

Understanding the Lived Experiences of Children in Conflict with Law Undergoing the Rehabilitation Process

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ABSTRACT

With the current status of the CICL in the Philippines, rehabilitation centers have various challenges. In this study, the researcher explored the lived experiences of Children in Conflict with Law undergoing Rehabilitation Process, using qualitative methods. Respondents were 19 children in conflict with the law in two (2) rehabilitation centers: five (5) at Bahay Pag-Asa in San Juan and (14) at Marillac Hills. A semi-structured interview was administered and analyzed through Thematic Analysis. The validity of the theme was analyzed using a triangulation method.

Result showed eight (8) major themes including emotional impact of institution/rehabilitation, positive impact of the facility, feedback and suggestions for improvement, disrupted family structures and attachment issues, social environment as a catalyst for criminality, psychosocial maladaptation and identity struggles, economic hardship and survival strategies, and emotional despair and psychological distress, which altogether comes with twenty-four (24) subthemes.

Keywords: Children In Conflict with Law (CICL), rehabilitation process, Juvenile Justice System, restorative justice, psychosocial factors, mental health, and psychological intervention.

1. INTRODUCTION

Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) represent a vulnerable population worldwide, facing significant legal, psychological, and social challenges. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021), millions of children get to face with the criminal justice system each year, often due to socio-economic marginalization, abuse, or lack of access to education and welfare services. Similarly, the United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF, 2020) reports that approximately one million children are held in detention globally at any given time, many of whom experience inhumane conditions, rights violations, and inadequate rehabilitation opportunities.

The juvenile justice system in Asia varies significantly between countries, yet common challenges include overcrowded detention centers, punitive rather than rehabilitative approaches, and limited access to legal representation (Human Rights Watch, 2022). In South and Southeast Asia, economic disparities, armed conflicts, and migration patterns have contributed to an increasing number of children engaging in unlawful activities (UNICEF, 2021). In India, for instance, the National Crime Records Bureau (2019) reported over 35,000 cases involving juveniles in conflict with the law, with a significant proportion linked to socio-economic deprivation. Furthermore, some Asian countries continue to impose severe penalties on juvenile offenders, exacerbating psychological trauma and limiting rehabilitation opportunities.

The Philippines presents a particularly pressing case concerning CICL. The Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act (RA 9344), passed in 2006 and later amended in 2013, aimed to establish a more rehabilitative approach to juvenile justice (Juvenile Justice and Welfare Council, 2019). However, despite these legal protections, an estimated 11,000 children are in detention facilities or rehabilitation centers annually (Save the Children Philippines, 2021). Reports indicate that many detained children experience abuse, neglect, and inadequate legal representation, which further exacerbates their vulnerability rather than fostering reintegration into society (Terre des Hommes, 2020).

Historically, the juvenile justice system has evolved to focus on rehabilitation rather than punishment. The first juvenile court was founded in Chicago in 1899, with the goal of rehabilitating children under the legal doctrine of *parens patriae*, which emphasizes state responsibility in guiding delinquent minors (Demsey, 2021). This principle remains central in contemporary juvenile justice frameworks, underscoring the need for interventions that prioritize personal growth, skill development, and behavioral transformation in young offenders (Abraham et al., 2020). Studies suggest that holding children accountable while providing support structures is crucial in helping them reintegrate into society and prevent recidivism.

A key aspect of juvenile delinquency involves social influences and environmental conditions. Research indicates that peer pressure, economic hardship, and family dysfunction significantly contribute to delinquent behaviors among CICL (Tudtud et al., 2017). Many children involved in criminal activities come from impoverished backgrounds, where financial struggles, domestic violence, and lack of parental guidance create an environment conducive to delinquency. Without proper support, these children may seek belonging in negative peer groups, leading them further into unlawful behaviors (Cortel, 2020).

Beyond economic and social factors, psychological trauma plays a significant role in juvenile delinquency. Many CICL have experienced abuse, neglect, or exposure to violence, leading to emotional distress and behavioral issues (Mwangangi, 2019). However, rehabilitation centers often lack adequate mental health services, exacerbating these conditions and making reintegration more difficult (Fabre et al., 2016). Studies indicate that depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) are common among CICL, yet mental health interventions remain insufficiently integrated into juvenile justice programs (Dizon, 2020).

Despite the existing literatures on juvenile justice, comprehensive research exploring the psychological and social dimensions of CICL's experiences remains limited. While legal frameworks and crime statistics are well-documented, there is a lack of qualitative insights into the personal narratives of CICL and the psychosocial factors influencing their rehabilitation (Oppus & Trabajo, 2019). Moreover, the impact of trauma, mental health disorders, and resilience in their rehabilitation require further exploration within the field of clinical psychology.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) emphasize the need to address juvenile delinquency, particularly SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions), which advocates for equitable access to justice. Additionally, SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-being) and SDG 4 (Quality Education) address the root causes that often lead children into unlawful behaviors, such as mental health issues and lack of access to education (United Nations, 2015). Understanding the lived experiences of CICL is essential to informing evidence-based interventions that align with these global development goals.

This study aims to fill these gaps by providing an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of CICL in the Philippines through qualitative methods. The research objectives include examining the psychological and emotional impact of legal encounters and detention, assessing the role of social and familial factors in juvenile delinquency, evaluating the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs, and

contributing new insights into trauma-informed care within juvenile justice systems. By addressing these research gaps, this study aligns with national and international efforts to improve juvenile justice policies, promote children's rights, and enhance mental health interventions for at-risk youth. The findings will offer valuable contributions to clinical psychology by expanding knowledge on trauma and resilience in juvenile offenders, informing policy recommendations for more effective interventions, and advocating for culturally sensitive mental health programs tailored for CICL.

2. EXPERIMENTAL METHOD/S

Method of Research

This study employed a qualitative research approach, which is appropriate for exploring the lived experiences of children in conflict with the law. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences rather than seeking generalizable truths (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). According to Merriam (1998), qualitative research is particularly valuable for capturing insights, meanings, and interpretations that emerge from real-life contexts.

The study utilized a phenomenological research design, which is commonly used in qualitative research to explore lived experiences (Creswell, 2013). A phenomenological approach helps researchers understand how individuals make sense of their experiences by focusing on their perceptions, emotions, and social interactions (Van Manen, 1990). This approach aligns with the study's goal of gaining deep insight into the realities faced by children in conflict with the law.

Through this methodology, the researcher was able to collect rich, descriptive data from participants, leading to the formulation of practical conclusions and recommendations that contribute to both academic knowledge and policy development. The qualitative approach was particularly useful in highlighting individual narratives and contextual factors, which may not be adequately captured through quantitative methods (Patton, 2002).

Population, Sample Size, and Sampling Technique

This study focused on understanding the lived experiences of children in conflict with the law who were residing in rehabilitation and youth care facilities at the time of the research. The study included 19 participants, aged 13 to 22, consisting of five males and fourteen females. These participants had been legally accused or found guilty of violating Philippine laws and were undergoing rehabilitation programs. To select participants, the researcher employed purposive sampling, a non-probability sampling method chosen to align with the study's objectives and the specific characteristics of the target population. This approach, also referred to as subjective, judgmental, or selective sampling, ensured that individuals with relevant experiences were included in the research (Crossman, 2020). Unlike convenience sampling, which selects participants based on accessibility, purposive sampling strategically identified respondents who could provide meaningful insights into the psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of juvenile rehabilitation.

Sources of Data

The primary sources of data for this study were nineteen (19) children in conflict with the law (CICL) residing in youth rehabilitation and care facilities. Under Philippine law, CICL refers to a child who has been accused of, charged with, or found guilty of committing an offense. This includes any individual under the age of 18 who has come into contact with the justice system due to criminal suspicion or accusations.

The study included fourteen (14) female participants and five (5) male participants from different youth

care and rehabilitation facilities. These participants provided firsthand insights into their experiences within the juvenile justice system and rehabilitation programs, contributing valuable perspectives to the research

Instrumentation

For this study, the researcher utilized a semi-structured interview as the primary method of data collection. This approach allowed for a flexible yet guided conversation, ensuring that key topics were covered while also providing participants the opportunity to share their experiences in depth. The interview questions focused on the lived experiences of children in conflict with the law (CICL) within the program.

To ensure the accuracy, clarity, and relevance of the research instrument, the questionnaire was reviewed and validated by three licensed professionals. Their expertise contributed to refining the questions, ensuring that they effectively captured meaningful insights while adhering to ethical and methodological standards. This validation process helped enhance the credibility and reliability of the study, ensuring that the data collected provided a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher implemented rigorous ethical protocols to ensure the confidentiality, privacy, and rights of all participants. To protect the collected data, all information was promptly transferred to secure storage, accessible only to the researcher, thereby minimizing the risk of unauthorized access. Informed consent was strictly observed, with participants being thoroughly briefed about the study's purpose, procedures, and ethical safeguards. Consent forms were signed with the assistance of a social worker, ensuring that participants fully understood their rights. They were explicitly informed that they could skip any questions that made them uncomfortable and were not required to respond to any inquiry. Furthermore, participants had the right to withdraw from the study at any time, in which case their responses were immediately destroyed to prevent data leaks. Anonymity was strictly maintained, and no identifying information was disclosed, safeguarding the privacy of all respondents.

To formally comply with ethical research requirements, the researcher submitted a request for approval to the University Research Ethics Committee (UREC) before conducting the study. Upon receiving approval, permission was sought from relevant institutions and organizations to carry out the research. A formal request was sent to youth care and rehabilitation facilities to obtain authorization for data collection.

Additionally, the researcher sought approval from the local government unit and the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) to conduct interviews with CICL participants. A formal letter, endorsed by the research adviser, was sent to the head of the local social development department, outlining the study's objectives and ensuring adherence to ethical guidelines. The request included an informed consent document, emphasizing the confidentiality of participants and their rights. Once approval was granted, the researcher proceeded with the interview process.

In addition, a formal request letter was also submitted to the regional office of DSWD, endorsed by the research adviser. The request included a research brief, which provided details such as the study's title, background, objectives, target population, methodology, ethical considerations, and project timeline. Additionally, a research request form was completed, detailing the study's objectives, target respondents, research instruments, and ethical protocols. This request was reviewed and signed by the program chairperson, research adviser, and the researcher. Prior to final approval, a copy of the research manuscript and questionnaire was submitted for evaluation. Through these comprehensive ethical measures, the researcher ensured that all legal and ethical standards were met, prioritizing the confidentiality, rights, and well-being of the participants while maintaining academic integrity throughout the study. Seven of

respondents are under the age of eighteen which is minor but voluntarily signed our informed consent to fully participate with the study, and with the approval of DSWD, social worker, & houseparent as legal guardian in the said facility.

Tradition of Inquiry and Data Generation Method:

This study employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) method for Thematic Analysis, a widely used approach for identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns within qualitative data. Thematic analysis was chosen for its flexibility and accessibility, making it particularly suitable for novice researchers. This method allowed the researcher to systematically extract key themes from participants' responses, offering valuable insights into the lived experiences of children in conflict with the law. While thematic analysis effectively captured major patterns in the data, it also required careful consideration to ensure that individual voices were not overshadowed by dominant themes.

Braun and Clarke's Six Phases of Thematic Analysis guided the data analysis process, ensuring a structured and rigorous approach:

Familiarization with the Data – The researcher began by thoroughly reviewing the collected data, repeatedly reading the transcripts to gain an in-depth understanding. The authenticity of transcripts was verified by cross-checking them with the original audio recordings to ensure accuracy.

Generating Initial Codes – After becoming familiar with the data, the researcher identified preliminary patterns by assigning initial codes to relevant excerpts. These codes captured meaningful features of the data and served as the foundation for later theme development.

Searching for Themes – At this stage, individual codes were examined collectively to identify broader themes. Codes with shared meanings were grouped together, forming potential themes that reflected significant patterns across the dataset. Relevant data excerpts were then gathered under each theme for further analysis.

Reviewing Themes – The researcher refined the initial themes by assessing their coherence and relevance. Some themes were combined, modified, or discarded if they lacked sufficient supporting data or did not align with the overall research objectives. This iterative process ensured that the final themes accurately represented the dataset.

Defining and Naming Themes – Once the themes were finalized, the researcher defined the core essence of each theme and clarified its scope and meaning. This step involved refining the themes to ensure they were specific, well-defined, and supported by relevant data excerpts. The goal was to avoid overly broad or ambiguous themes, ensuring a clear and precise thematic structure.

Producing the Report – In the final stage, the researcher compiled the findings into a coherent and compelling narrative, presenting the themes in a structured and meaningful way. The report included representative excerpts from participant responses to support the analysis, ensuring that the findings were both credible and insightful. The thematic analysis aimed to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences, highlighting the psychological, emotional, and social aspects of juvenile rehabilitation.

Triangulation Method

Researcher interview & Transcribe



Validation of theme as per respondents DSWD Personnel

The researcher used triangulation method to validate the reliability and validity of the themes results and minimized the possible biased of the research, increased the credibility of the themes mentioned in this study, & gain a comprehensive understanding to the experiences of Children in Conflict with the Law. The themes come from 3 perspective, researcher interview & transcribe, from respondents & from DSWD personnel before finalizing the said themes.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participants

Category	Subcategory	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	5	21.1
	Female	14	78.9
	Total	19	100
Age	13-15	1	5.3
	16-18	6	31.6
	19-21	10	52.6
	22 & Above	2	10.5
	Total	19	100
Sources of Admission	DSWD	14	73.7
	PNP	5	26.3
	Total	19	100
Length of Stay	1 Month – 1 Year	8	42.2
	1 Year – 2 Years	5	26.3
	2 Years & Above	6	31.6
	Total	19	100
Educational Attainment	Elementary	3	15
	High School	3	15
	Senior High School	13	70
	Total	19	100
Offense Committed	Drugs	10	52.6
	Murder	2	10.5
	Robbery & Theft	2	10.5
	Rape	2	10.5
	Child Abuse	1	5.3
	Human Trafficking	1	5.3
	Serious Physical Injury	1	5.3
	Total	19	100

Majority of respondents are female, representing the large number of population from Marillac Hills composed of 14 respondents. While 21.1% of respondents are male from Bahay Pag-asa San Juan comprising 5 respondents. Historically, delinquency has been seen as primarily a male issue, often analyzed through a male-centric lens that overlooks female involvement in delinquent behavior. However,

females are now the fastest-growing group within the correctional system, highlighting the need to better understand their offending patterns. Recent studies indicate that the factors predicting delinquency in males do not fully account for female delinquency, as research focused on male offenders fails to consider the significant effects of childhood sexual abuse and other key family-related issues on female juveniles (Nagle, 2019).

Contradicting to the results of Embornas & Solmayor, (2024) the majority of respondents are male from General Santos City Social Welfare and Development Office. The CICLs consisted of 204 males and 18 females. On the rationale majority of the respondents on this research come from Marillac Hills – National Training for Girls which is a training center for girls.

Most respondents are already 19 to 21 years old composed of 10 respondents equivalent to 52.6% of the total population. Also, 22 years old and above have 2 respondents equivalent to 10% of the total population. Noticeably these respondents are relatively older due to the length they spend in the center up to the date of interview they are still waiting for their verdict/judgment. The second majority of respondents include 16 to 18 years old composed of 6 respondents which is equivalent to 31.6% of the total population. While only 1 respondent came from the age bracket of 13-15 which is 5.3% of the total population

Data shown dominantly admission of respondents is through DSWD personnel with the frequency of fourteen (14) respondents equal to 73.7% of the total population while five (5) respondents or 26.3% of the total population is through PNP personnel.

Eight (8) of the respondents are currently staying from 1 month to 1 year in the center or around 42.4% of the total population, while six (6) respondents composed of 31.6% of the total population currently stay 2 years and above. Additionally, five (5) respondents currently stayed for 1 year to 2 years composed of 26.3% of the total population

Majority of respondents are Senior High School composed of thirteen (13) respondents or 70% of the total population due to the educational program implemented on Bahay Pag-asa in which the Alternative Learning System and the CICL had the right to study from Elementary to Senior High School. While three (3) respondents or 15% of total population has Elementary educational attainment. In addition, another three (3) respondents or 15% of total population are on High School level. Similarly, from the study of Camana et al., (2021) Children involved in legal conflicts are given the opportunity to pursue and complete their education through the Alternative Learning System (ALS). They view participation in ALS as a chance to improve their lives after leaving juvenile rehabilitation centers. They hope that by completing their studies, they can achieve their aspirations, assist their families and others, and enhance their quality of life. Although joining the program is voluntary, their decision to participate may be influenced by personal choice, as well as by the encouragement of peers and family members.

Dominantly the offense committed by respondents is related to drugs comprising ten (10) respondents or 50% of the total population, followed by murder which two (2) respondents or 10% of the total offense committed. Also, two (2) respondents or 10% of population is related to rape and robbery/thief. And 5% of total population is related to human trafficking, child abuse, and serious physical injury. In contrast, Palomares (2018) found that common offenses committed by young offenders include minor physical injuries, rugby sniffing, minor property damage, smoking in public areas, carrying bladed weapons, rape, drug use, theft, robbery, and murder.

Theme 1: Emotional Impact of Institution/Rehabilitation:

Emotional well-being for CICL relies heavily on rehabilitation and incarceration. Emotional distress, self-blame, and withdrawal are normal reactions to change from an uncontrolled setting to a controlled one. For most CICL, it is their initial extended time away from their family, so they undergo emotional distress in the forms of remorse, apprehension, or despair. Even though the orderly structure of the center is meant to promote reform, it tends to promote feelings of punishment rather than rehabilitation. Their introspection regarding their previous choices reflects these emotional difficulties, causing them to be torn within themselves between regret and acceptance of themselves. Loneliness and self-blame, which are part of the lived experiences of CICL throughout their rehabilitation process, are a result of this emotional suffering. As the narration of respondents, being at center plays a significant role for their emotional well-being as interaction for their rehabilitation. The following sub themes are present as emotional impact for being rehabilitated 1.1 Loneliness & Remorse 1.2 Self-blame

Subtheme 1.1 Loneliness & Remorse

This theme represents that loneliness and remorse are not merely incidental emotions experienced by CICL who were undergoing rehabilitation, but rather, they show a dominant and impactful emotional outcome of the rehabilitation process itself. These emotions are not solely negative, their acknowledgement and integration are important steps towards genuine rehabilitation and future positive development.

The running theme among the respondents when sharing their experiences in the rehabilitation centers was feelings of isolation and deep regret for the past. They struggled with guilt and isolation following separation from their families, often recalling the decisions that led them to such circumstances.

Andrew, a Bahay Pag-asa San Juan resident, felt sad when he said, “May kalungkutan lang po talaga, di ko po kasi nakakasama yung family ko” (Sometimes I feel lonely in this center because I cannot be with my family). It was also resonated by Jamil, who averred, “May mga kalungkutan talaga po lalo na pag naalala ko yung mga nakaraan” (I feel lonely, especially when I remember the past.) Her words corroborate Cherry's (2023) definition of loneliness as feeling a sense of disconnection and seeking companionship, something which showed in the responses' struggles of being apart from their loved ones.

For others, the distance from loved ones was compounded by the lack of visits. Jennalyn, who was residing at Marillac Hills, expressed her frustration, “Minsan po di ko maiwasan malungkot dito kasi malayo ako sa pamilya ko at may mga pagkakataon na wala pa kong dalaw” (sometimes I feel like I'm lonesome here because I'm away from my family, and sometimes I didn't have a visitor.) Without family ties, a fundamental source of comfort, intensified the sense of isolation, supporting Bulatao's (2023) rationale that children undergoing rehabilitation are likely to experience emotional struggles as a result of being separated.

In addition to loneliness, regret burdened the respondents. Most of them could not stop thinking about what they had done in the past and dwelling on it in regret. Rexcel, a resident of Marillac Hills, confessed, “Meron po kasi talaga kong pagsisi” (I truly feel regret), whereas Rama expressed, “Nagsisisi po ko naalala ko yung mga ginawa ko sa nakaraan” (I regret the things I did in the past.) Their experience is a reflection of Mudge's (2024) observation of guilt as an intrapersonal affect, one that follows from behaviors that are inconsistent with moral standards.

Their introspection was helped extensively by the rehabilitation process under such adversity. Though difficult, the respondents knew that their stay at the center offered them a chance to critique their choices and work towards personal development. Courtesy of the intervention by the program, they were able to

ponder reshaping their lives positively under the hope of making amends with their families. These findings concur with Bulatao's (2023) research, which is concerned with the potential for change and healing as it is with the psychological distress of rehabilitating individuals.

These common experiences put into context the widespread ill impacts brought about by family disintegration and past misdeeds to the psychological health of children in conflict with the law (CICL). While shame and isolation might still persist, expert therapy provides them with an opportunity to introspect, grow, and even dream of a brighter tomorrow.

Subtheme 1.2 Self-blame

One of the greatest psychological challenges people must overcome during the rehabilitation program is self-blame. The majority of individuals experience overwhelming guilt and responsibility once they realize the effects of their previous actions. The internal conflict affects their emotional and psychological well-being in addition to dictating how they recover.

Andrew's story is a poignant example of this dilemma. Reflecting upon his life, he expressed regret for having acted as he did, stating, “Meron po ko isang pagkakamali na di ko inaasahan na ganito mangyayari” (I made a mistake, and I did not expect this to happen.) His words point to the suddenness of his actions and the weight of their consequences. As with so many others in his situation, he was caught up in a vicious cycle of remorse, seeking to reconcile his actions in the past with his situation now.

Andrew and others' rehabilitation process were typically characterized by sloppy assumptions and susceptibility to outside influence. Their criminal activity was primarily brought on by their impatience and inability to anticipate the consequences of their actions. But it was not just the actions themselves that haunted them; it was also what they learned about how those actions affected other people and themselves. Their self-criticism grew as a result of this increased self-consciousness, which further made healing more complex.

Self-blame, as defined by psychologists Coulacoglou and Saklofske (2017), is the inclination to attribute responsibility to oneself for unfavorable results. Cognitive dissonance, the psychological tension resulting from the inconsistency between one's actions and their self-perception, may be the cause of such internalized blame. People may associate their self-image with the unfavorable effects of their actions in an attempt to minimize such dissonance, which promotes a vicious cycle of self-condemnation and guilt. This self-blame was a burden and a turning point for Andrew and many others like him. It resulted in change despite the fact that it made them more emotionally distraught initially. Being able to see their wrongdoing enabled them to accept responsibility, which is an important part of the healing process. But this transition from self-judgment to self-forgiveness—a transition essential to true personal growth—was the difficult part.

As their narratives progress, one can see that, in spite of the pain, self-blame is a necessary part of atonement attempts. It compels one to face the past, own his or her mistakes, and in the end, seek a way to retrieve the future and reintegrate into society. One learns from these experiences about the psychological and emotional aspects of rehabilitation, with a special emphasis on the necessity for providing interventions that promote accountability and self-compassion.

Theme 2: Positive Impact of the Facility

The centers offer structured programs that allow constructive development of the CICL, as opposed to the psychological loss incurred through institutionalization. The majority of the CICL lacked access to education, skill upgrading, and individual development entitlements in these centers prior to their

incarceration. Rehabilitative programs hold the promise of self-improvement, educate about moral and ethical expectations, and teach discipline. CICL typically report their appreciation for the care and second chances they are given, noting the facility's involvement in their development of self-worth and accountability. Their stories reflect themes of appreciation and thankfulness, individual change, and development, and increased self-efficacy, demonstrating how organized interventions can lead them back into society. The following are the positive impact in the facility has seen in the narration of respondents 2.1 Gratitude and Appreciation, 2.2 Personal Growth and Transformation, 2.3 Educational and Skills Development, 2.4 Improved Self Efficacy.

Subtheme 2.1 Gratitude and Appreciation:

Being at the center has given most of the interviewees a boost of confidence and hope. They had discovered themselves to be in a position to have their basic needs fulfilled, many times to their satisfaction, after having experienced difficult times. Their words show a sincere appreciation to the resources, care, and support they were given.

Ashley, who stays at Marillac Hills, was content with her situation, testifying, “Okay naman po kami dito sir, halos lahat nga po ng pangangailangan naming na pro-provide” (We are okay here sir, almost all of our needs are provided.) This was also testified to by Jesu, who stated, “Lahat naman po ng mga shampoo at sabon meron kami di naman nagkukulang” (All our needs are provided.) These confirmations indicate how the center has ensured that none of its children fall short of anything.

Beside the material aspect, the support system available was also highlighted as playing a crucial role in the children's well-being. Sam, Bahay Pag-asa San Juan, spoke of the responsiveness of the center and stated, “Di naman po sila nagkukulang basta magsabi ka lang po sa house parent sa pangangailangan mo” (They are not lacking as long as you just tell the house parent what you need.) This indicates that the center not only supplies needs but also makes an open system where the children are heard and valued.

One of the most significant provisions the respondents appreciated was food. Unlike the uncertainty they may have had before coming to the center, they now eat regularly and in abundance. Rexcel spoke eagerly, “4 times a day kami nakakain dito busog na busog” (We can eat four times a day, we are very full.) Bondat went so far as to state that there is normally too much food, thanks to generous donors, and he added, “Madalas pa nga po sobra sobra pa yung mga pagkain namin dito. Madami po kasing donors” (We often have too much food here. There are so many donors.)

Their overall health was also improved by good nutrition. Harida brought out the impact their health has experienced, explaining, “Malulusog po kami dito sir, dahil sa dami ng binibigay kita naman po sa katawan” (We are healthy here sir for the food given by the center, as you see in our body). This is what highlights the manner in which access to healthy and sufficient food not only contributes to their physical health but also to their overall sense of stability and care.

These children's exhibits of appreciation symbolize a stronger psychological and emotional transformation than that of a mere recognition of the comforts they presently enjoy. Many of them, before they entered the facility, were victims of hardship, neglect, or brutality. They can now recognize their value and develop a positive expectation of their future because of the relentless attention and nurturing that they have received. As Jans-Beken et al. (2020) indicate, gratitude can be a stable personality trait as well as a short-term emotional state. The appreciation of the children for the kindness shown to them could be the first step towards their readmission to society with new vigor and determination.

Moreover, appreciation can also be a state of mind and not necessarily an emotion, as Fagley (2018) hypothesized. The children's first reaction to the care they are given is one of immediate gratitude. This

gratitude can become second nature as time goes by and can influence the way they view their surroundings, the people assisting them, and even their future prospects.

The center is crucial in the healing of the children because it is where they feel loved and appreciated. Their appreciation is a good realization that they are getting a second chance, and not a reflection of what had happened before. It is through building this appreciation that children can be better informed, resilient, and create a brilliant future.

Subtheme 2.2 Personal Growth and Transformation

The stories of the children in conflict with the law (CICL) at Bahay Pag-asa San Juan and Marillac Hills are a moving account of transformation, development, and direction. In their words, the intervention programs at the centers have played a key role in changing their behavior, thinking, and philosophy in life. The majority of the residents exhibit huge differences in their patience, humility, and respect for others. Jesu from Marillac Hills illustrates this by saying, "Ang laki po ng nagbago sa pag-uugali ko dito sa Center. Ngayon po, mas mahaba na ang pasensya ko, at natuto ako magpakumbaba. Nakikinig na po ako sa mga nakakatanda sa paligid ko" (My behavior here at the center has changed a lot. Now my patience is longer, and I have learned to be humble. I listen to the elderly people around me).

Harida, also from Marillac Hills, says the same: "Naging matured po ako na harapin ang mga problema na dumarating sa buhay ko" (I became mature in facing the problems that come in life). Similarly, Jennalyn confesses, "Ang laki po ng pagbabago ng attitude ko dito" (There's a big change in my attitude here). These observations are consistent with current research, which highlights that rehabilitation interventions tend to lead to better emotional stability, enabling children to manage emotions and make good decisions (Manuel, 2019).

Besides modification of behavior, the testimonies consider the work of the center in teaching values such as respect and gratitude. Dons remarks, "Palasagot po kasi ako dati sa pamilya ko at mahilig sa bisyo, dito ko lang po narealize lahat. Natuto po ako dito magdasal, gumamit ng 'po' at 'opo', gumalang, at rumespeto sa nakakatanda" (I used to answer back my family and was addicted to vices, but I realized everything here. I learned to pray, use polite words, and show respect to elders). Similarly, Ashley reports, "Kung hindi po sa center, wala pa rin akong respeto sa mga taong nakapaligid sa'kin at hindi ko malalaman ang mga pagkakamali ko" (If I weren't at the center, I still wouldn't have respect for the people around me and wouldn't recognize my mistakes).

These findings point to the success of values-formation processes in the setting of rehabilitation institutions. These arguments clearly explain how structured interventions like casework, religious programs, and sociocultural interventions facilitate positive behavioral changes (Kermen, 2018).

The role of spirituality in the rehabilitation process also surfaces in the testimonies. Prayer and religious advice are emphasized by most residents as key to their transformation. Rexcel of Bahay Pag-asa San Juan affirms, "Dati po puro lang ako bisyo, pero dito natuto akong magdasal, gumamit ng 'po' at 'opo', at makisama" (Before, I was only into vices, but here, I learned to pray, be respectful, and get along with others).

Bondat of Marillac Hills emphasizes the importance of religious guidance, quoting, "May mga Pari po dumadalaw sa'min tuwing Sabado, at nakakatulong po yun para mapalapit kami sa Diyos" (There are priests who visit us every Saturday, and that helps us get closer to God). These events align with findings of research studies carried out by Impact Laws (2022), which identify the efficacy of religious practices in rehabilitation programs.

The testimonies also reveal how the rehabilitation process changes one's perspective, allowing the

residents to look at life in a different way. Jesu bears witness, "Nagbago po pananaw ko at natuto akong mag-appreciate sa mga bagay-bagay dito sa center" (My perspective changed, and I learned to appreciate things here at the center). Jamil of Bahay Pag-asa San Juan also bears witness:

"Mas naging maayos po ang buhay ko. Nakabalik ako sa pag-aaral, nagbago pananaw ko, nag-iba ang community ko. Dati, naimpluwensyahan ako ng masamang environment. Dito, tahimik, hindi sila mapanghusga. Nakikita ko na may nagmamalasakit sa'kin. Kung hindi ako napunta dito, baka kwento na lang ako sa dami ng beses na muntik na akong mamatay dahil sa droga at sa mga kaaway ko. Ilang beses akong nabugbog, napalo, nasaksak, tinakpan ng sako, at sinaksak ulit. Noon, hindi ko pa tinanggap ang Diyos, pero dito, hindi ka nila huhusgahan" (My life has been better. I went back to school, my perspective changed, and my community changed. Before, I was influenced by the bad environment. Here, it is peaceful, they do not judge. I see that they care to correct your mistake as long as you listen. If I didn't come here, my life would just have been a tale. I nearly died several times because of drugs and my enemies. I was beaten, beaten, stabbed, covered with a sack, and stabbed again. Before, I didn't accept God, but here, they don't judge).

Jamil's story is a powerful assertion of the power of rehabilitation to save lives. His story is a testimony of how rehabilitation programs not only allow CICL to break free from past addictions and destructive ways but also acquaint them with hope and direction for the future.

Bahay Pag-asa San Juan and Marillac Hills residents' stories exhibit a universal pattern of growth, change, and rehabilitation. From their journeys of learning humility and patience to gaining respect and spirituality, they attest to the merit of rehabilitation interventions in conditioning their personalities and guiding them to a brighter future. In order to help these children, regain control over their life and progress their personal and spiritual growth, educational, religious, and social interventions must be integrated into them.

The transformational stories are supplemented by earlier research (Manuel, 2019), which illustrates how rehabilitation interventions enable young people to make good decisions, form good relationships, and become part of society in a healthy manner beyond developing emotional resilience. Finally, such interventions illustrate the potential for change through the delivery of the right support framework with a future opportunity unfolding into a good and brighter one for the CICL.

Subtheme 2.3 Educational and Skill Development

At the center, the provision to pursue education and vocational training is one of the most important aspects of rehabilitation of children in conflict with the law (CICL). Most of these children belong to families with no or minimal exposure to formal education and skill development. Yet, individuals are provided both academic education and practical exposure to various vocational skills in the formal setting of the center so that they are well prepared to be reintegrated into society.

For some, the center was the turning point in their life. Harida shared her experience with gratitude and stated, "Dito po sa center ako nakatapos ng Senior High School ko" (I was able to finish my Senior High School here at the center). Like Harida, many CICL were made to complete their basic education, something which they would not have been able to achieve outside the center.

Apart from education, vocational training is also crucial in equipping these people with skills. Ashley discussed how much the TESDA program has benefited them, saying, "Madami po kaming vocational course na nakuha at NC II dahil po sa TESDA program dito sa center" (We got many vocational courses and NC II because of the TESDA program here at the center). These workshop courses, i.e., computer skills, beauty care, baking, and dressmaking, make them gain physical skills that they can use in working or running their own business in the future.

Mina also pointed out the variety of training programs provided: "Sobrang dami sir (training skills) bakery, beauty skills, beauty care, dressmaking tapos bukod pa po yung mga NC II binibigay sa amin dito na magagamit naming paglabas" (There are so many training skills given to us like bakery, beauty skills, beauty care, dressmaking, and besides, the NC II certificates we receive here can be useful when we leave). This highlights the way the center optimizes CICL's residence not only to retain them but also to prepare them for life beyond its fence.

The sense of empowerment that is created through learning something new is evident in the residents' comments. Bondat expressed his appreciation, stating, "Nagpapasalamat po ko napunta ko sa Marillac (Hills) dahil ang dami kong natutunan na akala ko hindi ko magagawa nung asa labas ako." Gaya ng pag-aaral" (I'm thankful that I was at Marillac Hills because I learned a lot—things I never believed I could do when I was outside, like studying). His testimony echoes the life-altering impact of institution-based learning in restorative settings.

Livelihood programs are also included in the program of the center. Jesu stated, "May mga livelihood at NC II po kami dito, nagbibigay po sila sir" (We have livelihood programs and NC II here, and they give them to us). These are a stepping stone to economic mobility, so when CICL leave the center, they are ready with the capability to earn a living.

Additionally, the center's structured training services give a productivity culture. Dons described the process: "Ano po kasi siya, meron kasi sa number of services, productivity service, sa ngayon po lima yung trainor para sa productivity lalo sa baking po, madami po kaming natutunan" (There are a number of productivity services, right now we have five trainers for productivity, and we learned a lot, especially in baking). This systematized plan ensures that the children receive proper education and firsthand training of employment-oriented skills.

Lastly, the eagerness to capture these opportunities is a common sentiment among CICL. Renalyn showed her determination: "Ngayon nandito po ko, grab ko na lang po lahat ng opportunities para po pag labas may magagamit ako" (Now that I'm here, I'll just grab all the opportunities so that I can use something when I go out). This reflects the positive mindset at the center where rehabilitation is more than time in, but training, expertise, and promise for a better life.

These accounts are in affirmation of studies which point to the importance of community engagement in restorative justice. These programs are a type of reparation, removing people from recidivism, as suggested by Rafferty (2018). Similarly, Gonzales et al. (2023) write about how local governments can help children reintegrate themselves into society effectively by offering livelihood and recreational pursuits like sewing, gardening, and selling handicrafts. The success of these programs is shown by the CICL accounts at the center, which testify to the central role that vocational training and education play in turning their lives around and taking them into a better future.

Subtheme 2.4 Improved Self Efficacy

The development of self-esteem and confidence in one's own abilities is one of the most significant developments observed in children in conflict with the law (CICL). Most of these children initially doubted their own abilities, questioning whether they were capable of learning new skills or changing their behavior. They discovered their own capabilities and realized they were more able than they previously believed, however, as they progressed through the rehabilitation program.

Harida, a participant at Marillac Hills, gave testimony of her journey of self-discovery. She recalled how, before joining the program, she lacked some skills and was limited by her past experiences. "Nagkaroon ako ng mga skills na wala ako dati sa labas. Naiisip ko dati hindi ko kaya nung nasa labas pero nung

binigay nila sakin kaya ko pala." (I gained skills I didn't have when I was still in my normal environment. I doubted myself at first if I could do it, but they believed I could do it, and I realized—I can, and I did.) Her message is the process of overcoming self-doubt and gaining confidence through guided learning and support.

Similarly, Rennalyn, a member of the group from Marillac Hills, shared how the things she was taught inside the rehabilitation center affected her new way of thinking. "Lahat po ng tinuro nila dito magagamit ko po talaga sa labas at nagbago po talaga ang ugali ko. Kakayanin ko po ang buhay sa labas." (Everything they taught me here will be useful outside, and my behavior has truly changed. I know I can handle life outside.) Her testimony says a lot about how the program not only educated her with practical skills but also gave her the strength and confidence to reintegrate into society successfully.

They coincide with the general research findings highlighted here, emphasizing greater self-efficacy to be at the forefront and as part of integral rehabilitation. Self-efficacy builds up progressively due to greater conviction and a breaking point on progressing from doubts towards confidence when prompted by acquired new skill levels and boosting oneself. It is not a mere emotional change; it produces tangible changes in behavior that enable such children to deal with the demands of life outside the center.

The CICL program offers more than a stage for self-discipline and self-reflection. In giving the children exposure to education, career opportunities, and critical life skills they otherwise might not have received, it is a stepping stone toward a better life. Some of these children had very limited options prior to their entrance into the program, and they were guided down destructive paths. They are able to now picture a different, better future since they have learned new information and gained increased self-knowledge.

Such programs have a long-term effect, promoting resilience and enabling individuals to cope with issues in life more strongly, according to Ubadno et al. (2023). The cases of Harida and Rennalyn show how ordered education and intervention can re-orient self-image, allowing children to believe in themselves again. The rehabilitation program not only guarantees their well-being but also equips them with the tools they require to forge a better future for themselves.

Theme 3: Feedback and Suggestion for Improvement

While CICL generally concurs that rehabilitation programs are beneficial, they also express concerns and make recommendations for facility enhancements. In their suggestions, they believe there must be additional recreational activities, better instructional materials, and additional emotional and psychological support. They also emphasize increased vocational training for future employment, increased provisions for their immediate needs, and available platforms for them to express their emotions. All these suggest that though rehabilitation centers fulfill their purpose, there are certain issues which should be resolved in order to improve the efficiency of such programs. As per narration of respondents they give feedback and suggestions for the improvement of the program. The following are the sub theme 3.1 Contentment and satisfaction, 3.2 suggestion and program enhancement, & 3.3 provision of basic needs.

Subtheme 3.1 Contentment and Satisfaction

The interviews with the Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) indicated a series of significant concerns, one of which is their overall satisfaction and happiness with the rehabilitation centers. The interviewees shared the ways the programs of the center have benefited them, particularly education, skill acquisition, and personal growth. They were thankful for the opportunities they were afforded, which they may not have had in the outside world:-

Mina, a Marillac Hills resident, was thankful for learning the skills that she gained during her stay at the center. According to her, "Masaya po ko dito po ko nakapag-aral at natuto ng mga skills gaya po ng beauty care, computer, at dress making." (I am happy here; this is where I studied and learned skills such as beauty care, computer, and dressmaking). Her statement reflects the importance of skill development initiatives in offering the CICL income-generating skills that will be able to sustain them in the future.

Similarly, Jamil of Bahay Pag-asa San Juan liked being able to study. He explained, "Masaya naman po ko dito, dito po ko nakapag Senior High School nung pumasok po kasi ko grade 7 lang. Dito po sa Center nakapag ALS ako gamit po yung module." (I'm content here; at the center, I was able to study up to Senior High School because I was only in grade 7 when I was admitted. Here, I was able to finish the Alternative Learning System (ALS) using modules). His case is a testimonial to how the center provides educational opportunities which allow CICL to advance their education notwithstanding past disappointments.

For Bondat, too, a Marillac Hills native, the center was a place of education as well as a place of transformation. He happily announced, "(Masaya) sobra sir nakita ko kasi yung pagbabago sa sarili ko, nakakuha ko dito sir limang NCII at nakatapos ako ng Senior High School." (I am so happy, sir. I saw a lot of change in myself; I earned five NCII certifications here, and I finished Senior High School). His description brings to light the rehabilitative role of the center, whereby young people are given a chance to improve their lives through schooling and vocational education.

Apart from learning and skill acquisition, the programs provided in the center also give a sense of fulfillment. Herida, a CICL in Marillac Hills, explained, "Contented po ko dito, kasi sa dami ng opportunity naming nakukuha dito na wala sa labas." (I feel contented here because of the many opportunities we get that are not available outside). This statement reflects how the structured activities in the facility enable CICL to feel valued and empowered.

Through imparting values to children values, information, and skills, to children, the Philippine Juvenile Justice System aims to rehabilitate and reintegrate CICL to society. Their exposure to violence and reoffending requires preventive strategies such as education, social skills development, and values formation (Sanders, 2012). The respondents' experience gives credence to this mission through its discovery on how CICL can be made to be happy, fulfilled, and filled with renewed hope through the provision of education and vocational training.

Their testimonies validate the need for well-integrated intervention programs that are responsive to educational and emotional requirements, finally creating a brighter future for these people. Overall, the testimonies of the respondents attest to the fact that not only do the rehabilitation centers equip them with personal and professional development skills, but they also offer them a place where they are content and pleased.

Subtheme 3.2 Suggestion for Program Enhancement

The voices of the Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) point out a number of elements that could enhance their experience of rehabilitation; their observations point to particular areas that require attention, from communication and recreation needs to spiritual guidance and personal development:

It is a source of strength for some other people living there. Some residents believe it helps them deal with life at the rehab facility. Jamil of Bahay Pag-asa San Juan said he would greatly value having a visiting pastor, illustrating the way hearing the Bible gives him strength and advice in his struggles each day. "Sa akin po, wala na pong dapat baguhin ang idadagdag lang po sa sana yung may bumibisitang pastor. Kasi po, kumbaga sa sitwasyon po namin yun na lang po yung nagpapalakas ng pananampalataya po namin parang mas lumakas pa po yung ano namin (faith) kasi po pag nakakarinig po kami ng word of God parang

sa akin po, pananaw ko lang pag nakakarinig po ng word of God, parang mas gumagaan po sa araw-araw na kinakaya ko yung dito. Parang kung may nagsi-share sa'yo na yung mga sila lang na nasa loob po ng Bible parang nare-recycle lang po. Yung mga pinagdadaanan namin, napagdaanan din po ng mga nandun sa Bible. Parang doon po yung, doon po yung kasagutan. Yung mga dapat mong gawin. Parang mas gusto ko po ay bumibisita ng pastor po ayun lang po, ayun lang po kong mangyari sana consistent yung pagbisita ng mga pastor po.” (In my opinion, nothing should be changed, it will only be added to hopefully have a visiting pastor. Because, in our situation, that is the only thing that strengthens our faith. It feels like our faith becomes stronger because when we hear the word of God, it makes my everyday struggles easier. If someone shares the Bible with us, it makes us realize that what we are going through has also been experienced by those in the Bible. That’s where the answers lie, on what we should do. If I could add a program, I prefer having a visiting pastor. I just want the pastor’s visits to be consistent.) His words highlight the possible advantages of including frequent spiritual counseling sessions in the treatment regimen.

There were respondents who suggested elevating physical activities by providing better facilities. Bahay Pag-asa San Juan's Sam spoke of the need for gym equipment, believing that it would be a part of their overall well-being. "Dito po sir maganda sana kung may mga gym equipment kami." (Here, sir, it would be nice if we had gym equipment.) Some emphasized having a variety of physical activities, like basketball, to make them active and engaged.

Ashley of Marillac Hills described a time management training shortage as residents most often do not receive structured instruction in their daily schedule planning. She said that some do not have room-to-room classes, therefore they do not receive proper supervision. "Hindi naman po sa babaguhin sir, kulang lang po siguro kami sa turo sa time management.". Di po kasi sila nag room to room, minsan po nagsasamahan na kami ng loob dito di po nila alam." (It's not that we're going to change, sir, perhaps we're just lacking in time management advice. Because they did not go room to room, sometimes we were together inside here without their knowledge.) This suggests a need for guided time management lectures or mentorship sessions for residents to acquire essential life skills for eventual reintegration into society. Expression of emotions and conflict resolution are also areas where there is a need for attention. Rama of Marillac Hills stated that they should have open forums where the residents can share their thoughts openly and resolve conflicts. "Gusto po sana naming sir may open forum para malabas naming ang mga saloobin.. Pag may nag away away nakakapag labas ng sama ng loob.” (Sir, we want an open forum so that we can express ourselves freely. When someone fights, hate is released.) Having a supervised and safe place for conversation may improve relations between residents and create less fighting in the facility.

A unifying thread throughout the responses was the demand for change in their daily routine, more particularly regarding food intake and interaction with their families. Aira of Marillac Hills testified about her desire for a change in the kinds of meals. "Gusto po sana namin mapalitan yung dinner namin sir lagi kasi gulay." (We would like to substitute our dinner, sir, because it is always vegetables.) Jesu from the same facility also suggested longer phone call durations on Saturdays since most of the residents are coming from distant places. "Maganda sana may phone call kami mas mahaba pag sabado sir karamihan po sa amin dito (Marillac Hills) sa malayong lugar." (It would be nice if we could have a longer phone call on Saturday, sir, most of us here (Marillac Hills) are from far places.)

Lastly, access to the internet was a significant concern for some of the residents. Rennalyn of Marillac Hills noted the importance of having internet access to assist them in their studies and assignments. "Internet po, kailangan po kasi namin mag research lalo pag may pag may mga assignment." (Internet,

because we need to do research, especially when we have assignments.) This indicates how important it is to incorporate digital learning materials in the rehabilitation programs to enable the residents to continue their education.

CICL's testimonies indicate that they share a shared vision of program improvement addressing their spiritual, emotional, physical, and educational needs. The rehabilitation program can better serve its members-all-around development by implementing their proposals, which include frequent pastor visits, gym machines, time management seminars, open forums, improved food choices, longer telephone calls, and the use of the internet. These results are helpful in the formation of better rehabilitation techniques and in ensuring a smoother reintegration mechanism for CICL in the future.

Subtheme 3.3 Provision of basic needs

Satisfying their basic needs is critical to the rehabilitation and general well-being of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) on a daily basis. Not only are basic needs like food, clean water, and shelter vital for survival, but they are also the building blocks for self-improvement and reintegration into society. An insight into the sufficiency of these provisions is given by the words of the children themselves, which continually highlight the sufficiency and care of the centers and their sponsors.

To most of these children who are being sheltered in rehabilitation centers, the realization that they have their basic needs provided for is a sense of security and comfort. As Harida would put it, "Okay naman po kami dito sir, halos lahat nga po ng pangangailangan naming na pro-provide" (We are okay here, sir. Almost all of our needs are provided). This is corroborated by Jamil, who asserts confidently, "Napro-provide naman lahat ng pangangailangan naming dito" (All our needs have been provided here). Their statements indicate that the centers where they are housed are diligent in ensuring the sufficiency of basic supplies.

Aside from food and shelter procurement, toiletries are also a must in maintaining personal hygiene and self-worth among children. Rama guarantees, "Lahat naman po ng mga shampoo at sabon meron kami di naman nagkukulang" (We have all the shampoos and soaps. There is no shortage of any of our basic needs). Similarly, Rexcel avers, "Di naman po sila nagkukulang basta magsabi ka lang po sa house parent sa pangangailangan mo" (They are not lacking as long as you just tell the house parent what you need). These statements illustrate the responsiveness of the caregivers in addressing the children's needs so that their hygiene and comfort would not be compromised.

Good nutrition is also an important part of the process of rehabilitating them. The children's statements attest to the fact that not only do they receive sufficient food, but they also appreciate the quality and quantity of the food. Andrew is satisfied and says, "Busog po kami dito masarap pa nga pagkain namin dito" (We are full here, and the food is delicious). Sam also emphasizes the abundance of food, and he says, "Oo naman po, 4 times a day kami nakakain dito busog na busog" (Of course, we eat here four times a day. We are always full).

The kindness of the donors also plays a long way in ensuring food availability. Bondat says, "Madalas pa nga po sobra sobra pa yung mga pagkain naming dito. Madami po kasing donors" (We have too much food here often. There are so many donors). It not only ensures that no child goes hungry but also reflects on the strong support system that exists for these centers.

The regular and satisfactory provision of basic needs attests to the devotion of sponsors and rehabilitation centers to the welfare of CICL. Chadha (2021) confirms that meeting basic needs is crucial in sustainable development because it lays the foundation for development in the social and economic domains. They offer a stable and supportive environment that facilitates the rehabilitation of the children through ensuring

that they have food, personal hygiene, and a secure place to live.

Moreover, CICL psychological and emotional health is enhanced by providing them with adequate food, shelter, and sanitation. From the children's account, they are cared for and nurtured, which may have a positive effect on their recovery process. By providing these services, the centers not only address the children's immediate needs but also set them up to become responsible and productive adults.

CICL's stories demonstrate how well their rehabilitation centers are equipped with the facilities required. These children are provided with the necessary facilities required for their growth and comfort when they are given good food, personal hygiene items, and a good environment. The joint efforts of rehabilitation programs and donors show the value of holistic treatment in changing the lives of CICL and making sure that they are given a chance to recover, mature, and become productive citizens in the future.

Theme 4: Disrupted Family Structures and Attachment Issues:

Child development is largely influenced by home life, and the majority of CICL are from dysfunctional homes where there is neglect, home conflict, and missing parents. Such an environment tends to produce emotional deficits, attachment problems, and higher crime propensity. The majority of CICL have premature role reversal, which forces children to adopt survival-oriented behavior because they gain adult responsibilities at an early age. This topic highlights the ubiquitous consequences of parental absence, broken family structures, and coerced autonomy, all of which culminate in their ultimate collision with the law. As per the narration of respondents, one of the experiences is disrupted family structures and attachment issues with the sub theme of (1) Broken Family and Emotional Void, (2) Parental Absence and Neglect, and (3) Early Role Reversal and Forced Independence

Subtheme 4.1 Broken Family and Emotional Void

Having a broken family is one of the shared histories of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL). Most of these children are emotionally vulnerable due to the lack of a stable family, which exposes them to circumstances leading to court cases.

The testimonies of the respondents provide a gripping insight into how family instability has affected their lives. Rexcel, one of the residents of Bahay Pag-asa San Juan, shared, "Broken family po kami, di po ko nakapag-aral at minsan hindi rin po nakakain." (We are a broken family, I didn't go to school, and sometimes I couldn't even eat.) His testimony highlights not just emotional abandonment but economic difficulties that further compounded his dilemma.

Similarly, Jamil, also an interviewee of the same center, spoke about how his family background affected his childhood: "Galing po kasi ko sa broken family, lumaki lang po ko sa lolo at lola ko." Di ko po nakilala tatay ko yung mama ko naman OFW. (Because my family is broken, I only grew up with my grandparents. I didn't know my dad, and my mom is an OFW.) Having no parents around deprived him of the care and emotional support by which could have contributed to his entanglement in legal cases.

For Airah, of Marillac Hills, the impact of a broken home did not end at emotional abandonment. She revealed, "Galing po kasi ko sa broken family, yung tatay ko po sir, nagbebenta ng mga illegal firearms at runner." (Because I come from a broken family, my father, sir, sells illegal firearms and runners.) Her testimony indicates how some CICL come from families where illegal activity is the norm and thus are more likely to engage in such activity themselves.

Dons, a resident in Marillac Hills who answered, presented an even better description of how dysfunctional family background would lead the child to risk behavior: "Yung buhay ko po bago ko mapunta sa center, broken family po ko tapos yung nga po natuto ko manigarilyo, mag-inom, mag-droga, sumama sa mga

kaibigan, tapos hanggang sa nakipag-live in po ko. Yung ka-live in ko po nagdro-droga po.". Tapos na ano po ko (lulong) sa droga." (I grew up in a broken family, then eventually I learned how to smoke, drink, and use drugs with friends. Later on, I had a live-in boyfriend who also used drugs. Later on, I was addicted.) The experience of Dons is a reflection of how children can become involved in risky activities and ill relationships due to lack of family support.

These interview respondents' accounts align with Laro's (2021) research, which affirms the huge role that families ought to play in the support of the children involved in conflict cases. Similarly, Emerita et al., (2013) also established that the most prevalent barangay CICL were from dysfunctional families, stressing that parental care and love are essential for these children. Children who don't have a solid family base are then forced to fend for themselves without a sense of direction, thus more likely to fall into bad influence. Family instability is revealed to be a strong influence in the lives of CICL, according to the common thread in these interviews. Not only are their problems generated by the absence of one parent or both parents, but also by the absence of proper role models, financial stability, and emotional support. These results highlight the need for family relationship-based intervention programs that offer youth with unstable family backgrounds alternative sources of support and guidance.

Subtheme 4.2 Parental Absence and Neglect

Emotional and psychological health of a child is significantly impacted when his/her parents stay away from their lives. The absence of direct parental presence leads to instability in emotions, feeling neglected, and, in some teenagers' cases, delinquent behaviors among the majority of teenagers.

The participants' lived experiences in this study are reflective of these findings. Jamil, who is living at Bahay Pag-asa San Juan, discussed his experience of having both parents absent. "Di ko po nakilala tatay ko, yung mama ko naman OFW. Nagpapadala lang po ng pera yung mama ko meron naman po para sa'kin kaso di ko po natatanggap." (I never met my father, and my mother is an overseas Filipino worker. She sends money for me, but I do not receive it.) Jamil's case shows the general fallacy that money alone makes up for the lack of parental care. Even though his mother pays for him, the lack of emotional support and proper supervision has left him isolated. Without the support of a parent figure to shape and take care of him, Jamil is alone to confront the issues of life, which may lead him to act out behaviorally.

Similarly, Rama, a resident of Marillac Hills, expressed how loss of parents has affected his independence: "Bali self-independent po ko wala na po kasi kong magulang." (I'm self-independent because I don't have parents anymore.) While Jamil at least has the notion of a distant parental figure, Rama has no parents at all. His remark exhibits the forced maturity of having to fend for himself during a period in life when parental guidance is most necessary. Sarantakos' research bears out this observation, referencing that delinquent juveniles are likely to have uninvolved parents. Lacking someone to look up to and get direction and emotional support from, these youths are more vulnerable to social deviance.

The story of Jamil and Rama both reflect the high emotional cost of parental absence. Their lives validate the body of literature explaining the link between emotional instability, delinquency, and neglect. These teenagers are bound to engage in risky behavior—to manage or due to lack of a good influence because they have nothing to lead them from parents—to seek stability without parental intervention.

According to study by Farrington and Jonkman (2021), insufficient guidance, familial conflict, and inadequate parental monitoring all result in adolescents acting antisocially or deviantly. Manggawi (2019) further emphasizes that the children will grow up with behavioral disorders if subjected to hostility from parents or remain indifferent.

The necessity to transcend material assistance is accorded priority in this subtheme. The economic

assistance matters, but parental care, adequate guidance, and emotional health are yet more important determinants of the welfare of children. In order to avert long-term negative effects among young people, addressing the issue of parental absence calls for community involvement, organized mentorship programs, and family-cohesiveness-promoting policies.

Subtheme 4.3 Early Role Reversal and Forced Independence

Ashley's voice was weighed with more years than hers when she spoke of her daily life. "Ako rin po kasi nag-aalaga, nagaasikaso ng kapatid ko. Ako po lahat." (I also take care of my brother. It's all me.) Her words simple but profound revealed the unseen burdens she bore in a family arrangement that had transformed so much.

Ashley, who resided in Marillac Hills, was accustomed to being the authority. She had taken on the caretaker responsibility herself, something that most children would have been looking up to their parents to do for them. Her upbringing had been rearranged so thoroughly that she found herself playing the parent before she was prepared for it. The urgent necessity to care for her younger brother took away her naivety and condensed her childhood.

One prominent sign of broken family systems is the early role reversal phenomenon, in which a child assumes duties that have historically been performed by parents. Ashley had to mature quickly because she was deprived of parental figure. This early role change is more than just a family adjustment; it's a reorganization of attachment styles that may have long-term consequences to mental and emotional health. Under attachment theory, the children who are constantly responded to by their physical and emotional needs by a parent develop security. Ashley-type children are left to process the distressing emotions of neglect, responsibility, and autonomy when this fails. They are made caretakers rather than receive it, destroying the idealized attachment relationship and resulting in enforced autonomy. While such independence is best termed as resilience, it might be the result of survival rather than free will.

Ashley's situation is not unique; rather, it is a symptom of a larger problem that many children who are raised in dysfunctional household's face. In adulthood, repression of feelings, worry, and inability to establish stable relationships can be the outcome of taking on adult responsibilities. Without intervention, young children can suffer from issues with vulnerability, trust, and even self-worth.

Ashley's narrative speaks to her resilience in the face of these adversity. But stolen childhood shouldn't be the price of resilience. There are numerous therapies, regular mentoring, and organized support networks that can help children like her rebuild the shattered attachment relationships.

Handling the long-term effects of dysfunctional families requires an understanding of enforced independence and early role reversal. We are not merely reading about a little girl taking care of her brother in Ashley's account; we are reading about the emotional toll, the unpaid sacrifices, and the need for immediate intervention by institutions to rearrange their lives into balance.

It is argued by Loeber, et. al., (2013) that children who are made to perform adult responsibilities as a result of their parents' absence tend to persist in criminal behavior. Care children are forced to take up adult responsibilities because of the role reversal phenomenon and forced independence, which hinder their decision-making capabilities and cause psychological distress. Crime usually follows from this suffering as a survival strategy. Due to lack of parental controls, youngsters find it difficult to control their emotions and therefore are more vulnerable to offending.

In the same vein, Abhisek & Balamurugan (2024) analyze early independence and parental neglect as social determinants that disrupt the development of a child and contribute to emotional instability and delinquency. When their parents fail to offer the support they need, children in conflict with the law

(CICL) instead turn to their peers for advice instead of going to their family. Because of their lack of family organization, they are more vulnerable to criminality, which perpetuates vicious cycles of deviant behavior.

Ashley's case represents these larger issues. Though it has its roots in survival and obligation, her early role reversal also underscores the structural dangers of imposed autonomy. Children who are not given adequate guidance will seek assistance from outside sources at their own expense at times. When not treated, such emotional pain resulting from these dysfunctional family systems may take the form of behavioral problems that further isolate the individuals from society.

An integrated strategy is needed to address such problems, one that not merely offers direct services to affected children but also empowers family structures so that role reversals are avoided in the first place. To mitigate the long-term consequences of early role reversal and provide children like Ashley with an opportunity to be able to recover their childhood years instead of being burdened with adult roles too early, successful mentorship, psychological therapy, and community engagement are imperative.

Theme 5 Social Environment as a Catalyst for Criminality:

The social setting in which CICL grow up has a lot to do with their behavior. Delinquency rises where people are exposed to violence, drug abuse, and crime; illegal behavior no longer seems a moral failure, but a survival need. The vulnerable youths are pushed towards criminal activities by gang affiliations and peer pressure, which further advance delinquent behavior. Offending behavior becomes cyclical as a result of normalization of illegal behavior brought about by poor models and unorganized guidance. The focus of remediation of ecological risk factors that contribute to adolescent delinquency is supported by this concept. The following are the social environment as catalyst for criminality 5.1 Exposure to Violence and Criminality, 5.2 Peer Influence and Deviant Behavior, & 5.3 Normalizing Illegal Activities.

Subtheme 5.1 Exposure to Violence and Criminality

The participants' testimonies clearly provide an indication of the direct involvement of their environment in the determination of the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency. Jamil and Aira's testimonies unveil the delinquent childhood they experienced, which consequently determined their engagement with legal issues.

Jamil, a resident of Bahay Pag-asa San Juan, recalled his childhood environment with a sense of resignation. "Sa lugar na kinalakihan ko, nandun po lahat ng violence... may nagbabarilan habang naglalaro po kami, nandun po yung mga nagbebenta ng drugs, nagbebentahan ng baril." (In the place where I grew up, there was all the violence... someone was shooting while we were playing, there were drug dealers, and gun dealers.) The normalization of violence within Jamil's community had the effect that from a young age, he was exposed to gunfights, drug deals, and criminal activities. This exposure not only desensitized him to violence but made these elements a normal part of his life, placing him at great risk of turning to criminal behavior himself.

Similarly, Aira, a resident of Marillac Hills, described a childhood immersed in crime. "Lumaki po ako sa environment na puro gulo, yung tatay ko po nagbebenta ng firearms at (drug) runner po." (I grew up in an environment full of trouble, my father sold firearms and was a (drug) runner.) For Aira, crime was not just present in her community—it was right inside her own home. With her father directly involved in illegal drug and gun trade, Aira's early exposure to crime made it difficult for her to imagine a life outside of it. The chaos that accompanied her growing up made way for the path that, for children like her, somehow seemed preordained.

These narratives confirm Rodriguez's (2015) research that determined that the exposure of a child to violence and, in turn, their involvement with the justice system are largely determined by the immediate surroundings. As crime and violence pervade the environment, a child's susceptibility to delinquency is escalated. Jamil's and Aira's stories indicate how much of an influence the home and society have on the decisions and actions of teenagers.

This subtheme recognizes that in order to break the delinquency cycle, attempts must be directed to healing the underlying causes, like unstable family life, criminal families in the home, and violent communities, rather than simply punishing juvenile delinquents.

Subtheme 5.2 Peer Influence and Deviant Socialization

The majority of the young people who engage in criminal behaviors attribute their involvement to peer influence and pressure from people who are older than them in their lives. Harida, Jamil, and Trisha's stories perfectly show how their environments and social networks impact their decisions and behavior. Harida's story is a sign of how peer pressure could lead individuals into committing offenses despite the fact that they do not have any individual inclination to do so. She admitted, "Naimpluwensyahan lang po ako ng kaibigan ko. Kaya naging pusher ako sir pero di po ko gumagamit" (My friend just influenced me. That's why I became a pusher, sir, but I don't use any drugs). This is consistent with Cilingiri's (2015) study, which found that more than half of the juvenile offenders committed crimes with adults or peers. Pressure and influence from their peer group members usually compel them to commit crimes they would otherwise not have participated in.

Jamil's life also presents how older peers' influence steers a child towards a way. At such an early age of 11 years, he was already company with ex-offenders, which extensively influenced his behavior as well. "11 years old po ko mga matatatanda na nakasama ko, mga labas pasok na po sila sa kulungan at napasama na po ko" (I'm 11 years old, the elders I hung out with were former prisoners of the jail, and I've been with them). His story is a manifestation of Fitriani and Hastuti's (2016) study findings, which pointed out the potency of peer attachment in fostering delinquent behavior. If a child is brought up surrounded by criminal behavior, they are likely to perceive such behavior as normal and acceptable.

Similarly, Trisha's experience shows how friendships or peer relationships may send the youth in the wrong direction. "Napasama lang po ko sir sa mga barkada, tapos kakasama natuto na rin po ako magbenta ng drugs" (I just joined bad influence friends, sir, and then because of their wrongdoings, I also learned to sell drugs). Her story aligns with research that demonstrates that close peer associations in adolescence are linked with delinquent behavior such as drinking, violence, and drug offenses.

Peer pressure is a major cause of youth crime, as these accounts demonstrate. Adolescents are frequently lured into criminality, either by direct temptation, exposure to crime, or a need to fit in. The research study of Cilingiri (2015) and Fitriani & Hastuti (2016) provides a strong foundation for comprehension of the impact of social interaction on behavior by emphasizing the importance of early intervention and support systems in deterring young people from criminal activity.

Subtheme 5.3 Normalizing Illegal Activities

Children are introduced to illegal business at a young age in crime-prone areas. They listen to conversations, see deals being made, and observe how the individuals become richer and more powerful in society. Gradually, their sense of what is legally and morally wrong becomes hazy. They are more likely to struggle with the difference between right and wrong if the people they look up to are doing something criminal. Rather, they view it as an option that is supported in their social circle as well as being acceptable. "I was eleven years old po nung natuto po kong magbenta ng shabu." (I was eleven years old when I

learned to sell shabu). Growing up in an environment where drug trade was rampant, Ashley saw it as a normal part of daily life. She did not get into it by being forced; rather, it was something that she observed and thereafter learned, in the same manner that other children may learn how to ride a bike or how to do laundry at home. Normalization of this criminal behavior went very deeply in her society, where criminality was not considered abnormal but rather a means of survival.

Ashley is just one of the many children whose story shows how early exposure to criminality in an individual can be influenced by the environment. She began selling shabu, a banned drug that has destroyed countless lives, when she was eleven. Her blunt but strong words indicate a more serious problem: criminality is not just a choice, but a norm adopted by youth in certain fields without so much as a second thought. Her story reflects a larger societal problem: the normalization of criminal activity as a result of a culture that glorifies crime. Children growing up in high-crime communities simply do not always have the direction and other options that would divert them from seeking out criminal endeavors. Despite schools, after-school programs, and law enforcement, the more direct and powerful influence of their social environment at times eclipses these institutions.

This process of normalization is the secret to learning how the transmission of crime takes place across the generations. It is much harder to end the cycle of criminality if children such as Ashley are instructed that offending is normal behavior. Which brings one to the question: how can this cycle be broken in society? In order to address this issue, structural reform must take place, namely education, rehabilitation, and the creation of opportunities that provide children with a different perspective on what their future will be like. Law enforcement and punishment will not be enough.

In impoverished urban communities, children are typically employed as they can evade detection by the authorities, making them excellent couriers in criminal enterprises. Porio and Crisol's (2004) participatory action research found that Filipino children are openly involved in drug selling and trafficking, which confirms Ashley's experience. Early exposure to crime instills deviant tendencies into their lifestyles, making their involvement in crime more real as they grow older.

Similarly, Buno, and Rivera (2019) highlighted how Filipino children are vulnerable to drug exposure. Teenagers who grow up in neighborhoods where drugs are used and trafficked are much more likely to get involved in the same, their research established. This supports the notion that the social environment a child grows up in significantly influences their path, whether they turn to crime or are able to find a way out.

Ashley's history and evidence demonstrate the need for intervention; if action is not taken proactively, children will continue to view crime as the norm rather than an option, creating a perilous cycle for generations to come.

Theme 6. Psychosocial Maladaptation and Identity Struggles

Decades of marginalization, stigmatization, and social exclusion have configured the identity problems most CICL have. They tend to internalize society's label of them as criminals, thereby seeing themselves as deviants or misfits. It may be difficult for them to be reintegrated into law-abiding society because they may have dissociated from mainstream morality. Additionally, some CICL go through cycles of violence and desensitization in which repeated exposure to violence and crime incapacitates their capacity for empathy or appreciation of moral limits. Re-entry into society after rehabilitation is usually difficult due to this maladaptation, necessitating specialized interventions to address these deep-seated identity issues.

Subtheme 6.1 Self-Perception as Deviant or Marginalized

Jesu, a resident of Marillac Hills, sat in silence as she reflected on her past and present problems. She talked in a calm voice with an undercurrent of resignation as she uttered words that conveyed the depth of her feeling of marginalization: "Wala po kasi talaga kong buhay sa labas, kung anong diskarte na lang po puwede gawin kahit magtinda po ng drugs." (Because I don't really have a life outside in the center, whatever hustle I will do it even if I sell drugs.) For Jesu, the world outside the center walls was distant, unapproachable, and unappealing. Her declaration is one that points toward a painful reality—she believes she is an individual with no viable place in society, no viable opportunities, and no viable future other than what she has become used to. This self-naming as deviant or marginalized is a product of her experiences of psychosocial maladaptation.

Reintegration becomes difficult for Jesu because she has been in institutional care for the majority of her life. The outside world is shown as a battle in which survival depends on using whatever means are available, rather than a place of promise. The statement "wala po kasi talaga kong buhay sa labas" expresses alienation and a perception that she does not belong to the wider society outside the center. She believes that she is already rejected and that the only alternatives for her are those that are commonly equated with criminality and deviance.

This internalized sense is congruent with the larger issue of identity conflict and psychosocial maladaptation. The remark by Jesus alludes to a deeper conflict with self and identity than mere drug peddling. "Diskarte," or "hustle," implies an adaptive strategy for living in a world that she sees has little potential for her kind of person. She thinks about surviving on unconventional, not infrequently illegal means rather than as one who can make stability in conventional terms.

Jesu's story is an example of the way excluded persons can build their identity using social exclusion as their frame of reference. This self-marginalization is supplemented by reduced social support, insufficient education, and rehabilitation programs involving a sense of purpose and belonging. Without reinforcement, this chain of self-marginalization can drive them further into dysfunctional lifestyle and affirm their conviction that deviance is the only path to follow.

The statement of Jesu is a strong demonstration of how identity is influenced by psychological problems. In addition to delinquency, her story also addresses an underlying need for acceptance, meaning, and belonging—things she feels are unavailable. Addressing the needs of marginalized youth and developing interventions that provide real hope for reintegration and change rely on an understanding of this perception.

According to the CICL assessment of Urminita-Martinez (2015) in Caloocan City, the majority of these children develop in an environment that is tainted with criminality and must suffer from the effects of poverty as well as shattered family relationships. The findings of the author justify the current study by explaining that such adverse environmental conditions lead to social alienation and make them unable to seek legal avenues for survival, thereby such illegal work appears to be their sole option.

Dominguez (2020) examined the personology of Filipino CICL children and depicted how social rejection and stigmatization result in the children having a negative self-image and low self-esteem. As a result of internalizing such negative perceptions, they develop an exclusionary self-concept, perpetuating the cycle of crime. Jesu's case supports these observations since she too feels as if she is withdrawn from society and resigned to using illegal means of existence. This parallel maintains the idea that psychological maladaptation due to outside social conditions is a major root of the way in which marginalized youths perceive themselves. Only by stopping this kind of criminality and isolation among CICL can their

perceptions be addressed.

Subtheme 6.2 Dissociation from Conventional Morality

Social conventions, upbringing, and life experience generally mould moral systems. Yet, for those suffering from psychosocial maladaptation, such systems become warped or completely unhinged from accepted moral norms. Often marked by the lack of remorse or a skewed sense of right and evil, this subtheme examines how people justify behaviour that violates moral norms. Through the study of instances of deviance from traditional morality, we can more closely observe the social and psychological forces that influence such behavior.

Jennalyn spoke softly, her manner calm, almost aloof. Her voice held no hesitation, no trace of inner struggle. "Sa labas po matino po ko, di po ko pala inom, di po ko pala bisyo. Na-inis lang po talaga ko sa pinsan ko, napatay ko po yung pinsan." ("Outside, I'm sober, I don't drink, I don't have any vice. I was just really annoyed with my cousin, that's why I killed my cousin.") There was no remorse or nervousness, the usual emotions when one confesses to killing someone, in her confession. Her motive, however, was simple: annoyance. The seriousness of what she had done did not seem to enter into it beyond the direct cause-and-effect logic that she employed. This disconnect from usual morality is a fascinating element of psychosocial maladaptation, where moral and ethical inhibitions are apparently disconnected from behavior.

Socially, experience, social reinforcement, and upbringing all play a role in determining morality. By societal standards, one comes to find certain behaviors as right or wrong. Jennalyn's reaction deviates from this norm, though. Her reaction is mechanistic—almost transactional—instead of showing the anticipated internal turmoil or self-censure. Her inability to understand the seriousness of what she has done reflects a lack of moral sensitivity.

A distorted view of the social repercussions might be one reason for this disconnect. People who engage in maladaptive behavior tend to have difficulty controlling their impulses and emotions. Jennalyn's insistence that she does not engage in vices, which are commonly associated with reckless behavior, supports the reality that what she did was an internal reaction to frustration and not the product of any outside influence. Her moral sense appears to be independent of conventional moral conditioning, which is evidenced by the lack of external excuse, i.e., drunkenness or force.

Mariano (2019) investigated the relationship between conduct disorder symptoms and moral competence capabilities among children who are Filipino and got into trouble with the law. The study confirmed that conduct disorder patients had lower levels of moral competence capabilities in relation to extensive antisocial behavior, and that their extended exposure to bad conditions appears to have a negative effect on their moral development, leading these children to begin thinking of serious offenses as the correct thing to do in settings.

This finding is directly relevant to Jennalyn's case because her justification for murder is not morally competent, and her lack of remorsefulness in her statement aligns with conduct-disordered individuals' normalization of behavior that does not adhere to conventional morality. Her growth, life experience, and possibly extensive exposure to dire circumstances may have influenced her perception of right and wrong as in Mariano's conclusion that morality is relative to one's actual life situation rather than a universal social convention.

Likewise, Cilingiri (2015) established that the majority of the young offenders offend in the presence of other young or adult offenders. The children in contact with the law (CICL) are disconnected from mainstream moral values and end up identifying with their offending as justified because of the interaction

with deviant peers and environments, making offending look common.

This view is also supported by Jennalyn's case. Her sense of morality could have been influenced by social forces that justified her use of violence if her surroundings condoned violent reactions to conflicts. The objective tone of her confession indicates a process of learning in which the use of violence was acceptable as a reaction to provocation rather than being evil action per se. This supports Cilingiri's point that absorption within the social environment that encourages deviant behavior usually results in moral disengagement.

In conclusion, Jennalyn's deviation from mainstream morality is symptomatic of a larger psychosocial maladjustment and not an isolated case. Her situation is just one example of the complicated interaction between individual psychological predispositions and conditioning by the environment warping moral judgment. By analyzing her reaction in the perspective of previous studies, we have a deeper understanding of how experiences can modify morality and cause individuals to justify behaviors that are in diametrical opposition to societal norms.

Subtheme 6.3 Cycle of Violence and Desensitization

Violence is rarely random acts. By creating a norm of acts that would otherwise be condemned, it usually operates on a cycle or pattern that has been passed down over generations. Most people who turn out to be criminals do not just wake up one morning and choose to become criminals. Rather, they are born into societies where anarchy, violence, and survival are all that they know. This downward spiral leads to desensitization, moral boundaries become obscure, and violence becomes the default. For some, like Aira, whose situation has a long time blurred the lines of good and evil.

Aira's is an account, as her childhood predetermined the course of her life even before she had a chance to choose. Her testimony, raw and unadorned, is proof of a world where violence is a business carried out within one's family and not a social taboo. "Galing po kasi ko sa broken family, yung tatay ko po sir, nagbebenta ng mga illegal firearms at runner. Nasama na po ko sa trabaho niya." Pumatay na po ko." ("Because my family is a broken one, my father, sir, earns from selling illegal guns and runners. I'm now part of his work. And I learned how to kill human beings.") The words of Aira are a reflection of the extent of her engagement with crime as well as violence normalization around her. Her father, one of the dominant figures in her life, not only participated in criminal activities but also brought her into the same lifestyle. Under such circumstances, crime was not a choice but a norm—a way of surviving and belonging. The cycle of violence had taken another generation into its grip.

Her speech is extraordinarily honest, especially "Pumatay na po ko" ("I have learned how to kill people"). She regards what she has done as just a part of the life into which she was born, and asks no questions and feels no guilt. This lack of emotional response suggests a degree of desensitization found in individuals raised up amidst crime. To her, it was the ordinary thing to take a life, but to others, it would be a moment of moral reflection.

Repeated and habitual experience of violence induces desensitization. Brutal crimes are less appalling the longer one stays in such surroundings. This emotional numbness is both a survival strategy and a defense mechanism, preventing reluctance and guilt from getting in the way of what is perceived as necessary action.

The extent to which violence can run through a family and community is highlighted by the evidence of Aira. She was defined by the lifestyle of her father, and without advice or direction from the outside, and without any alternative, she would inevitably follow in his footsteps. For the likes of herself, to interrupt the cycle entails more than force of will; it involves structural change, psychosocial rehabilitation, and

room to redefine themselves in terms of the violence that built them.

Learning about Aira's experience is essential in grasping the overall problem of psychosocial maladaptation. The children are left with their ancestors' pain, survival strategies, and moral ambivalence, something that is not a personal failure but one that speaks to failure at the community level too. Her experience also reminds one of the abysmal realities that many people are living in where violence cannot be an option but is life.

This reality is also supported by the National Baseline Study on abuse Against Children in the Philippines conducted by Ramiro et al. (2022), which indicates that children from the Philippines are constantly exposed to various forms of domestic violence perpetrated by their closest relatives. Because children have repressed sentiments towards violent actions, such exposures normalize violent action and foster criminality. Aira's case supports the study's findings by showing how violence at home on a daily basis desensitizes and eventually normalizes aggression.

The study also identifies how kids exposed to violence in the home are apt to be aggressive and become antisocial. Domestic violence normalizes violence by starting a vicious cycle in which children are reared with it and even use it in their relationship lives. Aira's transition to criminality was not of her own making alone; rather, it was the manifestation of a larger pattern through which exposure to criminality and domestic violence shapes individuals to internalize and even engage in violent conduct.

Ramiro et al.'s (2022) observations and Aira's case are similar, which emphasizes the necessity of changes at the systemic level and intervention at an early point. Children like Aira will continue to be lured towards violent life if this vicious cycle is not broken, seeing aggression as a justified reaction to adversity and a survival strategy. The aim of this study is to identify the degree to which domestic violence is a contributory cause toward more general social problems like identity issues, crime, and maladjustment, rather than an issue in itself.

Theme 7 Economic Hardship and Survival Strategies

One of the strongest predictors of criminality among children is poverty. In order to survive, most CICL commit crimes for a living; others even take illegal jobs in order to feed their families. Poor children frequently turn to stealing, drug trafficking, or other offenses in order to maintain their survival needs. Since money needs constrict their options and push them into criminality, poverty has had a historical association with crime. This is a matter of focus that raises the question of how much destitute children desperately need to have vocational education, economic empowerment interventions, and other forms of alternative livelihoods. Evidenced by Nisar et al. (2015) and Bagheri et al. (2022). Thus, economic struggles within the family can create an environment conducive to illegal activities due to a lack of resources and support.

Subtheme 7.1 Poverty as a Driver of Criminal Behavior

Poverty plays a large role in shaping the behavior and choices of youth, especially in communities with few opportunities. This subtheme explores some of the ways that financial struggles can encourage young people to commit crime, such as dealing drugs and other criminal behavior. The intertwining of socioeconomic factors and youth crime can be more fully understood by examining firsthand narratives in conjunction with current research.

"Mahirap lang po kasi kami kaya napasok ko yung drugs, naging pusher po ko," is one of Mina's strong testimonies. It means, "It's just that we were poor that's why I got into drugs, I became a pusher." Mina's statement indicates a truth that most young people in poverty-stricken communities are forced to endure:

not having money can push people into committing crimes to survive.

Mina's observation is supported by research, which shows a general trend associating poverty with crime. Poverty and unemployment are powerful socioeconomic determinants of juvenile violence and criminality, posit Khan and Singh (2014). Mwangangi (2019) findings, which also show poverty as one of the leading causes of juvenile delinquency, support this. Further, Palomares' (2018) overview portrays a clear correlation between variables of poverty and difficulty in family histories and the likelihood of children to commit crimes. Krohn et al. (2015) also introduce a necessity for directing attention towards focused poverty as the driving force towards violence since the conditions of social disadvantage are said to be traditionally exacerbated by delinquency increases.

Mina's life story is a grim illustration of how poverty can perpetuate a cycle of violence and crime among adolescents. We can have a better grasp of the serious concern of teen delinquency and the urgent need for treatments that deal with the deeper roots of poverty in targeted communities by meshing her story with scholarly studies. According to a local study by Na. (2022), poverty is mainly the reason behind adolescent crime in the Philippines. According to the data, most criminals under their juvenile category are usually 14 to 15 years old, which indicates how economic status can usually be responsible for early involvement in crimes.

Subtheme 7.2 Illicit Work as a Means of Financial Support

The majority of people participate in illegal work as a vital survival strategy due to economic adversity. Families that face financial difficulties, where traditional working opportunities are unavailable or inadequate, are most affected by this phenomenon. The following excerpt, from an interview with a youth named Rama, is representative of the manner in which poverty compels individuals—young persons in this instance—to turn to criminality, frequently in an attempt to contribute to the maintenance of their families. Rama's narrative represents the sophistication of survival tactics of the poor.

"Ako po kasi nagbibigay ng financial (assistance) sa mga kapatid ko." In this profound yet basic statement, Rama is showing us his motivation for committing illicit labor: a sense of duty to his brothers and sisters. Coming from a poor household, the weight of financial hardship is a suffocating burden upon his shoulders so young. Rama's role as a financial supporter for his siblings demonstrates the harsh reality faced by many children in such circumstances. The social stigma of poverty leads to feelings of inadequacy and hopelessness, pushing young people like Rama into choices that have catastrophic consequences.

It is generally the case that criminality among youth and poverty correlate with each other. Poor families have children who commit crimes since they are likely to find alternative sources of livelihood and support for themselves and their parents. The failure of Rama's parents to provide for his needs pushes him into obtaining funds through the drug trade. Youth can get trapped in crime because of this cycle of despair, and the cycle of despair can fuel a cycle of poverty and anarchy.

Rama's involvement in criminal activity is a function of structural conditions around poverty and not simply a reflection of taste. Despite the risks, the allure of making easy illegal money can become a rather enticing alternative when legitimate work is thin and hard to come by. This shows just how essential it is to take on the source of economic hardship and offer protection nets that are capable of safeguarding families from such debilitating situations.

The more that we know of Rama's life, the more it becomes apparent that his is a story symptomatic of a wider social problem and not merely an isolated instance. Even quite innocent people may be getting pulled into offending due to pressures from unstable financial situations, so the actual need for across-the-board measures to reduce poverty and assist vulnerable children comes into focus. We can only start

constructing effective interventions to end the cycle of crime and poverty and provide people with hope for a better tomorrow by comprehending these processes.

Existing studies also strengthen the link between youth criminality and poverty. BusinessMirror (2022) informs us that financial difficulties are among the main reasons why young people get involved in criminal activities. The majority of children, including Rama, end up turning to other sources of income because they lack economic stability, hence getting involved in criminal activities like drug peddling. Illicit work is a tempting—though risky—option for earning a living where legal opportunities are either limited or unavailable because of structural obstacles like social stigma and illiteracy.

Through the analysis of how drug-related killings affect CCT beneficiaries in the Philippines, this article by Pangilinan et al. (2020) in the Journal of Illicit Economies and Development highlights the connection even stronger. According to the study, a significant proportion of the casualties belonged to low-income families, indicating that struggling individuals are particularly susceptible to committing illegal activities. This lends support to the argument that engaging in an illegal activity is a survival option in a society where legal means of generating income are circumscribed by poverty and are not merely a matter of personal choice.

This is supported by Rama's account, which demonstrates how desperation for funds drives teens into vulnerable situations. His financial means to cater to his siblings is a common scenario where children of low-income families bear huge responsibilities beyond their age. Without proper government action or community initiatives, individuals such as Rama have few options, subjecting them to the risk of engaging in criminal economies.

These trends highlight the need to treat economic poverty as a root cause of crime because it has the potential to break cycles of poverty-criminality by providing greater access to education, employment opportunities, and social services. Otherwise, more kids are going to be driven into underground work—not by choice but by necessity.

Subtheme 7.3 Struggles with Basic Needs

The socioeconomic conditions of young people are a prime factor when studying the determinants of juvenile delinquency. When there are unmet basic needs, most children and youths experience significant challenges that can propel them into becoming delinquent. This subtheme explores the realities of youth in trouble-making situations, concentrating on how poor support and irregular finances can affect their development and result in bad behavior.

One poignant illustration of this reality is from an interview with Rexcel, a San Juan Bahay Pag-asa resident youth. He described the loneliness and hunger he felt and said, "Wala na po (si) nanay sir asa malayo, di ko na po nakikita. Di po ko nakapag-aral at minsan hindi rin po nakakain." (My mother is far away, I can no longer see her. I'm not able to go to school, and sometimes I don't eat.) Rexcel's statement conveys a sense of utter despair and sadness. His everyday problems are starkly delineated by the lack of parental care and supervision, as well as the unavailability of education and basic necessities. Birckhead (2012) believes that this kind of deprivation is a major source of juvenile offending and goes beyond personal tragedy. Most vulnerable to taking crime as their survival option are children like Rexcel who bear the double blow of poverty and abuse.

This link between misbehavior and socioeconomic adversity is essential to making sense of the larger implications of children's lives. In not being able to afford food and clothing, their physical well-being is compromised, but so is their emotional and psychological growth. Lacking support and stability, Rexcel is vulnerable to being influenced into making choices that jeopardize his future.

Examining these stories helps us to understand the multifaceted interaction of various factors that impact the lives of young people and suggests the necessity of broad-based support systems to treat the underlying causes of delinquency. Developing effective interventions that can promote resilience and healthy development in at-risk adolescents requires knowledge of personal stories like Rexcel's.

Theme 8: Emotional Despair and Psychological Distress

CICL have severe emotional issues and are likely to be depressed, anxious, or confused about their future. There is intense regret and self-doubt among a few about their past actions, while the majority turn to substance abuse or escapism as coping mechanisms. The other psychological stress that impedes their rehabilitation is brought about by the emotional toll of jail and the stigma they encounter upon reentry. Since unresolved emotional pain enhances the risk of recidivism and long-term maladjustment, their mental health should be treated. This is a theme calling for CICL to be provided with psychological care systems and trauma-informed rehabilitation.

Subtheme 8.1: Feelings of Hopelessness and Emptiness

Individuals experiencing emotional despondency and psychological pain tend to be haunted by a sense of hopelessness and despair. A nice feeling of not belonging to anyone or even one's self tends to be the source of these emotions that will surround a person and give him/her the sensation of life having no value. This subtheme reflects the internal conflict of those ensnared in the cycle of addiction when seeking short-term relief in drugs is trying to escape from the realities of life. The following passage, being from a participant interview of Bondat, expresses similar sentiment in terms of desperation and longing for something beyond mere existence.

In a dimly lit room where the remnants of a once vibrant life linger, Bondat slumps forward, his gaze lost on the horizon. His words spill out with an uncomfortable candor that slices through the air, revealing a raw vulnerability. "Pariwalaya ako sa buhay sir, di ko po alam kung anong mangyayari sa'kin.". Anuman mabili ko lang ang pangangailangan ko ng drugs. (I'm in good shape as far as I'm concerned, I don't know what'll become of me. As long as I'm able to acquire the drugs that I need.) Most people who are addicted share this deep feeling of hopelessness reflected in these words. For Bondat, life is a string of fleeting moments, characterized by the frenzied search for drugs rather than goals or dreams. Freedom, which is typically linked to possibility and opportunity, has been twisted into a meaningless existence dominated by drug dependency. His words show a disconcerting truth: while he is free of conventional social expectation, he is also tortured by an incapacitating uncertainty regarding his future.

This dualism shows the richness of emotional suffering, for the solace gained from drugs turns into a double-edged sword. Bondat is caught in a vicious cycle that only makes him emptier as he flees from the paralyzing weight of being. The persistent reality that every day dissolves into another without purpose or direction casts a shadow on the transitory highs. When the control illusion is lost, the drugs become a trap and a lifeline.

Bondat's story reveals a larger story that many others who have found themselves in the same situation have told. Isolation is a common thread throughout their stories, where relationships with friends and family are stretched or cut off entirely. The world outside is blinded by the abyss of addiction and replaced with an oppressive inner world. Despair and emptiness become the landscape, creating a bleak picture of life boiled down to survival. His poignant observation then serves as a powerful reminder of the urgent need for compassion and support for those trapped in the throes of addiction. It will require more than just awareness to cure feelings of despair; it will also require compassion, a sense of community, and a

commitment to forging healing paths. Society can lend a beginning to eliminating the stigma of addiction by recognizing the depth of their desperation, opening the way for recovery and reconciliation.

The Psychological Association of the Philippines (2017) still places this in context by underscoring the emotional and mental difficulties that Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) experience. Their position paper underscores that expectations from society, coupled with weak support systems, make hopelessness complicated for youth offenders and further drive them towards crime. This proves to be a significant point of reference through which to understand Bondat's narrative. His statement, "Pariwalaya ako sa buhay sir" (I'm free in life, sir), can be interpreted as a defense mechanism—an attempt to rationalize his lack of direction. However, as the PAP highlights, this apparent detachment is likely rooted in psychological distress rather than genuine apathy. Without proper intervention, such distress only intensifies, leading to a reinforced cycle of substance dependence and legal infractions.

Thus, Bondat's biography is not a standalone instance of addiction; rather, it is evidence of the broader psychological and social problems of many people, and especially those socially rejected and abused in childhood. His own words precisely account for the devastating effect of emotional despair, which conforms to evidence showing that hopelessness is both a cause and an effect of chronic criminality. In order to address the underlying causes of addiction and criminal behavior, these patterns must be recognized and emphasize the immediate need for intensive psychological treatment instead of punishment only.

Subtheme 8.2 Coping through Substance Use and Escapism

The majority of people turn to all sorts of coping mechanisms to weather their issues when they are at their psychological lowest and most desperate emotionally. Escapism and addiction are among those that are extremely prevalent as coping mechanisms that offer temporary reprieve against the suffocating feelings. This subtopic shows how, although their issues are most likely to worsen with these coping strategies, some gain relief through drinking liquor and clubbing.

This is evident in the following quotation from an interview with Sam, a resident of Bahay Pag-asa San Juan: "Puro po ko inom, puro tambay. Doon po ko narerelax." (I just drink, just hang out. I relax there). As Sam describes, we catch a glimpse of a world in which alcohol is a means of escape from the difficulties he is experiencing. He speaks of drinking and partying because he is attempting to unwind and get away from the emotional anguish that permeates his everyday life. This is a statement that perfectly encapsulates the very nature of escapism: the desire for a place where fears fade and brief moments of pleasure are savored.

Sam's drinking and partying isn't merely the use of substance; it is also bonding, as attested by the fact that these gatherings are always topped with social contact. His saying is proven to be correct since, even as such incidents happen to provide some relief at that moment, it is highly possible that these temporarily mask deeper-seated psychological issues that still remain unsolved.

In Sam's life, it transpires that drinking is an escape for a troubled world and not merely a form of relaxation. His use of alcohol as a way of coping with problems raises serious questions about the efficacy and fallout of such escape. Though it may provide temporary relief, it also sustains a vicious cycle of addiction that can culminate in even deeper emotional despair. His story illuminates a key aspect of coping with mental distress. Social relationships and drug use create a complex environment in which people can find comfort but risk becoming more entrenched in their situation. In order to effectively treat the origin of emotional despair and create healthier coping mechanisms and a more supportive environment for people like Sam, it is necessary to know these coping mechanisms.

Sam's evidence is corroborated by current research, which shows a relationship between substance consumption, poor coping skills, and psychological distress. According to Sy and Hechanova (2020), even though family support decreases the risk of substance dependence, people with poor coping skills are at higher risk. The same can be said of the research participants, who tend to use drugs as a coping mechanism for their emotional distress issues. The same is the case with Sam's use of alcohol to relax, showing how people tend to turn to drugs for temporary relief when they do not have any healthy coping mechanisms. In addition, Simbulan et al. (2019) point out how the rigid stance of the Philippine government against drug abuse has exacerbated the situation for individuals such as Sam. The criminal justice system often ignores rehabilitation and emotional support in favor of addressing substance use as a social and emotional issue. Therefore, those who rely on alcohol or drugs as means of dealing with their problems are deprived of assistance that will benefit them in acquiring better coping mechanisms. The experience of Sam illustrates this reality; instead of receiving psychological counseling or emotional support, his major modes of escapism are alcohol drinking and hanging around other individuals, and this keeps him trapped in a cycle of substance abuse.

Cumulatively, these works enhance the current research findings through illustrating how structural barriers, inadequate coping strategies, and lack of emotional support foster substance use as an escape. People like Sam continue using drugs as a means of coping with psychological distress rather than as a last resort if proper interventions are not put in place.

Subtheme 8.3 Regret and Uncertainty about the Future

Regret tends to be a persistent memory of previous choices, looming over the here and now and potential future. The fact that the future remains a mystery might heighten this perception, creating an overall sensation of fear and hopelessness. Here, people struggle with the consequences of their choice and inquire about how their life would have turned out differently had they acted otherwise. The case of Andrew, one of the inhabitants of San Juan's Bahay Pag-asa, is the following well-crafted report of this inner struggle. "Malungkot po yung asa labas pa po ko. Meron po ko isang pagkakamali na di ko inasahan na ganito mangyayari." Andrew's words convey a deep sense of reflection and sadness. He starts off by releasing his sad feelings when he sits outside, a reflection of the state of his heart and physical position. "Malungkot," which translates to "sad," conveys a sense of gloominess and the heaviness of his heart. Andrew is aware that he feels alone; he is introspecting himself and suffering over decisions and memories that resulted in where he is.

As he goes on, Andrew discloses the cause of his suffering: one error that has irrevocably changed the direction of his life. The term "isang pagkakamali" (a mistake) evokes a profound sense of remorse and implies that such a decision was important and maybe unexpected. He emphasizes the shock element and the harsh unpredictability of life by confessing that he "did not expect" the result of this error. It is a reference to a bygone era of dreams and visions that are now eclipsed by the burden of what might have been.

Along with revealing his inner conflict for remorse, the admission of such a mistake by Andrew also increases the ambivalence that follows. The doubt starts haunting him as he considers the destiny that this decision will earn him in the future. Fighting through his life in a time when anything like transformation did not appear to be an option, the doubt adds to his anxiety. He is forced to consider the aftermath of his decisions and wonder if he will ever be free from his circumstances or if he will forever be trapped in the unhappiness of them.

Andrew expresses the emotional suffering that results from doubt and regret in this short but intense

utterance. His story shows the plight of those who are experiencing mental anguish and reminds us of the complicated relationship between our past choices and current situations. Andrew's voice shines light on the darkest corners of human emotion and the need for hope amidst tragedy, creating an awareness of the turmoil of one who is compelled to face past mistakes while seeking a path through an undecided future.

4. CONCLUSION

There is a dynamic interaction among social pressures, economic hardships, and emotional distress that exists in Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) lives that has a big impact on rehabilitation and reintegration into society. The research results show that despite CICL evaluating their past actions and modifying themselves to conform to institutionalized rehabilitation settings, they experience extensive emotional distress in the form of isolation, self-blame, and regret. Their psychological battles underscore the importance of trauma-informed care to promote their mental health and aid their individual development.

Family ties highly impact the experience of CICL. Numerous responders were from dysfunctional family or circumstances characterized by abuse, neglect, or poverty. Among the most common factors linked with offending behavior, parental lack of supervision and support was identified as a significant issue. Family counseling and support programs need to be given highest priority in reintegration plans to mend fractured relationships and give CICL a stable support network upon release.

Social environment and peer pressure have been identified as strong predictors of youth deviance. Risky environment puts vulnerable children at risk, resulting in gang involvement, neighborhood violence, and desensitization of crime. Proactive, community-based programs, role models, and mentoring programs need to counteract these in order to promote pro-social norms.

One of the key drivers of juvenile delinquency is economic hardship, with the majority of CICL engaging in crime for survival. The study cites the need for economic empowerment initiatives, such as financial support and vocational skills, in lowering recidivism and enabling rehabilitated CICL to access decent means of livelihood. Their prospects for successful long-term reintegration can be improved by strengthening such initiatives in rehabilitation facilities.

The study also emphasizes the necessity for gender-sensitive rehabilitation since female CICL have special problems that require customized treatments. In consideration of the fact that female CICL are disproportionately victimized by exploitation, abuse, or trauma, the study implies that the rehabilitation program must be tailored to respond to gender-specific needs.

All other things being equal, the results highlight the imperatives of holistic and multi-sectoral approach in rehabilitation. For CICL to be successfully reintegrated into society as productive and law-abiding citizens, a holistic rehabilitation program should incorporate psychological intervention, education, economic empowerment, family, and community participation. In order to achieve long-term and effective solutions to enhance the juvenile justice system and the general well-being of CICL, legislators, mental health practitioners, educators, social workers, families, and community organizations must come together to address these issues.

The results show the complex issues that CICL in rehabilitation centers have to deal with. Economic hardship, social pressures, and emotional pain all have a profound impact on their mental health and treatment outcomes. Even though rehabilitation centers are structured, and the youth have the possibility of personal development, root causes of problems like broken family relationships, exposure to crime, and mental illness remain. In order to address the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency, this study

emphasizes holistic, trauma-informed, and culturally appropriate therapies. Future regulations need to be geared towards creating holistic support systems that enable CICL to reintegrate into society smoothly after rehabilitation.

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