

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING AND COPING STRATEGIES OF SELECTED WOMEN DEPRIVED OF LIBERTY: A BASIS FOR MINDFULNESS EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM**

---

***Myra D. Landagan<sup>1,2</sup> and Marie Antonette Sunga-Vargas<sup>2</sup>***

**Abstract:** This study presents the psychological well-being and coping strategies of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) at Manila City Jail Female Dormitory. Findings of this study will serve as basis for the Mindfulness Empowerment Program anchored on the theories of Mindfulness (Langer) and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy. The Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale and Filipino Coping Strategies Scale were used. Findings were drawn from 84 female PDL. Results show that autonomy has positive correlation with cognitive reappraisal, problem solving, and religiosity. Negative correlations with environmental mastery and tolerance; personal growth and emotional release; purpose in life and tolerance; and purpose and life and emotional release were also revealed.

*Keywords: Coping Strategies, Empowerment, Mindfulness, Persons Deprived of Liberty, Psychological Well-being*

### **INTRODUCTION**

The incarcerated population is an understudied group in the Philippines. There is a dearth in Philippine studies that tackle the precarious situation of prisoners and their psychological well-being, most especially among female detainees (Ormita & Perez, 2012). In addition, the number of systematic studies conducted in the Philippine prisons is limited (Narag & Jones, 2016).

At present in the Philippines, prisoner population is increasing due to the ongoing OPLAN Tokhang cases. The prison facility is not improving in terms of its existing size of prison cells but the number of prisoners is increasing every day. Given this situation, it is a common observation that prisoners have poor psychological well-being because of their physical condition. Moreover, they are away from their loved ones and they have an ongoing case. Thus, this can be an additional contributing factor to the prisoners' psychological well-being. Also, their coping

---

<sup>1</sup>Graduate School, University of Santo Tomas, España Boulevard, 1025 Manila, Philippines

<sup>2</sup>Department of Psychology, Far Eastern University – Manila, Philippines

strategies are being tested.

Last July 3, 2018, the Commission in Audit (COA) called the attention of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) because of the worsening condition inside jails all over the country. In addition, based on the COA report as of 2017, the total jail population increased by 612% (146,302 for 20, 653 capacity). From this increase of population, Philippine jail facility failed to adhere with the United Nations Standard declaring that each jail inmate should be given 4.7 square meters of space (Ayalin, 2018).

With this scenario, there is a need for psychological services among the Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL). Detainees who participate in correctional programs are least likely to recidivate and most likely to be employed after detention (Sokoloff & Fontaine, 2017). The main purpose of this study is to determine the psychological well being and coping strategies of the Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) of Manila City Jail Female Dormitory (MCJFD).

This study aimed to determine the psychological well-being and coping strategies of Persons Deprived of Liberty in Manila City Jail Female Dormitory. Results of the study will be the basis of a proposed empowerment program using Mindfulness and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy as theoretical foundation.

*Mindfulness* as defined by Bishop [(2004) as cited by Niemiec and Lissing, 2016], involves the self-regulation of attention with an approach of curiosity, openness, and acceptance (Niemiec and Lissing, 2016). It refers to being present to *what is happening* in the unfolding moment to moment experience rather than what is *always thought about mindfulness* which is mostly about getting into the relaxation state (Niemiec and Lissing, 2016). Most of the existing programs and theories about mindfulness involve the combination of approach from the East and West. The Acceptance and Commitment Therapy is one of the mindfulness interventions programs which focuses on the relationship of thoughts and feelings. Usually, many people would associate mindfulness as a meditative program. Mindfulness intervention program is a combination of the Eastern and Western approaches. Bishop et al. [2004 as cited by Fletcher & Hayes (2005)] defined mindfulness in two parts : (1) the self-regulation of attention so that it is maintained on immediate experience; (2) a particular orientation toward one's experiences in the present moment, and it is characterized by curiosity, openness, and acceptance. In addition, Ellen Langer (2000) defined further *mindfulness* as a flexible state of mind which we are actively engaged in the present moment, noticing new things and sensitive to context Langer [2000 cited by (Fletcher & Hayes, 2005)]. In addition, the mindfulness methods are becoming popular in the forensic clinical practice (Howells, 2010). The Mindfulness Empowerment Program (MEP) being developed will focus on integrating the central elements of Mindfulness and Acceptance and Commitment Therapy which is being actively mindful of the present moment in terms of the activities they are doing or while the PDLs are focusing on their current life situation. In addition, by implementing the central concept of the two theories on the MEP, it will also help the participants develop adaptive coping mechanisms that they will imbibe, which will allow them not to become recidivists.

This study utilized the mean and standard deviation to identify the psychological well-being and coping strategies of the female PDLs. It is hypothesized that the psychological well-being and coping strategies were correlated. The findings of this research will form the basis of the Mindfulness Empowerment Program under which the female PDL will benefit as one of the FEU-Project HOPE 's psychosocial support services.

## METHODOLOGY

This current study utilized a descriptive correlational method to determine and explore further the psychological well-being and coping strategies of the female PDL. This study will serve as one of the bases of the Mindfulness Empowerment Program being developed. Through this study, the researchers would be able to know where to focus more in empowering their psychological well-being and adaptive coping strategies. On the first part of the study, correlational research design was utilized to determine which of the subscales of the Ryff Psychological Well-being scale and the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale will be correlated. Participants were recruited from the Manila City Jail Female Dormitory (MCJFD) through purposive sampling. The participants inclusion criteria include being able to read and understand English and Filipino language and must have been staying in the MCJFD for at least six months. Only 102 PDL were permitted by the Manila City Jail Female Dormitory because of security purposes and limitation of space inside the visitors' area of the dormitory. The final number of participants was reduced into was reduced to 84 because the others did not entirely answer the research instruments.

The mean age of the sample was 41 (SD = 11.12). More than half of the participants were married (58%) and were in the High School level of education (52%). In terms of their occupation before imprisonment, twenty-four percent of the participants were unemployed, nineteen percent were self-employed (e.g. vendor); fifteen percent were housewives, eleven percent were into domestic services such as care giver, household helper, and laundry woman.

The rest of the distribution was 1-5% in terms of the type of employment before imprisonment such as factory worker, government employee, tour guide, driver, garbage scavenger, waitress, and sales lady. More than half (75%) of the participants were imprisoned because of drug related cases such as possession and selling of prohibited drugs.

The Ryff Scales of Psychological Well-being and Filipino Coping Strategy Scale were administered to the respondents to measure well-being and coping strategies, respectively.

This study will be using the 7 item per scale version of the Ryff Psychological Well-being Scale. It consists of six point likert scale: 1 - strongly disagree; 2 - moderately disagree ; 3 - slightly disagree; 4 - slightly agree; 5 - moderately agree; and 6 - strongly agree. Based on the original 20 item per scale, there are items that are reversely scored. There are no specific cut – off that would define the high or low well – being. The distinctions would be indicated based on the information from the data collected (Ryff, 1989). The distinctions can be derived based on the scores collected. An example given by Ryff was; high well-being could refer to scores above the 25% (quartile) and low well- being could be scores in the bottom of 25% quartile. Another alternative given by the author to define well-being was scores that are 1.5 standard deviations above the mean for high well-being and 1.5 standard deviations below the mean will be interpreted as low well-being (Ryff, 2014).

The internal consistency of the test was based on the original 20 items per scale: Autonomy .83; Environmental Mastery .86; Personal Growth .85 ; Positive Relations with others .88 ; Purpose in Life .88; and Self – acceptance .91 (Ryff, 1989).

The *Filipino Coping Strategies Scale* consists of 37 items and measures nine domains of coping dispositional profile and its internal consistency: Cognitive Reappraisal(Pagsusuri) .705; Social Support (Paghingi na Tulong) .789; Problem - Solving (Pagtugon) .755; Religiosity (Pagkarelihiyoso) .950; Tolerance (Pagtituis) .648; Emotional Release (Paglabas na Saloobin) .683; Overactivity (Pagmamalabis) .729; Relaxation/ Recreation ( Paglilibang) .600; and Substance Use (Pagbibisyo) .861 .

Also, the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale is in a 4-point likert scale: 1 - never or *hindi* to 4 - always or *palagi*. In addition, the scoring procedure needs to compute for the composite scores per domain will be computed by adding the scores and dividing the total raw scores by the number of items. Thus, 1 is the minimum composite score and 4 is the maximum composite score. The composite Scores will be converted to its corresponding percentile ranks. The percentile ranks would indicate which of these coping strategies the test taker will engage towards the stressful situation (Rivaleria, 2018).

Ethical approval was obtained for the study from the University of Santo Tomas Graduate School Ethical Review Board. Also, written informed consent forms were provided to the participants. The informed consent form was read and explained to the participants. In addition, their right to withdraw from the study at any time were explained to them. Obtained data were analyzed using JASP 0.11.00 for Windows. Pearson correlation was utilized for the relationship of Ryff Psychological Well-Being Scale and Filipino Coping Strategies Scale.

## RESULTS

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics for Psychological Well- Being and Coping Strategies. Results show that the subdomains of the Ryff Psychological Well-Being scale in which the PDLs mean scores were below the 25th quartile are environmental mastery (M 23.94; SD 4.227) and positive relations (M 26.667, SD 4.778). The PDLs are having difficulty in managing their own lives and establishing satisfying and excellent relationships.

<b>Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Well-being and Coping Strategies</b>		
<b>Variable</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>
<b>Psychological Well-being</b>		
1. Autonomy	26.405	5.068
2. Environmental mastery	23.94	4.227
3. Personal growth	27.952	5.252
4. Positive relations	26.667	4.778
5. Purpose in life	28	4.587
6. Self-acceptance	27.143	4.78
<b>Coping Strategies</b>		
1. Cognitive reappraisal	2.562	0.58
2. Social support	2.361	0.64
3. Problem solving	3.057	0.64
4. Religiosity	3.446	0.58
5. Tolerance	2.268	0.786
6. Emotional release	2.107	0.553
7. Overactivity	2.462	0.699
8. Relaxation	2.693	0.631
9. Substance use	1.49	0.564

In contrast, the PDLs were high scorers in the following subscales: Autonomy (M 26.405, SD 5.068); Personal Growth (M 27.952, SD 5.252); Purpose in Life (M 28, SD 4.587); and Self-acceptance (M 27.143, SD 4.78). Inside prison, they are to be able to resist social pressures as they are afraid to be reprimanded by their jail officers. Also, imprisonment made them reflect more about their shortcomings and mistakes. This makes them open to new experiences. As they learn reformation in prison, the biggest challenge would be learning to continue and apply the learned strengths while imprisoned. This makes the PDLs prone to recidivism. The mindfulness empowerment program proposed to be developed investigate strengthening the high subscales of the Ryff Psychological well-being scale. In addition, the low scorers' subscales of the Ryff Psychological well-being scale will be also focused to enhance these areas.

Subsequently on table 1 is descriptive statistics for the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale. It presents the nine domains of coping strategies. To interpret the mean scores, it should be converted to percentile ranks (PR). Based on the results of the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale, the PDLs are more likely to engage in substance use (M 1.49, SD 0.56, PR 59); problem solving (M 3.06, SD 0.64, PR 48); Religiosity (M 3.45, SD 0.58, PR 42); Relaxation (M 2.69, SD 0.63, PR 32). Using prohibited substances when experiencing stressful situation is an alarming coping strategy for the PDLs because this show the tendency to recidivate. They may argue that using prohibited substance will make them feel relaxed and help solve their problems. although, some PDL would ask help from God to give them strength and help them solve their problems.

On the contrary, the PDLs are least likely to engage on the following coping strategies during stressful situation/s: tolerance (M 2.27, SD 0.79, PR 10); emotional release (M 2.27, SD 0.79, PR 12); social support (M 2.36, SD 0.64, PR 15); cognitive reappraisal (M 2.56, SD 0.58, PR 18); and over activity (M 2.46, SD 0.7, PR 21). The PDLs are

least likely to endure the stressful situation and this can lead to finding the easy way out to solve their problems such as using prohibited drugs. Also, they would be least likely to vent out, share, or ask support with their problems to other people thinking that they will be stigmatized. In addition, they would have the tendency to be pessimistic and will not look for adaptive solutions with their problems. They would resort to easiest ways to solve their problems. With the proposed Mindfulness Empowerment Program, it is important to psychoeducate the PDLs with the adaptive coping rather than the negative coping whenever they experience stressful situations. It would be easy for them to say that they will never repeat the same mistakes but the real challenge on their part is when they get out of prison and deal with situations such as how they will begin a new life as a changed person and how not to easily falter when challenges and problems come along their way. Being able to cope effectively in the future is a good indicator of an empowered person.

Table 2. Correlation between Psychological Well-being and Coping Strategies

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
1. Autonomy	—														
2. Environmental mastery	0.15	—													
3. Personal growth	0.268	0.265	—												
4. Positive relations	0.319	0.219	0.384	—											
5. Purpose in life	0.339	0.209	0.517	0.373	—										
6. Self-acceptance	0.168	0.268	0.237	0.248	0.352	—									
7. Cognitive reappraisal	0.25*	0.067	0.108	0.233*	0.017	-0.048	—								
8. Social support	0.155	0.106	0.088	0.212	-0.019	0.056	0.416	—							
9. Problem solving	0.242*	0.031	0.153	0.35**	0.045	-0.073	0.688	0.439	—						
10. Religiosity	0.349**	-0.042	0.187	0.294	0.19	-0.014	0.415	0.242	0.444	—					
11. Tolerance	-0.068	-0.24*	-0.2	-0.132	-0.316**	0.118	0.263	0.368	0.188	0.174	—				
12. Emotional release	-0.113	-0.163	-0.28*	-0.088	-0.256*	0.11	0.396	0.34	0.208	0.046	0.55	—			
13. Overactivity	0.18	0.111	0.122	0.164	-0.043	0.056	0.485	0.594	0.471	0.411	0.441	0.406	—		
14. Relaxation	0.216	-0.024	0.28*	0.271	0.11	0.193	0.44	0.47	0.44	0.486	0.328	0.206	0.605	—	
15. Substance use	-0.19	-0.045	-0.12	-0.057	-0.182	0.126	0.298	0.184	0.097	-0.07	0.36	0.484	0.268	0.198	—

\* < .05  
 \*\* < .01

Table 2 presents that correlation between Psychological Well-being and Coping Strategies. The hypothesis of the study was to correlate psychological well-being and coping strategies of the female PDLs that will be the basis of the Mindfulness Empowerment Program.

It was hypothesized in the study that the six subscales of the psychological well-being are correlated with the nine coping strategies. Based on the results, the psychological well-being: autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, and environmental mastery were the only significantly correlated with the following coping strategies: cognitive reappraisal, problem solving, religiosity, tolerance, and emotional release.

The variables of the psychological well-being and coping strategies that showed significant positive correlation were autonomy and cognitive reappraisal ( $r = 0.25, p < .05$ ); autonomy and problem solving ( $r = 0.242, p < .05$ ); and religiosity ( $r = 0.349, p < .01$ ). Also, there was significant positive correlation between positive relations and problem solving ( $r = 0.35, p < .01$ ).

There were negative significant correlation between the following variables: environmental mastery and tolerance ( $r = -0.24, p < .05$ ); personal growth and emotional release ( $r = -0.28, p < .05$ ); purpose in life and tolerance ( $r = -0.316, p < .01$ ); and purpose and life and emotional release ( $r = -0.256, p < .05$ ).

**DISCUSSION**

Learning to say “no” to people who would cause trouble in a person’s life and being able to resist peer pressure are one of the things the PDL should learn mindfully. This is not just going with the flow whenever someone tries to influence or persuade them to do something illegal. The intervention program that will be developed will show that it is better among the female PDLs to learn how to become mindful when making decisions. Psychoeducational programs like capacity building programs can help them tap their strengths, resources, and coping skills that will help contribute long-term wellness for themselves and their fellow PDL (Ormita and Perez, 2012).

Also, integrating the importance of religiosity in making the right decision can be a good way to help the female PDL to have the feeling of sense of direction and purpose in life. With this the PDL will have the sense of control in the difficult situation whether they are still in detention or even outside detention. Religion is a good protective factor on a person's psychological well-being (Saleem and Saleem, 2017). By becoming mindful that God is watching and guiding them, it can be a positive coping strategy whenever they experience problems or stress. Also, turning to religion in the face of trials in life can help the person can be an adaptive coping and helpful in someone's psychological well-being. The enrichment of the PDL's spirituality can help facilitate the expected adaptive coping and subjective wellness (Tajudeen, Abiola, Armiyau, Adepoju, & Udofia, 2017).

Aside from facing their current case, the PDLs are also worrying about the condition of their family and loved ones. Not being with them is a bigger problem than thinking about their case. This finding was supported by the finding of Alvarez (2018), wherein detention has greater impact among the female PDL because of being separated with their children. Also, the PDLs served as providers and bread winners of their respective families. The removal of a parent from the family disrupts the operational structure of a family as a unit. The roles and responsibilities were either disrupted or altered of each family members (Losel et al., 2012 as cited by Weaver and Nolan, 2015). The female PDLs would feel that they are trapped with their present condition, they have an ongoing case, detained, and away from their loved ones. It is difficult for them to manage these things at the same time, especially their family. For the female PDL, regardless of their marital status, they are very worried about their family members. Not being able to be with them physically is gruelling. PDLs who are not regularly visited by their family members affect their psychological well-being. For single PDLs, lack of visits from their parents affect their mental health during the first two months of incarceration (Monahan, Goldweber, and Cauffman, 2011 as cited by De Claire and Dixon, 2015). Intimate relationships were stressed because of imprisonment (Travis et al. 2005; La Vigne et al. 2005 as cited by Weaver and Nolan, 2015).

Spending time with their family is one of the focus of the management of the BJMP. Visitation days are from Tuesday to Sunday but still it seems for the PDLs that the schedule is not enough. Family visit can help the PDL sustain positive psychological well-being. Also, it can help the PDL improve their depressive symptoms (De Claire and Dixon, 2017). The PDLs who are frequently visited by their loved ones show positive emotion and mood compared to those who PDLs who are seldomly visited.

On the other hand, the peaceful and friendly interaction toward their co-PDL despite of their individual differences is one of the adjustments experienced by the PDL. Their way of adjusting in prison the prison environment has a big impact on the current state of their well-being. Their disposition, ability to adjust with daily routines, and submission into in prison are also important to consider in their psychological well-being (Prendi, 2014).

The psychosocial support programs are more needed among women because of the impact of family disruption, some are victims of domestic violence and other types of abuse (Achakzai and Bukhari, 2012). Venting out their problems through psychosocial programs can help address or ease their emotional baggage. It is cathartic to them to participate in psychosocial programs. As their emotional problems are being addressed, they experience psychological growth. Also, they can learn that instead of enduring their problem without thinking of positive coping which may lead them not to become recidivists.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this present study, psychosocial programs are needed among the Female PDL. It is cathartic on their part whenever they participate from psychosocial programs. Their problems that molded or pushed them to commit crimes needs to be addressed. Based on the results, in terms of their psychological well-being, the proposed study needs to focus on their autonomy, environmental mastery, purpose in life, and personal growth. In terms of their coping strategies, the PDL utilize cognitive reappraisal, problem solving, religiosity, emotional release, and tolerance. Based on these significantly correlated variables, the psychosocial program Mindfulness Empowerment challenge is how to help the PDLs to be prepared in the future while waiting for the court decision how to become mindful of their possessed positive qualities that can help them become.

## REFERENCES

- Achazai, J., & Bukhari, S. (2012). Situation and Needs Assessment of Women in Jails A Case Study of Province of Bolochistan. *FWU Journal of Social Sciences*. Retrieved from <http://sbbwu.edu.pk/journal/SUMMER-2012-vol-6-No-1/Paper%205.pdf>
- Afra, Z., Bakhshayesh, A. R., & Yaghoubi, H. (2017). A comparative study between resilience with life satisfaction in normal and prisoner women. *Journal of Fundamentals of Mental Health*(special issue), 172 - 178. Re

trieved from <http://jfmh.mums.ac.ir>

- Alvarez, M. C. (2018). Women, Incarceration and Drug Policies in South East Asia: Promoting Humane and Effective Responses. Retrieved from <http://nobox.ph>: [http://fileservr.idpc.net/library/Philippines\\_Policy\\_Guide\\_Women.pdf](http://fileservr.idpc.net/library/Philippines_Policy_Guide_Women.pdf)
- Ayalin, A. (2018). Overcrowded Philippine jails housing over 146,000 inmates, above 20k Capacity: COA. Quezon City: ABS CBN News. Retrieved from <https://news.abs-cbn.com/news/07/03/18/overcrowded-ph-jails-housing-over-146000-inmates-above-20k-capacity-coa>
- Berrie, Theresea M., personal communication, October 22, 2018
- De Claire, K., & Dixon, L. (2017). The effects of prison visits from family members on prisoners' well-being, prison rule breaking, and recidivism: a review of research since 1991. *Trauma Violence Abuse*, 18(2), 185-199. doi:10.1177/1524838015603209
- Fletcher, F., & Hayes, S. (2005). Relational Frame Theory, Acceptance and Commitment Therapy, and a Functional Analytic Definition of Mindfulness. *Journal of Rational Emotive and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*, In press, 24(4), 315-336. doi:10.1007/s10942-005-0017-7
- Narag, R. E., & Jones, C. R. (2016). Understanding Prison Management in the Philippines: A Case for Shared Governance. *The Prison Journal*, 1-24. doi:10.1177/0032885516679366
- Ormita, L. A.-L., & Perez, H. M. (2012). The Psychological Profile of Incarcerated Women under the FEU - Project HOPE : A Multiple Case Study. *International Review of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2(2), 30-37.
- Prendi, A. (2014). Psychological Well - Being of the Minor in Conflict with the Law. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences*, 5(4), 488 - 494.
- Rivaleria, J. R. (2018). The Development of the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale. *Asia - Pacific Social Sciences Review*, 18(1), 111-126.
- Ryff, C. D. (2014). Psychological Well - Being Revisited: Advances in Science and Practice. *National Institute of Health*, 83(1), 10-28. doi:10.1159/000353263
- Saleem, S., & Saleem, T. (2017). Role of Religiosity in Psychological Well-Being Among Medical and Non-medical Students. *J Relig Health*, 1180-1190. doi:10.1007/s10943-016-0341-5
- Sokoloff, N. J., & Schenck-Fontaine, A. (2017). College programs in prison upon reentry for men and women: a literature reviews (Vol. 20). Taylor & Francis Online. doi:10.1080/10282580.2016.1262772
- Tajudeen, A., Armiyau, A. Y., Adepoju, L., & Udofia, O. (2017). Prison Types and Inmates' Psychosocial Profiles: A Comparison between Medium and Maximum Security Prison. *Journal of Forensic Science and Medicine*, 128-131. doi:10.4103/jfsm.jfsm\_47\_17
- Weaver, B., & Nolan, D. (2015). Families of Prisoners: a review of the evidence. Center for Youth and Criminal Justice