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Lived Experience of Reformed Children in Conflict with the Law

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Abstract. This qualitative study explored the experiences of four reformed children in conflict with the law (CICL) in General Santos City, focusing on their journey through the case management process. The in-depth interviews were conducted with purposefully selected participants while the data were processed and analyzed thematically. The narratives revealed that these CICLs faced various factors that led them to conflict with the law. Their experiences during the diversion and rehabilitation program at Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys showed that the length of their stay depended on the nature of their case and their adherence to the program's terms. The structured daily schedule offered a variety of rehabilitative activities, and the program provided support to help them overcome the various challenges they faced through guidance, acceptance, prayer, and a personal commitment to change. However, the programs offered limited support. They primarily focused on monitoring, home visits, and financial assistance (when funds were available). The participants viewed hope as a crucial factor in their transformation. It motivated them to change, gave them the belief of living a good life, and provided a sense of purpose. The aspirations helped them realize life's meaning, and hope signifies the restoration of order. The case management process aimed to repair the harm caused, and the children's situations were addressed through reintegration (reinstating them back into society) while ensuring fair treatment. Community-based programs offered during reintegration and aftercare further facilitated the restoration of peace, healing, and reconciliation. Ultimately, the experiences of these reformed CICLs highlight that their success hinged not only on the programs offered but also on their self-determination to make positive life choices.

Keywords: Reformed children; Conflict with the law; Case management process; Rehabilitation program; Self-determination.

1.0 Introduction

The Philippines prioritizes the well-being of children in conflict with the law (CICL) through a well-developed legal framework of the Juvenile Justice and Welfare Act of 2006 that underscores the significance of children's rights and their potential as future nation-builders. The framework is by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which mandates that CICL is cared for with dignity and a focus on reintegration. The Supreme Court's Revised Rule on CICL (2019) further strengthens this commitment by implementing a case management approach that prioritizes restorative justice principles.

Through case management, CICLs benefit from a system that ensures their dignity and fundamental rights are respected throughout the process. It considers their age and developmental needs, aiming to reintegrate them as positive members of society. The program offers various alternatives to institutional care, such as care orders, counseling, probation, and vocational training. By prioritizing their well-being, the system also fosters a sense of community responsibility through restorative justice principles. Despite these advancements, significant

challenges persist, as documented by Goldson (2011) and Dyer et al. (2021). Societal attitudes and conflicting approaches to juvenile justice, often focused on punishment rather than rehabilitation, can lead to rights violations for CICL.

According to the General Santos City Social Welfare and Development Office, there were 145 CICAL cases in 2021 and 222 CICAL cases in 2022. Additionally, 22 CICAL cases were considered repeat offenders in 2022. The CICAL had a 9.90% chance of becoming repeat offenders. The CICALs were composed of 204 males and 18 females. There were 77 CICAL cases higher than the previous year. Moreover, the top five (5) CICAL cases committed include theft, rape, robbery, carnapping, and frustrated murder. The 80 CICALs were below 15 years old, and 142 CICALs were above 15 years old but below 18 years old. Usually, the case status of the CICAL in the city is the following: undergoing community-based intervention, endorsed to parents/guardians, the complainant is not interested in filing a case, and pending inquest proceedings before the City Prosecutor Office. Moreover, the top five (5) barangays with the highest number of CICAL cases were Labangal, Mabuhay, Fatima, Apopong, and Calumpang. Based on the data, there was an increased number of CICAL cases in the city each year.

There is a limited study of the lived experiences of reformed children in conflict with the law in the Philippine setting. The majority of the research studies focused more on the socioeconomic factors, legal framework, detention conditions, restorative justice, rehabilitation programs, CICAL perspectives, and law enforcement practices (Bermudez et al., 2004; Irene et al., 2013; Palomares, 2018; Forones, 2017; De Pano, 2014; Cortel, 2020; Aguilar, 2016; Koller, 2015; Banzon-Librojo, 2023; Banzon-Librojo, 2024; Del Rosario, 2018; Mariano, 2019).

This research can contribute to the literature concerning the lived experiences of reformed children in conflict with the law (CICAL) in the case management process. The future recommendations of this study can be campaigned to the Local Government Unit of General Santos City, the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO), and other agencies who were directly involved in handling CICAL cases to enhance and strengthen the implementation of the case management in the city. Significantly, this research provides an avenue for future research in other local settings.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This study is qualitative research focusing on data or information generation whereby the researcher seeks out the quality of a particular phenomenon. Primarily, a case study design is used to investigate the contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and provides a data generation method that explores and analyzes the participants' experiences. It allowed the researcher to gain insights into people's attitudes, behaviors, value systems, concerns, motivations, aspirations, contexts, and lifestyles. The qualitative research data take the following forms: interview transcripts, recordings and documentation outputs, field notes, photos, and other visual texts (Barrios, Conaco, Go, and Portus, 2018). The researcher used an in-depth interview through purposive sampling and thematic analysis to process the narratives of the reformed CICALs on the case management process from rescue to aftercare.

2.2 Research Locale

The study was conducted in General Santos City, South Cotabato, Region XII, Philippines. According to the General Santos City Social Welfare and Development Office, there were 145 CICAL cases in 2021 and 222 CICAL cases in 2022. Additionally, 22 CICAL cases were considered repeat offenders in 2022. The CICAL had a 9.90% chance of becoming repeat offenders. The CICALs were composed of 204 males and 18 females. There were 77 CICAL cases higher than the previous year. The top five (5) CICAL cases committed include theft, rape, robbery, carnapping, and frustrated murder. The 80 CICALs were below 15 years old, and 142 CICALs were above 15 years old but below 18 years old. Usually, the case status of the CICAL in the city is the following: undergoing community-based intervention, endorsed to parents/guardians, the complainant is not interested in filing a case, and pending inquest proceedings before the City Prosecutor Office. The top five (5) barangays with the highest number of CICAL cases were Labangal, Mabuhay, Fatima, Apopong, and Calumpang. Based on the data, there was an increased number of CICAL cases in the city each year. Generally, the interviews took place in coffee shop areas for safety protocols and safe spaces where they felt comfortable throughout the conversation.

2.3 Research Participants

The participants of this study only included the reformed CICLs in the interview due to safety protocols and as per referral from the forensic social workers and center social workers of General Santos City. They are aged 18 to 25 years old and were previously alleged/accused/violated the law but discharged from the *Bahay Pag-Asa* for Boys, and their case status is dismissed. Only four (4) reformed CICLs residing in General Santos City voluntarily confirmed their participation in the interview. The inclusion criteria were the following: should be a resident of General Santos City; aged 18 years old and above; alleged/accused/violated a law at the age of minority; discharged from *Bahay Pag-Asa* for boys; accomplished the terms and conditions based on the contract agreement; and cases dismissed from the court. Moreover, the exclusion criteria were the following: participants with mental health concerns (including those reported for self-harm or harming others); participants with underlying health and medical conditions; participants with scheduled court hearing sessions; repeat offenders with criminal offenses aged 18 years old and above.

2.4 Research Instrument

This study utilized a researcher-made interview guide focusing on the experiences of the reformed CICLs throughout the case management process with three (3) different sections (before, during, and after). The General Santos City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO) also checked and approved the interview guide to adhere to the policy protocols and ethical considerations in research.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher accomplished first the approval and recommendation letter, HRMDO Memo Number 05-2023-1086, from the Human Resource Management and Development Office (HRMDO) under the Local Government Unit of General Santos City to conduct the study concerning the case management of children in conflict with the law (CICL) involving the City Social Welfare and Development Office (CSWDO). Before conducting an interview, the researcher needed to wait for approval and referral from the forensic and center social workers to secure the informed consent of the reformed CICLs and their willingness to participate. The purpose of this was to consider the safety measures of the participants beforehand. Generally, the time allocated for each interview depended on the informant's capacity to share narratives and responses based on the interview guide questions.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

The researcher followed the Data Privacy Act of 2012. The researcher ensured that all the data and information provided by the various agencies and the reformed CICLs were secured and confidential in compliance with the law of the Philippines. The researcher gave a copy of informed consent indicating the title, principal researcher, institutional contact information, purpose of the study, subject of participation, confidentiality, and authorization of information. Moreover, the participants were informed about the importance of voluntary participation, the confidentiality of the information, and their rights. The participant responses were anonymized to ensure confidentiality. In the interview, selecting a safe place where the participants felt comfortable to be interviewed was necessary to uphold safety protocols and protection.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Experiences Before Admission to Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys

Multidimensional Factors that Influenced the Children to Become CICLs

The participants highlighted that the reasons why they were accused/alleged/adjudged in committing an offense were the following: the act of attempted or frustrated murder due to peer group conflicts; their engagement with negative influence peers and involvement in harmful activities; adult offender (school guard) framed the child (drug case) and the police used the child for the buy-bust operation to apprehend another offender; the family conflict that ends up to murder case and the accusation of his involvement in the incident. Moreover, the previous clients were all rescued by the police officers. The documents to prove the minority of these children were prepared and submitted.

Case 1: Attempted or Frustrated murder due to peer group conflicts called "Fam Group"

The participant was a member of a peer group. A group conflict happened, and he visited the other peer's territory to make amends. However, the other peer member slapped his back and threw a stone at his friend, who brought a big knife. His friends were able to escape and went back to take revenge by cutting other peer member's head

with the big knife and smashing it with wood and stone. During that time, he was still a teenager who did not think of the consequences of his actions. Thus, he became a CICL due to an attempted and frustrated murder case.

"I went there to make amends with the other group. Still, when I arrived, they slapped me in the back. Of course, you will get angry easily and unable to think of the consequences of your actions. My friend was able to escape and run. After that, the two of us cut his (the member of other fam groups) head, smashed him with wood, smashed him with stones." -J.Y.L.

Case 2: Engagement with negative influence peers and involvement in harmful activities

The participant was a member of a peer group. Based on his narratives, he did not participate in group activities like throwing stones at the cars or finding someone to make fun of. The incident happened after they attended the birthday party of one of his friends. After a few months, all the members engaged in the incident asked to surrender. If he did not surrender and at the same time turned 18 years old in a few months, a warrant of arrest would be issued. The case would be treated as a regular rather than a suspended sentence for CICLs.

"They (friends) do bad things. Then they will encourage you to do them, too. If cars pass by, they will throw stones. However, I am not participating in their activities. If they inflict damage, I will just let them. After that, they pointed fingers at each other and blamed each other." -X.A.K.

Case 3. An adult offender (school guard) framed the child (drug case) while the police used the child for the buy-bust operation to apprehend another offender

The participant was set up and framed by the adult offender (school guard) who used drugs that were supposed to be apprehended by the police officers. Also, the participant was used as bait for the buy-bust operation that the officers conducted near the area.

"He (the school guard) framed me (during the apprehension). Before they brought me to the police station, they conducted a buy-bust and used me as bait for the apprehension of the target suspect. They instructed me what to do and explained that he (the suspect) was the influential man." -D.R.O.

Case 4. The family conflict ended up in a murder case and accusations of his involvement in attempted murder

It was his grandfather's birthday party when the incident happened. His uncle and his wife have heated arguments because his uncle impregnated his wife. During the argument, his uncle stabbed his wife, and his uncle received eight (8) stabbed wounds. When the visitors (some of them were his relatives) entered the house, they saw him holding the big knife and concluded that he was part of instigating the crime scene.

"...My uncle and his wife stabbed each other. My uncle was stabbed in the back. He stabbed back his wife. My uncle received eight (8) stab wounds in the back. It happened so fast. During that time, I was about to think negative thoughts. I was holding a big knife when the visitors came inside the house to celebrate the birthday party. Some were my relatives." -Z.M.N.

The socialization process with the significant others (family, peers, etc.) may influence the behavior of the individuals. With this, exposure to violence can be considered a risk factor for juvenile delinquency (Sartika, 2019). Based on the narratives, socioeconomic factors were not the primary contributors to juvenile delinquency. The results contradict Bermudez et al., 2004; Irene et al., 2013; Palomares, 2018; Gupta, 2015; and Das, 2022.

3.2 Experiences Inside Bahay Pag-Asa (BPA) for Boys

The social workers conducted an admission conference to discuss the reason for admission to Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys and explained their rights and processes throughout the case management.

The Length of Stay in BPA for Boys is Dependent on the Type of Case

The length of stay inside Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys in the diversion and rehabilitation process depends on the type of case, accomplishment of the diversion contract's terms and conditions, change in behavior, and center social worker's monitoring, progress, and manifestation reports. In the context of this study, there are four (4) cases:

Case 1. Damage to property/ physical injuries. The previous client stayed inside the Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys for almost one (1) year.

Case 2. Drug case (9165). The previous client stayed inside Bahay Pag-Asa for over three (3) years. The process took longer due to the involvement of a private lawyer hired. The social worker encouraged and suggested having a public lawyer from the Public Attorney's Office instead of hiring a private lawyer so that the case process would move.

Case 3. Attempted murder/frustrated murder. He stayed for two (2) years inside *Bahay Pag-Asa* for Boys.

Case 4. Attempted murder/frustrated murder. He stayed for three (3) months in the same year of admission inside *Bahay Pag-Asa* for Boys.

The regional trial court implemented a speedy trial if the case is considered minor under the Branch 11 Family Court. It is part of restorative justice in the CICL's case management. All the participants experienced a speedy trial during the case conferences.

The Structured Daily Activities Offered Various Rehabilitative Programs and Services

The *Bahay Pag-Asa* for Boys in General Santos City offered various programs and services for CICLs, such as gardening or garden beautification contests. Also, sports or physical activities were accessible, including basketball, chess, and dama (board games). Moreover, livelihood or skills training was also available. They offered rug-making to the children. Also, educational opportunities such as Alternative Learning Systems are accessible for continuing educational learning inside the institutional facility. Religious activities, specifically Bible study and sharing, were offered. Various church institutions visited the institutional care facility, like Mount Calvary Bible Baptist Church and Catholic, and a separate session for Muslim brothers who practiced Islam faith. Counseling sessions were also available. Usually, they prioritize those who are more vulnerable and need constant counseling sessions. Also, there were donations from outside organizations or foundations. Inside the institutional facility care, there were structured daily activities that will serve as a routinary task for the children:

Morning Time.

1. Wakeup call
2. Arrange and clean the bed
3. Take a bath/shower
4. Prayer
5. Exercise
6. Eat breakfast
7. Clean the dishes
8. Educational activities or Alternative Learning System
9. Break time/leisure time (watch television or play)

Lunch Time.

10. Eat lunch
11. Clean dishes

Afternoon Time.

12. Nap time (if no other activities) or join activities conducted by foundations/organizations
13. Watch television or play
14. Take a bath/shower

Evening Time.

15. Clean dishes
16. Watch television or play
17. Journal writing
18. Sleep time

The abovementioned structured daily activities functioned as a training ground for the children to cultivate habitual routines, ultimately facilitating their successful reintegration and participation in the aftercare process. Based on the narratives, the most influential activity they experienced was religious activities such as Bible study, sharing, and praying. It influenced them to acquire good morals, values, and self-discipline.

"Bible sharing. You will share during Bible sharing. Others will also share. Each person should share what he has learned."
-J.Y.L.

"Religion gave me the idea that I need to keep moving forward." -X.A.K.

"Discipline. I applied it to my child now. He is very disciplined. It is because of the Bible. I always read the Bible because we have plenty of free time. So, we will always read the Bible." -D.R.O.

In General Santos City, the *Bahay Pag-Asa* for Boys has enormous space for the CICL admitted to the center and offers various rehabilitation programs, contrary to the findings of Forones (2017). However, Aguilar (2016), Koller (2015), and Cortel (2020) challenged the effectiveness of rehabilitation programs in terms of positive house-parent resident relationships, incorporating Filipino values, and addressing the root causes of offending behavior.

The Multifaceted Problems of CICL Inside the BPA for Boys were Addressed through Seeking Advice, Acceptance, Prayer, and Self-Determination to Change

The children who stayed inside the youth care facility also faced some challenges, such as feeling lonely, longing to see their family, realizing that their parents were far away from them, stealing things from other children and storage room (clothes and food), initiation ("welcome") for newcomers, and some peers turn into foes.

"It is painful. It is different if you are outside. Inside (Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys), you do not have anyone to talk to." -J.Y.L.

"I miss my family. If you eat food and your parents are not there, You want to see your parents. I will eat instead to survive. I will cry." -X.A.K.

"The peers inside can turn into foes. The newcomer was physically harmed by the CICLs inside the BPA." -D.R.O.

"It is boring inside." -Z.M.N.

Despite facing numerous challenges, the participants developed a multifaceted coping strategy. It includes seeking guidance from their mentor, accepting responsibility for their actions, seeking solace through prayer, and reflecting on past advice from family. Additionally, they focused on rebuilding trust with social workers through helpful actions, reconciling with peers, and developing a positive self-image. Finally, they actively participated in youth activities after their case dismissal, demonstrating a commitment to positive change.

"I became active in youth activity." -Z.M.N.

"I accepted it. I always pray and ask for advice. That is why I accepted why I am there (Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys). I told myself the time would come when I could get outside. Only God knows." -J.Y.L., D.R.O., X.A.K.

3.3 Experiences After Discharged from BPA for Boys

Accepted by their Family/Guardian, But the Community Perceived them Negatively Except for Religious Institutions

All the participants affirmed that their immediate family or guardian accepted them during reintegration and aftercare. Their support, care, and love were essential to the success of reformation.

"I asked for forgiveness for what I did and did not listen to them. I cried everything there." -X.A.K

"So eventually, someone accepted me, my aunt." -D.R.O

"During the release, my mother and father." -J.Y.L.

"My parents are supportive of what I am passionate about." -Z.M.N.

Most of the participants disengaged from the negative influence of peers, gained new friends who accepted them for who they were, and provided social support.

"I do not engage with my peers. I have my world. I want to work." -X.A.K.

Sometimes, a CICL's status was disclosed to the educational institution. This disclosure aimed to facilitate the implementation of appropriate interventions conducive to the reintegration. While some classmates extended social support and encouragement, a subset of teachers initially harbored reservations. However, these reservations ultimately yielded to acceptance.

"My classmates knew. All of them were visiting me in the Center. There was no problem. They encouraged me." -J.Y.L.

"Eventually, they say something about me and make me feel like the same person in the paper. Sometimes, I can hear them when I make a mistake. However, I disregarded it because I think I am outside the Center now." -D.R.O.

"They already knew because of the gossip." -Z.M.N.

Furthermore, reintegration at the community level presents distinct challenges. Social acceptance is obstructed by informal communication channels, such as gossip, that disseminate inaccurate information about the child and generate negative commentary. Conversely, religious institutions embrace these individuals without judgment. Despite societal stigma, the program participants resolutely maintain their aspirations and establish goals for a fulfilling and virtuous life.

Korde (2023) and Attivon (2022) asserted that labeling youth as deviant can shape their identity and hinder rehabilitation. Also, parental involvement and community support are crucial for preventing delinquency and promoting reintegration (Malesa, 2024; Sartika, 2019).

The Aftercare Programs and Services were Limited to Monitoring and Home Visitation as well as Financial Assistance Depending on the Availability of Funds

The participants attested to the availability of reintegration and aftercare programs and services. These services primarily included monitoring, home visitations, and community-based programs. Implementing these programs is essential for generating monitoring reports, progress reports, and manifestation reports that are submitted to the court. Only two participants received cash assistance under the Assistance to Individuals in Crisis Situation (AICS) program.

"You will be the one to visit the barangay. I need to clean the surroundings. I did not wait for them. I voluntarily did community service. Once a month only." -X.A.K.

"In 6 months, you cannot leave GenSan. You need to finish the observation." -D.R.O.

"I was given financial assistance when I was released (Bahay Pag-Asa for Boys). I gave it to my father to buy some rice. I was not allowed to hold the money." -J.Y.L.

"I received AICS. It is a financial assistance for school." -Z.M.N.

Within the context of General Santos City, the participants emphasized the need for financial aid during the aftercare program to address necessities. They identified multifaceted challenges such as financial hardship, physical strain from demanding labor (such as carrying 50kg tanks), social stigma, and difficulties affording educational expenses (including uniforms). Despite these obstacles, participants demonstrated remarkable resilience by securing employment with income, pursuing educational opportunities through scholarships (e.g., the UNIFAST program), maintaining humility, and seeking alternative means to support their parents or guardians.

"I am working by carrying a heavy 50 kg tank. You need to carry and maneuver it." -X.A.K.

"My cousins were accused by my teachers (as CICLs). They inflict negative comments." -J.Y.L.

"The temptation of peers is to drink alcoholic beverages. If you drink, you can do something negative again." -Z.M.N.

"The situation of the aunt is very challenging. Her only source of livelihood is alupi. Her income is not daily." -D.R.O.

Hope and Aspiration are Multifaceted Concepts

According to the participants, hope is a multifaceted concept. They described it as a symbol of personal transformation undertaken for the benefit of their families, an ideology that motivates them to pursue a positive and fulfilling life, and a source of internal motivation that propels them forward.

"It (hope) is like a motivation. Motivation to uplift the status of your life in terms of finances." -Z.M.N.

"Hope is for my partner, my mother, and my father." -X.A.K.

"For my family and my child." -J.Y.L.

"Hope is the ideology that gives me an idea of how to continue. Despite how difficult it is, hope gives you a boost to continue." -D.R.O.

The participants' aspirations provide them with a realization that life has a purpose. They aspire to have complete and healthy family members, financial stability, review and pass the board exam in one take, apply to the government for work, and buy a house and lot for parents and family. Through this, they develop a life strategy to find a job that will suffice their basic needs.

"I aspire to have a complete family." -X.A.K.

"I aspire to have provisions for the basic needs of the family." -J.Y.L.

"My goal this year is to decide to review for the board exam this upcoming August. Hopefully, I can reach my goal of passing the board exam. With God's grace, so that I can apply for reinforcement service." -D.R.O.

"If I can buy a house for my parents and a lot. Hopefully, I will be accepted into the government service this year." -Z.M.N.

The participants attributed their reformation and the pursuit of a meaningful life to the transformative power of their experiences. These experiences fostered a sense of responsibility towards their families, motivating them to achieve their goals and strive for personal growth. Additionally, participants drew strength from their faith and a personal conviction that life's challenges serve a purpose. The program equipped them with enduring life lessons, fostering resilience in adversity and empowering them to earn respect through their accomplishments.

"You can accomplish your goals. You need to help your parents. You are free from the chains." -X.A.K.

"I have realizations. It influenced me positively and with lifelong lessons in life. Because of that, I realized that you should live better." -D.R.O.

"Respect from other people. You will earn respect based on your profession." -Z.M.N.

"If I had not experienced it, I would not have been the person I am today. I am drinking alcohol and do not have a family now. If I had not experienced it, I would not mature now. I will not learn what life is. I cannot meet other people." -J.Y.L.

Moreover, the participants of this study have a sense of self-determination to exercise their rights in terms of decision-making and good choices in life.

"In terms of the service DSWD could provide. They gave me the services needed for my case. If they lack services, maybe I am not free now. However, because I am here now, meaning, they were able to provide my basic needs for the diversion programs intended for me. The justice is okay. I received the justice I hoped for. If justice was not served, I am still suffering now. I am okay now." -D.R.O.

"I cannot say that it is okay because you should be the one who knows what mistakes you have committed. You need to adjust. It depends on your choice. For me, I want to be productive and reformed. That is my choice to reach what I have now." -Z.M.N.

"In my own opinion, I accepted what happened. I do not want negative comments given to me. The social workers assisted me and explained. They saved me. It is my chance now. I am free outside. I will not waste it." -X.A.K.

"For now, I am concerned about my family's situation. Because the person (school guard) who framed me. He was found dead maybe after three (3) days. He had a cardiac arrest. My grandmother was hoping that the karma would return to him. That is why my grandmother felt relieved." -J.Y.L.

The findings of this study are similar to Korde (2023), Limantè (2022), and Attivon (2022) in that it is valuable to emphasize the understanding of CICL's perspectives on their own experiences and needs. Also, it is essential to examine the inner world, need for support, sense of capabilities, and concern for others (Banzon-Librojo, 2023; Banzon-Librojo, 2024).

4.0 Conclusion

Based on the data results, the CICLs faced various factors that led them to conflict with the law. The participants highlighted that the reasons why they were accused/alleged/adjudged in committing an offense were the following: the act of attempted or frustrated murder due to peer group conflicts; their engagement with negative influence peers and involvement in harmful activities; adult offender (school guard) framed the child (drug case) and the police used the child for the buy-bust operation to apprehend another offender; the family conflict that ends up to murder case and the accusation of his involvement in the incident.

Their experiences during the diversion and rehabilitation program at *Bahay Pag-Asa* for Boys showed that the length of their stay depended on the nature of their case and compliance with the given terms and conditions. The structured daily schedule offered a variety of rehabilitative activities. A multifaceted approach was used to address the complex challenges encountered. This approach incorporated guidance, self-acceptance, spiritual reflection, and a commitment to personal transformation.

However, the reintegration and aftercare programs offered limited support. They primarily focused on monitoring, home visits, and financial assistance (when funds were available). Moreover, the participants viewed hope as a push factor in their transformation. It motivated them to change, gave them the belief to live a good life, and provided a sense of purpose. Their aspirations helped them realize the meaning of life, and hope implied a restoration of order.

The case management process aimed to repair the harm caused, and children's situations were addressed through reintegration (reinstating them back into society) while ensuring fair treatment. Community-based programs offered during reintegration and aftercare further facilitated the restoration of peace, healing, and reconciliation. Ultimately, the experiences of these reformed CICLs highlight that their success hinged not only on the programs offered but also on their self-determination to make positive life choices.

Moreover, based on the narratives of the reformed CICLs, the level of consciousness of their actions and decision-making in life varied on the reflective monitoring, rationalization, and motivation of their actions. They only behave according to what they know or believe concerning the outcome of the action. However, intentional acts often produced consequences for which the reformed CICLs had not originally accounted for. These unintended consequences become unacknowledged conditions of future actions. Generally, the ability to become a successful reformed individual may also depend on their self-determination to make the "right" and "good" choices in life.

Furthermore, this research suggested conducting quantitative research to establish baseline data on children in conflict with the law in General Santos City for future references and research opportunities. Also, it is recommended that the number of reformed CICL participants be increased and that a study conducted in another local setting be conducted to assess the implementation of Republic Act 9344 and the integration of restorative justice principles. In addition, it is advised to explore the lived experiences of children in conflict with the law who were committed inside the City Jail before the implementation of R.A. 9344. Lastly, to conduct a study focusing on CICL that is no longer a minor, a recidivist, and at the same time non-compliant to diversion measures.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

The first author, Jenena Solmayor, coordinated and processed the approval and recommendation from the Local Government Unit of General Santos City, specifically the Human Resource Management and Development Office and City Social Welfare and Development Office, gathered the data, coded and analyzed the data, accomplished the results, discussions, and conclusions of the study. The second author, Amabelle Embornas, served as the research adviser who shared her knowledge and enhanced the overall output of the research through checking, rechecking, formatting, editing, validating, and finalizing the paper.

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

This research publication has no conflict of interest as long as it is used for academic purposes only.

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