

# A phenomenological study of the lived experiences of persons deprived of liberty with special needs

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## Abstract

This study examined the lived experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) with special needs in BJMP-manned jails, focusing on senior citizens, PDLs with disabilities, and sick PDLs. Utilizing a narrative phenomenological approach, the research aimed to uncover their distinct challenges and hardships, ultimately providing recommendations for enhancing their conditions. A purposive sampling method selected 15 male and 15 female PDLs, with five participants from each category. Data was collected through interviews, confirmed by focus group discussions. Senior citizen PDLs face substantial physical, emotional, and social challenges due to inadequate medical attention and the absence of specialized services, often leading to feelings of isolation and neglect. The study highlights the urgent need for comprehensive reforms in correctional facilities to address these significant challenges. PDLs with disabilities experience barriers to accessibility, limited healthcare, and rehabilitation services, compounded by bureaucratic obstacles that hinder access to resources. Sick PDLs struggle with managing complex medical conditions while facing loneliness and restricted medical care, which adversely affects their health and well-being. Despite these difficulties, senior citizen PDLs recognize that personal growth and self-improvement are achievable, regardless of age or circumstances. They learn valuable lessons about self-reliance, faith, adaptation, and resilience, which empower them to overcome hardships. The inclusion and well-being of PDLs necessitate addressing these issues through extensive accommodations, accessible facilities, and robust mental health care. This action plan aims to enhance health services in selected BJMP-NCR jails, ensuring a comprehensive healthcare system that meets the unique needs of all PDLs while promoting their dignity, health, and rehabilitation.

**Keywords:** phenomenological study, persons deprived of liberty, special needs, lived experiences, incarceration

## **A phenomenological study of the lived experiences of persons deprived of liberty with special needs**

### **1. Introduction**

The effective treatment and reintegration of persons deprived of liberty (PDL) with special needs require a comprehensive approach that considers their unique risks and needs (UNODC, 2008). These individuals—comprising senior citizens, persons with disabilities (PWDs), those with chronic illnesses, and individuals with mental health challenges—face significant barriers within correctional institutions. Their reintegration presents an opportunity to assess both the conditions of incarceration and the systemic obstacles to rehabilitation. This phenomenological inquiry focuses on these vulnerable groups and explores how correctional systems address their needs.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) emphasizes that prisons, given their restrictive environment, intensify the challenges experienced by disabled individuals, with issues such as overcrowding, insufficient supervision, and violence worsening their situation (UNODC, 2008). The growing number of elderly and disabled prisoners underscores the need for policies that protect their rights and limit unnecessary imprisonment. As the prison population ages, particularly in developed countries with increasing life expectancy, there is an urgent call to reduce the incarceration of offenders with disabilities and safeguard their well-being through targeted interventions (UNODC, 2008).

The UNODC also highlights the harmful impact of punitive sentencing on offenders with mental health conditions, leading to their overrepresentation in correctional institutions ill-equipped to address their healthcare needs (UNODC, 2008). Isolation, poor prison conditions, and lack of safety contribute to severe mental health issues, reinforcing the need for prison management strategies that prioritize mental well-being. Access to timely, individualized treatment equivalent to community healthcare must be provided, emphasizing consent and dignity. This aligns with the World Medical Association's stance on ethical mental healthcare practices (UNODC, 2008).

In the Philippines, the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), as part of the criminal justice system, is responsible for ensuring the safekeeping and development of PDLs, including those with special needs. The BJMP primarily oversees detainees awaiting trial or serving short-term sentences (BJMP Operational Manual, 2015). National laws, such as Republic Act No. 9994 and Republic Act No. 10754, provide benefits to senior citizens and PWDs, reinforcing the state's commitment to social equity. These laws grant these groups exemptions and discounts on services and reflect constitutional principles that uphold human dignity, social justice, and the provision of essential services (RA No. 9994, 2010; RA No. 10754, 2016).

The BJMP has issued policies, including Memorandum Circulars 66 and 96, to address the specific needs of senior and disabled PDLs. However, challenges persist in fully implementing these measures. Memorandum Circular 66, for example, acknowledges the vulnerability of senior PDLs, who often require specialized healthcare and protection from abuse, but also notes the absence of standardized care programs (BJMP Memo Circular 66, 2019). Similarly, Memorandum Circular 96 focuses on integrating PWDs into jail programs and encourages collaboration with external organizations to enhance service delivery (BJMP Memo Circular 96, 2020). Both policies emphasize connecting PDLs with local government units for access to essential services and identification cards under relevant laws.

The study also reveals that PDLs with special needs, particularly the elderly and mentally ill, often struggle to participate in rehabilitation programs due to their physical and mental limitations. These difficulties hinder their progress in court cases and participation in jail activities. Mental health challenges, in particular, can prevent affected individuals from attending court hearings, further complicating their legal status. Addressing these

disparities is essential to ensuring that vulnerable PDLs benefit from rehabilitation programs designed for the general prison population.

Ultimately, this research aligns with broader efforts to advance social justice by addressing the intersecting forms of discrimination that PDLs with special needs experience. It calls for reforms to promote equity and ensure that correctional policies respect the rights and dignity of all individuals, regardless of their legal or disability status. Conducting this phenomenological inquiry fills a critical gap in literature and offers insights to guide future policies and practices that support the well-being and reintegration of this marginalized population.

This study examined the lived experiences of persons deprived of liberty (PDL) with special needs in BJMP-manned jails across Metro Manila during 2023-2024. It aimed to address key questions, including the distinct experiences of three specific groups: senior citizens, PDLs with disabilities, and those with chronic illnesses. The study also explored the significant hardships these PDLs face during incarceration and sought to identify areas for improvement in their treatment and living conditions. Lastly, it provided recommendations based on the findings to enhance the care, support, and overall well-being of these vulnerable individuals within the correctional system.

## **2. Methodology**

This study employed a qualitative narrative phenomenological design to explore the lived experiences of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) with special needs in BJMP-manned jails across Metro Manila during 2023–2024. Recognizing the sensitivity of the participants, strict ethical protocols were integrated into the methodology. The study focused on senior citizens, PDLs with disabilities, and those with chronic illnesses, with 30 respondents purposively selected from five jails: Manila City Jail, Quezon City Jail, Pasay City Jail, Caloocan City Jail, and Mandaluyong City Jail. Each group included five male and five female participants. Data collection was carried out using semi-structured interviews, written narratives, and focus group discussions, which provided a comprehensive understanding of participants' lived experiences. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in questioning, enabling the researcher to probe deeper into individual experiences while maintaining a consistent framework across respondents. Written narratives offered participants an opportunity to express their thoughts and emotions in a reflective manner, enriching the data with personal insights. Focus group discussions facilitated interactive dialogue among participants, revealing shared experiences and differing perspectives, thereby adding depth and context to the findings.

Ethical considerations included obtaining informed consent through clear communication about the study's purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by securely handling data and using pseudonyms during analysis and reporting. Flexible interview arrangements ensured participants' safety and comfort, with accommodations made for their specific needs. The researcher employed phenomenological reduction and epoche techniques to approach the data without bias, guided by Moustakas' (2017) methods for analysis, including coding, thematic classification, and narrative interpretation. These methodological and ethical measures ensured a nuanced and respectful exploration of the unique challenges faced by vulnerable PDLs, contributing to actionable recommendations for improving their care and treatment within the correctional system.

## **3. Results and Discussion**

### *3.1 Lived Experiences of Senior Citizens Deprived of Liberty*

The lived experiences of senior citizens deprived of liberty reveal significant physical, emotional, and social challenges, compounded by the prison environment. These elderly inmates often struggle with the lack of proper medical care, leaving treatable conditions unmanaged, leading to unnecessary suffering. Aging bodies require specialized attention, yet prisons fail to provide adequate care, undermining the dignity of these individuals. The emotional burden is equally heavy, as many inmates experience profound loneliness and isolation, separated from

family and grandchildren, and feeling forgotten by friends and loved ones. Mothers in prison suffer additional emotional distress, unable to care for their children.

The physical decline associated with aging exacerbates these difficulties, with inmates dealing with mobility issues, vision loss, and hearing impairments. Participants described the emotional pain of feeling abandoned by the system, lamenting the unfairness of facing such hardships in their old age. Despite their unique needs, elderly inmates are often treated the same as younger ones, receiving little respect or recognition for their circumstances. This dehumanizing treatment highlights the urgent need for correctional reforms to ensure that elderly inmates receive appropriate care, respect, and emotional support.

The findings align with previous studies, such as those by Cano, Omega, and Chua (2023), which revealed similar themes of emotional struggle, self-reflection, and adaptation among PDLs. Their research emphasized the importance of public awareness about the realities of life in prison, showing how inmates grapple with loneliness and discrimination but also engage in personal growth and change. Addressing these challenges through enhanced medical services and tailored programs can improve the well-being of elderly inmates and uphold their basic human rights, fostering more humane treatment within the correctional system.

### *3.2 Lived Experiences of Sick Persons Deprived of Liberty*

The lived experiences of senior citizens deprived of liberty reveal significant physical, emotional, and social challenges, compounded by the prison environment. These elderly inmates often struggle with the lack of proper medical care, leaving treatable conditions unmanaged, leading to unnecessary suffering. Aging bodies require specialized attention, yet prisons fail to provide adequate care, undermining the dignity of these individuals. The emotional burden is equally heavy, as many inmates experience profound loneliness and isolation, separated from family and grandchildren, and feeling forgotten by friends and loved ones. Mothers in prison suffer additional emotional distress, unable to care for their children.

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### *3.3 Lived Experiences of Persons with Disabilities Deprived of Liberty*

Incarcerated individuals with disabilities face significant challenges that severely affect their daily lives. Key issues include the absence of accessibility tools like ramps, elevators, and wide pathways, making it difficult for them to move independently and safely within the facility. This lack of mobility infrastructure results in physical exhaustion, heightened injury risks, and dependence on others, which diminishes their autonomy and dignity. Emotionally, the confined environment exacerbates feelings of neglect, discrimination, and social isolation, significantly impacting their mental well-being.

PDLs with disabilities struggle with daily activities, such as accessing medical care, managing pain, and maintaining hygiene, due to insufficient accommodations. They also experience exclusion from programs like

education, rehabilitation, and work initiatives, which are not tailored to their needs, leading to missed opportunities for personal development. Some inmates shared the emotional toll of being forgotten, mistreated, and stigmatized by peers and staff, further contributing to their isolation and psychological distress.

Participants' accounts highlighted the need for systemic reforms in prisons, including accessible infrastructure, comprehensive mental health support, anti-discrimination measures, and specialized services to meet their specific needs. Privacy and dignity are often compromised, and inmates struggle with inflexible meal provisions and inaccessible hygiene facilities. Even finding peace and rest is a challenge due to overcrowded and noisy environments.

These findings align with research by Bersamina, Rilveria, and Tolio (2021), which identified gaps in correctional services for vulnerable groups, such as disabled inmates, senior citizens, and women. They emphasized the need for improvements in areas like mental health, legal aid, and specialized programs to ensure better care and support. Without such reforms, PDLs with disabilities continue to face hardships that undermine their well-being and human rights.

### *3.4 Challenges Faced by Senior Citizens Persons Deprived of Liberty*

Senior citizen Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) encounter a complex array of challenges within the correctional system that deeply affect their health and well-being. As they age, their physical health often declines, and this deterioration is exacerbated by inadequate medical care. Participant J articulates this struggle, stating, "Every day feels like a battle. My body is aging, and the lack of proper medical care makes it even harder to cope with my ailments." Similarly, Participant B reflects on the relentless nature of chronic pain in prison, expressing that living with such conditions feels like an "endless ordeal" without appropriate treatment.

Beyond physical ailments, emotional burdens arise from the isolation senior PDLs experience due to separation from family and friends. Participant D shares, "The isolation weighs heavily on me. Being separated from my family and friends at this age is one of the hardest things I've ever faced." This sentiment resonates with Participant J, who frequently feels forgotten and abandoned, which significantly impacts his mental health. The emotional toll of loneliness compounds their existing struggles, creating a vicious cycle that affects their overall well-being.

The correctional facilities themselves often fail to accommodate the specific needs of elderly inmates, leading to additional challenges. Participant E notes, "The facilities are not designed for elderly people. Simple tasks become monumental challenges without proper support." Participant F echoes this, highlighting mobility issues that make navigating the prison environment particularly difficult. Such inadequacies in infrastructure can turn everyday movements into struggles, further complicating the lives of aging inmates.

Despite these difficulties, some participants find solace in small daily routines and connections within the prison community. Participant E finds peace in activities like reading and meditation, which help maintain a sense of normalcy. The sense of community among senior inmates, as described by Participant J, fosters mutual support during tough times, emphasizing the importance of peer relationships in coping with isolation and adversity.

A significant gap in the correctional system is the absence of tailored rehabilitation programs for elderly inmates. Participant D expresses the need for more age-appropriate programs, indicating that "rehabilitation should consider our age and health conditions." Participant G highlights that the lack of adequate support systems makes it difficult to maintain hope, emphasizing a demand for increased attention and care tailored to the unique needs of elderly PDLs.

Amidst their struggles, some participants reflect on personal growth and resilience gained through their experiences, underscoring the importance of inner strength. The longing for family connections and hopes for reunification, voiced by multiple participants, reveal the emotional impact of separation and the necessity for

policies that support family visits and emotional well-being.

### *3.5 Challenges Faced by Sick Persons Deprived of Liberty*

Sick PDLs endure a unique set of challenges that significantly affect their physical and emotional well-being. Incarceration complicates illness management through limited healthcare access, bureaucratic delays, and an environment that worsens discomfort and stress. Many struggle with feelings of neglect, compounded by inadequate support systems within prison facilities. The emotional burden of isolation and the absence of essential resources amplify their difficulties, making the need for family connections crucial. Family support offers emotional resilience and provides hope in the otherwise harsh realities of prison life.

Participants highlight the deep emotional toll of illness behind bars, which often goes unnoticed but leaves lasting effects on well-being. As Participant A notes, living with illness in a jail setting complicates emotional challenges, exacerbated by the lack of healthcare access and isolation. Participant G emphasizes the compounded nature of physical and emotional distress, intensified by environmental limitations. Managing health in prison is likened to navigating a maze, where every step is fraught with uncertainty, delays, and scarce resources. These conditions force inmates to battle not only illness but also systemic obstacles, resulting in heightened mental strain and fear.

In these circumstances, family connections play a vital role in sustaining the morale of sick PDLs. Participant G describes family as an emotional anchor, providing love and support that build resilience even during the toughest moments. Visits from loved ones are seen as beacons of hope, helping inmates feel valued beyond their circumstances. For many, maintaining family ties becomes a crucial source of strength, fueling determination to overcome health challenges. Participant D adds that family connections provide the courage to face each day with renewed hope and purpose.

Addressing these challenges requires understanding the emotional and physical struggles of sick PDLs. Improving healthcare services, reducing bureaucratic hurdles, and strengthening emotional support networks are essential to promote well-being in correctional settings. These findings align with the study by Flores-Barolo & Vicente (2019), which identified various coping mechanisms adopted by inmates at the Sablayan Prison and Penal Farm, Occidental Mindoro. Participants reported challenges such as feelings of powerlessness, adherence to prison norms, and being perceived as forgotten victims. They coped through self-reflection, faith, religious activities, and developing adaptive behaviors.

### *3.6 Challenges Faced by Persons Deprived of Liberty with Disabilities*

Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) who have disabilities confront a unique set of challenges that significantly impact their daily lives and overall health. Accessing basic utilities, healthcare, and rehabilitation services within the prison system is often hindered by a lack of infrastructure and resources. Bureaucratic obstacles and an unsupportive environment further complicate their ability to maintain dignity and autonomy. The psychological effects of neglect and isolation exacerbate their physical difficulties, underscoring the urgent need for inclusive policies and specialized support networks. As Participant I noted, simple daily tasks become incredibly challenging without proper facilities or assistance, emphasizing the systemic barriers they face.

Isolation is a common experience for disabled PDLs, as highlighted by Participant C, who expressed that limited access to public areas within the prison leads to severe segregation. Participant F echoed this sentiment, lamenting that their needs are frequently overlooked in favor of those without disabilities. The lack of appropriate safety measures puts disabled inmates at heightened risk of accidents and injuries, further complicating their already challenging circumstances. Participant B pointed out that inadequate safety protocols contribute to an unsafe environment, amplifying the physical risks they encounter daily.

Many disabled PDLs struggle to engage in prison programs and activities due to physical barriers, as

articulated by Participant D. This inability to participate contributes to feelings of worthlessness and hopelessness, as expressed by Participant G. The lack of training for prison staff in caring for inmates with disabilities leads to misunderstandings and mistakes, further isolating this vulnerable population. Participant H emphasized that inadequate staff training results in significant challenges in addressing the unique needs of disabled PDLs, which affects their overall treatment and experience in prison.

Despite these obstacles, a strong support system can provide much-needed encouragement and resilience. Participant H remarked that having a good support network instills courage to face daily challenges, while Participant I noted the invaluable support from fellow PDLs, creating a familial bond amidst adversity. Volunteer support from outside the prison is also crucial, as Participant D described these individuals as "angels" who bring hope and joy to their lives. Access to specialized medical services and therapists is vital for their health, further reinforcing the need for inclusive policies within the correctional system.

Emotional well-being is supported through educational and recreational programs organized by prison staff, which significantly contribute to the mental health of disabled PDLs. Mental health support groups provide a safe space for discussing fears and concerns, as shared by Participant F. Additionally, maintaining connections with family members through calls and visits plays a critical role in offering inspiration and strength during incarceration, as highlighted by Participant E.

### *3.7 Lessons Learned by Senior Citizens PDL*

Senior citizens who are Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) share valuable lessons learned through their experiences, highlighting the importance of personal responsibility, faith, resilience, respect, and adaptability amid the challenges posed by incarceration. These individuals reflect on the significance of inner transformation, emphasizing that hope and faith can guide them through difficult times. Participant A articulates this sentiment by stating, "Change begins within the heart and mind. Even within prison walls, we can still be accountable for our actions and decisions." Participant B reinforces this idea by stressing that faith and hope are crucial for navigating the path toward transformation and reintegration into society, further illustrating how these values shape their journeys.

The insights shared by the participants also emphasize that age should not be a barrier to progress. Participant C asserts, "Age is not a barrier to progress and change. Every day presents an opportunity for us to become better individuals," underscoring the potential for self-improvement at any stage of life. Additionally, Participant D highlights the importance of treating others with respect, stating, "Respect and reverence for others are crucial in demonstrating dignity and integrity, even within the confines of prison barriers." This commitment to respect and dignity serves as a foundation for building positive relationships and fostering a supportive community, even in challenging environments.

Participant E shares the significance of remaining calm and observant, noting that "being calm and observant in every situation teaches us that we have the strength to overcome life's challenges." This perspective on resilience emphasizes the ability to confront trials with composure and determination, illustrating that adaptability is key to navigating life's adversities. Collectively, these findings underscore the transformative power of inner strength, faith, respect, and resilience in overcoming obstacles, regardless of the circumstances faced.

The emphasis on personal values and mindset reflects a crucial observation about the role of individual responsibility in navigating challenges within prison systems. The study highlights how these core values shape perceptions and responses to adversity, significantly influencing overall well-being. The notion that age does not limit personal growth challenges the conventional belief that one's capacity for improvement diminishes with time. This empowering perspective encourages individuals to seize opportunities for self-development, fostering a sense of hope and possibility even in the most difficult situations.

The lessons learned from senior citizens PDLs serve as vital reminders of the importance of maintaining

dignity and integrity amidst challenges. By promoting respect, resilience, and personal growth, these values contribute to a sense of agency and empowerment, enabling individuals to face their circumstances with grace. The findings align with Salvador's (2016) study, which highlights the vulnerabilities of older individuals in society and the pressing need for comprehensive support systems. As the population of senior citizens grows, addressing their unique challenges becomes increasingly essential, particularly in areas such as healthcare, housing, and social support.

### *3.8 Lessons Learned from Sick PDLs*

The experiences of senior citizens who are Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) in prison reveal profound insights into vital lessons surrounding personal responsibility, resilience, faith, respect, and adaptability. These individuals have developed a deep understanding of inner transformation, maintaining hope, and navigating life's challenges, even within the constraints of incarceration. Their narratives illustrate the transformative power of these core values, enabling them to overcome adversity and foster personal growth despite their circumstances. Participant C's narrative highlights the critical role of personal responsibility in managing one's health while in prison, emphasizing the need for proactive resilience. They share, "My illness taught me that taking responsibility for my health is crucial, even in the confines of prison. Every day is a battle, but I've learned to be resilient and proactive in managing my condition."

Participant G provides a perspective rooted in faith and hope, identifying these as guiding lights during their darkest moments of illness. They state, "In the darkest moments of sickness, faith and hope became my guiding lights. They reminded me that there's always a chance for recovery and renewal, even in the most challenging circumstances." This view showcases the continuous opportunities for renewal and recovery that can arise from maintaining a positive outlook, underscoring the strength gained from faith and hope. Similarly, Participant H expresses their resilience by stating, "Illness doesn't define me; it's a challenge I've learned to overcome. Through perseverance and determination, I've discovered my inner strength and resilience." Their perspective frames illness as a challenge rather than a limitation, highlighting the transformative potential of determination.

Participant D emphasizes that illness does not diminish one's worth or dignity, reminding us to maintain integrity and respect for others regardless of the circumstances. They articulate, "Being sick in prison doesn't diminish my worth or dignity. It's a reminder to uphold my integrity and treat others with respect, regardless of the circumstances." This narrative reinforces the enduring value of respect and dignity, even in challenging environments, emphasizing that one's health condition should not dictate their self-worth. Additionally, Participant A reflects on the lessons learned from their illness, stating, "Illness has been my teacher, showing me the importance of self-care, empathy, and embracing each day with gratitude and resilience." This viewpoint portrays illness as an opportunity for personal growth and highlights the importance of essential values such as self-care and empathy in navigating daily challenges.

Together, these narratives create a compelling picture of resilience, faith, respect, and adaptability, showcasing how these qualities can facilitate personal growth and the ability to overcome hardships within the complexities of prison life. These findings illustrate the strength inherent in human nature, offering insights into the human capacity to thrive even in adverse circumstances. The examination of elderly PDLs reveals the critical need for personal accountability in managing health through these core values. This highlights the necessity for health education and empowerment programs to promote self-care and accountability within prison settings. Moreover, these insights underscore the importance of resilience-building initiatives and mental health care, demonstrating how faith and hope can serve as coping mechanisms for prisoners facing health challenges. Viewing health issues as teachers can facilitate adaptation and growth, while maintaining integrity and respect fosters a climate of mutual regard. Incorporating these lessons into correctional policies may aid in the reintegration of PDLs into society.

Similar findings were noted in the study by Chua and Omega (2023), which explored the lived experiences of PDLs using a phenomenological approach. The research identified key themes, including connections, self-



reflection, difficulties, challenges, and adapting for survival. The findings highlight the complexity of PDL experiences, which include both negative aspects—such as loneliness and discrimination—and positive changes resulting from personal reflection and growth. These insights not only provide a foundation for increasing public awareness but also emphasize the potential for inspiring positive change among youth, helping them understand the realities of life in prison and the importance of making constructive choices.

### *3.9 Lessons Learned by PDLs with Disabilities*

The experiences of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) with disabilities reveal profound insights into the resilience of the human spirit, the affirmation of self-worth, and the ability to adapt to challenging circumstances. These individuals embark on transformative journeys, realizing that their disabilities do not encompass their entire identities. Instead, they glean essential life lessons in perseverance, self-advocacy, and the creation of nurturing environments that celebrate diversity and promote inclusivity. Their narratives serve as powerful testimonies to humanity's capacity for growth, empathy, and the pursuit of equality and dignity, irrespective of differing abilities or life situations.

Participant I's reflections emphasize the value of perseverance and adaptability in confronting the unique challenges associated with their disabilities. They assert, "My disability taught me the value of perseverance and adaptability in the face of challenges. It's not about what I can't do, but how I can find alternative ways to achieve my goals and contribute positively despite my limitations." This mindset fosters resilience and encourages them to focus on their strengths, enabling effective navigation of obstacles while ensuring that perceived limitations do not hinder progress. Similarly, Participant E reinforces this sentiment, noting that "having a disability doesn't define my worth or capabilities. It's a reminder to focus on my strengths, cultivate resilience, and embrace opportunities for growth and learning." By emphasizing self-advocacy and self-acceptance, they contribute to creating environments that celebrate diversity.

Participant D's experiences highlight the multifaceted nature of identity, asserting that disability is merely one aspect of who they are. They state, "Through my experiences, I've learned that disability is just one aspect of who I am. It's taught me the importance of self-advocacy, acceptance, and creating a supportive environment that values diversity and inclusion." This journey underscores the strength derived from community support and collaborative efforts in navigating life with a disability. By advocating for the removal of barriers and fostering inclusivity, individuals can work collectively toward a more accessible society. Participant H adds to this dialogue, sharing that "disability has been my teacher, shaping my perspective and instilling empathy and compassion." Their narrative advocates for equal rights and challenges societal stereotypes, calling for a world where every individual is respected and valued, regardless of their abilities.

The study underscores the importance of adaptability and resilience among PDLs with disabilities, as well as the need for self-advocacy and affirmation of self-worth. It emphasizes the establishment of supportive environments and the confrontation of stereotypes, urging society to prioritize accessibility and dismantle obstacles that hinder inclusivity. The findings advocate for societal changes in attitudes and legislation to provide equal rights and opportunities for individuals with disabilities. Overall, these insights demonstrate the transformative potential of personal experiences and resilience. Similar observations are found in the study by De Ocampo (2019), which explores the lived experiences of PDLs after incarceration, focusing on job hunting and social reintegration. This research highlights the stigma associated with being an ex-PDL and the emotional and psychological challenges faced during reintegration, such as rejection by loved ones and prejudice from potential employers. These experiences further illustrate the need for societal empathy and understanding, reinforcing the lessons learned by PDLs with disabilities in advocating for inclusivity and dignity.

## **4. Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings regarding Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) with special needs, particularly senior citizens

and individuals with disabilities, reveal pressing challenges that necessitate immediate action. Senior citizens often face significant physical, emotional, and social difficulties exacerbated by inadequate medical care, leading to feelings of neglect and isolation. The human rights issues prevalent in correctional facilities, including insufficient resources, hinder rehabilitation efforts and overall well-being, emphasizing the need for systemic reforms that uphold the autonomy and dignity of these individuals. Similarly, PDLs with disabilities encounter barriers that restrict their daily activities and foster discrimination, highlighting the urgent need for improved accessibility and comprehensive accommodations. A holistic approach that promotes inclusivity and anti-discrimination measures is crucial to enhancing the quality of life for all PDLs, making advocacy for systemic change essential to ensure their rights and needs are met.

The experiences of senior citizen PDLs, sick PDLs, and those with disabilities illustrate the potential for personal growth and resilience within challenging prison environments. Senior citizens have learned that meaningful change begins within, emphasizing that age should not impede self-improvement while maintaining respect and dignity as vital components of their identity. Sick PDLs emphasize the importance of personal responsibility and adaptability in managing health challenges, with family connections providing essential emotional support. Meanwhile, PDLs with disabilities demonstrate that their identities are not defined solely by limitations, embodying perseverance and self-advocacy. Collectively, these insights underscore the need for correctional policies that prioritize respect, dignity, and personal responsibility, fostering supportive environments that empower PDLs to successfully reintegrate into society.

The findings emphasize the urgent need for practical interventions by both the community and the local government to address the challenges faced by Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) with special needs, particularly senior citizens and individuals with disabilities.

For local government, systemic reforms are critical. These include enhancing healthcare services within correctional facilities by providing regular medical check-ups, specialized healthcare professionals, and access to mental health support. Infrastructure improvements, such as wheelchair-accessible pathways, ramps, and grab bars, should be prioritized to accommodate the needs of PDLs with disabilities. Furthermore, rehabilitation programs tailored to address the unique needs of senior citizens and PDLs with disabilities should focus on fostering life skills, emotional well-being, and self-advocacy. Training for jail personnel on inclusivity and the specific needs of these populations will further ensure dignity and respect in their treatment.

From a community perspective, partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs), academic institutions, and private sectors can help bridge resource gaps in correctional facilities. These collaborations could include volunteer programs for skills development, psychological counseling, and family outreach initiatives to foster stronger emotional resilience. Public awareness campaigns to combat stigma and promote inclusivity are essential to create a supportive environment, both during incarceration and after reintegration into society.

To address the pressing challenges faced by Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) with special needs, particularly senior citizens and individuals with disabilities, several key recommendations are proposed. First, correctional facilities should implement a comprehensive medical care framework that includes routine health assessments, access to specialized professionals, and tailored mental health services to reduce feelings of neglect and isolation. Enhancing accessibility is also critical; prisons need to modify their infrastructure by adding ramps, grab bars, and accessible restrooms to promote independence and dignity for PDLs with disabilities. Additionally, targeted rehabilitation programs focused on physical health, emotional well-being, life skills, and self-advocacy should be developed for these populations. Moreover, fostering family engagement through regular visitation programs is vital for the emotional resilience of PDLs. Training correctional staff on the specific needs of senior citizens and PDLs with disabilities will promote dignity and respect. Implementing strict anti-discrimination policies will combat stigma and create an inclusive environment. Advocacy for systemic policy reforms, in collaboration with human rights organizations, is essential to uphold the dignity and rights of these vulnerable groups. Finally, creating supportive environments that recognize and encourage personal growth will aid in the

successful reintegration of PDLs into society.

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