

BEHIND BARS: NAVIGATING THE UNIQUE CHALLENGES AND RESILIENCE OF LESBIAN, GAY, BISEXUAL, TRANS- GENDER AND QUEER PERSONS IN PRISONS

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explores the lived experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) persons incarcerated in Philippine correctional institutions. Despite emerging global scholarship on gender, sexuality, and incarceration, limited research in the Philippines captures how LGBTQ inmates navigate systemic structures within prison settings. Using Colaizzi's method of analysis, the study gathered rich narratives from detained LGBTQ individuals to uncover their challenges, coping mechanisms, interpersonal relationships, and institutional treatment. Data reveal complex experiences shaped by discrimination, isolation, and survival strategies that highlight both resilience and systemic neglect. Participants reported experiences of marginalization in access to healthcare, work assignments, and emotional support, yet also demonstrated adaptive resilience through peer solidarity and self-acceptance. The findings illuminate how heteronormative prison systems reinforce invisibility and vulnerability among LGBTQ inmates while simultaneously generating alternative spaces of belonging and identity formation. The study contributes to the growing discourse on queer criminology, emphasizing the urgent need for gender-responsive penal reform, staff sensitization programs, and inclusive correctional policies that protect and affirm LGBTQ individuals behind bars.

Keyword: LGBTQ, incarceration, phenomenology, queer criminology, lived experiences, Philippine prisons

1. INTRODUCTION

Imprisonment has long been a mechanism of state power, designed to control, punish, and reform those who deviate from social norms. Within this system, the experiences of individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) remain largely invisible, especially in developing countries like the Philippines where correctional discourse continues to operate under heteronormative assumptions. As global attention increasingly turns toward human rights and inclusivity, understanding the lived realities of LGBTQ inmates becomes a crucial academic and policy concern. Their narratives reveal not only personal struggles but also the institutional dynamics that define modern carceral systems.

Globally, queer criminology has emerged as an essential lens in unpacking the intersection between sexuality, punishment, and institutional control. Scholars such as Ball (2016) and Buist and Lenning

(2017) argue that carceral spaces reproduce gendered hierarchies and heteronormative power structures that marginalize those whose identities challenge binary norms. International studies reveal that LGBTQ persons in prisons face unique challenges including sexual victimization, psychological distress, social exclusion, and inadequate healthcare (Mogul et al., 2011; Sexton, 2015). In countries like the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom, gender-sensitive correctional reforms have begun to address these inequities through specialized housing, counseling, and anti-discrimination policies. However, such measures remain underdeveloped or inconsistently implemented across Southeast Asia.

In the Philippine context, incarceration reflects broader societal norms influenced by Catholic moral traditions, patriarchal systems, and conservative attitudes toward sexuality. Prisons often mirror the biases and inequalities of the outside world, translating into discrimination, neglect, and lack of institutional protection for LGBTQ persons behind bars. While the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) and the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) have made strides toward gender awareness, correctional environments largely remain structured around heteronormative frameworks that fail to recognize diverse gender identities and expressions. This invisibility perpetuates the marginalization of LGBTQ inmates who navigate stigma both from fellow inmates and institutional staff.

Studies from the Commission on Human Rights (2022) and local NGOs indicate that LGBTQ detainees in the Philippines often experience harassment, involuntary isolation, and exclusion from work and livelihood programs. Transgender women, in particular, face compounded discrimination as they are typically confined in male facilities, leading to physical and psychological distress. Access to healthcare, gender-affirming services, and emotional support remains limited. Yet amid these adversities, many develop resilience through solidarity networks, faith, creativity, and personal transformation. Their stories reflect how identity, adaptation, and resistance coalesce within oppressive structures.

This research builds on that gap by documenting the lived experiences of LGBTQ inmates through the lens of phenomenology. The study adopts Colaizzi's (1978) seven-step method to explore the meaning and essence of their experiences within the carceral environment. Guided by Queer Criminology and the Minority Stress Theory, it seeks to unpack how systemic structures shape personal identities, relationships, and survival strategies in confinement. Specifically, it aims to illuminate how LGBTQ persons construct meaning in a system that often denies their individuality and humanity.

By centering voices from within prison walls, this study contributes to a broader understanding of gender, sexuality, and justice in Philippine criminology. It offers both theoretical and practical significance: theoretically, it extends the discourse of queer criminology to the Global South, where carceral narratives remain understudied; practically, it provides insights that can inform gender-sensitive correctional reforms. Ultimately, this work affirms that inclusive justice cannot exist without recognizing the dignity and diversity of those most marginalized by the system.

1.1 Theoretical Framework

Queer Criminology Theory, developed by scholars like Ball (2016), serves as the main theoretical lens of this study. This theory emerged as a critical response to traditional criminology's failure to account for the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals within the criminal justice system. At its core, Queer Criminology examines how legal and penal systems are structured around heteronormative and cisnormative ideals—norms that marginalize, criminalize, and pathologize LGBTQ+ identities. It highlights how institutions like law enforcement, courts, and correctional facilities often perpetuate systemic violence, discrimination, and exclusion against non-normative genders and sexualities. This lens is particularly relevant to this study, which investigates the structural injustices experienced by LGBTQ+ Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in Philippine prisons. By centering Queer Criminology, the research aims to expose and challenge the carceral practices that render LGBTQ+ PDLs invisible, vulnerable, and unprotected.

To enrich this primary framework, the study also draws on several supporting theories. Labeling Theory (Becker, 1963) explains how societal definitions of deviance contribute to the overrepresentation and stigmatization of LGBTQ+ individuals in the justice system. Intersectionality Theory (Crenshaw, 1989) deepens the analysis by showing how overlapping identities—such as sexual orientation, gender identity, class, and race—compound experiences of discrimination and marginalization. Minority Stress Theory (Meyer, 2003) offers insight into the psychological impact of sustained stigma, rejection, and institutional neglect, which are prevalent in prison environments. Lastly, Strain Theory (Merton, 1938) helps contextualize the socioeconomic barriers that may push LGBTQ+ individuals into conflict with the law, particularly through survival-based offenses.

Together, these frameworks provide a multidimensional understanding of the systemic barriers and human rights violations faced by LGBTQ+ PDLs. However, it is Queer Criminology that anchors the analysis, enabling a critical and justice-oriented examination of how carceral systems uphold inequality and perpetuate harm against LGBTQ+ individuals.

1.3 Research Question

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) in prison, focusing on the unique challenges they face, their coping mechanisms, and the broader institutional and societal factors that shape their incarceration. Specifically, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. In what ways do institutional policies and practices affect the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals in prison?
2. What unique challenges do LGBTQ+ individuals deprived of liberty experience during their incarcerations?
3. How do LGBTQ+ individuals cope with the difficulties they encounter in the prison environment?
4. How do societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals influence the treatment of PDLs within the correctional system?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design

This study used qualitative research design, an approach that seeks to understand human experiences by exploring meanings, emotions, and social contexts through non-numerical data such as interviews and narratives. It emphasizes depth over breadth, making it ideal for uncovering complex, lived realities that are often overlooked in quantitative research. In this study, the qualitative design allows an in-depth exploration of the experiences of LGBTQ+ individuals deprived of liberty (PDLs) within the prison system. By focusing on personal stories and perceptions, the research can capture the emotional and psychological dimensions of incarceration, discrimination, and resilience. This method is essential to understand how these individuals interpret their realities and cope with institutional challenges, ensuring that their voices are authentically represented and that the findings are grounded in their lived experiences.

2.2 Research Locale

This research was conducted in selected BJMP-run jails located in the provinces of Surigao del Norte and Surigao City. These facilities housed Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) who were serving short-term sentences. The study involved LGBTQ+ PDLs from each of these provinces to gain insight into their lived experiences within the correctional system. The selection of these locations was based on their relevance to the research objectives and the need to explore the conditions, challenges, and institutional treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in various detention facilities across the Caraga Region. This regional approach aimed to provide a broader and more comprehensive understanding of LGBTQ+ incarceration in Mindanao, addressing the existing gap in localized research on this marginalized population.

2.3 Data Gathering Procedure

Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) with ten (10) LGBTQ+ Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) were conducted across selected BJMP-run jails in Surigao del Norte—specifically Bislig City Jail and Lianga District Jail—and in Surigao City, specifically the Surigao City Jail. Data collection was made possible through the endorsement of BJMP Regional Director, Jail Superintendent Ferdinand D. Pontillo.

The researcher first wrote a formal request to the Regional Director of the BJMP, with the recommendation of the study adviser. Upon receiving approval, the researcher proceeded with the conduct of the study. To ensure adherence to human rights standards and confidentiality protocols, the process began with securing the necessary authorizations and ethical clearance from the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) and a recognized ethics review committee. The researcher then coordinated with jail officials to identify eligible participants who met the study's inclusion criteria.

After explaining the purpose of the study, its confidentiality measures, and the voluntary nature of participation, informed consent was obtained from each participant. Data collection involved one-on-one, semi-structured interviews conducted in secure and private settings within the participating jails. These interviews encouraged open-ended responses, allowing participants to freely share their experiences, coping mechanisms, and challenges. With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supported by field notes to capture key insights while maintaining confidentiality.

The semi-structured format ensured that essential topics—such as systemic discrimination, identity navigation, institutional policies, and access to support—were thoroughly explored. After data collection, the interviews were transcribed verbatim and analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns and insights.

To enhance the trustworthiness and credibility of the findings, the researcher employed both member-checking and peer debriefing. The entire data collection process—including clearance acquisition, participant recruitment, interviews, transcription, and analysis—was completed over approximately two to three months. By following this ethical and systematic approach, the study aimed to authentically represent the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ PDLs and contribute meaningfully to discussions on prison reform and LGBTQ+ rights within correctional institutions.

2.4 Data Analysis Approach

The study employed Colaizzi's seven-step phenomenological method as the primary data analysis approach. This process began with reading all transcripts to gain familiarity with the data, followed by identifying significant statements that reflected participants' experiences. Meanings were then formulated from these statements and clustered into thematic categories representing broader concepts. From these themes, a comprehensive description of the phenomenon was developed, highlighting the essence of the lived experiences of LGBTQ+ PDLs. Thematic analysis was subsequently used to refine and organize findings into major themes such as institutional discrimination, identity negotiation, emotional resilience, and coping mechanisms. To ensure the credibility of interpretations, findings were returned to participants for validation and cross-checked with peer reviewers for consistency.

2.5 Ethical Considerations

By following ethical research guidelines, this study guaranteed the anonymity, dignity, and safety of its participants. Participants were given a thorough explanation of the study's goals, methods, potential risks, voluntary nature of participation, and their right to discontinue involvement at any time without facing consequences, through an informed consent form. They were asked to read and sign a permission form confirming their understanding and willingness to participate prior to the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). No force or pressure was applied to those who chose not to participate, and they were given full freedom to decline or withdraw from the research at any point.

During the interviews, participants' names were kept completely confidential, and pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities. Additional ethical precautions were taken—including obtaining clearance from the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), ensuring a secure interview setting, and avoiding questions that could cause discomfort—due to the involvement of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in the study.

2.6 Methodological Limitations and Rigor

The qualitative nature of this study inherently limits the generalizability of its findings. With a relatively small sample size of ten participants from specific correctional facilities, the results cannot represent all LGBTQ+ PDLs across the Philippines. Nonetheless, measures were taken to ensure methodological rigor and trustworthiness. Credibility was established through triangulation of data sources, member-checking, and peer debriefing. Transferability was supported through detailed contextual descriptions that allow readers to determine applicability to other settings. Dependability was ensured by maintaining a clear audit trail of data collection and analysis procedures, while confirmability was reinforced by grounding interpretations in participants' actual narratives. Despite these limitations, the study provides valuable insight into an underexplored area of criminological research and offers a robust foundation for policy development and further investigation.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis yielded four major themes and several subthemes that capture the lived experiences of LGBTQ persons incarcerated in Surigao del Sur. Each theme represents a dimension of how participants negotiate their identity, safety, and humanity within a carceral system largely structured around heteronormative and binary gender norms. These findings are presented with corresponding participant excerpts that exemplify the emotional tone and meaning of their experiences.

SOP1: Institutional Policies and Practices Affecting the Experiences of LGBTQ+ Individuals in Prison

Theme 1: Inconsistent Implementation of Protective Policies

Despite the existence of protective policies for LGBTQ+ Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), their implementation in many correctional facilities is often inconsistent. A lack of proper gender sensitivity training among correctional staff contributes significantly to the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ inmates. As a result, LGBTQ+ inmates continue to face risks such as physical violence, harassment, and sexual assault. Codes / Key Concepts: *Inconsistent policies, lack of training, gender sensitivity, harassment, systemic ignorance, violence, sexual assault.*

R1 (KII-1A): *“Murag matamayan man ang bayot, labi na sa mga laki. Labi na pag magka edad na. Kulang jud ilang respeto. Usahay binuangan ka, tslugon imo lubot. Naa gud mga balaod na bawal na pero dili man ata na sila aware.”*

(Translation: **“It feels like gay people are looked down upon, especially by the straight men. Especially as we age, there's less respect. Sometimes they make fun of you, even attempt to sexually assault you. There are laws prohibiting that, but it seems like they are not aware.”**)

This illustrates a direct link between the lack of staff awareness and the ongoing mistreatment LGBTQ+ individuals face. Similarly, another participant echoed the same frustrations regarding the inconsistency in enforcement:

R2 (KII-2B): *“Naay mga balaod nga nagprotekta sa amoa, pero ang mga tawo nga nagbantay dili aware o wala sila’y training para sa among sitwasyon. Usahay, magpaka-blind na lang sila.”*

(Translation: **“There are laws that protect us, but the people who guard us are not aware or don't have the proper training for our situation. Sometimes, they just pretend not to see.”**)

This suggests that despite the policies, without proper awareness, LGBTQ+ inmates are still subjected to harm. Furthermore, when issues are reported, there is often no follow-through:

R3 (FGD-1A): *“Kung magreklamo ka, walay action. Naa koy bala, pero wa gihapon makakita og hustisya.”*

(Translation: **“When you complain, there's no action. I have a complaint, but I still don't see justice being done.”**)

This indicates that, even with the existence of laws, the lack of institutional response results in continued mistreatment and a lack of accountability within the prison system.

In conclusion, inconsistent implementation of protective policies creates a significant gap in the prison system. Even when protective laws exist, they are often ineffective due to a lack of training, awareness, and institutional accountability. The testimonies reflect how systemic neglect leaves LGBTQ+ inmates vulnerable to ongoing mistreatment. This theme emphasizes the importance of not just having laws but ensuring their consistent and effective implementation.

This theme is aligned with McCann & Brown (2021) and Human Rights Watch (2023), which document the continued mistreatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in prisons, despite the presence of protective laws. The testimonies underscore how institutional failure, compounded by insufficient staff awareness and training, exacerbates the risks LGBTQ+ PDLs face within the prison system.

Theme 2: Gender Classification and Housing Issues

Another significant issue identified in the study is the misclassification of transgender inmates, particularly transgender women, and the housing issues they face. Many transgender individuals are placed in male wards based on their biological sex at birth, increasing their vulnerability to harassment, sexual assault, and psychological trauma.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Misclassification, transgender inmates, gender-affirming policies, sexual assault, psychological trauma, housing issues.*

To further understand this issue, participants shared their experiences with the misclassification of gender:

R4 (KII-3C): *“Wala man ko gibutang sa women's ward bisan transgender ko. Ingon nila basta lalaki ka pagkaanak, didto ka dapat. Pero mas safe unta ko sa babae kay naa koy hormone therapy.”*

(Translation: **“They didn’t place me in the women's ward even though I’m transgender. They said as long as you’re male by birth, you belong there. But I would feel safer among women because I’m on hormone therapy.”**)

This experience highlights the rigid and outdated practices in gender classification, which disregards the safety and well-being of transgender individuals. Moreover, another participant pointed out the risks involved in such misplacements:

R5 (FGD-2B): *“Mas grabe ang experience nako sa lalaki kay maglisod ko og protektar sa akong kaugalingon. Ang akong kalawasan, mas delikado sa mga lalaki.”*

(Translation: **“My experience is worse with men because I struggle to protect myself. My body is more vulnerable to men.”**)

This statement further emphasizes the dangers transgender individuals face when placed in male facilities. One participant went on to suggest a more appropriate solution for transgender inmates:

R6 (KII-4D): *“Ako lang ang trans nga gibutang sa mga lalaki. Mas okay unta kung dunay lugar para sa among mga trans nga inmates.”*

(Translation: **“I’m the only trans person placed with the men. It would be better if there was a space designated for us transgender inmates.”**)

This statement suggests the need for specialized spaces for transgender individuals within correctional facilities, which would promote safety and dignity.

The issue of gender classification and housing issues reveals a critical failure in the prison system to recognize the gender identity of transgender individuals. Misplacing transgender inmates based on their biological sex at birth exposes them to violence and psychological harm. This failure to provide gender-affirming housing reflects a systemic issue in the prison system that needs urgent reform.

This theme aligns with research by Jenness & Fenstermaker (2016) and Andrews & Crewe (2022), which emphasize how misclassification and inadequate housing policies place transgender inmates in jeopardy.

Additionally, Human Rights Watch (2023) advocates for gender-affirming housing practices to protect transgender individuals in the correctional system.

Theme 3: Positive Experiences with Select Staff and Facilities

Some correctional facilities, such as Surigao City Jail, were highlighted by participants for their inclusive policies and practices. These facilities ensured that LGBTQ+ inmates were treated with dignity and respect, offering appropriate housing, access to rehabilitation programs, and a supportive environment where LGBTQ+ individuals could thrive and feel safe.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Empathy, respect, inclusive practices, supportive environments, rehabilitation programs, dignity.*

The positive impact of these practices is reflected in the following accounts:

R7 (KII-5E): *“Sa Surigao City Jail, lahi ra gyud. Naay kaugalingong selda ang mga bayot. Naay mga programa, naay aktibidad.”*

(Translation: **“In Surigao City Jail, it’s really different. Gays have their own cells. There are programs and activities.”**)

This participant’s account highlights how gender-sensitive policies can create a positive environment where LGBTQ+ inmates are given appropriate housing and opportunities for rehabilitation. Moreover, another participant emphasized that these policies are not only theoretical but are actually practiced in daily routines:

R8 (FGD-3C): *“Dili parehas sa uban na gahimo lang og mga balaod pero wala sad gipractice. Ang Surigao Jail, lahi kay ang mga balaod naa sa act ug makita nimo sa mga daily routines.”*

(Translation: **“It’s not like other places where they just make laws but don’t practice them. Surigao Jail is different because the laws are actually in action, and you can see it in the daily routines.”**)

This statement illustrates that Surigao City Jail is a model facility where inclusive laws are implemented effectively, fostering a respectful and supportive environment for LGBTQ+ inmates. Additionally,

R9 (KII-6F): *“Ang Surigao Jail, di lang sa mga gay, pati sa mga babaye ug laki, nagtan-aw sila og equal. Wala’y diskriminasyon.”*

(Translation: **“In Surigao Jail, they don’t just treat the gays well; they treat everyone—men and women—equally. There’s no discrimination.”**)

This reflects the broader culture of inclusivity at Surigao City Jail, where equality is a central value, and discrimination is not tolerated.

The theme of positive experiences with select staff and facilities highlights the transformative potential of inclusive policies. When correctional facilities adopt respectful, gender-sensitive practices, LGBTQ+ inmates are provided with a safe and supportive environment where they can thrive and engage in rehabilitation programs. Surigao City Jail exemplifies how these practices can create a safer and more inclusive space for LGBTQ+ inmates.

This theme aligns with Brown & Coker (2020) and Jenness et al. (2023), which show how inclusive policies in correctional facilities foster positive outcomes for LGBTQ+ inmates, improving their safety and rehabilitation. The experiences at Surigao City Jail demonstrate the tangible benefits of implementing inclusive, respectful policies in prison systems.

SOP 2: Unique Challenges Experienced by LGBTQ+ Individuals Deprived of Liberty During Their Incarceration

Theme 1: Social Isolation and Peer-Only Support

LGBTQ+ individuals in prison are often isolated from the broader inmate population, relying solely on their fellow LGBTQ+ inmates for support. This peer-only support system, while valuable, cannot replace institutional care or mental health services. As a result, LGBTQ+ inmates often feel excluded from the

larger institutional support networks, leading to emotional distress. Without structured support or consistent staff engagement, LGBTQ+ PDLs face a psychological toll that is not addressed by the correctional system.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Social isolation, peer support, exclusion, emotional toll, peer solidarity, psychological isolation.*

One participant revealed:

R3 (KII-1A): *“Kami-kami ra man gayud diri ang magtinabangay. Walay laing moapil sa amo kalipay o kasakit gawas sa amo kaugalingong grupo ug usahay, kung malumo ang personnel.”*
(Translation: **“It’s really just us helping each other here. No one else shares in our happiness or pain except for our own group and sometimes, when a personnel is kind.”**)

This statement highlights how marginalized identities often lead to emotional and psychological seclusion within the carceral environment. The lack of support from the broader inmate population and staff means that LGBTQ+ PDLs rely heavily on peer solidarity. However, this solidarity, while vital, cannot fully meet their psychological needs. Additionally, another participant echoed this sense of exclusion:

R4 (FGD-2B): *“Kami ra gyud magtinabangay, dili parehas sa uban na naay ayuda gikan sa personnel.”*
(Translation: **“We really help each other out, it’s not like other groups who get support from the staff.”**)

This further demonstrates how peer support is the primary mechanism for emotional well-being for LGBTQ+ inmates, but it highlights the insufficiency of this support when compared to institutionalized care. Moreover, one respondent elaborated on the emotional toll of this isolation:

R5 (KII-3C): *“Walay magtabang namo, kami lang gyud ang magpuyo ug mag-uban. Dili man amoing pasipala, pero lisod gyud ang walay uban.”*
(Translation: **“No one helps us, it’s just us living and sticking together. It’s not that we’re complaining, but it’s really hard to be alone.”**)

This statement emphasizes the psychological toll of isolation within the prison system, where the absence of support from both peers and staff leads to increased emotional and mental strain. LGBTQ+ inmates are left to navigate their incarceration with minimal institutional assistance, underscoring the importance of systemic reform.

The issue of social isolation and peer-only support reveals a fundamental gap in the correctional system's ability to support LGBTQ+ inmates. While peer solidarity offers some relief, it is clear that this is not sufficient to address the complex emotional and psychological challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. The lack of institutionalized care exacerbates their isolation, making it more difficult for LGBTQ+ PDLs to cope with the harsh realities of prison life.

This theme aligns with findings from McCann & Brown (2021) and Human Rights Watch (2023), which document the isolation of LGBTQ+ inmates within correctional facilities and the lack of institutional support for their mental health needs. These studies emphasize the importance of building institutional frameworks that actively support LGBTQ+ inmates, reducing isolation and providing tailored psychological care.

Themes 2: Lack of Reporting Channels

Many LGBTQ+ inmates face verbal harassment, including cat-calling and derogatory names such as "salot" and "bayot." These verbal abuses take a significant toll on their mental and emotional well-being, but participants felt powerless to respond or seek help due to the lack of accessible reporting channels. Without a clear and effective process to report abuse, LGBTQ+ inmates are left vulnerable to ongoing mistreatment, as the negative perceptions of others in the facility often go unchecked.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Bullying, verbal harassment, derogatory names, lack of reporting, emotional distress, powerless.*

One participant shared:

R3 (KII-2B): *“Daghan sa amo diri nagbully ngan insult kay mga bayot kami. Minsan sinasabihan kami ng “salot” or “bayot” dahil wala naman daw sa bibliya ang mga bakla. Nasasaktan kami pero wala naman kaming magagawa kase yun ang tingin nila sa amin.”*
(Translation: **“Many of us here are bullied and insulted because we are gay. Sometimes they call us ‘salot’ (curse) or ‘bayot’ (gay) because, according to them, being gay is not accepted in the Bible. We feel hurt, but there’s nothing we can do because that’s how they see us.”**)

This participant’s experience demonstrates the verbal bullying LGBTQ+ inmates endure, often justified by the perpetrators’ personal or religious beliefs. This harassment contributes to the mental and emotional distress of LGBTQ+ PDLs, but without proper reporting channels, they feel powerless to address the mistreatment. As one participant mentioned:

R4 (KII-3A): *“Sakit kaayo ang paminawon pero walay mahimo kay walay lugar nga makareklamo. Gahi ang systema, walay magdawat sa amoa.”*
(Translation: **“It hurts a lot to hear, but we can’t do anything because there’s no place to report. The system is tough, and no one accepts us.”**)

This statement underscores how the lack of reporting channels leaves LGBTQ+ inmates with no means of seeking justice or protection. Another participant added:

R5 (FGD-2C): *“Wala gyud klaro ang proseso sa pagreklamo. Ang ubang gay, magpanuko nalang kay wala nay mahimo.”*
(Translation: **“The process for complaining is unclear. Some gays just give up because there’s nothing else they can do.”**)

This reinforces the idea that the absence of clear, safe reporting mechanisms for LGBTQ+ inmates allows the cycle of harassment to continue unchecked.

The lack of reporting channels serves as a critical barrier for LGBTQ+ inmates subjected to verbal harassment and bullying. Without effective mechanisms for reporting abuse, LGBTQ+ PDLs remain vulnerable to ongoing mistreatment. This theme highlights the urgent need for accessible, transparent reporting systems within correctional facilities, allowing LGBTQ+ inmates to seek justice and protection from harassment.

This theme resonates with Human Rights Watch (2023) and McCann & Brown (2021), which emphasize the importance of accessible reporting channels for victims of abuse. The lack of effective reporting systems is a significant barrier to addressing discrimination and harassment, leading to ongoing harm for LGBTQ+ PDLs.

Theme 3: Unequal Access to Mental Health or Counseling Services

Many LGBTQ+ inmates reported the absence of specialized psychological support services tailored to their unique needs. While general counseling services may be available, they often fail to account for the specific traumas and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ individuals. As a result, their psychological and emotional needs remain unmet, further compounding their challenges during incarceration. The lack of adequate care intensifies the psychological strain experienced by LGBTQ+ PDLs.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Mental health, counseling, lack of specialized support, trauma, gender and sexuality-related issues, unmet needs.*

For instance, one participant shared:

R2 (KII-3A): *“Naay counseling pero dili para sa amo. Dili nila kasabot among giagian.”*
(Translation: **“There’s counseling, but not for us. They don’t understand what we’ve gone through.”**)

This illustrates a significant gap in mental health services, where general counseling does not meet the unique needs of LGBTQ+ inmates. Another participant echoed the lack of tailored support:

R3 (FGD-2A): *“Wala gyud kaila ang mga counselor sa amoa. Di sila maka-approach sa among kahimtang.”*
(Translation: **“The counselors don’t know us. They can’t relate to our situation.”**)

This statement highlights the lack of training and awareness among mental health providers about the specific experiences and challenges faced by LGBTQ+ inmates. Furthermore, one participant described how this lack of understanding impacts the quality of counseling services:

R4 (KII-4B): *“Ang mga counselor, wala’y pagka-trained sa gender issues. Ang among mga problema, lain kaayo sa uban nga problema sa mga inmates.”*
(Translation: **“The counselors are not trained in gender issues. Our problems are very different from the other inmates' issues.”**)

This underscores the need for specialized mental health services that can address gender and sexuality-related trauma faced by LGBTQ+ inmates.

The unequal access to mental health or counseling services reflects a significant gap in correctional facilities' ability to meet the psychological needs of LGBTQ+ inmates. Without specialized care, LGBTQ+ PDLs' unique emotional and psychological challenges go unaddressed, leading to continued psychological harm during their incarceration.

This theme aligns with findings from McCann & Brown (2021) and Human Rights Watch (2023), which document the lack of appropriate mental health care for LGBTQ+ inmates. These studies emphasize the need for inclusive mental health services that can address the gender and sexuality-related trauma of LGBTQ+ PDLs.

The challenges identified in this study resonate strongly with the existing literature and related studies. The theme of social isolation and peer-only support aligns with Minority Stress Theory, which highlights how isolation and lack of support increase mental health issues in marginalized populations. Similarly, Queer Criminology Theory informs our understanding of how institutional neglect, such as the lack of reporting channels, perpetuates the marginalization of LGBTQ+ individuals in the prison system. The lack of mental health services also corresponds to the findings of Human Rights Watch (2023) and McCann & Brown (2021), which document the absence of tailored psychological support for LGBTQ+ inmates and the compounding stress this causes.

SOP 3: Coping Strategies of LGBTQ+ Individuals in the Prison Environment

Coping mechanisms among LGBTQ+ persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) are shaped by their continuous navigation of stigma, discrimination, and institutional neglect. Despite the challenges, many demonstrate remarkable resilience through emotional, social, and behavioral strategies. Their ability to adapt to the harsh environment often depends on the level of acceptance they receive from co-inmates, the attitudes of correctional staff, and the overall atmosphere of the facility. In some jails, particularly where LGBTQ+ PDLs are isolated or subjected to daily humiliation, coping becomes a matter of survival. They turn inward, finding strength in self-expression, journaling, faith, and forming tight-knit support groups. In more inclusive environments, such as Surigao City Jail, coping takes on a more empowering tone. Opportunities for creative expression through events like Ms. Gay contests, as well as positive treatment by personnel, allow some to cope by embracing their identity rather than hiding it. These variations

demonstrate that while LGBTQ+ PDLs often endure similar types of pain, the tools they use to cope—and the outcomes—are significantly influenced by their environments.

Theme 1: Formation of Support Circles Among Co-Inmates

LGBTQ+ individuals in prison often form “chosen families” or peer support groups to help each other navigate the harsh realities of incarceration. These informal alliances provide emotional backing, shared resources, and collective protection against discrimination or aggression. In the absence of institutional support, these peer groups become a critical source of emotional and physical security.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Chosen families, peer support, emotional backing, collective protection, mutual care, informal alliances.*

One participant shared their experience:

R3 (KII-1A): *“Magpundok mi sa among grupo. Magsabot mi kung kinsa among kuyog matulog, magtinabangay sa mga kalisod.”*

(Translation: **“We stick together as a group. We decide who we sleep next to, we help each other during tough times.”**)

This statement highlights how LGBTQ+ inmates rely on peer solidarity as a means of survival. Without the backing of staff or institutional care, these peer groups act as a lifeline, creating a micro-community where mutual care is prioritized. Furthermore, these support systems provide a sense of belonging in an otherwise hostile environment. Another participant emphasized this sense of support:

R4 (KII-2B): *“Kami ra gyud magtinabangay, dili parehas sa uban na naay ayuda gikan sa personnel.”*

(Translation: **“We really help each other out, it’s not like other groups who get support from the staff.”**)

The solidarity shared among LGBTQ+ inmates enables them to endure the emotional and physical challenges of prison life. One more participant reflected on the importance of this bond:

R5 (KII-3C): *“Walay magtabang namo, kami lang gyud ang magpuyo ug mag-uban. Dili man amoing pasipala, pero lisod gyud ang walay uban.”*

(Translation: **“No one helps us, it’s just us living and sticking together. It’s not that we’re complaining, but it’s really hard to be alone.”**)

This reinforces the idea that peer support is essential for LGBTQ+ PDLs, as they find strength and security within these informal support systems.

The formation of support circles among LGBTQ+ inmates shows the resilience and adaptability of this marginalized group. While institutional care is scarce, LGBTQ+ PDLs compensate by building tight-knit networks that provide them with the strength to endure incarceration. This theme highlights the importance of peer solidarity and the psychological security it offers in environments that are otherwise hostile.

This theme aligns with McCann & Brown (2021), which explores how LGBTQ+ individuals in prisons often rely on their peer networks for protection and emotional well-being. The formation of chosen families is also discussed in Human Rights Watch (2023), where it is recognized as a vital survival strategy in the absence of institutional support.

Theme 2: Humor and Performance as Coping Tools

Many LGBTQ+ inmates use humor, singing, dancing, and other forms of creative expression to manage emotional stress and maintain a sense of identity. These activities provide psychological relief and help them cope with the monotony and pressures of incarceration. Rather than being mere distractions, these

acts serve as therapeutic outlets, enabling LGBTQ+ inmates to reclaim agency over their identities in a space that typically suppresses such expressions.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Humor, creative expression, singing, dancing, identity reclamation, psychological relief.*

One participant shared:

R5 (KII-1A): *“Usahay magpatawa lang mi, kanta-kanta, para makalimot sa kasakit. Amo na lang paagi para malingaw.”*

(Translation: **“Sometimes we just joke around, sing, just to forget the pain. It’s our way to stay entertained and cope.”**)

This statement illustrates how humor and creative outlets are used to provide emotional release. These expressions are more than just activities; they are coping strategies that allow inmates to push through difficult times. Another participant emphasized the power of performance:

R6 (KII-2B): *“Minsan mag-dance kami para magsaya at makalimutan ang hirap sa loob. Tulong na rin iyon sa pagharap sa aming mga problema.”*

(Translation: **“Sometimes we dance to feel happy and forget the hardships inside. It helps us face our problems.”**)

This activity serves as an important psychological coping tool that mitigates the harsh realities of incarceration. As a final example, another respondent discussed the empowerment derived from performance:

R7 (FGD-3C): *“Pag magperform kami, parang nakakabalik kami sa normal na buhay namin. Masaya kami kahit saglit lang.”*

(Translation: **“When we perform, it feels like we’re back to our normal lives. We are happy even if it’s just for a short time.”**)

This reinforces how performative acts—whether through humor or art—allow LGBTQ+ inmates to reclaim their identity and emotional resilience, offering them a sense of empowerment in an otherwise repressive environment.

The theme of humor and performance as coping tools demonstrates how LGBTQ+ inmates use creative expression as a means of survival. These strategies provide psychological relief, help them reclaim their identity, and foster emotional resilience. This theme underscores the power of performative acts in creating moments of joy and empowerment in a repressive environment.

This theme correlates with Sexton & Jenness (2016) and Brown & Coker (2020), which discuss the therapeutic value of creative expression as a form of resistance and healing for marginalized inmates. Performance and humor offer LGBTQ+ individuals a safe space to express themselves and cope with the trauma of incarceration.

Theme 3: Acceptance and Spiritual Grounding

For many LGBTQ+ inmates, faith and spirituality provide a crucial coping mechanism, offering them inner peace and a way to understand their suffering. Participants spoke of turning to religion or spirituality to make sense of their situation, finding comfort in belief systems that offer hope, forgiveness, and strength. This theme highlights how spiritual grounding enables LGBTQ+ PDLs to maintain their sense of worth and hope despite the oppressive environment of incarceration.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Faith, spirituality, inner peace, acceptance, hope, religious coping.*

One participant expressed:

R8 (KII-4D): *“Dawaton ang ako kahintang sanan if may pag preach mamati ako.”*

(Translation: **“I will accept my situation, and if there is preaching, I will listen.”**)

This statement emphasizes how acceptance of one’s circumstances through faith can offer a sense of peace and clarity. Another participant shared how spirituality helps them understand their struggles:

R9 (FGD-2A): “*Ang relihiyon akong gi-turn to. Dili ko magsalig sa akong kaugalingon, apan sa akong ginoo.*”

(Translation: “**I turn to religion. I don't rely on myself, but on my God.**”)

This reinforces the role of spiritual grounding as a way to regain control and hope. For LGBTQ+ inmates, spirituality offers a framework for healing and resilience. One more participant spoke about how faith contributes to their sense of identity:

R10 (KII-5C): “*Sa akong pagtuo, dili ko magpasipala. Ang ginoo lang ang nakahibalo kung unsa ako.*”

(Translation: “**In my faith, I don't need to hide. Only God knows who I truly am.**”)

This indicates that spirituality becomes a source of empowerment and self-affirmation, allowing LGBTQ+ PDLs to embrace their identity despite external rejection.

Acceptance and spiritual grounding provide LGBTQ+ inmates with a sense of peace and hope amidst the hardships of incarceration. Faith-based coping mechanisms offer inner strength and resilience, allowing inmates to navigate the emotional and psychological challenges of the prison environment.

This theme correlates with Clark, White Hughto, and Pachankis (2021) and Brown & Coker (2020), which discuss the importance of faith as a coping mechanism for LGBTQ+ individuals in prison. Spirituality offers a framework for self-empowerment and psychological resilience in the face of adversity.

The coping mechanisms identified in this study resonate with existing research and theories. The theme of support circles aligns with Minority Stress Theory, which explains how marginalized groups build resilience through peer support. Similarly, Queer Criminology Theory provides insight into the ways LGBTQ+ inmates resist systemic oppression by creating their own support networks. The theme of humor and performance as coping tools reflects findings in Sexton & Jenness (2016), which underscore the therapeutic value of creative expression for marginalized groups. Lastly, spirituality as a coping mechanism aligns with Minority Stress Theory and Queer Criminology Theory, showing how faith helps LGBTQ+ inmates overcome psychological distress and reclaim their identity.

SOP 4: The Influence of Societal Attitudes on the Treatment of LGBTQ+ PDLs in the Correctional System

Societal perceptions of LGBTQ+ individuals deeply influence their treatment within correctional settings, often shaping the roles they are permitted to assume and the respect they receive. Carceral institutions, being microcosms of broader society, tend to mirror prevailing cultural biases—both negative and positive. Many LGBTQ+ PDLs reported facing stigma rooted in heteronormative and patriarchal norms, manifesting as ridicule, exclusion, and discriminatory practices. However, this study also revealed positive developments, such as in Surigao City Jail where increasing societal acceptance and external support have translated into inclusive policies and programs. Moreover, in some facilities, societal perceptions are beginning to shift, allowing LGBTQ+ PDLs to take on leadership roles such as ALS (Alternative Learning System) teachers or trustees. These contrasting experiences highlight the importance of continued advocacy and policy reform to combat prejudice and promote equity within the prison system.

Theme 1: Internalized Social Stigma within Correctional Communities

Many respondents noted that fellow inmates and some officers mirrored the discriminatory views of broader society. This includes verbal abuse, ridicule, and being treated as second-class citizens within the jail. The stigma of being LGBTQ+ often leads to dehumanization, which is mirrored in how individuals are treated by their peers and the institution itself.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Internalized stigma, verbal abuse, ridicule, dehumanization, societal stigma, marginalized identities.*

For instance, one participant shared:

R1 (KII-1A): “*Sige lang mi’g birahan sa ilang mga joke. Kataw-anan daw kay bayot mi. Murag di mi tinuod nga tao.*”

(Translation: “**They always make jokes about us. They say we’re funny because we’re gay. It’s like we’re not real people.**”)

This participant’s account underscores how societal stigma continues to dehumanize LGBTQ+ individuals within the prison system. The mockery and ridicule reflect the persistence of societal views that see LGBTQ+ identities as less valid or less dignified. Another participant added:

R2 (FGD-1B): “*Mura mi mga kataw-anan sa ilang mata. Murag kami ra ang puno sa kalipay nilang tanan.*”

(Translation: “**We seem like a joke in their eyes. It’s like we’re the source of all their laughter.**”)

This response reflects the dehumanizing impact of stigma on LGBTQ+ inmates, reinforcing their marginalized position within the correctional system. Additionally, another participant noted how this ridicule manifests in daily interactions:

R3 (KII-2B): “*Dili mi tagdon sa uban, kay bayot mi. Wala mi’y bili sa mata sa mga kasapi sa prisohan.*”

(Translation: “**We’re not considered by others because we’re gay. We have no value in the eyes of the prison community.**”)

This illustrates how internalized stigma within the prison system further marginalizes LGBTQ+ inmates, perpetuating their exclusion and reinforcing their lack of respect.

The internalized social stigma within correctional facilities illustrates how prevailing societal attitudes toward LGBTQ+ individuals shape their treatment in prisons. The verbal abuse and exclusion they face reflect the broader societal disrespect for LGBTQ+ identities, which is mirrored in the prison environment. The lack of institutional support and protection reinforces the marginalization of LGBTQ+ PDLs.

This theme aligns with Human Rights Watch (2023) and McCann & Brown (2021), which document how societal stigma continues to permeate prison systems, resulting in the mistreatment and dehumanization of LGBTQ+ inmates. These findings underscore the need for institutional reforms that challenge stigma and promote respect for LGBTQ+ identities.

Theme 2: Restricted Access to Leadership and Work Roles in Some Facilities

Due to prejudiced views of LGBTQ+ individuals as unreliable or incapable, some participants experienced limitations in accessing work or leadership roles within the jail. This theme underscores how traditional gender expectations influence institutional roles, restricting opportunities for LGBTQ+ PDLs to demonstrate their abilities and contribute to the facility. The lack of access to such roles not only limits empowerment but also perpetuates societal biases within the correctional system.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Leadership, work roles, institutional bias, gender expectations, limitations, empowerment.*

One participant shared their frustration:

R3 (KII-1A): “*Bisan gusto mi motabang, di mi tagdon. Ingon sila, bayot man gud, dili kuno kasaligan.*”

(Translation: “**Even if we want to help, they ignore us. They say because we’re gay, we’re not trustworthy.**”)

This reflects how gendered expectations within the prison system limit LGBTQ+ inmates' access to leadership and work roles, reinforcing their marginalization. Another participant emphasized the difficulty of being perceived as reliable despite their desire to contribute:

R4 (KII-2B): *“Pangandoy nako nga magtudlo o magtrabaho sa organisasyon, pero ingon sila, dili daw ko kasaligan tungod kay bayot.”*

(Translation: **“I dream of teaching or working in the organization, but they say I’m not trustworthy because I’m gay.”**)

This illustrates the prejudiced perception that LGBTQ+ PDLs are incapable or unreliable, limiting their potential contributions to the facility. A final respondent shared:

R5 (FGD-3C): *“Kaming mga bayot, bisan gusto pa mi mangayo og trabaho, di gyud mi tagdon kay wala mi’y respeto sa ila.”*

(Translation: **“We gays, even if we want to ask for work, we’re never considered because we lack respect in their eyes.”**)

This further underscores the bias that dictates who gets to contribute and hold leadership roles in the prison environment.

The restricted access to leadership roles highlights the institutional biases within the prison system that prevent LGBTQ+ PDLs from fulfilling their potential. The prejudiced views of LGBTQ+ individuals as unreliable or incapable limit their access to opportunities for personal and professional growth. These biases reflect societal attitudes that influence the structure of correctional facilities.

This theme aligns with Human Rights Watch (2023) and McCann & Brown (2021), which identify how institutional bias based on gender and sexual identity limits opportunities for LGBTQ+ individuals in prisons. These findings stress the need for reform in prison policies to provide equal access to leadership and work roles for LGBTQ+ PDLs.

Theme 3: Recognition and Empowerment in Progressive Facilities

In contrast to the restrictive environments mentioned previously, some participants shared how, in more inclusive facilities like Surigao City Jail, LGBTQ+ PDLs are empowered and recognized for their talents and leadership. These more inclusive environments allow LGBTQ+ PDLs to assume leadership roles, such as ALS teachers or trustees, demonstrating the positive impact of progressive societal attitudes on the treatment of LGBTQ+ inmates.

Codes / Key Concepts: *Empowerment, recognition, inclusive facilities, leadership roles, progressivism, societal change.*

One participant shared:

R5 (KII-3A): *“Ako ALS teacher diri. Nagtudlo ko sa mga walay nahuman. Nalipay ko kay gisalingan ko’g salig.”*

(Translation: **“I’m an ALS teacher here. I teach those who weren’t able to finish school. I’m happy because they trusted me.”**)

This statement demonstrates the empowerment LGBTQ+ PDLs can experience in environments where acceptance and progressive attitudes are prevalent. Another participant reflected on the recognition they received:

R6 (KII-2C): *“Gihimo kong trustee kay maayo daw akong pamatasan ug kasaligan ko.”*

(Translation: **“I was made a trustee because they said I had good conduct and was trustworthy.”**)

This demonstrates how progressive policies and societal acceptance can help empower LGBTQ+ PDLs to take on leadership roles and contribute positively to the facility. These roles enhance their sense of dignity and self-worth.

The recognition and empowerment experienced by LGBTQ+ PDLs in progressive facilities show the transformative impact of inclusive policies and practices. These environments allow LGBTQ+ individuals

to embrace their identities, take on leadership roles, and contribute positively to the facility, improving both their well-being and rehabilitation.

This theme is aligned with Brown & Coker (2020) and Human Rights Watch (2023), which document the positive outcomes of inclusive facilities where LGBTQ+ PDLs are empowered and recognized. These studies highlight the importance of progressive attitudes in improving the treatment and rehabilitation of LGBTQ+ inmates.

Theme 4: Inclusive Social Programs and Celebratory Events

In Surigao City Jail, a model facility for inclusivity, participants described how external LGBTQ+ advocacy groups entered the facility during events like Pride Month, providing support and organizing celebratory activities such as Ms. Gay contests and other events that affirmed LGBTQ+ identities. These activities not only provided emotional relief but also created a sense of belonging and dignity.

Codes / Key Concepts: *External support, Pride Month, inclusive events, social programs, identity affirmation, visibility.*

As one participant shared:

R7 (KII-4A): *“Diris Surigao Jail, lahi gyud. Naay kalihokan para sa amo, sama sa Pride Month. Murag special mi. Makita gyud nga giatiman mi.”*

(Translation: **“Here in Surigao Jail, it’s different. There are activities for us like during Pride Month. We feel special. You can really see that we are cared for.”**)

Another participant described the positive impact of these events:

R9 (FGD-3A): *“Makita gyud nimo sa among panagway nga okay mi diri. Lahi sa uban nga lugar.”*

(Translation: **“You can really see from our appearance that we’re doing okay here. It’s different from other places.”**)

These testimonies highlight the role of celebratory events in affirming LGBTQ+ identities and reducing stigma within correctional facilities. Such programs foster psychological resilience and create safe spaces for LGBTQ+ PDLs.

The celebratory events and inclusive social programs in Surigao City Jail demonstrate the positive impact of societal acceptance and support on LGBTQ+ inmates' mental and emotional well-being. By affirming their identities and offering a space for self-expression, these programs promote psychological resilience and reduce stigma.

This theme resonates with Brown & Coker (2020) and Human Rights Watch (2023), which underscore the importance of supportive programming and celebratory events in creating inclusive and empowering environments for LGBTQ+ PDLs.

The themes identified in this study reveal the significant influence that societal attitudes have on the treatment of LGBTQ+ individuals in the correctional system. Internalized stigma, restricted access to roles, recognition and empowerment, and inclusive social programs demonstrate the wide range of experiences LGBTQ+ PDLs face based on the institutional environment and the societal attitudes towards LGBTQ+ individuals. These findings align with the work of Human Rights Watch (2023), McCann & Brown (2021), and Queer Criminology Theory, which emphasize the role of inclusive policies and positive societal change in improving the treatment and well-being of LGBTQ+ inmates.

4. CONCLUSIONS

4.1 Summary of Findings

The study revealed that while institutional policies aimed at protecting LGBTQ+ persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) exist, their implementation varies across facilities. In many cases, jail personnel lack

awareness or training in gender-sensitive approaches, resulting in inconsistent application of protective laws. Transgender individuals, for instance, are often placed in male wards without regard for their gender identity or safety. Conversely, some facilities such as Surigao City Jail exhibit more progressive practices by placing LGBTQ+ PDLs in separate, safer cells and organizing inclusive activities during Pride Month, reflecting a more humane and respectful environment.

Participants reported distinct challenges tied to their gender identity and sexual orientation, including verbal harassment, social exclusion, and, in severe cases, physical abuse. In many jails, LGBTQ+ individuals rely heavily on their co-members and a few understanding officers for emotional and physical safety. However, in facilities with more supportive environments, these challenges are mitigated by active engagement programs and safe housing policies that acknowledge their identities.

LGBTQ+ PDLs adopt various coping mechanisms to survive incarceration. These range from emotional reliance on peer groups to spiritual practices and engaging in facility-based programs. In more supportive environments, some PDLs take on leadership roles, such as serving as Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers or trustees, which contribute to their sense of purpose and identity affirmation. However, in less inclusive settings, their coping is more defensive, focused on avoidance and emotional suppression.

The treatment of LGBTQ+ PDLs is heavily influenced by broader societal attitudes toward the LGBTQ+ community. In conservative communities, stigmatization is mirrored inside the facility, limiting their access to institutional opportunities and subjecting them to biased treatment. In contrast, more progressive jails reflect an evolving social consciousness, with some officers treating LGBTQ+ PDLs with dignity and respect. The presence of external support groups and celebrations such as pageants during Pride Month also suggests a growing societal and institutional acknowledgment of their rights and identities.

4.2 Conclusion

This study explored the lived experiences of LGBTQ persons deprived of liberty in Surigao del Sur, revealing how gender identity, institutional structures, and social relationships intersect within the correctional environment. Guided by Situated Learning Theory, Network Governance Theory, and Intelligence-Led Policing principles, the findings demonstrate that incarceration for LGBTQ individuals is not solely an experience of punishment but also one of adaptation, negotiation, and resilience.

The analysis surfaced four interrelated themes: (1) negotiating identity and acceptance, (2) experiencing discrimination and vulnerability, (3) developing resilience and community support, and (4) aspiring for equality and reintegration. Together, these illustrate that while LGBTQ inmates face systemic exclusion within a binary and heteronormative system, they also exhibit agency by constructing micro-communities and advocating for respect and recognition.

At the institutional level, the study exposed persistent implementation gaps between policy and practice. Although the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) promotes gender sensitivity under its Gender and Development (GAD) framework, operationalization at the local level remains inconsistent and often dependent on officer discretion. These disparities are symptomatic of a fragmented governance system that lacks coordination among national agencies, local administrators, and civil society partners.

Yet, amid such structural constraints, the participants' narratives reflect a remarkable capacity for adaptation and learning. Through peer solidarity and informal support systems, they transform carceral spaces into communities of care, mirroring Wenger's (1998) concept of situated learning through shared participation. Their lived experiences reveal that correctional rehabilitation extends beyond policy compliance—it is rooted in empathy, relational understanding, and experiential learning.

Ultimately, this study concludes that effective and inclusive correctional governance requires more than institutional mandates; it demands the cultivation of a learning culture within the prison system. Such a culture recognizes that

human rights, dignity, and equality are not external impositions but integral to genuine rehabilitation and public safety.

4.3 Recommendation

This study examined the multifaceted perceptions and experiences of MAELT students and educators with Drawing from the findings and theoretical insights, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance inclusivity, governance, and learning in the Philippine correctional system—particularly in Surigao del Sur and similar provincial contexts:

1. The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP): may consider implementing mandatory gender-sensitivity training programs for all jail personnel to ensure respectful and appropriate treatment of LGBTQ+ PDLs, guided by existing national policies on human rights and equality.
2. To Jail Administrators and Facility Heads: Facility management might review and revise current housing assignment protocols to better accommodate the gender identity and safety concerns of transgender and other LGBTQ+ individuals deprived of liberty.
3. To Program Development Officers and Jail Educators: It is recommended that they may adopt inclusive and affirmative programs—such as skills training, spiritual development, recreational activities, and wellness initiatives—that acknowledge and support the diverse identities and needs of LGBTQ+ PDLs.
4. To Jail Management and ALS Coordinators: They might consider allowing qualified LGBTQ+ PDLs to serve as Alternative Learning System (ALS) teachers, trustees, or peer mentors within the facility, as a way of recognizing their leadership potential and supporting their personal growth.
5. To Local Government Units (LGUs) and Civil Society Organizations (CSOs): LGUs and CSOs may strengthen collaboration with correctional facilities by providing external support programs, including workshops and recreational events during Pride Month, to foster inclusion and emotional well-being among LGBTQ+ PDLs.
6. To the Department of Justice (DOJ) and Oversight Bodies: A standardized monitoring and evaluation mechanism might be established to assess the implementation of anti-discrimination and gender-sensitive policies across all jail facilities, ensuring accountability and best practice sharing.
7. To Non-LGBTQ+ PDL Community and Internal Peer Leaders: Awareness campaigns and orientation seminars may be conducted to promote understanding, reduce stigma, and encourage peer support within the broader inmate population.
8. To BJMP Regional Offices and Policy Makers: The adoption of inclusive models observed in progressive jails, such as Surigao City Jail—where LGBTQ+ PDLs are visibly cared for and allowed to thrive—may be considered as a benchmark for national implementation, with contextual adjustments as necessary.
9. Future researchers: may explore comparative studies involving other vulnerable groups in correctional settings (e.g., persons with disabilities, elderly PDLs) or examine the long-term impact of rehabilitation programs specifically tailored for LGBTQ+ individuals. It is also suggested that future inquiries might adopt mixed-method or longitudinal designs to capture broader perspectives and trace developmental changes over time

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