

Invisible Watchers: Work World of Operatives of the Philippine National Police Drug Enforcement Unit (PNP-DEU)

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ABSTRACT

This study delved into the live experiences of drug operative of the Philippine National Police Drug Enforcement Unit of second district of Samar. Identifying their effectiveness in their campaigned against illegal drugs in Samar Province.

This study used phenomenological research design. Ten (10) drug intelligence operative from various areas in Second District of Samar, including City of Catbalogan, Municipalities of Jiabong, Motiong, Paranas, Hinabangan, San Sebastian, Calbiga, Pinabacdao, Villareal and Damar were chosen as informants. These operatives, with a minimum of two years of experience, were selected from the Samar Police Provincial records.

Interviews were conducted and recorded using a smartphone application, ensuring detailed and accurate transcriptions. Most responses were in Waray-Waray, with a small portion in English, which was translated for clarity.

The study identified nine emergent themes: *Community Dynamics and Influence, Operative Motivation and Ethical Consideration, Risks and Burdens of the Job, Systematic and Institutional Factors, Operational Integrity and Efficiency, The Planning of illegal Drug Operations and The Influence of Technology, Drug Control and Mitigation Strategies, Boosting Number of Personnel and Proper Funding*. These themes highlighted the importance of Community trust, operative motivation, job risks, institutional support, operational integrity, strategic planning with technology, comprehensive drug control, and adequate personnel and funding are key factors influencing effective anti-drug operations.

Keywords: *Criminal Justice, Drug Operation, Philippine Drug Enforcement Unit, Community Relation, Strategies, Relationship, Support, Illegal Drugs, Rehabilitation*

1. Introduction

Drug enforcement efforts use an international approach, attempting to combat the manufacturing, trafficking, and consumption of illegal substances across borders. These initiatives involve coordination among numerous countries, law enforcement agencies, and

international organizations to address the worldwide drug problem. The primary goals of such efforts are to dismantle drug networks, disrupt supply lines, and reduce demand through public awareness and prevention measures. On a global scale, drug enforcement efforts frequently include intelligence sharing, cooperative investigations, and coordinated operations against major drug cartels and criminal groups (Tookitaki, 2024). This multi-agency and cross-border method improve efficiency in identifying and apprehending significant drug producers and traffickers (UNODC, 2019). In this concept drug enforcement operates on an international scale through collaboration, intelligence and coordinated to concern agencies domestic or foreign country.

In Philippines setting, during the administration of the former President Rodrigo Roa Duterte, drug enforcement campaigns use a forceful and contentious stance known as the "war on drugs". This campaign has launched a highly intensive and aggressive campaign to combat drug trafficking, drug consumption, and drug-related criminal activity. These campaigns have been characterized by the implementation of "Oplan Tokhang" and "Oplan Double Barrel." These initiatives involve police going door-to-door, encouraging drug users and pushers to surrender, and engaging in anti-drug operations aimed at arresting or neutralizing drug suspects (Caliwan, n.d.). The strategy had been goes beyond expectation that resulted to a numerous number of surrenders in drug related crime and crime rate goes decreased up to 11% from the year 2017 to 2017 (Marquez, 2020).

Intensify drug operation in the province of Samar well greatly help the PNP-Samar Provincial Office in the fight against illegal drugs. One of successful operation conducted by PNP-Catbalogan headed by PMaj. Niño T. Cabañas, intelligence operative together with PDEA-Samar Provincial office on November 13, 2023 at barangay 10 Catbalogan City, Samar. The said operation is resulted to the arrest of 8 individual who is allegedly one of it was the drug den maintenance and 7 individual was visitors it also dismantled a suspected drug den in the said area. Thought this intense drug intelligence operation by Drug Enforcement Unit of Catbalogan in cooperation with PDEA-Samar Provincial office, it results deterrent for future criminal and locate or identified lawless criminals particularly drug personalities (Drug Den Sa Catbalogan, Sinalakay Ng PNP-PDEA; 8 Indibidwal, Timbog;, 2023). In this context intensify drug operation need good communication among multi-agency to have a successful drug campaign.

This study would greatly help the PNP Drug Enforcement Unit in their daily scenario face in real world. The aim of this study is to uncovered the lived experiences of PNP Drug Enforcement Unit in their challenges encountered during performance of duties, and how it may affect to their line of duty and the effect of their duties in their personal live.

As a Criminologist and a faculty member of the College of Criminal Justice Education, I am encouraged to pursue this study to be able to answer underlying issues on the challenges encountered by the Drug Enforcement Unit in their performance of duties. This study will be utilizing a transcendental phenomenology approach, this study aims to explore the lived experiences of PNP Drug Enforcement Unit in the second District of Samar, Philippines. By this study, it will give emphasis the particular issues, challenges, interaction and achievements in intelligence operation. The result of the study will be significant in developing more effective and accurate intelligence gathering, technique, and procedures, as well as enhancing the partnership

and understanding the importance of good relationship to government and non-government organization connected in intelligence operation.

Theoretical Background

This study is anchored on the Risk Theory of Hanspeter Schmidli (2018) as a main theory of the study, and supported by Undercover Operations Theory (1979) of Mark S. Goldstein and further supported by Intelligence-Led policing Theory (1995) of William P. Greenstreet.

Risk theory of Hanspeter Schmidli (2018) discusses the influence factor that causes people and even organizations to engage in certain risky behaviors, including drug trafficking. Study explores different 'need' and profit Informants take the risks and presents some powerful frameworks to reduce risk as well as help us better understand unresolved uncertainties and help society arrange things that the unexpected or unknown can be foreseen, or faced with, in a reasonable way that is ethical by humans. Risk Theory has been used in criminology to study numerous elements of criminal conduct, such as decision-making, crime prevention techniques, and criminal justice policy. Understanding the underlying motivations and risk perceptions allows criminologists and lawmakers to devise more effective approaches for preventing and reducing crime.

Risk theory is a criminology structure that focuses on identifying and assessing the elements that enhance the risk of persons engaging in criminal behavior. In this concept Risk Theory is critical for understanding and combating drug-related crimes. Police Drug Enforcement Unit utilizing Risk Theory to identify high-risk people, locations, and behaviors related to drug trafficking and usage. Police can identify possible hotspots for drug-related crimes through analyzing data and intelligence acquired from a wide range of sources, including Informants, surveillance, and criminal network analysis.

Furthermore, Risk Theory assists police drug enforcement units in prioritizing their resources and efforts by focusing interventions on locations or individuals with the highest risk of involvement in drug-related offenses. This targeted approach enables law enforcement to proactively prevent and disrupt criminal activity before it escalates. In addition, context of Police Drug Enforcement Units enables a strategic and data-driven approach to addressing drug-related crimes, resulting in more successful enforcement actions and improved public safety.

Undercover Operations Theory of Goldstein (1979) a support theory. The theory looks into the aspects surrounding the use of undercover agents to gain access and information on groups that carry out criminal activities. Undercover theory is composed of; Infiltration Techniques, Information Gathering, Ethical Considerations, Deception, and Risk Management. This approach is based on the idea of cops going undercover to infiltrate criminal organizations and collect vital information that may be used to solve cases and prevent future crimes.

Undercover Operation Theory refers to the use of covert tactics and techniques to gather intelligence, investigate criminal activity, and capture offenders. These operations often include law enforcement officer assuming false identities and entering criminal organizations, or engaging in undercover activities to build confidence and obtain evidence. The primary goal of undercover operations is to acquire information and evidence that can be utilized to uncover illegal activity, apprehend perpetrators, dismantle criminal organizations, and prevent future criminal behavior. Officers may need to put themselves in dangerous situations, create

misleading personalities, and engage in criminal acts to acquire the trust of criminals (Manojlović & Banović, n.d.).

Furthermore, Undercover operations involve thorough preparation, risk assessment, and a complete knowledge of the laws and regulations that regulate such actions. The effectiveness of these operations is frequently dependent on preserving secrecy, good communication channels, and close cooperation between undercover operatives and supporting law enforcement teams. In general, covert operations seek to disrupt criminal activity, safeguard public safety, and bring offenders to justice while ensuring the protection of the undercover personnel involved. Understanding of this theory would allow intelligence operative to be undetected in their operations and help them capable of gathering data with high caution and consideration on the situation.

Finally, Intelligence-Led Policing Theory (1995) of William P. Greenstreet that describes a policing approach driven by intelligence and analysis. This theory emphasizes the significance of acquiring and evaluating data on criminal activity, patterns, and trends in order to advise and guide policing actions. Intelligence-led police theory is critical for understanding and responding to criminal behavior. Law enforcement organizations can respond proactively to possible threats and prevent crimes by using intelligence data to identify and forecast criminal activity. This method supports not only in the detection and apprehending of offenders, but also in the disruption of criminal networks and organizations.

Intelligence-Led Policing Theory also encourages collaboration and information sharing through law enforcement agencies, as well as among government agencies and community organizations. Working together and sharing intelligence helps law enforcement organizations to get a better understanding of criminal activity and improve their capability to respond efficiently.

In the end, William P. Greenstreet's Intelligence-Led Policing Theory promotes a data-driven approach to law enforcement that allows agencies to anticipate and prevent crimes, resulting in a safer and more secure society. In the PNP Drug Intelligence context, this theory greatly help in-depth understanding of the importance on how an information or data was carry by their operatives.

Republic Act No. 8551, Section 2. Declaration of Policy and Principles. It is hereby declared the policy of the State to establish a highly efficient and competent police force which is national in scope and civilian in character administered and controlled by a national police commission. The Philippine National Police (PNP) shall be a community and service-oriented agency responsible for the maintenance of peace and order and public safety. The PNP shall be so organized to ensure accountability and uprightness in police exercise of discretion as well as to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of its members and units in the performance of their functions (Republic Act No. 8551, n.d.).

Republic Act No. 9165, Section 2. Declaration of Policy. – It is the policy of the State to safeguard the integrity of its territory and the well-being of its citizenry particularly the youth, from the harmful effects of dangerous drugs on their physical and mental well-being, and to defend the same against acts or omissions detrimental to their development and preservation. In view of the foregoing, the State needs to enhance further the efficacy of the law against dangerous drugs, it being one of today's more serious social ills (The LawPhil Project, 2024).

Republic Act No. 9165 article 9, SEC. 77. The Dangerous Drugs Board. The Board shall be the policy-making and strategy-formulating body in the planning and formulation of policies and programs on drug prevention and control. It shall develop and adopt a comprehensive, integrated, unified and balanced national drug abuse prevention and control strategy. It shall be under the Office of the President.

The Dangerous Drugs Board is the creation of the Philippine government for the proper implementation, coordination, and construction of policies in the fields of the prevention of drug abuse and control. Its primary functions include the formulation of a national drug abuse strategy, coordination of all programs in drug abuse prevention and control, as well as instruction about dangerous drugs. The said board is also responsible for advising the President in the matters of drug abuse. The Board is also attributed with the authority to issue policies, rules, and regulation for the successful implementation of the drugs control strategy in the country. Moreover, the Dangerous Drug Board has the right to conduct research and create educational facilities in the field as well as coordinate with other departments of the Filipino government (R.A. 9165, n.d.)

According to the Dangerous Drugs Board Regulation No. 4 Section 3. Coverage - These guidelines involve the acquisition, handling and utilization of dangerous drugs for the conduct of profiling by law enforcement forensic laboratories. The same shall cover drug profiling using a profiling sample from the bulk of dangerous drugs seized, confiscated and surrendered by law enforcement agencies, other government offices, or private individuals before the commencement of a criminal proceeding. The guidelines shall likewise include drug profiling on the representative sample of the dangerous drug during the pendency of a trial dealing with violations of R.A. No. 9165, as amended (Board Regulations, n.d.).

NAPOLCOM Resolution No. 2017-317, Approved on June 2, 2017. Whereas, the proposed reorganization and renaming of the PNP-AIDG as PNP- DEG, and creation of PNP DEUS under the PNP Territorial Units, are aimed at intensifying the PNP's campaign in effectively dealing with the complexity of drug operations, involvement of organized crime groups in drug trafficking, and eradicating or dismantling of clandestine drug laboratories and other plant sources of illegal drugs. Now therefore, the Commission in the exercise of its constitutional mandate to administer and control the PNP, has resolved to approve, as it hereby approves, the reorganization and renaming of the PNP Anti-Illegal Drugs Group (PNP-AIDG) as "PNP Drug Enforcement Group (PNP-DEG)" and the creation of Drug Enforcement Units (DEUS) under the PNP territorial units. The NAPOLCOM provide the Memorandum Circular No. 2024-046 dated on May 28, 2025. This MC provides the guidelines and procedures in the usage of PNP DRDIGS version 2 (PNP DRDIGS v.2) by offices/units of the PNP to effectively manage the recording, storing, controlling, and handling of data on the accomplishments of the anti-illegal drugs campaign. This is to ensure a secure, accurate, quick, efficient and real-time reports and statistics.

Based on this memorandum circular on the General Guidelines number 16 Intelligence, Operations, PCR, and Forensic units of the PNP shall be equipped with adequate ICT equipment/resources compliant with the minimum specifications prescribed in NAPOLCOM Resolutions and PNP MCs to be used solely for PNP DRDIGS to ensure that data will be secured and violation of the data privacy law will be prevented.

Accordingly, the PNP DEUS shall perform, among others, the following functions: 1) Act as operating arms of the PNP on Demand Reduction Strategy; 2) Implement the anti-illegal drug

strategy of the PNP in their respective areas of responsibility; 3) Strictly implement the protocol on the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations; 4) Responsible for the service of warrants of arrest and conduct of manhunt operations; and 5) Coordinate any matters of mutual concern with other PNP units as well as with the units of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and other law enforcement agencies which are operating within their respective areas of jurisdiction (NAPOLCOM, n.d.).

Rule on the Destruction and Disposal of Seized Dangerous Drugs, Other Substances, and Instruments Prior to the Filing of an Information, A.M. No. 21-02-01-SC, it provides guidelines for the immediate destruction and disposal of seized dangerous drugs, controlled precursors, and essential chemicals, as well as instruments, paraphernalia, and laboratory equipment. The aim is to prevent their reuse for illegal activities. Within 24 hours from the conduct of the ocular inspection, the court shall order the immediate destruction and disposal of the remaining seized drugs or instruments and equipment. The seized drugs shall be sent and delivered to the Drug Forensic Center of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) for destruction and disposal, unless the PDEA already has custody of the seized drugs.

Illegal drug prices are determined by more than just supply and demand. Other factors influencing drug prices include production costs, trafficking hazards, law enforcement activities, and even socioeconomic situations. Increasing law enforcement actions can result in a decrease in drug supply, causing prices to rise despite constant or dropping demand. On the other hand, changes in economic conditions or advances in medication production processes might cause swings in drug pricing (Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency [PDEA], 2022).

In 2021, there were 60 million non-medical opioid users, of which 31.5 million used opiates, primarily heroin.¹ Following several years of stability, the number of new psychoactive substances (NPS) on the global market increased. 36 million people had used amphetamines, 22 million had used cocaine, 20 million had used "ecstasy"-type substances. Moreover, according to the world drug report 2023, the market for "Captagon," an illicitly manufactured tablet that frequently contains various concentrations of amphetamine, is still expanding in the Near and Middle East. Of the 618 NPS reported to be on the global market in 2021, 87 were recently identified (Hachem et al., 2023).

There are 1.8 million drug users in the Philippines today, and 4.8 million Filipinos report having taken illegal drugs at least once in their lifetime, according to the Dangerous Drugs Board (DDB), the government organization tasked with creating policy for illegal drugs in the country. Over 75% of drug users are male (87%), adults (91%), and have completed high school (80%). Sixty-seven percent are employed. Shabu, also known as "poor man's cocaine," is a methamphetamine derivative that is most frequently used in the Philippines. A 2012 United Nations report stated that the country has the highest rate of methamphetamine abuse in East Asia, with 2.2% of Filipinos between the ages of 16 and 64 using the drug (Simbulan et al., 2019). Law enforcement has been leading the charge in the "war against drugs" for more than 20 years. Millions of pesos are spent annually by the government on drug enforcement initiatives, and a substantial portion of state and local police budgets are allocated to drug enforcement efforts (Kappeler, 2022). The nation is concerned about the rising number of drug-related crimes, so agencies were tasked with controlling the problem and making it a high priority because drug dependence and drug pushing are among the leading causes of major crimes (Rosales, n.d.).

According to PBGEN. Reynaldo H. Pawid, Regional Director of PNP Regional office 8, strong collaboration between various law enforcement agencies and the community will address the illegal drug problem in the country. PNP will be relentless in their efforts to stop the spread of this illegal drugs within the community, particularly focusing on dismantling drug dens that serve as breeding grounds for criminal activities (Police Regional Office 8, 2024).

On April 15, 2024, operative from Regional Police Drug Enforcement Unit 7 headed by PBGEN. Anthony Aberin, Regional Director, arrested high-value drug personality. The said operation resulted the arrest of high-value target on drug in region 7 with an estimated PhP. 1.3-million worth of illegal drugs. According to PBGEN. Aberin, the said accomplishment was result of intelligence-driven operation as to basic policing to crime prevention, crime preemption, crime solution, and organizing and mobilizing the community. Moreover, he said that it is strong and categorical warning to all lawless elements in Central Visayas in line with there comprehensive policing strategies in maintain peace and order across there region so that community will have safer environment, free from drugs, crimes, and other forms of transgression (PRO7-PIO, 2024). Intelligence-driven operation, which included members of the Provincial Crime Intelligence Unit and members of the Detectives Unit, successfully apprehended a 34-year-old man at a rented two-bedroom residence where he was manufacturing a variety of drugs. While Major General Jan Scheepers, the SAPS Acting Provincial Commissioner, praised the members of the Provincial Crime Intelligence Unit and Detectives for their outstanding performance and concluded that they will entangle this kind of criminal activities until we have a drug free society (South African Police Service, 2018).

Lastly, in a press briefing in Camp Crame, Quezon City, the DILG secretary Benjamin Abalos Jr. said that the reported quality and amount of drug haul intercepted in a checkpoint in Batangas province is only estimated into two (2) tons and worth PHP 13.3 billion. The said operation is one of the biggest drug hauls by the Philippine National Police, Philippine Coast Guard and PDEA. Moreover, the DILG secretary refused to divulge further information as follow-up operation to identify those behind the shipment of the said contraband (Philippine News Agency, 2024).

Cox and Cunningham (2021), this assessed the influence of the discretionary Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Program (EBMGP) on drug arrests and crime. The statistics demonstrate that implementing the EBMGP resulted in an increase in police hiring, an increase in drug sales arrest rates for both Blacks and Whites, and a decrease in overall crime. Nonetheless, the Black-White racial discrepancy in drug sales arrests remains large, increasing by about one for every 1,000 Black inhabitants. Our findings emphasize the importance of federal crime-control strategies in state and local enforcement. Although the EBMGP was a colorblind policy initiative, it was not implemented in a race neutral manner.

The study of Zakini, et.al, (2022), Research on police attitudes and opinions about drugs and drug enforcement is particularly relevant amidst current critiques of policing that put their role into question. This study found that cops have several tasks or 'hats', such as criminal fighter, helper, health responder, and administrator. Wearing 'too many hats' resulted in role tension and strained relationships with the community. The findings emphasize the significance of clearly defining police roles and expectations, as well as providing resources to meet the community's public health and social service requirements.

Jones (2022) study fighting has evolved throughout history in response to the evolution of crime strategies. Undercover operations were one of these strategies, created to counter particular types of criminal activity, starting with government corruption and white-collar crimes. Now, covert operations are used in a variety of other contexts, such as narcotics stings and internet operations that target sexual offenses. Over time, evidence has shown that undercover operations carry a risk of unfavorable psychological toll on the participating officers. Promising adjustments and remedies to some of the fundamental causes of adverse effects have been identified by interacting with previous and current studies.

Increasing training, changing the way law enforcement views mental health, and giving officers access to a range of mental health resources are some of the resolutions included in this list. These alternatives should be explored by law enforcement leadership across the country, as they have the potential to lessen the severity of negative psychological effects experienced by officers who return from undercover operations. To evaluate the efficacy of each suggested remedy and identify any more areas in need of development, it is also advised that additional research be done on this subject.

Nemanja Filipović, Joko, and Dragojlović (2022) study today, one of the unique approaches to combating organized crime is through covert operations, which are crucial legal and criminalistic measures that stem from undercover investigations. An undercover investigator is the most effective covert operations strategy. Undercover agents can stop suspects and members of criminal organizations from committing crimes in the future by carefully preparing every step of the investigation. This is why successful undercover operations are so important.

In Rowe, M., & Søgaaard, T. F.'s study. (2019). Police forces have applied variations of the pulling levers approach to individuals and groups identified with gun crime, drug supply, and other serious offenses. This strategy targets organized criminals, intelligence, and the issues with pulling levers efforts to combat organized crime. Criminal justice agencies and their partners then focus their interventions on those identified persons and their networks. When levers are pushed, numerous agencies' attentions are directed toward offenders, making their life miserable. Therefore, the quality and currency of police intelligence as well as identifying the appropriate individuals for this kind of attention are critical considerations for such methods.

Ready, J., Bottema, A. J., and Telep, C. W. Since October 2014, the Phoenix Police Department has been putting intelligence into patrol operations by using intelligence officers (IOs), an innovative initiative. As part of the program, intelligence officers (IOs) are educated to concentrate on obtaining material, reporting it to intelligence analysts, and utilizing intelligence to address persistent problems in a team environment. We give a synopsis of the intelligence-led police literature that informed the creation of the IO program, outline its implementation efforts thus far, and provide an overview of the program.

Lastly, According to E. Fuentes et al. (2023), a major obstacle is the jeopardization of an officer's personal and family security because they frequently face threats and reversals from drug traffickers. Law enforcement has to act quickly to eradicate drug-related criminality from the community, as seen by the rise in crimes in this area. But individuals who are resistant to cooperation and who might use methods that put the families of the officers in danger pose a threat to law enforcement. Prioritizing surveillance to obtain precise information on suspects and their actions can help police officers tackle these issues.

In Akhmetov and Rysmagambetova (2022) found out the importance of promptly identifying and preventing illegal activities, which reflects the effectiveness of law enforcement agencies. It aims to examine the challenges within Kazakhstan's current legal framework governing operative-investigative activities, especially during situations involving widespread public disorder. The findings suggest a need to enhance the powers of Kazakh law enforcement by implementing special procedures to more effectively carry out these investigative operations (Akhmetov & Rysmagambetova, 2022).

In Dirhamsyah et al. (2022) Maritime law enforcement plays a crucial role for coastal states, as inadequate enforcement can threaten a nation's sovereignty, security, and safety. The frequent maritime crimes in Indonesian waters, particularly illegal fishing, highlight ongoing challenges in upholding maritime security laws. This study explores both international and national legal frameworks governing maritime security and evaluates how Indonesia has structured its maritime security institutions (Dirhamsyah et al., 2022).

In Hofer and Savell (2021) reveals that while police officers face high levels of chronic stress and trauma, numerous barriers prevent them from accessing mental health services. Through interviews with 48 U.S. officers, the research identifies key issues including fear of professional stigma, unclear organizational policies, and a lack of trust in mental health services. Officers emphasized the need for clear, supportive leadership, transparent mental health procedures, and services that are tailored to the realities of police work. The findings call for a cultural shift within police agencies one that promotes resilience, normalizes preventive care, and ensures accessible, confidential, and credible support. These insights offer practical strategies to improve mental health service use and foster well-being in law enforcement (Hofer & Savell, 2021).

2. Problem

This study aimed to delve into the life experiences of the operatives of Philippine National Police Drug Enforcement Unit (PNP-DEU), Second District of Samar, Philippines.

Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the Informants in the performance of their duties?
2. How do the Informants address the problems encountered in the performance of their duties?
3. What are the aspirations of the Informants to improve the performance of their duties?

3. Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a transcendental phenomenological research approach, a type of qualitative research, this research approach has a goal to uncover the structures of consciousness and the basic aspects of human experience. It emphasizes the important of human experience and aims to study phenomena as they appear to consciousness rather than making assumption about external world. It aims to prevent any presuppositions and preconceived notions and approach experience with a pure and open minded (Allan & Marinay, n.d.).

As posited by Creswell (1994) describes qualitative research as "an inquiry process of understanding a social or human problem based on building a complex, holistic picture using words, reporting detailed views of Informants, and conducted in a natural setting" (Creswell, 1994). Yilmaz (2013) defines qualitative research as "an emergent, inductive, interpretive, and

naturalistic approach to the study of people, cases, phenomena, social situations, and processes in their natural settings in order to reveal in descriptive terms the meanings that people attach to their experiences of the world. In this research approach both Creswell, (1994) and Yilmaz (2013) seeks to explore the experiences of PNP intelligence operative in relation to intelligence operation in second district of Samar, focusing on surveillance, information gathering, and operation (Lanka et al., 2021).

3.1 Research Environment

This study was conducted in the Second district of Samar specifically in the City of Catbalogan and Municipalities of Jiabong, Motiong, Paranas, Hinabangan, San Sebastian, Pinabacdao, Calbiga, Villareal, and Daram Samar, Philippines.

The province has a land area of 6,048.03 square kilometers (2,335.16 square miles). The population as of the 2020 Census was 793,183. This accounted for 17.44% of the total population of the Eastern Visayas region, 3.85% of the entire Visayas island group, and 0.73% of the total population of the Philippines. Based on these numbers, the population density is calculated as 131 people per square kilometer or 340 people per square mile. Samar contains 24 municipalities and two cities. The province contains 951 barangays (Samar Profile – PhilAtlas, 1903).

The Samar Police Provincial Office (SPPO) is the main law enforcement agency in Samar province, under the Philippine National Police. It covers 24 municipalities and 2 cities (Catbalogan and Calbayog), addressing both urban and rural policing needs, including insurgency-prone areas. Led by PCOL Antonietto Eric A. Mendoza, SPPO personnel are assigned across local stations and special units. The office is constructing a new ₱29.1M headquarters in Catbalogan to replace its current base in Camp Vicente Lukban. SPPO also promotes public safety through community programs and stakeholder partnerships aligned with PNP's PATROL Plan 2030.

The Catbalogan City Police Station is located at 591 Del Rosario Street, Catbalogan City Proper, Samar, Philippines. Under the leadership of PLTCOL Daryll S. Chua, the station actively engages in law enforcement operations, including anti-drug campaigns and community outreach programs. In 2023, it received three new patrol vehicles to enhance its operational capabilities.

The Jiabong Municipal Police Station is situated in Jiabong, Samar, Philippines. While specific details about the number of personnel are not publicly disclosed, the station is actively involved in maintaining peace and order in the municipality. Notably, in March 2022, Jiabong police operatives were involved in a successful operation that led to the neutralization of two New People's Army (NPA) leaders who had engaged government forces in a firefight.

The Motiong Municipal Police Station, located in Motiong, Samar, actively serves the municipality through law enforcement operations. While the exact number of personnel is not publicly available, the station has been involved in significant activities such as arresting wanted individuals (Samar News, 2012) and responding to security threats, including a deadly ambush on its officers in 2019 (SunStar, 2019).

The Paranas Municipal Police Station is located along the National Road, Brgy. Zone 4, Paranas, Samar. Led by PCPT Manuel O. Ricalde Jr., it operates from a two-story facility built in 2013. While personnel numbers are not public, the station is active in law enforcement and community events.

The Hinabangan Municipal Police Station is located in Barangay Rawis, Hinabangan, Samar. While the exact number of personnel isn't publicly stated, past reports indicate a small but dedicated force. The station actively conducts operations, including the 2025 arrest of a top most wanted person.

San Sebastian is a coastal municipality in the province of Samar. The San Sebastian Municipal Police Station is located in San Sebastian, Samar. While the exact number of personnel is not publicly available, the station is actively involved in law enforcement, including environmental protection efforts. It serves a population of around 8,700

Calbiga is a fourth-class coastal municipality in Samar province, comprising 41 barangays. The Calbiga Municipal Police Station is located along Rizal Street, near the Calbiga Municipal Hall, in Calbiga, Samar, Eastern Visayas. While specific personnel numbers are not publicly disclosed, the station actively participates in law enforcement operations, including the apprehension of individuals involved in illegal activities such as logging and fishing. Additionally, the station collaborates with other security forces in counter-insurgency efforts.

Villareal is a coastal municipality in the province of Samar. The municipality covers 98.54 square kilometers (38.05 square miles), accounting for 1.63% of Samar's total territory. The population as of the 2020 Census was 27,394. The Villareal Municipal Police Station serves the municipality of Villareal in Samar, Philippines, which has a population of approximately 27,394 as of the 2020 census. While specific personnel numbers are not publicly disclosed, the station operates under the Samar Police Provincial Office, headquartered at Camp Lukban in Catbalogan City.

Pinabacdao is a fourth-class coastal municipality in Samar, comprising 24 barangays. The municipality covers an area of 183.06 miles, or 70.68 square kilometers, or 3.03% of Samar's total land area. As of the 2015 census, the population was 18,252. The Pinabacdao Municipal Police Station is located along the National Road in Pinabacdao, Samar, Philippines (ZIP code: 6716). While specific data on the number of personnel is not publicly available, the station is actively engaged in law enforcement and public administration activities.

Daram is a third-class coastal municipality in Samar province, organized into 58 barangays. It covers 140.26 m² (54.15 m²) and accounts for 2.32 percent of Samar's territory. The 2015 Census recorded 42,879 persons. The Daram Municipal Police Station is located in Barangay Poblacion 1, Daram, Samar, Philippines. Under the leadership of PLTCOL Norman D. Ala, the station actively engages in various law enforcement activities, including anti-illegal fishing operations, crime prevention patrols, and community outreach programs.

3.2 Research Informants

The Informants of this study were 10 selected police officers assigned in the Drug Enforcement unit with at least two (2) years experiences in the drug intelligence operation of the research environment, where all of the Informants will be for individual interview. Informants will be recognized as they attain at least two (2) years in PNP service, at least one (1) year in intelligence operation under PNP Drug enforcement group special operation units (PDEG SOUs) or in Drug enforcement unit (DEUs) of LPUs, and has relevant training in intelligence operation or relevant training to drug enforcement. Those who did not qualify were automatically excluded as Informants.

3.3 Research Instruments

As part of the research methodology, the investigator prepared an interview guide, a standard instrument used in qualitative research to enable in-depth investigation of participant experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017). This guide comprised open-ended questions designed to provide Informants with the freedom to express their perceptions and experiences about their life satisfaction through medical and welfare services.

Creswell and Poth (2017) define open-ended questions as inquiries that allow respondents to explain and understand experiences and events that influence their life happiness. These questions allow Informants to provide thorough, nuanced responses, which can produce valuable data for research.

In preparation, Interview guide will be validated by the panel and Ethical review committee. The instrument is composed of three parts; Part I: What are the experiences of the Informants in the performance of their duties? Part II: How do the Informants address the problems encountered in the performance of their duties? Part III: What are the aspirations of the Informants to improve the performance of their duties?

3.4 Research Procedure

Data Collection. Prior to data collection, the letter will be address to the Dean of the graduate school, requesting permission to conduct the study outside of the school. In addition, the letter will address to the Provincial Director of the Samar Provincial Police Office, requesting authorization to perform the research study in his area of responsibility. After approval of letters, and data administration will begin. The data will acquire through personal interviews with the Informants. Each informant will be interview for at least 30 minutes and no more than 45 minutes. An audio recorder will use to accurately document the information gathering. After which, a transcript of the individual interview will be created.

Data Analysis. This study uses Phenomenological research utilizing thematic analysis, qualitative research method that aims to comprehend and characterize the universal essence of a phenomenon. The technique explores people's everyday experiences while suspending the researchers' previous notions about the phenomenon. In other words, phenomenology research focuses on lived experiences in order to acquire a better understanding of how people interpret them. Thematic analysis is a way of studying qualitative data that entails reading over a set of data and looking for patterns in its meaning to identify themes. It is an active reflexive process in which the researcher's subjective experience is crucial to understanding the facts. Thematic analysis is used in qualitative research. It focuses on detecting, analyzing, and interpreting qualitative data patterns. This study allows for a specific look at qualitative data. It is commonly used to denote a collection of texts, such as an interview or transcripts. The researcher examines the data closely to identify recurring themes, such as recurrent ideas, subjects, or ways of expressing something (Villegas, 2022).

3.5 Ethical Considerations

Regarding the study's ethical aspects, confidentiality and privacy were strictly adhered to. There was no disclosure of the Informants' names or other identifying information. The Informants had been handed a consent form. This consent also forms the basis for the Informants' voluntary engagement. Furthermore, the Informants will be informed about the potential risks and benefits associated with the study's conduct.

Beneficence. It is authoritative to ensure that the research contributes positively to the welfare and well-being of the Drug Enforcement officers of the 2nd District of Samar. This entails conducting the research with sensitivity and respect towards the experiences and challenges faced by Drug enforcement officers, while also highlighting their invaluable contributions to fight against illegal drugs. Moreover, any findings derived from the research should be utilized to inform policies and practices aimed at enhancing the effectiveness of the combating drug by the Drug Enforcement Unit officers' initiatives, thereby furthering the goal of having a Drug-Free environment.

Non-maleficence. On the other hand, the researcher will identify and mitigate any potential dangers or negative effects of the Informants' engagement. This includes safeguarding the Informants' privacy and anonymity, especially given the sensitive nature of their work and the potential implications of releasing their identities or experiences without consent. Furthermore, the researcher will ensure that the methods used to collect data and conduct research do not unintentionally subject Informants to additional stress or trauma, and that appropriate channels of support are in place to address any adverse reactions or emotional distress that may arise during the Informants' participation.

Justice. Furthermore, it is important to ensure that Drug Enforcement officers in the 2nd District of Samar are provided with unbiased opportunities to participate in the study, regardless of their position, affiliation, or background. This entails using inclusive recruitment techniques, making the goals and methods of the research easily accessible, and taking into account the various requirements and preferences of Informants in order to enable their meaningful participation. Similarly, the researcher will also take into account the wider result of their conclusions and suggestions, working to improve programs in combating drug and addressing underlying issues and challenges as part of Drug Enforcement Unit.

Autonomy. Finally, the researcher will respect the Informants' autonomy by obtaining their voluntary and informed consent before incorporating them in the study. This requires providing Informants with comprehensive information about the study's objectives, risks, benefits, and techniques, as well as allowing them to ask questions and get explanations as needed. It also involves respecting their ability to withdraw from the study at any moment without repercussions. Additionally, the researcher will consider power dynamics.

3.6 Trustworthiness of Research

To guarantee the study's reliability, credibility, dependability, transferability, and conformability are being monitored. The study's credibility was maintained by collecting all data from credible sources. Furthermore, the interview had been performed at the convenience of the Informants. The researcher ensured that all of the Informants' responses were based on their own experiences and perceptions.

Credibility. Credibility is determined by whether the study's findings accurately depict the events that took place within its purview and by the researcher's comprehension of the material they were attempting to gather. It also involves reflexivity being used to prevent Informants' presumptions, recording any partiality that may have occurred, and how information is interpreted and disseminated.

During the initial stages of the study, I also shared with the Informants my own experiences related to the analysis along with the main goal of the research and methodology. My Informants agreed to the interview process, so I carried on with the interview.

Dependability. All information, including significant significances, clusters, and evolving patterns, will be double-checked and validated to ensure that the results are consistent with the raw data collected and processed. I must ensure that other researchers can reach identical conclusions, observations, or findings while studying the evidence.

Transferability. Transferability refers to the extent to which the research findings can be adapted or used to different contexts or settings. From a qualitative standpoint, transferability is primarily the responsibility of the person conducting the generalizing. This study will use detailed descriptions of the research background and assumptions. This way, other researchers will be able to use this research in their own studies that may be connected to this one.

Confirmability. Compliance with the retention of original transcripts will be ensured, as will the use of audit trails. As with the coding process, original transcripts will be reviewed by my mentor and a well-known community relations expert. I used categorization as the source of the audit trail to provide easy and accurate information access. In this regard, anyone planning to undertake comparable research can confirm or corroborate the findings of the proposed study.

Bracketing and Reflexivity. As a researcher conducting this study, i do aware that as a Filipino citizen of the Philippines may influence my perception and ideas throughout my research process. Growing up in the Philippine culture context has shape my belief and values, which may inevitably impact on how i approach mt data collection, analysis and perception. i strive to be aware of my biases and actively engage in reflexivity to ensure that my personal experiences will not unduly influence the finding of this study. I will regularly reflect on my professionalism and strive to maintain objectivity and rigor in all aspects of the research process.

4. Findings

Upon meticulous data collection from the Informants, nine distinct themes emerged. These themes were crafted to encapsulate various facets of the informant's experiences and aspirations, as well as strategies for implementing programs against insurgencies.

The first set themes address the experiences of the experiences of the Informants in their performance of duties. Among these, *Community Dynamics and Influence, Operative Motivation and Ethical Consideration, Risks and Burdens of the Job, and Systematic and Institutional Factors*.

In terms of Informants address with the problems encountered in the performance of their duties, three themes were generated. *Operational Integrity and Efficiency, The Planning of illegal Drug Operations and The Influence of Technology*.

Finally, in terms of the aspirations of the Informants to improve the performance of their duties, two theme was crafted: *Drug Control and Mitigation Strategies, Boosting Number of Personnel and Proper Funding*.

5. Conclusion

This research examined the experiences of PNP Drug Enforcement Unit operatives in the Second District of Samar, emphasizing the successes and difficulties they face while carrying

out their responsibilities. Thematic analysis showed that operatives find motivation in community backing, successful missions, and a strong commitment to safeguard their families and the public. Simultaneously, the results revealed the substantial dangers, emotional strains, and organizational failings that these officers encounter, such as risks to personal security, insufficient operational resources, procedural shortcomings, and systemic inefficiencies. These real-life encounters illustrate the intricate and challenging aspects of drug intelligence operations, highlighting the vital part these agents have in the government's counter-narcotics efforts. Additionally, the research emphasized the significance of strategic planning, collaboration among agencies, and community involvement in reaching successful drug enforcement outcomes. Informants conveyed desires for enhanced training, greater funding, and additional staff to aid their missions. The findings emphasize not only the courage and determination of these officers but also the necessity for institutional changes that focus on their well-being, career growth, and operational efficiency. This research offers valuable insights into the realities of grassroots law enforcement and serves as a foundation for enhancing policy, support mechanisms, and public awareness regarding drug enforcement initiatives in the context of the Philippines.

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