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CHALLENGES FACED BY PHILIPPINE DRUG ENFORCEMENT AGENCY OPERATIVES IN THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION: AN EXAMINATION OF OPERATIONAL ISSUES

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ABSTRACT

As the anti-drug campaign by the Philippine government persists, this study investigates the challenges encountered by Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) operatives during their operational phases. It assesses the impact of these challenges on their efficiency and effectiveness in combating illegal drugs in the Philippines. with 115 PDEA operatives participating as respondents, of whom 5 were purposefully selected for interviews. Furthermore, it revealed the difficulties faced by operatives in the pre-operation, actual operation, and post-operation stages. The study's significance lies in shedding light on critical aspects of drug enforcement efforts, contributing to informed policy decisions and operational improvements.

KEYWORDS: *Actual operation, Operational issues, PDEA NCR, Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency Operatives, pre-operation, Post-Operation*

INTRODUCTION

Law enforcement organizations across the globe are ramping up their efforts to tackle the surge in crimes associated with illegal drug use. They have initiated a variety of strategies and measures to stem the proliferation and consumption of these substances. Nonetheless, they encounter substantial obstacles, including large-scale trafficking of drugs such as heroin, an escalation in the production and distribution of methamphetamine, diversion of regulated substances from legal to illicit channels, smuggling of pharmaceutical preparations containing narcotic and psychotropic substances, and a lack of synergy among various drug enforcement agencies.

In the United States, 130 people are dying every day from an opioid overdose. This crisis has necessitated a multitude of initiatives and responses from law enforcement agencies across the country (NIJ, 2019). US law enforcement agencies are grappling with a complex and multifaceted drug problem that requires a comprehensive and multi-disciplinary approach for effective resolution.

Mexico, strategically located and sharing borders with the US and Central America, is a hotspot for organized crime groups exploiting its geography for drug trafficking. The rise of synthetic drugs like fentanyl poses significant challenges to law enforcement due to their structural characteristics and the ease of developing similar unscheduled drugs (Interpol, n.d).

The rise of synthetic drugs and the diversification of criminal activities by Spanish criminal groups further complicate the situation. The power of these cartels often leads to violent confrontations with law enforcement agencies, straining the country's security apparatus. According to narcotics prosecutor José Ramón Noreña, who has spent 14 years dealing with drug crime, "this is an area that has no boundaries and is only going to grow, not just in Spain but across the world, and the solution, if there is one, is complex" (El Pais, n.d).

The National Institute for Security Studies and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime launched a threat assessment of organized crime affecting Nigeria. The report found organized crime to be one of the main drivers of insecurity in Nigeria, posing an acute threat to its people, economy, and environment. Nigerian law enforcement agencies are confronting a multifaceted drug issue that necessitates a holistic strategy for successful resolution. This involves rectifying internal institutional challenges, combating organized crime syndicates operating both within and outside the country, and adapting to the changing dynamics of the drug market (United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, n.d.).

On October 22, 2022, The 44th HONLAP meeting in Bangkok discussed the worsening drug situation in the Asia Pacific, with a shift towards synthetic drugs like methamphetamine, largely produced in northern Myanmar. Record seizures of methamphetamine and increased ketamine seizures were reported, while seizures of precursor chemicals remained low. The meeting served as a networking platform and resulted in practical recommendations to address these issues (UNODC, n.d).

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According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (n.d), South Asian law enforcement agencies face numerous challenges in their operations due to the evolving drug markets and the increase in methamphetamine production and trafficking. The diversion of controlled substances from legal to illegal channels, including the smuggling of pharmaceuticals containing narcotic and psychotropic substances, adds to these challenges. Furthermore, inadequate coordination between various drug enforcement agencies can lead to inefficiencies and missed opportunities in combating drug trafficking

In the Philippines, the anti-illegal drug campaign has been controversial due to its association with a high number of killings and violence. Reports indicate widespread killings related to the campaign across nearly all regions of the country. There are concerns about potential abuses of power and intent to kill during police operations. The campaign has faced criticism for allegedly normalizing abuse, executions, and excessive government force. Moreover, drug smugglers have demonstrated adaptability in altering their supply chains in response to law enforcement efforts (Commission on Human Rights, 2021).

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) is the lead agency in the Philippines' fight against illegal drugs. It faces numerous challenges in its anti-illegal drug campaign. A significant hurdle is the collaboration between PDEA and the Philippine National Police (PNP). Miscommunications, misunderstandings, and unfortunate incidents among drug law enforcement units hinder the government's efforts to reduce drug supply. In response to this, PDEA and PNP have established a unified set of coordination guidelines. Nevertheless, illegal drug cartels exploit the weaknesses and loopholes in these coordination and inter-operation procedures (Abad, 2021).

In the National Capital Region (NCR), Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) had numerous challenges in the anti-illegal drug operations which has a high incidence of violence and killings related to these operations. Police reports often claim that victims were aggressive or resisted arrest. However, witness accounts suggest several inconsistencies, such as: questionable validity of the operations; doubts about victims initiating shootouts; instances where victims were already in police custody when killed; prevalent unjustified violence; witnessed planting of evidence; and cases where the killed individuals might not have been the intended targets (Commission on Human Rights, 2021).

Therefore, PDEA operatives in the National Capital Region face a myriad of challenges in their operations as they often encounter various operational problems that hinder their effectiveness and jeopardize their personal safety. The nature of their job exposes them to a range of obstacles that hinder their efforts to successfully apprehend drug traffickers and disrupt the supply chain of illicit substances.

Considering that the researcher is a member of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, this study will greatly help the researcher's organization in identifying the challenges that PDEA operatives encounter in the conduct of anti-illegal drugs operations. Moreover, this paper aims to examine these operational issues, shedding light on the difficulties that will be encountered in terms of pre-operation, actual operation and post-operation. By understanding these challenges, it able to explore potential solutions and improvements to enhance the effectiveness of PDEA's future anti-drug operations.

Literature Review

Wheeler and Zedillo's (2012) statement is valid as there has been a significant focus on creating institutions. The Federal Police has experienced a steady increase in budget and manpower in recent years. The Federal Police's current focus on combating drug trafficking may expand in the future, as suggested by the upward trend, making them a potential avenue for undertaking various law enforcement operations. To further enhance institution building, it is essential to implement a range of legislative measures that strengthen the current legal framework in order to effectively address criminal activities.

In their study, Babor et al. (2018) thoroughly examine the existing evidence pertaining to drug policy formulation across different levels, such as local, national, and international scales. Through the lens of public health, this literary work explores the realm of illicit drug consumption and the non-medical use of prescription medications. It delves into these phenomena, providing an in-depth examination. It also emphasizes the necessity for a new drug policy that is grounded in evidence, practicality, and coordination. The evidence collected provides valuable insights into policies that are effective and those that are not.

The issue of drug misuse is a significant concern that has captured the attention of societies worldwide, prompting them to contemplate effective solutions. The objective of the present study is to analyze the overall features of drug misuse treatment programs, the war on drugs (WOD), and harm reduction (HR) in the selected countries.

The phenomenon of drug markets evolving rapidly is currently happening at an unprecedented speed. Law enforcement agencies often encounter resource limitations and the risk of corruption. Additionally, they operate within justice systems that may be weak, leading to a culture of impunity. As a result, there is growing pressure on the police to improve their effectiveness in tackling drug trafficking. The

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increased demand, unfortunately, leads to the indiscriminate apprehension of individuals who are more likely to be seen as criminals. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019), there is a concern that law enforcement officials may exhibit bias due to a phenomenon where they prioritize investigating and apprehending individuals involved in less complex drug-related crimes. This could potentially divert their attention away from more serious offenses, such as major drug trafficking and homicide.

In their study, Champion et al. (2022) examine and analyze computer- or Internet-based school-based alcohol and other drug prevention programs that are currently available. The findings indicate that computer- and Internet-based preventive programs implemented in schools can effectively decrease alcohol and drug use, including intentions for future drug use. Based on the research findings, it is evident that there is a clear requirement for effective prevention measures.

The objective of the War on Drugs was to systematically dismantle drug trafficking networks that were distributing their products within the United States. Given the ongoing military operations abroad and the strict zero-tolerance policies at home, it would be reasonable to assume that the illicit drug trade has been greatly reduced. The War on Drugs, despite significant financial investments in preventive and punitive measures, has been consistently evaluated as ineffective by various assessments (American Addiction Centers, 2022).

Drug addiction in the United States has been a long-standing and widespread problem that continues to be deeply rooted in society without a clear resolution. Studies have shown that the measures taken to reduce drug demand have not been successful. Furthermore, it is worth noting that the government's efforts to control drug use have not produced satisfactory results. The United States is faced with the urgent problem of widespread drug abuse within its borders.

Human Rights Watch (2017, March 2) reported that the Philippine police have been fabricating evidence in order to justify the unlawful killings that have occurred during the country's "war on drugs," which has resulted in over 7,000 deaths. The individuals in question engaged in a pattern of carrying out extrajudicial killings targeting individuals suspected of involvement in drug-related activities. Furthermore, they consistently asserted that these actions were taken in self-defense, despite evidence to the contrary.

According to the director general of PDEA, the agency is currently encountering numerous challenges. A significant number of barangays have not yet activated their barangay Anti-Drug Abuse Council (BADAC), and a similar proportion of local government units also have inactive municipal and local anti-drug abuse councils. The collaboration and assistance of various organizations, such as the Philippine National Police (PNP), local health offices, and local social welfare organizations, played a crucial role in the fight against illegal drugs (Leonen, 2018).

Simbulan (2019) argues that the drug problem in the Philippines has traditionally been approached from a law enforcement and criminality perspective, with the government primarily emphasizing a policy of criminalization and punishment. The Duterte government has employed punitive measures and mobilized the Philippine National Police (PNP) and local government units across the country as part of its efforts in the "war on drugs." Law enforcement agents have been conducting extensive door-to-door operations, following orders from the President. In August 2017, a notable operation took place in Manila with the objective of surprising and overwhelming drug dealers. Tragically, this operation led to the loss of 32 lives in a single night as a result of police actions.

In addition, due to the government's failure to provide clear information about the killings related to the drug war, various independent initiatives have been launched to monitor the number of fatalities. However, these efforts have faced challenges such as the unavailability of police data and the need to rely on publicly accessible media reports (Tostevin & Morales, 2019).

The Department of Justice's decision to examine these killings has been positively received by the families of the victims. However, an analysis of recent data from ACLED reveals that the number of civilian casualties in the Philippines' war on drugs, carried out by the government and its supporters, is significantly higher than what official figures indicate. According to ACLED's findings, the actual number of Philippine civilians killed in anti-drug operations since 2016 is at least 7,742, which is 25% higher than the government's reported count, even when taking a conservative estimate into account (ACLED, 2021).

Former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte's drug war is a significant domestic policy that builds upon the measures he initially implemented during his tenure as mayor of Davao. According to both the Governmental Commission on Human Rights and domestic human rights organizations, it is estimated that the actual number of deaths is three times greater than what has been reported (Human Rights Watch, March 2, 2021).

The evaluation of the BADAC involved three phases of drug clearance operations, which aimed to create an analytical functionality model of intervention mechanisms. The study focuses on the development of a baseline model that aims to improve public safety and

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security by effectively implementing barangay drug clearing operations (Romualdo, 2022).

Theoretical/Conceptual Framework/Paradigm of the Study

This study was anchored on two theories, which are organizational behavior theory and intelligence-led policing. These theories were pertinent to the current study as they served as a foundation and used their premises and assumptions as a guide to explain this research endeavor.

Organizational Behavior Theory is a field of study that looks at how people, groups, and structures affect behavior inside organizations for the purpose of applying such knowledge towards improving an organization's effectiveness (Robbins, Judge, & Vohra, 2017). In relation to this study, it will examine how individual and group behavior within drug enforcement agencies affects operational outcomes. By understanding this theory, the researchers can identify where improvements can be made to enhance operational effectiveness.

Intelligence-led-policing (ILP) is a method that makes use of modern data analytics and data gathering techniques to provide important "intelligence" that can be utilized to more effectively target law enforcement resources at the individuals and locations where they will likely have the most positive impact (Fritsvold, n.d.). This framework incorporates concepts such as risk assessment, resource allocation, and intelligence sharing among different agencies that are beneficial to this study as it collects and analyzes information on combating illegal drugs.

Significance of the Study

For the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency, this study will provide awareness of their drug enforcement officers's work situations and potential problems that their personnel may encounter during operation. This provides an idea that will help them develop and improve their operational strategies.

To the PDEA Operative, this study will encourage them to become aware of the operation-related problems and will serve as an eye-opener for them to take action in effective and preventive ways during their operation.

To the Dangerous Drugs Board, this study provides awareness on the problem as the implementing arm of drug suppression or eradication and how these can be managed as the agency affected by the various organizational and community factors.

To the members of the community, it will be a great aid to inform the citizens that Drug Enforcement Officers are exerting extra efforts to suppress and prevent the increasing number of crimes committed by those high on illegal drugs.

To the local government, this research will give an idea of the problems and difficulties that the drug enforcement officers experience during their operation. Moreover, it is an eye-opener for them to develop preventive measures that will guide PDEA operations to ensure their safety during operation.

To the Philippine College of Criminology, this will provide additional references and materials to improve and guide the students of the university with regard to the subject matter.

For the researcher, it will give a deeper understanding and enough knowledge on the subject matter. It will also strengthen the researcher's motivation to soar high and pursue a career as a decorated intelligence officer.

For future researchers, the data gathered in this study can be an accurate source of information. The study will provide them with an in-depth understanding of the subject. It can also be a good resource for related literature, which may be used as a pattern for future research.

Objectives of the Study

The study aims to assess the operation-related problems encountered by the drug enforcement officers assigned to the National Capital Region.

Specifically, it sought answers to the following questions:

1. What is the level of agreement of the respondents with the drug operation-related problems in the following pre-operation phases:
   1.1 Initiatory Acts;
   1.2 Planning, preparation, and
   1.3 Coordinating Requirements?
2. What is the level of agreement of the respondents with the drug operation-related problems in the following actual operation phases:
   1.1 Cordoning the area;

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1.2 Arresting of suspects; and
1.3 Physical inventory?
3. What is the level of agreement of the respondents with the drug operation-related problems in the following post-operation phases:
3.1 Processing of the suspect(s);
3.2 Turnover of evidence; and
3.3 Preparation and filing of a case folder?
4. Based on the findings, what action plan may be proposed?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study aims to determine the level of agreement among PDEA operatives in the NCR regarding drug operation-related problems in terms of pre-operation, actual operation, and post-operation. This mixed-methods research utilizes a self-constructed questionnaire as a research instrument to gather the necessary information for the study. Additionally, interviews were conducted with selected respondents among those who answer the research instrument.

According to Mertens (2014), mixed-method research is not merely a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods in one study. It's a process where two or more methods are integrated, and this integration is employed when the methods enhance each other's results.

This study adheres to ethical guidelines and regulations, ensuring that respondents are properly informed that their responses were treated with the strictest confidentiality and used exclusively for scholarly purposes.

With this, statistical measures were employed to analyze and interpret the data and results in the order in which they appear in the statement of the problem. Conclusions were drawn based on the statistical analysis of the data. The proposed action plan discusses, and recommendations for further research may be provided.

Research Method

This study utilized a descriptive method to determine the level of agreement among the respondents. It is believed that this method is the most appropriate for identifying the operation-related problems encountered by the PDEA operatives in NCR. The treatment of the data was based on the responses of the respondents to the quantitative and qualitative data that were collected for the purpose of this study.

According to Shields and Rangarjan (2013), a descriptive research design is used to describe the characteristics of a population or phenomenon being studied. It does not answer questions about how, when, or why the characteristics occurred; rather, it addresses the "what" question, like what are the characteristics of the population or situation being studied.

Population of the Study

The respondents of the study are all operating agents of PDEA assigned to NCR. One hundred fifteen (115) total respondents were selected through purposive sampling, as they were believed to be present at the time the study was conducted and are the primary concern of this study. Moreover, five (5) respondents were selected purposefully as PDEA operatives in order to proceed to the one-on-one interview phase.

Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling technique where researchers use their expertise to choose certain participants who will help the study achieve its goals. While analyzing their study question, the researchers must take into account the distinctive characteristics of these people. In other words, the researchers "on purpose" choose their subjects (Frost, 2023).

Data Gathering Tools

A self-constructed questionnaire and a semi-structured interview instrument for the co-researchers were used in this study. The researcher engaged an expert to review the questionnaire and determine whether the questions are categorized correctly. Furthermore, the expert was persuaded to provide suggestions, comments, and recommendations for the development of the questionnaire. The researcher believed that the experts are qualified to validate the research instrument as they are operating agents of the PDEA. After several revisions, the final draft was presented to the adviser for grammatical accuracy and content appropriateness.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. The first part determines the level of agreement of the respondents with the drug operation-related problems in the following pre-operation, while the second part deals with the respondents' level of agreement with the

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drug operation-related problems in the following actual operation phases. Lastly, the level of agreement of the respondents with the drug operation-related problems in the following post-operation phases were assessed.

In the constructed questionnaire, the respondents were requested to rate each item on a four-point rating scale with their designated verbal interpretation. Value Mean Ranges Verbal Interpretation were used: 4-strongly agree, 3-agree, 2-disagree, and 1-strongly disagree.

Data Gathering Procedures

The questionnaire was validated by a professional in the field of anti-illegal drug operations, and it was also given to a grammarian for error correction. The questionnaire was personally administered to the respondents as soon as the total population of PDEA-NCR operators was obtained.

To gain the cooperation and interest of the respondents, instructions were given, and the purpose of the study was clarified. The respondents took a few minutes to finish answering the questions. The researcher gathered these for evaluation. The results were tallied and interpreted.

After the collection of quantitative data, the researcher personally approached the five (5) PDEA operatives and explained the endeavor of his inquiry and the purpose of the interview. The researcher asked for their consent. When they gave their consent, the researcher proceeded to the one-on-one interview phase.

Treatment of Data

The following statistical measures were used to analyze and interpret the data and results in the order in which they appear in the statement of the problem.

Ranking. The various research indicators were arranged in this manner based on how the respondents feel about them.
Median. This median was used to represent the middle value of the operation-related problems encountered by the drug enforcement officers in terms of pre-operation, actual operation, and post-operation. The evaluation and interpretation of the information and its results, as well as the order in which they appear in the problem statement, will be carried out.

Ethical Considerations

In this study, respondents were given a consent letter with the background of the study in order to understand the purpose, benefits, and risks involved before agreeing or declining to take part. A self-constructed questionnaire was used in the gathering of data.

They were given assurance for confidentiality, counseling, debriefing, and providing the details of the study when asking for consent to partake in research. It must be taken into account that if the respondents do not know the true aim of the study, they may change their answers, which would reduce the validity of the results.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Level of Agreement of Respondents in Drug Operation Problems during the Pre-Operation Phase

Table 1 presents the level of agreement of the respondents with the drug operation-related problems during pre-operation in terms of the initiatory acts, the planning and preparation, and the coordination requirements.

When assessing the initiatory acts conducted, drug enforcement officers agree with all the given problems, with agency initiatives being the highest at 3.16, followed by the directives of their superiors at 2.97, and lastly the intelligence report at 2.90. In evaluating the agreement level regarding the issues in the pre-operation phases of drug operations, particularly in planning and preparation, it is evident that most respondents agreed that the allocating of operational equipment to be used in casing and surveillance on the area of operation had a score of 3.10. This was followed by the making authority to operate, coordination form, and/or pre-operation reports, which scored 2.89. Lastly, getting information that can contribute to establishing the modus operandi and seizure of prohibited items with the least danger posted to operating elements that help in the conduct of briefing gained the

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Table 1
Pre-Operation Phase

INITIATORY ACTS		
Statement As a Drug Enforcement Officer, I encountered problem in……	**Med**	**Int**
1. Intelligence Report- information extracted from the blotter, information reports, and/or summary of information	2.90	A
2. Directives from superiors	2.97	A
3. Agency Initiative- initiate investigation based on information provided by a concerned citizen, or their assets and confidential informants	3.16	A
Overall Mean	**3.04**	**A**
PLANNING/ PREPARATION		
1. Allocating operational equipment to be used in Casing and Surveillance on the Area of Operation	3.10	A
2. Getting information that can contribute to establish the modus operandi and seizure of prohibited items with the least danger posted to operating elements that helps in the conduct of briefing	2.72	A
3. Making Authority to Operate, Coordination Form and/ or Pre-operation Reports	2.89	A
Overall Mean	**2.92**	**A**
COORDINATION REQUIREMENTS		
1. coordination when the subject personality is a law enforcer, politicians and or/ persons considered as high value target	3.00	A
2. the coordination that hinders confiscation of dangerous drugs and Controlled Precursors and Essential Chemicals (CPECs)	3.16	A
3. Allocating operational equipment to be used such as but not limited to vehicles and radios	3.01	A
Overall Mean	**3.03**	**A**

**Legend: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree*

lowest at 2.72. Furthermore, the assessment of the coordination requirements revealed that drug enforcement officers agree with all the given problems, with coordination that hinders confiscation of dangerous drugs and controlled precursors and essential chemicals (CPECs) being the highest at 3.16, followed by allocating operational equipment to be used, such as but not limited to vehicles and radios, at 3.01, and lastly, coordination when the subject personality is a law enforcer, politician, or other person considered a high-value target at 3.0.As stated in the law enforcers at The Unified Manual in the Investigation and Prosecution of Illegal Drug Cases (2020), agency initiative is the ability of law enforcement officers to start an investigation independently, with the consent of their higher-ups. This investigation can be based on information received from a worried citizen, their resources, or confidential sources. According to the results of the initiatory acts before a drug operation, agency initiative is seen as the biggest problem for law enforcement.

This is because the veracity of information is critical in law enforcement, especially in the conduct of operations where decisions are based on the provided information. With that, not all information should be taken at face value, especially if there is a potential for misunderstanding or conflict with the target subject. Participants share the importance of validating information during the initial acts of pre-operation. According to Xu, Chen, & Safarnejad (2020), the veracity of information, whether it is true or false, can significantly influence how the information is perceived and used. The PDEA operatives are mandated or authorized to initiate investigations that secure authority to verify the information and validate it for counter-action. For that reason, it is imperative to conduct research that contributes information regarding initiatory acts in pre-operation.

As stated in the law enforcers at The Unified Manual in the Investigation and Prosecution of Illegal Drug Cases (2020), agency initiative is the ability of law enforcement officers to start an investigation independently, with the consent of their higher-ups. This investigation can be based on information received from a worried citizen, their resources, or confidential sources. Operations are successful through thorough planning and preparation. This includes ensuring human rights, safety, and the integrity of evidence. Good intelligence analysis, covering factors like maps, suspect profiles, and terrain, is crucial.

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Drug enforcement operations are complex and multifaceted, requiring a high level of coordination, precision, and adherence to legal and ethical standards. The deliberate informality and lack of precision in the instructions they receive from their higher-ups can obstruct the success of their operations.

When discussing the planning and preparation phase before a drug operation, participants shared a common experience: the shortage of equipment in drug-related operations can lead to delays or, in more severe cases, operation failures. Ensuring adequate resources and proper equipment is crucial for successful and efficient operations in combating drug trafficking.

Indeed, the shortage of equipment poses a significant challenge for PDEA operatives in their fight against illegal drugs. Two critical factors hinder the execution of their duties: insufficient manpower and expertise, as well as inadequate facilities and equipment (Trajano, 2014). The allocation of resources, including equipment and personnel, needs to be efficient and effective. Inadequate or improper allocation can lead to operational inefficiencies and potential failures. Kepp (2023) states that the well-being of law enforcement officers is integral to maintaining public order, particularly when such events escalate into chaos. In such chaotic situations, it's crucial to ensure the safety of these officers. An officer who is well-trained and safeguarded is more capable of making crucial decisions under high-pressure circumstances.

Moreover, it became evident that the allocation of operational equipment for use during operations poses a significant challenge. This allocation issue has the potential to hinder the success of drug combat efforts. All anti-illegal drug operations require proper allocation, authorization, coordination, and documentation (The Unified Manual in the Investigation and Prosecution of Illegal Drug Cases, 2020). Coordination with the local police in the area of operation is essential to prevent any possible misidentifications, provided that the security and confidentiality of the operation will not be compromised.

The provided results on the coordination requirements for a drug operation pose a challenge to the coordination, communication, and directives from higher authorities. These challenges can significantly impact the overall success of the operation. This is corroborated by Olanrewaju et al. al. (2017), who identified poor communication as a significant factor contributing to an organization's underperformance. The absence of a common language between supervisors and employees, workplace stress, attitudes of superiors and colleagues towards site workers, misinterpretation of instructions, and poor communication skills among workers are all elements that can hinder effective communication and, consequently, the overall performance of an organization.

Coordination with other operatives is of great importance to avoid misinterpretations that can lead to fatalities for the drug operatives. As stated by Bolledo (2021), the Philippine National Police (PNP) and the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) have jointly developed unified guidelines and protocols for anti-illegal drug operations. Guidelines that aim to enhance communication and coordination procedures between the two agencies during anti-drug operations in specific areas. One of these guidelines is that other operating units are not allowed to conduct anti-drug operations on their own unless they are jointly done with PDEG and/or the concerned DEUs that will lead and initiate coordination with PDEA (Villanueva, 2020). This guideline helps in promoting safety and coordination between differing operating units during drug operations.

To conclude, Philippine Drug Enforcement Officers acknowledge that they face challenges during their pre-operation procedures, which can potentially impede their ability to effectively tackle the issue of illegal drugs. These obstacles, which arise during the crucial preparatory phase of their operations, can compromise both their efficiency and effectiveness. The overall performance of an organization can be adversely affected by factors such as the misinterpretation of instructions and deficient communication skills among employees, which can obstruct effective communication (Olanrewaju et al., 2017).

2. Level of Agreement of Respondents in Drug Operation Problems during the Actual Operation Phase

Table 2 presents the level of agreement of the respondents in the drug operation-related problems during pre-operation in terms of cordoning the area, the arresting of suspects, and the physical inventory.

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Table 2
Actual Operation Phase
**Legend: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree*

CORDONING THE AREA		
Statement As a Drug Enforcement Officer, I encountered problem in……	**Med**	**Int**
1. Recording the exact time of arrival and all pertinent data regarding the operation	2.88	A
2. Securing the crime scene with a PDEA line or whatever available material like ropes, straws, or human barricades to preserve integrity	2.93	A
3. Identifying possible witnesses and conduct preliminary interview	2.95	A
Overall Mean	**2.89**	**A**
ARRESTING OF SUSPECTS		
1. Using Body-Worn Cameras	3.13	A
2. Apprising the Constitutional Rights and Anti- Torture Rights in a language/dialect known and understood by the subject personality	3.43	SA
3. Suspects have unruly, uncooperative, and aggressive behavior	3.35	SA
Overall Mean	**3.18**	**A**
PHYSICAL INVENTORY		
1. Taking Photographs and Placing Markings on Drug and Non- Drug Evidence	2.86	A
2. Defining the items to be seized that will be written in the Inventory Form	3.03	A
3. Securing the items seized in an evidence bag to maintain its integrity	2.75	A
Overall Mean	**2.89**	**A**

In the assessment of the agreement level regarding the issues in the actual operation phases of drug operations, particularly cordoning the area, it is evident that most respondents agreed that identifying possible witnesses and conducting preliminary interviews had a median of 2.95. Close to this with a median of 2.93 is the securing of a crime scene with a PDEA line or whatever available material like ropes, straws, or human barricades to preserve integrity, followed by recording the exact time of arrival and all pertinent data regarding the operation with a median of 2.88.

When evaluating the arresting of suspects, a median of 3.43 indicates that apprising the constitutional rights and anti-torture rights in a language or dialect known and understood by the subject personality is a strongly agreed-upon problem by drug enforcement officers, followed by the suspects having unruly, uncooperative, and aggressive behavior with a median of 3.35.

Moreover, the assessment of physical inventory in actual operation revealed that the item to be seized with the highest the highest median of 3.05 is defining the items to be seized that will be written in the inventory form. Next to this is taking photographs and placing markings on drug and non-drug evidence, with a median score of 2.86. Lastly, securing the items seized in an evidence bag to maintain its integrity with a 2.75 median.

When cordoning the area during the operation phase of a drug operation, identifying potential witnesses and collecting relevant details is one of the biggest problems investigators face. Identifying a possible witness can pose problems for law enforcers, especially when a witness has bias or other intentions that make it difficult for the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agents to rely on the witness statement. Rillera-Laroya and Fernandez (2022) revealed that one of the law enforcement officers explained that one of the biggest challenges in the conduct of an investigation is the unwillingness and uncooperativeness of victims, witnesses, and even suspects.

Investigators can build a clearer picture of the situation and potentially uncover crucial evidence. It underscores the importance of thorough fact-finding and engaging with those who may have observed or been involved in the events. Identifying possible witnesses and conducting preliminary interviews during drug busts are crucial components of law enforcement efforts. These activities can provide valuable information and evidence that can help make the operation easier and less challenging.

To conclude, the participants' statements have common experience of encountering difficulties when attempting to locate a cooperative witness who can assist them in conducting successful drug operations. According to a study published in UKEssays (2018), investigators

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face the task of adjusting their strategies to overcome challenges related to witness cooperation. This adaptation is crucial for gathering accurate and detailed witness accounts, regardless of when the investigation takes place. In other words, investigators must find effective ways to encourage witness participation, even if the witnesses are initially uncooperative.

Every person possesses specific legal rights, such as the right to remain silent, the right to legal representation, and the right to be informed of the charges against them. However, there are situations where law enforcement officers encounter difficulties due to identifying possible witnesses and conducting preliminary interviews in order to gain more information on the drug operation. This is a challenge due to the difficulty of gathering accurate information from drug users due to their being hesitant to disclose information due to fear of legal repercussions (Wendell, 2011). An extension of this problem faced by investigators is that when dealing with foreigners involved in drug operations, the language barrier can pose a challenge for them.

Wendell (2011) suggests that when dealing with this problem, ensuring suspects understand the criminal case, hiring appropriate interviewers, and providing appropriate training for staff will be crucial for overcoming the skepticism and fear that may hinder the collection of accurate data. Language lessons may also provide valuable service when dealing with foreign suspects and criminals. According to Dhage (2021), effective communication is crucial because, without it, nothing can be efficiently accomplished. Misunderstandings can occur due to miscommunication. Proper communication enables police officers to handle evidence and witnesses more effectively, minimizing any miscommunication.

When law enforcement agents conduct an operation and seize objects for evidence, it is critical to document and describe each item. The documentation is essential for legal purposes, ensuring transparency, and maintaining the integrity of the evidence. However, practical issues occur when a large number of objects are seized. Writing detailed descriptions by hand for each item can be time-consuming and tedious.

The proper documentation of seized items during law enforcement operations is crucial to preserving evidence integrity and guaranteeing a fair legal process (Scott, 2009). The importance of this documentation is particularly evident in the seizure of narcotic drugs, where it significantly improves the quality of forensic examination and the effectiveness of the investigation (Lozova, 2023). However, practical issues occur when dealing with various item descriptions and a high number of seized objects. The respondents acknowledge that they face challenges during their actual procedures, which can hinder the effective communication of these rights, potentially infringing on the subject's rights due to a lack of understanding. Proper evidence collection, identification, and storage are emphasized as key factors in successful prosecution (Ashburn, 2004).

3. Level of Agreement of Respondents in Drug Operation Problems during the Actual Operation Phase

Table 3 presents the level of agreement of the respondents with the drug operation-related problems during post-operation in terms of the processing of the suspects, the turnover of evidence, and the preparation and filing of the case folder.

When conducting the processing of the suspects during the post-operation phase, the biggest problem that officers face is the turnover to the PDEA jail facility for safekeeping while waiting for an for an inquest resolution or commitment order (3.37), followed by booking procedures including fingerprint, mug shot, and taking personal information (2.86), and lastly, the conduct of medical and drug examinations (2.86).

The turnover of evidence is another problem encountered by police officers during the post-operation phase, with the preparation of the request for laboratory examination (3.26), communication with the duty chemist due to their strict definition of items seized (3.24), and lastly, the documentation on submission or turnover in the chain of custody (2.90).

Table 3
Post Operation Phase

PROCESSING OF THE SUSPECT/S		
Statement	**Med**	**Int**
As a Drug Enforcement Officer, I encountered problem in……		
1. The Conduct of Medical and Drug Examination	2.86	A
2. Booking Procedures including Fingerprint, Mug Shot and Taking personal Information	2.86	AS
3. Turnover to PDEA Jail Facility for Safe-Keeping while waiting inquest resolution or commitment order	3.37	A
Overall Mean	**2.94**	**A**

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	TURNOVER OF EVIDENCE		
1.	Preparing Request for Laboratory Examination	3.26	SA
2.	Documentation on submission or Turnover in the Chain of Custody	2.90	A
3.	Communication with the Duty Chemist due to their strict definition of items seized	3.24	A
Overall Mean		**3.10**	**A**
	PREPARATION AND FILING OF CASE FOLDER		
1.	Preparing other Documentary Evidence, that may be presented upon being required by the Inquest/ Investigating Prosecutor	3.26	SA
2.	Filing the complaint and/or information before the Office of the Prosecutor	2.83	A
3.	Complying with other supporting evidence needed by the Inquest/ Investigating Prosecutor	2.89	A
Overall Mean		**2.91**	**A**

**Legend: SA – Strongly Agree, A – Agree, D – Disagree, SD – Strongly Disagree*

The turnover of evidence is another problem encountered by police officers during the post-operation phase, with the preparation of the request for laboratory examination (3.26), communication with the duty chemist due to their strict definition of items seized (3.24), and lastly, the documentation on submission or turnover in the chain of custody (2.90).
When looking at the preparation and filing of the case folder, drug-enforcement officers strongly agree that the preparation of other documentary evidence that may be presented openly is required by the inquest or investigating prosecutor, with a median of 3.26. They agree that there is a problem when it comes to the filing of complaints and/or information before the office of the prosecutor, with a median of 2.83, and the compliance with other supporting evidence needed by the inquest or investigating prosecutor, with a median of 2.89.

The processing of suspects during the post-operation phase of a drug operation is one of the many important tasks done by PDEA investigators, and one of their most difficult challenges encountered is the turnover to the PDEA Jail Facility for Safe-Keeping while waiting for inquest resolutions or commitment orders.

With this, the turnover of suspects to PDEA jail facilities for safekeeping while they await inquest resolution or a commitment order is indeed a big challenge for PDEA operatives. This can impact both the efficiency of law enforcement and the rights of the suspects, especially when the PDEA Jail Facility is overcrowded. As stated by Gul (2018), the overcrowded facility has jeopardized the well-being of the suspects. Moreover, legal complications can also arise during the turnover process. Delays in the inquest process or in issuing a commitment order can result in the prolonged detention of suspects. This not only strains the resources of the jail facilities but also raises concerns about the violation of the suspects' rights. Prolonged detention without a court order can be seen as a violation of the right to liberty and can potentially lead to legal repercussions. Furthermore, the processing of suspects takes time, especially for the prosecutor, as it involves reviewing evidence and assessing whether there is probable cause to proceed with formal charges. Therefore, the entire process can be time-consuming, including preliminary investigations, court proceedings, and any related motions.

When assessing the turnover of evidence by PDEA investigators, PDEA seizes illegal drugs, securing them as evidence for legal proceedings. One of their biggest challenges was communication with the duty chemist because of their strict definition of items seized. This is due to the laboratory having different standards and procedures from those of the drug officers or the PDEA operatives. If the requests of the drug operatives are not followed according to laboratory standards, the investigation may need to start all over again.

Following laboratory protocols during drug busts is crucial for ensuring accurate and reliable results. Fernandez (1984) highlights the role of narcotics laboratories in drug abuse and trafficking cases, emphasizing the need for representative samples, appropriate equipment, and personnel training. These studies collectively underscore the critical role of following laboratory protocols in drug busts to ensure the integrity of the evidence and the accuracy of the results. By following proper protocols, it increases the chances of a successful drug operation and allows investigators to act confidently moving forward in the investigation and post-operation process.

The PDEA operator ensures that all relevant information is accurately recorded in the case folder. They must promptly compile and organize case files after an operation. According to the results of the data, the biggest problem investigators face is the preparation of other documentary evidence that may be presented upon being required by the inquest or investigating prosecutor. The documentary evidence can be difficult to present at trial. Regardless of how crucial the evidence is in the case, a trier of fact hearing it for the first time may not recognize its relevance right away. Failure to make that relevance evident could have a negative influence on the case because a judge or juror may recognize its importance too late in the game to analyze and link other crucial evidence (Querijero, n.d.).

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The participants' statement shows a prevalent difficulty in the legal proceedings involving documentary evidence. To keep the case clear and avoid problems, unnecessary documentation should be avoided. The organization of legal documents during a drug bust operation is a complex process, often hindered by a lack of coordination between pre-trial proceedings bodies (Ergashevna, 2021). This is compounded by issues in documenting criminal activity during operatively-search measures and the need for improved supervision of the legality of inquiry and preliminary investigation in drug trafficking cases.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) operatives encountered several challenges during different phases of drug operations. In the pre-operation phase, issues related to agency initiative, operational equipment allocation, and coordination hindered the confiscation of dangerous drugs and controlled precursors and essential chemicals (CPECs). During actual operations, respondents identified problems such as identifying witnesses, conducting preliminary interviews, apprising Constitutional Rights and Anti-Torture Rights, and defining items for seizure. Post-operation challenges included turnover procedures, evidence handling, and case folder preparation.

To address these issues, several recommendations emerge. First, PDEA operatives in the National Capital Region (NCR) may implement targeted programs to address operational challenges. Enhancing skills during critical moments can prevent operational burnout. Regular training, meetings, or seminars are crucial. Second, further research may explore the reasons behind these challenges, aiding in resource allocation. Third, improving communication among PDEA investigators during drug operations is essential. Clear instructions, better documentation, and effective communication across different chains of command can enhance overall efficiency. Finally, the study results may guide the development of proper recommendations, training, and seminars to address the various problems encountered during drug operations.

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CURRICULUM VITAE

Ediex De Jesus Liwanag
Lipa City, Batangas
Master of Science in Criminal Justice with
Specialization in Criminology



EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Level	Degree (Year graduated, awards, if any)	School & Address
Graduate	Master in Public Administration (2022)	Lipa City Colleges
Tertiary	BS in Criminology (2013) ● Mas Scholar	Lipa City Colleges
Secondary	High School Diploma (2009) ● Achiever	Lodlod National High School
Elementary	Elementary Diploma (2005) ● With Honors	Lodlod Elementary School

AWARDS AND RECOGNITIONS RECEIVED

Awards/Citation Received	Award Giving Body	Date
Exemplary Performance for being Expert Witness	Office of the City Prosecutor- Olongapo City	June 19, 2019
Certificate Of Commendation On The Conviction Of Jhon Lloyd Espinosa Who Was Arrested on The Controlled Delivery Operation At Olongapo City	Prosecutor Melani Fay V. Tadili	June 19, 2019

NATIONAL EXAMINATION PASSED

Examination	Administering Body
Board Criminologists Licensure Examination	Professional Regulatory Board of Criminology April 2013 in Lucena City

PROFESSIONAL WORK EXPERIENCE

Position/Work	Agency/ Company/ Institution	Inclusive Date
Chief, Intelligence Division	NAIA-IADITG	2019 - Present
College Instructor (Part time)	Lipa City Colleges	2022 - Present

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MEMBERSHIP IN PROFESSIONAL ORGANIZATIONS		
Organization	**Position**	**Duration**
Professional Criminologists Association of the Philippines, Inc. (PCAP)	Member	Lifetime (2013)

SEMINARS/ TRAININGS/ SCHOOLINGS COMPLETED	
Training/Schooling	**Organizer/Date**
Airport Interdiction at NAIA Terminal 3, Pasay City Which Resulted To The Arrest Of Agus Burhan And Seizure Of Shabu Weighing 1,4530.9 Grams Signed By Dir III Joel B. Plaza	July 17 , 2019
Conduct Of Airport Interdiction at NAIA Terminal 3, Pasay City Which Resulted To The Arrest Of Mike Taman And Seizure of Shabu Weighing 45.2855 Grams Signed Dir Iii Joel B. Plaza	May 29, 2019.
Anti-Drug Smuggling Campaign Signed By Bureau of Customs NAIA DISTRICT COLLECTOR CARMELITA TALUSAN	February 19, 2019
Coordination And Partnership Signed By Bureau of Customs NAIA DISTRICT COLLECTOR CARMELITA TALUSAN	October 15, 2018

I hereby certify that the above information is true and correct to the best of my knowledge.

Ediex D. Liwanag
Researcher