

A Deeper Look at an Inmate's Journey

Sir Bimboy Cueno is the dean of the College of Criminology at FU and directs his passion for the field into academic research to better both himself and criminology as a whole. Recently, he undertook an analysis of current attitudes on the effectiveness of the Inmates' Welfare and Development Program (IWDP) within a jail in the province of Negros Oriental. The phenomenological journey of an inmate has changed rapidly since President Duterte launched the "War on Drugs", exponentially increasing those with law violation charges to a startling degree. In 2015, the Philippines had approximately 30,5000 inmates but as of 2018, it skyrocketed to over 145,000. The Philippine correction system is ideally meant for around 20,000 prisoners alone. While countries all over the globe seek to rectify their latest correctional philosophies, such as Norway, Nigeria, Ireland, the USA, and Canada, the Philippines has been ranked #1 for overcrowding conditions in the world. Cueno took a deeper look into the livelihood of an inmate suffering from these harsh circumstances perpetuated by a lack of funding. The IWDP receives a budget of about 1.2 million pesos meant to provide minimal necessities (i.e. food and water) for 30,000 inmates; this does not include recreational facilities, uniforms, and other aspects of a decent livelihood. Many people housed in jail develop skin infections, paralysis, hypertension, and a whole host of other illnesses. Cueno states that under the "assumption that criminals can undo criminal behavior, inmate rehabilitation is considerably a 'shoot-for-the-moon' ambition of the correction pillar." We shift from the most rudimentary form of punishment of torture and isolation in correction evolution to the most humane with rehabilitation; this form parallels medical personnel curing disease. Poor behavior that harms society is no different.

The IWDP offered by the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology seeks to provide inmates a chance to train, develop skills, and improve overall livelihood. It has also been understood that religion contributes as a coping resource to how inmates make sense of their circumstances within a district jail. Cueno conducted interviews of participants that had been in the IWDP for at least six months, ones that had endured the 806% overcrowding rate. The district jail assessed was meant for only 15 people. For the study, 21 were selected and briefed beforehand. They underwent intensive interviews and the jail staff were consulted afterwards. The results were then analyzed by experts in the field. In the interviews, inmates offered both

textual and structural descriptions. The former revealed their experiences whereas the latter exposed how the context or setting influenced said experiences. Many believed the IWDP was beneficial for their journey through jail because they developed skills, such as creating rugs, which gave the opportunity to seek out a stable job once released. Participation also tended to eliminate negative thoughts that arise from boredom, loneliness, anxiety, and depression. Participants also gained a deeper understanding of their fellow inmates, could exercise more, and advance their reading and writing skills. One expressed his appreciation for learning how to read and write, *“At first time I did not know how to read but gradually I learned how to, because they allow us to practice,”* and another, *“When I was still outside, I was a drunkard. If I will be released someday, my life will no longer be the same. For instance, when I arrive here I did not know how to read. When time comes that I return back to my place, I am proud that I know already how to read.”* Having remained at a Grade 4 reading level, they were grateful for their new abilities. In addition to these academic skills, inmates developed their soft skills of respect, humility, patience, and compassion. They began to see imprisonment as a part of God’s plan, giving everything a sense of purpose. Although amenities were always low, the jail administration and staff were often expeditious to sorting out the struggles and demands of its prisoners when it came to medicine, such as Vitamin C supplements. Inmates commented that the jail staff were thoughtful towards their predicament.

Overall, the IWDP efforts demonstrated increased skills, income, focus, and cognitive capabilities for inmates on top of uplifted spiritual reconciliation, physical conditioning maintenance, better personal relationships, and character reformation. It cannot be determined whether or not it’s enough to establish self-sustenance in a life outside of jail though. More research is needed, as well as funds for more regular teachers, amenities, and necessities. Hopefully the Philippines can expand its rehabilitation efforts to make the livelihood of every citizen a happier one, former convicts included.