

Life World of Former Female Basic Internal Security Operations Course (BISOC) Trainees

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.51584/IJRIAS.2025.100900048>

Received: 26 September 2025; Accepted: 02 October 2025; Published: 15 October 2025

ABSTRACT

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of former female Basic Internal Security Operations Course (BISOC) trainees in the Philippine National Police Regional Mobile Force Battalion 7. Specifically, it investigated their positive and negative experiences during the training, the strategies they used to address challenges, and their aspirations for improving the quality of BISOC training. Using a qualitative phenomenological approach, in-depth interview and focused group discussion were conducted using Interview Guide (IG) with ten (10) former female BISOC trainees as informants. Data were analyzed using Colaizzi's method to extract significant statements, formulate meanings, and identify clustered and emergent themes that characterized the phenomenon.

Eight (8) emergent themes were formulated from the participants' narratives. Under their experiences, four (4) themes emerged: Holistic Development Through Skills, Ethics, and Operational Preparedness and Empowerment Through Inclusive Training and Personal Growth (positive experiences); and Physical and Mental Resilience in the Face of Training Struggles and Empowerment Amidst Gender-Specific Challenges (negative experiences). Regarding the strategies for addressing challenges, two themes emerged: Inner Resilience and Strategic Coping for Survival and Growth and Collective Empowerment Through Teamwork and Support Systems. For aspirations toward improved training, the themes Advocating for Enhanced Training Quality and Resources and Pursuing Excellence Through Instructor and Professional Development were identified.

The study revealed that BISOC training significantly contributes to the transformation of female trainees into resilient, disciplined, and skilled police officers, prepared for internal security operations. However, like any training program, it requires continuous evaluation and enhancement to meet the evolving demands of modern law enforcement.

Keywords: Female BISOC Trainees, Police Internal Security Operations, Female Law Enforcer Resilient.

INTRODUCTION

The Philippine National Police (PNP), as the country's premier law enforcement agency, is mandated not only to maintain peace and order but also to support the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) in internal security operations, especially in counter-insurgency. As outlined in Republic Act No. 6975 and its amendment under R.A. 8551, along with Executive Orders No. 110 (1999) and its amendment (2006), the PNP is tasked with active participation in addressing insurgency threats and other serious national security concerns.

Based on its legal definition, internal security operations refer to actions undertaken to protect a country from threats that originate within its own borders. These include efforts to prevent and respond to acts of terrorism, espionage, sabotage, and other forms of subversion. Internal security operations encompass surveillance activities, border control, intelligence gathering, counter intelligence, law enforcement, anti-terrorism measures, and counter-insurgency efforts.

The Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP) are the primary government agencies mandated to conduct internal security operations. While both institutions are involved, the AFP typically assumes the lead role, particularly in areas with a strong presence of insurgent groups or terrorist threats. The PNP is mandated to arrest a suspected terrorist or any insurgent groups by virtue of arrest warrants

issued by a competent court. They have the power to arrest. Given the complexity and danger involved in internal security operations, proper training of police personnel is crucial. This operational mandate necessitated the establishment of specialized training courses such as the Basic Internal Security Operations Course (BISOC), aimed at enhancing the tactical and operational capabilities of mobile force units.

The Basic Internal Security Operations Course (BISOC) training equips officers with the skills and knowledge needed to respond effectively to such internal threats. BISOC is an intensive 60-day or 480-hour training program designed to develop foundational skills in leadership, discipline, physical endurance, and combat readiness. It emphasizes not only technical competencies but also resilience, mindset transformation, and moral discipline—qualities essential in police internal security operations. Participation in BISOC is a requirement for all new graduates of the Field Training Program (FTP) and the Philippine National Police Academy (PNPA) who are assigned to mobile force units. The program prepares them for real-life high-risk encounters such as ambushes and armed clashes, and imparts strategies for survival, teamwork, and operational effectiveness in rugged and high-pressure environments.

While the course has traditionally been male-dominated, an increasing number of female officers are now undergoing BISOC training as part of their deployment to the field. As of 2023, female police officers represent only 18.3% of the PNP's total force, and the training quota for women in BISOC classes remains disproportionately low. For instance, in the Police Regional Office 7 (PRO7), only 32 female officers were scheduled to undergo BISOC training in 2024. Many more remain in backlog, assigned to administrative duties while awaiting their turn. This structural limitation restricts their exposure to field operations, affecting not only their morale but also their opportunities for career advancement and personal development.

Female trainees face unique challenges in a physically demanding training environment designed primarily with male trainees in mind. Despite undergoing the same rigorous activities—including extreme physical training, psychological resilience tests, and live simulation exercises—female officers must also contend with societal expectations, limited support systems, and potential gender-based discrimination.

Furthermore, concerns regarding abuse and misconduct in training environments, although not prevalent in BISOC, highlight the vulnerability of women in a rigid, hierarchical institution. These lived realities necessitate a deeper understanding of their experiences to inform reforms in training policies and practices.

Existing studies on police training in the Philippines have largely focused on general training quality, resource allocation, and the effectiveness of tactical education. However, little attention has been given to gender-specific perspectives, particularly the experiences of female officers within specialized programs like BISOC. The lack of empirical data on how female trainees navigate and interpret their BISOC journey leaves a critical gap in the literature and, more importantly, in institutional reforms.

This study addresses that gap by exploring the lived experiences of former female BISOC trainees. Through a phenomenological lens, it seeks to understand the essence of their participation in the training—how they confronted its physical and mental demands, managed gender-related challenges, and articulated aspirations for personal and professional growth. Their voices are vital not only in assessing the inclusiveness and fairness of current training structures but also in enhancing the BISOC training design to be more responsive, equitable, and empowering.

Moreover, study results would contribute to institutional learning, particularly for key stakeholders such as the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG), National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM), PNP Training Service, and Regional Mobile Force Units. These agencies are instrumental in the continuous development, funding, and evaluation of police training programs. The insights from the study can inform policy revisions, instructor development, gender-sensitive training practices, and the allocation of resources that better accommodate the diverse needs of trainees.

The researcher emphasized the urgent need for an in-depth study of the lived experiences of former female Basic Internal Security Operations Course (BISOC) trainees. This qualitative study aims to explore their experiences during the rigorous training program, the challenges they encountered, how they navigated those challenges, and their aspirations upon completion of the course. By focusing on the lived experiences of female BISOC trainees,

the study aims to promote evidence-based improvements in police training's, support systems, and leadership development, ultimately contributing to a more capable, motivated, and inclusive Philippine National Police.

Statement of the Problem

This study explored the life world of former female basic internal security operations course (BISOC) trainees of the Philippine National Police Regional Mobile Force Battalion 7 (PNP RMFB 7).

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

What are the experiences of the informants during the training?

How do the informants address the challenges encountered during the training?

What are the aspirations of the informants to improve the quality of the training?

METHODOLOGY

The design of this research study was a phenomenological design. A phenomenological study is a type of qualitative research that focuses on exploring and understanding individuals lived experiences of a particular phenomenon. Its goal is to capture the essence of how people perceive, feel and make sense of specific experiences or situations. This study utilized the tools of a phenomenological method, for it investigates, explores, and describes the life experiences of former female BISOC trainees to create a phenomenon without resorting to theories and already established principles.

The research informants were ten (10) selected former female BISOC trainees assigned to RMFB 7. To qualify, the informants had to be former female BISOC trainees who had graduated from BISOC training and had been assigned to RMFB 7 for at least two (2) years. Six (6) of them participated in a Focus Group Discussion (FGD), while the remaining four (4) underwent in-depth interviews. Of the six (6) informants who participated in the FGD, two (2) were from the RMFB 7 headquarters, while the others were distributed among the Technical Support Company, the 701st Maneuver Company, the 702nd Maneuver Company, and the 703rd Maneuver Company. Among the four (4) informants who had in-depth interviews, two (2) were from the 704th Maneuver Company, and the other two (2) were from the 705th Maneuver Company. The informants were recommended by their respective commanding officers.

The researcher used an interview guide for the qualified informants. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that addressed the following aspects: the life experiences of female BISOC trainees during their training, including both positive and negative experiences, and how the trainees addressed the challenges they encountered throughout the program. It also explored the aspirations of the female BISOC trainees for the development of BISOC training.

The interviews were conducted and supplemented with field notes and a voice recorder to document the responses of the informants. In the validation process, the interview guide was reviewed and approved by the adviser and a panel of experts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study explored the experiences of the former female BISOC trainees. The research method used a qualitative phenomenological approach, to explore the life world of former female BISOC trainees. The technique captured the essence of their realities as they engaged in their training and faced various challenges.

The data gathered was thoroughly analyzed to arrive at well- detailed evaluation of the lived experiences of the informants. Significant statements were extracted from the informant's transcripts pertaining directly to the research phenomena. Formulated ideas were constructed from the significant statements and arranged into cluster themes. Clustered themes were then regrouped and which evolved into emergent themes.

After analyzing the data gathered from the informants, The researcher identified and created eight themes. This

emergent theme was developed from the responses of the informants during the interview. The researcher grouped the emergent themes into their core meanings: the informants' experiences, ways of dealing with challenges, and aspirations.

The researcher divided the themes related to the informants' experiences: positive experiences and negative experiences. For positive experiences, the themes were, Holistic Development Through Skills, Ethics and Operational Preparedness and Empowerment Through Inclusive Training and Professional Growth, for negative experiences, Physical and Mental Resilience in the Face of Training Struggles and Empowerment Amidst Gender Specific Challenges.

For the informants addressing the challenges during BISOC training, the themes were, Inner Resilience and Strategic Coping for Survival and Growth and Collective Empowerment Through Teamwork and Support Systems.

As for the aspirations of the informants to improve the quality of BISOC training, the themes were, Advocating for Enhanced Training Quality and Resources and Pursuing Excellence Through Instructor and Professional Development.

The lived experiences of former female BISOC trainees—represented by themes mentioned above are illuminated when viewed through Empowerment Theory, Resilience Theory and Feminist perspective in policing. Each theoretical lens clarifies different aspects of the trainees' narratives and together, provides an integrated interpretative frame.

Empowerment Theory emphasizes growth in personal agency, access to resources, and participation in decision-making processes. The theme "Empowerment Through Inclusive Training and Professional Growth" reflects increased self-efficacy and professional identity that arises when training environments provide skills, mentoring, and legitimate opportunities for advancement. Contemporary evaluations and program descriptions indicate that gender-aware training, mentorship, and organizational commitments to inclusion measurably improve women officers' sense of belonging and career prospects (UN Women, 2021; UNODC handbook on gender-responsive policing). These programmatic efforts mirror informants' descriptions of empowerment as both an individual psychological process and an outcome of organizational practice.

The themes "Physical and Mental Resilience in the Face of Training Struggles" and "Inner Resilience and Strategic Coping for Survival and Growth" align closely with Resilience Theory, which foregrounds adaptive capacities that enable individuals to maintain functioning and grow following stressors. Recent systematic reviews and intervention research report that resilience-oriented modules (e.g., stress management, scenario-based coping, mindfulness, and team debriefing) can reduce stress markers and enhance adaptive responses among law-enforcement personnel (Moreno, 2024; Vadvilavičius et al., 2023). Trials of mindfulness-based resilience training and feasibility randomized trials likewise report benefits for stress, aggression regulation, and health outcomes in policing contexts, supporting the conclusion that BISOC —when paired with resilience-focused content and supports—can operate as a site of positive adaptation rather than purely of attrition.

The themes "Empowerment Amidst Gender-Specific Challenges" and aspirations for enhanced resources and instructor development are best understood through feminist analyses of policing. Recent empirical and policy literature documents persistent organizational barriers—bias in role assignments, cultural norms privileging masculine practices, and inadequate facilities—that constrain women officers' progression and produce gendered stress (Charman, 2024; scoping reviews on women's stress in policing, 2024). Informants' accounts of gender-specific obstacles and their advocacy for structural changes (training design, facilities, instructor competency) reflect not just individual coping but also a push for institutional transformation consistent with liberal-feminist prescriptions for equal access and organizational reform.

Themes emphasizing teamwork, peer support, and collective empowerment correspond with evidence that social resources buffer occupational stress. Recent studies and program reports show that peer mentoring, supportive supervisors, and cohesion-enhancing practices reduce burnout and facilitate retention—particularly for women working in male-dominated units—thus linking participants' emphasis on collective strategies to empirically validated protective mechanisms. Integrating social-support structures into BISOC design (buddy systems,

structured debriefs, mentorship) therefore aligns with evidence-based practice.

Taken together, the theoretical lenses and literature suggest that empowerment, resilience, and feminist-informed reforms are mutually reinforcing. Empowerment-oriented practices (mentorship, inclusive assignments) increase women officers' ability to use resilience skills effectively; resilience training improves wellbeing and performance, enabling women to sustain careers long enough to press for institutional change; and feminist-informed structural reforms remove barriers that otherwise blunt both empowerment and resilience interventions. This integrated perspective indicates that improvements in BISOC will be most durable when interventions operate at individual, team, and organizational levels simultaneously.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This phenomenological study explored the life experiences of former female trainees of the Basic Internal Security Operations Course (BISOC), uncovering their journey through challenges, growth, and transformation within a traditionally male-dominated training environment. The findings revealed that BISOC training was not merely a technical and physical undertaking but a multidimensional process of professional empowerment, ethical formation, and psychological endurance.

The themes derived from the study—Holistic Development Through Skills, Ethics, and Operational Preparedness; Empowerment Through Inclusive Training and Professional Growth; Physical and Mental Resilience in the Face of Training Struggles; Empowerment Amidst Gender-Specific Challenges; Inner Resilience and Strategic Coping for Survival and Growth; and Collective Empowerment Through Teamwork and Support Systems—reflect a complex interplay between empowerment and constraint. While the training facilitated growth and strengthened competence, it also exposed structural and cultural inequalities embedded within the institution.

Viewed through the lens of Empowerment Theory, the participants' experiences illustrated both individual and collective empowerment, where female trainees gained confidence, self-efficacy, and a sense of agency despite systemic limitations. However, empowerment was often self-driven rather than institutionally supported, revealing gaps in gender-sensitive leadership and policy structures. From the perspective of Resilience Theory, the participants demonstrated adaptability and perseverance as mechanisms for survival in a demanding, male-centered environment. Yet, such resilience was often necessitated by structural barriers rather than fostered through equitable support systems.

Using a Feminist Perspective in Policing, the study highlighted how entrenched gender norms and masculine ideals continue to shape training culture. The expectation for women to "prove themselves" in terms of endurance and strength underscores persistent institutional bias. Female trainees thus navigate a dual identity—maintaining professional competence while negotiating acceptance within a patriarchal police culture. These findings echo recent global studies (e.g., Bourassa Rabichuk et al., 2024; Charman, 2023; UN Women, 2022), which emphasize that women in law enforcement often face invisible labor, gender stereotyping, and limited access to leadership roles.

Despite these challenges, the informants expressed aspirations for improvement, particularly through Advocating for Enhanced Training Quality and Resources and Pursuing Excellence Through Instructor and Professional Development. Their vision for reform demonstrates a forward-looking form of empowerment—one that seeks structural transformation rather than mere adaptation.

While this study offers deep insight into the meaning of being a female trainee in BISOC, it is important to acknowledge its limitations. The research involved a small number of participants drawn from a single geographic region, which, while appropriate for phenomenological inquiry, restricts the generalizability of the findings. The results should therefore be understood as context-bound, reflecting the institutional culture of a particular training environment rather than representing all female police trainees nationwide.

Nevertheless, the study's strength lies in the depth of interpretation and the authenticity of the voices represented. It contributes to the growing body of literature on women in policing by illuminating how empowerment, resilience, and gender dynamics intersect within the Philippine National Police training system.

In conclusion, this study has given voice to the lived realities of women who dared to thrive in an environment historically defined by masculinity. Their narratives demonstrate that empowerment is not simply the outcome of endurance, but the result of agency exercised within—and against—structural constraints. The challenge for the institution is not merely to integrate women into existing systems but to transform those systems into spaces of equity, respect, and empowerment. Through structural reform, inclusive leadership, and continuous advocacy for gender-sensitive policing, the PNP can ensure that every woman who enters training is not only equipped to serve but empowered to lead.

These are the recommendations which are actionable, literature informed and directly linked to the study's themes.

Institutionalize Gender-Sensitive Training Policies. The PNP and training institutions should adopt a gender-responsive framework that ensures equitable opportunities, fair treatment, and respect for female trainees. This includes reviewing BISOC's curriculum, evaluation systems, and disciplinary policies to remove implicit gender bias.

Integrate Empowerment and Resilience Development Programs. Training modules should include psychosocial support, mentorship, and leadership development activities that build resilience without overburdening women through unequal expectations of toughness. Institutional resilience must accompany personal resilience.

Enhance Instructor Competence through Gender Awareness Training. Regular seminars and workshops should be provided to instructors and training officers to promote gender sensitivity, ethical mentoring, and inclusive communication. As the participants suggested, instructors play a vital role in shaping trainees' confidence and sense of belonging.

Improve Training Facilities and Support Systems. Providing appropriate dormitory accommodations, sanitation facilities, and access to medical and psychological services can improve female trainees' physical and emotional well-being. Ensuring adequate resources will strengthen morale and retention.

Establish a Gender Advisory Unit within Training Centers. A dedicated unit or focal person for gender and development (GAD) concerns should be assigned in every police training center to handle grievances, monitor gender equality measures, and serve as a support network for female trainees.

Encourage Comparative and Longitudinal Research. Future studies should include participants from multiple regions and batches of BISOC to capture variations in experiences and institutional culture. Comparative studies across police training programs—both local and international—can enhance understanding of how gender-sensitive reforms evolve.

Promote Women's Leadership and Representation in Training Management. Female officers with BISOC experience should be given opportunities to become instructors or course directors, providing role models and challenging the entrenched male hierarchy in training environments.

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