
| RESEARCH ARTICLE

Internalizing the Moral Recovery Practices of the Philippine National Police (PNP): Perspectives of Police Officers in the Quad Cities of Cebu

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| ABSTRACT

The Philippine National Police (PNP) Moral Recovery Program (MRP) is designed to foster ethical conduct, integrity, and accountability among police officers. This qualitative study, conducted in the Quad Cities of Cebu—Cebu, Mandaue, Lapu-Lapu, and Talisay—examines the perspectives of PNP personnel regarding the program's implementation, its impact on their work-life, and their aspirations for improving its effectiveness. Data were gathered through in-depth interviews with eighteen (18) police officers providing rich insights into their perspectives with the Moral Recovery Program and Practices of the Philippine National Police (PNP). Thematic analysis revealed two key themes under the positive perspective: Internal Cleansing by Way of Ethical Rebooting and Mindset Makeover: Finding the 'Good Cop' Within. Conversely, two themes emerged under the negative perspective: Program Glitches: When Good Intentions Go Rogue and Reputation Rehab: The Stigma That Sticks Like Glue. Further, the study identified the MRP's impact on officers' work-life through the themes: Heart's Wake, Mind's Take and Tempest Tamed, Spirit Framed. Lastly, participants expressed their aspirations for program improvement, with two additional themes: All In, All the Time: Making the Moral Recovery Program Universal and Ethics Over Excuses: Making It Work. This study provides an understanding of the PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices, offering valuable insights for leadership and policymakers in assessing its effectiveness. The findings highlight the need for comprehensive application, stronger engagement, and strategic reforms to ensure that ethical development remains a cornerstone of police training and service.

| KEYWORDS

Philippine National Police, Moral Recovery Program, Police Ethics, Phenomenological Study.

| ARTICLE INFORMATION

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1. Introduction

Police officers occupy a uniquely powerful position in society, entrusted with enforcing laws, maintaining public order, and safeguarding democratic values. This role demands the highest ethical standards, as the public's trust hinges on officers' integrity and professionalism. Yet, across the globe, ethical lapses among law enforcement personnel have become increasingly visible and troubling. Violations such as falsifying testimonies, accepting bribes, excessive use of force, and discriminatory practices not only erode public confidence but also compromise the legitimacy and effectiveness of policing institutions (Tankebe, 2022).

Despite decades of reform efforts and professionalization campaigns, studies reveal that rule violations—often deliberate—remain prevalent within police organizations, with many incidents going unrecorded (Westmarland & Conway, 2020). These moral failures persist even as officers grapple with internal conflicts, including moral injury—an emotional and psychological toll that arises when enforcement duties clash with personal values or when betrayal by trusted colleagues and superiors occurs (Blumberg et al., 2020). Such experiences can lead to guilt, shame, and disillusionment, further complicating the ethical landscape of law enforcement.

In principle, the law enforcement profession is guided by a universal code of conduct that emphasizes ethical behavior, accountability, and mutual respect. This standard is not only a public expectation but also a professional imperative. However, in the Philippine context, the persistence of corruption within the police force has drawn widespread concern. The Philippine National Police (PNP) has been repeatedly cited as one of the most corrupt government institutions, with media reports highlighting unethical decision-making and misconduct among officers (Benter, 2020).

This research seeks to address a critical gap in the literature by examining the perspectives of police officers on the moral recovery program and practices implemented by the PNP. Specifically, it explores how these initiatives influence officers' work-life experiences and their aspirations for improving ethical standards within the organization. By focusing on the cities of Cebu, Mandaue, Lapu-Lapu, and Talisay, the study aims to generate localized insights that can inform policy development and institutional reform.

As a criminologist and educator of future law enforcement professionals, the researcher recognizes the urgency of this inquiry. The findings are expected to benefit not only police officers but also policymakers, government administrators, and the broader Filipino community. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on moral recovery, institutional integrity, and the cultivation of ethical resilience within the Philippine law enforcement system.

2. Literature Review

This study is anchored on the Social Learning Theory of Albert Bandura (1977) and supported by the Organizational Culture Theory of Edgar Schein (1990) and the Transformational Leadership Theory of James MacGregor Burns (1978). The Social Learning Theory posits that human behavior is acquired through the observation, imitation, and modeling of others, emphasizing the role of cognitive processes in learning and behavior formation. Bandura (1977) explains that individuals create symbolic representations of observed actions and the consequences that follow, guiding their own behaviors based on these mental models. Learning occurs both through direct experience and vicariously by observing others. Within the context of law enforcement, this theory suggests that police behavior—whether ethical or deviant—is shaped and reinforced through social interactions within the organization. Peers serve as role models, and actions are often influenced by the rewards or sanctions that follow (Chappell & Piquero, 2004). When officers witness unethical conduct being ignored or rewarded, such behaviors may become normalized. Conversely, consistent reinforcement of integrity and professionalism fosters ethical behavior. Hence, this theory underscores how social interaction and environmental reinforcement within the police culture influence the transmission of values, norms, and behaviors that either strengthen or weaken moral conduct among officers of the Philippine National Police (PNP).

Supporting this framework, Schein's Organizational Culture Theory (1990) explains how shared values, beliefs, and underlying assumptions within an organization shape members' behavior and performance. Schein defines organizational culture as a pattern of basic assumptions developed by a group as it learns to cope with issues of external adaptation and internal integration. These assumptions, once proven effective, are taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think, and act (Schein, 1990). The theory identifies three levels of culture—artifacts and behaviors, espoused values, and underlying assumptions—that together determine how members interpret and respond to organizational realities. Within the PNP, this theory highlights how organizational culture shapes perceptions of integrity, accountability, and professionalism. Studies by Newburn and Webb (1999) and Prenzler (2009) found that weak institutional structures, low accountability, and permissive subcultures often contribute to corruption and misconduct, eroding public trust. Conversely, cultivating a culture founded on ethical values, transparency, and professionalism enhances discipline and restores confidence in law enforcement institutions.

Complementing these perspectives, Burns' Transformational Leadership Theory (1978) emphasizes the importance of moral leadership in inspiring followers to achieve higher ethical and professional standards. Transformational leaders motivate subordinates by fostering shared vision, trust, and commitment to collective goals. Burns (1978) asserts that genuine leadership is moral in nature—it transforms both leaders and followers by appealing to ideals such as justice, service, and integrity. Within the PNP, transformational leadership promotes moral renewal, accountability, and ethical awareness among officers. Research supports this link between leadership and ethical behavior: Huberts et al. (2007) found that the integrity of police officers is significantly influenced by the role modeling, openness, and strictness of their leaders, while Delattre (2002) emphasizes that moral reasoning and ethical decision-making foster professionalism and public trust within police organizations.

The relevance of these theories is reinforced by institutional frameworks such as the Philippine National Police Ethical Doctrine Manual and the Moral Recovery Program (Executive Order No. 319), which institutionalize moral education and ethical standards across all government agencies. These initiatives aim to cultivate God-centered, service-oriented, and family-based values among PNP personnel. Similarly, Republic Act 6713, known as the Code of Conduct and Ethical Standards for Public Officials and Employees, reinforces principles of honesty, integrity, and accountability in public service. Despite these measures, however,

issues of corruption and misconduct persist within the organization. According to the 2013 Global Corruption Barometer, the PNP was identified as the most corrupt institution in the Philippines, with 68% of Filipinos perceiving widespread corruption among its ranks (Romero, 2013). Jensen and Hapal (2018) further noted that while the PNP attributes misconduct to a few “erring officers,” such instances significantly damage institutional credibility and public confidence.

Existing literature also emphasizes the need for ethical training, accountability mechanisms, and restorative practices in addressing police misconduct. Steinberg and Austern (1990) identify ignorance and rationalization as common justifications for unethical behavior, while Morgan et al. (2000) highlight the need for enhanced ethics education in police training programs. Zehr (2015) underscores the role of restorative justice in promoting accountability and repairing harm caused by misconduct, and Blumberg et al. (2021) stress the importance of fitness-for-duty assessments in ensuring the emotional and moral readiness of officers. Furthermore, studies by Tyler and Huo (2002) demonstrate that fair and transparent policing practices foster voluntary compliance and strengthen police-community relations. Community policing, as discussed by Bucqueroux and Trojanowicz (1998) and Imam (2022), enhances trust, collaboration, and proactive crime prevention, relying heavily on ethical leadership and organizational culture.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study utilized a qualitative research method employing a transcendental phenomenological approach to gain a deeper understanding of the lived experiences of police officers regarding the Moral Recovery Program (MRP) and the ethical practices within the Philippine National Police (PNP). According to Husserl (1931), transcendental phenomenology focuses on uncovering the essence of lived experiences by setting aside biases and preconceived notions to perceive the phenomenon in its purest form. This approach allows the researcher to explore the meanings and perspectives constructed by participants based on their actual experiences within their organizational and ethical contexts. While phenomenology seeks to capture the unfiltered essence of human experience, it also acknowledges that the process of meaning-making is shaped by the participant's consciousness and lived reality, thus allowing for a more profound understanding of their moral and professional perspectives.

The study also adopted a descriptive case study design to examine in depth the experiences, insights, and reflections of police officers in relation to the implementation and influence of the Moral Recovery Program in promoting ethical behavior within the organization. Rooted in the philosophical foundations of Edmund Husserl (1931), transcendental phenomenology emphasizes the comprehension of consciousness and the pursuit of true knowledge through understanding the structures of human experience. Husserl's concept of “transcendental consciousness” underscores the importance of bracketing personal biases while maintaining empathetic openness toward participants' lived realities. As Moustakas (1994) explained, this process involves describing rather than interpreting experiences, focusing on the “what” and “how” of human perception and awareness. Similarly, Creswell (1998) described phenomenology as the study of the meaning of lived experiences of individuals concerning a particular concept or phenomenon, thereby uncovering how individuals make sense of their experiences through thought, emotion, and action.

Through this lens, the study aimed to uncover the core essence of police officers' lived experiences in internalizing and applying the principles of the Moral Recovery Program within their professional practice. It sought to explore how they perceive the program's moral and ethical teachings, the challenges they encounter in upholding ethical standards, and the extent to which these experiences shape their sense of duty, discipline, and moral integrity. This methodological approach not only captures the depth of their lived realities but also provides valuable insights that can guide the enhancement of ethical education, moral recovery initiatives, and leadership development within the PNP. By understanding the intentional actions and perspectives of police officers, programs can be better designed to foster integrity, accountability, and moral resilience, ultimately contributing to a more ethical and service-oriented police organization.

3.2 Research Participants

This study employed eighteen (18) police officers as research informants with at least three (3) years in police service. This approach prioritizes participants with direct experience relevant to the study's objectives, ensuring diverse perspectives on the moral recovery program and practices. The selection criteria will further focus on participants who are actively engaged and willing to share their experiences during individual interviews. The inclusion of individual settings allows for in-depth exploration of individual narratives, enriching the data collection process. There will be eighteen (18) participants for individual interview, ten (10) informants from Cebu City, three (3) from Mandaue City, three (3) from Lapu-Lapu, and two (2) from Talisay City.

3.3 Research Instrument

In gathering of data, the researcher designed and used an interview guide for the in-depth interview to enable the researcher to identify, elicit detailed narratives and insights on the perspectives of the informants on PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices. The interview guide was validated by the adviser, panel of experts, and dean of the Graduate School. The interview guide contained informed consent to formally invite the informants and for them to freely and voluntarily provide information needed in the study. This guide consisted of open-ended questions covering range of topic objectives. The first part of the interview guide sought to elicit the perspectives of the informants on the PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices including the positive and negative perspectives of the informants. The second part sought to determine the impact of the PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices. The third and last part sought to determine the aspirations of the informants to improve the implementation of the PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices.

3.4 Data Collection

As the researcher stated in this study, I collected data through individual interviews using a voice recorder and field notes. Within 72 hours of the interview's conclusion, I manually transcribed any digital audio recordings. I made certain that the recordings and transcriptions correctly portrayed the entire discussion experience.

3.5 Data Analysis

The researcher employed a thematic analysis to systematically analyze the extensive data that has been gathered from interviews, detailed notes, and observations. Several stages are involved in this process. To begin, the researcher familiarized themselves with the data by thoroughly reviewing the transcripts and notes. Codes were generated to organize data segments that are pertinent to the research questions. These codes can be either descriptive or interpretive, capturing the main ideas, experiences, and emotions that the participants have expressed. Afterward, the researcher group and designate related codes into overarching themes and sub-themes, ensuring that these themes accurately reflect the depth and richness of the participants' narratives (Moustakas, 1994).

The researcher consistently revisits the data to refine the identified themes, considering their relationships and any discrepancies that may emerge, as the analysis is iterative. The researcher analyzed these themes concerning the research objectives, theoretical frameworks, and relevant literature. This analysis examined the importance of each theme in comprehending police officers' perspectives on the Moral Recovery Program and Practices, with attention to theoretical, practical, and policy implications.

3.6 Ethical Consideration

This study on exploring the perspectives of police officers on the moral recovery program and practices of the Philippine National Police (PNP) prioritizes upholding ethical principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy. Potential participants' welfare and well-being have been the leading concern during the planning phase. Measures have been outlined to minimize any potential harm and maximize the benefits of participation once the study commences.

4. Results and Discussion

From the gathered data, through the recorded responses of the informants, eight (8) emergent themes were created. These themes formulated are as follows:

For the positive perspectives of the informants on the PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices, the themes generated were: Internal Cleansing by Way of Ethical Rebooting and Mindset Makeover: Finding the Good Cop Within.

For the negative perspectives of the informants on the PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices, the themes generated were: Program Glitches: When Good Intentions Go Rogue and Reputation Rehab: The Stigma That Sticks Like Glue.

For the impacts of the PNP's Moral Recovery Program and Practices on the work-life of the informants, the following themes were: Heart's Wake, Mind's Take and Tempest Tamed, Spirit Framed.

For the aspirations of the informants to improve the implementation of the Moral Recovery Program and Practices, the themes created were: All In, All the Time: Making the Moral Recovery Program Universal and Ethics Over Excuses: Making It Work.

4.1 Internal Cleansing by Way of Ethical Rebooting.

This theme emphasizes the program's capacity to restore the symbolic value of the police badge, rectify past ethical infractions, reinforce core values, and provide a fresh start for officers through a gradual, systematic approach. It explains that ethical growth

is not an abrupt change but rather a gradual, incremental process in which each value is meticulously analyzed, reinforced, and incorporated into daily practices.

4.2 Mindset Makeover: Finding the Good Cop Within.

This theme centers on the program's capacity to support a significant shift in officers' internal viewpoints, assisting them in reconnecting with their inherent positive qualities and embracing a more optimistic and constructive perspective.

4.3 Program Glitches: When Good Intentions Go Rogue.

This theme explores the concept that, despite the positive, well-intentioned objectives of individuals or organizations, their actions or systems may occasionally result in unintended, detrimental outcomes. This phenomenon occurs when the execution of good intentions is compromised by systemic failures, lack of foresight, or poor execution, resulting in counterproductive or detrimental outcomes. It emphasizes the necessity for perpetual vigilance and adaptation in the development and implementation of strategies, as well as the intricacy of human behavior and the unpredictability of systems.

4.4 Reputation Rehab: The Stigma That Sticks Like Glue.

This theme addresses the persistent challenge of overcoming negative reputations or perceptions, particularly when they are deeply ingrained within social or organizational settings. This theme tries to explain why it can be hard for a person or group to gain trust and repair their reputation after a bad event or image. The phrase "stigma that sticks like glue" shows how hard it is to get rid of a bad image, even when people really want to change.

4.5 Heart's Wake, Mind's Take.

This theme highlights a comprehensive internal transformation. This includes a significant transformation in both emotional and intellectual understanding. Individuals undergo a recovery of fundamental values and empathy, alongside a transformation in cognitive perspective and self-awareness. This comprehensive transformation promotes personal and possibly spiritual development. As a result, it develops more compassionate, ethical, and thoughtful actions, embodying a comprehensive approach to a meaningful existence.

4.6 Tempest Tamed, Spirit Framed.

This theme represents the attainment of ethical and internal stability. It describes the control of disruptive internal factors, such as emotional or behavioral instability, "to cultivate a refined sense of purpose. This is accomplished by establishing strong ethical foundations that offer structure and clarity. The theme indicates a transition from chaotic behavior to disciplined, ethical action. This transformation cultivates a sense of order, substituting internal chaos with a tranquil disposition. This leads to a state of personal and organizational balance.

4.7 All In, All the Time: Making the Moral Recovery Program Universal.

This theme emphasizes integrating ethics, morality, and responsibility into personal, professional, and organizational life. Instead of moral rehabilitation being transient or situational, it promotes ethical norms and moral growth in daily conduct and decision-making. Universalizing the Moral Recovery Program involves incorporating these principles into everyone's culture and behavior, not just during crises or recovery. It advises individuals and organizations to promote ethical contemplation, learning, and improvement rather than waiting for mistakes or catastrophes to create moral rehabilitation initiatives.

4.8 Ethics Over Excuses: Making It Work

This theme focuses on applying ethical ideas in real-world situations, especially in relation to the PNP's Moral Recovery Program (MRP). It is a call to action, imploring the company to give ethical development first priority and overcome obstacles that impede its effective implementation. It disavows the idea that restrictions need to be used as excuses for disregarding moral principles. It highlights how important it is to be resourceful, flexible, and proactive in order to overcome challenges. It's about turning well-meaning intentions into observable results.

5. Conclusion

This study explored the perspectives, experiences, and aspirations of police officers regarding the Philippine National Police (PNP) Moral Recovery Program and Practices. Using a transcendental phenomenological approach, the study sought to capture the essence of how the program influences their ethical values, professional conduct, and personal growth within the organization. The findings revealed that while officers recognized the program's positive intentions in promoting moral renewal and ethical awareness, its implementation remains inconsistent and hindered by organizational and cultural challenges.

The study concludes that the PNP's Moral Recovery Program holds strong potential as a transformative framework for fostering moral integrity, discipline, and accountability among police personnel. However, for it to be truly effective, the program must move beyond compliance and become an integral part of the organizational culture. This requires continuous leadership commitment, systematic monitoring, and genuine participation from all ranks. Strengthening ethics education, mentorship, and value-based leadership can further sustain the moral reform envisioned by the program.

Moreover, the study emphasizes that moral recovery within the police force is not only an institutional responsibility but also a personal journey of self-reflection, renewal, and service. When internalized, the principles of integrity, transparency, and public accountability can rebuild public trust and reinforce the PNP's role as a moral guardian of peace and justice. Ultimately, a sustained and inclusive moral recovery movement—anchored in ethical leadership and organizational integrity—can transform the PNP into a more trustworthy, service-oriented, and morally resilient institution.

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