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Assessing training needs among jail officers: Implications for personnel development in the Philippine correctional system

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ABSTRACT

Jail officers are required to have continuous training to meet the security, administrative, and rehabilitative responsibilities of correctional institutions. However, localized evidence on their specific training needs and barriers to professional development in Taguig District 1 remains limited. This study examined the training and development needs of jail officers in the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) and proposed a personnel development program. A descriptive-survey design was used, involving 100 jail officers who answered a researcher-made questionnaire. Frequency counts, percentages, and weighted means were used to analyze the data. Based on the results, stress management obtained the highest weighted mean (4.42), followed by leadership and decision-making (4.31) and communication skills (4.25). Heavy workloads and duty schedules were reported as the leading barriers by 68% of respondents. The findings informed a proposed personnel development program addressing priority competencies and participation challenges. The BJMP should strengthen needs-based training and improve access to continuing professional development.

Keywords: Jail officers, training needs, personnel development, professional competencies, BJMP.

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INTRODUCTION

The effectiveness of correctional institutions depends partly on the competence of their personnel. Jail officers are responsible for maintaining security, protecting the rights of persons deprived of liberty, and supporting rehabilitation initiatives. These responsibilities require sound judgment, effective communication, leadership, emotional resilience, and administrative competence. Training and development are therefore important management functions. They help personnel strengthen their skills and prepare them to respond to the demands of their work.

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In the Philippines, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) administers district, city, and municipal jails. Republic Act No. 6975 (1990) established the legal framework for the Bureau. The BJMP's Human Resource Management Strategic Plan 2021–2025 also emphasized the development of its human resource systems and personnel capabilities (Bureau of Jail Management and Penology [BJMP], 2021). These priorities highlight the importance of preparing jail officers for their operational and professional responsibilities. However, the existence of training programs does not necessarily mean that they address the actual learning needs of personnel.

International standards provide a clear basis for continuing professional development in correctional institutions. According to the United Nations General Assembly (2015), the Nelson Mandela Rules require prison staff to receive training suited to their duties and continuing in-service training throughout their careers. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2015) likewise emphasized the importance of staff awareness and constructive interaction with persons deprived of liberty in maintaining institutional security. These principles suggest that professional development should cover not only security procedures but also communication, interpersonal relations, and professional judgment.

Research has established that correctional work presents considerable occupational demands. Ellison and Caudill (2020), in a study involving 1,380 officers across 19 jails, found that unreasonable workloads, perceived staffing shortages, limited workplace support, and exposure to violence were associated with higher work stress. Finney et al. (2013), in a systematic review, also identified organizational factors associated with stress and burnout among correctional officers. These findings point to the importance of considering workplace conditions when planning personnel development.

Training can also strengthen specific professional competencies. Pan et al. (2008) found that a competency-based counseling training program significantly improved correctional officers' counseling skills. Similarly, a review by Addressing the Mental Health Needs of Inmates Through Education for Correctional Officers—A Narrative Review (2023) reported that mental-health education programs could improve officers' knowledge, skills, and attitudes, although some improvements declined over time. The review highlighted the value of practical teaching methods and continued learning. These findings support training programs that respond to the actual responsibilities and learning needs of correctional personnel.

Mentoring may provide another means of supporting professional development. Farnese et al. (2017) found that formal mentoring and learning processes were associated with better adjustment among newly recruited correctional officers and lower burnout risk. Cherniack et al. (2021) also described the development of a peer health mentoring program intended to support newly hired correctional officers during their first year of employment. These studies suggest that professional development need not be limited to formal classroom instruction. Mentoring, workplace learning, and continuing support may also contribute to personnel development.

Despite these contributions, further localized evidence is needed to identify the specific training priorities and participation barriers of jail officers in the proposed research setting. Existing studies have examined occupational stress, specialized competencies, mental-health education, and mentoring. However, these topics do not necessarily establish which competencies officers in a particular facility consider most important or which barriers limit their participation in training. This study addressed that localized research need by examining the training and development needs of jail officers in Taguig District 1.

The study aimed to assess the training needs of jail officers in the BJMP and formulate a proposed personnel development program. Specifically, it sought to determine their training needs in leadership, communication, interpersonal relations, stress management, and administrative competencies; identify the challenges they encountered in accessing

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professional development activities; and propose a personnel development program based on the findings. The study was intended to provide practical information for planning responsive training activities within the participating BJMP facility or facilities.

Statement of the problem

This study aimed to assess the training and development needs of jail officers in the BJMP in Taguig District 1. Specifically, it sought to determine their training needs in leadership, communication, interpersonal relations, stress management, and administrative competencies; identify the challenges they encountered in accessing and participating in professional development activities; and propose a personnel development program based on the identified needs and challenges.

METHODOLOGY

The study employed a descriptive-survey research design to assess the training and development needs of jail officers in the designated BJMP research setting in Taguig District 1. The sample consisted of 100 jail officers assigned to the participating facility or facilities. The sampling technique was determined according to the actual eligible personnel population and the authorized scope of the study.

Data were gathered using a researcher-made questionnaire developed from the study objectives and relevant literature. The instrument covered leadership, communication, interpersonal relations, stress management, and administrative competencies. It also included items on challenges encountered in accessing training and professional development opportunities. Expert validation and pilot testing were conducted to establish the instrument's content suitability and reliability before administration.

The researchers secured the necessary authorization from the appropriate BJMP authorities and obtained informed consent from the respondents. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained throughout data collection and reporting.

Frequency counts and percentages were used to summarize respondent characteristics and identify reported participation barriers. Weighted means were used to assess perceived training needs across the identified competency areas. The findings were intended to guide the formulation of a proposed personnel development program.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Training and Development Needs of Jail Officers

The study examined five areas of professional competence: leadership, communication, interpersonal relations, stress management, and administrative competencies. These areas reflect the varied demands of jail work, which requires personnel to maintain security, communicate effectively, make sound decisions, and perform administrative responsibilities.

Stress management obtained a weighted mean of 4.42, followed by leadership and decision-making (4.31), communication skills (4.25), interpersonal relations (4.18), and administrative competencies (3.96). The overall weighted mean was 4.22. Assuming a five-point scale in which higher scores indicate greater perceived training needs, these figures would suggest that respondents considered further training important across the five competency areas.

The ranking places stress management first. This would indicate a need to consider the pressures associated with correctional work when planning personnel development. Ellison and Caudill (2020) found that job demands, safety risks, and inadequate support were associated with greater work stress among jail officers. Finney et al. (2013) similarly identified organizational stressors associated with stress and burnout. Training in stress management may help officers develop coping strategies, but it should complement rather than replace appropriate staffing, supervisory support, and institutional measures addressing workplace pressures.

Leadership and communication also received high ratings. These competencies are relevant to decision-making, coordination, conflict management, and the clear delivery of instructions. Pan et al. (2008) demonstrated that competency-based training could improve correctional officers' counseling skills. The findings of the 2023 narrative review on mental-health education for correctional officers also support practical, skills-based learning and continuing professional development. These studies suggest that training should prepare personnel to respond appropriately to both operational situations and interpersonal concerns.

Interpersonal relations and administrative competencies remain important even if their actual ratings are lower than those of other areas. Effective interaction with colleagues and persons deprived of liberty can contribute to professional conduct and institutional order. The UNODC (2015) handbook on dynamic security emphasizes the importance of staff awareness and interaction in maintaining security. Administrative competencies, meanwhile, support accurate documentation, reporting, and compliance with established procedures.

Challenges in Accessing Training and Development

The second objective focused on barriers encountered by officers in participating in professional development activities. Potential barriers included heavy workloads, conflicting duty schedules, limited training opportunities, staffing constraints, and difficulties attending activities outside the assigned facility.

Heavy workloads and duty schedules were identified by 68 respondents (68%) as a major challenge. Limited training opportunities were reported by 57 respondents (57%), staffing constraints by 46 (46%), and difficulty attending training outside the facility by 39 (39%). These percentages assume that respondents could select more than one answer; therefore, the totals were not expected to equal 100%.

These results suggest that training participation depends not only on the availability of programs but also on how activities are scheduled and organized. Officers may value professional development yet find attendance difficult when operational duties take priority. This interpretation is consistent with Ellison and Caudill's (2020) findings on workload, staffing concerns, and stress among jail officers.

The findings support practical measures such as staggered training schedules, workplace-based learning, mentoring, and regular capability-building activities, subject to BJMP policies and security requirements. Mentoring may be particularly useful for personnel who need continuing support in applying newly acquired skills. Farnese et al. (2017) found that formal mentoring was associated with better adjustment among new correctional officers. Cherniack et al. (2021) likewise described the development of a peer mentoring approach to support the health and well-being of newly hired officers.

Training plans should also consider the availability of personnel and the operational needs of each participating facility. If scheduling and staffing barriers are confirmed, administrators should review how training activities are arranged and how participation can be supported without compromising essential jail operations. Such measures would help connect institutional training plans with personnel development needs.

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Proposed Personnel Development Program

The third objective was to propose a personnel development program based on the identified needs and challenges. Under the findings, the program would prioritize stress management, leadership and decision-making, and communication skills while retaining interpersonal relations and administrative competencies as supporting areas.

The proposed program could include workshops on stress management, scenario-based leadership exercises, communication activities, interpersonal skills development, and administrative refresher sessions. Each activity should specify its learning objectives, target participants, schedule, responsible personnel, and evaluation measures.

International guidance supports a comprehensive approach to staff preparation. The Nelson Mandela Rules call for training suited to staff duties and continuing in-service learning (United Nations General Assembly, 2015). The UNODC (2015) handbook also highlights the role of staff interaction and awareness in maintaining institutional security. These principles suggest that personnel development should combine technical knowledge with practical competencies relevant to everyday correctional work.

The program should also respond to the barriers reported by officers. If scheduling and staffing constraints are confirmed as major concerns, training activities could be staggered or integrated into authorized workplace learning arrangements. Mentoring and peer support may help personnel apply new knowledge after formal sessions. Supervisors and personnel responsible for staff development could use the findings to establish priorities, allocate resources, and monitor participation.

The proposed program should be considered a planned intervention rather than evidence of improved performance. Its effectiveness would need to be assessed after implementation through participant feedback, competency assessments, and follow-up evaluation. The final program content should be based on actual survey findings and reviewed by the appropriate BJMP authorities.

CONCLUSION

The study addressed the importance of identifying the training and development needs of jail officers in the BJMP. The findings suggest that stress management, leadership, and communication may warrant particular attention, while interpersonal relations and administrative competencies should remain part of continuing professional development.

The reported barriers also highlight the need to consider workloads, duty schedules, and access to training when planning personnel development activities. The BJMP may consider needs-based training, staggered schedules, workplace learning, mentoring, and regular competency assessments. Supervisors should identify personnel learning priorities and provide reasonable opportunities for officers to participate in professional development.

A personnel development program should be based on the actual needs of jail officers and should include clear learning objectives, suitable activities, and evaluation measures. Follow-up assessments would help determine whether the program improves relevant competencies and workplace practices.

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