

Life in Prison: Expectation, Adaptation, Socialization and Power play among Prisoners

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Abstract

As what the media portrays, life in prison is characterized by pure violence. But in this study, the truth behind bars was shown through the inmates' expectation, adaptation, socialization and how power occurred among the latter within Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP)-Cauayan, Isabela, Philippines. The results of the study showed that inmates' expectation upon entry to the prison is way too different to the actual life there; inmates adapt themselves to the prison environment in various time-frames depending on their behaviors and lifestyles; inmates socialize well, given the good relationships that they have with each other but conflicts still occasionally occur; and that the power is still in the hands of the BJMP management staff but was somewhat diffused to the elected Chairman/Chairwoman in every dorm in the prison cell. They are the leaders in charge of maintaining order within their dorms alongside with their co-officers and they also serve as coordinators to the BJMP management staff. As it is stated, this set up was designed to ensure order and smoother flow of announcements and concerns from the higher authorities to the inmates themselves. Interview was the method used in this study which included inmates, inmates' leaders and the jail officers.

Keywords: life in prison, prisoners, expectation, adaptation, socialization, power play

1. Introduction

A life of a person in a limited and controlled environment alongside with different personalities is considerably uncomfortable. This is the life of the inmates. Their time depends on what the officers who are in charge tell them, their actions are limited because of the high walls that surrounds the environment they are in, their characters were expected to be orderly and maintained as such, or else punishment will be given. Thus, a life in prison is a life without life—which is mainly characterized by lack of liberty. Why does a person commit crime? Survival is the main aim of each individual. To survive is a must, even if it is fueled by immoral doings. This idea was made known by the great philosopher Thomas Hobbes (as cited by Scott & Stephan, 2006), his principles which were written in his book *The Leviathan* includes the statement “men have the right to do anything as long as they are capable of doing it, but at the same time by doing so they interfere with others' right of nature, hence, the liberty each man has cannot be called as such anymore because it is limited by other men's actions.” Moreover, it is because of the “pursuit of their individual rights” that men enter into a conflict which jeopardizes their self-preservation. So it is their natural right which helps them to survive that actually puts them in a situation of “continual fear” and where they are in “danger of violent death (Scott & Stephan, 2006).” This concept exists during the 15th century where humans fight to get what they need. But we are now

living in the 21st century, in which, rights and privileges are given, where the society is governed by laws and most of all, where men can depend on their selves to survive. But still, others would prefer Hobbes' principle, some may just steal, some may frighten a person to get what they want, and others may kill in order for them to survive, this is now the person who's known to be the law offenders. They are considered to be the society's delinquent members. But once these offenders were caught by the law enforcers and been sentenced by the Court, they will be called inmates or jail prisoners.

In the Philippines, there is a rising population of inmates in various Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) institutions and due to this, they are exposed to various risks. Possibility of gang wars may occur. One case of this is in the study of Bo et al. (No date) "Bilibid or Not", which highlighted an incident in the New Bilibid Prison (NBP) on November 16, 2012. He reported that there is an injury of six inmates due to a grenade blast. Although jail members only suffered minor injuries from the explosion, reports from the superintendent claim that the attack was an offshoot of another gang war (Ibid.). This is why it is a challenge for the jail administrators to maintain peace and order in a prison.

2. Methodology

This study aims to showcase the truth behind bars covering the inmates' expectation, adaptation, socialization and how power was portrayed within the walls of BJMP-Cauayan. The method used in gathering data is interview. The participants were inmates, inmates' leaders and the warden himself. The inmates who were interviewed and participated in this research were detained for 6 months-10 years and still on the process of attending their hearings.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Inmates' Expectations vs Reality

The expectation of the newly detained inmates and even the community outside the prison cell about the life in BJMP was just like it is shown in media. As it was typically portrayed, inmates were tortured and beaten by the fellow inmates. This statement is also coordinated in the study of Chong (2013) stating that "...with news focuses on stabbings and deaths between inmates, popular media and news outlets have contributed to the often hysterical and violent view of the inmate community." In connection, Rideau (1992) said in his study, "if it bleeds, it leads"—is a common saying in television and news which pertains to the life of the inmates. With the overwhelming effect of these negative stories, it has led to associations of inmate-to-inmate relationships with criminal activity or violence, insinuating that inmate relationships mainly focus on illicit activity and other harmful associations." With these much evidence that have been release on air through media, it is typical that most of the people, not only the inmates would expect that kind of treatment. This is shown through the statement of one of the inmates, Participant A (personal communication, January 9, 2018) who said: "I was scared, I saw what's on the T.V, it was my first time in jail, but I realized it was different, different from what I saw and what am I doing." Also, Participant B (personal communication, January 9, 2018) have the same expectation, according to him: "At first, I was afraid at the inmates, I thought that they are... the same as what I thought." Participant C (personal communication, January 9, 2018) also have the same idea, as his statement goes "Just the same, when I first came here, I thought they're gonna beat me, punish me, and those doings... just what have shown on T.V, nothing comes in my mind but that scenario only. It was also the problem of Participant E (personal communication, January 10, 2018) as he said "I am also afraid, what I thought of being inside BJMP. I will be hurt something like that, punished, but no." These

gathered data have been proved with the same study of Hartman (2009) in his research which tackled the tendency to think that inmate community is defined by violence and composed of inherently violent individuals means that people going into the prison for the first time are sometimes surprised by the people who they meet. Because surprisingly, they found a community of diverse men living their daily lives in tightly controlled environment. Just as society outside is not composed of constant violence, the community inside is also not composed of one-dimension “hard” man. Rather concerned with criminal behavior, Hartman (2009) notes the daily rituals goes on, as “most prisoners I meet are more concerned of staying out of troubles and getting out.”

Given that it has been portrayed in the media that prison life is consists of pure violence, the reality is that, although they are inmates, still, they are capable of being humane to one another—thus there is peace and order in BJMP-Cauayan. This claim was supported by the statements of various participants. Participant A (personal communication, January 9, 2018) explained: “they are kind, different from what I saw but still, I am afraid, afraid but not that much, because they are kind to me.” Participant B (personal communication, January 9, 2018) added “What was shown in T.V. is not true.” Also Participant C (personal communication, January 9, 2018) agreed in the previous participants who stated “...But then, the truth is far too different in what I saw and the reality inside” which is also relevant on the statements of Participant E (personal communication, January 10, 2018) and Participant G (personal communication, January 11, 2018). Most of the new inmates have the common expectation of being beaten and tortured in the prison by co-inmates but that idea was proven wrong because inmate violence inside BJMP-Cauayan is not evident compared to what is happening in NBP. And as the inmates stated, as time passes by in their stay inside, they come to understand the real essence of the BJMP’s existence—it is to rehabilitate the latter to be ready for community’s reintegration when they come out. And for those who have grave cases who were waiting to be transferred to NBP, it is an avenue for them to realize the consequences of what they did.

3.2. Inmates’ Adaptation

It is determined that inmates’ adaptation is a long process. It is argued that inmates may took more than a year before they can say that they are used to their environment. This is according to the participants who have been imprisoned for more than a year. Participant H (personal communication, January 11, 2018) who spent his life in jail for more than 2 years and still on trial stated “It took me more than one year to adapt.” Then Participant D (personal communication, January 10, 2018) also stated that: “...to me, more than 1 year before I recovered.” But other participants said that it took them long period of time. In the statement of Participant A (personal communication, January 9, 2018) who has been detained for 3 years said “It’s long, until now I’m not that used in staying here.” In connection with the statement, Participant G (personal communication, January 11, 2018) who has been detained for 5 years stated “I didn’t know how long I was able to adapt.... first time I was jailed, I only ask questions, but when I actually entered, I was totally in shock... but what I know is that it was hard during my first year.” The first set of participants stated that it took them a year or more than that but some stated that it took them only seven or eight months before they adapt themselves in the new environment. It is the shortest period of time indicated by the participants. Participant B (personal communication, January 9, 2018) who has been detained for 2 years stated that “7 months before I adapt myself here.” Just a month different, Participant C (personal communication, January 9, 2018) who has been in jail for more than a year almost have the same period of adaptation, he stated “Almost 8 months before I get used in staying

here, then I just entertained myself.” It is shown that inmates have different time frame in adapting themselves to the life in prison. Therefore, it can be stated that inmates have no significant number of months or years of adaptation. In connection to this, it was stated by Arbach-Lucioni et al. (2012) in his research that inmates’ adaptation comes through their different behaviors and lifestyle, that is why some of the inmates can easily adapt to different surroundings and some may take long period of time.

3.3. Inmates’ Socialization

Furthermore, socialization of inmates is one of the most important ways to keep the BJMP in order. In this part, the inmates were interviewed on how they socialize with each other knowing that they are living in a same place with different characters. In the study of Zamble & Porporino (1988), he stated that an inmate adjusts to a system characterized by the deprivation of freedom and the strong influence on one's identity. This adjustment will enhance the new inmates to be more comfortable with their new surroundings. In connection to this, through socialization, adaptation could be faster for it may help them reduce their boredom which is caused by their longing to their families. Based on the data gathered, socialization among inmates are characterized by good relationships and occasional conflicts. As Participant A (personal communication, January 9, 2018) stated “It’s good to be with them, we don’t hate each other.” The same statement is supported by Participant C (personal communication, January 9, 2018) as he said “The socialization inside... they are good in socializing...we have unity.” Also, the same perspective of Participant E (personal communication, January 10, 2018) who said “They know how to socialize inside.” But then again, conflicts also occur, here are some of the inmates statements regarding occasional disputes, Participant F (personal communication, January 10, 2018) explained “... if you don’t know how to socialize, you will be in trouble... but that doesn’t mean, if we fight, or hurt each other... we are already enemies, the good thing here is that there are people governing us... they advise us in order to settle the disputes. There is no perfect community, there will always be conflicts, but it can always be settled because of the people who are leading us here who gives us advices.” The socialization of inmates can affect one another’s perspective, but most of them developed friendship within the prison. Being humane to their fellow inmates is also important for them especially for the old inmates who have been staying in jail for so long. Also, according to the Participant B (personal communication, January 9, 2018), he stated that “It is crab mentality right? You know that your fellow member is being recognized, then you’ll pull him down. That’s what they are doing inside. Instead of lifting you up, they’ll pull you down, that’s what they do.” It is shown that inmates have their own perspective on how socialization happens inside, most of them stated that it is good socializing with their so-inmates and others described the prison to be a place of no one you could trust. It is now concluded that inmates’ socialization has its different variation due to the different kind of people who are detained there. Zamble and Porporino (1988) explained in his study that the sociological literature on prisons contains some confusion and disagreement on at least three interrelated issues: (a) the character of inmate society, (b) the forms of inmate adaptive behavior and the (c) nature and extent of prison socialization. In w/c inmates would create an irrelevant situation that will soon make conflict between them. With these, the study shows sufficient evidence to justify that inmates socialization is in good condition, but still, conflict occurs because of their different backgrounds, and also the place itself is the reason why conflict can arise. As added by Skarberk (2014), he stated that inmates’ socialization differs on the mainstream of the person. And that, conflict and jealousy would intervene in the environment and

it may cause a gap between the inmates that will soon form different kind of groups which will lead us to the next discussion of this paper.

3.4. Powerplay in the Prison: Choosing Leaders and Inmates' Groupings

As it is stated by one of the participants, there are leaders in the cell who are keeping the peace and order in the prison besides the BJMP jail guards. They are the ones who settle disputes between inmates. These leaders were chosen through voting by raising their hands. As stated by Participant A, B and C (personal communications, January 9, 2018), "It's just like election, whoever gains higher votes, he will become our mayor." It is supported by Chong (2013) who stated that groupings elect their leaders through the process of election, in order to have a just and equal way of choosing their leaders. Thus, saying that inmates in BJMP-Cauayan used this democratic process as a tool in choosing their leaders. Moreover, the qualifications being considered by the inmates in choosing their leaders are leadership skills and experience or length of stay in prison. According to Participant H (personal communication, January 11, 2018) "A leader who knows how to motivate or lead those who are under him, not the other way around." Even though they have a different world, there are still inmates who have leadership skills as argued by Chong (2013). Thus, this quality is being considered. Secondly, experience or length of stay in prison, when asked what he considers in voting for a leader, Participant G (personal communication, January 11, 2018) answered "Maybe I will base my decision on someone's experience or period of stay here in jail, or who they like, and those who are not that strict." The inmates' groupings were created according to dorms. Each dorm has a leader, and he will be the coordinator/connection of BJMP management staff to the inmates residing in his/her dorm. In specific, Dorm 1 have 16 officers and a member of 105, in Dorm 2, they have 10 officers and a member of 54, in Dorm 3 they have 9 officers and 49 members, and in Dorm 4, they have 6 officers and 20 members. The Chairman or chairwoman also known as the Mayor or Mayora, is considered to be at top officer, followed by the V-chairman, then the Auditor, the secretary, the bastonera (depends in the number of your members), and the chief cleaners (depends on the number of your members). Also, the leaders explained that body contact are prohibited to use against any necessary reasons. Inmate members in a group depends on the population of their cells, the inmates are separately organized according to their cases, there are now 4 dorms, showcasing 4 groups, and these groups as the warden said, are created by them in order to help them facilitate the inmates, officials were assigned so that some implementation and needs will be easily distributed, although it is not advisable to have some, but it is for the humanitarian's sake, but still we strictly disregards gangs and other illegal doings. But they are allowed to create some rules and regulations for them to keep the inmates in orderliness because we are aware that the number of the jail officers is far too short compared to the number of inmates or the so called inmates. As stated by the Jail Chief Officer Romeo L. Villante, Jr. (personal communication, January 12, 2018), "actually the act of organizing them in every dorm is just, something that needed if there's a problem, we will just go directly to the concerned PDL (Persons Deprived of Liberty), it is similar to the set-up in a school, we have the PTA, school org. So just like that, like a through channel. I, for example, I have immediate concern in the four dorms, what I will do is just to call the four chairmen/chairwomen, I now call them, then they will be responsible in relaying my announcement or concerns to the others. In its legal aspect, it is not inherent, but it's needed, so that there could be a smooth flow of process or administration for everyone." This method or idea is described in the study of Skarbek (2012) in which it has the most basic rules in the early 90's where the inmates and government creates an agreement for the manner of

discipline and welfare of the both party. So, through groupings by dorm which were led by leaders termed “Chairman/Chairwoman”—BJMP ensures that these leaders implement rules, make sure they are united as a dorm and maintain the presence of respect with each other. This kind of grouping method is more peaceful and fit in the small population of BJMP-Cauayan.

4. Conclusion

As stated above, this study aims to show the true happenings within the prison by understanding the inmates’ expectation, adaptation, socialization and power play in BJMP and interview was used to gather the needed data which were supported by document studies. The researcher found out that inmates or the inmates expectations when they first entered the jail was far too different from reality. The ideas of beating and other physical contact as a welcoming tradition to the new inmates have never existed inside the BJMP-Cauayan. Also, even as time passes, there was no dealings of physical contacts, just sanctions like cleaning is expected if they break the rules and regulations inside. It was also revealed that adaptation of inmates to the prison’s environment have no specific time frame, there are those who adapt themselves for seven or eight months, or one year or more than that. The period of adaptation is mainly based on the behavior and lifestyle of the inmates themselves (Arbach-Lucioni et al., 2012). Moreover, as for socialization, most of the participants stated that they have good relationships inside but two in specific claimed that there are still misunderstandings/disputes. But out of these conflicts, there are prison leaders who were called “Chairman/Chairwoman” or “Mayor” who were elected to maintain peace and order within a dorm. These leaders were the coordinators of the BJMP management and in specific, this is an effective strategy for the BJMP-Cauayan to maintain order inside the cells.

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