

Navigating Police Officers Recruitment: Challenges and Strategies

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ABSTRACT

The recruitment of police officers is a critical process for ensuring that qualified and committed individuals enter law enforcement service. In the Philippines, the recruitment process of the Philippine National Police (PNP) involves rigorous requirements that may present financial, physical, and psychological challenges to applicants. This study, completed in May 2026, explored the challenges and coping strategies experienced by newly appointed police officers during the PNP recruitment process. A qualitative research design was employed to examine the lived experiences of six newly appointed police officers from Police Regional Training Center 2, Batch 2024-02 MANDALA, who were assigned to the Cauayan City Police Station in Isabela. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews using voice recordings and written responses and were analyzed through thematic analysis. The findings revealed two major challenges: economic constraints, particularly expenses related to documentary requirements and travel, and physiological strain, including sleep deprivation and fatigue. These challenges contributed to psychological stress but also facilitated resilience, adaptability, and personal and professional growth. To manage these difficulties, participants employed strategies such as financial resourcefulness, including part-time work, and consistent physical conditioning. The study concludes that navigating police recruitment requires holistic readiness, encompassing physical preparedness, psychological resilience, financial resourcefulness, and sustained determination. The findings highlight the importance of strengthening applicant support mechanisms to help qualified individuals navigate the demands of police recruitment.

Keywords: Coping Strategies, Holistic Readiness, Lived experience, PNP Recruitment Process, Recruitment Challenges

INTRODUCTION

Police recruitment is a critical process in developing a competent, disciplined, and professional law enforcement organization. The Philippine National Police (PNP) maintains qualification and selection standards to ensure that individuals entering the service possess the knowledge, physical capability, psychological readiness, and character required for police work. The PNP was established under Republic Act No. 6975 and strengthened through Republic Act No. 8551, which provides the legal framework for police organization, personnel standards, recruitment, and appointment. The National Police Commission (NAPOLCOM) exercises administrative control and operational supervision over the PNP, including policies concerning recruitment and selection.

Despite the importance of these standards, the recruitment process can be demanding for applicants. Meeting documentary, medical, physical, psychological, and examination requirements may require considerable financial resources, time, and personal preparation. Applicants may shoulder expenses related to documents, transportation, medical examinations, and other recruitment-related activities. These financial demands can become particularly challenging for individuals with limited resources. Similarly, physical assessments require sustained preparation and conditioning, while the uncertainty of selection and the possibility of failing at any stage may contribute to psychological pressure, anxiety, and reduced motivation.

The challenges experienced by applicants may therefore extend beyond the formal requirements of recruitment. Administrative procedures, accessibility, communication, and scheduling can also influence applicants' experiences and perceptions of the fairness and efficiency of the process. While rigorous standards are necessary to protect the quality of police personnel, recruitment systems must also provide qualified applicants with a fair opportunity to meet those standards. This concern is consistent with Sustainable Development Goal 10, which promotes reduced inequalities and greater inclusion.

Existing research has largely examined police recruitment in terms of organizational standards, selection policies, workforce requirements, and institutional effectiveness. However, relatively limited attention has been given to the lived experiences of Filipino police officers who successfully navigated the recruitment process. In particular, there remains a need to understand how applicants experienced the financial, physical, psychological, and procedural demands of recruitment and how they responded to these challenges. Newly appointed officers are particularly valuable sources of such insights because they can reflect on the experiences that shaped their journey from applicants to members of the police service.

This study explored the challenges encountered by newly appointed police officers during the PNP recruitment process and the strategies they used to navigate these challenges. It focused on their financial, physical, psychological, and recruitment-related experiences and examined how these experiences influenced their persistence and readiness for police service. By documenting these lived experiences, the study aims to provide evidence that may contribute to more accessible and supportive recruitment practices while maintaining the professional standards required of police personnel.

Research Questions

This study explored the challenges encountered by newly appointed police officers during the Philippine National Police recruitment process and the strategies they employed to navigate these challenges. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

- What challenges did newly appointed police officers encounter during the recruitment process?
- How did these challenges affect their recruitment experience?
- What strategies did they employ to cope with and manage these challenges?
- What preparations can aspiring police officers undertake to better navigate the recruitment process?

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the lived experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of newly appointed police officers during the Philippine National Police (PNP) recruitment process. A qualitative approach was appropriate for obtaining detailed accounts of participants' perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was conducted at the Cauayan City Police Station in Isabela, Region II, where the participants were assigned for their field training. The participants consisted of six (6) newly appointed police officers from Police Regional Training Center 2 (PRTC 2), Batch 2024-02 MANDALA, who had recently completed the PNP recruitment process and could provide firsthand accounts of the challenges they encountered and the strategies they employed. Data were collected using a semi-structured interview guide developed in accordance with the study objectives and reviewed by an expert to ensure the clarity and relevance of the questions. After securing the necessary permissions and obtaining informed consent, interviews were conducted according to participants' availability and preference through voice-recorded interviews and written responses. The recorded interviews were transcribed and reviewed for accuracy and completeness. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, wherein participants' responses were systematically reviewed, coded, categorized, and organized into recurring themes related to their recruitment challenges, experiences, and coping strategies. Ethical principles were observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, informed consent was obtained, and participants were informed of the

purpose of the study and their right to participate freely. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by removing identifying information from the research records and presentation of findings. All information was used solely for academic purposes, reported accurately, and securely handled. Voice recordings, written responses, and other research materials were disposed of after completion of the study in accordance with the researchers' data-management and privacy procedures.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges Encountered During Recruitment

Economic Constraints emerged as a prominent challenge among the participants during the recruitment process. The financial burden was associated not only with documentary requirements but also with transportation, printing, food, and repeated travel to processing centers. One participant explained, "Challenges I have encountered during recruitment process are transportation and travel because I was just commuting to the processing center to submit all my required documents" (P1). This account reflects a broader experience among the participants, who described how repeated travel and recruitment-related expenses placed additional pressure on their limited financial resources.

The findings suggest that the cost of participating in recruitment may extend beyond the formal requirements established by the PNP. For applicants from rural areas or households with limited income, transportation difficulties and recurring expenses for documents and other necessities may make the recruitment process more demanding. Although these costs are not intended to serve as selection criteria, they may nevertheless influence applicants' ability to navigate the process efficiently. This finding is consistent with literature indicating that recruitment-related expenses can create barriers for qualified applicants from economically disadvantaged backgrounds (Stogner et al., 2020). It also reflects the broader concern that socioeconomic and geographic conditions can influence access to opportunities (World Health Organization [WHO], 2021).

Thus, economic preparedness appears to be an important but often overlooked dimension of navigating police recruitment. The participants' experiences demonstrate that persistence in the recruitment process requires not only meeting formal qualifications but also managing the financial demands associated with completing the application requirements.

Physiological Strain emerged as another challenge experienced by participants during the recruitment process. Their accounts indicated that completing recruitment requirements could involve physical exhaustion, insufficient sleep, irregular meals, and prolonged travel. One participant shared, "These challenges are often a mix of physical exhaustion because of lack of sleep and poor diet and sometimes I didn't eat on time" (P5). This experience reflects the broader accounts of participants who described physical fatigue associated with the demands of completing recruitment requirements.

The findings suggest that the recruitment process may affect participants' physical well-being, particularly when applicants have to manage multiple requirements within limited timeframes. Travel, waiting, repeated visits to processing centers, and other recruitment-related activities may reduce opportunities for adequate rest and regular meals. For applicants traveling from distant areas, these demands may be further intensified by long journeys and early or late travel schedules. Thus, physical strain appears to be closely connected with the logistical and time demands of recruitment rather than solely with formal physical assessments.

The participants' experiences further indicate that maintaining well-being during recruitment is important for sustaining motivation and readiness throughout the process. Prolonged fatigue and inadequate rest may make it more difficult for applicants to manage other recruitment requirements effectively. This finding is consistent with Selye's stress framework, which suggests that prolonged exposure to stressors can eventually contribute to physical exhaustion. Similarly, Blum (2021) noted that sustained strain during preparatory or transitional periods may affect individuals' well-being and capacity to cope with continuing demands. These findings emphasize that successful navigation of police recruitment involves not only meeting institutional requirements but also managing physical well-being throughout the process.

Effect of Recruitment Challenges

Psychological Stress. Recruitment challenges affected participants' psychological well-being through stress, low morale, overthinking, self-doubt, and anxiety. These effects were closely associated with financial difficulties, physical exhaustion, and uncertainty throughout the recruitment process. One participant stated, "This financial burden made it harder for me to submit the required documents on time... and it also added stress for me" (P3). This experience reflects the broader accounts of participants who described how financial and physical demands affected their emotional well-being and confidence during recruitment.

The findings suggest that these challenges were interconnected. Financial pressure and prolonged travel contributed to fatigue and uncertainty, which in turn increased psychological stress. Despite these difficulties, participants continued pursuing their goal of entering police service, demonstrating persistence and resilience. This finding supports the view that demanding recruitment processes can generate psychological pressure among applicants (Stogner et al., 2020). Consistent with the Yerkes-Dodson principle, moderate pressure may support performance, whereas excessive stress may negatively affect functioning. Thus, psychological readiness and effective stress

Professional Character Transformation. Despite the difficulties encountered during recruitment, participants described positive changes in their attitudes toward police service. The challenges strengthened their perseverance, increased their appreciation of the profession, and broadened their understanding of the qualities required of a police officer. One participant explained, "The challenges changed my perspective on being a police officer. I used to think that being a police officer was only about physical strength, but because of the challenges I experienced during the recruitment process, I realized that mental resilience, emotional control, discipline, and integrity are also very important" (P6).

This account reflects the broader experiences of participants who viewed recruitment difficulties not only as obstacles but also as experiences that strengthened their commitment to police service. Participants emphasized persistence, respect for the profession, and a greater appreciation of the responsibilities associated with becoming a police officer. The findings suggest that successfully navigating recruitment may contribute to a shift from viewing policing primarily as a career to recognizing it as a profession requiring discipline, resilience, integrity, and commitment to public service.

This finding is consistent with resilience theory, which emphasizes the capacity to adapt positively when confronted with significant challenges (Masten, 2023). It also supports Blum's (2021) view that successfully managing pre-service challenges may contribute to a stronger sense of commitment and professional identity. Thus, recruitment challenges, while demanding, may also become formative experiences that strengthen applicants' readiness and commitment to police service.

Coping Mechanisms and Management Strategies

Economic Resourcefulness. Participants responded to financial challenges through practical strategies that enabled them to sustain their participation in the recruitment process. These included seeking additional income, reducing personal expenses, borrowing from friends, engaging in small livelihood activities, and relying on family support. One participant stated, "My strategy was really to work to earn extra money to add to my application expenses" (P2). This account reflects the broader experiences of participants who actively sought ways to meet recruitment-related expenses rather than allowing financial difficulties to prevent them from continuing.

The findings indicate that participants demonstrated resourcefulness and persistence in managing economic constraints. Some obtained part-time work or engaged in small-scale selling, while others practiced financial restraint or received assistance from family and friends. These strategies suggest that social and economic support can play an important role in sustaining applicants throughout a financially demanding recruitment process. Rather than passively experiencing financial hardship, participants adapted their financial practices to maintain their progress toward appointment. Such resourcefulness reflects the persistence and adaptive

capacity required when individuals encounter constraints while pursuing demanding career goals (Papazoglou, 2018).

Physical Conditioning emerged as an important strategy for managing the physical demands of the recruitment process. Participants described maintaining their physical fitness, prioritizing rest, and preparing themselves for the demands associated with recruitment and subsequent training. One participant stated, “I focused on physical fitness, training myself so that when I enter the training, I will not have too much difficulty. I also focused on mental conditioning and maintaining a positive mindset” (P6). This reflects the broader accounts of participants who viewed physical preparation and adequate recovery as necessary for sustaining their readiness throughout the recruitment process.

The findings suggest that participants adopted a proactive approach to managing physical demands rather than relying solely on preparation immediately before assessments. Rest was also considered important, particularly after periods of travel and physical exhaustion. These practices indicate that participants understood physical readiness as requiring both conditioning and recovery. The finding is consistent with Bandura's (1997) view that physiological and emotional states can influence self-efficacy, as improved physical readiness may strengthen individuals' confidence in their ability to manage demanding situations. It also aligns with Papazoglou and Tuttle (2018), who emphasize wellness as an important component of resilience among law enforcement personnel. Thus, maintaining physical fitness, adequate rest, and a positive mindset were important strategies through which participants managed the demands of police recruitment.

Recommended Preparations for Aspiring Officers

Holistic Readiness and Self-Investment. Participants emphasized that aspiring police officers should prepare holistically for the demands of recruitment. Their recommendations centered on physical fitness, financial preparedness, mental and emotional readiness, patience, discipline, and perseverance. One participant advised, “My advice is to invest in yourself, especially in your health; do not neglect it because that is your investment in passing the exams. Also prepare yourself with patience; of course, money is needed because every step has a cost” (P1). This statement reflects the broader advice of participants, who consistently viewed preparation as extending beyond physical fitness.

The findings indicate that successful navigation of recruitment requires applicants to prepare for both the formal requirements and the practical difficulties associated with the process. Participants recommended maintaining physical fitness, preparing necessary documents, managing finances, developing stress-management skills, and maintaining focus despite setbacks.

This perspective suggests that applicants' readiness is multidimensional, involving personal well-being, financial capacity, psychological preparedness, and sustained commitment. Beltran (2020) similarly noted socioeconomic challenges among aspiring criminology and police-service candidates, highlighting the importance of considering financial circumstances in preparation for professional entry. Thus, holistic readiness may help aspiring officers manage the demands of recruitment while maintaining their well-being and commitment to entering police service.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that navigating the Philippine National Police recruitment process involves interconnected financial, physical, and psychological demands. Participants identified transportation and documentary expenses, physical exhaustion, inadequate rest, and psychological stress as major challenges. Despite these difficulties, the recruitment experience also contributed to greater perseverance, appreciation of police service, and recognition of the importance of discipline, resilience, and integrity.

To manage these challenges, participants demonstrated economic resourcefulness through additional work, financial restraint, and social support, while physical conditioning and adequate rest helped them maintain readiness. Their experiences further indicate that successful navigation of recruitment requires more than

meeting formal eligibility requirements. Aspiring police officers need holistic readiness, encompassing physical fitness, financial preparedness, psychological resilience, and sustained commitment. These findings suggest that applicant preparation and recruitment support should address both the formal requirements of selection and the practical challenges applicants encounter throughout the process.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following:

Recruitment Orientation. The ISU-Cauayan CCJE Department, in collaboration with the PNP, may conduct recruitment orientation seminars for graduating students covering recruitment procedures, requirements, preparation, and expected expenses.

Applicant Preparation Program. The CCJE Department may provide simulated recruitment activities, including documentary preparation, mock interviews, physical conditioning, and digital application training, to improve applicants' readiness.

Financial and Wellness Support. Relevant government agencies and local stakeholders may consider appropriate assistance for financially constrained applicants, while aspiring officers should develop financial, physical, mental, and emotional readiness before entering the recruitment process.

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