



Exploring Repeat Substance Abuse in Female Offenders: A Phenomenological Study

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Abstract

Substance abuse relapse contributes to the Philippines' ongoing problem. Stigmatization and a lack of appropriate aftercare services impede the development of crucial skills for successful reintegration into society. To address the essential issue of relapse from substance addiction, this study seeks to provide information specific to the issues that lead to repeat substance abuse in female offenders. The nation's rising relapse rates and the serious implications of their acts highlight the importance of this study. To prevent relapse and enhance rehabilitation, it is critical to identify and address the underlying causes. Utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), eight (8) repeat substance abuse female offenders ages 38-53 years old who were jailed twice for substance abuse in Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines, were asked using a semi-structured interview. This study generated ten (10) themes which were: Longing for Loved Ones, Strict Protocols, Difficult Tasks, and Unappetizing Foods; Therapeutic Programs; Mixed Emotions, Family Reintegration, Working Habits; Negative Labeling, Insufficient Support from Family and/or Peers; Physical and Mental Well-Being; Livelihood and Socialization; Positivity and Resilience; Dealing with Relapse; Family Problem and Acquaintances; and Lack of Psychological Support. Consequently, an improved diversion program was created to help prevent the relapse of female drug re-offenders after being released from jail.

Keywords *Relapse, Substance Abuse, Female Offenders, Stigmatization, Rehabilitation*

INTRODUCTION

Substance abuse relapse among female offenders is a crucial yet understudied public health and criminal justice concern. In the United States, [Minton and Zeng \(2016\)](#) revealed that women make up such a small percentage of inmates, which is why the majority of empirical research on the subject of incarceration still focuses on men. In a similar vein, the [Dangerous Drugs Board \(2023\)](#) stated that there were eighty-five (85) relapse cases or readmissions recorded in the treatment and rehabilitation facilities in the Philippines. The center admissions comprised ninety-two percent (91.74%) males, around eight percent (7.70%) females, and less than one percent (0.56%) among them LGBT. The ratio for admission cases of males to females was 12:1, with an average and median age of 35. The intricate connection of factors that contribute to persistent substance use in this population requires a comprehensive investigation. The absence of necessary services and discharge planning initiatives to meet the specific needs of women in the criminal justice system is particularly disturbing ([Beeble & Hampton, 2021](#)). As such, more comprehensive rehabilitation and reintegration programs are required to address these underlying reasons in order to reduce the likelihood of recurrent offences and promote successful reintegration into society ([Onsat & Breva, 2023](#)).

Furthermore, determining the several causes of relapse into criminal behaviour could help create prevention programs tailored to each person's particular criminogenic needs ([Villanueva, 2019](#)). At present, substance abuse in the Philippines remains widespread, with crystal meth or "shabu" and nicotine being the most commonly abused drug ([Briones et al., 2023](#)). [Alob and Fuente](#)

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(2021) and Patrick et al. (2019) both stated that peer influence is the top-ranking cause of drug abuse and relapse. It is followed by family problems and family influence. Moreover, Tsang (2019) and Dangerous Drugs Board (2022) both agreed that to be able to get through despair and helplessness because of poverty, people get hooked on behaviours involving drugs.

Pursuant to the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, also known as Republic Act 9165, article 2, section 11, the penalty for drug possession corresponds to the amounts of illegal drugs possessed. The penalties included a fine of five hundred thousand pesos (P500,000.00) to ten million pesos (P10,000,000) and life imprisonment to death. (Estacio Jr. et al., 2021). Whereas, drug use entails a minimum 6-month rehabilitation sentence in a government center for first-time offenders, as well as 6 years and 1 day to 12-year prison sentence and a fine ranging from P50,000 to P200,000 for repeat offenders (RA 9165, article 2, section 15). Despite the penalties and the given intervention in jail, re-offenders were still rampant. Hence, there is a need to enhance the current diversion program set by the laws of our country. Upon review of the guidelines of the Therapeutic Community Modality Program (TCMP), there were parameters that need to be considered. There are indicators of re-offenders satisfaction with the intervention plan that obtained the lowest weighted mean that needs to be addressed. Furthermore, the TCMP does not adequately address the psychological problems at the root of relapse, such as the requirement for better aftercare and assessment immediately following release from jail (Virtudazo & Dausan, 2021). Implications for future techniques include programs designed holistically, encouraging beneficial influences, and placing a strong emphasis on peer support and social modelling in correctional environments (Empinado et al., 2023). The idea gives public policy meaning, yet these viewpoints give different meanings to the concept of public policy (Digdowiseiso, 2022). Accordingly, the theoretical framework and concepts utilized in this study differ from those of previous research and are intended to explain repeat substance abuse among female offenders through the lens of the Cycle of Change and Problem Behavior Theory.

Vadhia (2023) used male views of offending to explain female offending. The experiences of women who have served lengthy periods in jail were examined using a combination of social constructivist and intersectionality theories. However, comprehending the fundamental causes of female offenders' criminal behaviour, as well as what they go through when attempting to quit or lessen their substance use, could be explained well by the Cycle of Change Theory. Furthermore, Solinas-Saunders and Stacer (2017) urged for a more complete understanding of repeat offending that takes into account the experiences of both male and female offenders.

Furthermore, Morash et al. (2020) examined criminal behaviour among substance-using female offenders utilizing narrative identity theory to develop a sense of self by arranging their life events into a coherent narrative. However, it does not address the variables that contribute to their persistent substance use, which could be explained effectively by Problem Behavior Theory. Another study by Cyr-Ashworth (2022) analyzed the psychopathology, substance abuse, and alcohol issues of adult female sex offenders using attachment theory to explain why such experiences have a profound impact on the individual, even later in life. Meanwhile, the Problem Behavior Theory contends that peer pressure, low self-esteem, and unpleasant emotions all have an impact on some problem behaviours, such as substance abuse. This is consistent with the experiences of many female offenders, who frequently face various challenges, including substance abuse, mental health problems, and victimization.

The study of repeat substance addiction among female offenders has the opportunity to broaden and develop existing theories on the subject. In line with the cycle of change theory, this study found that the maintenance stage, also known as the transitional stage, was especially difficult for female offenders due to factors such as gender norms, stigma, family and interpersonal problems, economic hardships, health issues, and revictimization. This could lead to refinements in

the theory to better account for these distinct experiences. Furthermore, by identifying gender-specific barriers, investigating underlying risk factors, and establishing tailored therapies, researchers can help to expand our understanding of substance abuse and treatment. In detail, a set of questions was formulated to gather the data and information required for this study, as outlined below:

1. What are the challenges you experienced inside the jail?
2. Could you please describe the intervention plan applied to you when you were inside the jail?
3. How do you describe your feelings and experiences after being released from jail?
4. How do your family and/or friends help you to stay away from drug involvement?
5. Has there been any health routine to maintain physical and mental wellness during and after being jailed? If yes, what were those?
6. What learnings and knowledge do you acquire inside the jail that you can use outside?
7. What coping strategies did you use to cope with your situation?
8. Has there been a time wherein you had relapsed and returned to being a substance abuse offender? If yes, when was that time, and how did you deal with it?
9. What do you think may have influenced you to relapse?
10. Have you sought help from others before you relapsed? If yes, what happened? If no, why?

The rationale behind these questions stems from the theoretical framework of the study, which focuses on the lived experiences of female offenders who have engaged in repeat substance abuse.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A thorough review of the relevant literature is necessary to comprehend the intricacies of substance abuse relapse among female offenders, especially when examining the material within the contexts of Problem Behavior Theory and the Cycle of Change. Relapse, as conceptualized by the Cycle of Change, offers a fundamental framework for understanding the complex factors influencing the lives of repeat substance abuse female offenders. Examining the Reason for Substance Abuse, as outlined by the Problem Behavior Theory, sheds additional light on the psychological and social consequences of substance abuse. The linked research attempts to disentangle the interrelated layers driving repeat substance abuse offences by weaving these theoretical viewpoints together. This approach provides comprehensive knowledge crucial for creating focused interventions and strategies.

Theoretical Framework

This study utilized the Cycle of Change by [Pacheco \(2018\)](#), and Problem Behavior Theory by [Jessor \(1992\)](#).

Cycle of Change

As mentioned in the published book by [Kolčić and Dragun \(2021\)](#), the cycle of change provides an interpretation of behaviour through six stages, namely, pre-contemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, maintenance, and relapse. These stages were represented in an upward spiral, which stated that every time a person experienced a cycle, they learned from it and became stronger, which might lead to a shorter or less severe relapse.

Moreover, in the book of [Norcross and Wampold \(2019\)](#), the Cycle of Change was used as a guiding principle for effective psychotherapy. A patient's readiness for behaviour change significantly influences the treatment process and result. Hence, this theory was used to better understand repeat substance abuse female offenders' experiences and adjustments through the

cycle of change and how this affected their personality, behaviour, and decisions. Furthermore, the researcher was able to evaluate what cycle stage manifests in the person and what tasks need to be done depending on the stage.

Problem Behavior Theory

In the published article by [Darvishi et al. \(2022\)](#), the Problem Behavior Theory is one of the most comprehensive ideas concerning the aetiology of problematic actions. PBT is a framework for social psychology that demonstrates the relationship between risk factors such as gang membership and participation in problematic behaviours such as substance use and problem drinking.

Thus, this theory helped in comprehending the study that led to challenges in managing and confronting relapse. It also provided ideas to the study that multi-component treatments focused on decreasing delay discounting and setting up abstinence consequences would be more successful in preventing relapse. This theory was used as a guide for learning more about the thoughts and actions of repeat substance abuse female offenders.

Relapse

The Philippines faced a significant challenge with high rates of relapse among those attempting recovery. [Chamberlain et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed that relapse can be caused by a variety of circumstances, including drug exposure and inadequate social support. Moreover, [Alob and Fuente \(2021\)](#) and [Patrick et al. \(2019\)](#) both stated that peer influence was the top-ranking cause of drug abuse and relapse.

Aside from inadequate family support, poverty was identified as one of the key factors that could increase the likelihood of relapse for someone in recovery from drug abuse. This was consistent with the [Anwar et al. \(2023\)](#) investigation. According to the survey, poverty, dysfunctional families, and family conflicts were the main reasons why people took drugs. It is accurate to state that dysfunctional families and family conflicts compel people to become involved in drugs.

In addition, rejection by the community fueled relapse. [Ekanayake \(2020\)](#) investigated the causes of the increase in repeat offenders. Problems with social integration were primarily caused by low levels of community acceptance, a lack of skill development during the punishment periods, unpredictability, political influence on authorities, stigmatization and the risk associated with social exclusion, a lack of involvement in rehabilitation programs during the process of reintegrating offenders, psychological discomfort related to social stigmas, and a lack of severity in the punitive measures.

Moreover, [Bernburg \(2019\)](#) stated that a person's behaviour might be deviant for various reasons, especially if the label was applied by criminal justice staff. Because they were being labelled, they may encounter entirely new issues and problems as a result of how they and others responded to harsh, negative stereotypes associated with labels of deviance. [Bjornestad et al. \(2019\)](#) also revealed that even after five years of recovery from substance abuse, the possibility of recurrence lingers.

Meanwhile, [Andersson et al. \(2019\)](#) revealed in their study that after a three-month follow-up, 37% of the sample had relapsed. Regardless of the duration of their stay, patients who got therapy at a short-term clinic (two to four months) as opposed to a long-term clinic (more than six months) were similarly more likely to relapse. Relapse risk was projected to be lower after completing the inpatient treatment stay.

[Mkosana \(2023\)](#) emphasized the importance of family support to prevent relapse. After recovering from substance abuse, having strong family support was important. To lessen the

chance of relapsing, the person may choose to avoid being under the influence of a drug abuser. This emphasized how crucial it was for the family to assist their loved one in their recovery from substance abuse.

Reason for Substance Abuse

There is no one-size-fits-all answer when it comes to the many and varied causes of substance abuse. The reasons behind substance abuse were complex and varied. As a result, research has shown the connection between families and drug addiction, poverty, curiosity, lenient sentencing policies, and the sale of illegal substances.

In line with the connection between families and substance abuse, [Whittaker et al. \(2020\)](#) highlighted the issues of drug usage among parents and the potential harm it might cause to their offspring. With the help of the testimonies of the children, the study demonstrated that the majority of drug-using parents will be bad parents and that drug-using parents still hurt their kids because of their "drug-related behaviour." Research also concentrated on analyzing solutions for drug-using families or delving more into the issue of parental drug use. The study also finds, concerning in its scope, "hidden" harm to children brought on by drug use and drug-using parents.

Furthermore, [Zakaria et al. \(2022\)](#) revealed in their study the impact of family life and peer pressure on the repeated violations committed by those incarcerated. The finest mentors were usually friends and parents, but this was not always the case for others. The results of the current study indicated that lack of support from family and/or friends, emotional neglect, and parental involvement in crime were significant predictors of reoffending. The results showed how crucial counselling and mentoring were in helping those who were incarcerated to develop their social and emotional competencies and deal with life's obstacles so they can go on to become valuable adults.

Another factor contributing to drug abuse was curiosity about substance usage. This pertains to an innate curiosity and need for exploration, which can occasionally result in the attempt of drugs or alcohol. According to [Attila et al. \(2023\)](#), risk and curiosity were directly correlated. Substance usage was at an increased risk with curiosity.

Furthermore, according to [Olurische \(2019\)](#), curiosity plays a critical role as a motivator in shaping human exploratory behaviours like substance abuse, sexual activity, learning, and enhanced brand recognition. The findings of the study in Cape Coast, Ghana, found that the most likely causes of substance use were curiosity and peer pressure. Undoubtedly, one of the main causes of substance use is curiosity.

Another reason for drug use was the reduced legal penalties for some drugs like marijuana. According to [Scher \(2023\)](#), Canada's Cannabis Act made cannabis a legally regulated substance in 2018. The Canadian Controlled Drugs and Substances Act, however, still makes most substances—such as heroin, cocaine, methamphetamine, and so on—illegal and makes both possessing and trafficking them crimes. But this also raised the question of whether decriminalizing small amounts of illegal substances for personal use will lessen drug abuse and highlights the ongoing discussion over decriminalizing other illicit drugs.

Other drugs were seen as less dangerous in the Philippines, which is why the majority of them were widely used. The study by [Yu and Lasco \(2023\)](#) explained the Philippines' usage of poppers, or alkyl nitrites. In comparison to other chemicals used for chemsex, poppers were generally considered to be "harmless," "acceptable," and socially and politically acceptable from a biomedical and legal standpoint.

In the Philippines, [Mehroliassani et al. \(2019\)](#) stated that the War on Drugs (WOD) policy had strict programs and actions, such as imprisonment and the death penalty for buying, selling, and using drugs. However, despite the actions of the government, illicit drugs were still rampant. Poverty could also be the reason for substance abuse in the Philippines, [Jardin and Sobradil \(2023\)](#)

found that a disproportionate percentage of women were incarcerated due to their involvement in drug use or selling, in addition to the sheer quantity of women entering the system overall. Drug-related charges account for 53% of the sentences served by female inmates. According to this poll, most respondents were between the ages of 45 and 54, and their monthly incomes ranged from ₱9,520 to ₱21,194.

Accordingly, [Mowen et al. \(2019\)](#) examined the relationship between criminal offences during prison reentry, substance abuse, and re-incarceration. Three distinct components of family support—interactional, instrumental, and emotional—were found to exist in the study. These results had a major role in preventing re-incarceration. Giving advice and assistance was known as interactional support. Instrumental support means providing housing and transportation services. Finally, love and a sense of belonging provided emotional support.

Accordingly, it was revealed that females were less likely to become drug offenders, and they were less likely than men to use almost all types of prohibited drugs. This finding was also supported by the [National Institute of Drug Abuse \(2022\)](#) study. However, it was also deduced that women were just as likely as men to develop a substance use disorder. Moreover, women may be more susceptible to craving and relapse, which are the crucial phases of the addiction cycle.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study utilized purposeful sampling when choosing participants. Purposeful sampling, according to [Patton \(2002\)](#), was a method used in qualitative research to categorize and identify in-depth experiences. Eight (8) repeat substance abuse female offenders who have been jailed twice, aged 38-53, residing in Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines, were chosen. According to [Moser and Korstjens \(2017\)](#) studies in phenomenology required fewer than ten participants of the study, aiming for data saturation. Saturation was attained by screening.

Interviews were undertaken face-to-face in their respective barangay's selected daycare center. While some of the participants were interviewed in the researcher's own home as it was requested by the participants for confidentiality. A topic guide was used to ensure consistency across interviews and included questions about the experience of treatment and care in jail, as well as specific treatment suggestions for service improvement. With the participant's consent, the interviews were audio-taped and transcribed. As outlined in the introduction, ten questions were developed with the assistance of five (5) validators to ensure the accuracy of the research instrument.

The Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) was used to conduct qualitative research, emphasizing similarities in group experiences and investigating significant aspects of a specific phenomenon. The researcher used methodical triangulation to increase the validity of the acquired data. The results were acquired using an interview protocol, which involved asking the participants through a validated semi-structured interview. As stated in the same protocol, the observable method and behaviour of how the repeat substance abuse female offenders responded to the set of queries were recorded. The transcription was completed after the interview, and a copy was forwarded to the participants for member verification. The member-checked replies were combined with the observed behaviour and the researcher's notes to generate the final data.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The profile of respondents who participated in the study is shown in the table; it includes information on their age and the offences they have committed. In compliance with the guidelines of the Data Privacy Act of 2012, the respondents' ages, location, and answers to the questions are the only parameters on which the information is gathered ([National Privacy Commission, 2023](#)).

Table 1. Participants of the Study

Respondent	Age	Location	Conflict with the Law
AAA	44	Barangay Canlubang	Substance Abuse
BBB	47	Barangay Mayapa	Substance Abuse
CCC	42	Barangay Sucol	Substance Abuse
DDD	53	Barangay Mayapa	Substance Abuse
EEE	51	Barangay Punta	Substance Abuse
FFF	51	Barangay Kay- Anlog	Substance Abuse
GGG	38	Barangay Bubuyan	Substance Abuse
HHH	41	Barangay Palo-Alto	Substance Abuse

The data collected from the investigation of the lived experiences of the repeat substance abuse female offenders provided similar experiences among the methods of inquiry. As such, this research endeavour was guided by the following central question: What is the essence of the lived experience of repeat substance abuse female offenders as to repeated violations?

Meanwhile, the corollary question has been answered in the discussion below:

Corollary Question Number 1. How do the repeat substance abuse female offenders describe their experience?

Interview Question 1: What are the challenges you experienced inside the jail?

When asked about the challenges encountered inside the jail, AAA cried and was full of sorrow while reminiscing about what happened. She stated,

"The most difficult times were... Naturally, you will miss your family, especially a mother like me...thinking How are they doing? How will my kids handle life's obstacles without my guidance? Things like that." – AAA

Life inside the jail was bearable, but the loneliness she went through while missing her family was too much, which made her too emotional. In like manner, GGG became worried and sad thinking about the state of her son and daughter without her guidance. She tried to hold back her tears to clearly explain what happened. She stated,

"I miss my family, especially my two kids. I'm not sure if they can eat healthily. Can they fall asleep without me by their side?" – GGG

Particularly, major depressive symptoms, including excessive sadness and loss of motivation to carry on with life, were more common in the prisoners. Richards and O'Hara (2014), deduced that there were a huge number of prisoners who attempted suicide. In line with that, personality disorders, panic disorders, and generalized anxiety disorders can also develop inside the jail. This was also supported by the study of Haesen et al. (2019) which revealed that the proportion of people over 50 who were imprisoned and had a serious mental disease diagnosis arose.

Interview Question 2: Could you please describe the intervention plan applied to you when you were inside the jail?

When asked about the intervention plan inside the jail, HHH proudly stated,

"I have learned a lot in the Therapeutic Community Modality Program (TCMP) to change negative behaviour. I have learned livelihood programs like basket or bag making and it helped me earn money." – HHH

Meanwhile, EEE also stated,

"We get up on our TC at five (5), which is when we should have already taken a shower. Each of us has a task to complete; some people wash, clean, and spoon rice. then, for instance, there is a discussion on women and anti-violence."- EEE

She stated the schedule of activities inside the jail. She said that their wake-up call was early at 5 a.m. All of them were assigned tasks per group. She also described the seminars about women's empowerment and learning about anti-violence acts. In all of the dimensions being assessed, [Virtudazo and Dausan \(2021\)](#) stated that the participants were generally satisfied with the Therapeutic Community Modality Program (TCMP). However, some metrics should be taken into consideration. The TC implementers must emphasize structure and community values when it comes to behaviour control. Academic training and educational activities needed to be strengthened on an intellectual and spiritual level, with an emphasis on group activities that combat negative conduct and uphold community values.

Interview Question 3: How do you describe your feelings and experiences after being released from jail?

During the interview, CCC stated,

"Ma'am, mixed emotions Ma'am, I was delighted to be freed since it gave me the opportunity to see my kids, of course, but the fear persisted since it became more of a concern for whether or not I would be welcomed by everyone around me." – CCC

She had mixed emotions when she was freed because she wanted to see her kids, but the dread persisted since it became more of a concern for whether or not she would be welcomed by everyone around her. In like manner, HHH stated,

"Naturally joyful...but afraid. Since it appears that you are unsure about how to handle it... because I do not know how to handle people who know that I just got released from jail...I already have a label...but still I am contented because I can finally spend time with my son and take care of him; it is our chance to bond and spend quality time together." – HHH

Hence, she was still contented, though, since now that she could finally take care of her son and spend time with him, they would have the opportunity to bond and have meaningful time together. In line with this, [Warren \(2023\)](#) investigated the negative consequences of criminal labelling on community reentry and pointed out that a criminal record's social stigma posed some obstacles to successful readmission.

Interview Question 4: How do your family and/or friends help you to stay away from drug involvement?

During the interview, DDD stated,

"I am also the one who voluntarily avoids that. Even if I know someone, I am the one who avoids it. Besides, even if you're avoiding it, of course you're released from the jail..., they'll think you are still the same." – DDD

This statement showed the participant's avoidance of the community because of how the community might perceive her. In relation to that, AAA expressed her dismay towards her son. She stated,

"My son mentioned... "Mi, she is there again, she is with you again... maybe you want to return to the jail!" – AAA

This showed how a family relative discriminated against her intentionally. This stigmatization can lead to discriminatory treatment, exclusion, and limited opportunities for social integration. In addition to the case of DDD, she stated that her family members also got jailed because of drug involvement. [Gomis-Pomares et al. \(2023\)](#) revealed that drug addiction runs in families. A person's genetic makeup determines around half of their likelihood of developing a drug addiction. Though it raises a risk, a family history of addiction does not ensure that one will develop an addiction.

Interview Question 5: Has there been any health routine to maintain physical and mental wellness during and after being jailed? If yes, what were those?

When asked, HHH stated,

"In the jail, Zumba and aero to improve our health... then there is also bible sharing and group activities and seminars that really helped a lot...then when I was released, I also often listen to the advice of Father Jowel Jomarsus P. Gatus since his homilies are so good." – HHH

This has to do with keeping a spiritual connection to the Almighty God both during and after incarceration in order to sustain mental wellness. She gained a more optimistic perspective on life by listening to Father Jowel Jomarsus P. Gatus' homilies. Physically, she improved her health with Aerobics and Zumba. Bible sharing, group exercises, and seminars greatly enhance their mental and physical well-being. Currently, she always listened to the advice of Father Jowel Jomarsus P. Gatus since his homilies were so insightful. Furthermore, DDD stated,

"There was usually prayer and physical activity. Nowadays, I always take my daily supplements as needed. Moreover, walking was another kind of exercise, and I also believed that even though I was not reading the bible, there was still value in watching the 700 Club Asia, which I did regularly for my mental health." – DDD

[Tinner \(2023\)](#) discussed how crucial religious programs were for formerly jailed people as they prepared to reenter society. It was revealed that churches helped those who were incarcerated and their families by offering counselling, support, and discipleship.

Interview Question 6: What are the learnings and knowledge you acquire inside the jail that you can use outside?

When asked, FFF gladly shared,

"I actually gained a lot of knowledge from the livelihood program at BJMP, which I applied in life once I was released from jail. I have been making wallets out of beads and will continue to do so." – FFF

Similarly, HHH stated,

"I learned about the workshops covering topics such as women's rights and heat stroke first aid, to name a few. I also got to socialize and generate income from my sideline making siomai which I learned through BJMP livelihood program." – HHH

To prevent or lessen the lack of a life framework, [Zahorcova et al. \(2019\)](#) addressed the significance of developing a new lifestyle with a new daily routine in their study. This was also supported by [Martinek \(2022\)](#), who added that individuals could maintain a healthy balance in their lives by including livelihood activities to earn money, socializing with friends and family, and meeting new people.

Interview Question 7: What coping strategies did you use to cope with your situation?

When asked about her coping mechanism, AAA stated,

"I maintained a positive outlook and self-assurance, and becoming adept at adapting and interacting with people."- AAA

In the same way, BBB expressed her financial issues. She stated,

"Life was good for me as long as I could obtain as much money as I could legally. I would find means to replenish our food supplies when I realized they were about to run out so we would not go hungry." – BBB

[Zeng and Tan \(2021\)](#) supported the importance of positivity in overcoming problems after being released from jail. A person can accomplish goals with a positive assessment of their environment and a positive anticipation of accomplishment.

Interview Question 8: Has there been a time wherein you had relapsed and returned to being a substance abuse offender? If yes, when was that time, and how did you deal with it?

Upon inquiry, CCC stated,

"I experienced depression back in 2018. Once again, I turned to drugs. When I was imprisoned again, I forced myself to get rid of all the resentment and all the questions in my mind because I believed that everything had a purpose." – CCC

Furthermore, GGG disclosed that,

“When I was imprisoned once again, I promised myself that I would truly pick the companions I hung out with after being released from jail.” – GGG

According to [Pettersen et al. \(2019\)](#), social relationships have a crucial role in attaining and sustaining stable recovery during prolonged periods of substance abuse. Family support after being released from jail had a significant effect and could reduce the likelihood of relapsing.

Interview Question 9: What do you think may have influenced you to relapse?

By disclosing her reason for drug use, AAA admitted that,

“Being in the wrong social group, being curious, and wanting easy money were my first motivations for using drugs. Despite the intervention in jail, I turned to drugs when I was in deep pain after my mother passed away.” – AAA

In a similar vein, FFF stated,

“Personal problems and my husband's infidelity took a toll on me, leading to a relapse. I was also influenced by my friends.” – FFF

In relation to this, [Parisi \(2019\)](#) stated that losing a loved one was a common experience. Most bereaved people go through painful grieving symptoms after a loss, but these symptoms eventually go away on their own without help from a professional. Some bereaved individuals have severe, protracted, and incapacitating mourning symptoms that could result in substance abuse.

Interview Question 10: Have you sought help from others before you relapsed? If yes, what happened? If no, why?

When asked if she had received assistance from her family, community, or both prior to the relapse, GGG replied,

“I have not requested assistance because I believed I could handle things on my own. I also believed at the time that asking for assistance from others was awkward. Therefore, I refrained from doing so.” – GGG

On the contrary, FFF claimed,

“When I approached other family members for assistance, they would only brush my request aside, told me that the drug addict would never change.” – FFF

It appeared that the opinions of others or her family simply served to deepen her depression. [Zakaria et al. \(2022\)](#) revealed in their study the impact of family life and peer pressure on the repeated violations committed by those incarcerated. The results of the current study indicated that lack of support from family and/or friends, emotional neglect, and parental involvement in crime were significant predictors of reoffending.

Gathering testimonies from the repeat substance abuse female offenders, the themes emerged were as follows: Longing for Loved Ones, Strict Protocols, Difficult Tasks, and Unappetizing Foods; Therapeutic Programs; Mixed Emotions, Family Reintegration, Working

Habits; Negative Labeling, Insufficient Support from Family and/or Peers; Physical and Mental Well-Being; Livelihood and Socialization; Positivity and Resilience; Dealing with Relapse; Family Problem and Acquaintances; and Lack of Psychological Support.

Longing for Loved Ones, Strict Protocols and Difficult Tasks, and Unappetizing Foods

In relation to the first theme, the participants shared the challenges they encountered inside the jail. Longing for loved ones creates feelings of loneliness, isolation, and anxiety and is exacerbated by being emotionally uprooted from loved ones. In addition, strict protocols for the inmates could be daunting and confining. Furthermore, difficult tasks imposed on prisoners were physically demanding, repetitive, or menial, and they may not offer chances for professional or personal development. Lastly, unappetizing foods served in jail were sometimes of poor quality and variety, which could be detrimental to the physical and emotional well-being of the inmates.

In relation to this, [Barolo and Vicente \(2019\)](#) stated that most inmates faced difficulties while serving time in jail. These included having a hard time adjusting to prison life, feeling helpless, following unwritten rules, suffering for the benefit of the family, avoiding trouble, taking advantage of the weak, and believing that they were the victims who were forgotten.

Therapeutic Programs

In line with the second theme, the participants described the intervention plan applied to them inside the jail. Therapeutic Programs included Livelihood Initiative, Insightful Seminars, Bible Sharing, and Daily Routines. Livelihood initiatives might offer job placement support, financial literacy instruction, and occupational training. In addition, providing insightful seminars on stress relief, relationship development, anger control, and substance abuse prevention could assist people in changing for the better and becoming more self-aware. Moreover, Bible sharing could offer consolation, hope, and a sense of direction for many people. Lastly, creating a regimented daily schedule could help with stability and predictability.

[Cai and Kosaka \(2019\)](#) reported that inmates who had participated in vocational programs had increased levels of literacy and numeracy, learned specific work skills, and—most importantly—applied more cognitive skills in their day-to-day activities while confined. Furthermore, [Chan \(2021\)](#) discovered that taking a predetermined amount of time off from routine activities for a spiritual retreat assisted individuals in reestablishing a relationship with God, mostly through prayer. Additionally, the vast majority of participants said that their faith in God served as their primary source of inspiration for self-improvement.

Mixed Emotions, Family Reintegration, and Working Habits

As part of the third theme, the participants described their feelings and experiences after being released from jail. Mixed Emotions consist of relief, fear, anxiety, shame, and hopelessness. Meanwhile, Broken Relationships, Financial Difficulties, and Stigma were the subthemes of Family Reintegration. As incarceration can damage relationships with friends and family, rebuilding these connections could be challenging. It could be necessary to rebuild trust.

In addition, financial difficulties could put additional pressure on relationships and make it difficult to provide for oneself and one's family. In like manner, the stigma associated with incarceration created barriers to reintegration and made it difficult to find acceptance and support. Rebuilding relationships with loved ones, locating and maintaining safe housing, and preventing relapses were a few of the difficulties that made the process of moving out of jail and into the community more difficult, according to [Liu and Visher \(2019\)](#). Their families were impacted by these issues as well. Family members may become stressed out while engaging with ex-offenders and adjusting to life after the reunion.

Negative Labeling and Insufficient Support from Family and/or Peers

Under the fourth theme, the participants stated the support they received from family and/or friends. Social Exclusion, and Stigmatization were the subthemes under negative labelling. The participants' unpleasant experiences with negative reactions from friends and family exacerbated feelings of hopelessness, shame, and loneliness. Lack of understanding and unrealistic expectations from a relative resulted relapse and feelings of failure.

[Akilith \(2023\)](#) stated that one's feelings of social exclusion were a result of negative labels they received from the community. This had a negative impact on mental health by continuing the cycle of stigmatization and exclusion. Rejection from family also had an adverse impact, making a person rely more on peer groups and harmful substances. [Joudrey et al. \(2019\)](#) explained the possible contributing factors for drug involvement and overdose. The underlying factors were being exposed to drugs, stigma because of being imprisoned, physical and psychological health problems, weak social support, and having financial problems. In addition, [Feingold \(2021\)](#) stated that stigma was linked to several behavioral and health issues, including reoffending and mental health symptoms. Stigma is a major contributing factor to the social inequalities that formerly incarcerated individuals experience.

Physical and Mental Well-Being

Under this theme, the participants revealed their health routine to maintain physical and mental wellness during and after being jailed. Physical and Mental Well-Being produced the subthemes: Spiritual Connection to our Almighty God, Walking as Means of Exercise, and Examining Ones' Physical State. Developing a regular health regimen boosts resilience, restores a sense of normalcy, and improves general well-being.

[Fahmy and Mitchell \(2022\)](#) revealed that religious practices, such as attending church before being imprisoned, had a beneficial effect on the mental and physical health of those who had served time in prison. The study also proposed a holistic concept of health and well-being. Furthermore, [Beazley \(2021\)](#) mentioned how crucial it was to set aside time for introspection and tend to spiritual needs daily. Developing new relationships would also help. Without the support of others, it would be impossible to expand oneself properly.

Livelihood and Socialization

In relation to the sixth theme, the participants shared the learnings and knowledge they acquired inside the jail that they could use outside. Livelihood and Socialization were produced after the interview with the participants. Being incarcerated presented a chance to hone entrepreneurial abilities. After being released, the participants used these abilities and knowledge to launch a small business, offering a way to make money and become financially independent. In addition, social ties, especially wholesome bonds with family and/or friends, were established and reintegration into society was successful. [Liu et al. \(2023\)](#) stated that daily pressures and disruptions to routines hindered people's ability to adapt after being released from jail.

Furthermore, [McKendy and Ricciardelli \(2021\)](#) stated that once released from jail, formerly incarcerated individuals who had become acclimated to the rules must balance the rigorous institutional routine with the evolving social norms outside the jail. It may be challenging to get used to this, which may cause anxiety and unease.

Positivity and Resilience

In line with the seventh theme, the participants revealed their coping mechanisms for coping with their situation. After the interview, positivity and resilience emerged. The majority of them stated that being optimistic about the future and concentrating on the positive aspects of their

circumstances helped a lot. Maintaining an attitude of thankfulness for what they had despite difficult circumstances and substituting a negative mindset with a realistic and upbeat one could also help. In addition, setting small, manageable goals and appreciating their accomplishments was beneficial.

[Pritchett \(2022\)](#) documented the resilience of individuals who had served time in prison as well as their common, individual experiences. Coping, cognitive reframing, and support were identified as resilience-related themes. The participants discussed how these themes aided in the building of the resilience that was required for an effective transition from prison to society.

Dealing with Relapse

Under this theme, the participants revealed the time of their relapse and how they dealt with it. Dealing with Relapse produced the subthemes: Acceptance to Recovery and Selecting Good Peers. Relapse was frequent during the healing process, and it is critical to see them as teaching moments rather than indications of failure. The participants who adopted this way of thinking were more capable of handling setbacks and maintaining their progress toward their recovery objectives. In addition, the participants' behaviour and recovery were significantly impacted by their social environment. Having supportive and inspiring friends who shared similar goals with them made them feel encouraged and accountable. [Zaidi \(2020\)](#) stated the importance of good peer groups and strong social support in preventing relapse. This was also supported by the study of [Horvath et al. \(2019\)](#), social support fostered a sense of safety, security, and belonging.

Family Problems and Acquaintances

Under this theme, the participants were asked about the strong cause for their relapse. The subthemes were: Death of a Loved One, Spouse' Misconduct, and Wrong Peer Influence. Death of a loved one resulted in grieving, sadness, and despair. These feelings make it more difficult to maintain recovery-focused attention and raise the possibility of relapse. Spouse's misconduct was also a significant cause of stress. In addition, being around peers who participate in risky or undesirable behaviours increases the risk of relapse.

According to Urie Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory ([Evans et al., 2023](#)), negative events may affect an individual since they may be perceived as important life transitions that fall under the chronosystem category. It was hypothesized that these modifications impacted the re-offender's conduct and judgment.

Lack of Psychological Support

Under this theme, the participants were asked whether they sought help from others before the relapse. The subthemes were Failure to Reach Out and Discouragement from Relatives. As stated before, most of the participants did not ask for assistance from others prior to their relapse. When people do not ask for help, they do not have the skills and tools to control their addiction to avoid relapse.

Hence, this is not the same as other responses. Other participants show how their relatives were turning them down after seeking help, which proves that other relatives' or other people's negative opinions can only make depression worse. These findings suggest that seeking help from the right people can be important to relapse prevention.

According to [Misa and Lioi \(2020\)](#), an individual's self-concept is important to prevent reoffending or relapse. Traits like connectedness and autonomy play a role in developing a sense of independence and trust in oneself. In addition, [Mowen et al. \(2019\)](#) state that family support has a major role in preventing re-incarceration.

CONCLUSIONS

Substance abuse is an alarming problem that affects a person's life, family, community, and society. The Philippines was no exception. The most frequently abused illicit substances were crystal meth or "shabu" and nicotine. In addition, our country also faced a significant challenge with high rates of relapse among those attempting recovery. It was revealed that relapse can be caused by a variety of circumstances, including the loss of a loved one, inadequate social support, drug exposure, and stigma. Moreover, it was revealed that inmates face challenges such as longing for loved ones, strict protocols, difficult tasks, and unappetizing foods. These challenges have a significant impact on the physical and mental health of inmates and/or the repeat substance abuse female offenders.

The ten (10) themes described above offer a well-rounded view of the complex lives of repeat substance abuse female offenders. The themes cover a broad range of experiences, from emotional, social, and to practical. This reflects the multifaceted nature of recovery. In addition, several themes highlight these women's challenges, including negative labeling, lack of support, and difficulty reintegrating into society. This suggests a need for programs that address these challenges. Moreover, it was encouraging to see themes like Positivity and Resilience, suggesting these women have the inner strength to overcome obstacles. Therapeutic Programs could be crucial in fostering these aspects.

Recommendations

The research's conclusions and findings lead to the following recommendations.

1. Repeat substance abuse female offenders may follow these essential techniques to prevent themselves from relapsing and getting back on track. One may get help by asking for support from family and/or friends or professionals.
2. The family may have strong support and guidance on substance abuse offenders. Communicating with loved ones while being jailed and after being released from jail can result in a harmonious return to the community.
3. The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) may enhance vocational training necessary to support substance abuse female offenders. Offering livelihood programs and vocational training to inmates upon their release from jail can be very beneficial. The information, abilities, and tools necessary may be provided to create and maintain sustainable livelihoods.
4. Academic institutions and other non-governmental groups may be asked to continue supporting the Parole and Probation Administration of the Department of Justice.
5. Female repeat substance abusers should utilize psychotherapy, particularly activity-based therapy, to heal from their problems outside of the community.
6. A community support group is suggested as a means of aftercare rehabilitation. Making connections with people who have gone through similar things and exchanging support could be very beneficial to their recovery.
7. To address substance abuse relapse among female offenders, local government organizations, such as the Barangay, support seminars and training programs. This could lessen the likelihood that someone will experience social marginalization in society.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

Based on study findings, the researcher recommends adopting a holistic approach to enhance the diversion program. Utilize the principles of the Cycle of Change by giving importance on the Maintenance and Relapse stages to prevent reoffending. Substance abuse awareness must be conducted to avoid stigma and discrimination. Further, it aligns with the Problem Behavior

Theory for understanding the reasons for substance abuse and relapse. However, the study may not have fully captured participants' unique experiences from various cultural groups. Future research could explore the specific demands and challenges female offenders from different cultural backgrounds face. In line with that, more research is needed about the unique challenges faced by female offenders due to cultural norms, societal expectations, and gender-based discrimination. Conduct qualitative research to understand the cultural beliefs and attitudes surrounding substance abuse and gender roles in the Philippines. This could inform the development of culturally appropriate prevention and treatment programs. Furthermore, to ensure that the Philippines' current rehabilitation program is continuously improving, and adjusted to the changing needs of the repeat substance abuse female offenders, exploring the development and implementation of culturally sensitive and gender-specific interventions that address the unique needs of female offenders must be explored. Moreover, while this study offers valuable insights, it would be strengthened by a more explicit call for future research to explore the phenomenon outside of the Philippines.

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