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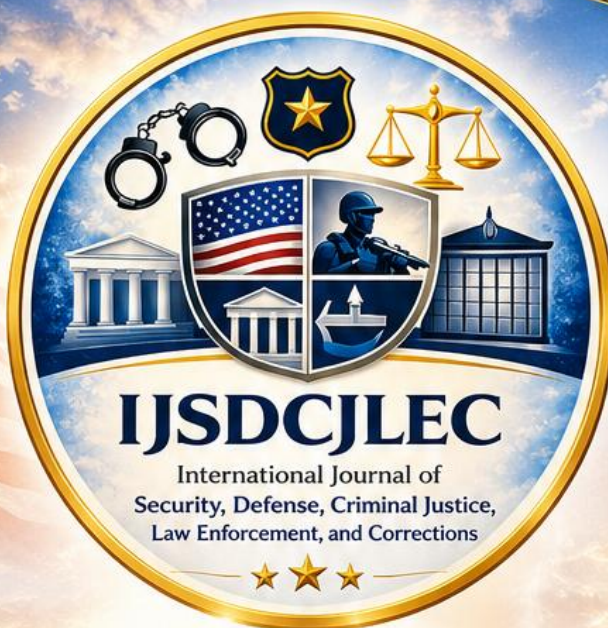
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Lived experiences of juvenile delinquents undergoing psychological interventions: A phenomenological study of rehabilitation and reformation

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Abstract

Aim: Juvenile delinquency continues to pose significant challenges to the juvenile justice system, highlighting the need for effective rehabilitation strategies. Psychological interventions have emerged as an important approach to promoting behavioral change and successful reintegration. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of delinquent juveniles who underwent psychological interventions and to understand the implications of these interventions in their journey of reformation.

Methodology: This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of twelve juvenile delinquents who had undergone psychological interventions. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and analyzed using thematic analysis.

Findings: The findings revealed that reformation is a gradual process characterized by behavioral, moral, and spiritual growth. Psychological interventions promoted participants' cognitive, emotional, and behavioral development while helping them overcome harmful behaviors and vices. Supportive relationships with caregivers and rehabilitation personnel facilitated positive transformation, whereas emotional distress, particularly loneliness resulting from family separation, emerged as a significant challenge during rehabilitation.

Conclusion: Psychological interventions play a vital role in facilitating the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral transformation of juvenile delinquents. The findings underscore the importance of strengthening evidence-based psychological interventions, supportive rehabilitation environments, and family-centered approaches to improve juvenile rehabilitation programs and promote successful reintegration within the juvenile justice system.

Keywords: *juvenile delinquency, psychological intervention, juvenile rehabilitation, phenomenology, Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), Philippines*

INTRODUCTION

Juvenile delinquency continues to be a widespread problem in various regions globally. It refers to unlawful acts committed by minors or children below the age of criminal responsibility who come into conflict with the law and are subject to intervention and rehabilitation under the juvenile justice system (Salih, 2024; Republic Act No. 9344, as amended by Republic Act No. 10630). According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), youth worldwide who encounter the justice system frequently experience stigma, interruptions in education, and restricted opportunities for rehabilitation. These challenges impact public safety and crime prevention, emphasizing the need for evidence-based juvenile justice policies that support rehabilitation and community reintegration (UNODC, 2024). Despite ongoing rehabilitation efforts, juvenile recidivism remains a challenge in many countries, prompting a global shift toward restorative approaches guided by the Beijing Rules, Riyadh Guidelines, and Havana Rules, which emphasize the protection, rehabilitation, and reintegration of children in conflict with the law (United Nations, 1985, 1990a, 1990b).

Empirical evidence demonstrates that psychological interventions facilitate rehabilitation by addressing underlying causes of delinquency, fostering behavioral change, and supporting reintegration. These interventions target cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and social factors linked to offending, utilizing evidence-based modalities such as cognitive-behavioral therapy, family-based and multisystemic interventions, and restorative justice. Such approaches



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are associated with reduced recidivism and improved psychosocial functioning among justice-involved youth (Aazami et al., 2023; Pappas & Dent, 2023; Mestre et al., 2022; Kimbrell et al., 2023). In the Philippines, psychosocial interventions grounded in a bio-psycho-social-spiritual framework have also proven effective in community-based rehabilitation (Hechanova et al., 2025).

Although previous studies have well identified effective rehabilitation strategies and demonstrated positive treatment outcomes alongside national and local government support and efforts, they provide limited insight into the lived experiences of juveniles throughout their process of reformation, particularly after participating in rehabilitation or intervention programs. Much of the existing literature emphasizes measurable outcomes, such as recidivism and behavioral change, while giving less attention to how delinquent juveniles experience rehabilitation and perceive their own transformation. Many recent reviews have therefore highlighted the need for more qualitative research that explores the personal experiences, perspectives, and recovery journeys of juveniles to understand better how rehabilitation promotes meaningful and lasting change (Papalia et al., 2022; Kvamme et al., 2022; Ferolino & Yap, 2023).

Most research on psychological interventions for juveniles focuses on outcomes like reduced recidivism and better psychosocial functioning. Few studies examine how juveniles actually experience or internalize these interventions. Some qualitative work explores the experiences of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), but it mostly centers on pre-delinquency or offense-related stories. As a result, there is little understanding of how juveniles make sense of reformation. This gap is especially clear in the Philippines, where studies connecting reformation stories to practical improvements in interventions are scarce. Addressing this gap is essential for developing contextually grounded interventions that may inform rehabilitation and correctional policies, support evidence-based juvenile justice administration and institutional decision-making and contribute to justice reform by improving the design and delivery of rehabilitation programs. Ultimately, these insights may strengthen rehabilitation governance, promote successful reintegration, reduce reoffending, and enhance public safety.

Review of Related Literature and Studies

Global Literature on the Lived Experiences of Delinquent Juveniles

Juvenile delinquency has significant psychological, educational, and social consequences for adolescents, and imposes substantial burdens on families and communities. Families often face strained relationships, emotional distress, and reduced functioning, while communities encounter increased demands on social welfare, education, and justice systems. These impacts underscore the necessity of comprehensive prevention and rehabilitation strategies that address both individual and contextual factors (Aazami et al., 2023; Pappas & Dent, 2023).

Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) is a widely adopted, evidence-based intervention that modifies maladaptive thinking and enhances emotional regulation, problem-solving, and coping in adolescents (Riise et al., 2021). Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) address systemic factors by strengthening family functioning and targeting the roles of family, peers, school, and community (Hunkin et al., 2025). Trauma-Focused CBT (TF-CBT) effectively reduces trauma-related symptoms and promotes adaptive coping in trauma-exposed youth (Olaghere et al., 2021). These interventions collectively underscore the importance of comprehensive, developmentally informed rehabilitation for justice-involved adolescents.

Recent global literature has also shifted from focusing solely on the causes of juvenile delinquency toward understanding the lived experiences of delinquent juveniles, particularly during detention, rehabilitation, and reintegration. Qualitative and phenomenological studies consistently demonstrate that they experience psychological distress, identity transformation, social stigma, and resilience, emphasizing the importance of supportive relationships and individualized interventions (Juliana et al., 2024; Moore et al., 2025).

Studies in the Philippine Context

In the Philippines, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) leads rehabilitation services for Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL). In partnership with the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (JJWC), which oversees the country's juvenile justice system, the DSWD developed the *Buklod Paglaom para sa CICL: Holistic Psychosocial and Economic (HoPE) Interventions Program*. The program serves as the intervention framework for Bahay Pag-asa, a residential rehabilitation facility for CICL, and Regional Rehabilitation Centers for Youth. It integrates cognitive-behavioral and psychosocial interventions, case management, family involvement, and community reintegration to promote behavioral change and reduce reoffending (Republic of the Philippines, 2006, 2013; DSWD & JJWC, 2022). The Philippine juvenile justice system adopts a rehabilitative philosophy that prioritizes protection, treatment, and reintegration of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) through community- and institution-based programs. Rehabilitation centers offer counseling, psychosocial interventions, values formation, educational support,



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family engagement, and structured routines to foster personal growth, psychosocial adjustment, emotional development, and reintegration (Nautan & Manda, 2025).

In terms of interventions, psychosocial interventions have demonstrated effectiveness in community-based rehabilitation programs in the Philippines. Hechanova et al. (2025) found that a bio-psycho-social-spiritual rehabilitation program significantly enhanced recovery skills, psychological well-being, and family support. These results highlight the effectiveness of integrated psychosocial interventions for juvenile rehabilitation. Facility-based programs offering coordinated psychological, educational, and behavioral support are most effective when employing multidisciplinary, trauma-informed approaches that integrate life-skills training and family involvement, improving emotional well-being and behavioral outcomes (Santos et al., 2023).

Synthesis

Although previous studies have well identified effective rehabilitation strategies and positive treatment outcomes, they provide limited insights into juveniles' lived experiences throughout the reformation process. Existing research largely emphasizes measurable outcomes, such as recidivism and behavioral change, while overlooking how juveniles perceive and experience rehabilitation. Consequently, recent reviews have called for more qualitative research to better understand their recovery journeys and the processes underlying meaningful and lasting change (Papalia et al., 2022; Kvamme et al., 2022; Ferolino & Yap, 2023). Overall, the literature underscores the need for qualitative inquiry into juveniles' lived experiences to enrich criminological evidence and support the ongoing refinement of correctional rehabilitation, juvenile justice reform, and evidence-based correctional policies that promote public safety.

Theoretical Framework

Drawing from the broad body of literature on juvenile delinquency, this study sets its ground on three encompassing theories that collectively explain the lived experiences of delinquent juveniles. These are Cognitive Behavioral Theory (Beck, 1976), Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), and Person-Centered Theory (Rogers, 1951).

This study first draws on Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT), which asserts that modifying maladaptive cognition fosters positive behavioral and emotional change. In juvenile rehabilitation, CBT underpins interventions promoting emotional regulation, adaptive coping, and self-control. Empirical research consistently supports CBT as an effective intervention for conduct problems and externalizing behaviors among delinquent youth (Beck, 1976; Riise et al., 2021; Sheerin et al., 2025). This study also utilizes Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which posits that human development is shaped by interactions with multiple environmental systems, including family, school, peers, and community. Recent research affirms the critical role of family involvement and coordinated community support in the rehabilitation and reintegration of delinquent juveniles (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Hunkin et al., 2025; Tang et al., 2024). Lastly, this study also employs Person-Centered Theory, which posits that individuals achieve growth and positive change through empathy, unconditional positive regard, and a supportive environment. This perspective underscores the role of therapeutic relationships with caregivers in fostering emotional healing and reformation among delinquent juveniles. Recent research affirms the effectiveness of person-centered, trauma-informed mental health services in enhancing resilience and psychosocial well-being in adolescents (Rogers, 1951; Santos et al., 2023).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework shows how psychological interventions shape the lived experiences and reformation process of juvenile delinquents. Participants' lived experiences provide insights into the reformation process, while both lived experiences and the reformation process contribute to the perceived rehabilitation outcomes. The framework reflects the assumption that psychological interventions foster positive behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and social changes, leading to successful rehabilitation.

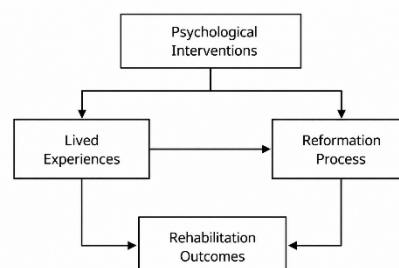


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study



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Statement of the Problem

Juvenile delinquency remains a significant concern within juvenile justice systems because of its implications for public safety, rehabilitation, and successful reintegration of children in conflict with the law. Although previous studies have extensively examined risk factors, intervention outcomes, and recidivism, limited attention has been given to the lived experiences and personal perspectives of juvenile delinquents undergoing psychological interventions during rehabilitation. Consequently, there remains insufficient understanding of how these interventions influence their behavioral, emotional, cognitive, and moral transformation throughout the reformation process. Addressing this gap is essential for strengthening evidence-based rehabilitation programs, improving correctional and psychosocial interventions, informing juvenile justice policy, and promoting successful reintegration into society. Therefore, this study explored the perceptions and lived experiences of juvenile delinquents regarding psychological interventions and examined how they interpreted the role of these interventions in their journey toward reformation.

Research Objectives

General Objective:

To explore the implications of psychological interventions on the rehabilitation and reformation of juvenile delinquents by examining their lived experiences throughout the rehabilitation process.

Specific Objectives:

1. To explore the perceptions of juvenile delinquents regarding their journey of reformation.
2. To examine the lived experiences of juvenile delinquents undergoing psychological interventions during rehabilitation.
3. To interpret the perceived implications of psychological interventions on the rehabilitation and reformation of juvenile delinquents.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of juvenile delinquents regarding their journey of reformation?
2. What are the lived experiences of juvenile delinquents undergoing psychological interventions during rehabilitation?
3. How do juvenile delinquents perceive the role and implications of psychological interventions in their rehabilitation and reformation?

METHODS

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design (Moustakas, 1994) to explore the lived experiences of juvenile delinquents who underwent psychological interventions. Phenomenology was chosen because the study sought to understand the meaning of participants' experiences rather than develop a theory, construct life stories, or examine a specific case. Data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis to identify and interpret recurring patterns aligned with the study's objectives (Creswell, 2014).

Population and Sampling

This study involved (twelve) 12 male juvenile offenders, aged 12–18 years, who had undergone at least two months of rehabilitation under the supervision and case management of the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and its partner local social welfare offices in Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), particularly in North Cotabato. The participants were recruited from youth centers managed by the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) and Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO), local government agencies responsible for providing social welfare, rehabilitation, and case management services to children in conflict with the law. Eight (8) participants were from the CSWDO, while four (4) were from the MSWDO.

Sampling Technique. This study employed purposive sampling to recruit participants with direct experience of the phenomenon under investigation. Purposive sampling was appropriate for phenomenological research because it intentionally selects individuals who can provide rich, meaningful accounts of their lived experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).



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Participants. Participants were selected based on predetermined inclusion criteria. They were required to be officially recognized as Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), received facility-based rehabilitation under the supervision of the appropriate social welfare authorities, and had undergone at least one form of psychological intervention, such as individual counseling, group counseling, or behavioral therapy. These criteria ensured that participants possessed relevant experiences and could provide rich descriptions of the rehabilitation process.

Instruments

The primary data collection instrument was a validated semi-structured interview guide developed by the researcher to align with the study's objectives. The guide, structured around three central research questions, included main and probing questions to ensure systematic yet flexible inquiry. A validation panel—comprising internal reviewers from the University of Mindanao and an external expert from the University of Southern Mindanao—evaluated the instrument for clarity, relevance, coherence, and alignment. The instrument received a validation score of 9.00 ("Good"), confirming its suitability for data collection after minor revisions.

Data Collection

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted at rehabilitation centers between October 2025 and February 2026, following ethics approval. Participants were purposively sampled, provided informed consent, and consented to audio recording. Interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically. Confidentiality and voluntary participation were ensured throughout.

Treatment of Data

The data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis framework. The interview transcripts were coded manually. This began with repeated readings to become familiar with them, followed by creating initial codes, then developing, reviewing, and refining the themes. The final themes were clearly defined, named, and arranged in thematic tables for interpretation. The researcher ensured trustworthiness by following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria. Credibility came from prolonged engagement and a validated interview guide. Transferability was achieved by detailing the context and methods. Dependability relied on an audit trail. Confirmability was supported by using participants' exact words, reflexivity, and independent review to reduce bias.

Ethical Considerations

The study adhered to established ethical principles and received approval from the University of Mindanao Ethics Review Committee (UMERC) under Approval No. UMERC-2025-368 on August 16, 2025. Participants provided written informed consent and were assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Pseudonyms were used to protect participants' identities, and all data were securely stored. Interviews were conducted in a supportive environment, with appropriate referral procedures available when necessary.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

This section presents the findings derived from the qualitative data collected from delinquent juveniles undergoing reformation. The analysis focused on their lived experiences, particularly their perceptions of the reformation journey, the psychological interventions employed, and the implications of these interventions on their personal transformation. The data gathered through in-depth interviews were systematically analyzed to identify significant statements, formulate meanings, and extract essential themes.

1. Perceptions of Delinquent Juveniles Regarding Their Journey of Reformation Themes

Gradual and Challenging Transformation

1.1 Gradual and Challenging Transformation

Participant 1's statement encapsulates the sentiment of incremental progress. This participant acknowledges the slow pace but finds value in the basic life skills acquired, indicating a shift from a focus on immediate gratification or external pressures to an appreciation for foundational self-sufficiency. The following is a sample excerpt:



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Participant 1: *“Okay lang po, ma’am. Hinay-hinay pero okay lang po. Nakatuon magbasa. Pagsulat. Paglaba.”* (“It was slow, but it is okay. I learned how to read here. I learned how to write. I learned to wash my clothes.”)

This theme suggests that effective interventions for juvenile delinquency require long-term support rather than short-term programs. Positive changes develop gradually through continuous participation in rehabilitation (Mulvey, 1993). Similarly, a meta-analysis found that interventions such as social skills training led to gradual improvements in behavior and social functioning (van der Stouwe et al., 2021). Local studies also support that Filipino juvenile delinquents experience slow and challenging transformation during rehabilitation (Ayeo-eo, 2025; Salih, 2024; Jugos & Nabe, 2025; Spruit et al., 2016).

This theme aligns with Carl Rogers’ Person-Centered Theory, which suggests that personal growth and behavioral change occur gradually rather than instantly. The participants’ experiences of gradual behavior and psychological improvement reflect a continuous process of self-discovery, self-reflection, and growth, supported by acceptance and positive relationships (Rogers, 1961; Rogers, 1951).

This finding implies that reformation is not an overnight event but a sustained, demanding process where small victories are recognized amidst significant personal hurdles. The participants’ ability to articulate both the slowness and the difficulty indicates a developing self-awareness and a realistic appraisal of their situation. These findings may inform juvenile justice and correctional practices by emphasizing sustained, individualized rehabilitation that supports successful reintegration and community safety.

1.2. Behavioral Shift

This theme captures the participants’ conscious recognition and demonstration of altered actions, attitudes, and behaviors, often contrasting their current conduct with their past delinquent lifestyles. Participant 4 reported:

Participant 4: *“Kanang.. kanang.. like sayo na mu mata ug dili na kayo parehas dati nga magtinamad, ug sige lang ug bolakbol ug like uhm, akong nakit-an nako sa akong sarili kabag-ohan nako diri sa center kay kanang kung unsaon pag sunod sa mas magulang pa nimo, ug kabalo na ka sa mga tama na buhatonon diri sa center ug.. diri pud nako Nakita akong kabag-ohan tungod kay nitaas akong pasensiya.”* (“Like... like, I wake up early now, and I’m not as lazy as before, always slacking off. What I’ve noticed about myself, the changes I’ve had here in the center, is that I know how to follow those who are older than me, and I now know the right things to do here in the center. I also see my change because my patience has improved.”)

The behavioral shift experienced by participants highlights the importance of structured interventions in promoting positive change. Cognitive-behavioral interventions help reduce delinquent behavior, improving self-regulation, emotional control, problem-solving, and impulse control (Sheerin et al., 2025; Baskin-Sommers et al., 2022). These changes are supported by cognitive restructuring, where changes in thinking lead to positive behavioral change (McGlynn et al., 2013).

This finding echoes Beck’s Cognitive Theory wherein maladaptive behaviors stem from distorted patterns of thinking. As individuals learn to identify, challenge, and replace these negative cognitions with more realistic and adaptive beliefs, corresponding behavioral changes are likely to occur (Beck, 1976; Beck & Haigh, 2014).

This finding suggests the need for programs to prioritize evidence-based behavioral interventions that reinforce positive coping strategies, further providing continuous support to facilitate long-term reintegration and reduce the likelihood of recidivism.

1.3. Moral and Spiritual Growth

This theme captures the participants’ acquisition of positive values, the development of discipline, the embrace of spiritual practices, and the cultivation of respect for others. As Participant 10 recognized:

Participant 10: *“Kuan ma’am.. kabalo nako mag-ampo. Diri ra nako na experience ang mag-ampo unya mag kuan.. mang hinlo ug kuan.. tarong na pang hinlo sa palibot. Diri ra nako na experience nga tudluan mi ug pag respeto pud respeto sa isig ka tao.”* (“I learned how to pray. It’s here that I experienced praying and properly cleaning, including the surroundings. It’s here that I learned to respect other people as well.”)



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This theme highlights the role of religious practices, disciplined routines, and respect for others in rehabilitation. Philippine studies show that faith-based interventions promote hope, moral transformation, and personal responsibility, supporting positive psychological and behavioral change among juvenile delinquents (Ferolino & Yap, 2023; Lucero et al., 2026).

Moral and spiritual growth aligns with Rogers' Person-Centered Theory, which views development as a holistic process of self-awareness and congruence with personal values. As individuals achieve congruence, they foster responsibility, compassion, and purposeful living. Participants' strengthened moral principles and renewed faith reflect self-actualization extending to moral and spiritual domains (Rogers, 1961; Rogers, 1951).

This implies that interventions may be designed to cater to the development of moral reasoning, empathy, and spiritual awareness of delinquent youth to achieve behavioral change, develop prosocial values, and successfully reintegrate into society. This finding may inform juvenile justice and correctional rehabilitation practices by promoting individualized interventions that contribute to crime prevention and community safety.

2. Lived Experiences of Delinquent Juveniles in Terms of Psychological Interventions Themes

Structured Environment

2.1. Structured Environment

A foundational theme emerging from the participants' accounts is the perception of the reformation center as a Structured Environment. This theme is characterized by the participants' recognition of the highly managed and controlled nature of their daily lives, the consistent supervision they experience, and the clear understanding of consequences for their actions. Participant 8 highlighted:

Participant 8: "Kanang pag mata ug buntag sayo. Sauna sa gawas kay dugay na ko mu mata unya kaddawon na pud ko mag uli ug mag uli ug ma tulog. Karon diri sa center alas nuebe or alas otso kay matulog nako. Kay inig human diri sa mga activity nga evening devotion, matulog dayon." ("Like waking up early in the morning. Before, when I was outside, I would wake up late and go home very late at night, then sleep. Now, here at the center, I sleep at around eight or nine o'clock. After finishing the activities and evening devotion, I go straight to sleep.")

These statements reflect the participants' engagement in structured daily routines that provide order, purpose, and opportunities for learning. Such routines create a stable environment that supports behavioral change. Studies show that structured programs help develop self-control, moral reasoning, and prosocial behavior (van der Stouwe, 2021). Local research also highlights that structured rehabilitation programs effectively address the behavioral and developmental needs of juvenile delinquents despite challenges in implementation (Gacad & Jarmel, 2024).

The theme is supported by Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, which emphasizes that development is shaped by environment, especially the microsystem. The structured rehabilitation setting, with its consistent rules, supervision, and supportive relationships, helped participants develop discipline, responsibility, and positive behavioral change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Taken together, these findings indicate that without a stable and structured setting, rehabilitation efforts become fragmented and less effective. This may inform juvenile justice and correctional management by acknowledging the importance of structured rehabilitation environments that support successful reintegration, reduce reoffending, and enhance community safety.

2.2. Psychological and Emotional Development

This theme captures the internal shifts in thinking, emotional regulation, and self-awareness fostered by the program's psychological components. As Participant 6 noticed:

Participant 6: "Tinulongan ako dito na pataasin ang pasensiya konti tapos tinulongan nila ako yung negative thoughts na gawing positive. Yun lang" ("They helped me extend my patience and turn negative thoughts into positive ones.")



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The participants' ability to transform negative thinking into positive thinking reflects cognitive restructuring, which helps individuals reframe unhealthy thoughts. This suggests that delinquency involves disruptions in cognition, emotion, and identity, not just behavior. Likewise, research shows that delinquent behavior can progress from cognitive distortions to healthier beliefs through psychological development and intervention (Miao et al., 2025).

Theoretically, this theme is explained by Carl Rogers' Person-Centered Theory, which suggests that emotional and psychological growth develops through supportive relationships that promote self-awareness and self-acceptance (Rogers, 1951; Rogers, 1961). It is also supported by Beck's Cognitive Theory, which explains how participants learned to replace negative thoughts with more positive and adaptive thinking during rehabilitation (Beck, 1976; Beck & Haigh, 2014).

This underscores the need for rehabilitation to promote emotional and psychological growth beyond discipline. This finding may inform juvenile justice and correctional practices by supporting interventions that strengthen lasting behavioral change, successful reintegration, and community safety.

2.3. Eliminating Vices and Misconduct

This theme highlights a proactive strategy of distancing themselves from people or situations that might trigger a return to past behaviors. Participant 8 elaborated:

Participant 8: "Dati kay kuan bisyoso kaayo ko, galgalero. Kaning na kuan na.. kabalo nako mag likay sa akong mga batasan dati, sa akong mga bisyo na kuan dili maayo malikayan na. Ug wala na pud diri sa center ang mga bisyo kay bawal man pud diri. Ug para makagawas ko kay mag kuan jud ko sa akong mga bisyo mag likay kay useless kaayo ang pag stay ug 6 months diri sa center ug mu balik gihapon sa uno." ("Before, I was very busy with bad vices and always provoking others. Now... I know how to avoid my old behaviors and vices, which are not good. There are no vices here at the center because they are prohibited. And so that I can get out, I really avoid my vices, because staying 6 months here would be useless if I go back to the same habits.")

The elimination of vices and misconduct among juvenile delinquents is a gradual process of replacing harmful behaviors with healthier alternatives through structured interventions and support. This aligns with findings that substance use reinforces delinquent behavior by impairing executive functioning and impulse control (Pichlmeier et al., 2024), whereas cognitive-behavioral and skills-based interventions effectively reduce misconduct by promoting self-regulation, goal-setting, and prosocial behaviors (National Institute of Justice, 2022).

The theme is supported by both Beck's Cognitive Behavior Theory and Rogers' Person-Centered Theory. Beck's theory explains that participants reduced harmful behaviors by changing negative thoughts into healthier and more adaptive thinking (Beck, 1976; Beck & Haigh, 2014). Likewise, Rogers' theory suggests that avoiding negative influences reflects increased self-awareness, personal responsibility, and growth toward becoming a better version of themselves (Rogers, 1951; Rogers, 1961).

The findings support cognitive-behavioral perspectives, suggesting replacing harmful habits with adaptive coping strategies promotes lasting behavioral change. These findings may inform evidence-based rehabilitation practices that strengthen successful reintegration, reduce reoffending, and enhance community safety.

3. Perceptions And Interpretations of Their Experiences with Psychological Interventions

Themes Support Systems

3.1. Support Systems

The participants frequently cited the positive influence of individuals within the reformation center who provided guidance, encouragement, and assistance. Participant 9 asserted:

Participant 9: "Ang mga tao po diri.. mga houseparents. Sila sir gina tudloan mi ug mga Math, answer sa module, kaning na kuan mi ba.. hinay-hinay ug kabag-o among huna-huna." ("The people here... the house parents. They teach us Math, help us answer our modules, and slowly, our way of thinking is changing.")



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This theme highlights that psychological interventions are more effective when supported by strong family, peer, and community relationships. Studies show that social support reduces delinquency and helps prevent reoffending by providing guidance and encouragement (Dong & Krohn, 2017). In the Philippines, many CICL come from families with limited supervision and emotional support, increasing their risk of delinquency (Derla et al., 2025). However, recent local studies show that support from family, peers, and rehabilitation institutions promotes positive change and strengthens reformation outcomes (Suizo & Nabe, 2025; Ayao, 2025).

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory posits that the microsystem—including family members, house parents, counselors, social workers, and other authority figures—directly influences individual development. The participants' experiences of receiving guidance and support that enhanced the effectiveness of psychological interventions reflect the important role of these close relationships in promoting learning, emotional adjustment, and behavioral change (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

Taken together, these findings suggest that support systems are not merely supplementary but also foundational in the reformation process, insinuating that sustained behavioral change is deeply rooted in the presence of consistent emotional, social, and relational support. The findings may encourage correctional institutions to strengthen family- and community-based support as part of rehabilitation planning and aftercare services.

3.2. Emotional Distress

Conversely, the theme emotional distress was identified as a hindrance towards fully experiencing the psychological interventions. Particularly, the experience of loneliness and separation from family emerged as a significant impediment. Participant 9 expressed:

Participant 9: "Ay kanang kuan ma'am.. mingaw jud. Gina mingaw ko sa akong pamilya" ("It's really lonely... I miss my family.")

The expression of feelings of loneliness inside the center directly addresses the emotional void created by separation. This loneliness can be profoundly disruptive to the reformation process. A qualitative study further revealed that CICLs often experience helplessness, fear of the future, and emotional instability during their rehabilitation process, highlighting that emotional distress continues even within structured environments but may gradually transform into emotional awareness when proper support is provided (Salih, 2024).

From a theoretical perspective, Rogers' Person-Centered Theory explains that feelings of loneliness can affect participants' engagement in rehabilitation, while supportive relationships that provide empathy and acceptance promote emotional healing and personal growth (Rogers, 1951, 1961). Similarly, Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory suggests that these emotional experiences are influenced by the participants' immediate environment, particularly their separation from family and adjustment to the rehabilitation center (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner & Morris, 2006).

This finding implies that rehabilitation and interventions should focus not only on behavioral change but also on addressing the emotional and psychological needs of delinquent youth. This finding may guide correctional rehabilitation programs in integrating counseling and psychosocial support to strengthen emotional well-being and facilitate successful community reintegration.

Conclusions

The findings show that juvenile rehabilitation involves gradual transformation in cognitive, emotional, moral, and spiritual domains. Structured environments and supportive relationships foster self-awareness and growth, while emotional distress—especially loneliness from family separation—hinders motivation. Successful rehabilitation depends on effective interventions, emotional well-being, and support systems. Theories by Beck, Rogers, and Bronfenbrenner suggest behavioral change comes from cognitive restructuring, relationships, and positive environments. Lastly, the findings enrich criminology and juvenile justice research by providing phenomenological insights that may inform evidence-based rehabilitation, strengthen correctional programs, and support successful reintegration and public safety.

Recommendations

The findings suggest that the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council (JJWC), Bahay Pag-asa administrators, local government units, and correctional rehabilitation centers may strengthen trauma-informed, evidence-based, and family-centered rehabilitation programs for Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL). Policymakers may enhance institutional capacity through continuous program evaluation and



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professional development. Future researchers may examine the long-term effectiveness of psychological interventions across diverse settings using longitudinal or mixed-methods approaches.

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