



BEYOND THE BUST: A DEEP DIVE INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF PDEA ENFORCERS IN THE CONDUCT OF DRUG OPERATIONS

Trixia Rose D. Paglala¹,

Vanjo M. Adolfo²,

Fame I. Bacalso³,

Cherryfe E. Pendang⁴ⁱ

¹Bachelor of Science in Criminology,
College of Criminal Justice Education,
University of Mindanao,
Davao City, Philippines

²Bachelor of Science in Criminology,
College of Criminal Justice Education,
University of Mindanao,
Davao City, Philippines

³Bachelor of Science in Criminology,
College of Criminal Justice Education,
University of Mindanao,
Davao City, Philippines

⁴Master of Science in Criminal Justice,
Faculty, College of Criminal Justice Education,
University of Mindanao,
Davao City, Philippines

Abstract:

This study explored the lived experiences of Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) enforcers conducting anti-drug operations. Through in-depth interviews and analysis of themes, the study revealed the experiences, challenges, and insights that the forefront agents faced daily in their efforts to eradicate the illicit drug trade. The study employed qualitative interviews with 10 drug enforcement personnel from Region 11, Davao City, with prior experience or involvement in anti-illegal drug operations. Purposive sampling was used to select the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) Regional Office participants 11. The result of the study revealed that the interview produced 11 primary themes based on their experiences. The emerging themes related to the lived experiences of participants involved in drug operations include compromising personal security in exchange for a sense of fulfillment and ongoing learning and growth. Throughout their journey, they encountered challenges and obstacles while carrying out their responsibilities, highlighting the following themes: lack of manpower, weather,

ⁱ Correspondence: email cherryfe1412@gmail.com

environment, the security of the enforcers' lives, time, and case filing. The PDEA enforcers shared valuable lessons and insights from their experiences in conducting anti-drug operations. These are divided into three themes: Collaboration and Teamwork, Excellence-driven and Accountable public servants, Training, Commendations, and Promotions. As a result, PDEA enforcers emphasized the value of achieving high standards of excellence and accountability in their roles as public servants. By embodying professionalism and integrity, they strived to earn and hold the trust and confidence of the public they serve.

Keywords: criminal justice, PDEA enforcers, anti-drug operations, challenges, phenomenology, Philippines

1. Introduction

The community's perception of law enforcers is heavily influenced by their own experiences of hypocrisy and injustice. This has led them to view these authorities as "kalaban" (enemy). They believe they are unfairly targeted by law enforcement, a sentiment deeply rooted in their collective experiences and hardships (Lasco, 2018). Drug enforcement officers operate in callous and demanding conditions, frequently dealing with intense and high-risk situations. The increased demand for drug cases may impact the public's perception of PDEA officers.

It may give rise to the belief that PDEA and other law enforcement organizations are incapable of successfully regulating or suppressing drug-related activity. Possessing "too many hats" resulted in strained relationships with the community and stress from roles. The results emphasize the significance of giving police precise role descriptions, expectations, and resources to address community needs for social services and public health (Zakimi *et al.*, 2022). This might undermine people's trust in their ability to handle the situation, especially if it seems like there has not been much progress made in the fight against drug-related crimes.

This study is essential to provide invaluable insights into law enforcement personnel's difficulties and complications in their resilient fight against the drug trade. Developing more efficient, moral, and fact-based drug enforcement techniques and regulations depends on this understanding. Furthermore, such a study can help protect the rights of people involved in drug cases by shedding light on the crucial topic of human rights and accountability in the context of drug enforcement. Their experiences highlight the necessity of ongoing instruction, tools, and assistance to deal with drug traffickers' constantly changing strategies. PDEA agents are essential to upholding drug laws and protecting the well-being of Filipino residents during this challenging environment. Their stories provide a gripping account of commitment, tenacity, and the firm journey of justice. To effectively battle the social and health risks associated with drug usage, it is crucial to establish a response network that unites many institutions and organizations (Dioquino & Gerona, 2022).

Other findings confirmed the efficacy of PDEA programs in reducing supply and demand. Respondents also claimed to be "aware" of the R.A. 9165, also known as the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002. Furthermore, a survey on the patterns and trends of drug abuse reported a significant improvement with a high degree of public understanding and positive perception of the government's anti-illegal drugs campaign. It demonstrates their awareness of the said campaign, and those who are informed support the government's anti-illegal drugs initiative (Philippine Anti-Illegal Drug Strategy, 2023). Following this, additional research also concluded that there was universal disapproval of killings committed for criminal or unlawful reasons. The numbers continue to rise, and the government is firm in its resolve to eradicate users of illegal drugs. It focuses on the desire to communicate to the international community, civil society, and the Philippine government the urgent need to address the country's "war on drugs"-related human rights crisis (Simangan, 2018).

1.1 Study Objectives

The main objective of this study is to explore PDEA enforcers' experiences conducting anti-illegal drug operations. Specifically, it aims to answer the following: (1) to explore the lived experiences of the PDEA enforcement officers in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations; (2) to identify the challenges and obstacles they have faced before, during, after the operations; (3) to solicit insights/lessons from their experiences.

1.2 Framework of the Study

This study draws its foundation from Seligman's Resilience Theory (1990), which comprises three key elements: personalization, pervasiveness, and permanence. The central premise of this theory is that these three aspects enable individuals to manage their thoughts when confronted with problems. It establishes a clear connection between the demanding nature of a leader's role and their ability to maintain resilience in the face of persistent adversity (Moore, 2019). Resilience-building programs commonly prioritize developing resources within individuals, such as self-efficacy and optimism, to help counteract the adverse impacts of future stressors. It is argued that leaders have a role in fostering resilience among their team members or colleagues by promoting positive emotional well-being and minimizing the negative emotions that often come with challenging circumstances.

For Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency enforcers, the Resilience theory is relevant to their operations because they are the ones who confront hazardous persons and risk their lives when conducting anti-drug operations. Individuals can manage and handle job-related stressors and pressures by focusing on resilience. Furthermore, PDEA enforcers will be able to handle challenges efficiently and perform to the best of their abilities in their demanding roles if their team leaders provide good leadership by promoting a positive environment and assisting them in maintaining their confidence and optimism.

Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977) supports Seligman's Theory. The theory is a significant concept in understanding human behavior and motivation that revolves around an individual's belief in their capacity to execute actions necessary to achieve specific goals. This theory suggests that individuals with high self-efficacy are more likely to set goals, persist in facing challenges, and perform better in various fields (Ackerman, 2018). Self-efficacy relies on an individual's confidence in their ability to accomplish tasks, whereas motivation stems from their aspiration to achieve. Understanding the self-efficacy and motivation of PDEA enforcers can provide valuable insights into their decision-making and performance during the demanding and challenging operations they undertake. Individuals with high self-efficacy often possess high motivation, and vice versa.

2. Literature Review

In terms of PDEA operations, this means that PDEA enforcers who believe in their ability to do their jobs are better prepared to deal with the stress and challenges of anti-drug operations. Their strong belief in their abilities, along with a great work ethic, keeps them sharp and resilient, allowing them to triumph over any hurdles and struggles that may arise during their anti-drug operations. Furthermore, with the appropriate level of support from their local authorities, government agencies, and other law enforcement agencies, they will be more driven to do their best, knowing they are not alone in the fight against drugs and criminals. This will eventually allow them to stay grounded, giving them the upper hand in their anti-drug operations and against the criminal syndicates.

Since the drug problem in the Philippines is complex and tied to issues like poverty, inequality, and the lack of power among the Filipino people, the government needs to take a broader and more complete approach. This means they should not only think of illegal drugs as a crime and a public order issue. They should also do more to prevent drug use, help people get better, and support those who use drugs to reintegrate into society (Malindog-Uy, 2020). They can negotiate difficulties, overcome obstacles, and continuously grow personally and professionally by striking a balance between their qualities and the needs of their environment. There are several ways that the police now implement harm reduction techniques (Kammersgaard, 2019).

When Duterte's anti-drug campaign intensified, the group encountered severe difficulties. Police forces were required by Duterte's policies to compile extensive lists of known or suspected drug users, who were then instructed to check themselves into "rehabilitation" institutions daily (Pinchin, 2019). Enforcement officers work in a hazardous field wherein guns are increasingly being used, and their targets may be terrorists or other threats that make the officers feel insecure about their lives (Zaimova-Tsaneva, 2021).

Like other countries, the Philippines has relied significantly on law enforcement, including the legal system and law enforcement task force (Lee *et al.*, 2022). The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) is best known for its buy-bust operations

and drug raids, which are the agency's most well-known activities under the national government's anti-illegal drug campaign. These two activities served as PDEA's public face and brand for many years. Nevertheless, have you ever wondered if PDEA accomplishes more than just these two measures to combat the problem of illicit drugs? Or are these their only means of carrying out their duty to see that regulations on dangerous medications are followed? However, to alter your perceptions and broaden your perspective, intelligence officers' or PDEA agents' responsibilities do not solely involve narcotics raids and buy-bust operations. To address all aspects of the current drug problem, PDEA also employs a comprehensive strategy, such as the demand reduction strategy, which tries to lessen or eliminate people's desire to use illegal substances. Their efforts to share knowledge have continued despite the COVID-19 pandemic threat. PDEA does not mean any harm; its only goal is to create a calm, safe environment for everyone, not just one person (Cabanayan, 2021).

For operatives of the Philippine Drugs Enforcement Agency (PDEA), managing the extreme mental stress experienced during narcotics operations is of utmost importance. PDEA has created a complex strategy for navigating these high-pressure situations. With PDEA's dedication to resilience training, agents' capacities to overcome challenges and maintain mental toughness in their hard line of work are further strengthened. Law enforcement agencies' tasks can harm an officer's physical, mental, and emotional balance between work and life and cause relationship challenges and work/family conflict. In law enforcement organizations, increased absenteeism, turnover, and reductions in effectiveness, including slower responses and less proficient decision-making, as well as increased complaints, policy breaches, and claims of misbehavior, are all signs of officer stress. Over time, stress can hurt officers' capacity to defend their areas and heighten hostility between officers and residents (Rineer, 2018).

Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency enforcers play a crucial role in combating drug-related crimes in the Philippines, but their experiences during anti-illegal drug operations still need to be studied. To address this issue, this study intends to fill the gap through extensive and in-depth research regarding motivation and resilience, work constraints, impact on personal life, and community engagement as law enforcement officers in their profession. Considering that the lived experiences of PDEA enforcers receive little to no attention, this study is noteworthy as it delves into their firsthand experiences in participating in illegal drug operations. Exerting efforts to delve into understudied issues is indispensable as they facilitate uncovering future discoveries (Dehghani *et al.*, 2021). On top of this, understanding the unique challenges PDEA enforcers face is vital for improving their work conditions and overall performance in carrying out their duties (Mumford *et al.*, 2021).

3. Material and Methods

This section presents the research respondents, materials and instruments, design, and procedure of this study.

3.1 Study Participants

The selected participants were 10 PDEA drug enforcement officers from Davao City, Region 11, who had prior involvement in anti-illegal drug operations, ensuring the inclusion of their experiences and providing in-depth insights. The researchers employed purposive sampling to identify the participants, gaining a detailed understanding of specific phenomena in the lived experiences of PDEA drug enforcement officers in their anti-illegal drug operations, which were most beneficial to the purposes of this research study (McCombes, 2023).

3.2 Materials and Instrument

For data collection, the researchers constructed an interview guide questionnaire relevant to the study's objectives. The interview guide questionnaire went through a validation process. Reviewed and enhanced by the research adviser and validated by the panel members, guaranteeing the questionnaire's effectiveness. Furthermore, the research utilized qualitative in-depth interviews to get thorough information that shed light on the participants' perspectives, experiences, and feelings (Rutledge & Hogg, 2020). The researchers utilized an audio recorder to record the interviews between the researchers and the participants, allowing accurate and detailed documentation of responses.

3.3 Design and Procedure

The study utilized qualitative, phenomenological research design. This study employed a qualitative research design to provide an in-depth understanding of the PDEA enforcement officers, capturing their perspectives and the factors in which they live. (Chavez *et al.*, 2023). The researchers adopted a phenomenological research approach as it examined the phenomenon of the PDEA enforcers by understanding and interpreting their lived experiences (Bhandari, 2020). It helped the researchers understand their subjective thoughts and feelings by employing a form of inquiry with their subjective experiences.

Before conducting the study, the researchers acquired title approval and a letter to interview the Dean's College of Criminal Justice Education, ensuring the necessary authorization to proceed. The researcher also obtained a letter of permission to conduct an interview from the PDEA Regional Office 11 director, ensuring compliance with the organization's legal compliance, such as data protection and privacy.

During the data collection phase, the researchers secured informed consent from all the participants regarding their data privacy, and all obtained responses were treated as confidential. The researchers gathered data through one-on-one, in-depth interviews with the selected PDEA enforcement officers to attain their lived experiences during anti-drug operations. The researchers strictly adhered to ethical principles, maintaining that participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were not compelled to answer questions from the questionnaire if they felt uncomfortable or preferred not to.

After gathering data, the researcher transcribed and translated all the information collected from the interviews, then meticulously re-read the data before going further.

With the help of the data analyst, the researchers organized the data systematically to generate initial information in a meaningful way regarding the phenomenon. Furthermore, the data analyst extracted the data to form themes by analyzing, combining, comparing, and relating them to one another. The study used a thematic analysis design, a process of identifying themes or patterns within qualitative data, to identify themes with the data gathered to conclude the meaning behind the participants' responses, accomplished by finding repeating themes from the data (Chavez *et al.*, 2023). Moreover, the researchers thoroughly honed, reviewed, and defined the themes and used them to formulate final analyses and findings to weave conclusions.

4. Results and Discussion

The findings and analysis of the data gathered are presented in this section.

4.1 Lived Experiences of PDEA Enforcers in the Conduct of Anti-illegal Drug Operations

The collected data based on the challenges of the participants, as shown in Table 1, shows three major themes: (1) Compromise of Personal Security, (2) Sense of fulfillment, and (3) Continuous Learning and Growth.

Table 1: Essential Themes on the lived experiences of PDEA enforcement officers in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations

Themes	Core Ideas
Compromise of personal security	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Fear for the security and family members- Death of enforcers during operations
Sense of fulfillment	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Feeling of satisfaction in catching those who are selling illegal drugs- Experiences boost the feeling of fulfillment- Discipline and patience during operations
Continuous learning and growth	<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Every operation is a learning- Advising and educating youth about illegal drugs- Advising and educating the family of the target (pusher/user)

4.1.1 Compromise Personal Security

The fight against illegal drugs has created an atmosphere of complicated fear directly, which has reshaped and unstable social interactions between people and the government as well as between locals (Warburg & Jensen, 2020). In the conduct of anti-drug operations, the PDEA enforcers convey feelings of fear due to the inherent risks involved, including potential retaliation from drug traffickers or exposure to dangerous situations that expose them to the possibility of physical harm, injury, or even death. Police operations accounted for more than half of the killings, with the other victims (David *et al.*, 2018). When faced with these threats, they feel compelled to take actions that compromise their security to mitigate the perceived dangers or protect the family members around them. Balancing the conflicting demands of violence and restraint in

policing is challenging due to the profession's hazardous nature and growing criticism (James *et al.*, 2018).

As we dive deep, the respondents expressed their notions and thoughts about their experiences in the conduct of anti-drug operations that can profoundly affect them personally and professionally. In which most of them stated that:

“When we arrest the subject of this operation. Yung mga kamag anak nila nagwawala talaga, gusto makipaglaban sa amin. Kaya, ang ginagawa namin talagang planned operation muna. We ah... assume talaga may ganitong mangyayari na mag re-retaliate yung mga kamag anak. That’s why we- yung sa shaped your perspective on our job, we ensure our kuan naman... yung security when it comes to danger sa mga kalaban.” (IDIP6)
(When we arrest the subject of the operation, their relatives often go berserk and want to fight us. That is why we always conduct a planned operation first. We always assume that something like this might happen and that the relatives might retaliate. To shape our perspective on our job, we ensure the security of our team when facing danger from enemies.)

“Sa experience ko, madami na akong kasama na... namatay during operation. So, ang ano ko talaga is i-continue yung trabaho para mahuli na yung mga drug offenders, at di na sila maka ano pa sa mga civilian. Kung бага, maka.. cause ng harm sa mga civilian.” (IDIP5)
(In my experience, I have had many colleagues who died during operations. So, for me, it is to continue the work to catch the drug offenders so they can no longer harm civilians.)

4.1.2 Sense of Fulfillment

Drug usage has been a problem in various countries, and it will continue to be so as the number of drug users grows year after year. Like other countries, the Philippines has relied significantly on law enforcement, including the legal system and law enforcement task force (Lee *et al.*, 2022). Law enforcement agencies' tasks can harm an officer's physical, mental, and emotional balance between work and life (Rineer, 2018). Despite their challenges and risks, PDEA enforcers often feel a profound sense of fulfillment in their jobs. This fulfillment stems from a combination of factors, including the satisfaction of apprehending individuals engaged in illegal drug activities, their experiences that boost the feeling of fulfillment become motivation, and their discipline and patience throughout drug operations. Law enforcement officers achieved a very high degree of success in their endeavors, as well as high levels of engagement, willingness to work, monitoring quality, and leadership (Donque, 2023).

As we deep dive, our respondents expressed their thoughts on these factors, collectively contributing to their sense of fulfillment and reinforcing their dedication to combating illegal drugs and safeguarding communities. In which most of the respondents stated that:

“Syempre yung, mahuli mo yung mga, talagang nag bebenta ng drugs. Ang fulfillment lang don para sa akin is yung, ah.. ma ano mo sa sarili mo na nakatulong ka talaga sa bayan. Kasi alam naman natin na drugs ang ano ang isa sa nakakasira ng mga ano sa tao-sa community.” (IDIP5)

(The satisfaction of catching those who are selling (illegal) drugs. The fulfillment for me is knowing that I have truly helped the country. Because we know that illegal drugs are one of the factors that harm individuals and communities.)

“Dapat patience jud ta kay naa man tay operation nga dugay kayo ma-materialize, dugay dayon ma-kuan ba, madakpan. So, kung wala kay patience, dili ka makahulat, dili nimo madakpan tung imong target.” (IDIP9)

(We need patience because operations take a very long time to materialize, and it takes a long time to apprehend them. Because if you do not have patience, you cannot wait, and you will not be able to apprehend your target.)

4.1.3 Continuous Learning and Growth

The PDEA enforcement officers realized that in every operation, no matter how it turns out, it teaches important lessons that can be used in other operations. They can negotiate difficulties, overcome obstacles, and continuously grow personally and professionally by striking a balance between their qualities and the needs of their environment. There are several ways that the police now implement harm reduction techniques (Kammersgaard, 2019). They understand the value of taking preventive action against illegal substances. There is ample evidence to support the claim that policing practices have an impact on PWUD's (Person Who Used Drugs) usage of harm reduction services, such as advising and educating young individuals about the risks associated with using illegal substances (Falzon *et al.*, 2022).

As part of their operations, they often provide support and guidance to their targets' families, offering resources for counseling and other forms of assistance. In 2014, UNODC recommended that community-based drug rehabilitation support be available. Giving preventive education, health promotion, screening, medication, and services for rehabilitation, primary medical services, essential assistance, learning, skill development, and livelihood possibilities in communities are all part of this comprehensive strategy for healthcare (Hechanova *et al.*, 2018).

As we dive deep, our respondents expressed their thoughts toward preventing future incidents and fostering a supportive environment for recovery and healing. In which most of the respondents stated that:

“We ensure that ah... yung kabataan natin nalalayo talaga (sa paggamit ng illegal drugs). We also give ah... partial our knowledge, tapos paano maiwasan- ini-encourage namin ang mga kabataan- mga youth na umiwas sa mga drugs- illegal drugs. Kaya dini-discuss namin, ganito ang effect niyan pag naka gamit tayo ng illegal drugs hanggang- until

pwedeng mapunta kayo sa prison, pwede mapunta sa mental hospital, or even death.” (IDIP6)

(We ensure that our youth stay away from using illegal drugs. We also share a portion of our knowledge on how to avoid and discourage the youth from using illegal drugs. We discuss the effects of using illegal drugs, from the possibility of ending up in prison, being admitted to a mental hospital, or even facing death.)

“Dapat jud diay tutukan jud nin-- labaw na ning nasa family. Smallest unit in the community, family jud. Didto palang mag start na ang anti-drug operation, for me ha. Kay, sa mga bata man gud na mag start.” (IDIP4)

(We really should pay attention, especially in cases involving family. Family is the smallest unit in the community. Anti-drug operations should start at that level, in my opinion, because it starts in children.)

4.2 PDEA Enforcement Officers Have Faced Challenges and Obstacles Before, During, and After the Operations

From the collected data based on the challenges of the participants shown in Table 2, there were five major themes: (1) Lack of Manpower, (2) Weather and Environment, (3) Security of the lives of the enforcer, (4) Time, and (5) Filing of the Case.

Table 2: Essential Themes on the challenges and obstacles of PDEA enforcement officers have faced before, during, and after the operations

Themes	Core Ideas
Lack of Manpower	Some personnel are sick and unavailable during operations Simultaneous operations conducted result in a lack of enforcers.
Weather and Environment	Weather is good or bad; operations must continue Narrow roads, squatters' areas, and it is difficult to find the target Unfamiliar places Needs to walk under the heat of the sun
Security of the Lives of the Enforcers	Drug pushers/users have guns Unfamiliar places A glitch in communication endangered enforcers' lives
Time	Limited time - 36-hour period to file the case Operations happened anytime, on-call
Filing of the Case	Much paperwork to be done (reports, affidavits, records)

4.2.1 Lack of Manpower

Drug enforcement officers face challenges in conducting anti-drug operations stemming from a shortage of workforce. It increases the workload for each enforcer and the risk of burnout, compromising their overall effectiveness. The adverse effects resulting from these challenges can compromise the workplace's stability and productivity (StaffAny Team, 2023). Considering the PDEA enforcers' nature of their work, they find it challenging to have a lack of workforce due to the demand for extra work for those who are present. As stated, being short-staffed results in tons of work, leading to poor

performance (Amadhila & Bhebhe, 2022). Also, being short on staff implies stress to available personnel and makes it more challenging for them (Syed, 2023). The participants highlighted the challenges arising from the lack of manpower, sharing their firsthand experiences faced in anti-drug operations, and stated:

"Minsan may obstacle as a team kung may magkasakit kulang sa tao ganyan talaga yan you need to adjust as a PDEA agent you are trained to be flexible. So, it does not mean na may kulang sa team hindi na matuloy ang plano, still you have to do it kahit gaano payan kahirap." (IDIP2)

(Sometimes, there are obstacles as a team, like when someone falls ill or there is a shortage of personnel; that is just how it is. As a PDEA agent, you are trained to be flexible. So, it does not mean that the plan will not push through if there is a shortage in the team. You still have to do it, no matter how challenging.)

"Before the operation, manpower. Makita man gud sa akola diri sa PDEA, gamay lang ang mga agents, tapos multi-task ang mga agents." (IDIP4)

(Before the operation, workforce. When I arrived at PDEA, the number of agents was small, and the agents had to multi-task.)

4.2.2 Weather and Environment

PDEA enforcers face obstacles due to adverse weather conditions and challenging environments when conducting anti-drug operations, whether dealing with scorching heat or heavy rain. In situations wherein certain weather conditions hit, such as increased weather temperature, heavy rainfall, and floods, certain activities are affected, such as operations and transportation (Gössling *et al.*, 2023). The unfamiliar operational workplace, characterized by narrow alleyways and unfamiliar places, further contributes to their obstacles in the workplace. Physical working conditions significantly impact employees' work performance, which in turn affects the employees themselves (Maryanti *et al.*, 2022). Despite these daunting challenges, they remain determined to commit to combating illegal drugs and safeguarding the community. Their resilience can be further understood through Albert Bandura's Self-Efficacy Theory (1977), which posits that individuals with high self-efficacy are more inclined to set goals, persist in the face of obstacles, and excel in their respective domains. The participants emphasized:

"Una yung panahon kasi kung ang area mainit man or maulan, adtoon jud namo siya within that time." (IDIP1)

(The weather, whether hot or rainy in a particular area, we will go there within that time.)

"Labaw na diri sa Pilipinas nga squats- squatters area, gagmay kaayo mga narrow kaayo ang kalsada. Lisod kay siya sudlon, lisod kay siya daganon, slide pajud." (IDIP4)

(Especially here in the Philippines, the roads are tiny and narrow in squatter areas. It is also difficult to enter, run through, and slippery.)

"Yung terrain. Kung, halimbawa sa bundok. May time na kailangan maglakad sa araw, ganun. Kasi di man pwede mag dala ng sasakyan. Tapos, dito sa city naman, may mga lugar na masyadong masikip." (IDIP5)

(Like the terrain. For example, in the mountains. There are times when you need to walk under the sun. Because you cannot bring a vehicle. And then, in the city, some places are too narrow.)

4.2.3 Security of the Lives of the Enforcer

The researchers have discovered that drug enforcement officers face challenges in ensuring their safety during anti-drug operations. They express concerns about the unpredictable nature of their work, perceiving that unexpected situations can arise, posing risks to their lives and requiring them to adapt quickly when their plans change. Enforcement officers work in a hazardous field wherein guns are increasingly being used, and their targets may be terrorists or other threats that make the officers feel insecure about their lives (Zaimova-Tsaneva, 2021). The presence of armed drug pushers and users heightens the danger the PDEA enforcement officers encounter, placing their lives directly in jeopardy. A study mentioned that police officers perceived suspects having a firearm in their hands as more threatening and dangerous than those who tend to reach for a gun (Terrill & Somers, 2022).

Additionally, communication failures, even minor glitches, can have severe consequences, potentially endangering the lives of enforcers by disrupting vital coordination and response efforts. Miscommunications lead to heightened stress and negative results (Oostinga *et al.*, 2019). The participants highlighted:

"Communication kase before operation need ng communication dili lang sa team pero also sa tao na naga lubog or alpha na tinatawag kung naa lang ma sipyat sa communication ha pwede masunog or madisgrasya." (IDIP3)

(Communication is crucial before the operation, both within the team and with the person in charge. If there is a glitch in communication, someone could get injured, or an accident could happen.)

"Obstacles like kanang... sigi kag huna huna kanang ang imong dakpon armado ba siyempre mahadlok jud ka tao lang naman ta" (IDIP8)

(Obstacles, like when you keep thinking about whether the target is armed, of course, you will be afraid, since we are only human.)

4.2.4 Time

Time constraints pose a pressing challenge for PDEA enforcers engaged in anti-drug operations. With a strict 36-hour to file cases, the pressure to gather evidence, conduct thorough investigations, and ensure all procedural requirements are met is difficult. In a world that continues progressing, it is crucial to be constantly aware of time. Chaudhari (2022) stated that when one fails in most activities, it results from their non-performance

in managing their time. When time is crucial at work, possessing the necessary knowledge and skills is essential to complete tasks efficiently and accurately. In a dynamic work environment, knowledge is the foundation for efficiently achieving the prioritized goal (Melhem, 2022). For PDEA enforcement officers, timely execution is vital to avoid delays and ensure the job is done effectively. The participants highlighted:

“Most challenging sa amin is yung time. Kailangan talaga naming maging accurate kami sa time pag ah... when it comes to anti-drug operation.” (IDIP6)

(The most challenging aspect for us is time. We need to be accurate with the timing during anti-drug operations.)

“Ah eto yung ano, ah... kumbaga yung anti-drug operations, madali lang yan matapos. Eto yung after na, yung preparation na ng filing of case, eto na yung mahirap, tsaka matrabaho. Kay, merong ano 36 hours na period na dapat ma file mo na yung case. So habulin nyo talaga yun kahit wala kayong mga tulog.” (IDIP5)

(Ah, here is the thing. The anti-drug operations can be quickly completed. The challenging part comes after the operations, which are the preparation and filing of the case. There is a 36-hour period within which you need to file the case. So, you have to go after that, even if you have no sleep.)

4.2.5 Filing of the Case

The PDEA enforcers have highlighted the challenges they faced as drug enforcement officers during the legal procedures involved in filing cases. Much paperwork, including detailed reports and affidavits, must be diligently prepared, reviewed, and compiled. Ricciardelli *et al.* (2023) stated that paperwork involves complex processes to comply with. The authors added that the demands of courts and governments regarding the procedures for paperwork add salt to the wound. In addition, in the legal context, accurately filing a criminal case is essential to uphold principles of justice, fairness, and due process, ensuring that the accused receives a fair trial and that the legal rights of all parties involved are protected (Kenton, 2022). The participants highlighted:

“After the operation... diyan pag after ng operation- diyan nagkakatalo na kami sa mga court. Dapat align talaga sa law. Lahat ng ginagawa namin, lahat ng sasabihin namin, dapat align talaga sa law, dapat wala kaming na v-violate.” (IDIP6)

(After the operation, that is where we often encounter challenges in court. We need to align everything with the law. Everything we do and say must be under the law; we should not violate any rules.)

“Challenging siya sa legal kuan kay mag himo man mog mga papeles, mga affidavit, basig dili mu lusot ang inyung gi file, ana gud. Mao na siya ma dismiss.” (IDIP8)

(It is challenging in legal matters because you have to prepare documents and affidavits; if what you filed fails, that is it. This could lead to dismissal.)

4.3 Insights/Lessons from the Experiences of PDEA Enforcement Officers

From the collected data on the responses of the participants shown in Table 3, there were three major themes about their insights and lessons gained from their experience, and these are (1) Collaboration and Teamwork, (2) Excellence-Driven and Accountable Public Servants, and (3) Training, Commendation, And Promotion for Accomplishment.

Table 3: Essential Themes on the challenges and obstacles of PDEA enforcement officers have faced before, during, and after the operations

Themes	Core Ideas
Collaboration and Teamwork	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Work with the barangay officials and other government entities - Cooperation in planning and implementing with the community for barangay clearing operations
Excellence-driven and Accountable Public Servants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Do the work with honesty, not on the achievement quota - Must have complete equipment during operations - Must have exact details to avoid mistaken identity - Doing what is right and following protocols - Safety of the target and family
Training, Commendation, and Promotion for Accomplishment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Seminars on handling cases, coping mechanisms, and the use of the latest technology - Promotions and commendations - More logistics personnel

4.3.1 Collaboration and Teamwork

The PDEA Enforcers highlighted the importance of gaining the public's attention and trust. The existence of collaboration and teamwork in conducting anti-drug operations gives them the advantage of using the remaining force that could bolster their mission. Middleton (2024) notes that the power of teamwork could help problem-solving lead to better outcomes. Further, it enables them to take more calculated risks, encourages personal growth and job satisfaction, and reduces burnout. The PDEA enforcers expressed their notions and thoughts about the significance of collaboration and teamwork in furthering their goals. IDIP1 expressed how connecting with barangay officials and other government entities could bolster their community relations, and he/she quoted:

“Dako jud syag lesson sa amoa no minsan dili mi always naga operations naa pud mi mga lectures para ma educate ang mga bata and sa mga barangay, eskwelahan and establishment naga conduct mig symposium. Daghan sya actually gusto lng nko e pahibalo sailaha ba na ang pag adik adik dili jud maayo.” (IDIP1)

(It imparts many lessons to us. Sometimes, we only conduct operations and have lectures to educate the children. We conduct symposiums in various barangays, schools, and establishments. It does a lot. I want to make them aware that getting involved in addictive behaviors is not good.)

Moreover, community relations with the PDEA enforcers towards their community when planning and implementing their drug-clearing operations will be much easier if they involve the cooperation of their jurisdictional barangays. Adra *et al.* (2020) note that according to Robert Peels' Nine Policing Principles, which states, "To recognize always that the power of the police to fulfill their functions and duties is dependent on public approval of their existence, actions, and behavior, and on their ability to secure and maintain public respect," as IDIP1 quoted:

"Naga conduct mig barangay drug clearing like ang mga surrenderies gina pa surrender jud namo na sa mga baranggay para ma tagaan namo silag program halimbawa kung naa ka sa watchlist epa surrender jud namo na kay pwede ka anytime ma hit kung mag apply kag trabaho." (IDIP4)

(We conduct barangay drug clearing operations where we encourage individuals who are involved in drug-related activities to surrender themselves to the barangay. By surrendering, we can provide them with appropriate programs and support. For example, if someone is on the watchlist, we strongly urge them to surrender because it can potentially affect their employment opportunities.)

In the article Philippines' Preventive Drug Education Approach (2024), the government of Singapore further supports this strategy by stating that the best interventions originate within the community, are carried out by the community, and benefit the community. It added that local Government officials and community leaders receive training programs to enhance their abilities to lead the implementation of drug abuse prevention and control programs in their communities. These programs include preventive education activities and community-based treatment and rehabilitation services. These vested powers and various programs help the PDEA enforcers in a way that alleviates the stressors that the PDEA might face before, during, or even after the conduct of their anti-drug operations.

4.3.2 Excellence-driven and Accountable Public Servants

The theme showcases that the PDEA works differently from other law enforcement organizations, for they work with great compassion and devotion to their line of work. Even though sometimes their supply is quite limited and insufficient, they still strive to perform with utmost excellence and accountability. It is consistent with Seligman's theory of self-resilience, which states that despite the high demands of their job and the occasional incapacibilities, temptations, and risks involved, they can withstand them and find a sense of purpose in their profession. As IDIP4 and IDIP3 stated that:

"Equipments dapat well provided kay lisud kaayo walay sakyanan pag operation." (IDIP4)
(It is essential to have well-provided equipment during operations, especially when transportation is needed.)

"Oo, kato presence of mind ug communication ug follow permi sa instructions." (IDIP3)
(Yes, just a presence of mind, good communication, and always following instructions.)

Furthermore, persuading the community to cooperate with the PDEA will be much easier when they function correctly to society's demands. PDEA enforcers accomplish this objective by performing their job with excellence and accountability. Lohrenz (2023) stated that by taking responsibility for our actions and decisions, driving results, and fostering a culture of accountability, creating a thriving environment where top talent flourishes, innovation thrives, and extraordinary achievements become the norm. As IDIP7 said that:

"Mostly na lalabas yung injustice is dahil sa achievements, quota. Example, sa taas, sabi niya 'uy bakit di pa kaayo nag o-operate?' So ma pressure mo. Konting chismis ahh- nag away lang pala sila sa lupa, nag sumbong ngayon dyan sa estasyon. Tapos, dahil sa may hinahabol silang quota, ino-peratan nila, walang na kuha. Mao to na ang- sakyan pud sa mga operatiba kay nangita ug trabaho, diba daghan na damay. Kanang gina ingon nila na... kanang unsay tawag ana... kanang na damay ba. Collateral damage ba. Para lang sa... dapat walaon lang nang quota quota." (IDIP7)

(Most of the injustice that arises is due to achievement quotas. For example, from the higher-ups, they might say, "Hey, why haven't you operated yet?" So, you feel pressured. When a situation arises due to gossip, they fight over land, and someone reports it to the station. Then, because of quotas, they are promptly arrested. Because of the quotas, operatives are also drawn in, and many people suffer. I suggest achievement quotas should just be removed.

The law enforcement ethics of the PDEA enforcers helped them gain the community's hearts and leave the matter of drug criminality to the PDEA agency. A culture of accountability or responsibility in law enforcement also creates trust within the community (Modise *et al.*, 2022). This portrayal of resiliency may assist them in achieving their organization's objective, which is to take a step closer to championing the reduction of illegal drug use in the country by implementing the Barangay Drug Clearing Program (BDCP).

4.3.3 Training, Commendation, and Promotion for Accomplishment

The PDEA enforcers' lived experiences depict gallantry. Despite the challenges and circumstances, they still demand continuous learning and growth. Participants highlighted that there should be more coping mechanisms and using the latest technologies. The importance of training for law enforcement officers (2023) emphasized the importance of continuous training for law enforcement officers as they need to adapt to the ever-changing landscape of studying criminality. It stressed that through training, law enforcement officers could have the advantage of staying one step ahead of criminal

activities, keeping up with technological advancements, and navigating quickly legal procedures. As IDIP2 stated:

"Sa amoa more trainings pa sa amoa mga law enforcement officers and sa mga gadgets na gamiton like body worn cameras although naa mn mi mga baril no pero knowing na hightech namn ngayon dapat more high tech gadgets for pdea agents and for programs strengthen more lectures and preventive sana mag karon pamig more projects with other agencies for the community kay dako jud syado syag tabang lalo na sa lectures kasi you are killing the suppliers through your lectures kumbaga gina input natin sa tao na Dangerous Drugs is bad and also promotion namin." (IDIP2)

(For us law enforcement personnel, there should be more training and high-end equipment such as body-worn cameras; while we have a pistol, it is insufficient given that we live in a new generation virtually entirely dominated by technology. Furthermore, there should be more programs, lectures, and projects with other complementing agencies because they are highly beneficial in preventing the spread of dangerous drugs.)

Furthermore, the participants also advocated for more seminars for handling cases and more logistics personnel. We all know that writing is a part of the law enforcement routine. Stewart (2020) stated that Police officer writings, whether in reports, press releases, or evaluations, are essential to the perception of the organization's effectiveness. As the time between the incident and media reporting closes, police writings must be clear, concise, and understood by the citizens to avoid backlash and protest. Furthermore, he added that skillful writing enables officers to think critically in investigations, form good arguments, and increase communication skills. Well-written reports provide a clear picture of an event and its circumstances and are an excellent reference source when testifying in court or creating intelligence briefs. As IDIP1 stated:

"Number one is dapat ang PDEA agent dili jud siya dapat mag stop to learn kasi naa namay mga bag oh na jurisprudence especially sa pag file ug kaso sa paghandle ug mga evidence so dapat si agent updated sya kase isang mali mo lang sira na ang case." (IDIP1)
(PDEA Agents ought to keep learning because there is new jurisprudence, particularly when filing cases, and in terms of evidence management, the agent should be appropriately updated because a tiny error could result in the case being dismissed.)

Lastly, participants found that more promotions and commendations are a loophole to staying motivated and passionate about their profession. Webster (2023) concluded, *"Employee recognition is a cornerstone of a motivated and high-performing workforce. It positively impacts motivation, job satisfaction, morale, and engagement."* As IDIP4 stated:

"Syempre ang pinaka number one jud e boost jud nila ang moral sa drug enforcement officer para ma boost among moral kailangan jud ug mga promotion, recommendations kay lahi ramn gud ang feeling na mu trabaho gane ka nga naa kay achievements kanang makita nimo imong goal na na achieve nimo lami kaayo magtrabaho ana biskan wala kay tulog."
(IDIP4)

(Promotions and recommendations are crucial since they increase our morale as narcotics enforcement officers. It is a different sensation when we finish our tasks since we know we worked hard for it, even if we did not get enough sleep.)

5. Implications

In this comprehensive study, the researchers explored the experiences, challenges, and insights of Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) officers involved in anti-drug operations. This section presents conclusions from the data gathered from in-depth interviews based on the research objectives. It also provides recommendations regarding the PDEA enforcement officers' experiences in their demanding profession.

The study underlines that providing mental health support and counseling services for PDEA enforcers is essential. To identify early signs of stress, fatigue, or other mental health problems, routine mental health evaluations can be done. If someone shows signs of stress, they should seek the organization's counseling services. By providing these, it can help them cope with job-related stress and trauma. At the same time, their hazard pay should be increased due to the high-risk nature of their duties.

The study also underscores that an attentive and continuous training program should be implemented and targeted recruitment campaigns initiated. This can be achieved by conducting simulated raids, arrests, and other operations in controlled locations in collaboration with other law enforcement agencies. The agency can set aside specific days or half-days per month for training activities and, to maintain operational capacity, use a rotating schedule to ensure that staff members are not all training simultaneously. Also, in terms of recruitment, the agency can offer job opportunities on the agency website, on social media, and through employment portals to increase the number of enforcers with diverse skills in the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency. Additionally, to advocate for increased budget allocation by meeting with important government officials, lawmakers, and policymakers to address PDEA's financing requirements and priorities to ensure adequate resources, equipment, and operational support.

Furthermore, the study will show how their active participation will contribute to their excellent community relation with the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency in anti-drug operations. As evident in the results of this study, active participation from the community helps the PDEA enforcer's job run smoothly and successfully. It will give the agency, specifically the enforcers, a sense of responsibility and accountability to perform their job effectively. In addition, other local government agencies and barangay officials that could foster the development of PDEAs' anti-drug operations should collaborate and

be complementary with one another, as it is part of their Law Enforcement Planning Considerations that agencies should operate in complementary with other bureaus, agencies, or organizations in carrying out a specific task. Through this, the agency can ensure the success of its mission and maintain public safety, peace, and order.

The aims and results of this study offer a fresh and new contribution to the field of research regarding the lived experiences of PDEA enforcers, which the researchers discovered to be extremely limited. Most of the existing research papers focused only on matters related to illegal drug killings and illicit drugs in general. No study was found to delve into the experiences of the PDEA enforcers themselves. Furthermore, collaborative efforts among researchers, enforcers, and policymakers can contribute to developing effective strategies for the future by presenting and discussing the study with the government units mentioned above. Furthermore, it is expected to provide an increased relationship between the research community, enforcers, and policymakers as one of its benefits.

Moreover, Criminology students, expected to work and be part of law enforcement units someday, will highly benefit from this study as it sheds light on the nature of the work of a PDEA enforcer and provides knowledge from their actual responses extracted from their lived experiences.

6. Concluding Remarks

Based on the study results, it is concluded that the tasks assigned to PDEA officers have a significant and multifaceted impact on their lives, as well as on the lives of their families and the families of offenders. First, Compromise Personal Security, a heightened fear for their personal security and family members due to the inherently risky nature of their work, which can lead to death. Second, the sense of fulfillment upon apprehending drug pushers. As for them, it represents a significant victory in the ongoing battle against the drug trade, and those experiences serve to boost officers' morale and reinforce their commitment to their duties. They realized that to achieve it successfully, they must be disciplined and patient. Third, Continuous Learning and Growth, acknowledging that each anti-drug operation offers significant chances for learning. They have received continuous education to strengthen their abilities to carry out their responsibilities as community advocates and educators for individuals of various ages.

It is also evident that Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) officers face various challenges and obstacles before, during, and after their operations. First, the Lack of Manpower causes an increase in the workload for each enforcer and the risk of burnout, compromising their overall effectiveness. Second, Weather and Environment, including bad weather, unfamiliar places, narrow areas, and working under the sun, pose significant risks and constraints on operational effectiveness. Third, the security of the lives of the enforcers. The presence of armed drug pushers and users operating in unfamiliar places and a glitch in communication endangered enforcers' lives, placing their lives in jeopardy. Fourth is time, where there is a limited time to file the case and on

demand. Lastly, case filing involves extensive paperwork such as reports, affidavits, and records. Their recognition of challenges or obstacles showcases their resilience through their heightened awareness. Their challenges serve as opportunities for growth, strengthening their skills and capabilities and preparing them for forthcoming encounters with similar challenges and obstacles.

Furthermore, based on the shared insights and lessons of the participants, we have discovered an enormous gap that the agency should look at for the success of anti-drug operations. First, Collaboration and Teamwork, working alongside other government agencies and creating good community relations, could help lessen the negative impacts of anti-drug operations. Second, if the organizations perform their responsibilities and impose policies and guidelines with humility, excellence, and integrity, excellence-driven and accountable public servants will reflect the organization's governance well. Third, Training, Commendations, and Promotions for their achievements must be upheld to boost PDEA enforcers' morale to perform their tasks with the highest quality and excellence.

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About the Authors

Trixia Rose D. Paglala is a Bachelor of Science in Criminology student at the University of Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines. She is passionate about criminal justice and aims to contribute to developing effective law enforcement strategies. Her academic interests include crime prevention, forensic science, and community engagement in upholding peace and order.

Vanjo M. Adolfo is an aspiring criminologist pursuing his Bachelor of Science in Criminology at the University of Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines. With a keen interest in law enforcement and criminal investigation, he strives to enhance his knowledge and skills to address real-world challenges in the field of criminology.

Fame I. Bacalso is a criminology student at the University of Mindanao, Davao City, Philippines. She is deeply committed to understanding the dynamics of crime and justice. Her goal is to make meaningful contributions to the field of criminology through research and practice.

Cherryfe España-Pendang, MSCJ is a faculty member of the College of Criminal Justice Education, University of Mindanao in Davao City, Philippines. She is also a Registered Criminologist, and she ranked 7th in the National Licensure Examination for Criminologists in December 2018. Prof. España earned her academic degrees: Master of Science in Criminal Justice and Bachelor of Science in Criminology, and she is currently pursuing her doctoral degree in Criminal Justice from the University of Mindanao. As a passionate Criminologist, she is also a national review lecturer for the Licensure Examination for Criminologists in various review centers and schools in the Philippines. Her research interests include criminal sociology, law enforcement, and forensic science.

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Appendix

a. Research Interview Guide Questionnaire

RESEARCH INTERVIEW GUIDE QUESTIONNAIRE

Dear respondents, we humbly request your approval to be one of our study informants in our research; entitled **“BEYOND THE BUST: A DEEP DIVE INTO THE EXPERIENCES OF PDEA ENFORCERS IN THE CONDUCT OF DRUG OPERATIONS”**.

Name (optional): _____

Research Objectives	Main Interview Questions	Probing Questions	Review of Related Literature
1. The lived experience of PDEA enforcement officers in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations.	1.1. What are your experiences in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations that had a significant impact on you personally or professionally?	1.1.1. How long have you been working in PDEA? Can you describe a specific anti-drug operation that have shaped your perspective on the job? 1.1.2. Can you discuss any remarkable encounters during anti-illegal drug operations that have shaped your perspective on the job? 1.1.3. How did these experiences impact your personal life?	Law enforcement agencies' tasks can have a negative impact on an officer's physical, mental, and balance between work and life, as well as cause relationship challenges and work/family conflict. In law enforcement organizations, increased absenteeism, turnover, and reductions in effectiveness, including slower responses and less proficient decision-making, as well as an increase in complaints, policy breaches, and claims of misbehavior, are all signs of officer stress. Over the course of time, stress can have an adverse effect on an officer's capacity to defend the areas that they serve and can heighten hostility between officers and residents (Rineer, 2018).
2. The challenges and obstacles of PDEA enforcement officers have faced before, during, after	2.1. What are the most common challenges and obstacles you encounter before, during, and after anti-	2.1.1. Before an anti-illegal drug operation, what are the primary challenges you face in the preparation phase in terms of physical, mental, and emotional	Illegal drugs pose a pervasive and longstanding problem in the Philippine Archipelago, requiring the efforts of law enforcement agencies to combat their proliferation. The escalation of crime resulting from drug-related activities

the operations.	illegal drug operation?	<p>considering the nature of work?</p> <p>2.1.2. During the operations, can you highlight specific obstacles that have proven to be particularly challenging for you and your team?</p> <p>2.1.3. After the operations, what challenges arise, related to personal well-being, team dynamics, and legal procedures?</p>	<p>further emphasizes the urgency for law enforcement to suppress this issue from the community. To address these challenges, police officers should prioritize through surveillance to gather accurate information on suspects and their activities. This entails utilizing available resources and collaborating with other agencies and stakeholders to gather the necessary intelligence (Fuentes et. al, 2023).</p>
3. The valuable insights/lessons from the experiences of PDEA enforcement officers.	3.1. Reflecting on your experiences, what insights or lessons have you gained that you believe are crucial for improving the effectiveness of anti-illegal drug operations?	<p>3.1.1. What can you consider the most valuable lessons you learned during the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations?</p> <p>3.1.2. Considering the possibility of injustices or concerns in drug operations, what insights can you provide to the concerned community in addressing or preventing such issues within the system?</p> <p>3.1.3. In your opinion, what specific improvements/programs/ strategies could be made to enhance the overall effectiveness and efficiency of PDEA's anti-illegal drug operations?</p>	<p>It contends that the drug war has created an atmosphere of uncertain anxiety disorders in the area, which has altered and affected social interactions both inside and between citizens and the state. Moreover, this phenomenon has given rise to other secondary moral discourses that revolve around social justice, family, and religion. These discourses hold differing opinions regarding the drug war and the justification of violence. (Warburg and Jensen, 2020)</p>

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