (NorthernSamar.gov, 2025). In contrast, the Allen Sub-Provincial Jail continues to face serious structural, sanitation, lighting, and security deficiencies despite housing 106 PDLs, prompting recommendations for comprehensive facility improvements (Northern Samar Provincial Legal Office, 2025). Similarly, the Laoang Sub-Provincial Jail, which houses 77 detainees, continues to operate with limited infrastructure and rehabilitation resources, highlighting its vulnerability during emergencies and disease outbreaks (Northern Samar Provincial Legal Office, 2025).

Despite international frameworks promoting the humane treatment of incarcerated individuals, a significant gap remains in research and policy implementation concerning rural and under-resourced correctional facilities such as those in Northern Samar. International organizations, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the World Health Organization (WHO), advocate standards such as the UN Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (Nelson Mandela Rules), emphasizing humane treatment, healthcare, and rehabilitation (UNODC, 2022; ICRC, 2021; WHO, 2021). However, the implementation of these standards in remote and resource-limited facilities remains insufficiently documented.

Most international prison research focuses on large urban detention centers, leaving provincial jails largely absent from the global literature. Consequently, the realities of inmates in rural settings remain underrepresented, limiting the development of context-sensitive correctional policies (Langley, 2023). Likewise, although prison health is recognized as a public health concern, little research examines the mental health of inmates in rural correctional facilities, where anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), loss of purpose, and social isolation may be intensified by strong family and community ties (WHO, 2025). Furthermore, international prison standards often assume adequate infrastructure, staffing, and financial resources, conditions that are frequently lacking in developing and rural regions. Organizations such as Penal Reform International and the World Prison Brief provide valuable statistical information, yet qualitative studies exploring inmates lived experiences, coping strategies, and reintegration remain scarce. This study addresses these international research gaps by documenting the experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in Northern Samar and supporting the achievement of Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 3 (Good Health and Well-being), 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and 16 (Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions) (United Nations, 2015).

At the national level, the Philippine correctional system continues to experience chronic overcrowding, inadequate rehabilitation services, poor living conditions, and limited mental health support. Many facilities operate far beyond their intended capacity, negatively affecting the welfare and rehabilitation of PDLs (Bureau of Jail Management and Penology [BJMP], 2024). However, most Philippine studies focus on urban jails and emphasize quantitative indicators such as inmate population and facility capacity. Limited qualitative research examines inmates' lived experiences, emotional and psychological struggles, coping mechanisms, and the "pains of imprisonment," particularly in rural jails (Painaga & Parreño, 2025; Alipoyo, 2022). Consequently,

evidence-based policies often fail to reflect the unique circumstances of rural provinces despite reform initiatives by agencies such as the Commission on Human Rights (CHR) and the Department of Justice (DOJ).

At the local level, Northern Samar's provincial and sub-provincial jails remain largely understudied despite facing challenges associated with geographic isolation, poverty, and limited institutional resources. Cultural values, including strong family ties, religious beliefs, and close-knit communities, may intensify the psychological burden of incarceration. Under the Local Government Code of 1991 (Republic Act No. 7160), the provincial government is responsible for managing provincial jails, including funding operations, appointing personnel, and providing essential services. This responsibility is reflected in the construction of the modern Northern Samar Provincial Jail, which features improved infrastructure, enhanced security, accessibility, and rehabilitation facilities (NorthernSamar.gov, 2025). The provincial government also collaborates with agencies such as TESDA, DSWD, and the Provincial Health Office to implement livelihood, education, health, and reintegration programs. Nevertheless, deficiencies in facilities such as the Allen Sub-Provincial Jail highlight the need for stronger monitoring, maintenance, and investment by the local government (Northern Samar Provincial Legal Office, 2025).

Given these international, national, and local research gaps, this study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of the lived experiences of PDLs in Northern Samar. By documenting their emotional, psychological, and social realities, the study aims to contribute to more humane, inclusive, and evidence-based correctional policies while ensuring that the voices of marginalized incarcerated individuals are represented in prison reform efforts.

This study seeks to explore, through a phenomenological lens, the lived experiences, adaptation, and personal growth of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs). Specifically, it aims to understand how PDLs perceive and describe their personal sense of autonomy and control within the prison environment despite institutional restrictions. It also examines how they experience and adapt to prison life by navigating daily routines, overcoming challenges, and adjusting to institutional conditions.

This study covered on how PDLs describe their personal sense of autonomy and control while inside the prison environment, how they experience and adapt to the prison environment in terms of mastering daily routines, challenges, and institutional conditions.

The persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) of the different correctional facilities of Northern Samar were included in this study, particularly five from Northern Samar Provincial Jail, two from Allen Sub-Provincial Jail, and five from Laoang Sub-Provincial Jail. Persons deprived of liberty who were presently under the custody of the jail facilities and spent at least three years therein during the conduct of the study were included. The study was conducted from October, 2025 to January, 2026. Willingness and cooperation of the respondents were considered constraint of the study. However, no unwilling participants were encountered during the study.

Materials and Methods

This study employed a qualitative descriptive phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in Northern Samar. Guided by the phenomenological approaches of Husserl,

Giorgi, and van Manen, the study sought to understand how PDLs experience autonomy, adaptation, coping, relationships, personal growth, and rehabilitation while incarcerated. Data were gathered through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, allowing participants to describe their experiences in their own words.

A purposive sampling technique was used to recruit 12 PDLs who had been incarcerated for at least three years and met the study's inclusion criteria. Participants were drawn from the Northern Samar Provincial Jail, Allen Sub-Provincial Jail, and Laoang Sub-Provincial Jail. Interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and supplemented with field notes. The interview guide underwent expert validation and pilot testing prior to data collection.

Data collection was conducted from October 2025 to January 2026 following approval from the provincial jail authorities. Data analysis followed a descriptive phenomenological approach, involving bracketing, repeated reading of transcripts, horizontalization, thematic clustering, imaginative variation, and synthesis to identify the essential meanings of participants' lived experiences.

The study adhered to ethical research standards by securing institutional permission, obtaining informed consent from all participants, ensuring voluntary participation, maintaining confidentiality and anonymity, and safeguarding all collected data throughout the research process. This study was achieved with the help of Artificial Intelligence-generated information and data.

Results and Discussions

Lived Experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty

The phenomenological study of the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) reveals the holistic condition of both the individuals and the Philippine justice system. Specifically, it provides a framework for understanding the emotional, psychological, and relational states of PDLs, which is instrumental in developing systems and institutional conditions to uplift their lives.

Utilizing a qualitative descriptive phenomenological approach, this study extracted narratives of lived experiences from within prison walls, focusing on personal autonomy, and adaptation. Following the descriptive phenomenological design, these narratives were gathered without external influence or prior preconceptions that might bias the interpretation. By successfully gathering 12 (twelve) narratives from the Northern Samar Provincial Jail, Allen Sub-Provincial Jail, and Laoang Sub-Provincial Jail, the study highlights the realities of the PDL experience within these correctional facilities.

This collection of narratives provides crucial data for reconstituting jail programs, activities, and strategies to ensure they effectively respond to the needs of PDLs. Once programs and correctional methods become responsive to these immediate needs, they will further improve the holistic growth, skills, and attitudes necessary for the individuals' future reintegration into society.

How do PDLs describe their personal sense of autonomy and control while inside the prison environment?

Perception of Choice and Control in Prison Setting

Inquiring whether PDLs maintain personal autonomy while deprived of liberty may seem contradictory. However, exercising autonomy over personal choices that foster self-improvement while being incarcerated helps preserve the

dignity and identity essential for their eventual return to the community.

PDLs continue to exercise autonomy in regard to essential activities of daily living, such as eating, bathing, and sleeping. P9 identified basic personal decisions and activities over which he still maintains control. P12 expressed a similar level of autonomy.

"Kay halimbawa mayaon kuan halimbawa manginano ak saak kalugaringon. kay urog kasi didi activity, syempre kailangan mo man liwat maglaba o nano pa na im kailangan para saim kalugaringon. iton an danay makontrol ko man."

"For example, there is uhm, for example I take care of myself, what happens here mostly is activity, of course you also need to do laundry or other things for yourself, with those things, I do have autonomy."

P12 expressed a similar level of autonomy.

"Ano la an akon pagmamata ko, parigo muna ako siton. Pagmata ko diretso ako sa simbahan mag ano la manguros la ako didto. Pagkahoman balik na sa selda ko."

"After waking up, I shower. After I get up, I go straight to church. do the sign of the cross there. After, I go back to my cell."

Personal autonomy is also exercised through religious practice and the expression of faith.

"Sugad siton sa pagmata yaon gehapon may gehapon pagbuhat saimo sarili na higdaan, makaon, dikan pangampo man gehapon antis ma kuan pangampo gehapon sa ginoo na mabuligan kit sini nga problema."

"Like after waking up, I get up from my own bed, eat, then of course pray, pray to God to help us with this problem."

"Kay ako saak kalugaringon na desisyon, kay pag gagawas ko man siton mapakadto ak sa sulod sa simbahan, nahihimo akon kuan dayun sa kalugaringon ko."

"As per my personal decisions, heading out, I go straight inside the church, I do that for myself."

Additionally, autonomy is exhibited through participation in relevant livelihood activities.

P7:

"Kay an magtrabaho kami, kad yadto man kami sa kitchen."

"When we work since we are assigned in the kitchen."

P8:

"Kay kun sa kuan pa an akon nala didi ginhihimo pagpakalikot, dikan siring pa nagsasarit man ak gehapon sa warden nga magawas ak pag upay."

"What I have been doing is repairing faulty equipment. I ask for our warden's permission if I could go out to fix something."

P9 provided a striking response regarding the inherent limitations of being incarcerated:

“Sa mga kuan, pwedi in may naabot na maraot na balita tikang sa gawas? Syempre bisan nano imo kuan talaga malain sa imo hunahuna. Syempre halimbawa bisan kun magbubulaw ka kay syempre malain sa hunahuna pero di mo mahihimo kaya nakokontrol ko nala. Kay di mo man pwedi himuon iton kay maiisgan ka sa guwardiya. So parang di mo magagawas an suol sa imo huna huna.”

"For the, is it okay if bad news arrives from outside? Of course, no matter how you try, it bothers your mind. For example, even if you lash out because it hurts, you cannot do it that is why I just control it. Because you cannot act it out or else you will be reprimanded by the guards. So it is as if you cannot vent out your head's frustrations."

However, they remain acutely aware that within prison walls, certain activities are strictly prohibited. P2 echoed these limitations, enumerating specific prohibited activities within the facility.

P9 shared:

“Pareho sa kuan inin nga halimbawa kun magsugad an jail management na pagparodlock na bisan karuyag may karuyag paak himuon parus wa na gud ak mahihimo na.”

"Like for example, if the jail managements says that it is time for lockout, even if I still wanted to do something, I cannot do anything about it."

P2 echoed these limitations, enumerating specific prohibited activities within the facility.

“Syempre kay didi sa sulod sir may kuan gad kami sa ginsusunod may batas gudmi na ginsusunod...Bawal didi sigarilyo, kontraban an alak, basta lahat ng tawag dito...ah basta yung bawal gawin sa loob.”

"We have rules that we follow inside and because of that we really must control ourselves to avoid committing mistakes...There are many like cigarette, hard liquors, and many more that is now allowed here."

P4 supported the statement of P2:

“Bawal an kontrabando, tapos bawal mangutang tas di nakakabayad, tapos bawal mo abusuhon an imo kaburungyod didto na bag o. Gidam e sir am ginkukuan didto kumbaga gisusunod na balaud.

"Borrowing money and not paying back is not allowed, you can't abuse your fellow inmate and many more, all should be followed."

Although these policies aim to maintain discipline and order, strict limitations can often undermine the essential needs of PDLs. As P9 shared:

“Maiton sadto didi saam an masaklap sir na bagyo gipan lock kami. Maiton an makuri sa amon kay gipakurian kami bisan bagyo di man la kami gin abrihan tas iton gin pan lock kami. Syempre nagkakagutom na kami, mapinit di na kami

nakakakape...”

"It wasn't hard but there was a time where we had a cruel team leder. He would lock as up all afternoon and even on stormy days. He would not open the door, we are getting cold and hungry inside, we can't have even our coffee..."

Similarly, P10 described the standard disciplinary measures imposed when violations occur

“May kami gintatawag na padlockan, yaon ginpapadlock sin pira ka days kun magaan la an imo sala hasta na mabug at pira liwat na dugang liwat depende sa nahimo mo na sala na nag violate san ira patakaran.”

"We do have a so-called locker, there are people who were held inside for how many days, if your violation is not too heavy, to heavy violations, your days inside will increase as well, that depends on what rules you have violated."

Compliance with these policies is an internal decision, driven by the hope of being granted Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA) and expediting legal cases by remaining law-abiding. P3 shared:

“Sanglit importante gud na mag isip ak sin maupay na mamaagi sin maupay na legal para madali ak akon paggawas man. Basi matagan ak good conduct sak allowance mao gad an gi importantihi na makontrol gud an imo pagkalugaring na kun sa gawas buotan ka mas inungod pa didi. Gikuani ka gud didi giomoki gud an imo huna huna.

"That's why it's very important to have discipline within oneself and do everything legally so I can get a good conduct to my allowance which is very important. If you have been good outside, you must be at your best inside. You need to strengthen your mind."

considering their family in every decision they act out to:

“Aw oo yaon gehapon kay may ak pamilya, syempre an maupay gihapon na desisyon an akon priority.”

"Aw, yes because I still have my family. I made it a priority to make the right decisions for them."

Preserving Agency and Human Dignity through Daily Autonomy

Personal autonomy is exercised through control over basic activities such as sleeping, bathing, and eating, while also maintaining control over the practice of religion and participation in livelihood opportunities. These activities are instrumental in maintaining psychological and emotional stability, as they provide a productive distraction from the reality of being deprived of liberty. Furthermore, strengthening their faith helps them persevere through daily challenges within the prison walls.

This aligns with the chapter on “Coping and Adaptation” by Springer (2026), which posits that the role of religion and a modicum of control allow PDLs to reclaim agency. Being able to exercise basic activities—specifically those essential to human needs—prevents the stripping away of their identity and helps preserve it even during the period of reintegration into society.

Fear-Based Compliance vs. Genuine Reformation

The statements of P9 and P10 reveal the approach of correctional facilities in Northern Samar, highlighting the use of solitary confinement as a punishment for violations. Although intended to make PDLs realize their wrongdoings, being locked away while others continue their usual activities further aggravates the situation and hinders the true purpose of incarceration.

Incarceration is supposedly intended to correct behavior, not to instill trauma and fear. Based on the statements of both P9 and P10, the immediate purpose of solitary confinement is achieved; however, this success stems from the fear instilled in their minds, and it is that fear—rather than genuine reform—that prevents them from violating policies. This is strictly contradictory to findings in various studies.

The narratives regarding incarcerated women in the U.S. in *Teen Vogue* (2026) underscore that many PDLs suffer from trauma, histories of abuse, and mental health disorders even prior to conviction. This suggests that punishing policy violations—such as being caught with cigarettes—through confinement may exacerbate their suffering rather than mitigate the underlying issues.

The use of confinement for prolonged periods, depending on the severity of the violation, may be ineffective. Applying Foucault's Theory of Discipline and Punish, disciplinary

power works by organizing space, time, and activity to create a "docile body"; however, true discipline should arise from organization rather than the instillation of fear. This further underscores the need for trauma-informed programs and improved prison conditions, reiterating that the goal of incarceration is not merely to punish, but to reshape behavior. The inquiry into personal autonomy may be contradictory while being deprived of liberty, but this is the foundation of this study. The introduction of this study explores the constraints imposed by the jail itself and the institutional control on both the spatial and temporal aspect of living. This reality, may be seen as in conflict with the constitutional and humanitarian rights of the PDLs, particularly following Nelson Mandela's rule of preserving human dignity despite being in a highly controlled environment. Therefore, the evaluation of this first statement of the problem is derived from this restriction of these facilities and the respect to national and international standards. By assessing how PDLs navigate their autonomy and control, the study bridges theoretical discussions on the realities of incarceration in the correctional facilities in Northern Samar. Thus, assessment establishes the mere fact that autonomy and control over personal necessary practices is not just a routine that needs to be done, but a necessary aspect for preserving identity towards a successful rehabilitation.

Table 1: Thematic Analysis on the Personal Sense of Control or Autonomy

Interview Question	Actual Responses	Themes
How do you experience your sense of control or autonomy while living here?	(P1) <i>Pareho gehapon sa paggawas gawas didi pag sumiring an jail guard na dida la kamo kay may mga bisita, dida la kami sa sulod saam mga selda. Tas may beses gehapon na syempre prisohan may mahigpit gehapon na adlaw. Seguridad gehapon sa prisohan maiton na ada la gehapon kami sa sulod.</i> Just like when we are going in and out here, when the jail guard say that we stay inside our cell because we have visitors, we will stay inside our cells. And there's an instance that of course we are in prison, there are days that they are strict. Prison security, that is why we are still here inside.	Limited Autonomy Within Institutional Rules and Security
	(P2) <i>Syempre kay didi sa sulod sir may kuan gud kami sa ginsusunod may batas gud kami na ginsusunod. Kay dimhi diri mo ngane iano yung sarili mo di mo ngane tutduan mismo na mag kontrol sa sarili mo diri mo iton mahihimo kun sugad may pinagbabawa, kun an lahat na pinagbabawal kay di man iton makuri na kun nano an gindidiri nira didi sa sulod dapat sundon.</i> We have rules that we follow inside and because of that we really must control ourselves to avoid committing mistakes. If you know what's prohibited and you just must follow the rules.	
	(P9) <i>Oo nag aadjust nala labi kun nano na syempre kadamo didi sa nakakasalamuha na kun bagaw pa halang an kaluluwa, nakakaupod namon didi mga patapon na an kinabuhi sanglit ako nala an nag aadjust, kun may nangingisog ginkukuan ko nala siya ako nala nalarga or nano. Kay didi kailangan mo pakisamahan ngatanan. Diri la sa guwardiya, pati sa igkasi mo na PDL kay halimbawa may ka kaptan na sugad sini na maburuong kailangan mo gud hirutan kay makuri kun makahimo ka maraot didi sa sulod lalo ka gud makukurian didi sa sulod. Kaya kinahanglan maghirot ka gud ura ura. Kay halimbawa mayaon kuan halimbawa manginano ak saak kalugaringon. kay urog kasi didi activity, syempre kailangan mo man liwat maglaba o nano pa na im kailangan para saim kalugaringon. iton an danay makontrol ko man. Pero almost gud talaga desisyon sa jail management.</i> Yes, I have learned to adjust... Those are the things that I can still control. But almost everything is really decided by the jail management.	
	(P11) <i>Sa amon sir na priso maupay man an amon kamutangan, kay di man kami giisgan sa guwardiya, di man kami gipapasul an ba. Kun nano la an sugo nira mao man am tuoron.</i> For us prisoners, sir, our situation is okay. The guards do not mistreat us or get angry at us, and they do not force us into things. Whatever they instruct us to do, that is what we follow.	
	(P3) <i>Aw oo yaon gehapon kay may ak pamilya, syempre an maupay gehapon na desisyon an</i>	Maintaining Self-Control

	<i>akon priority. Kay kailangan parigo basi maupay an lawas, hitso gehapon kay basi man an imo lawas an sulod an maupay na pangsipan.</i> Aw, yes because I still have my family. I made it a priority to make right decisions for them. Of course, taking a bath for proper hygiene and cleaning your body outside and inside. <i>(P5) An akon desisyon sir sa mga kuan sugad siton makalaya didi nag-aaro ak kunta bulig pero kay waray man saak nanginano dinhi saak kaso maiha na nga panahon pito ka tuig. Sugad siton sa pagmata yaon gehapon may gehapon pagbuhat saimo sarili na hegdaan, makaon, dikan pangampo man gehapon antis ma kuan pangampo gehapon sa ginoo na mabuligan kit sini nga problema.</i> My decisions came from such things like for my freedom... when I wake up, I make my bed, eat, and pray to the Lord to help me with this problem. <i>(P10) Oo, mayaon man gehapon paru sa ginkukuan ko an ak oras. Bali kuan la, basta tama la ak ginhihimo nga mga desisyon ko na kalugaringon ko. Basta tama la.</i> Yes, I still have that, like I can manage how I use my own time. Basically, as long as what I do is right, my decisions are my own.	Through Personal Responsibility and Daily Routines
	<i>(P4) Ah saak man kunbaga sugad sa adi man ak didi sa sulod, di man maupay an mga ginhihimo sa ak iba na mga kaupod ginsasagdunan ko nala, ngan diak nakikiapi nala. Ahm sugad po san kuan pagbasketball tapos pag nagbabasa kami sa mga kuan halimbawa bible sugad siton. Tas kun nano nano pa na di man bawal himuon didi ginpapabay-an manla kami.</i> For me since I'm here in jail, if my fellow inmates are doing something wrong, I advise them to stop and I won't join the trouble. Just like playing basketball, reading the Bible, and doing activities that are allowed inside the facility.	Exercising Autonomy Through Positive Choices and Prosocial Behavior
	<i>(P6) Sa akon naman diri ko nakukuan an akon mga trabaho kay gitutuyangan man ak, nagkukan man ak siton sa warden na sir kun pwedi maghahanap buhay man ak, natuyang man iton sira sa akon permi diak ginpapabayaan nira. Maiton permi an kuan saak na diri gud ak permi maboaring kay waray gud ak dalaw sir, kada adlaw sa akon permi ak siton nagsasarit sa ira na tuyangan man ak nira permi sir kay kailangan ko kay waray ak dalaw. I have no problems when it comes to that because they allowed me to have work... since I rarely receive visitors, they always help me.</i> <i>(P7) Kay an magtrabaho kami, kay adto man kami sa kitchen. When we work, we are assigned in the kitchen.</i> <i>(P8) Ako didi kuan saak buhay okay gad la. Pakisama la sa mga tawo. Kay kun sa kuan pa an akon nala didi ginhihimo pagpakalikot, dikan siring pa nagsasarit man ak gehapon sa warden nga magawas ak pag upay.</i> My life is okay here. I simply get along with others. I usually repair equipment, and I ask the warden for permission to go out and fix things. <i>(P12) Oo kay for example, maguwas ak sa akon selda maremedyo ak malibot ak naman siton bado. Ginpapalibot ak nira sarwal, may porsyento ak siton.</i> Yes, for example, I am allowed to go out of my cell to sell clothes, and I receive a percentage from the sales.	Experiencing Autonomy Through Work Opportunities and Productive Engagement

Table 2: Thematic Analysis on the Ways on Making Own Choices

Interview Question	Actual Responses	Themes
Kindly describe any moments or ways in which you feel you can make your own choices.	<i>(P1) Oo mayda gehapon, labi na kun naabot an panahon na sira may mga dalaw tas ikaw waray dalaw, labi na kun kinukurian ka gehapon pag abot sa panahon. Sa mga bagay gehapon labi na kun may mga bagay na kailangan kami na magdesisyon, mga magkuri na bagay. Paru san problema namon san am mga kaso. Oo kailangan gud namon mag desisyon kun nano am dapat himuon.</i> Yes, there is, especially during times when other inmates had visitors while you had none. There are difficult situations, particularly regarding our legal cases, where we still have to decide what we should do. <i>(P3) Una una may ak pamilya, may ak kabataan, kabugtuang nga nangasuporta saak. Sanglit importante gud na mag isip ak sin maupay na mamaagi sin maupay na legal para madali ak akon paggawas man. Basi matagan ak good conduct sak allowance mao gad an giimportantehi na makontrol gud an im pagkalugaring na kun sa gawas buotan ka mas inungod pa didi. Gikuani ka gud didi giomoki gud an imo</i>	Exercising personal choice through self-discipline, spirituality, and personal decision-making

	<i>huna huna.</i> First and foremost, I have my family, my children, and siblings who support me. That is why I choose legal ways and good conduct to help me gain my freedom. It is important to strengthen self-control and one's mindset. (P5) <i>Iton na pangampo nala mao na iton (silence).</i> Just pray, that's it. (P9) <i>Kay ako saak kalugaringon na desisyon, kay pag gagawas ko man siton mapakadto ak sa sulod sa simbahan, nahihimo akon kuan dayun sa kalugaringon ko. Tapos nakakapanlimpyo sa kalugaringon ko pero diri gud kuan actually na tanan gud nga nakukuan ko sa akon daily routine.</i> For me, my own decisions include going to church whenever I can, taking care of myself, and managing parts of my daily routine, although not everything is within my control. (P12) <i>Ano la an akon pagmamata ko, parigo muna ako siton. Pagmata ko diretso ako sa simbahan mag ano la manguros la ako didto. Pagkahoman balik na sa selda ko. Dikan magkulop waray na.</i> When I wake up, I first take a bath, then go straight to church to pray. After that, I return to my cell, and by afternoon, there is nothing else I do.	
	(P2) <i>Kuan nala an nahihimo ko para sa akon sarili na kalugaringon ah nag iingat nala ako didi sa sulod kay maaram ka preso kami diri namon aram an kada taga sa isip, an ikaduha ako an mayor didi sa sulod sir. Kay dinhi sir sa kulungan sanayan naman la pero kun sa una makuri ka maka move on, di ka makaka pagdesisyon kun nano imo hihimuon pero kun sa awatan makakapag desisyon ka na ini hihimuon ko ini, ini di ko ini hihimuon kay diri ini tama.</i> What I do is take care of myself because we are in prison and everyone thinks differently. Over time I learned to decide what is right and what is wrong. (P4) <i>Kunbaga sugad siton na kami didi burungyod kami didi sa sulod, halimbawa nala may mali na an am kaupod didi sa sulod kumbaga mali nagud siya kunbaga ako diri ko na giaabuyonan ngan ginsusugad ko gud an kalugaringon na makabulig man la ak sa kanya na mali talaga an iya ginhimo.</i> If someone here does something wrong, I do not support it. Instead, I advise him and try to help him realize that what he did was wrong.	Making responsible choices by avoiding wrongdoing and guiding others
	(P6) <i>Oo sir, syempre priso kami kun nano nga kiwa namon limit pagkadi. Kaya an ideya ko naman para diri ak gehapon masungyaw, didto laak pokus laak saak trabaho. Naiwas ak sa mga, an diri ak masungyaw sa mga empleyado.</i> Yes, our movements are limited here, so I simply focus on my work to avoid conflict. (P7) <i>Kay nagtatrabaho kami sa kitchen, pag tug on. Di gad nagmamata kami agap pa, kuan ala una pala sa gab e.</i> We work in the kitchen, cooking rice, and wake up very early to do our duties. (P8) <i>Ah sir san nakadi ak sa trustee tapos (inaudible).. nagtatrabaho ak. Kanina ngane masuol ak tiyan waray ak pagtangpos.</i> When I was assigned as a trustee, I worked. Earlier my stomach hurt, so I could not finish my work.	Experiencing choice through work and assigned responsibilities
	(P10) <i>Halimbawa ano naglulugaring ak sa akon mga desisyon na sarili ko la na kun labag sa kanra mga mga kaparusahan. Kailangan mag desisyon ka na ayon sa kanra ngan sa amon didi ginsusunod na mga patakaran.</i> I can make my own decisions as long as they are not against the rules. My choices must always follow the regulations.	Autonomy exercised within institutional rules and authority

	(P11) <i>Pag kuan nasarit man ak siton sa guwardiya, halimbawa yaon ka upayon magsusugad ka mun a sa guwardiya kay di ka man pwedi basta basta mag kuan doon sin gamit kay tumikang dapat sa kanra muna. Pagtuyang mao ka man makakatrabaho san imo mga hirimuon.</i> Whenever I want to do something, I first ask permission from the guards. Only after they approve can I proceed with my work or activities.	
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Table 3: Thematic Analysis on the Things PDLs have no Control

Interview Question	Actual Responses	Themes
What are some things you feel you have no control over?	(P1) <i>Sa dinhi? Pareho gehapon sa mga dinhi mayda gehapon pinagbabawal, mga pinagbabawal. Sugad sa mga sugad siton halimbawa oras na san halimbawa pag umabot na san alas nuwebe bawal na an preso gumawas. Padlock na an main gate, sa selda na kami sana diri na kami pwedi maggawas. Magawas la kami halimbawa importante mag CR mag ihi, mao la it sugad siton la na mga bagay. May mga patakaran gehapon.</i> There are still rules. For example, when it is already nine o'clock in the evening, inmates are no longer allowed to go outside. The main gate is locked, and we remain inside our cells except for important reasons, such as using the restroom. (P3) <i>Ay oo talaga sumunod ka nala kay iton an kaupod san imo pagkalugaring sa mga patakaran para ta man iton para saak ta man iton. Aw oo obligado ka para amnesty, good conduct allowance sugad san kun nano an mga kuan nira didi. Kun nano an mga programa, pangadyi, kailangan sa oras sa pangadyi masabat ka, kun nano la na mga ikakupay na mga lakaw dihan sa jail kailangan mao gud talaga an sumunod ka la. Kay ikakapay ta man saam.</i> You simply have to follow the rules because they are for our own good. Participation in programs and compliance with regulations are required to qualify for benefits such as good conduct allowance and amnesty. (P4) <i>Mga hirimuon na bawal talaga didi? Kay sugad siton na mga bawal po nga di ka gud pwedi magbuot. An diri gud namon didi pwedi pagbut an an amon dithon magna carta na ito mga pinagbabawal. Iton gud an di namon pwedi labagon kumbaga gisusunod gud iton namon kay labagon ngane iton namon may gud parusa na aabaton.</i> There are prohibited acts that we cannot control because they are clearly forbidden. We cannot violate the Magna Carta because doing so results in punishment. (P7) <i>Kay may mga balaud sugad san ito nagpipinanlabot doon.</i> There are rules that govern those kinds of actions. (P9) <i>Pareho sa kuan inin nga halimbawa kun magsugad an jail management na pagparodlock na bisan karuyag may karuyag paak himuon parus wa na gud ak mahihimo na.</i> When the jail management orders a lockdown, even if I still want to do something, there is nothing I can do. (P10) <i>Kailangan ak sumunod sa mga buruhaton didi sa sulod tulad sa paglimpyo didi sa sulod, diri ka dapat kumadto siton na lugar kailangan sumunod ka kay kun makag violate ka, ada na an parusa. May kami gintatawag na padlockan, yaon ginpadlock sin pira ka days kun magaan la an imo sala hasta na mabug at pira liwat na dugang liwat depende sa nahimo mo na sala na nag violate san ira patakaran.</i> I have to follow assigned duties and restrictions. Violations result in punishment, including confinement or "padlock" depending on the seriousness of the offense.	Restricted autonomy due to institutional rules, regulations, and sanctions
	(P2) <i>Depende man la iton sir sa kada taga sa tawo kun para sa ako ako nakokontrol ko an sarili ko. Damo didi an diri mo pwedi himuon didi. Damo didi an bawal a kay sugad san, mga butang ha sir? Mga butang? Bawal didi sigarilyo, kontraban an alak, basta lahat ng tawag dito.. ahh basta yung</i>	

	<i>bawal gawin sa loob. Diri kuan dini sir pag abot sa alas dyes sa gab e, pag abot sa alas dyes kailangan pamahuway na. pag abot naman sa alas kwatro sa umaga kailangan naka parigo na kay maghuhulat naman kami san amo para pamahaw na rasyon. Although I can control myself, many things are prohibited here such as cigarettes and alcohol. There are also fixed schedules that everyone must follow.</i> <i>(P8) Waray man didi makuri, waray man dihan naghihimo kay sugaran pa sa kontrabando, diri kami siton naghihimo kay diri pwedi sa amon. Kay didi maupay man an pagtrato tas pagdara saam dinhi, mao kami narespeto man kami. Diri kami pahados hados, waray kami samok didi sa sulod kay nagkukuan kuanay kami.</i> Nobody does prohibited acts like possessing contraband because they are not allowed. We are treated well, so we also respect the rules and avoid causing trouble. <i>(P11) Sugad sa kuan halimbawa kay nag gagarden ka man mahuram ka gehapon sin mga purang masarit ka gehapon sa kanra na mag dalos kami tas pag kakulop ibalik mo ta gehapon sa kanra. Ah kay sugad siton na bawal didto an sigarilyo sa amon, maghuygo bawal. Oo halimbawa pag padlock di ka pwedi na gumuwa mag sarit ka man mag guwa isasarit mun a sa guwardiya. Kay di ka man pwedi mag buot kay sayu ka la liwat na suruguon nira.</i> Even simple tasks require permission, such as borrowing tools. Smoking, gambling, and leaving the cell without permission are prohibited, so inmates must always seek approval from the guards. <i>(P12) Maghimo ka ngane san butang na diri angay, for example pag inom kay bawal. Madakpan ka sa guwardiya padlock ka siton... (full response)... Parang adi ka la sa kuan.</i> Prohibited acts such as drinking alcohol or possessing weapons result in punishment. Monthly inspections are conducted, movement is restricted, and inmates must stay only within designated areas.	
	<i>(P5) Kay kuan man ak waray man ak didi kuan gud an akon la ginkukuan an akon trabaho, nagtatrabaho ak dikan parehos saak mga kakuan maiton man an akon didi. An mingaw saak kabugtuan.</i> I simply focus on my work like everyone else, but I have no control over missing my siblings. <i>(P6) Pag may problema ak, blanko ak utak sugad siton. Nawawara ak pag-asa, nawawad an ak sin pag-asa na nagparakaturug nala ak, lalo na pag diri kami nahihearing nga karuyag namon lumaya. Iton sir kumbaga minsan nagsusugad nala ak na diak na. Minsan diak na pag nauli kami sir na napopostpone, makuan ak siton dayun pag abot namon mahegda ak siton problemado nga di ka manla mahearing. Oo mag iha na liwat kahuhulat tas makaturug nala ak siton dayun dikan naiisip ko na diak na, nga lord diri naak mabuhi. Sugad siton.</i> Whenever my hearings are postponed, I lose hope and feel helpless. The uncertainty of my case causes emotional distress to the point that I sometimes no longer want to live.	Lack of control over personal circumstances and emotional struggles

The findings indicate that while persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) experience significant restrictions within the prison environment, they continue to exercise a meaningful degree of personal autonomy through decisions involving their daily routines, religious practices, and participation in livelihood activities. Participants consistently described maintaining control over basic self-care activities such as bathing, eating, sleeping, doing laundry, and organizing their daily schedules. They also exercised autonomy by choosing to engage in prayer, attend religious services, and participate in work assignments, all of which helped preserve their sense of identity, dignity, and purpose despite incarceration. At the same time, participants acknowledged that their autonomy is bounded by institutional regulations. Compliance

with prison rules—including restrictions on prohibited items, mandatory lock-up schedules, and behavioral expectations—is recognized as an unavoidable aspect of incarceration. Many participants reported voluntarily adhering to these policies, motivated by the desire to obtain Good Conduct Time Allowance (GCTA), facilitate their eventual release, and avoid disciplinary sanctions. Family also emerged as an important influence, encouraging PDLs to make responsible decisions while incarcerated. However, the findings further reveal that institutional control often limits opportunities for personal agency. Participants described situations in which strict enforcement of rules, prolonged lock-up periods, and disciplinary confinement restricted even basic daily needs and emotional expression.

Fear of punishment, particularly solitary confinement, discouraged policy violations but appeared to promote compliance primarily through fear rather than internalized behavioral change. This suggests that while disciplinary measures are effective in maintaining institutional order, they may not necessarily foster genuine rehabilitation.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that PDLs perceive autonomy not as complete freedom but as the ability to exercise control over the limited aspects of daily life still available to them. These everyday choices enable them to preserve their human dignity, cope with the psychological demands of incarceration, and maintain hope for successful reintegration into society. Nevertheless, the findings also highlight the need for correctional practices that balance institutional discipline with opportunities for meaningful agency, ensuring that rehabilitation is grounded in personal growth rather than fear-based compliance.

How do they experience and adapt to the prison environment in terms of mastering daily routines, challenges, and institutional conditions?

Adaptation to Institutional Conditions and Routines

The prison environment represents a radical departure from the outside world. While the narratives of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) suggest they maintain some level of autonomy in certain activities, the rigid policies of correctional facilities strictly dictate and limit their daily routines.

P1 enumerated his usual daily routines:

“Pagkaaga headcount, pagkaaga rasyon. Alas otso ma head count kami balik sa selda ngan mayda kami mga bible study maiton an ginhihimo namon Seven Adventist man ako an ginhihimo namon kada sabado nagbabible study kami didi kanya kanya sa mga selda...”

“In the morning, we do headcount and ration. At eight o’ clock, headcount then we go back to our cell, and we have bible study, that’s what we do, and I am a Seventh Day Adventist, we do bible studies inside our own cells...”

P2 and P6 also shared their routines, which are nearly identical to those of P1.:

“Diri kuan dini sir pag abot sa alas dyes sa gab e, pag abot sa alas dyes kailangan pamahuway na. pag abot naman sa alas kwatro s aumaga kailangan naka parigo na kay maghuhulat naman kami san amo para pamahaw na rasyon.”

“No, sir, when ten o’clock hits in the night, all of us should be in bed already, then at four o’clock in the morning we should have taken a bath already and prepare for our breakfast ration”

“...kuan sir diretso na man kami siton kasulod pag alas sais kay padlock na kami siton...”

“...By six o’clock we get back to our cell and we’ll be locked...”

This abrupt shift in environment and lifestyle significantly alters an individual's perception of both time and space. The inquiry into how PDLs adapt to these sudden changes was encapsulated in the statements of P1, P2, and P6.

P1:

“Hinay hinay ko gehapon na adopt tungod sa hinay hinay man kami sa pagdisiplina sa guwardiya, gihinay hinay kami ngan gin iistoryahan man kami na maini an patakaran na kailangan namon masunod kay tungod sa preso kami kailangan namon sundon an mga patakaran para sa amon gehapon...”

“Little by little, I was able to adopt because the guards have been patient with us when it comes to discipline, and they tell us what are the rules that we need to follow since we are in prison and we need to comply because it’s for us too...”

P4:

“...ako naka adjust ak san ako ta kabungyod doon kumbaga nahiuna man saam nag aadvice gehanpon sin ini an himua didi, kumbaga sunod sunod nala muna habang adi ka mao ini muna an himoa pagsunod la si maupay para makakiwa ka man si maupay.”

“I was able to adjust because my fellow inmate who has been here before me gave me some piece of advice that I should follow the rules, in that way, I will be able to move freely.”

Apart from the help of fellow inmates and prison personnel, internal motivations also aided PDLs in their gradual adjustment.

P3 shared:

“Kay hinganhi ko waray na iba na maupaykay iton na an maupay na sumunod ka nala. Pagsulod mo ngadi sumunod nala sa mga activity dihan.”

“Since I got here, there’s nothing much that I can do but to follow the rules and the activities given to us.”

Similarly, P4 also shared:

“...sa una maninibag-o ka dikan taod taod la makasabay kana. Sugad siton na unti unti mo na siya na matatanggap na adi kala talaga muna ngadto sa katima san kuan.”

“...I was still not used to it, but I managed to adopt later on. Little by little I had accepted the fact that I will be staying here until my sentence end.”

This sudden change in environment imposes anxiety and stress on PDLs, particularly during the first few months of adaptation. Informants shared their challenges and grievances while inside the correctional facilities.

P9 and P10 shared their sentiments on slow judicial process:

“Dikan a sayu pa na nakaka stress didi maaram ka kun nano? An justice system ta didi, kay kakuri danay nahulat kami 3 to 6 months tas pag aabot namon sa justice tala la na may problema mabalik kami kay postponed. Paru sa naistress ka nga dali ka didi mastress.”

“And one thing that is stressful in here you know what? Our justice system here, waiting is so hard, sometimes we wait for 3 to 6 months, then arriving at the justice hall, occurrence of small problem, we are told to just go back because the

hearing is postponed. Because of this, we are easily stressed out."

"Yun an nagpaiha sa sobra na kaiha mag schedule, tulo ka bulan waray hearing another tulo ka bulan wala pa rin. Hanggang sa 1 year isa lang an hearing... Oo tapos dumating an pandemic sayu lat iton sa nakapagpatagal kasi halos tatlong taon kami na hindi na hearing."

"What slows it down is the scheduling, for three months there is no hearing, then another 3 months passed, still none. Until a year passed, there was only one hearing that took place...yes then pandemic happened, it slowed the process even more because for almost three years, there was no hearing."

Apart from the slow court processes, P1 and P10 also noted challenges in acquiring basic commodities that are not readily provided by the facility.

P1 shared:

"Kun wara ka talaga dalaw, syempre kay pan adlaw adlaw nimo. Mga sabon, an panlawas nimo labi na kun nagkakasakit ka..."

"No one has to visit, of course, your daily needs. The soaps, your well-being, especially when you get sick..."

P10 also shared the same:

"Una, nagkasakit ak tatay tas karuyag ko dumalaw pero di man pwedi kay may proseso hasta sa namatay wara lat ak pakadalaw. Panduha ito waray ka gud ura ura bisan piso, karuyag mo kumaon sin pagkaon pero diri mo makaon. Kay waray ka mabubunot, waray ka lat maduduukan kay kun may ka man maduukan pareho ta saim na waray ta."

"First, my father got sick, I wanted to pay a visit, but I could not because there is process until such time that he passed away without me visiting. Second is when you do not even have a peso, you wanted to eat something, but you were not able to do so. You do not have anything left, you have no one to run to, you have someone but like you, has nothing as well."

With the same situation as P1 and P10, P12 along with P10 shared how he was able to provide his daily basic needs:

"Oo kay for example, maguwas ak sa akon selda maremedyo ak malibot ak naman siton bado. Ginpapalibot ak nira sarwal, may porsyento ak siton."

"Yes, because for example, I goes out of my cell, find ways to earn, I would roam selling clothes. They make me rove around to sell pants; I do have a percentage."

"Sa kada adlaw makuri kay iton naglibot laak sin kuan kun nano an pwedi iglibot doon gin babaligya ko patungan ko la iton may porsyento sugad siton may porsyento mao la an akon man kita. Kay kun waray, waray man liwat. Makuri an ngaran na PDL... Libre kami pagkaon pero sa kape, sabon, colgate amo gud iton. Kailangan makuha iton namon."

"Every day is a challenge because I sell anything, roam

around, I make profit from selling or percentage, that is how I get by. If there is nothing, then, none. Being PDL is hard. Food is free but in terms of coffee, soap, colgate, it is on us. We need to get it."

The availability of immediate medical attention is also a challenge while incarcerated, as shared by P6:

"...Kun diri ka man malapit sa mga team leader dati, diri ka dayun madadara sa hospital..."

"...If you are close with the team leader, you can be hospitalized immediately, if not, you'll have to wait."

Social Interaction and Internal Resilience as Adaptive Mechanisms

Personal privacy becomes a luxury, and the sense of time is reshaped by institutional schedules; daily life is no longer governed by personal choice, but by the specific timings mandated by facility policy—these are the changes that occur upon incarceration.

The responses collected highlight the crucial role of social interaction in adjusting and adapting to prison environments. The narratives shared acknowledged the role played by jail guards and fellow PDLs in their gradual integration into the facility. Similar to incarcerated Turkish youth (Sentse *et al.*, 2024), incarcerated individuals in Northern Samar also rely heavily on peer relationships (aside from family visitations), highlighting how human connections provide support in navigating the challenges of confinement and adapting to a new environment.

While peer and mentor relationships aid in adaptation, internal motivations also helped in effective adjustment. Acceptance of the current situation and hope for future freedom allow PDLs to make peace with their confinement, turning their focus toward a positive outlook rather than sulking in their situation. This is deemed effective based on a qualitative study performed in Sri Lanka, which highlighted that positive thinking about the future acts as a coping mechanism helping PDLs manage distress.

Systemic Barriers to Well-being: Procedural Delays, Material Deprivation, and Healthcare Inequity

Extended periods of detention are not an isolated situation in the country or globally. This aligns with the findings of the World Prison Brief (2023), wherein around 65.2% of prisoners in the Philippines were pretrial detainees who had not yet been given an exact sentence. Many of these individuals spend extended periods in detention due to slow court processes, sometimes waiting several years for a verdict (Preso, 2022).

Although the Philippines' Department of Justice adheres to international standards by implementing steps to digitalize case processing (Philippines DOJ, 2023), narratives reveal that the postponement of hearings remains prevalent. This systemic delay negatively impacts the emotional well-being of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) and reflects the current challenges within the Philippine justice system.

These findings indicate that the situation in the province mirrors the challenges faced by most jail facilities regarding trial processing. National efforts, such as the National Jail Decongestion Summit and Supreme Court-led initiatives aimed at addressing the root causes of prolonged pretrial detention (Supreme Court of the Philippines, 2023), must be reinforced to alleviate this burden and successfully decongest

correctional facilities.

Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) often rely on their families and relatives to provide for their basic needs. However, the narratives gathered in this study revealed that not all PDLs receive visitors—some not even once a year. This lack of external support is a primary reason why PDLs seek work and earn money within the prison facilities to provide for themselves. While this provides a sense of agency, the absence of family contact simultaneously poses significant challenges to maintaining their emotional well-being.

Pamungkas *et al.* (2023) highlight the critical role of emotional and familial support in a study of incarcerated women in Indonesia, revealing that family support is significantly correlated with the use of emotion-focused coping strategies. However, this is not what occurs for several PDLs. Narratives shared reveal that some informants are in survival mode rather than focusing on their emotions. For some, families provide unavailable commodities such as soap, toothpaste, and other hygiene products. But narratives revealed that there are PDLs who need to work and earn to provide lacking commodities; thus, the focus shifts from emotion-focused coping strategies toward livelihood plans to support personal needs.

Significantly, the truth revealed by P6 regarding biased access to medical attention is also mirrored in the Human Rights Watch (HRW, 2023) report, *A Nightmare for Everyone*, wherein wealthier inmates often bribe their way into superior hospital care. Similarly, this study found that inequality is

prevalent and preferential treatment depends on personal "closeness." Such disparities prove that healthcare is not truly accessible to all, ultimately undermining the fairness of institutional care.

The ease with which PDLs adapt to routines, challenges, and institutional conditions serves as a metric for how effectively a facility provides corrective support. While conducive facilities and structural designs are essential, they are insufficient on their own. Comprehensive programs and strategic interventions must be implemented to help PDLs navigate new routines, alleviate suffering, and successfully adapt to the institutional conditions of the correctional facility.

The review of literature incorporates Gresham Sykes' classical sociological framework regarding the structural deprivations of prison life which encompasses the loss of liberty, goods, services, autonomy, and security. This framework explains as to why PDLs responses and attitude becomes reserve and cautious when forced into a strictly managed place and routine. The narratives shared by each individual may be adapted by the local jails to first, regulate negative impacts to PDLs due to systemic flaws, and second, to aid PDLs survival through programs and interventions adaptations. Tracing the review of literature proving that global congestion is not a stranger in correctional facilities, this study establishes the truth that systemic delays and deprivations has always been there, reflecting the country's judicial weakness, and calls for nurturing internal resilience as an important adaptive strategy.

Table 4: Thematic Analysis on the Routines and Rules of Prison Life

Interview Question	Actual Responses	Themes
How have you adapted to the routines and rules of prison life?	(P1) <i>Hinay hinay ko gehapon na adopt tungod sa hinay hinay man kami sa pagdisiplina sa guwardiya, gihinay hinay man kami ngan gin iistoryahan man kami na maini an patakaran na kailangan namon masunod kay tungod sa preso kami kailangan namon sundon an mga patakaran para sa amon gehapon. Kay kun diri kami magsusunod ipapadlock man kami. Halimbawa makabuhay kami san diri maupay halimbawa makasakit kami saam igkasi preso, ipapadlock kami kun diri kami sumunod sa ira patakaran.</i> Little by little, I was able to adapt because the guards patiently disciplined and oriented us about the rules that we needed to follow. Failure to comply results in punishment. (P3) <i>Kay hinganhi ko waray na iba na maupay kay iton na an maupay na sumunod ka nala. Pagsulod mo ngadi sumunod nala sa mga activity dihan.</i> Since I got here, the best thing to do is simply follow the rules and participate in the activities. (P4) <i>Ah an sa ako po kun бага, ako naka adjust ak san ako ta kabungyod doon kumbaga nahiuna man saam nag aadvice gehapon sin ini an himoa didi, kumbaga sunod sunod nala muna habang adi ka mao ini muna an himoa pagsunod la si maupay para makakiwa ka man si maupay.</i> I adjusted because fellow inmates advised me to follow the rules so I could live peacefully inside. (P9) <i>Gin adjust ko la sugad siton na sa gawas diba magmamata kit na at katurog kun kan o la kit magmamata, didi nag adjust ak paru sa ginsasanay ko nala ak kalugaringon na sumunod ak sa balud ngadi. Oo kay sa una kasi makuri talaga an pag adjust, pero sa dalagan san panahon parus sa matututo ka nala talaga. Pag adjust nala kun nano an kuan. Kay sa regulasyon, kun talaga susundon mo ngatanan an mga jail management na mga regulasyon talaga makuri gud ura ura masunod an tanan, pero kay waray ka gud choice kay mag violet ka, may man patakaran an jail management na ig stockage ka sanglit naghihirot nala kami saam kalugaringon nala kun nano.</i> At first, adapting was difficult, but over time I trained myself to follow the rules because there was no other choice if I wanted to avoid punishment.	Gradual adaptation through learning and complying with institutional rules

	(P10) <i>Sa una pala san bag o ka pala didi yaon dayun matapo saim na maini an mga bawal kailangan sumunod ka. Tas yun ikaquarantine ka pag bag o ka pala tas doon pala iglilecture ka siton nira na ini an mga di dapat himuon ngan yadi man an mga dapat himuon.</i> Upon admission, new inmates undergo orientation and are taught the rules and prohibited acts before joining the general population.	
	(P2) <i>Una una tinukduan ko an akon kalugaringon na, wara ako pag kuan sa iba na tawo kay maaram man ako sa pinagbabawal, maaram ako sumunod. Nagsunod ako nga nagsunod para kay dinhi sa sulod makuri man lat an magkamali. Oo para di na ako makabuhay pa sin, kun бага may na ngane problema dadagdagn ko pa mas lalo na kukurian la ako.</i> I taught myself to follow the rules and avoid mistakes because making errors would only worsen my situation. (P5) <i>Ah ak gikukuan nala siton sugad siton nga rumespeto ka sa mga guwardiya mao la iton tas di ka naghihimo sin kalokohan sa kanra. Dikan pagrespeto gehapon dikan may man pag antos kay ini na kit sa presohan kailangan ikuan ta gehapon bintahi diri na kit mahingadto sa karat-an.</i> I adapted by respecting the guards, avoiding trouble, and learning to endure my situation. (P7) <i>Nag adjust kay nadisplina gehapon kay maupay ngane dihan sa sulod kay nadidisiplina. An problema gikakaturugan na gad la.</i> Discipline helped me adjust, and I cope with problems by sleeping. (P11) <i>Kuan la kay iba man kay sa laya syempre imo man ngadto pagbuot gud ngadto didi iba man kay kailangan tipid ka sa imo mga kiwa.</i> I adjusted by realizing that prison is different from life outside, where personal freedom is more limited.	Developing self-discipline, respect, and behavioral restraint
	(P6) <i>A didi sir yaon man kami didi kada adlaw nasimba kami may time na may misa, may man kami rosaryo, may iba iba man didi na mga nagkakasulod na iba iba na relihiyon, may ALS maiton na nakukuan namon pag kuan sa kada adlaw na hirimuon didi na paglimpyo. Oo nasanay nala ak didi iton nala, kuan sir diretso na man kami siton kasulod pag alas sa is kay padlock na kami siton. Ginsasanay ko nala kada adlaw na gawaon didi kuan man kami siton nakokontrol man didi namon an amon mga hirimuon. Oo sir, nasanay na gad la sa 14 years kun nano an mga buruhaton didi buhaton kun nano an mga kuan sa empleyado sundon.</i> I adapted by becoming accustomed to the daily routine of worship, education, cleaning, scheduled lock-up, and following the staff's instructions over many years.	Adjustment through structured daily routines and institutional activities
	(P8) <i>Ah kuan didto sa laya pa nagkokontrol ak saak kalugaringon, diri ak masyado barkador, ako la trabaho. Dikan kun may man kwarta tala, di gud ak barkador na madadara sa kanra mga tukso. Kaso la iton na babaye la an nakakuan saak.</i> Even before incarceration, I was already disciplined and focused on work rather than bad influences, although one personal relationship changed my life. (P12) <i>Nag bulan haon kay nakaturog kami adaw pag gab e diri kay syempre nag iisip kami saam pamilya di man namon kaya magbulig kay bag o man la kami... Iton la an amon buhay didto yana. It took months to adjust because I constantly worried about my family. Although I could not be with them, I found a way to help by giving my wife money to start a small store so that our children could survive while I was incarcerated.</i>	Drawing on personal values and family responsibility to cope with incarceration

Table 5: Thematic Analysis on the Challenges Faced in Adjusting to the Environment

Interview Question	Actual Responses	Themes
What challenges have you faced in adjusting to this environment?	(P1) <i>Damo gehapon, paru sa problema gehapon. Syempre danay gin hihearing ka, na attend an imo complainant syempre kukulbaan ka... Pero an akon la permi kuan an sa diyos gehapon. Sugad tsana na labi na gud kun waray ka talaga dalaw... labi na kun nagkakasakit ka dida talaga dida na maturo an imo luha kay im isip waray na nagmamahal sa imo...</i> There are many challenges. Court hearings make me anxious because I fear the outcome of my case. Sometimes I think about ending my life, but I always turn to God. It becomes harder when no one visits me, especially when I get sick because I feel like no one loves me anymore. (P5) <i>Namomproblema gad ak kudi kay ananoon ko man na adi na man ak sa sulod, an akon nala gikukuan an paki.</i>	Emotional distress, loneliness, and psychological burden

	I do become troubled, but what can I do? I am already here. (P7) <i>Kamingaw gehapon, kay nauuyam ka man doon kinakaturugan nala.</i> Loneliness is one of the challenges, but I just sleep it away. (P8) <i>An mabug at man la didi na nangyari sa sulod an pagkawara saak nanay ngan tatay... Pero diri ko gipapabay an akon pagkaon... nagkasakit ak.</i> The hardest part was losing both my parents while I was here. I constantly thought about them, and it affected my health.	
	(P2) <i>Damo sir... ako maaaram gud ako na tawo makisama... An nakukurian la ako an sa kamatuoran an aragway ko sa pamilya ko. Mao la yun.</i> I can easily get along with people anywhere. The only thing that really weighs on me is my family situation. (P4) <i>Saak po... nagkaproblema ak habang adi ak kay... an ak kabugtuang adto sa Manila... naging kulang ak didi sa dalaw... pag may nababalitaan ak na di maupay... nakakaapekto iton sa ako.</i> My family being far away means fewer visits, and hearing bad news about them greatly affects me. (P6) <i>...Pero san nasanay naak didi sa jail... pero kakaiba an sa laya ngan sa didi kay syempre maupay didto kay an imo mga pamilya didi diri mo sira kaano ano makakasama mo...</i> I eventually adjusted, but nothing compares to being with your family outside. (P10) <i>Una, nagkasakit ak tatay tas karuyag ko dumalaw pero di man pwedi... hasta sa namatay wara lat ak pakadalaw... Panduha ito waray ka gud ura ura bisan piso...</i> My father became ill and later died, but I was unable to visit him. Another hardship was having no money and no one to rely on.	Separation from family and inability to fulfill family roles
	(P3) <i>...Kay kabaraka gehapon sa presohan kun nanon ak kahihinatnan... pero pag hingadi ngay an mas maupay ta man ngay an didi basta maaram ka la makibagay... Kailangan aringit ngane, relax ka man. Mao la an labanan...</i> I worried about what would happen to me in prison, but eventually I learned that adapting means getting along with others, remaining calm, and keeping myself occupied. (P11) <i>Ak giimagine nala na magkayaon ka hirimuon iton daw na masarit ka gud... diri ka makasala o di ka makaproblema didi.</i> I simply accepted that I had to adjust by limiting myself and asking permission so I would not get into trouble.	Learning to adapt through acceptance and self-restraint
	(P6) <i>Una nga pagkadi ko... kahadok... Di ka mahingaturug, mahadok ka sa mga igkasi inmates mo na di mo mga kila. Minsan may time na nanbubully... maiton na kuan gehapon an ideya ko nala siton pag ikmat gehapon...</i> When I first arrived, I was afraid of unfamiliar inmates and experienced bullying. Over time, I learned to adapt by following others and obeying the staff. (P12) <i>Ano an akon la sadto kinurihan kay kuan may guwardiya didi na first cousin sa namatay namon... Anytime pwedi kami niya ig discipline dikan patayon kami... wa kami siton mahihimo kay syempre priso kami.</i> I struggled because a guard was related to the victim in my case. I constantly feared retaliation and felt powerless because I was a prisoner.	Fear, vulnerability, and insecurity within the prison environment
	(P9) <i>Sa mga kuan, pwedi in may naabot na maraot na balita tikang sa gawas?... bisan kun magbubulaw ka... di mo mahihimo kaya nakokontrol ko nala... di mo magagawas an suol sa imo huna huna.</i> Receiving bad news from outside affects me deeply, but I cannot express my emotions because I have to control myself to avoid reprimand from the guards.	Emotional suppression under institutional restrictions

Table 6: Thematic Analysis on How PDLs Manage Daily Challenges

Interview Question	Actual Responses	Themes
Kindly share how you manage daily challenges or difficult situations here.	(P2) <i>Dinadaan ko nala muna sir sa, nagpipray nala ako kada adlaw. Pagmata ko, pagkaturog ko na maresolbar ko an akon mga problema makayanan ko ini.</i>	Drawing strength through faith, prayer, and spiritual coping

	I just pray every day. When I wake up and before I sleep, I pray that I will be able to solve my problems and endure them. (P4) <i>Ako man po nalalampasan ko iton sa kada adlaw namon na ginhihimo ngadi... dikan pagsadiyos gehapon... nalalagpasan ko siya.</i> I overcome those challenges through our daily routines and by keeping my faith in God. Because of that, I feel that I am able to get through my problems. (P5) <i>An amon didi mangampo o mangadyi gehapon basi diri kami makahimo sin maraot, didi kinahanglan rumespeto sa mga guwardiya kay yadi ka naman sa sulod mao la iton na rumespeto na gudla.</i> We pray so we will avoid doing wrong, and we always show respect to the guards. (P9) <i>Ako kasi... puro akon dalagan talaga sa church didto ko nala gibubuhos ngatanan... didto ko nala gingagawas.</i> Whenever I experience conflicts or emotional struggles, I go to church and pour everything out there instead of arguing or fighting. (P12) <i>Nalalagpasan ko iton kasi syempre sa simbahan, nag aampo man kami ngadto. Naka relax kami nga tagan man kami sin maupay na panlawas. Parang gingaguide ako siton na mga bagay.</i> I overcome difficulties by going to church and praying. It gives me peace, good health, and a sense of guidance.	
	(P1) <i>Gin hinay hinay ko kay naadopt ko na manla kun бага nasasanay sa sugad tsana pagkakaaga makuha kami rasyon, pagka alas otso ma headcount, maparigo, manginginano syempre magliligpit sa amon kanya kanya selda.</i> I take things slowly because I have already adapted to the daily routines like receiving rations, headcount, bathing, and cleaning our cells. (P3) <i>Kay nakaisip man gehapon si maupay kay okay man didi an pag kaon... nangangadyi... naghihitso gehapon san lawas kay permi iton nakakabulig san aton panhunahuna.</i> Good food, prayer, and maintaining personal hygiene help me think clearly and manage daily difficulties.	Adjusting through daily routines and self-care practices
	(P6) <i>Iton para sir magkuan ak gintatrabaho ko nala iton... mapagod man an akon kalugaringon... ginsasaya ko nala an akon kinabuhi... makikichika ak nga diri laak mabug atan...</i> I keep myself busy with work, laugh at my problems, and talk with others so I will not become overwhelmed. (P7) <i>Kuan ginlilibang libang gehapon sir. Sugad san pag tanom tanom gehapon sir doon kay nag gagarden man ak...</i> I distract myself through gardening and other daily chores. (P10) <i>Kuan la pagka aga kailangan makapagbaligya ak mga pagkaon... kinahanglan continue kada adlaw kinahanglan ko magtrabaho gud.</i> I manage by working every day, selling food so I can earn money for my daily needs.	Keeping busy through work and productive activities
	(P8) <i>Pag masuol ak ulo... Kakaturogan ko nala iton... Karawat ko na kun diri sira magpakadi, tanggap ko na saak sarili... gitinawaan.</i> When I feel sad because no one visits me, I sleep it off, accept the situation, and even laugh about my sentence. (P11) <i>Kuan nala mag ilob ka nala kun nano man... pwedi ka man mangaro sa guwardiya sa pankape. Nahatag man an guwardiya oo.</i> I simply endure whatever happens. If I need something like coffee and have no visitors, I ask the guards for help, and they willingly provide it.	Acceptance, endurance, and seeking available support

The findings reveal that Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) adapt to institutional conditions by gradually accepting the structured routines and regulations that govern daily life in correctional facilities. Participants described highly regulated schedules involving headcounts, meal distribution, religious activities, work assignments, and mandatory lock-up periods,

demonstrating that daily life is largely dictated by institutional policies rather than personal choice. Despite the abrupt transition from community life to incarceration, most participants reported that adaptation occurred progressively through guidance from jail personnel, support from fellow PDLs, and personal acceptance of their circumstances.

Social relationships emerged as a key factor in successful adaptation. Participants emphasized that advice from experienced inmates and patient guidance from correctional officers helped them understand institutional expectations and adjust to prison life. At the individual level, acceptance of incarceration, compliance with rules, and hope for eventual release enabled PDLs to develop resilience and cope with the psychological demands of confinement.

However, the findings also highlight several systemic barriers that complicate adaptation and negatively affect well-being. Prolonged court proceedings and repeated postponement of hearings were consistently identified as major sources of stress and uncertainty, leaving many participants anxious about their future. Limited financial resources and the absence of family support further intensified hardship, as some PDLs struggled to obtain essential hygiene products and other personal necessities. Consequently, many engaged in livelihood activities within the facility to earn income and meet their basic needs.

Additionally, participants identified inequitable access to healthcare as a significant concern. Narratives suggested that timely medical attention may depend on personal relationships with prison personnel, indicating inconsistencies in the provision of healthcare services. This perceived preferential treatment raises concerns regarding fairness and equal access to essential health services within correctional facilities.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that adaptation to prison life is shaped by both personal resilience and institutional conditions. While PDLs gradually adjust through social support, acceptance, and adherence to routines, systemic challenges—including delayed judicial processes, material deprivation, inadequate family support, and unequal healthcare access—continue to undermine their well-being and rehabilitation. These findings underscore the need for correctional institutions to complement structured discipline with supportive programs and equitable services that promote successful adaptation, safeguard human dignity, and strengthen rehabilitation outcomes.

Conclusions

The study concludes that Persons Deprived of Liberty retain a meaningful sense of autonomy despite the restrictive nature of incarceration by making decisions regarding their daily routines, religious practices, livelihood activities, and personal conduct. These limited opportunities for choice contribute to the preservation of dignity, resilience, and hope while promoting psychological adjustment within correctional settings. Adaptation to prison life is facilitated by acceptance of institutional realities, adherence to established routines, and support from fellow PDLs and correctional personnel. However, the findings also reveal that rehabilitation is constrained by systemic challenges, including prolonged court proceedings, financial deprivation, limited family support, and perceived inequities in healthcare access. Furthermore, while institutional discipline effectively maintains order, compliance driven primarily by fear of punishment may not produce lasting behavioral change. Therefore, correctional institutions should strengthen rehabilitation by balancing security and discipline with programs that enhance personal agency, ensure equitable access to essential services, foster positive social support, and promote holistic personal development. Such an approach can better prepare PDLs for successful reintegration into society while upholding their dignity and fundamental human rights.

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Ethical and Technical Compliance

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