ISSN (Online): 2455-3662
EPRA International Journal of Multidisciplinary Research (IJMR) - Peer Reviewed Journal
Volume: 11| Issue: 9| September 2025|| Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra2013 || SJIF Impact Factor 2025: 8.691 || ISI Value: 1.188

EXPLORING THE CAUSES OF MENTAL HEALTH ISSUE AMONG PERSONS DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY IN NEW BILIBID PRISON: BASIS FOR A COMPREHENSIVE INTERVENTION PROGRAM

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Article DOI: https://doi.org/10.36713/epra24138
DOI No: 10.36713/epra24138

ABSTRACT

This study aims to investigate the underlying causes of mental health crises among PDLs in New Bilibid Prison and establish a foundation for a comprehensive intervention program, recognizing the imperative need to address these issues. The research endeavors to propose evidence-based solutions that will enhance the overall effectiveness of the correctional system in promoting rehabilitation and reintegration by identifying key factors that contribute to psychological distress and assessing existing mental health services. This will improve the well-being of incarcerated individuals. This study employs a quantitative research design, specifically utilizing the descriptive survey method, to assess the causes of the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in New Bilibid Prison (NBP). It involves three groups of respondents: Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), Custodial Officers, and Reformation Officers in New Bilibid Prison. Findings formulated after investigating the issue on the assessment on the causes of mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison in terms of Poor Living Conditions,Mental Health Services, Exposure to violence, Pre-Existing Psychological Disorder and Need for Family Visitation are Agreed. However, there are situations needed to improve. Based on the results, the study proposes to have a collaboration with external stakeholders that offers mental health programs and funding to help the PDL in preventing health crisis.

KEYWORDS: *Exploring, Mental Health, Persons Deprived of Liberty, Comprehensive Intervention Program, New Bilibid Prison.*

INTRODUCTION

The growing recognition of the psychological distress experienced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) has resulted in the mental health of incarcerated individuals becoming a significant global concern. Inmates are subjected to severe stressors that can have a detrimental impact on their mental health due to the restrictive and frequently antagonistic environment of correctional facilities. Incarceration is a concept that entails the deprivation of liberty, autonomy, and personal agency, which can result in psychiatric disorders, emotional instability, and psychological distress. The prison environment, which is defined by congestion, violence, a lack of privacy, and limited access to health services, has been shown to exacerbate pre-existing mental health conditions and promote the development of new disorders, according to research. In numerous instances, the insufficient mentacare services available in correctional institutions result in the deterioration of conditions for individuals who enter prison with undiagnosed or untreated mental illnesses.

Mental health professionals and criminal justice practitioners have expressed concern regarding the prevalence of melancholy, anxiety, schizophrenia, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among prisoners, underscoring the necessity of a rigors strategy for addressing these issues. The psychological decline of incarcerated individuals may result in self-harm, increased aggression, and difficulty reintegrating into society upon release if effective intervention is not provided. It is essential to comprehend the underlying causes of mental health crises in PDLs in order to develop a comprehensive intervention program that is tailored to their unique requirements and encourages rehabilitation.

A critical instance for examining the mental health crisis among PDLs is presented by the New Bilibid Prison, the largest correctional facility in the Philippines. The facility has been beset by severe overcrowding, poor living conditions, and limited access to medical and mental health services for an extended period. According to reports, the harsh conditions of New Bilibid Prison have resulted in a significant number of inmates experiencing chronic tension, anxiety, and depression. Furthermore, their mental health is deteriorating due to the protracted uncertainty of their sentences, the absence of family visits, and exposure to violence. This study aims to investigate the underlying causes of mental health crises among PDLs in New Bilibid Prison and establish a foundation for a comprehensive intervention program, recognizing the imperative need to address

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these issues. The research endeavors to propose evidence-based solutions that will enhance the overall effectiveness of the correctional system in promoting rehabilitation and reintegration by identifying key factors that contribute to psychological distress and assessing existing mental health services. This will improve the well-being of incarcerated individuals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Overcrowding in correctional facilities remains one of the most critical issues affecting the mental well-being of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs). Baffour et al. (2024) emphasize that overcrowding not only violates fundamental human rights but also significantly contributes to heightened anxiety and depression among inmates. The lack of space and access to essential support services exacerbates feelings of helplessness and distress. Similarly, Brivik (2014) highlights how overcrowding serves as a major barrier to mental health care, leading to inadequate service provision and worsening psychological conditions. These findings are further supported by The Series (2022), which discusses how the lack of personal space and privacy fosters tension, conflict, and aggression among inmates, making rehabilitation efforts more difficult. While these studies agree on the detrimental impact of overcrowding on mental health, they differ in their emphasis—Baffour et al. (2024) focus on systemic human rights violations, while Brivik (2014) underscores the operational barriers that prevent proper mental health intervention. Nonetheless, they collectively highlight the urgent need for policy reforms to address overcrowding in correctional institutions.

Exposure to violence within prison settings further compounds the mental health crisis among PDLs. Cardoso et al. (2024) illustrate how the cyclical nature of violence perpetuates anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) among inmates, reinforcing a cycle of trauma and mental instability. In contrast, León-Jiménez (2024) provides a broader socio-political perspective, examining institutional violence in South American correctional facilities. The study reveals how violence exists at multiple levels—interpersonal violence between inmates and systemic violence inflicted by prison authorities. This aligns with global research that emphasizes the role of socio-economic disparities and corruption in perpetuating mental health crises in prisons. While Cardoso et al. (2024) focus on the psychological consequences of trauma, León-Jiménez (2024) highlights institutional factors that exacerbate these conditions, suggesting that without structural reforms, mental health deterioration among PDLs will persist.

The lack of mental health services further exacerbates the struggles of incarcerated individuals. Yarcia and Bernadas (2023) argue that failing to provide adequate mental health care in prisons constitutes a violation of international human rights obligations. They stress the need for legal and institutional reforms to ensure that detainees receive appropriate psychological support. Saguran et al. (2023), on the other hand, take a qualitative approach by documenting the lived experiences of PDLs, revealing a direct correlation between poor prison conditions, social isolation, and psychological distress. Their findings reinforce the idea that the absence of mental health services worsens anxiety, depression, and other psychiatric disorders among inmates. While both studies agree on the urgent need for mental health interventions, Yarcia and Bernadas (2023) focus on the legal responsibilities of states, whereas Saguran et al. (2023) emphasize the human impact of these deficiencies. Their combined insights suggest that addressing this issue requires both legal advocacy and practical improvements in prison conditions.

Taken together, these studies reveal a consistent pattern of systemic neglect, institutional violence, and resource scarcity contributing to the mental health crisis among PDLs. Overcrowding, exposure to violence, and the lack of mental health services create an environment where psychological distress becomes an unavoidable consequence of incarceration. While some studies emphasize the legal and policy aspects (Yarcia & Bernadas, 2023; Baffour et al., 2024), others focus on the lived experiences of inmates and institutional failures (Saguran et al., 2023; León-Jiménez, 2024). These perspectives complement each other in highlighting the multifaceted nature of mental health issues in prisons, reinforcing the necessity for comprehensive intervention strategies. Addressing this crisis requires not only improvements in prison conditions and mental health care but also broader structural reforms to ensure humane and rehabilitative correctional environments.

In sum-up, the reviewed articles provide critical insights into the present study by highlighting the key factors contributing to the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in New Bilibid Prison. The discussions on overcrowding (Baffour et al., 2024; Brivik, 2014; The Series, 2022) establish how excessive inmate populations create stress, tension, and inadequate access to mental health care. Studies on exposure to violence (Cardoso et al., 2024; León-Jiménez, 2024) further emphasize how physical and institutional violence contribute to trauma and mental instability among inmates. Additionally, the works of Yarcia and Bernadas (2023) and Saguran et al. (2023) on the lack of mental health services highlight systemic neglect and human rights violations that worsen psychological distress. These findings align with the present study's objective of assessing the causes of mental health crises in correctional facilities, reinforcing the need for policy reforms, improved rehabilitation programs, and enhanced mental health interventions for PDLs.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aims to assess the causes of mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison to serve as basis for a comprehensive intervention program.

Specifically, it seeks answers to the following problems:

1. How do the three groups of respondents assess the causes of mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison in terms of:

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1.1. Poor Living Conditions
1.2. Lack of Mental Health Services;
1.3. Exposure to Violence;
1.4. Pre-existing Psychological Disorder; and,
1.5. Need for family Visitation

2. Is there significant difference among the assessments of the three group of respondents on the causes of mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison in terms of the abovementioned variables?
3. What are challenges encountered to prevent the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison?
4. What are the measures can be proposed to address the challenges encountered to prevent the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison?
5. Based on the findings, what comprehensive intervention program can be proposed to prevent the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison?

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey method is chosen because it is effective in describing existing conditions, behaviors, and perceptions of the respondents regarding mental health challenges in prison settings (Groves et al., 2018). This method is particularly useful in correctional research as it helps identify patterns and correlations among variables affecting the mental health of inmates. In this study, respondents will be asked to assess the severity of each contributing factor using a standardized rating scale. Through this approach, the study can determine which factors are most significant in exacerbating the mental health crisis among PDLs, thereby providing valuable insights for the development of targeted intervention strategies.

Furthermore, the study will rely on statistical techniques such as frequency distribution, mean scores, and correlation analysis to interpret the data collected. The descriptive analysis will help in identifying trends and commonalities in the experiences of PDLs regarding their mental health challenges (Fowler, 2014). The findings from this research will serve as an empirical basis for recommending policy changes and formulating a comprehensive intervention program aimed at mitigating the mental health crisis in NBP.

SCOPE AND DELIMITATION

The study was conducted at the New Bilibid Prison (NBP), specifically within the Maximum-Security Compound, where the highest number of PDLs with severe sentences are housed. The Maximum-Security Compound presents unique ch allenges in terms of security, rehabilitation, and mental health interventions, which are essential in understanding the broader mental health crisis in the Philippine correctional system.

The respondents of the study will be composed of three key groups: (1) Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), (2) Custodial Officers, and (3) Rehabilitation Officers. The PDLs will provide firsthand insights into their mental health conditions, the challenges they face, and their experiences with existing prison policies and interventions. Custodial officers will offer perspectives on the security-related aspects of managing inmates with mental health issues, including their roles in maintaining order and preventing violent incidents. Rehabilitation officers will contribute insights into mental health programs and rehabilitation efforts, as well as the institutional challenges in addressing psychological disorders among PDLs. The inclusion of these three groups will ensure a comprehensive understanding of the mental health crisis from multiple perspectives.

The study encompassed February to May 2025, covering the data collection, analysis, and formulation of intervention strategies within this period. The four-month duration is deemed sufficient to conduct survey questionnaires, complementary interviews, and data interpretation, allowing for a thorough assessment of the causes of mental health issues among PDLs in NBP. This timeframe also ensures that the study remains focused and manageable, enabling the researcher to generate accurate, timely, and relevant findings that can be used as a basis for policy recommendations and future interventions.

Data Gathering Tool

The study utilized a survey questionnaire as the primary tool for data gathering supported by the complementary interview to support the findings of the study.

Survey Questionnaire. The survey questionnaire is structured to systematically collect relevant information from the respondents, ensuring that the data obtained aligns with the objectives of the study. It is divided into three main parts, with the first part focusing on the demographic profile of the respondents. This section gathers data on age, gender, civil status, and educational attainment, which will help in understanding the background of the respondents and identifying possible correlations between their personal characteristics and their experiences with mental health issues within New Bilibid Prison (NBP).

The second part of the survey questionnaire consists of two subparts, each addressing key areas of the study. The first subpart examines the causes of the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) based on specific factors, namely: overcrowding, exposure to violence, lack of mental health services, poor living conditions, pre-existing psychological disorders, and social isolation. These aspects have been identified as significant contributors to deteriorating mental health conditions in correctional facilities. The second subpart focuses on the challenges encountered in preventing the mental health crisis within NBP, particularly from the perspectives of PDLs, custodial officers, and reformation officers. This section aims to identify the difficulties in addressing mental health concerns and

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implementing proper interventions in a highly restrictive environment.

The third part of the questionnaire seeks to explore the possible measures that can be proposed to address the challenges in preventing the mental health crisis among PDLs. This section allows respondents to provide insights on potential solutions, intervention programs, and institutional reforms that could help improve the mental well-being of incarcerated individuals. By structuring the questionnaire in this manner, the study ensures a comprehensive approach to data collection, enabling a deeper analysis of the factors contributing to mental health issues, the barriers to effective mental health management, and the possible strategies for addressing the crisis within NBP.

Complementary Interview. In addition to the survey questionnaire, this study will utilize complementary interviews as a secondary source of data to gain deeper insights into the causes of the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in New Bilibid Prison (NBP). The researcher will conduct interviews with key officials, including prison administrators, mental health professionals, custodial officers, and reformation officers, who are knowledgeable about the psychological challenges faced by PDLs. These interviews will provide qualitative data that can help explain the findings from the survey, offering a more comprehensive understanding of the institutional, systemic, and environmental factors contributing to mental health issues in NBP. The information gathered will also help identify existing policies, challenges in their implementation, and potential recommendations for improving mental health interventions within the prison system. Through this mixed-method approach, the study ensures a holistic analysis of the issue by combining quantitative survey data with qualitative insights from experienced professionals.

Data Gathering Procedures

The data collection process for this study will follow a structured approach to ensure the accuracy and reliability of the gathered information. Before administering the research instruments, the researcher will first seek approval from the appropriate authorities, such as the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) and the management of New Bilibid Prison (NBP), to conduct the study within the facility. Once approval is granted, a brief orientation will be provided to the respondents, including Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), custodial officers, and reformation officers, to explain the purpose of the study, assure them of confidentiality, and obtain their informed consent. Ethical considerations, such as voluntary participation and anonymity, will be strictly observed to protect the rights and welfare of the respondents.

Following the orientation, the survey questionnaire will be administered to the selected respondents. The researcher will personally distribute the questionnaires to PDLs, custodial officers, and reformation officers, ensuring that they have ample time to complete their responses. Given the sensitive nature of the topic, respondents will be encouraged to answer the survey honestly based on their personal experiences and observations. To accommodate any literacy concerns among PDLs, assistance will be provided as needed while maintaining neutrality to avoid influencing responses. After collecting the completed questionnaires, the researcher will review the responses for completeness and accuracy before proceeding with data analysis.

In addition to the survey, complementary interviews will be conducted with key officials who have firsthand knowledge of the mental health crisis among PDLs. These interviews will provide qualitative insights to supplement the quantitative survey data. The interviews will be semi-structured, allowing respondents to elaborate on their perspectives while ensuring that key topics such as the causes of mental health issues, institutional challenges, and potential interventions are addressed. The researcher will take detailed notes and, with permission, record the interviews for accuracy. Once all data have been gathered, the researcher will proceed with data interpretation and analysis, integrating both survey findings and interview insights to develop a comprehensive understanding of the mental health crisis in NBP.

Ethical Considerations

During the study, exploring the causes of mental health issues among persons deprived of liberty in New Bilibid prison, numerous crucial ethical considerations were noted. All respondents, including PDL's, Custodial officers and Rehabilitation officers, provided informed consent, demonstrating their voluntary involvement and comprehension of the study's objectives. Stringent protocols were implemented to preserve privacy and secrecy, safeguarding sensitive information. The study sought to mitigate harm, ensure equitable treatment of all respondents, and offer potential advantages to both people and society. When necessary, we secured ethical approval and ensured transparency throughout the research process. The findings were appropriately reported, and the respondents were provided with debriefing sessions. In summary, the study adhered to ethical norms by upholding integrity, respecting participants' rights, and complying with relevant rules.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Challenges encountered to prevent the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison

Table 1 shows the Challenges encountered to prevent the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison. This is Serious with an overall mean of 3.16. The three group of respondents consider this as serious where PDL has a mean of 3.13, Custodial Officer has a mean of 3.17 and Rehabilitation Officer has a mean of 3.17. Most of the indicators are Serious. This are the following with their mean: "Lack of funding limits the availability of mental health programs and services" has a mean of 3.55; "Lack of rehabilitation and reintegration programs hinders long-term mental recovery" has a mean of 3.41; "Limited social support due to restricted family visits increases isolation" has a mean of 3.40; "Lack of recreational and rehabilitation activities limits emotional expression and coping mechanisms" has a mean of 3.39;

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"Inadequate mental health screening upon admission leads to undiagnosed conditions" has a mean of 3.34; "Overcrowding makes it difficult to provide individualized psychological support" has a mean of 3.30; "Limited access to psychiatric medications prevents proper treatment of mental disorders", "Cultural and systemic neglect of mental health issues in prison reduces prioritization of psychological well-being" and "Insufficient policies and protocols for handling inmates with severe psychological conditions" have the same mean of 3.24; "Shortage of trained mental health professionals leads to inadequate care" has a mean of 3.22; "Insufficient crisis intervention programs increase the risk of suicide and self-harm" has a mean of 2.31; "Poor coordination between medical, correctional, and psychological services delays interventions" has a mean of 2.29.

Table 1
Challenges encountered to prevent the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison

INDICATORS	PDL		Custodial Officers		Rehabilitation Officers		Overall	
	M	VI	M	VI	M	VI	M	VI
Lack of funding limits the availability of mental health programs and services.	3.54	VS	3.55	VS	3.56	S	**3.55**	**VS**
Overcrowding makes it difficult to provide individualized psychological support.	3.25	S	3.29	S	3.36	S	**3.30**	**S**
Shortage of trained mental health professionals leads to inadequate care.	3.20	S	3.24	S	3.22	S	**3.22**	**S**
Limited access to psychiatric medications prevents proper treatment of mental disorders.	3.21	S	3.28	S	3.24	S	**3.24**	**S**
Poor coordination between medical, correctional, and psychological services delays interventions.	2.24	S	2.29	S	2.34	S	**2.29**	**S**
Inadequate mental health screening upon admission leads to undiagnosed conditions.	3.33	S	3.35	S	3.37	S	**3.34**	**S**
Limited social support due to restricted family visits increases isolation.	3.41	S	3.40	S	3.38	S	**3.40**	**S**
Lack of recreational and rehabilitation activities limits emotional expression and coping mechanisms.	3.39	S	3.38	S	3.41	S	**3.39**	**S**
Cultural and systemic neglect of mental health issues in prison reduces prioritization of psychological well-being.	3.14	S	3.26	S	3.33	S	**3.24**	**S**
Insufficient crisis intervention programs increase the risk of suicide and self-harm.	2.25	LS	2.33	LS	2.39	LS	**2.31**	**LS**
Lack of rehabilitation and reintegration programs hinders long-term mental recovery.	3.39	S	3.41	S	3.42	S	**3.41**	**S**
Insufficient policies and protocols for handling inmates with severe psychological conditions.	3.24	S	3.20	S	3.30	S	**3.24**	**S**
Overall	**3.13**	**S**	**3.17**	**S**	**3.19**	**S**	**3.16**	**S**

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Practical Implications

The study found that mental health crises among Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in New Bilibid Prison are mainly caused by poor living conditions, inadequate mental health services, exposure to violence, pre-existing psychological disorders, and limited family visitation. Specific issues include fear and distress from pests and diseases, long waits for psychiatric consultations, trauma from witnessing violence, and unmanaged psychological disorders leading to behavioral problems. The absence of regular family visits fosters depression and isolation, while insufficient funding, lack of rehabilitation and reintegration programs, limited recreational activities, and inadequate mental health screening further worsen their mental health challenges.

Theoretical Implications

The assessments of the three groups of respondents reveal no substantial differences regarding the causes of the mental health crisis among Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison.

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Factors such as Poor Living Conditions, Mental Health Services, Exposure to Violence, Pre-Existing Psychological Disorders, and the Need for Family Visitation are collectively recognized as contributing factors to the mental health crisis faced by Persons Deprived of Liberty in New Bilibid Prison. Thus, the Null Hypothesis is rejected.

Based on the provided data, the following recommendations are proposed:
After the study, the researcher recommended the following:

a. **Poor Living Condition.** Ensure proper ventilation, waste disposal, and clean water access to prevent disease spread and educate residents about hygiene practices and disease prevention to empower them and reduce fear.
b. **Mental Health Services.** Hire more mental health professionals or bring in visiting consultants to reduce wait times and equip nurses or counselors with tools to manage mild cases or provide initial support.
c. **Exposure to violence.** Use conflict resolution training, surveillance, and clear disciplinary policies to reduce incidents and train staff to respond appropriately to victims of trauma.
d. **Pre-existing Psychological Disorder.** Regular mental health evaluations to identify at-risk individuals early and tailor disciplinary approaches to consider underlying psychological conditions.
e. **Need for Family Visitation.** Allow more frequent, flexible, or extended visit times where possible and use video calls or voice calls to connect individuals with family if in-person visits are not feasible.

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