Navigating Mental Health Crises: Evaluating the Philippine National Police Crisis Intervention Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Mental health crises present complex challenges for law enforcement agencies worldwide, necessitating effective intervention strategies to ensure public safety and well-being. This study evaluates the crisis intervention practices of the Philippine National Police (PNP), aiming to identify strengths, challenges, and recommendations for enhancement. The research critically examines the intersection of law enforcement and mental health care, considering issues of human rights, community welfare, and officer well-being. Through a comprehensive literature review, it explores the impact of stressors on police officers' mental health, emphasizing the need for tailored interventions to mitigate burnout and secondary traumatic stress. The study highlights existing challenges faced by the PNP in managing mental health crises, including stigma, resource limitations, and concerns about coercive interventions. It underscores the importance of specialized training, collaboration with mental health professionals, and their utilization to enhance crisis response capabilities. Furthermore, the study advocates for collaborative partnerships with external stakeholders to develop culturally sensitive and comprehensive crisis intervention strategies aligned with community needs. The research contributes to ongoing discourse on mental health care and law enforcement collaboration, striving for more effective, humane, and community-centered responses to mental health crises. The study's findings are crucial for informing policy and practice within the PNP and broader mental health landscape, ultimately promoting a safer and healthier society.

Keywords: Mental health crises, Philippine National Police, Crisis Intervention, Strategies, Challenges.

INTRODUCTION

Mental health crises pose significant challenges globally, necessitating effective intervention strategies from law enforcement agencies. The Philippine National Police (PNP) is entrusted with maintaining public safety, including responding to emergencies involving individuals experiencing mental health crises. However, the intersection of law enforcement and mental health care raises complex issues regarding appropriate intervention, safeguarding human rights, and promoting community well-being (Santos & Cruz, 2023). Over time, the struggle to lessen the victims suffering may come with a cost. Compassion fatigue has multiple negative effects on the police's well-being and can disrupt their performances. (Lim & Parreno, 2020).

Over the past decade, there has been a growing recognition of the need to improve crisis response protocols within the PNP to better address mental health emergencies. This research aims to critically evaluate the crisis intervention practices of the PNP in responding to mental health crises from 2020 to 2024, shedding

light on existing challenges, identifying best practices, and proposing recommendations for enhancement (Reyes & Fernandez, 2022).

This research's significance lies in its potential to inform policy and practice within the PNP and its broader implications for the broader mental health landscape. By scrutinizing the PNP's crisis intervention methods, this study seeks to contribute to the ongoing discourse on mental health care and law enforcement collaboration, ultimately striving for more effective, humane, and community-centered responses to mental health crises.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Being a Law Enforcer can be stressful and challenging, especially during their duty. When arriving at the crime scene to provide initial police action, police officers need to face hazardous conditions, traumatic situations, human suffering, critical incidents, and occurrences of violence. At the same time, the police officer still has to carry the load that comes from other daily job requirements (Voss et al., 2021). The nature of police work can be physically and mentally demanding, and if not properly addressed, can result in burnout and the development of secondary traumatic stress. This can negatively impact a police officer's mental and physical health, duty performance, interactions with the community, and personal relationships (Voss et al., 2021; Maran et al., 2020; Queirós et al., 2020; Kirshman, 2018). Burnout and secondary traumatic stress can be too costly and have many negative impacts (Maran et al., 2020).

The crisis intervention strategies employed by the Philippine National Police (PNP) in addressing mental health crises are of paramount importance in ensuring the safety and well-being of individuals experiencing acute psychological distress. This underscores the significance of effective crisis intervention techniques tailored to the unique cultural, social, and legal contexts of the Philippines. Research by Rodriguez et al. (2023) highlights the challenges faced by law enforcement personnel in managing mental health crises, emphasizing the need for specialized training and collaboration with mental health professionals.

Similarly, a study by Wittman et al. (2021) underscores the importance of police officers' understanding of mental health issues and their ability to de-escalate potentially volatile situations. Moreover, Crisis Intervention Teams (CITs), as suggested by Nick et al. (2022), have demonstrated effectiveness in improving police responses to mental health emergencies by equipping officers with the appropriate skills and knowledge to interact with individuals in crisis. However, concerns regarding the stigmatization of mental illness and the potential for coercive interventions persist, as noted by Steiger et al. (2023), underscoring the importance of ongoing evaluation and refinement of crisis intervention protocols. In conclusion, while the PNP's efforts to address mental health crises are commendable, continued research and collaboration with mental health experts are essential for the development of comprehensive and culturally sensitive crisis intervention strategies.

Furthermore, collaborative partnerships with mental health professionals, community organizations, and other stakeholders are integral to strengthening crisis intervention within the PNP (Edwards & Kotera, 2021). Collaborative efforts facilitate information sharing, resource allocation, and the development of tailored intervention strategies aligned with the unique needs of local communities. By leveraging external expertise and resources, the PNP can enhance its crisis intervention capabilities and ensure a coordinated, holistic response to mental health crises.

Theoretical Framework

Social Learning Theory: Bandura's Social Learning Theory suggests that individuals learn from observing others' behaviors, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviors (Bandura, 1977). Applied to crisis intervention

within the Philippine National Police (PNP), this theory posits that police officers' responses to mental health crises are influenced by their prior experiences, training, and the behaviors they witness from their colleagues and superiors. Effective crisis intervention training can provide officers with the necessary skills and knowledge to respond empathetically and appropriately to individuals in crisis, thereby reducing the likelihood of escalation and promoting positive outcomes.

Stress and Coping Theory: Lazarus and Folkman's Stress and Coping Theory suggests that individuals experience stress when they perceive a discrepancy between the demands of a situation and the perceived ability to cope with those demands (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the context of the PNP's response to mental health crises, police officers may encounter stressful situations when faced with unpredictable and potentially dangerous scenarios involving individuals experiencing mental health emergencies. Effective crisis intervention training can equip officers with coping mechanisms and de-escalation techniques to manage their stress levels. Also, respond effectively to crisis situations while safeguarding the well-being of all involved parties.

Conceptual Framework

Crisis Intervention Continuum: The crisis intervention continuum provides a framework for understanding the various stages of crisis intervention, including pre-crisis, crisis, and post-crisis phases (James & Gilliland, 2017). In the PNP's approach to mental health emergencies, this continuum includes proactive steps like providing mental health awareness training to officers and implementing crisis de-escalation techniques during emergency responses. Additionally, it involves offering post-crisis support and referral services to individuals requiring continued mental health assistance. By addressing mental health crises within a comprehensive continuum of care, the PNP can enhance its ability to respond effectively to such emergencies while promoting the well-being of individuals in crisis and the community at large.

Collaborative Partnerships: Collaboration with mental health professionals, community organizations, and other stakeholders is essential for enhancing crisis intervention within the PNP (Paton, 2006). Collaborative partnerships can facilitate information sharing, resource allocation, and the development of joint intervention strategies tailored to the unique needs of the local community. By leveraging the expertise and resources of external partners, the PNP can strengthen its crisis intervention capabilities and ensure a coordinated, holistic response to mental health crises.

Significance of the Study

This study aims to assess the effectiveness of crisis intervention measures employed by the PNP in handling mental health crises, examining the impact of training programs, community partnerships, stakeholder engagement, and awareness campaigns. This study aimed to offer evidence-based suggestions for improving the PNP's ability to handle mental health crises by examining recent literature and conducting empirical research, with a focus on safeguarding the well-being and rights of individuals in crisis. By studying the crisis intervention methods employed by the PNP, the research can contribute to the development of specialized training programs for police officers and Other professionals and researchers may also use the findings of this study in their academic writings and research.

Objectives of the Study

The study focuses on assessing the crisis intervention of the PNP in mental health crises. Specifically, it delved on the following:

1. To assess the current crisis intervention strategies of the PNP in handling mental health crises.

2. To identify challenges faced by the PNP in responding to mental health crises.

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

The research methodology chosen for the study is a qualitative-descriptive approach. This approach is considered suitable as it helps in comprehensively studying the experiences of the participants and the meanings they derive from them. The approach provides a safe space for the participants to express themselves freely, using their own words and emphasizing what is most significant to them. To capture the experiences of the participants, the researchers will use semi-structured interviews, utilizing open-ended questions that will facilitate reflection on research objectives with the participants. Additionally, the interview format will allow the participants to articulate stories that might otherwise go unspoken and unnoticed..

Population and Locale of the Study

The population of the study consists of 15 police officers assigned to the Police Regional Office Cordillera, particularly those assigned to the Regional Medical and Dental Unit – Neuro and Psychiatry Section, and their counterparts– Station Health Unit (SHU) personnel of the Baguio City Police Office. Purposive sampling was employed to select and identify information-rich participants relevant to the phenomenon under investigation. The researcher utilized criterion-based selection as the sampling method.

The selection of this population was strategic, considering the unit's significance in the region and its potential to be the case study for the implementation of the different crisis intervention programs of the PNP in responding to mental health crises. The diverse police force population representing various units, offices, and backgrounds enables a comprehensive examination of the impact of these interventions in response to the mental health crisis which is a growing problem not only in the agency but in the whole community.

Data Gathering Tool

The researchers employed an interview guide questions for the key informants. Through these, the researchers validated the information and engaged in interactive conversations to gain deeper insights into the participants' perspectives. The interview guide served as a key tool for gathering data to assess the current crisis intervention practices of the PNP in handling mental health crises, identify the challenges and barriers faced by the PNP in responding to mental health crises, and evaluate PNP's crisis intervention strategies and approaches to include training programs, collaboration with mental health professionals, and community support systems.

Data Gathering Procedures

The researchers allowed ample time to develop an interview guide questionnaire to serve the intended participants. The interview guide questionnaire was conducted through an informal interview. Communication letters addressed to the Head of the agency were made. The interview guide questionnaire and the communication letter for the study were submitted to the facilitator for checking and approval. Upon approval of the interview guide questionnaire and the communication letter by the facilitator, the same were submitted to the head of the agency for his approval. Thereafter, the interview guide questionnaires were distributed to the intended participants and they were given ample time to answer the questionnaire. Observations were also conducted. Afterward, the researchers collected the questionnaires, and the data and information gathered were compiled.

Treatment of Data

The researchers used thematic analysis which is a process that gives more emphasis to the content of the narratives during the conversational exchange between the researchers and the participant. The narrative thematic analysis process in this study consists of five stages: (a) organization and preparation of the data, (b) obtaining a general sense of the information, (c) the coding process, (d) categories or themes, and (e)interpretation of the data. Each transcript was individually analyzed. Several readings of each transcript started with the "initial noting" of descriptive comments which were coded to form "emergent themes." This step was repeated for each transcript before searching for similarities, characteristics, and patterns across the entire data.

Ethical Considerations

The Researchers prioritized obtaining informed consent from all participants, especially police officers, ensuring they understand the purpose of the study and their rights to confidentiality and withdrawal. Additionally, researchers ensured no harm by providing access to mental health support services and respecting participants' autonomy in disclosing personal information. Maintaining objectivity, avoiding bias, and striving for inclusivity in participant recruitment and dissemination of findings are essential to uphold justice and ensure the study's fairness and relevance to policy and practice within the PNP and broader society. Risk management strategies were adopted to ensure the safety of all involved. Selection criteria for participants were non-discriminatory and justifiable based on the nature of the study. These ethical considerations were integrated into the study's design and methodology to maintain the ethical integrity of the research within the sensitive context of crisis intervention and management.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The crisis intervention strategies of the PNP in handling mental health crises

This section reveals insights on the responses that indicate the several key components of the Philippine National Police's (PNP) crisis intervention program:

Detection of Mental Health Crises

The survey conducted revealed various ways to detect mental health crises within the Philippine National Police (PNP). The Bantay Kaisipan Program and early warning signs, such as changes in behavior or frequent tardiness, were found to be crucial detection tools. However, certain challenges exist such as fear of stigma and reluctance to admit issues which can affect the accuracy of reporting. Despite these challenges, there are efforts to utilize established programs and indicators to identify individuals in need of intervention.

The study also acknowledges the challenges faced in detecting mental health issues among law enforcement personnel, such as stigma, fear of repercussions, and reluctance to seek help. These insights provide valuable information about the importance of early detection methods and the challenges involved in identifying mental health crises among law enforcement personnel. The findings support the need for ongoing efforts to improve detection strategies and promote a supportive environment for addressing mental health issues within law enforcement organizations.

A related study titled "Mental Health Screening amongst Police Officers: Factors Associated with Under-reporting of Symptoms" conducted by Marshall et al. (2021) explores methods for detecting mental health issues among law enforcement personnel, including police officers. The study emphasizes the significance

of early detection in mitigating the impact of mental health crises on individuals and organizations.

Intervention Strategies

The Philippine National Police (PNP) has developed various effective intervention strategies to address mental health crises among its personnel. These include psychotherapy, counseling sessions, and intake interviews, with additional support from training programs like Psychological Skills Enhancement Training (PSET). The PNP's crisis intervention programs are implemented through assessments conducted by psychometricians and subsequent counseling sessions, with an emphasis on providing tailored support to individuals based on their specific needs and circumstances.

The PNP's multidisciplinary approach to crisis intervention, involving collaboration between psychometricians, counselors, and other mental health professionals, has proven to be successful in addressing the diverse mental health needs of law enforcement personnel. By providing personalized support and leveraging training programs, the PNP is better equipped to handle mental health crises among their personnel and promote overall well-being.

A recent study by Lu and Petersen (2023) titled "Effectiveness of Psychological Skills Training for Police Personnel: A Meta-Analysis" provides evidence of the efficacy of psychotherapy and counseling as intervention strategies for addressing mental health crises among law enforcement officers. The study underscores the importance of the PNP's efforts in providing tailored support and individualized interventions to effectively address the diverse mental health needs of law enforcement personnel.

Follow-up and Monitoring

The PNP's approach involves following up and monitoring individuals who have received intervention programs. Respondents emphasized the importance of providing ongoing support through teleconferencing, monthly follow-ups, and monitoring by Station Health Unit (SHU) personnel. These measures aim to ensure that individuals under monitoring receive continued care and assistance to manage their mental health effectively.

It is important to note that follow-up and monitoring on long-term mental health outcomes is also crucial, emphasizing the need for continued care and assistance beyond the initial intervention phase. This proactive approach to mental health management includes regular check-ins and support services to prevent relapse and promote sustained well-being.

A relevant study by Lamb et al. (2002) titled "The Police and Mental Health" examines the significance of follow-up and monitoring protocols in mental health crisis intervention programs tailored for law enforcement personnel. The study underscores the role of teleconferencing, monthly follow-ups, and regular monitoring by designated personnel, aligning with the measures highlighted by respondents in the PNP.

Challenges faced by the PNP in responding to mental health crises.

Respondents identified various challenges encountered by the PNP in responding to mental health crises. These include difficulties in assessing mental health issues due to individuals' reluctance to seek help, denial of their condition, and fear of stigma. Additionally, challenges in responding to crises were noted, such as underreporting of cases, hesitation from superiors to refer personnel, and resource limitations, including a lack of facilities or personnel. These challenges impact the effectiveness of intervention programs and highlight the need for targeted solutions to address them. Furthermore, additional challenges in responding to mental health crises, such as underreporting of cases, hesitation from superiors to refer personnel for intervention, and resource limitations, including insufficient facilities or personnel. These

challenges mirror the difficulties outlined by respondents in the survey and underscore the systemic issues faced by law enforcement agencies in addressing mental health crises.

Fisher et al. (2024) conducted qualitative analyses based on interviews and focus group discussions with law enforcement personnel to identify key barriers to effective response. The research identifies the following major obstacles faced by law enforcement agencies in addressing mental health issues: people's unwillingness to seek assistance, their refusal to acknowledge their mental health problems, and their concerns about facing stigma. These issues were frequently mentioned by survey participants.

Suggestions for Improvement

Respondents proposed solutions to tackle the identified challenges and improve the Philippine National Police's (PNP) ability to handle mental health emergencies efficiently. These include providing more training for mental health practitioners, increasing awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, and strengthening support networks like Squad Weekly Interactive Meetings (SWIM). By implementing these suggestions, the PNP can improve its ability to support the mental well-being of its members and address mental health issues more proactively. Furthermore, highlighted the significance of increasing awareness campaigns to reduce the stigma surrounding mental health issues within law enforcement organizations. By promoting a culture of openness and acceptance, law enforcement agencies can create a supportive environment where personnel feel comfortable seeking help when needed.

A relevant study by Rodriguez et al. (2023) titled "Law enforcement mental health: Strategies and issues in prevention and treatment" offers valuable insights into strategies for improving mental health support systems within law enforcement agencies. Rodriguez et al. (2023) conducted a comprehensive review of existing literature and consulted with mental health experts and law enforcement professionals to identify effective strategies and recommendations. The study emphasizes the importance of providing ongoing training for mental health practitioners within law enforcement agencies, echoing the suggestion made by respondents in the survey.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that the Philippine National Police (PNP) has implemented several proactive measures to address mental health challenges within its ranks despite facing significant barriers such as stigma and resource limitations. The utilization of programs like the Bantay Kaisipan Program and the observance of early warning signs showcase the PNP's commitment to identifying individuals in need of intervention. Moreover, the PNP's intervention strategies, which include psychotherapy and counseling sessions tailored to individual needs, underscore a personalized approach to mental health care within the organization.

Furthermore, the PNP's post-intervention support mechanisms, such as teleconferencing, monthly follow-ups, and monitoring by Station Health Unit personnel, highlight a dedication to ongoing care and support for individuals' mental well-being. However, challenges such as stigma, underreporting, and resource limitations persist, emphasizing the need for targeted solutions to address systemic issues hindering effective crisis response. Proposals put forth in the study, including increased training for mental health practitioners and awareness campaigns to reduce stigma, align with respondents' suggestions, indicating a shared commitment to enhancing support networks and fostering a culture of openness within the PNP to proactively address mental health issues.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusion drawn, the following are the recommendations forwarded by the researchers:

1. The PNP should invest in comprehensive training programs for mental health practitioners to equip them with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively identify and address mental health issues among law enforcement personnel. Training should focus on recognizing early warning signs, destigmatizing mental health, and providing appropriate interventions.

2. Implement targeted awareness campaigns within the PNP to reduce stigma surrounding mental health issues. Utilize various communication channels such as seminars, workshops, and digital platforms to disseminate information and promote a culture of openness and acceptance regarding mental health.

3. Promote the development of robust support systems within the PNP by advocating for engagement in platforms such as Squad Weekly Interactive Meetings (SWIM), providing a space for personnel to openly address mental health issues. Facilitate peer support groups and mentorship programs to provide additional avenues for individuals to seek guidance and assistance.

4. Establish measures to improve the reporting of mental health concerns and ensure the efficient tracking of individuals who have participated in intervention programs. Utilize technology such as digital reporting platforms and data analytics to track trends, identify gaps, and allocate resources more efficiently.

5. Advocate for increased allocation of resources to address resource limitations within the PNP's mental health crisis intervention program. This may involve securing funding for additional facilities, hiring more mental health professionals, and expanding mental health services to reach a wider audience within the organization.

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