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Research Article

The Lived Experiences of Filipino Incarcerated Mothers

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative research paper will examine the experiences of incarcerated mothers in the Philippines, including their emotional hardships, how they manage such stressors, and their ways to live resilient lives. The study, based on semi-structured, in-depth questionnaires and a tool, thematic analysis, shows that maternal guilt, societal stigma, and institutional injustices enhance the impact of incarceration trauma, whereas faith, peer networks, and routines contribute to hope and self-development. The most significant results point to the two-fold concern of internalized shame and external constraints as the factors including limited family visitations, absence of post-release work, and shelter insecurity, which sustain marginalization cycles. The narratives of the participants highlight the potential of the transformative nature of the trauma-informed interventions and the prosocial conduct which redefines the guilt as agency and solidarity. Nonetheless, punitive policies and cultural stigma continue to pose a big hurdle in the reintegration process. The research proposes whole system changes, such as wider vocational training and family-based policies, in which maternal health takes precedence. This study can be applied to restorative justice systems capable of healing the soul and repairing the system by putting the voices of incarcerated others into the forefront, which in turn provides practical information to policy makers, correctional facilities, and community activists.

Keywords: *Correctional Institutions, Incarcerated Mothers, Maternal Guilt, Maternal Incarceration, Psychological Well-Being, Resilience*

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Background

Maternity is a state that describes the numerous responsibilities of motherhood and the myriad of the unending demands that come with having and raising children (Villanueva and Gayoles, 2019). It forms the basis of a healthy psychological and social growth. However, crossing the path of the criminal justice system makes it impossible for mothers to fulfill their responsibilities.

Maternal incarceration is a term that describes a mother that is found guilty and sentenced in the criminal justice system. As a result of the length of the sentence, (Glaze & Maruschak, 2019) posits that a convicted mother is separated from her family and community. The problems that an incarcerated mother experiences are short-term yet they negatively affect the family relations and health of the mother. The significant impacts on the family structure due to maternal incarceration has drawn much attention in the U.S. and the rest of the world. Schnittker and John (2019) cite the U.S. as among the top countries in the world for female incarceration rates. For example, the U.S. Bureau of Justice Statistics indicates that as of 2021, 8.8% of the entire prison population were female inmates. And 2022, the Prison Policy Initiative reported that 58% of female prisoners in the United States are mothers.

The problem of maternal imprisonment is quickly becoming an issue in the Philippines as well. With new reports coming in of the rising number of women incarcerations worldwide, the International Coalition of Children with Incarcerated Parents (INCCIP) (2019) reported that 43,568 children had mothers in prison in 2019.

The rights being afforded to Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) include women incarcerated as mothers, are enshrined in various laws and regulations in the Philippines. Republic Act No. 9745, or the Anti-Torture Act of 2009, is the first law that incorporates provisions that explicitly mention torture and other cruel, inhumane, or degrading treatment or punishment of detainees. Notwithstanding this, there are still challenges with the implementation of laws that protect them.

Michael Beltran states (2024) that the Center of Women Resources (CWR) commented that the Philippine government allocates \$0.27 and \$1.25 daily for the medical and food expenses of inmates, respectively. CWR noted that in the case of the Philippines, incarcerated women do not receive the care that is consistent with international standards, and, as a result, they have to navigate these structural challenges as she attempts to fulfill her responsibilities as a mother.

Filipino female inmates face many issues. The detailed study in the work of David and Gomez (2019) depicts the state of correctional institutions. Among the problems are the overcrowded quarters and the resulting poor ventilation and sanitation. At the Correctional Institution for Women (CIW), Mandaluyong, of the 3110 Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL), the facility is licensed to accommodate only 1008. This gives a staggering 209% congestion rate.

A common phenomenon, and even more so for the Philippines, is maternal incarceration. However, Dizon and Pascual (2019) bemoan the absence of studies on Filipino mothers in prison. They argued that studies on mothers in prison are inadequate, particularly on the experiences of the mothers behind bars. This absence of studies is something that Ceballo and Absin (2022) noted when comparing literature on incarcerated mothers in the Philippines to other parts of the world. It is this gap that points toward the absence of research on Filipino mothers in prison that would allow them to articulate their experiences.

The proposed research will fill these gaps by using literature, data from questionnaires, and secondary data analysis, and discussing the lived experiences of Filipino women incarcerated in correctional facilities. While the research will involve data collection and result summarization from other research and relevant reports, the study will focus on the psychosocial health issues and overall resilience, and the research will attempt to address the psychosocial health issues and overall resilience of incarcerated women. Understanding these variables is crucial for developing policies and programs to address

the psychosocial health issues and overall resilience of incarcerated women's vulnerabilities and to facilitate their successful re-integration into the community and future better contact with their children.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the experiences of Incarcerated Filipino mothers. It specifically seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What are the Filipino incarcerated mothers' experiences towards a decade inside a correctional institution?
2. What are the generated themes and subthemes?

Methods

A qualitative research design will be used for this study. Qualitative research is employed to gain a deeper understanding of participants' deep perceptions, behaviors, and attitudes (Girardin, M., 2023) regarding a phenomenon they encountered firsthand (Busetto, L., Wolfgang, W., & Gumbinger, C., 2020). Interpretative phenomenological research aims to gain insight into human lived experiences and how they interpret this phenomenon in their life (Politz, D., 2023). The data collection method that will be used in this study is a demographic profiling and semi-structured questionnaire. Since face-to-face interviews are not permitted because of security reasons visitor access to Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) is prohibited, the questionnaire will be printed and distributed to the participants who meet the study's criteria. This approach allows participants to provide detailed responses in writing while maintaining privacy and minimizing any potential discomfort (Delve. Ho, L., & Limpaecher, A., 2024). Thus, this design and methods will be employed in our study in order to fully investigate and comprehend incarcerated Filipino mothers' experiences inside the correctional institution in Mandaluyong, Metro Manila, Philippines.

Participants of the Study

This study will focus on six (n = 6) participants who are volunteers and meet specific criteria: they must have spent or

convicted at least ten (10) years in the Correctional Institution for Women in Mandaluyong, Philippines. According to Webster (2019) long term incarcerated viewed their circumstances more positive and; they had come to terms with their conditions and the necessity of making a life for themselves inside the correctional facilities, learning how to manage their time, deal with what build in the future, and stay in control which developed a method of coping with the experience. While there is no common definition agreed upon that outlines the length of time that makes an individual a "long-term" incarcerated, Building Future Program has identified this category as anyone who has been incarcerated for 10 years or longer (Baywater, 2022). Second, become a mother prior to entering the facility. Mothers are separated from their children upon entering prison, which can significantly add to the emotional burden of their incarceration (Enos,2001; Page et al., 2021). Lastly, have a partner prior to entering the facility. Incarceration affects relationships in various ways, leading to a range of outcomes, including some relationships ending, strengthening others, and leaving some unaffected (Widdowson et al., 2020). Being Incarcerated presents obstacles for maintaining romantic relationships (Condry & Minson, 2021). According to Lindberg (2020) the total of 6 participants is considered reasonable to support interpretative phenomenological study. The aim of IPA is to offer detailed and thorough insights into how participants perceive and comprehend experiences, leading to deliberately small sample sizes. Depending on the research objectives and practical limitations, sample sizes typically fall between one and fifteen participants, with the most common range being six to eight individuals (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014, p. 9). It is important for the qualitative researcher to ensure that the selected participants are suitable and qualified about the issue of the study (Tenny et al., 2022).

Sampling Technique

In this study, the selection of participants will be done through a purposive sampling technique. It is a non-probability sampling

technique, according to which researchers select participants depending on their decisions and a certain criterion, as introduced by Crossman (2020). Researchers want to use purposive sampling of a relatively homogenous group of people who share a particular phenomenon (Pietkiewicz & Smith, 2014). This will be a selective process that will be targeting a more specific focus rather than a generalized focus which will provide a greater depth of meaning to the study. Purposive sampling is a key characteristic of qualitative research. Additionally, it provides a set of directed criteria that will be used to guide the selection of the participants.

For this study, the research participants will be assisted by the officers of the Correctional Institution for Women (CIW) in Mandaluyong, Philippines. The researchers will provide a selection criterion for the participants to the officers. The officers will identify potential participants who meet the

following criteria: they must have had a minimum of ten years of incarceration, and must have been mothers, and had a living partner prior to incarceration. Purposive sampling is a method in which participants are more closely defined by the criteria set forth in the study (Davies, R. S. 2020). The officers will then obtain consent from the participants to be included in the study, and will circulate the questionnaires to those who agree to participate.

This process ensures that the chosen individuals meet the study's objectives as it relies on the officer's discretion and the participants' autonomy. While this may seem indirect, the purpose of sampling by the officer is more defensible, as the sampling is done according to pre-determined and research-oriented guidelines. This sampling method guarantees that participants will meet all the necessary, research-based criteria to enrich the study's outcomes (Taherdoost, 2022).

Result and Discussion

Table 1. Main Theme and Subthemes

Theme	Subtheme
1. Emotional Struggles	1.1 Guilt and Regret 1.2 Stigma, Shame, and Identity Crisis
2. Coping and Resilience	2.1 Religious Practices 2.2 Social Support 2.3 Structured Activities
3. Personal Growth and Transformation	3.1 Self-forgiveness 3.2 Shift in Perspectives 3.3 Helping Others
4. Hope and Future Aspirations	4.1 Rebuilding Family 4.2 Belief in Second Chance

Theme 1: Emotional Struggles

The emotional toll of prison life can be significantly worse for female inmates who are separated from their children. Feelings of guilt, shame, and remorse are coupled with the emotional and psychological trauma of losing one's identity. These challenges are exacerbated by the psychological effects of self-stigmatization and societal stigma. The psychological barriers to reintegration and rehabilitation these feelings create can be formidable.

Guilt and Regret

Mothers in prison experience guilt and remorse mainly to due to their separation from their children. They often reflect on how they defamed their families and on the mistakes, they have made in the past. Such emotional investment manifests as a sense of parental failure and inhibits self-forgiveness.

The three characters experience deep regret and guilt that connects all their stories, and that is the result of the choices they made that resulted in their incarceration and later alienated them with their families. Participant

2 remembers the way her pride and feelings overcame her and how it would have been a better decision had she preferred to be humble and be with her children. Sadly, Participant 5 believes that in case she had made better decisions in her life she would not be in prison and would be enjoying her family and husband. Participant 4, however, has self-rage that she did not embrace the error that took her to this situation since she understands that the actions have changed her life permanently. Put together, their accounts reveal the intense feeling of guilt and remorse, that they are burdened with, in tandem to a desire to live with their relatives.

The emotional accounts of the incarcerated mothers are fraught with feelings of guilt and remorse especially when it comes to their perceived inability to meet the maternal roles. Such feelings were usually increased by the fact that they were separated long-term by their children and were not able to observe them or take part in their significant milestones in their development. According to Sufrin et al. (2020), this was a kind of double punishment because not only the legal outcomes of their behavior were devastating, but the emotional loss of their interrupted maternity as well. Such regret was not limited to incarceration and it was often based on what options were selected before the conviction. This highlights the influence of a mother whose guilt has been going on.

According to Walsh et al. (2023), guilt that is not resolved can also add to the presence of depression, emotional withdrawing, or unwillingness to accept support of the institution. Nevertheless, evidence-based programs such as Parenting Inside Out provide a healing opportunity. The U.S. based cognitive-behavioral program provides prisoners with parenting skills, builds emotional strength, and promotes a new self-identity of nurturing and competent mothers. When implemented to the Philippines setting, this may be used to a great effect to improve the maternal rehabilitation by making guilt to be a source of personal development.

Stigma, Shame, and Identity Crisis

The stigma surrounding incarcerated

mothers contributes to profound identity crises, and crises of self-worth, and self-esteem. Labeled as bad parents, they internalize feelings of shame, and feelings of low self-worth. The internal stigma associated with incarceration has profound effects on self-perception.

The stories of the participants are a deep indication of the influence of stigma, shame, and identity crisis caused by incarceration. Internalized stigma can result in a low self-esteem as evidenced by participant 3 who feels worthless and self-blame giving her the impression that her life is meaningless. On the same note, Participant 5 feels shame because she believes that she is a burden to her family because she feels helpless with her imprisonment and a heavy sentence. This feeling of shame is informed by the feeling that she is no longer able to carry out her duties, which strengthens the sense of guilt and social rejection. On the other side, Participant 6 faces issues with her identity as a mother, which emphasizes the fact that incarceration deprives people of their roles, causing a crisis in perception and a feeling of complete alienation. Collectively, these stories prove the strength of stigma, shame, and identity crisis, as it can impact both the way society looks at incarcerated people and how people themselves feel.

The incarceration stigma contributes to the emotional distress, because such labels as the society has towards them, such as the label of unfit mothers, are shattering the self-worth and causing identity crisis. According to Abrams and Dettlaff (2020), punitive measures, including holding court hearings in public or reporting on imprisoned women in the media as people of a loose character, support internal shame. Gobena et al. (2022) also emphasize the loss of identity of a mother as a good parent, which exposes them to discrimination and alienation caused by imprisonment. This is a really harmful stigma due to the fact that it deprives the mothers of their caring identity, which exposes them to self-doubt and social rejection.

Narrative therapy and arts-based programs are examples of creative interventions that provide avenues of regaining their agency.

Indicatively, Heidemann et al. (2023) discovered that storytelling sessions enable other people to reinvent their identities beyond social categories. In the meantime, such programs as 'Prison Arts Collective' (Brewster, 2023) depend on visual arts in order to make women work through the trauma and overcome dehumanizing stereotypes.

Theme 2: Coping and Resilience

Despite the adversities that come with the process of imprisonment, many mothers are able to adapt and build resilience. Along with religious practices, social support, and participation in structured activities, they are able to experience a semblance of normality and achieve emotional equilibrium. Thus, they are able to endure imprisonment with purpose and hope.

Religious Practices

Religion provides a pivotal means of coping with the psychological distress that the mothers in prison must face; it fosters a sense of hope. Prayer, reading of scriptures, and participation in other religious and spiritual activities elicit feelings of psychological relief, and help reinforce a sense of purpose.

The interviewees emphasize that religious activities play a major role in helping them cope with imprisonment. Participant 2 says that she finds strength in prayer and that it gives her some sense of comfort and assurance she is not alone. Similarly, Participant 4 also views her situation in terms of faith by stating that the prison is there on purpose according to the plans of Allah. Participant 3, on the contrary, describes her experience of transformation where an original feeling of obligatory obedience has turned into a genuine spiritual worship; her newfound faith has led to active participation in religious practices, such as leading songs and preaching. These narratives depict the way in which religious activities provide emotional encouragement, a perceived meaning and a way of personal development in the face of the difficulty of confinement.

Religion serves as an important coping tool, as it provides hope and emotional stability to the incarcerated mothers. According to a study by Hallett et al. (2020) 68 of women in prison

use prayer or meditation to cope with stress, most of them referring to spirituality as the "peace in their soul in the middle of the institutional mayhem. However, researchers like Sered (2022) are against excessive dependence on spirituality and recommend the use of combined interventions that include religious and trauma-counseling to treat the psychological wounds they harbor.

A faith-based intervention called the Resilience Ministry in Texas women prisons is a combination of scripture study and cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) to deal with trauma. An example is that mothers use biblical themes on forgiveness and CBT methods to dispute negative self-statements. Johnson (2021) discovered that the respondents were reporting a 40percent decrease in anxiety and depression symptoms. As a result, such programs can help to achieve the holistic resilience of incarcerated mothers.

Peer Support

The imprisoned mothers are often filled with fellow inmate who then plays out the role of an alternate family unit hence provide emotional support and creates an in depth understanding. The overlapping of the common experience creates strong relational ties, which offer comfort and can, in effect, alleviate the sense of isolation.

The participants highlight the critical importance of social support in enabling a coping mechanism when incarcerated. Participant 3 tells how she finds consolation with other inmates and sees them as a kind of family that can listen and offer emotional assistance during a difficult situation. Similarly, Participant 4 expresses the relief of being known to individuals with similar problems and thus alleviating the emotional weight of being in prison. Participant 6 also emphasizes empowerment through mutual support where the inmates motivate and support one another through the day to day challenges. All these testimonies depict a consistent illustration of how interpersonal relationships amongst parolees can act as an important platform of emotional strength, a feeling of belonging and group strength in the face of adversity.

Connection with peers in the prison environment is often a lifeline to the imprisoned mothers. The role of a second family is played in this scenario by fellow inmates. The collective nature of the adversity that comes with incarceration forms strong relationships as the mothers depend on each other to offer emotional comfort, understanding, and friendship. Empirical studies show that peer support in prison can help improve mental health and reduce the level of emotional distress because the ability to share experiences with people of much the same tribe can help reduce the feeling of loneliness (Favrol & Van, 2023).

It is the presence of a supportive network that makes the emotional processing of mothers, the development of hope and the perpetual pursuit of behavior change possible. A piece of research by Barrenger and Hampson (2021) shows that informal mothering groups, where women give each other childcare tips and emotional support, are surrogate familial arrangements that reduce the feeling of abandonment. Such relationships are not limited to the affective aspects; according to O'Hear (2020), the percentage of recidivism has decreased by 30 over the relationships as strong as peer networks; the author explains that this correlation is caused by the mechanisms of accountability that women create regarding their post-release goals.

These organic bonds would be harnessed to offer formal psychosocial support, which would be implemented through implementing formal peer-mentoring systems within the institutional context. It is also possible to use peer navigators with minimal active listening and emotional first-aid skills to enhance emotional safety nets. The example of Los Angeles is a reentry initiative program through which formerly incarcerated mothers are contracted with peer mentors in a systematic manner. Such mentors support mentees on housing applications, job search, and custody, which reduce recidivism by 40% in five years (Barrenger & Hampson, 2021).

Structured Activities

The everyday practice and deliberate programmes assist incarcerated mothers to

achieve a feeling of purpose and control. Engagement in vocational training, education, and working on custody helps them to cope with emotional distress and being motivated.

The participants emphasize the importance of daily routine and the organized activities that provide mothers in incarceration with a feeling of control and goal in the face of their confinement. Participant 1 is active and engages herself in various activities in order to ease her distress by using the activities of daily life. Participant 2 finds meaning through serving other people in the institution hence remaining purposeful despite her situation. Participant 5 practices organized sporting activities like Zumba and adheres to a daily routine that includes domestic activities and meetings with peers. The routines also help to achieve stability emotionally, cope in jail, and be motivated in their daily lives.

Procedural schedules, such as training in vocations and educational courses, give incarcerated mothers a sense of meaning and normality. Baldonado et al. (2022) have discovered that physical and mental wellbeing of people in prisons was positive when these people were engaged in livelihood activities. This is a method that turned out to be one of the most effective coping strategies during their prison sentences.

In the US, there are a dozen correctional centers that provide a coding bootcamp to train incarcerated mothers on web development and entrepreneurship. Graduates also receive industry certifications with thirty per cent securing technology related jobs on release. According to Yun et al. (2021), the allocation of depressive symptoms related to the participation decreased by a quarter, which is explained by the development of concrete skills that contribute to the well-being of the family.

By ensuring that their activities and physical exercises are wide in range, correctional facilities can improve the emotional stability of PDLs. Collaborations with TESDA or colleges can offer more options in the skill-building programmes outside sewing and laundry, which could be digital skills, arts and crafts, or entrepreneurship. The routines should be organised in such a way that besides rehabilitation, the long-term livelihood

opportunities after the release should be highlighted.

Theme 3: Personal Growth and Transformation

Numerous mothers in prison are experiencing immense personal development, as they reconstruct their worldviews and process the meaning of their prior experiences. Even though they have to learn to live with many challenging realities, they manage to develop a motivated sense of purpose through self-forgiveness, perspective shifting, and a want to assist others.

Self-forgiveness

The meditations made by the participants highlight the critical importance of self-forgiveness in promoting emotional healing. Participant 3 notices that despite the fact that the past cannot be changed, individual change still is possible, which is a sign of deliberate refusal to blame oneself. Participant 5 blatantly states that self-forgiveness is a necessary step towards progress and that the presence of guilt is a hindrance to progress. Similarly, Participant 1 achieves acceptance by means of faith and deep thought, which proves that the self-forgiveness process is lengthy and inward. These results shed light on how the guilt is internalized by the incarcerated individuals, which makes it affordable to them, making it possible to recover and build a new life.

The process of developing self-forgiveness among imprisoned mothers is a long and painful one. They often feel deep feelings of guilt in relation to what they did to attract their imprisonment and especially the loss of their offspring. With time, through contemplate thinking, spiritual involvement, and social support, they come to value the fact that by holding on to guilt, they are only prolonging their own agonies.

Self-forgiveness is a pivotal point in the healing process, and it has been linked to being more likely to achieve better mental-health outcomes and a higher success rate of reintegration after release (Leigey & Reed, 2020). According to Leigey and Reed (2020), restorative-justice programs are proactively involved in this process by

encouraging mothers to address their antecedent behaviors as they develop a prospective orientation to change.

The self-compassion in mothers can be nurtured in correctional facilities through therapeutic programs that directly educate mothers on self-forgiveness. Cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) is also a contributing factor that allows women to re-frame guilt as a growth stimulus instead of a sentence of guilt (Barrenger & Hampson, 2021). When well customized, such interventions enable mothers, to be disinterested in self-worthiness in transgression, hence encouraging resilience and responsibility.

Shift in Perspective

A lot of imprisoned mothers experience a radical change in their attitude, viewing imprisonment not as punishment in the first place, but as a chance to develop themselves. Gratitude and positive reframing help them in their process of navigating their lives and development of resilience.

The reflections of the participants also show a drastic change in the way of thinking, and they show that the incarceration has triggered self-awareness and personal development. Participant 3 says that the acceptance of their situation has helped them to learn tough lessons including that of self-change and making conscious decisions. Similarly, Participant 6 recognises the value of patience, forgiveness, and acceptance where according to him, the past may be uncontrollable but there is still a chance to be better to benefit loved ones. Participant 4, in turn, ponders over achieving a larger perspective of life, in which experiences, even unpleasant ones, are given a purposeful role. All these insights can explain the way people can restructure their experiences and build a more positive perspective, which will eventually lead to their personal transformation.

Most of the imprisoned mothers experience significant changes of mindset in which imprisonment is seen as a learning experience and not a form of punishment. They start perceiving life differently and valuing things which are not obvious to them. Such transition

paves the way to manage their plight by paying off feelings. Drapela et al. (2021) explain the change by gratitude ceremonies, which help women to concentrate on small wins rather than thinking about defeat.

Studies also show that gratitude practice can be transformative toward the emotional well-being of individuals, particularly in stressful settings. Mcfarlane (2020) states that gratitude is beneficial and it enables a person to focus the mind not on what is missing but what is available and make one become more optimistic. Participating in the list of things to be thankful, people are able to leave the sphere of pain and look at the future, being able to see the meaning even in the realities of confinement.

It, therefore, is necessary to introduce initiatives like the digital stories program, by the Bard Prison Initiative, where mothers can share their stories and turn them into survivor accounts (Heidemann et al., 2023). These programmes do not only enhance mental health but make the existing stereotypes in the society about the incarcerated women a challenge.

Helping Others

Most of the incarcerated mothers get a purpose of supporting and taking care of fellow inmates. Assisting others by engaging in little activities, listening to them, or giving them encouraging words makes them feel that they have a purpose and they are valued. This can assist them to deal with their agony, since they turn their suffering into sympathies to people around them.

The cogitations of the participants reinforce the strength of the effects of helping other people. Participant 2 has a pleasure in acts of kindness, either in gifting advice, helping with some tasks or even just listening and understanding that such actions are beneficial to the wellbeing of other people. Participant 3 is also proud of sharing the divine word, which he considers to be a channel of bringing hope. In case of Participant 6, serving others is one of the ways through which redemption can be achieved, which supports the belief that even in the most harmful conditions, it is possible to do good. These

observations show that service oriented activities give imprisoned people a new purpose and emotional satisfaction in addition to the positive way of giving back to their community.

It has been shown empirically that prosocial behavior, including the act of helping others can enhance mental wellbeing and reduce emotional distress even in the context of incarceration. In a longitudinal study, Raposa et al. (2020) found that benevolent acts have a protective effect on the negative psychological impact of stress by creating resilience and social connectedness.

The biological support of neurobiological and social reward systems underlies the so-called helper effect, which is the tendency of emotional relief when supporting others and strengthening the psychological resilience. Hui et al. (2020) concluded that prosocial behavior is associated with the activation of neural pathways linked to reward processes and thus, an interdependent healing loop is formed that supports reciprocal healing.

Lastly, Van der Linden (2021) used cross-cultural research to argue that prosociality under restricted conditions facilitates post-traumatic development so that people can understand the presence of suffering as a valuable contribution. This literature demonstrates the therapeutic use of structured peer-support programs in prisons.

Theme 4: Hope and Future Aspirations

Incarcerated mothers face challenges that would lose most people hope. However, these mothers remain hopeful for the future. Their motivation to change and reintegrate into the community comes from the desire to return to their families and to make a positive contribution to the community.

Rebuilding Family

The desire to be close to their children and restore their family ties acts as a powerful driving force to motivate women who are kept in the prisons. Emotional resilience and facilitation of positive behavioral changes are the advantages of predicting the reengagement with dependents.

The participants are eager to develop their family relations and underline the way their incarceration period develops due to their need to reunite with the beloved ones. The emotional weight of separation can be seen in the fact that Participant 1 is excited to be able to hug their children again on the day. Equally, the same applies to Participant 2 who is bent on reconciliation and is remorseful and committed to correcting the errors of the past. Participant 5, on the other hand, views their day-to-day activity as a training on coming home as a better parent and member of the family. Their words convey a strong desire of incarcerated women to mend broken ties, watch their trust, and create a more prosperous future of their families.

This is because among incarcerated mothers, restoring relationships with their children is not only a goal but an important factor of successful rehabilitation. According to Schlafer et al. (2023), frequent parent-child visits decrease maternal depression by 40 percent, which is why motivation to establish connections with family members alleviates depression and decreases the likelihood of reoffending (Poehlmann-Tynan et al., 2023).

Such programs like “Sesame Street Little Children, Big Challenges support the idea of child-friendly visitation areas, which reduce the emotional burden of visiting prison and help to have healthier interactions. Similarly, the letter writing programs of Girl Scout Beyond Bars contribute to retaining emotional connection despite the separation (Dyler & Pleck, 2022). However, these connections are still hindered by systemic pains such as the limited opportunities of visiting and the high costs of telephone communications.

To mitigate these issues, the correctional facilities might increase the number of programs aimed at assisting people to overcome their past trauma in the form of trauma-informed visitation, introduce virtual visits to make contact with families that are distant due to their geographic locations, and introduce parenting workshops that would help to build trust through children and their mothers. Other policy changes are also required to protect the rights of the mothers like the abolition of the practice of isolating

mothers and babies and also the abolition of communication charges. Through focusing on family relationships, the institutions will reduce intergenerational trauma and open the avenue that enables the reintegration of mothers into the lives of their children upon release.

Belief in Second Chances

Although they are in prison, a lot of incarcerated mothers are hopeful about being redeemed and having their lives fixed. They want to make a difference in society, break the stigma and show that they can change.

The participants demonstrate a strong feeling of hope and desire to rebuild their life after incarceration. Participant 2 misses the freedom to reunite with family and makes a plea to come out early so that he can make up the lost time and show his love. Similarly, Participant 3 also has high expectations of a new beginning and views himself/herself as stronger, more responsible, and goal-focused after reentry. The fact that they want to work or start a small business indicates that they are focused on their self-sufficiency and to support their loved ones. Participant 6, in the meantime, would be inspired to demonstrate his/her change, taking every chance and striving to live a stress-free and satisfying life. Their stories, when combined together, reveal the strength of hope, strength, and the need to seek redemption as they return to society.

Even in the conditions of their existence, a lot of PDLs do not lose hope to get the second chance and the possibility to restructure their lives. Dorr (2025) also writes that once a person goes to prison, it is not an easy task to start anew, and second chances are one of the hardest an individual can face. There is a society that views individuals who have already been incarcerated as being irreparably damaged and this mentality, which keeps them in a poverty and alienation cycle.

Hope and cycles of incarceration are also broken by education and employment opportunities that are also important in restoring hope. Educational programs like the Prison University Project which provides collegiate degrees to female inmates have shown that recidivism is reduced by half and

post-release employment outcomes are better (Davis and Bozick, 2022). Likewise, homegrown programs, like Homeboy Industries, include job training and mentorship with 8% of participants obtaining long-term jobs six months after release (Visher et al., 2022).

Although these achievements have been made, there are still systemic inequities. As an example, the Clean Slate Law, which automatically erases non-violent criminal records, has raised the level of employment by 25% percent; however, not all people tend to receive this kind of reforms (Avery et al., 2023). Also, the formerly incarcerated mothers face extreme lack of housing, and 15% of them end up receiving affordable housing (Desmond and Bell, 2023).

The way to maintain second chances as long as possible is to ensure the development of prison-based educational programs, build alliances with employers that would reduce hiring biases, and invest in housing programs that should return citizens to their home. Without de-escalating these structural blocks, even the most ambitious people will be threatened with falling back to poverty and returning to prisons.

Conclusion

The research has identified the intersectional nature of suffering and resilience in Filipino imprisoned mothers. They are showing a two-sidedness of deeply emotional suffering, which is accompanied by guilt and loss and marginalization by the society, and extreme flexibility, which is motivated by faith, peer support, and hopes of a second opportunity. The results indicate the ineffectiveness of the existing correctional programs to meet the psychosocial needs of incarcerated mothers, especially to maintain maternal relationships and promote rehabilitation. Although the resilience of the mothers provides a route to healing, there are gaps in the system of mental health support, family visitation policy and reintegration programs that sustain trauma cycles. This study highlights the critical need to focus on culturally specific interventions that are more concerned with maternal health, reinforcing

family relationships, and proving counter-stigmatizing discourse. The study will promote a more balanced approach to corrections that lies between accountability and compassion and allows incarcerated mothers to grow and contribute to society by raising their voices.

Recommendation

In solving the identified challenges, policy-makers and institutions of correction must focus on re-forms that will improve the psychosocial wellbeing of incarcerated mothers.

First, the increase of mental health provision or screening, such as trauma-informed counseling and peer-support groups, would help on the emotional distress and healing. Second, the policies that govern visits should be revised to accommodate child-friendly areas and virtual interaction to maintain maternal relationships that are broken by prison. Third, vocational training, parenting and faith-based programs should be incorporated into the rehabilitation program so that the mother can be prepared with skills on how they can fit back and personal growth. These efforts could be enhanced by working with NGOs and community organizations.

Researchers who undertake study in the correctional facilities such as CIW in the future need to be aware of institutional constraints that they will face in this study. The research design was also influenced heavily by the time consuming approval process, time constraints on data collection and inability to interact directly with the participants because of security measures. Researchers can overcome these obstacles by getting into contact with correctional administrators in the early stages, providing substantial time to carry out ethical approvals, and structuring versatile methodologies to suit delays caused by institutions. The use of written questionnaires (as the face-to-face interviews were not allowed) predetermined the lack of a chance to dig deeper into the narratives of the participants. This would be reduced in the future by creating wide and open-ending questions beforehand or exploring meditated channels of communication that the institution would approve. Also, the sensitivity of the subject matter required tactful approach to emotional revelations, the next generation of

studies needs to inculcate longer debriefing procedures, or have mental health practitioners on site to assist the respondents.

Lastly, the scope of this research to include the study of long-term incarcerated mothers in a single facility creates the necessity to conduct the investigation on a broader scale to cover the various correctional settings. Some areas where researchers are needed include inter-generational effects of maternal imprisonment, how the cultural values (e.g., pagtitiyaga or endurance) are involved in the development of resilience, and the efficacy of post-release support systems. By filling these gaps, a better future will be informed by work to implement policies that will turn the correctional environments to healing and equitable spaces of incarcerated mothers and their families.

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