



Unlocking Dignity: Self-Worth and Life Satisfaction through the Lens of Female Persons Deprived of Liberty

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of female PDLs in relation to self-worth and life satisfaction, as most incarcerated mothers find it challenging to adjust to their lives and find balance in maintaining their relationships. To fully understand self-worth and life satisfaction from their perspectives, their past experiences, present circumstances and plans were discussed. Seven (7) incarcerated mothers who gave birth from years 2020-2024, ranging from 20-35 years old, were interviewed. The theories utilized were Self-Worth Theory and Life Satisfaction as an aspect of Subjective Well-being. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was used, wherein the participants were interviewed via semi-structured interview guide questions. This study generated 11 superordinate themes which mainly centered on their education, career, status, children and family. From these findings, the author came up with supplemental programs, otherwise collectively called the MAC Program, that could help the incarcerated mothers, their children, their families and the jail authorities, both while the PDLs are in jail and after being re-integrated into their communities. It is a holistic program which includes activities for Psychological Wellbeing and Mental Health Services; Educational Assessment and Career Development; Family Support System; and Motherhood and Parenting Support Program. Investigating the self-worth and life satisfaction of the female PDLs can help assess how to better manage the PDLs as well as avoid re-incarceration. Equipping the female PDLs with the proper knowledge, skills, and behaviour can help them and their families live a better and renewed life once they get released from the jail facilities.

Keywords *Self-Worth, Life Satisfaction, Persons Deprived of Liberty, Re-Integration, MAC Program*

INTRODUCTION

From a world of a dark past, stigma and judgment, persons deprived of liberty often carry deep psychological scars and are perceived as outcasts within society. Thus, one cannot help but wonder how they can regain the self-worth they once had and unlock their dignity once they re-enter their community. From this perspective, recovering from the pits of regrets and despair becomes more vital with each passing day. Given this circumstance, considering the personal drive to regain one's dignity can become the motivation to strive, persist and keep going. Through this study, the proponent aims to answer the research question: How do female persons deprived of liberty perceive self-worth and life satisfaction?

Various literature on incarcerated individuals' lives was available as a reference throughout the study. However, there was very limited research focusing on the welfare of incarcerated mothers and their children. Only a few delved into and focused on the self-worth and life satisfaction of female persons deprived of liberty, particularly when it comes to local studies. Thus, this bridges the literature gap, especially with regard to local references. Some of this literature only touched on self-worth and life satisfaction as one of the factors or sub-aspects in relation to other components, such as subjective well-being for life satisfaction and self-esteem for topics in relation to self-worth.

To provide an overview, [Owusuaa \(2023\)](#) and [Tanasugarn \(2020\)](#) defined self-worth as a person's perception of oneself as worthy of love. [Gupta \(2023\)](#) and [Maier and Ricciardelli \(2022\)](#)

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agreed that several factors could affect a person's self-worth. These included their pre-prison identity, poor past choices and negative self-impressions. Unfortunately, according to [Visher and Eason \(2021\)](#), life in prison could cause a "sense of shock" and "disorientation" to a person, which could also lead to diminished self-worth and a sense of lack of control. However, according to [O'Brien \(2023\)](#), a person could rebuild her self-worth by diverting attention to meaningful goals and being inspired by past experiences. Moreover, [Diendo et al. \(2022\)](#) and [O'Brien \(2023\)](#) found that attaining balance in physical, emotional and social aspects could improve one's self-worth despite imprisonment.

To define life satisfaction initially, [Rowan \(2023\)](#) stated that it was based on one's assessment of one's life and whether one considers oneself a fulfilled person. Furthermore, [Baharudin et al. \(2021\)](#) found that the Quality of Life of inmates played a role in their life satisfaction. However, [Mutz and Muller \(2023\)](#) discovered that perceived substantial health and life satisfaction could both decline during incarceration. Looking at the present state of jails and prisons in the country right now, it is safe to say that persons deprived of liberty have less access to psychological services than they actually need. Given the delicate circumstances that one undergoes during the process of pregnancy to motherhood, it would be beneficial to explore the sense of self-worth and life satisfaction of female persons deprived of liberty who have given birth while imprisoned.

During these times, some are either undergoing trial or are serving their sentences. Those who have given birth in prison may only be given a certain amount of time to spend with their newborn. This, in turn, not only affects the mental health of the mother who has just given birth while imprisoned, but this crucial situation can result in negative effects on the newborn child as well. Considering these factors and knowing how they are interrelated on a mother deprived of liberty would help psychology professionals come up with a holistic approach on how to best provide services not only to the persons deprived of liberty who have given birth in jail but most especially to their young ones whose innocent minds became immediately exposed to such a crucial experience that might have detrimental effects as they grow up.

This study aimed to comprehend the essence of the lived experience of female persons deprived of liberty. It provided an explanation of how the PDLs characterized their perceptions in relation to self-worth and life satisfaction. It also examined the themes that came up from the PDLs' testimonies and served as the basis for an enhanced program proposal that can help the Jail Officers, the PDLs, and their families during incarceration and towards recovery upon re-integration.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Exploring the lived experiences of mothers deprived of liberty in relation to self-worth and life satisfaction necessitates an extensive understanding of the related literature, particularly within the frameworks of Self-Worth Theory and Life Satisfaction as an Aspect of Subjective Well-being. According to a study by [Wang \(2022\)](#), female perspectives have two main definitions of Self-Worth, namely: Recognition Self-Worth and Evaluative Self-Worth. Recognition self-worth pertains to how a person feels in relation to how she is able to contribute something worthy to others and within her society. On the other hand, evaluative self-worth pertains to one's expectations of self in relation to achieving her dreams and goals. According to Covington and Beery's Self-worth theory, as defined by [Wang \(2022\)](#), achieving a high sense of these two may vary depending on a person's ability, performance and effort.

In a study by [Baharudin et al. \(2021\)](#), Life Satisfaction was explored as one of the fundamental components of Diener's Subjective Well-Being Model. It generally points to an individual's cognitive perception of a better life. It pertains to one's overall sense of accomplishment (past), general feeling of fulfilment in current life (present), and the perception of

having hope towards achieving dreams (future).

Recognition and Evaluative Self-Worth

Conclusively, according to [Moyao-Donato et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Bea et al. \(2024\)](#), mothers deprived of liberty show discontentment with how they perform their roles in motherhood and parenting. According to [Ford \(2022\)](#), the time spent by the children with their incarcerated mothers was directly affected by the relationship between their caregivers and incarcerated mothers. According to [Benyounes \(2021\)](#) and [Goncalves and Andrade \(2021\)](#), prisons systems need to be improved to better address the concerns and needs of incarcerated individuals. Based on studies by [Belknap \(2021\)](#) and [Johnson \(2023\)](#), they found out that the number of women involved in the justice system had increased.

Life Satisfaction-Past

According to [Cornelius \(2021\)](#) and [Luke et al. \(2020\)](#), one's belief system and coping mechanisms could affect how a person experiences life in prison. By leaning towards a positive mindset, individuals can have a smoother transition flow during their stay in prison. Conclusively, according to [Lovell \(2023\)](#) and [Baker \(2021\)](#), more women were becoming involved in the legal justice system.

Life Satisfaction - Present

Unfortunately, according to [Beichner and Hagemann \(2022\)](#) and [Belknap \(2021\)](#), women had some sort of negative or adverse experiences in relation to being involved in the criminal justice system. Some examples of these are: overcrowding ([Clarke, 2019](#)), poor nutrition and lack of hygiene ([Ordoñez, 2022](#)), as well as lack of privacy ([Nieva, 2021](#)), decreased self-esteem ([Eriyanti et al., 2021](#)) and criminalization of the impoverished ([Blimkie, 2019](#)). This may be the reason why, according to [Ordoñez \(2022\)](#), the Philippines was planning to release up to 5000 inmates by June 2024 to avoid concerns in relation to prison overcrowding.

According to [Mutz and Muller \(2023\)](#), health and wellness interventions aided the holistic well-being of prisoners. The activities they mentioned as being implemented were sports, meditation, mindfulness, and yoga. These activities were suitable for both men and women. However, pregnant women or those who gave birth during the course of their trial or while serving a sentence have distinct needs that should be met. Thus, different interventions and programs were being implemented specifically for them and their newborn children.

Furthermore, according to the studies of [Aranda-Hughes et al. \(2021\)](#), [Artizona \(2019\)](#), and [Ramirez \(2023\)](#), varied challenges were being experienced inside the jail that may have contributed to the emergence of BioPsychoSocial coping mechanisms. Thus, studies from [Januin et al. \(2023\)](#) and [Soenaryo \(2020\)](#) found that increasing skills and knowledge were being implemented to empower adult PDLs while they were incarcerated.

Moreover, according to [Haggerty and Bucerius \(2020\)](#), both verbal and non-verbal actions were monitored in prison. According to articles by [Greenfield \(2019\)](#), [Versey \(n.d.\)](#), and [Buranich \(2023\)](#), in order to achieve a successful offender reform, the US prison facilities utilized a program to encourage participation among PDLs in terms of livelihood, art and recreation. According to an article by [Curren \(2020\)](#), it is still important to consider ethical standards. However, according to [Keegan \(2024\)](#), televised beauty pageants in prison settings could breach the privacy and confidentiality gap, especially for those with exposure. In the Philippines, according to the [Bureau of Corrections \(2024\)](#) and [Caliwan \(2024\)](#), the authorities implemented various activities wherein the PDLs could participate in various art activities and be able to attend seminars promoting lightheartedness and a sense of humour.

Throughout the world, different policies and programs were being implemented to accommodate the needs of both children and incarcerated mothers. Examples of these are the “Mothers Matter Program” in South Australia (Lovell et al., 2020) which then became “The Mothers Matter Parenting Program” in 2023 (Lovell, 2023), the “Prison Doula Program” in the US (Pendleton et al., 2020) and the “Parents in Jail Act of 2021, House Bill No. 8153” in the Philippines (Atienza, 2020).

Life Satisfaction - Future

In addition to that, based on the studies of Blair-Lawton et al. (2020), Breuer et al. (2021), Beichner and Hagemann (2022), and Critoph (2019), they all agreed that PDLs who had been released should be met by a restorative approach, which would prevent former inmates from experiencing the unnecessary stigma that comes from bias and discrimination. Thus, the needs of their family, especially their children, should also be considered. Luckily, in the Philippines, a project named “Second Chances Philippines” (See, 2021) and a program named “Focused Reintegration of Ex-Detainees program” (Humanitarian Legal Assistance Foundation, 2023) were already being implemented.

Through qualitative analysis and exploration of the lived experiences of PDLs, the study encapsulates the deeper intricacies of incarcerated mothers' perspectives in relation to their self-worth and life satisfaction. By acknowledging nuances from previous studies and incorporating new knowledge, this research aims to add value and come up with a more holistic approach to addressing the needs of incarcerated mothers and their families.

RESEARCH METHOD

The study focuses on incarcerated mothers who have given birth while serving their sentence in prison. According to Jones (2022), saturation was defined as the tipping point in qualitative research, wherein a homogenous group could reach saturation for as few as 5 interviews. As such, the researcher was able to find (7) PDLs who were considered qualified participants for the given study from different city jails in Laguna. The participants' age range was 20-35.

An interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) was utilized to qualitatively investigate the lived experiences of female PDLs in relation to self-worth and life satisfaction. The proponent submitted a written formal request to the Regional Director of the Jail Bureau of CALABARZON through electronic mail. It was done to request permission to conduct the study among the female PDLs who qualified as participants. Attached to the emailed request were the objectives of the study, the approach and processes to be utilized for the research, the intended qualifications for the participants, and the validated semi-structured interview questions that served as the main research instrument. Upon approval of the head of the facilities, the researcher personally conducted the interview sessions. The PDLs who served as participants and the jail authorities have given their consent and agreed that the interview sessions be audio recorded. According to Akilith (2023), utilization of audio recordings is necessary for IPA as there's a risk of necessary information being overlooked during the actual interviews. After the data collection process, transcriptions from the audio recordings were made. Then, hard copies were produced and shown to the participants for member checking.

To increase the validity of the collected data, the proponent utilized methodological triangulation. Using an interview protocol, the responses were gathered, and behavioural observations were taken into account as the basis for analysis. After the interview, transcriptions were made, and copies were presented to the respondents. Based on the answers and observations, themes were manually identified as being in correlation to self-worth and life satisfaction. The steps

for this process were as follows:

1. The researcher summarized the responses, which directly answered the guide questions. Wherein, initial themes were manually generated.
2. Then, the summarized transcriptions were submitted to the Qualitative Data Analyst, who manually verified the themes generated as they correlated with the participants' responses.
3. The researcher then received the checked transcription with the Qualitative Data Analyst's input. From here, the researcher, the adviser, and the Qualitative Data Analyst finalized the themes to be presented in the study that were most aligned with the participants' responses and study's objectives.

Due to restrictions and safety protocols, the researcher could only stay in specific areas during the research process. However, it was observed that cell populations were maximized by having double-deck beds in each cell prison. Typical prison cells in Laguna City Jails would have around 18-26 PDLs inside. As a citizen of the region, the researcher aims to coordinate with the local government to implement better prison programs.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1 below shows the profile of the participants in the study, including their age, civil status, duration of stay, current case and number of children.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Code	Age	Civil Status	Duration of Stay	Current Case	No. of Children
PDL 1	34	M	10 months (since 5.23.23)	Section 5 (Selling Drugs) and Section 11 (Possession of Drugs)	3
PDL 2	29	S	9 months (since 6.8.23)	Section 26 (Maintenance of den or Manufacture/Cultivate drugs)	4
PDL 3	32	S	8 months (since 7.25.23)	Section 11 (Possession of Drugs)	6
PDL 4	28	S	1 year, 3 months (since 12.24.22)	Section 5 (Selling Drugs) and Section 11 (Possession of Drugs)	1
PDL 5	35	S	1 year 4 months (since 12.7.22)	Section 5 (Selling Drugs) and Section 11 (Possession of Drugs)	4
PDL 6	20	S	8 months (since 7.25.23)	Section 5 (Selling Drugs) and Section 11 (Possession of Drugs); confirmed Section 12 instead of 11 (Possession of Paraphernalia)	1

Code	Age	Civil Status	Duration of Stay	Current Case	No. of Children
PDL 7	35	S	1 year and 6 months (since 9.29.22)	Section 5 (Selling Drugs) and Section 11 (Possession of Drugs)	4

The data collected from the investigation of PDLs' experiences and behavioural observations were taken into consideration for this study. As a result, the research was guided by the central question that is: What is the essence of the lived experience of female persons deprived of liberty from different City Jails in Laguna in terms of self-worth and life satisfaction?

Meanwhile, the corollary questions have been answered in the discussion below.

Corollary Question 1: How do the female persons deprived of liberty describe their experiences in relation to their sense of self-worth and life satisfaction?

Interview Question Number 1: Given your current circumstance, how do you see your self-worth?

"I changed a lot ever since being imprisoned. When I was still free, I felt like everything was okay. I thought providing what my children need is enough. But when I came here, I got the chance to think about myself and how I had changed. I have learned a lot that I can apply as a mother once I'm free." – PDL1

PDL 1 clarified the question before answering, which gave the researcher the impression that she was a perfectionist. After fully understanding the question, PDL 1 answered with confidence that she had changed for the better and that being incarcerated had helped her learn and grow as a person. This is especially true when it comes to being a good mother and a responsible human being. She feels that she can apply what she learned as a PDL once she gets reunited with her family and children.

"Right now, I can see my worth by actively participating in livelihood programs. That way, I can see myself doing something worthwhile in prison. It makes me realize that I am capable of helping myself despite my situation." – PDL 2

On the other hand, PDL 2 answered that she felt a sense of purpose and worth while working on livelihood projects being implemented in the City Jail. Throughout her answer, she displayed conviction and was proud of what she accomplished so far. It was evident that being able to do handicrafts through livelihood programs helped her achieve a sense of pride, as these avenues helped her earn money and provide for herself while she was currently incarcerated.

Interview Question Number 2: What abilities do you have that others find admirable and that also help boost your sense of self-worth?

"By giving advice to them. Sometimes I feel like it is a form of training on how to raise my kids and see it as a way for me to work towards improvement" – PDL 5

PDL 5 answered that she was able to practice and enhance her abilities to be a mother by giving advice to fellow PDLs. It was observed that she possessed positive emotions as her experience invoked hope. Somehow, she anticipates that she will be able to do the same for her children once she has served her sentence.

"It is when others say that I am strong and brave because I can independently solve not only my own problems but also handle our family problems." – PDL 6

PDL 6, on the other hand, showed a firm demeanour, somehow subconsciously expressing what she stated that others find her admirable for her courage, independence and strength.

Interview Question Number 3: In what ways are you currently performing the tasks expected of you in your given roles?

"I am able to do bag handles, and even with the little amount of money from doing that, I am able to provide on my own." – PDL 4

PDL 4 was a bit shy, as she shared that she is only capable of doing bayong bag handles. Despite feeling low on her self-esteem, she showed positivity by sharing with a smile that though others expect more highly of her in terms of execution, she is still able to provide for her needs in her own ways.

"Self-improvement. Working practice makes perfect in our daily routine. Especially when it comes to relating with others wherein I can be a part of the solution instead of being a part of the problem. Just like what they say, we need to be good followers when it comes to house rules so that I will be disciplined enough and be more effective in raising my children once I am released and as I oversee them growing up." – PDL 5

As for PDL 5, she answered with confidence, firmness and conviction that she believes that practice makes perfect. Being inside the jail helped her exert effort towards independence, obedience, camaraderie, and discipline.

Interview Question Number 4: In what better ways do you fulfil your roles and responsibilities?

"In ways wherein I show how much I like them by doing them effectively. It is hard to work when you do not want to because you will not be efficient with it." – PDL 1

It was observed that PDL 1 answered based on her actual experience. She unconsciously reflected on her positive sense of self-worth whenever she showcased her talents and abilities on tasks that she found enjoyable.

"For being a positive thinker. If I remained optimistic every day, I could plan out better how I can be a great mother to my kids. In relation to that, I can also serve as a guide to my fellow PDLs who need advice and be inspired to change by seeing a role model when it comes to camaraderie." – PDL 5

PDL 5, on the other hand, exemplified a mature demeanour by expressing herself in a generally positive and optimistic way. Her words were aligned with her nonverbal cues, and this

showed how hopeful she was that life would still improve despite her current situation.

Interview Question Number 5: How do you hone and utilize your skills to have a more positive outlook on yourself and life?

"I am using my self and my experience to inspire my fellow PDLs, especially those who feel weak and hopeless. I try to help them by staying positive and by telling them that they can overcome obstacles." – PDL 2

PDL 2 took a few seconds before answering as she tried to recall how she was able to apply and practice her innate skills and abilities. At that point, she derived an answer that exemplified her skill of being an effective speaker and the ability to be a good counsellor towards fellow PDLs wherein she gave her own experiences as the main source of example to inspire and motivate others who are experiencing the same setbacks/struggles.

"I do not give up. I do my best in everything. Kidding aside, I can apply what I learned here once I'm freed. One example would be beading. There are a lot of other things that I have learned, and I try to absorb even more so that my mind would not drift and lead me back to who I was before." - PDL 3

PDL 3 was smiling, joking, and laughing as she recalled that she used to be a bit outlandish but was still able to give a sensible answer. This showed how much she improved during her residency in the city jail. The way she answered reflected a sense of pride in what she is now capable of doing after learning a lot from her jail experience.

Interview Question Number 6: In what way(s) do you show how much you value yourself?

"Of course, it would be best to avoid vices altogether as they can cause health problems!" – PDL 4

"Drinking alcoholic beverages, mingling with bad influence, these are some of the things that I avoid, especially now that I have a child of my own." – PDL 6

PDL 4 and PDL 6 showed an opposite range of emotions when asked this question. PDL 4 showed lightheartedly that she felt positive about future outcomes towards improvement and change. PDL 6, on the contrary, seemed to take things quite seriously, especially regarding her young child. She expressed that being a mother inspired her to stop drinking. However, it was also noted that PDL 4 showed a willingness to change to have a better quality of life since she was incarcerated due to a drug case, twice. This shows how different people can show various emotions, which may reflect how they cope with life experiences in general. Some learn their lesson and tend to become more serious when dealing with their priorities, while others choose to keep an attitude of optimism as they try to maintain their peace.

Interview Question Number 7: How are you able to show exemplary performance in different fields and roles?

"I show my talents through the things that I do. I see to it that I do tasks properly. One example is by maintaining cleanliness in our dorm and keeping things neat, pleasing and organized.

This leads to others having an impression that I am also like that even before being imprisoned." - PDL 1

PDL 1 answered with confidence that she was capable of executing tasks excellently. It was quite obvious that PDL 1 had a penchant for showcasing herself by doing mechanical tasks, especially those related to clerical work and those that require organizational and time management skills. She lives up to those standards whether she is in or out of the facility.

"It is not enough to say that I can do something, I see to it that I show what I am capable of, through my actions. One example is through elaboration, wherein I also guide others in expressing themselves while sharing our concept and verse of the day. It makes me happy and proud that those who used to ask me, no longer seek help because they are now capable of effectively expressing themselves." - PDL 2

PDL 2, on the other hand, answered with firm conviction that she ensured that she served as a good role model for her fellow PDLs. She expressed this verbally, inspiring and motivating others by sharing her personal learnings and experiences.

Interview Question Number 8: What/Which parts of your life influence/contribute to your life satisfaction in general?

"I am satisfied by how my family values my worth by always visiting me here despite our circumstances. They still remember me, and that makes me feel fulfilled for having such a loving family." - PDL 2

"By giving reverence to what I have learned, I am able to consider the welfare of others as well, especially my family. I share what I know and have through positive ways. I do not want them to follow in my footsteps and experience what I have experienced. I will tell them the story of my past so that they will learn from it. For me, it is not advisable to stay in this kind of place." - PDL 3

Both PDL 2 and PDL 3 showed appreciation and respect for the lessons they learned from the past. PDL 2 attributed her sense of life satisfaction to what her family provided. PDL 3, on the other hand, expressed how her family greatly influenced her and hoped that they would learn from her experiences and not repeat the same mistakes she made.

Interview Question Number 9: What/Which past experience are you most proud of?

"Being a single mom makes me proud that I was able to raise my kids on my own without asking for the help of their father. My family also supported me as I struggled to juggle being a mother and a provider. I found it hard to do them simultaneously, but I was still able to decently provide for my children." - PDL 2

"I really enjoy selling balut with my child. I did not know how well-known my child was in our community. It surprised me to find out that even those from the other barangay knew my child. I want to show my children that they should not be shy about being a balut vendor. I will support them with selling different kinds of things, except drugs." - PDL 3

PDL2 felt a sense of pride and achievement for being a single mother as she narrated how she and her family provided for her children and her needs. This might be rooted in an inner desire to prove oneself when it comes to parenting and partnership. PDL 2 seemed to gain confidence by being self-sufficient and independent. PDL 3, on the other hand, expressed how she and her family withstood poverty. They did so by working hand in hand while strengthening their bond through productive activities.

Interview Question Number 10: Considering your current circumstances, what needs should be prioritized to enhance your overall satisfaction with life?

"Right now, I am focused on how I can graduate. I want to focus on my education while I am still here so that I can use it once I get released so that I will be able to find a decent job. I know that what I earn from being a vendor may not be enough. Even my family and children can sell balut. I want all of us to find a source of income for us to live better. That is why I will find a better job, not just being a vendor in a terminal." – PDL 3

"Joining enhancement activities, so that I can increase what I know and am capable of, which I can apply once I am out of prison." – PDL 7

Both PDL 3 and PDL 7 exemplified emotions of excitement as they narrated what they had learned and reached so far. Both were feeling hopeful that giving more focus on the PDLs' education and livelihood programs can improve their self-esteem as well as provide opportunities to find better jobs or engage in business once they get re-integrated into their respective communities. These responses show that the PDLs appreciate the experiences and learnings brought to them by their respective city jails. They both expressed the importance of having an education and acquiring a new set of skills they can eventually apply once they re-integrate into their communities.

Interview Question Number 11: What changes in yourself are you hoping to experience to improve your life while ongoing trial/serving your sentence in prison?

"Even if others say that there are people who are hard to please, I still try my best to show some love by giving food and other personal needs. So that, I would be able to make them happy and at ease. That is how I can also improve myself." – PDL 1

PDL 1 recalled many experiences in which her patience was challenged due to conflicting beliefs with fellow PDLs. Her facial expressions fluctuated, resembling emotions ranging from irritability and annoyance to hopefulness and sympathy.

"It is about not being gullible; that is what I would avoid once freed from prison. I will also be careful when it comes to giving my trust to others. Not everyone who is crying should be given attention. I pray that I will not encounter liars, users and untrustworthy people. I find myself trusting easily and being abused for it." – PDL 6

PDL 6, on the other hand, was teary-eyed as she recalled how her experience from the past made her gullible. Showing feelings of regret, shame and doubt all at the same time. It almost seemed like she felt guilty for having trusted someone, which led to her being incarcerated due to her carelessness and lack of judgment.

Gathering testimonies from the female PDL participants, the researcher sought out the emerging themes which will be presented in the manuscript. Those pertaining to self-worth were the following: Self-Reflection; Skill-Utilization, Personal, and Interpersonal Relationships; Performing Tasks thru Self-Discipline, Obedience and Embracing Responsibilities; Optimism and Positivity; Self-Love; and Evaluative Self-Worth in their Performance. On the other hand, emerging themes pertaining to life satisfaction are: Becoming a Mother, Achievements and Past Accomplishments, Dreams, Goals, and Aspirations in Life, and Hoping for a Better Life.

Self-Reflection

The first interview question, "Given your current circumstance, how do you see your self-worth?" generated the first theme: "Self-Reflection". A recurring element in their insight on self-importance was Self-Reflection. The researcher noted the answers regarding their own definitions of self-worth based on their own individual understanding. Self-Reflection was a theme that exemplifies how a PDL viewed oneself while inside the city jail. It included individuality, a sense of purpose and the roles they play. These roles were either within their family or as members of their society. One's subjective perception of self-worth can reflect how she handled herself and influenced others to value and treat her.

The researcher focused on the individual perceptions of each PDL regarding self-worth. As stated in the Self-Worth theory (Wang, 2022), there were two main types of self-worth, namely: Recognition Self-Worth and Evaluative Self-Worth. Recognition Self-Worth pertains to the expectations set forth by society in relation to an individual's perceived roles. Evaluative Self-Worth, on the other hand, is centered on how a person perceives oneself, including his/her morals and standards while portraying given roles. The answers were a mix of one's beliefs and societal expectations. The PDLs used their own morals, standards, and set of beliefs as compasses to conform to what they perceive is right and fulfil societal expectations.

Skill-Utilization, Personal and Interpersonal Relationships

The second interview question, "What abilities do you have that others find admirable and that also help boost your sense of self-worth?" generated the second theme: "Skill-Utilization, Personal and Interpersonal Relationships." The theme Skill-Utilization, Personal, and Interpersonal Relationships emerged from the participants' responses pertinent to the abilities that others find admirable that helped boost their sense of self-worth. It was quite refreshing how open they were to share their abilities and how they recognized their strengths by answering this question. In relation to the Self-Worth Theory, there are three main factors of self-worth, and one of them is "Abilities". There were two main kinds of Self-Worth; one is "Recognition Self-Worth". This question aims to find out how they are able to show their abilities in social settings and how they utilize them as they create a positive impact towards others. Being aware of how one could help, influence, and support another can help boost self-confidence and enhance her sense of self-worth by seeing how her abilities are valued and appreciated.

In an article by Caliwan (2024), he narrated the launch of DILG's new program. In this program, PDLs nationwide were encouraged to participate. Some of the activities included were handicraft-making, painting and songwriting competitions. This paved the way for people deprived of liberty towards self-expression through artwork and creativity.

Performing Tasks through Self-Discipline

The third interview question, "In what ways are you currently performing the tasks expected of you in your given roles?" generated the third theme: "Performing Tasks through Self-Discipline".

The theme of Performing tasks through Self-Discipline emerged to demonstrate the efforts being exerted by the PDLs while incarcerated. Within this theme, are lived experiences concerning how they conformed to societal expectations across varied roles. The PDLs' compliance and their effort while imprisoned only showed how they improved during incarceration. Recognizing the importance of following rules and respecting authorities can help them not only while inside the facility but most especially when they get re-integrated into their communities.

In an article by [Curren \(2020\)](#), she explained the importance of practicing ethical behaviour inside the correctional facility. According to her, this did not pertain to knowing the difference between right and wrong. It was about taking actions that consider the welfare of both correctional personnel and current inmates.

Obedience and Embracing Responsibilities

The fourth interview question, "In what better ways do you fulfil your roles and responsibilities?" generated the fourth theme: "Obedience and Embracing Responsibilities". The theme Obedience and Embracing Responsibilities emerged when Recognition Self-Worth pertaining to Performance was explored among the lived experiences of the female PDLs. This theme showed how they set standards in performing tasks, responsibilities and roles in accordance with what others perceive as right, just and lawful. In performing their tasks, subconsciously, the PDLs were able to show who they truly were. The quality of their performance exemplifies their true intentions and motives in relation to how they would like to create an impact on others. In an article released by [Versey \(n.d.\)](#), she wrote that some vital factors were necessary to achieve successful offender reform. These included a change in sense of self, finding positive social connections, and engaging in meaningful and worthwhile activities or work.

Optimism and Positivity

The fifth interview question, "How do you hone and utilize your skills to have a more positive outlook on yourself and in life?" generated the fifth theme: "Optimism and Positivity". The theme Optimism and Positivity emerged to demonstrate the contents pertaining to how the PDLs were able to showcase their innate abilities to help improve their sense of self-worth and keep a positive attitude towards life. Being able to express oneself through talents and innate abilities can help boost a person's self-esteem, self-worth and life satisfaction. Through activities wherein she could showcase what she is capable of and being able to freely express herself, she could help fully immerse herself in experiences that she finds meaningful and worthwhile.

Contrary to this, feeling pressure and experiencing changes while imprisoned could decrease a person's self-esteem. In a study conducted at Prison Class II A—Semarang, Indonesia, in May 2020, it was found that the majority of the prisoners had moderate self-esteem. In addition to that, it was also observed that a decrease in self-esteem occurs among the female prisoners in majority. In this research, they realized that efforts are required to increase the female prisoners' self-esteem ([Eriyanti et al., 2021](#)).

Self-Love

The sixth interview question, "In what way(s) do you show how much you value yourself?" generated the sixth theme: "Self-Love". The theme Self-Love emerged among the responses of the female PDLs as they narrated the efforts, they exerted to show how much they value themselves as a reflection of their Evaluative Self-Worth. This theme shows that the PDLs are still aware of their essence, worth and value despite their circumstances. They do not let mistakes, wrong decisions or negative experiences from the past define them. Instead, they utilize what they learned and assess their own needs to sustain their wellbeing while residing inside the city jails and being far from

their homes and loved ones.

In relation to this, based on a quantitative study by [Mutz and Muller \(2023\)](#), the results have shown that the inmates' perceived substantial health declines during incarceration. These included a decrease in their general health ($d=-0.52$) and life satisfaction ($d=-0.84$). They also found out that there was an increase in the number of health problems experienced ($d=0.71$). On a positive note, engaging in sports can potentially buffer the decline of the inmates' health. They found out that inmates who were active in sports had less adverse health development in comparison to inactive prisoners. Thus, it was conclusive that more time spent in sports could result in better health trajectories. This showed how physical activities contribute to one's holistic wellbeing, especially while inside the jail facility.

Evaluative Self-worth in their Performance

The seventh interview question, "How are you able to show exemplary performance in different fields and life roles?" generated the seventh theme: "Evaluative Self-worth in their Performance". The theme that emerged across the participants' answers was Evaluative Self-Worth in their Performance. This showed how the PDLs were able to incorporate their morals, values and beliefs in relation to standards they set on their performance in different tasks and activities.

Relative to Self-Worth Theory, there are two main types of Self-Worth, namely: Recognition Self-Worth and Evaluative Self-Worth. To discuss further, Evaluative Self-Worth pertains to how a person perceives oneself through the lens of one's own morales, values, beliefs and standards according to [Wang \(2022\)](#), who adapted Covington and Beery's Self Worth Theory. There are 3 determinants in relation to self-worth. These are: Ability, Effort and Performance. Focusing on performance, this pertains to the quality on how a person executes various activities.

Contrary to this, in a study by [Soenaryo \(2020\)](#), he found out that increasing prisoners' skills and knowledge was ineffective in fostering the independence of PDLs in Malaysia. This might be due to several factors, such as: lack of human resources for facilitation, a limited budget for coaching and inadequate facilities in the prison setting.

However, in an article published by [Cornelius \(2021\)](#), he narrated how one's belief system affects one's thoughts, words and actions. When it comes to doing the right thing inside a correctional facility, one must always be able to regard others with respect and dignity. One should see that fairness and justice are exercised among those involved within the community.

Becoming a Mother

The eighth interview question, "What/Which parts of your life influence/contribute to your life satisfaction in general?", generated the eighth theme: "Becoming a Mother" (the theme that emerged among responses of the female PDLs was Becoming a Mother – this may be emitted so that it won't be redundant). In this question, the PDLs were asked what they perceived as the main contributor to their life satisfaction. Based on the answers provided, majority of them anchored their life satisfaction to Motherhood and Living the Moment. The theme that emerged showed that the main priorities of the selected individuals were mainly centered on being a good mother as well as focusing on their recovery while they are incarcerated.

In relation to this, in a book by [Critoph \(2019\)](#), she wrote that Rule 42(2) of the Bangkok Rules states that prisons should be flexible enough to accommodate nursing mothers, pregnant women and women with children. Wherein, childcare arrangements or facilities should be implemented so that the mothers of these children would still be able to participate in prison activities. This program aims to provide a holistic rehabilitation program wherein both the mothers and their children who are in prison would receive support as the PDLs may find themselves struggling to maintain the balance between providing for their basic needs and parenting for their

children.

According to [Rowan \(2023\)](#), life satisfaction is based on one's assessment of his or her life. Here in the Philippines, life satisfaction among individuals may vary. Having experienced what it is like to be incarcerated, the participants in this study came to learn how to be satisfied, contented and fulfilled through life's simplicity.

Achievements and Accomplishments

The ninth interview question, "What/Which past experiences are you most proud of?" generated the ninth theme: "Achievements and Past Accomplishments" (The theme that emerged across the answers of the participants was Achievements and Past Accomplishments – this may be emitted so that it won't be redundant). This theme exemplified how they valued their families and that their past experiences, though tough and quite extraordinary from regular people, they are still able to feel proud of themselves for what they achieved from different aspects in the past.

[Baharudin et al.'s \(2021\)](#) study was anchored on the Subjective Wellbeing Model wherein Life Satisfaction was one of its major aspects. They have mentioned that Life Satisfaction is one of the fundamental components that comprise Diener's Subjective Well-being Model. This research viewed life satisfaction as an individual component towards a better life. It also pertains to one's overall sense of achievement in life which is usually associated with a significant life experience from the past.

Based on a study by [Ramirez \(2023\)](#), she found out that there are varied challenges being encountered by individuals who are incarcerated. These challenges pertain to the social, physical, and interpersonal aspects. Ways of coping were discovered, and they include repressive coping, diversion, and finding social acceptance.

Dreams, Goals and Aspirations in Life

The tenth interview question, "Considering your current circumstances, what are the needs you believe should be prioritized to enhance your overall satisfaction with life?" generated the tenth theme: "Dreams, Goals and Aspirations in Life".

Relative to the incarcerated women's responses, the theme that emerged regarding what should be improved while serving their sentence in jail or undergoing their trial was Dreams, Goals, and Aspirations in Life. This coincides with how things should ideally be based on their perspectives. This theme also covers how they recognize the effort put forward by the jail authorities and would simply like some improvements on how their learnings can be applied once they reunite with their family.

In an article by [O'Brien \(2023\)](#), she narrated how being incarcerated for two and a half years propelled her to work harder and build her own business wherein she employed other peers to help her. In her article, she shared some advice on working through feelings of low self-worth. Wherein, she realized and saw the importance of setting attainable and realistic goals.

Hoping for a Better Life

The eleventh interview question, "What changes in yourself are you hoping to experience to improve your life while serving your sentence in prison?" generated the eleventh theme: "Hoping for a Better Life". The theme that emerged, as observed between the answers of the PDLs, was Hoping for a Better Life. In relation to the Subjective Wellbeing Model, wherein Life Satisfaction is one of the major aspects by [Baharudin et al. \(2021\)](#). It was noted that Life Satisfaction can be determined by memories from the past, experience from the present and hope for the future. This theme summarizes how the incarcerated mothers view their lives and selves in terms of change and improvement. Generally, people subconsciously feel more at ease or satisfied in their lives when

they feel like there is still hope for things to change and improve. This serves as a motivation for them to keep going despite the seeming obstacles, buffers and challenges. Hope gives them a sense of meaning and purpose, as well as why they do what they do and to whom they are doing it. Seeing the light on how their good intentions could come to fruition could boost their self-worth and could help them see their value as they envision tomorrow with a sense of ease and satisfaction towards a better future.

CONCLUSIONS

In relation to the Self-Worth Theory by Covington and Beery, anchored in the study of Wang (2022), it is sufficient to infer that different factors can affect a person's perception of self-worth. The themes that emerged in this study in relation to self-worth are: Self-Reflection; Skill-Utilization, Personal and Interpersonal Relationship; Performing Tasks thru Self-Discipline; Obedience and Embracing Responsibilities; Optimism and Positivity; Self-Love; and Evaluative Self-Worth in their Performance. Moreover, the PDLs life satisfaction were mainly focused on: Becoming a Mother; Achievements and Past Accomplishments; Dreams, Goals and Aspirations in Life and; Hoping for Better Life.

This study recommends implementing the Motherhood Awareness and Childcare Program (MAC Program), which is presented in Appendix A. The MAC Program involves various psychological activities for mothers and their families to improve their relationships and address specific concerns. The main focus of this program are Psychological Wellbeing and Mental Health Services; Educational Assessment and Career Development; Family Support System; and Motherhood and Parenting Support Program.

LIMITATION & FURTHER RESEARCH

As most of the literature mentioned was studied abroad, this implies that there was a lack of literature mainly focusing on both self-worth and life satisfaction in the Philippines. This study could serve as a gateway towards more research or literary reviews on female PDLs lived experiences, especially the incarcerated mothers. Future studies can conduct a comparative analysis between subgroups among existing PDLs to further identify specific needs. This may be in relation to age, gender and status. Future researchers may also delve in deeper by exploring the lived experiences of jail personnels and family members of PDLs to gauge an extensive overview of what is happening inside the jail and once the PDLs get reintegrated into their communities. Once psychology practitioners and mental health advocates start to work together, it would help not only the PDLs themselves, but their families and their societies would also be greatly impacted as well.

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APPENDIX A.

Motherhood Awareness and Childcare (MAC) Program Overview

Table A1. MAC Program

Areas Of Concern Addressed	Goals And Objectives	Activities	Person Responsible	Time Frame	Expected Outcome
<i>Psychological Wellbeing and Mental Health Services</i>					
*Self-Reflection	1. To build a strong foundation by recognizing strengths and addressing concerns or weaknesses through individual counselling, psychotherapy and group therapies.	1. Psychological Assessments	1. Eligible Individuals	1. Weekly or monthly	1. Improved Psychological Wellbeing
*Optimism and Positivity		a. Psychotherapy	a. Registered Psychologist	a. Psychotherapy (as needed) for individuals experiencing Psychological symptoms that need to be addressed (weekly sessions for a span of 6 weeks)	a. PDLs will gain clarity and a deeper understanding of themselves, other people and their circumstances as they face their life situations while incarcerated.
*Self-Love		b. Counseling	b. Registered Guidance Counselor	b. Monthly counselling for each PDL	b. PDLs will realize that they are not alone and that what they feel is valid, as being deprived of liberty can be distressing to some individuals due to the need for adjustment and adaptation to their new environment.
*Achievements and Past Accomplishments					
<i>Educational Assessment and Career Development</i>					

Areas Of Concern Addressed	Goals And Objectives	Activities	Person Responsible	Time Frame	Expected Outcome
<p>*Skill-Utilization, Personal and Interpersonal Relationships</p> <p>*Performing Tasks thru Self-Discipline</p> <p>*Evaluative Self-Worth in their Performance</p>	<p>2. To provide a thorough analysis and re-alignment In terms of career and job placement.</p>	<p>2. Career Assessment</p> <p>a. Career Aptitude Tests</p> <p>b. Personality Tests</p>	<p>2. Eligible Individuals</p> <p>a. Registered Psychometrician</p>	<p>2. Upon admission and before release</p>	<p>2. The results of the pre-assessment tests will help determine which kind of educational program or income-generating activities would best be suitable for each PDL while inside the jail/prison.</p> <p>The post-assessment test, on the other hand, will help the PDL decide which career path would best suit him/her once released or during community re-integration.</p>
<p><i>Family Support System</i></p>					
<p>*Becoming a Mother</p> <p>*Hoping for a Better Life</p>	<p>3. To establish a support system when it comes to parenting and motherhood</p>	<p>3. Motherhood Awareness Program</p> <p>a. Seminars</p> <p>b. Family Therapies</p> <p>c. Modules and Self-Assessment Forms</p>	<p>3. Eligible Individuals:</p> <p>a. Registered Social Worker</p> <p>b. Registered Psychologist</p> <p>c. Registered Teacher/ Psychometrician</p>	<p>3. Once a month: wherein parents and expectant mothers may participate in the said activities</p>	<p>3. Loved ones, partners, children and respective family members will make up for the lost time and will be able to spend more quality time.</p> <p>Through these proposed activities, female PDLs will be equipped with proper knowledge and skills to utilize once they reunite with their families.</p>
<p><i>Motherhood and Parenting Support Program</i></p>					

Areas Of Concern Addressed	Goals And Objectives	Activities	Person Responsible	Time Frame	Expected Outcome
<p>*Obedience and Embracing Responsibilities</p> <p>*Dreams, Goals and Aspirations in Life</p>	<p>4. To provide the proper care and guidance to the PDLs' newborn child/children</p>	<p>4. Mother-Child Provisional Activities</p> <p>a. Financial Education: Financial Support is provided through budget allocation, wherein the PDL can decide how much she will send to her children or their guardians.</p> <p>The funds will come from the earnings from the livelihood program and other service-related activities that the PDL participated in.</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>a. Jail Officers</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>a. Weekly or Monthly, depending on the target budget and amount of funds available</p>	<p>4.</p> <p>a. Female PDLs will be given a sense of accomplishment and fulfilment while serving as providers or breadwinners for their families and children.</p>
		<p>b. Family Day: Personal visits and family time during special occasions</p>	<p>b. Jail Officers</p>	<p>b. Occasional: Mother's Day, Christmas Day and Graduation Day (of children)</p>	<p>b. Through this proposed program, the female PDLs and their children will spend significant events together and be able to look back on these remarkable memories wherein they have been given the chance to spend time together as mother-child or as a family.</p>

Areas Of Concern Addressed	Goals And Objectives	Activities	Person Responsible	Time Frame	Expected Outcome
		<p>c. Childbirth Aftercare Program: To allow at least 7 days for the mother and child to spend time together after childbirth and be able to breastfeed.</p>	<p>c. Jail Officers</p>	<p>c. Seven (7) days after giving birth to a newborn child.</p>	<p>c. The newborn child will be provided nourishment and may be allowed to stay in a suitable facility.</p>