

# Lived Experiences of Therapeutic Community Modality Program Residents: A Phenomenology

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## Abstract

The phenomenological qualitative study explored the lived experiences of eight PDLs who were enrolled in the TCMP across eight BJMP-managed facilities in Cagayan Province. Individual one-on-one semi-structured interviews were held, and the participants' responses were recorded verbatim. Furthermore, transcripts were then analyzed using Braun and Clarke's Thematic Analysis and four our significant themes were identified: (1) personal growth and self-transformation, (2) improved communication and confidence, (3) emotional release and reflection, and (4) strengthened brotherhood and social support. Participants recounted substantial behavioral changes, such as better discipline, emotional regulation, patience, and lessened aggression. In addition, interpersonal outcomes of the participants were better cooperation, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and deeper relational bonds. Strengths of TCMP, as recognized, were the emotional healing, structured routines, and spiritual grounding, whereas the weaknesses were the overcrowding, limited staff, inconsistent implementation, and insufficient program materials. These discoveries underscore the effectiveness of TCMP in engendering holistic rehabilitation even in congested and resource-limited settings. Nevertheless, there is a need to address the structural constraints if the program fidelity and sustainability are to be maximized. This research suggests that facilitator training be enhanced, facility infrastructure improved, psychosocial support strengthened, and post-release follow-up systems institutionalized. In brief, this study serves as a real-world example of TCMP's value in rehabilitation and is a source of credible directions for policy change in the Philippine correctional system.

**Keywords:** *Behavioral Transformation, BJMP, Persons Deprived of Liberty, Rehabilitation, Therapeutic Community, Phenomenology, Qualitative research*



## I. INTRODUCTION

As a global trend, correctional facilities are switching from harsh systems based on punishment to more humane and rehabilitative ones, which still impose consequences, but focus on the change of the inmate's behavior and their return to society. Among these, the Adoption of the Therapeutic Community Model has become one of the most popular programs that promotes behavioral accountability and long-term personal change. The implementation of rehabilitative interventions in jails of the Philippines is overshadowed by the chronic overcrowding of jails, limited resourcing, and the increasing count of PDLs.

On the one side, this situation contributes to the bad mental health of the PDLs, while on the other, it keeps the public from benefiting from the activities that are meant to prepare them for their return to the community. BJMP institutionalized TCMP as a core reformation strategy. The different spheres of emotional, intellectual, and social development are reflected in the activities of the daily routines, encounter groups, value formation, and spiritual development, whereby the TCMP is expected to impart to the PDLs concepts like emotional resilience, discipline, and social responsibility. The latest BJMP evaluations show that the TCMP is a great vehicle through which the PDLs can experience personal accountability, moral renewal, and improved interpersonal functioning (BJMP, 2022; BJMP Regional Office II, 2023).

While different BJMP facilities have incorporated therapeutic communities (TCMP) into their reformation programs, the implementation of these programs still varies due to differences in personnel training, facility capacity, and the availability of psychosocial support services. Studies in Europe, Asia, and Latin America have shown the transformative potential of therapeutic communities in correctional settings (Vandeveldt et al., 2017; Grossi & Augelli, 2025). However, there is very little empirical evidence in the Philippines, particularly studies based on the experiences of PDLs actively participating in TCMP. Several local studies (e.g., Rubio et al., 2024; Teves, 2023; Luceño, 2024) indicate that the therapeutic community program in correctional facilities (TCMP) helps improve communication, emotional stability, and moral reflection; however, these studies also acknowledge that overcrowding, few counseling staff, and irregular program reinforcement remain to be the major challenges in the area.



Such deficiencies indicate that TCMP results need to be examined from a phenomenological perspective, where PDLs describe their experiences of behavioral, emotional, and social changes despite the limitations of local correctional environments. Grasping these lived experiences is key to evaluating how peer influence, structured routines, leadership roles, and spiritual reflection, as the main elements of TCMP, affect the rehabilitation dynamics in under-resourced provincial jails. This kind of evidence is crucial in steering policy changes that are in line with the country's priorities such as the Department of the Interior and Local Government's (DILG) emphasis on humane, rights-based corrections and the Philippine Development Plan's objectives of restorative justice and reintegration.

Consequently, this research delves into the lived experiences of PDLs who are going through the TCMP in eight BJMP-managed facilities in Cagayan Province. The study of the emotional, behavioral, and social aspects of their rehabilitation journeys hopes to offer a grounded empirical evaluation of the effectiveness of the TCMP. It also maps out the program's strengths and weaknesses, and through evidence-based recommendations, it propels the enhancement of implementation fidelity, staff capability, and institutional support. In essence, this research aligns with local and international dialogues on humane rehabilitation by showing how the therapeutic community model can facilitate change even in the most overcrowded carceral environments.

## **II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **Research Design**

This research used a qualitative phenomenological design to uncover the lived experiences of PDLs during TCMP. Phenomenology is a suitable approach for obtaining deep, subjective, and personal transformational meanings (Moustakas, 1994). It opens the door for the investigation of emotional, behavioral, and social changes in a natural correctional environment.

### **Participants**

Eight PDLs who were in TCMP for at least three months were purposely selected from eight BJMP facilities in Cagayan Province: Tuguegarao Male and Female Dorms, Tuao, Lal-lo,



Gattaran, Aparri, Sta. Teresita, and Ballesteros jails. The inclusion criteria ensured that participants were mentally stable, willing to share their experiences, and actively engaged in TCMP. One participant from each facility ensured diverse representation.

### **Data Gathering Procedures**

After getting BJMP Region II approval and UCV-IRB ethical clearance, the researcher conducted one-on-one semi-structured interviews with the participants in a private room in each facility. With the consent of the interviewees, the sessions were audio-recorded. They were then transcribed verbatim and subjected to participant validation through member checking. Each participant was given the opportunity to review his/her transcript for accuracy and authenticity.

### **Data Analysis**

Thematic analysis was the chosen method of data evaluation in this study as per the Braun & Clarke's (2006) procedure. The researchers carried out open coding, axial coding, and thematic clustering manually to locate the themes that were repeated in different narratives. Cross-checking, constant comparison, and participant feedback were the methods through which the themes were verified, thus, the study's trustworthiness and rigor were ensured.

## **III. RESULT and DISCUSSION**

Table 1. Lived Experiences of PDLs Under TCMP

<b>Emergent Themes</b>	<b>Experience Descriptors from PDL Narratives</b>
<b>Personal Growth &amp; Self-Transformation</b>	Discipline, acceptance, patience, moral reflection
<b>Improved Communication &amp; Confidence</b>	Overcoming shyness, responsible expression, public speaking
<b>Emotional Release &amp; Reflection</b>	Emotional catharsis, crying as healing, spiritual grounding
<b>Brotherhood &amp; Social Support</b>	Camaraderie, unity, cooperation, peer encouragement



The firsthand experiences of the PDLs illustrate a multidimensional change that was made possible through TCMP. In a very consistent manner, the participants referred to the program as a path to self-discovery and moral reconstruction, whereby they had an opportunity to look over their past and take healthier patterns of behavior. In the same way, communication got better through the repeated involvement in group sharing and hosting activities, whereby the PDLs were able to acquire the necessary skills to express their ideas in a clear and confident manner. The emotional release which among other things involved crying, sharing, and silent reflection, was very instrumental in providing psychological relief. In the end, brotherhood was very important when the PDLs started depending on each other for support, guidance, and shared responsibility—thus forming a micro-community which was “family-like” in nature inside the jail.

Table 2. Behavioral and Emotional Changes Experienced by PDLs Under TCMP

<b>Change Category</b>	<b>Specific Indicators Observed in Narratives</b>
<b>Improved Discipline &amp; Self-Control</b>	Adherence to routines; reduced impulsivity; thinking before acting
<b>Enhanced Patience &amp; Tolerance</b>	Increased calmness; avoidance of conflict; greater understanding of others
<b>Emotional Stability &amp; Regulation</b>	Reduced anger; clarity of thinking; emotional calmness
<b>Spiritual Renewal</b>	Strengthened faith; moral reflection; reliance on prayer
<b>Reduced Aggression</b>	Less hostile reactions; respect for others; peaceful behavior
<b>Greater Self-Awareness</b>	Insight into past mistakes; understanding personal triggers

The data from table 2 reveals that the treatment program at TCMP was instrumental in bringing about major changes in the behavior and emotions of those who took part, the most dominant being the changes of discipline, patience, and emotional stability. The inmates benefited from the daily disciplined routines of the program by controlling their impulses and lessening their anger. The spiritual aspects gave the inmates a sense of morality and peace. Less violence and better self-awareness show that the therapy not only changed the outward behaviors



but also deepened the emotional nature of the patients. Personal regulation and emotional maturity in a custodial environment where stressors are typically high are, in fact, the program's major accomplishments.

Table 3. Interpersonal and Social Outcomes of TCMP

<b>Outcome Category</b>	<b>Observed Indicators</b>
<b>Improved Communication</b>	Active listening, clear speaking, reduced misunderstandings
<b>Stronger Cooperation</b>	Shared tasks, teamwork, willingness to help peers
<b>Conflict Reduction</b>	Calm resolution, avoidance of fights, mutual respect
<b>Brotherhood &amp; Unity</b>	Collective identity, empathy, trust, daily collaboration

The results show that the intervention through the TCMP had a significant positive effect on the PDLs' interpersonal relationships. One of the main features of improved communication was the engagement of the parties in habitual hosting, group discussions, and receiving feedback in a structured manner. Participants learnt to express their ideas in a polite manner and hence there was a noticeable decrease in the cases of misunderstanding between communication and also lessening of the personal tension. More cooperation was revealed when PDLs took up joint activities and responsibilities, thus helping each other in cleaning, organizing and dorm processes. The demonstration of conflict reduction illustrated how the TCMP through the ability it has to bring calm and understanding to the participants' character had them reporting quieter affairs and more peaceful settlements. Brotherhood and togetherness appeared as one of the core aspects of the TCMP, thereby being a major source of emotional safety, trust, and shared accountability in the dorms.



Table 4. Strengths and Weaknesses of TCMP Identified by Participants

STRENGTHS	WEAKNESSES
Emotional Healing	Overcrowding
Discipline & Structure	Limited Staff
Brotherhood & Support	Inconsistent Activities
Spiritual Development	Lack of Materials

Most of the participants came up with various strengths of the TCMP, among which was the promotion of healing, discipline, and unity. The structured routines and daily activities helped create an environment that was very conducive to reflection and behavioral change. Spiritual development, which was highly emphasized during the values formation, was also a great support to emotional resilience. However, it faced some challenges, for example, overcrowding, which made it difficult to conduct activities that required space for movement or privacy. Limited staffing made it difficult to have more trained facilitators, while across facilities, the different levels of implementation affected program reliability. These limitations highlight that the success of TCMP is deeply dependent on the availability of resources and the consistency of operations within the institution.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

First and foremost, evidence attests the Therapeutic Community Modality Program (TCMP) is a major factor that raises behavioral, emotional and social changes of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) in eight BJMP facilities in Cagayan Province. Those who underwent the program recounted changes in their traits such as discipline, self-awareness, emotional regulation, communication skills, and even a deeper sense of brotherhood, thus proving the efficiency of TCMP in providing holistic rehabilitation in densely-packed prisons. The attributes of the program—like emotional healing, engaging in the routine, and spiritual development—are just a few pieces of evidence that demonstrate TCMP's enormous potential to foster pro-social behavior and to help PDLs develop the necessary skills to cope with the situation in a healthy manner. On the other hand, the perpetuation of systemic barriers such as overcrowding, lack of



enough trained personnel, irregular implementation, and scarcity of materials has led to waning program fidelity as well as sustainability. In conclusion, the PDLs' firsthand accounts show that the TCMP is still the most effective strategy of reform in the BJMP system, however, it will take institutional strengthening and policy-supported provision of resources for its sustained success, which in turn, will lead to the full realization of rehabilitation outcomes and the smooth post-release reintegration of the PDLs.

## V. RECOMMENDATION

If the BJMP and partner agencies want to make the TCMP more effective and have a consistent rehabilitative impact, they should first focus on capacity-building initiatives. These include increasing the number of TCMP facilitators who are well-trained and ensuring that all facilities have the same implementation standards. Besides that, infrastructure improvements such as having dedicated TCMP spaces, sufficient materials, and less congestion are necessary for the emotional safety of the participants and for maintaining a therapeutic environment. The emotional and behavioral changes may be further supported through the reinforcement of more psychosocial support services like counseling, mental health assessments, and peer-led mentoring. Moreover, the evolution of well-organized post-release follow-up programs and the establishment of partnerships with LGUs, CSOs, and faith-based organizations will help in the continuity of care and the lowering of relapse or recidivism rates. At last, the establishment of regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms should be part of the institution's agenda to evaluate TCMP fidelity, to record the best practices, and to be a guide for policy changes based on the evidence aiming at humane, restorative, and sustainable rehabilitation results.

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