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Female Drug Enforcement Officers' Perceptions and Experiences in the Drug-Law Enforcement World

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study focused on the lived experiences of female drug enforcement officers in the drug enforcement field. Using quota sampling, ten female drug enforcement officers of PDEA ROXII were the participants of the study. The feminist theory helped to clarify the constructed meanings the women attached to their experiences. In-depth interviews were conducted, and the data analysis was guided by the Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method. The findings revealed that all of the women pursued law enforcement careers because of job security, influence from family and friends, and the desire to help the country solve the problem of illegal drugs. Their job satisfaction was influenced by the successful performance of their duties through the arrest of high-value targets, a conviction of drug personalities, and their perception that they have a challenging and exciting job. Physical and physiological barriers, safety and security, number of cases handled, and desire to practice their professions also influenced their careers. This study revealed that there is gender equality perceived by the female drug enforcers in PDEA ROXII. The differences in roles and their exemptions in certain situations in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations were not perceived as inequality but more as special treatment and protection of their male counterparts to them. This study contributes to social change by raising awareness about the current status, concerns, and accomplishments of women in law enforcement. Additionally, findings may assist police administrators and legislators in creating policies and procedures that incorporate the needs of female drug enforcement officers.

INTRODUCTION

The intensified campaign against illegal drugs is one of the programs that has been implemented by the Philippine government for several years already. As per Republic Act 9165 or The Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002, the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) was created for the efficient and effective law enforcement of all the provisions on dangerous drugs and/or precursors and essential chemicals as provided in R.A. No. 9165 (www.pdea.gov.ph).

PDEA, being the lead law enforcement agency in implementing the drug law, is responsible for the supply reduction, demand reduction, and harm reduction strategies in fighting the problem of illegal drugs. In the SOCSSKSARGEN region, PDEA Regional Office XII leads the campaign

against illegal drugs, along with other national and government agencies, private sectors, and other stakeholders. To carry out its functions, the Drug Enforcement Officers (DEO) of the Agency are tasked to conduct anti-illegal drug operations, as part of the drug supply reduction strategy.

Law enforcement has been a predominately male-oriented job (Freshour, 2012). In 2019, only 12.8 percent of full-time law enforcement officers were female, while 87.2 percent of law enforcement officers were male (Duffin, 2020). The male-dominated profession of law enforcement began to acknowledge women's presence in the field by the 1980s. Female police officers had achieved representation in law enforcement, which allowed their experiences to be studied (Sklecki & Paynich, 2007). However, the recent number of female

representatives in the world of law enforcement does not agree with this.

In the United States of America, women account for a small but growing percentage of police officers which is 11.6%, up from just 3% in the 1970s (Fritzvold, 2021). In the Philippines, women account for 17.2% of the personnel in 186,000 strong members of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and 15.35% of women comprise the PNP Officer Corps (Cabrera, 2019). The lesser percentage of women in the police force may be attributed to the existing Republic Act 8551 particularly Section 58 which states that only 10% of the annual recruitment, training, and education of the PNP shall be reserved for women (www.lawphil.net).

Institutional barriers and societal misconceptions still hinder women's participation in the law enforcement sector, even if the Philippines has made significant strides in achieving gender equality in the country, according to United States Ambassador Sung Kim in her speech during the opening day of the inaugural Asia Women Leading Law Enforcement Conference on September 14, 2019, at the Novotel Manila in Cubao, Quezon City (Cabrera, 2019).

When Filipino women started to join the male-dominated Philippine National Police (PNP), they were given only assignments that were administrative in nature and jobs that could be classified and described as "desk duties". Within the following thirty years - years after the establishment of the PNP in the early period of the 1990s, female Filipino police officers have participated in other police activities and functions, including risky operations (www.en.wikipedia.org).

According to the data from PDEA RO XII, 36% of the population of DEOs in the region is composed of women. While the bulk of police research focused more on experiences of women in the workplace such as gender differences, perceived discrimination, barriers and sexual harassment, and limitations on the assigned tasks in the police world, there are limited studies that focused on the experiences of women in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations.

As the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) is in the limelight as the lead government agency in implementing the anti-drug campaign of the government, the role of female drug

enforcement officers in the field of law enforcement is a key concept that needs to be studied.

This study generally seeks to answer what are the lived experiences and perceptions of female drug enforcement officers in the field of drug law enforcement in the performance of their duties, particularly in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations. Specifically, it sought to answer the following research questions: What situations have influenced female drug enforcers' job satisfaction? How do the experiences of the female drug enforcers impact their careers? How is the treatment of the male drug enforcers to the female drug enforcers in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations?

This study is guided by the Feminist Theory. Feminist theory as defined by Brown University, is an extension of feminism, which is a belief in equality of the sexes, into a theoretical, sociological, or philosophical discourse. It is a scholarly pursuit that aims to understand the nature of gender equality or inequality and covers fields like psychoanalysis, philosophy, anthropology, biology, literature, education, economics, and many other fields.

Feminist theory explores both inequality in gender relations and the constitution of gender which is best understood as both an intellectual and a normative project (Carlson, 2011). The feminist theory that accompanied the feminist movement in the mid-seventies has two major shifts akin to Marxism. These shifts include from universalizing to particularizing and contextualizing women's experiences and from conceptualizing men and women as categories and focusing on the category "women" to questioning the content of that category and moving to the exploration of gendered practices (Armstrong, 2020). According to the theory of feminism, supporting equal rights for women is necessary and demands equal pay, promotions, and provision of the same benefits provided to their male counterparts (Wilson, 2016).

The study will be conducted in Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency Regional Office XII which covers the jurisdiction of the provinces of South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, North Cotabato, and Sarangani Province. The participants of the study are female drug enforcement officers of PDEA ROXII with more than one (1) year of experience in the conduct of anti-illegal drug

operations. The conduct of the study covers from October to November 2021, but the experiences and perceptions that will be studied start from the day they were deployed at the regional offices of PDEA until the day of the interview. The study may not generalize the all-female law enforcers of PDEA since the regions and provinces in the Philippines have different drug situations.

METHODS

The study utilized the descriptive qualitative research design specifically the phenomenological study which is best fitted to capture the lived experiences and perceptions of the female drug enforcement officers of PDEA ROXII in the field of drug law enforcement and the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations. A phenomenological approach was necessary to capture the true lived experiences of the participants since phenomenology is a research approach that seeks to describe the essence of a phenomenon by exploring it from the perspective of those who have experienced it (Teherani, Martimianakis, Stenfors-Hayes, Wadhwa and Varpio, 2015).

The Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency Regional Office 12 covers the areas popularly known as SOCCSKSARGEN. A region-wide study was conducted in the four provinces, namely: South Cotabato, Sultan Kudarat, Sarangani, and Cotabato Province, and to include the City of General Santos.

The participants of the study are the female drug enforcement officers of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency (PDEA) Regional Office XII who have more than one (1) year of experience in the field and the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations. They were chosen as participants because of the length and actual exposure in the field that can capture varied experiences and perceptions in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations.

A semi-structured interview questionnaire was used to gather data on the lived experiences and perceptions of the participants in this study. The first part of the questionnaire focused on the demographic profile of the participants to collect background information such as age, ethnicity, educational background, civil status, and the number of years in the drug law enforcement world. Since there was limited literature and research on the experiences and perceptions of female drug

enforcement officers in the drug law enforcement world, the researcher developed sets of questions based on the research problems of this study. There were eighteen (18) probing questions on the second part of the questionnaire. The questions were divided into three sections. The first section was formulated to capture the different situations and experiences of the participants in the field of drug law enforcement that influenced their job satisfaction. The second section included questions on the experiences and challenges in the field that made an impact on their career. Questions on the experiences of the participants on how their male counterparts treated them in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations made up the last section of the questionnaire.

In gathering data for the study, approval was sought from the Regional Director of the Philippine Drug Enforcement Agency Regional Office XII. After the identification of the participants of the study, a schedule for the interview was set depending on the availability of the chosen participants. Before the conduct of the interview, confidentiality was thoroughly explained to the participants and signature on the informed consent was sought from the participants. It was also explained to the participants that the interview would be recorded. A face-to-face interview was conducted by the researcher at different times. Some participants were interviewed individually, while some opted to be interviewed in pairs. During the interview, field notes were used as a backup to the audio recording as a means of capturing non-verbal information. To enhance internal validity, a multiple triangulation method was used. According to Meijer, Verloop, and Beijaard (2002), triangulation is a process that allows researchers to verify the agreement of independent measures. Before data analysis, the audio responses were transcribed. Furthermore, the interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes.

After documenting a detailed description of the participants' experiences, an analysis of the data was conducted to identify codes, themes, or issues. In analyzing the data, content analysis specifically thematic analysis was used to code the findings. The purpose of content analysis is to organize and elicit meaning from the data collected and to draw realistic conclusions from it (Bengtsson, 2016). Thematic analysis is a qualitative data analysis

method that involves reading through a data set, such as transcripts from in depth interviews or focus groups, and identifying patterns in meaning across the data (delvetool.com). As suggested by Moustakas (1994), the modified Stevick-Colaizzi-Keen method and the six-step process of Creswell (2013) were used to guide the data analysis. The suggested steps were used with each participant's transcript by finding the meaning units of the experiences, organizing the units into themes, and blending the units and themes into a description of the participants' experiences.

The researcher also served as the interviewer, data recorder, and data analyst of the study. The researcher has been a permanent employee of PDEA ROXII, the locale of the study, for more than seven (7) years assigned in the Administrative Division. As a Regional Public Information Officer, the researcher has few backgrounds on the roles, functions, and experiences of female operatives in the field of law enforcement. To ensure that the identities of the drug enforcement officers will be protected and that any information that may prejudice the operation of the Agency will be kept confidential, a letter was sent to the Regional Director of PDEA ROXII for approval.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The data analysis generated four primary themes to represent a synthesis of the participants' individual lived experiences: (a) aspirations for becoming a drug enforcement officer (DEO); (b) factors influencing job satisfaction; (c) gender roles and equality; and (d) physical barriers as a female.

During the data analysis process, themes emerged through the identification of participants' significant statements. The basic meaning units were captured when participants used the same words repeatedly. Thus, primary themes were determined based on the majority of participants mentioning the theme at least once. However, subthemes emerged from the existing primary themes and may have been mentioned by all or some of the participants. Interviews were conducted with ten (10) female drug enforcement officers of PDEA ROXII. Women will be referred to by their pseudonyms and total time of law enforcement experience. The women's ranks range from Intelligence Officer I to Investigation Agent 3, with years of experience ranging from two (2) years to

over 13 years, and were assigned mostly in one to two regional offices. The ages of the respondents range from 24 to 43 with a mean of 31.4, where 60% are married with children and 40% are single.

Aspirations for Becoming a Police Officer

The first theme that emerged from the data was the aspirations of the participants to become drug enforcement officers. Along with the growing awareness of their potential to make a positive impact, women in law enforcement have different reasons why they pursue a career as a drug enforcement officer. Research indicates that many female police officers choose their career paths for some of the same reasons (Chen, 2015). Job security, influence from family and friends, and helping the country were the sub-themes under this core theme.

Job Security. Eight out of the ten participants answered that the main reason why they entered the law enforcement world is because of job security. Since PDEA ROXII is a national government agency, being employed as a government employee had drawn them to apply as a drug enforcement officer. According to Agent YY "I chose to apply in PDEA because of stability of tenure and job security. Government agency *kasi. Lahat naman ata gusto mag-apply sa* government. Actually, BS Criminology graduate *kasi ako kaya kahit saan lang mauna sa PNP at dito. Eh nauna man nag-contact ang PDEA kaya nag-go ako dito* (I chose to apply in PDEA because of the stability of tenure and job security. It's a government agency. The majority want to apply in government service. Actually, I am a BS Criminology graduate and I applied for both PNP and PDEA. PDEA contacted me first so I pushed my application here). Agent Liz said "It's a stable job. It's a regular plantilla position." Similar to the answer of other participants, Agent Crying Lady stated that "I want to be employed in the government". The other participants also stated that the stability of tenure and job security are the reasons of their aspirations to become part of the drug law enforcement agency.

Influence from Family and Friends. A number of factors can shape and influence the career paths that a person chooses, starting with how the family shapes the perceptions of different employment options. Aside from the reason of stability of tenure and job security, half of the participants have family and friends in the law enforcement who influenced

them to take the same career path. According to Agent CJ, “I have a relative in law enforcement. That influenced me to also apply here. Aside from the fact that the job seems exciting and challenging”. Agent Queeny also said that she was influenced by her peers, *Nisabay ra ko apply sa ako mga kauban ug mga kauban na intern dati. Tapos nakapasa man, mao nga para diri jud siguro ko* (I just joined my classmates and former co-interns in applying here. I passed the recruitment process, so I guess I am destined to work here).

Help the Country. Four of the participants stated that they are now working in PDEA because they want to help the country in addressing the problem of illegal drugs. They stressed giving back to their communities and helping others as inspiring their career. Agent Brownies stated that “I applied in PDEA because I want to fight the problem of illegal drugs. *Gusto ko talaga makatulong.* Sounds plastic *ba? Pero for real, yan talaga* reason why I applied in the agency (I applied in PDEA because I want to fight the problem of illegal drugs. I really want to help. Though it may sound not true but that is really the reason why I applied in the agency). Agent Queeny also added “Aside from the fact that it is a very exciting and challenging job, one of the reasons that I worked here is to fight the problem of illegal drugs. As a Criminology graduate, I guess it is my duty to serve the country by fighting crime and other things”. According to Agent Liz, one of the reasons also of pursuing a career in PDEA is aside from the excitement, she has a positive experience with the law enforcers, “I am really fascinated of the thought of being a female agent. It looks exciting and I also have positive experiences with law enforcers, those things pushed me to pursue a career here”.

Men and women, pursuing a career in policing were affected by many personal characteristics and the current socio-political climate (Diaz and Nuño, 2021). This study confirms the research that financial security, job security, and encouragement from family and friends are major motivations for women to enter the law enforcement profession (Kim & Merlo, 2010).

In Dubai, while helping others was the top one reason for females to join law enforcement, the majority (more than three-quarters) of the female officers in Taipei chose to become police officers because of job security (Chu, 2017). A study by

Elntib and Milincic (2020) on the motivations of police officers to enter the field of law enforcement revealed that officers from developing countries scored higher motives related to job availability and benefits, helping family and friends, and family influence than those from developed countries. The age recruited was negatively associated with social capital and family influence motives and positively associated with job availability and benefits-driven motives. Those recruited more recently were more likely to score high motives related to job availability and benefits motives.

Wu, Sun & Cretacci (2009) proposed five clusters of motives of the police officers in China in entering law enforcement, namely, job security and steady salary, job qualities and functions, autonomy-power-prestige, influence from significant others, and drifting into the job. Similarly, four clusters were identified in a study by Moon and Hwang (2004) which include influence from others, job security and steady salary, authority and law enforcement, and intrinsic qualities of the job. In addition, motives for joining law enforcement may be good markers for subsequent job satisfaction and a hint to inform law enforcement recruitment and management (Elntib & Milincic, 2020).

Factors Influencing Job Satisfaction

While previous research revealed several factors for the job satisfaction of women in law enforcement such as contentment in the current job, work environment, and their views of their supervisors and mentors (Sousa and Gauthier, 2008), different factors were identified in this study on the job satisfaction of the female drug enforcement officers in the drug law enforcement world. Job satisfaction and the factors of how it was influenced was the second core theme that emerged in the data analysis. Sub-themes were also identified which include performance of duty, contemplating a career change, and challenging and exciting job.

Performance of duty. All the participants found satisfaction in the performance of duty when they had positive anti-narcotic operations conducted and, in the perception, that they could save lives because of the arrest of the drug personalities. According to Agent Thea, she found satisfaction in the job every time they arrested a high value-target drug personality, Every time *mag-positive ang* operation or *naa madakpan na* drug personalities,

makahatag sya ug job satisfaction kay nabawasan napud ang drug personalities sa kalibutan. Magstart man gud na sa information gathering, mag-casing pa and surveillance tapos test-buy. So mahaba talaga ang process. Then if madakpan na ang target and na-file na ang kaso, ma-feel nako na productive ko as DEO. Plus, if na convict ang suspect, it is really gratifying kay wala na jud sya chance makagawas ug maghimo ug dautan (Every time that the operation is positive or if there are drug personalities arrested, it gives me job satisfaction because there are now the lesser number of drug personalities in the world. The conduct of anti-illegal drug operations starts with information gathering, casing, and surveillance then test-buy. The process is really long. So, if the target is already arrested and the case is already filed, I feel that I am a productive drug enforcement officer (DEO).

“If *mag-positive ang operation and ma-convict ang suspect* (If the operation is successful and the suspect is convicted)”, Agent Queeny added that she experiences job satisfaction after the conduct of a successful operation.

One more sub-theme that gives job satisfaction to the participants is the perception that they save the lives of the future generation through the arrest of drug personalities. Agent Brownies stated “One thing that is satisfying in our work is that we have the chance to save the youth and the children. And also, *ang mga drug users na masira ang family nila*. Because if we arrest drug personalities, *nababawasan ang nag-susupply ng illegal drugs*. So, the more personalities that we arrest, the more lives will be saved and changed (One thing that is satisfying in our work is that we have the chance to save the youth and the children, and the families of the drug users. Because if we arrest drug personalities, we reduce the drug personalities that supply illegal drugs. So, the more personalities that we arrest, the more lives will be saved and changed”.

According to Zhao, Thurman, and He (1999), job satisfaction among law enforcers was related to the perceptions of the importance of their work, the recognition they received for their work, and the ability to perform their duties as capable employees. This confirms the result of the study that the arrest of high-value targets, conviction of drug personalities, and saving the lives of young children

gave satisfaction to the participants and they perceived that they are capable employees in the performance of their work.

Contemplating a Career Change. Though they are all satisfied with their jobs, the participants contemplated a career change some time in their careers because of various reasons. For the participants who are new in public service, they said that they contemplated a career change because they want to practice a profession that is related to their job. Agent CJ said “I am a graduate of BS Psychology and I want to practice my profession. If given the chance to work in another agency, maybe I will grab it especially if the job is related to my course. I’m still young, so who knows?”. Agent Liz further added that, “*Siguro if maka eskwela na ko law tapos kaluy-an mag-lawyer*, then that’s the time *na mag-transfer ko*. (Given the chance that I can pursue my desire to study in a law school and become a lawyer, then that’s the time that I will change my career”. However, after several years in the service, some of the participants said that they rather stay in the agency where they are working.

Safety and security in the day-to-day work as a drug enforcement officer also is a factor for a career change for some of the participants. Agent Tutz even had a near-death experience in the performance of her duty, “I am the sole survivor of the ambush last October 25, 2018, in Lanao Del Sur where five (5) of our colleagues died on the spot. We are on our way back to the Office from work at that time. I can still remember their faces and the smell of the blood until now”. She further added “*Daghan ko tama sa bala ato na time. Pagbugtaw nako naa na ko sa hospital*. I had to undergo treatment and rehabilitation for years. Actually, *naa pa isa ka bala nabilin sa ako lawas. Pag mag agi ko sa metal detector kay mutunog ko, tapos ako kamot buslot ni sya, gitapalan lang ug panit gikan sa ako lubot*. I contemplated for a career change, *pero* because of my age, I hesitated (I was shot several times during that time. When I woke up, I was already at the hospital. I had to undergo treatment and rehabilitation for years. Actually, there is still a bullet left in my body that when I pass through a metal detector, it makes an alarm. My palm also had a hole because of the gunshot, and was skin grafted. I contemplated for a career change but because of my age, I hesitated).

“Delikado pero challenging sya. Pero if may option, then career change (Dangerous but challenging. If there is other option, then I’ll go for a career change)”, according to Agent GG. Some of the participants also consider the safety and security of their family in contemplating for a career change.

Four out of ten participants had other reasons for career change. One of it is the number of cases handled as a drug enforcement officer. Agent Liz said that if she has many cases and court hearings to attend to, she may contemplate for a career change. “In my 5 years in the Agency, I already have more than 100 cases and court hearings to attend to. Either poseur-buyer, arresting officer, photographer, etc. If ever there will be more and more cases, then maybe I will transfer? But it still depends, according to Agent Liz. Other participants also said that in their few years in the agency, they already have many cases where they are required to attend the court hearings.

It was stated by the majority of the participants that they had to adjust to their hectic schedule during their early years in the agency. Some of them have a hard time adjusting to the work-life balance and they rarely spend time with their family. But after a few months in the field, they have already adjusted to their work as drug enforcement officers.

Previous research reports that many female officers have problems balancing work with their family life (Bradley 1999). Although there were two participants who stated that there were times that they could not spend time with their family, eight out of the ten participants stated that they can balance their time well especially if they do not have pending anti-illegal drug operations.

Challenging and Exciting Job. One of the sub-themes that emerged under job satisfaction is that the participants perceive their job as an exciting and challenging job. According to the participants, they got to play different roles as undercover agents, travel to different places as part of their job, and experience firefights during the operation.

During the conduct of the case build-ups, surveillance, information gathering, and arrest of drug personalities, the participants said that they had to play different roles to lure the drug personalities to agree to sell illegal drugs to them. They have to hide their identities and carry a new personality as part of their jobs. Agent Thea stated “I have been born in a very conservative family.

There was this operation that was remarkable to me because I was obliged to wear very ‘short’ shorts. Usually *kasi* if *babae* ang *ka-transact* ng drug personalities, they do not perceive us as *kalaban*. We are effective *sa pag-blend* sa situations. What was funny about that experience was when we met up with the suspect the second time ‘for a date’, *nagpakulay* sya hair, *nagpa gupit*, *nagpa pogi talaga* sya. But after the transaction had been consummated, after *inabot* ang illegal drugs, our team members arrested him. He was really shocked. *Nabasa ko sa mga mata nya ang* questions na “*Bakit?*” (I have been born in a very conservative family. There was this operation that was remarkable to me because I was obliged to wear very ‘short’ shorts. Usually, if female agents transact with the drug personalities, they do not see us as enemies. We are effective in blending with different situations. What was funny about that experience was when we met up with the suspect for the second time for a supposedly date as undercover for our buy-bust operation, he had his hair colored, had a haircut, and dressed well. But after the transaction had been consummated, when he already handed us the illegal drugs, our team members arrested him. He was really shocked. I can see the question in his eyes). Other participants also said that they played the role of a vendor, a text mate, and a drug user, as part of their undercover job.

The participants also revealed that at times, there are cases where firefights ensue in the conduct of their anti-illegal drug operations. There are drug personalities who have high-powered firearms as their protection for themselves. According to Agent Brownies, one of the experiences that was remarkable to her was the operation conducted at Midsayap, Cotabato Province. According to her “Super challenging *kasi minsan may putukan talaga*. Like *nung* nag operate kami sa North Cotabato wherein *may apat na nalagas sa tropa* ng PNP at Marines, we have to stay there for *pila* ka hours *para lang mapasok ang area*. Since *alam naming* na armed group ang *kalaban* namin, *marami kami noon*. Pero *yun lang*, part *talaga* ng *trabaho* ito na *pag nag* operate kami, we always risk our lives” (This is a very challenging job because we really encounter gun fights at times. Just like when we conducted an operation at North Cotabato wherein there were members of the PNP and

Marines who died. We had to wait for several hours before we could penetrate the area since we knew that they were members of the armed groups. It is part of our job that every time we conduct anti-illegal drug operations, we always risk our lives).

Moreover, one of the reasons that makes the participants' jobs exciting and challenging is the fact that they got to travel to different places rather than stay in the office the entire day. Agent YY said that "What is exciting about my job is that I got the chance to travel to other places and meet a lot of people. If you will compare it from other government agencies, women usually stay at the office and doing paper works. But in our line of work, we usually go out every day, and that makes it exciting and challenging. Not boring". This sub-theme is contrary to what Smith (2003) said that although women have made enormous progress in their representation in the labor force, increasing nearly 200 percent since 1900, they remain in less powerful occupational positions that are often boring, low paying, and with very little advancement for promotions. According to the participants, wherever the male goes for the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations, they also go, except for certain cases.

Gender Roles and Equality

There is gender equality in the treatment of male drug enforcement officers, as perceived by the female counterparts, towards them in their field of work. The equality starts during the recruitment, training and in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations. The participants have their specific roles in the performance of their duty, though there are times that there are special treatment towards them. However, they do not perceive it as inequality in the gender roles but more of protection and safety. Under this core theme, there were three sub-themes that emerged namely gender equality since recruitment and training, role of female in the anti-illegal drug operation, and perceived special treatment towards female drug enforcers.

Gender Equality Since Recruitment and Training. Contrary to RA 8551 which mandates that the recruitment of female police officers in the Philippines should only be 10% of the total quota, in PDEA there was no law that limits the number of female recruits in every batch of trainees. According to the participants, they did not feel inequality from the start of application and

recruitment process until the training. "Equal treatment *talaga kasi pagpasok pa lang sa academy*, trained *na kami na equal talaga ang babae sa lalaki*. Walang quota like PNP na dapat 10% lang ang babae. Sa amin basta natapos mo lahat ng process sa recruitment and *nakapasa ka* then *maka-training ka*. Ranking *ang basehan*, not the gender. (When we entered the academy, we were trained that female should be equal with the male, so there is really equal treatment. We do not have quota like the PNP that only 10% is allotted to the female applicants. In PDEA, as long as you pass the recruitment process, then you will undergo the training. There basis is your ranking and not the gender)", according to Agent CJ.

Moreover, once the participants are already inside the academy for the six (6) months rigid training on Drug Enforcement Officer Basic Course (DEOBC), female trainees should perform what the male trainees do. There was no special treatment perceived by the participants. According to Agent MC, "*Kailangan mo makipagsabayan sa mga lalaki. Bawal maarte. Walang special treatment sa training*. That's why *pagdating sa field ito ang ginagawa na dahil sa training pa lang nakasanayan na*. Actually, *sa batch namin sa academy, mas madami pa nga nag-quit na mga lalaki* compared *sa mga babae* (You have to do what the men do. You cannot complain. No special treatment during the training and it continues even after the training. Actually, in our batch, there were more men who quit compared to the female trainees)."

Research shows that occupational norms have been linked to work segregation by sex (Coser & Rockoff 1971). In other words, men and women are different and should be doing different things. Early studies and literature reveal that women who have entered a variety of traditionally male occupations have faced discriminatory hiring assignments and practices, opposition from co-workers, and inadequate on the job training. According to Charles (1982), inequality is attained at the training academy level by women officers. Men are required to have a higher plateau of fitness and strength than women which in return gives men a reason to label women as passive, weak, and unable to handle themselves in demanding physical situations. However, this is not the case in PDEA according to the participants because there was no perceived gender inequality for them.

Role of Female in Anti-Illegal Drug Operations. According to United Nations (UN) Women (2020), when women participate in law enforcement, at all levels and in all roles, law enforcement is more responsive to and reflective of, the community it serves. The meaningful participation of women in law enforcement increases operation effectiveness, enhances community trust, and decreases corruption.

One of the sub-themes that emerged during the data analysis is that the participants perceived their importance in the conduct of their jobs especially in their roles in the anti-illegal drug operations. According to the participants, in the conduct of buy-bust operations or implementation of search warrants, or in any narcotic operations where there are female drug personalities, they should always be present. “In every buy-bust operation or implementation of Search Warrant, *meron talaga dapat babae. Kasi* there are times *na ang asawa or anak ng* suspect *ay nandiyan*. So, our role as female DEO is very important *kasi* we are the one who pacifies the child or *ang asawa or mama ng* suspect. (In every buy-bust operation or implementation of a Search Warrant, there should always be a female drug enforcement officer because there are times when the wife or children of the suspect is there. So, our role as female DEO is very important because we are the one who pacifies the child, wife, or mother of the suspect),” according to Agent CJ.

Agent Tutz further added that “If the target is a female, automatically we are the arresting officer. *Hindi pwede na lalaki ang* arresting. Or *if lalaki ang* suspect, usually *hindi kami* arresting. Either poseur-buyer, photographer, or team leader. (If the target is a female, then we should be the arresting officer and not the male drug enforcers. If ever the suspect is a male, then we are not the arresting officer, we are usually the poseur-buyer, photographer, or team leader). However, Agent Queeny said that “In instances *na hindi kami makasama sa* operation, then our role usually is *mag* prepare *sa ilang gamit, magluto* for them *pagdating nila, mag-asikaso*. *Tapos* usually *pag maghimo na papel* or affidavit *sa pag-file ng* case, *ga tabang jud mi sa ilaha*. (In instances that we cannot join the operation, then we are the one who prepares what our teammates need, we cook and tend to them after the operation. Then we usually help them prepare the affidavits for

filing of the case/s)”. Agent Liz and CJ also have almost the same statement.

The skill of women in taking care of the family of the arrested drug personalities may be contributed to their interpersonal communication skills. Studies reveal that the female gender has inherent superiority over men when it comes to interpersonal communication skills and the ability to empathize with others (Patil & Bagavandas, 2020). Thus, their role in the anti-illegal drug operations makes gender-sensitive police reforms that will benefit society at large as it would help in developing police institutions that are responsive to people’s needs.

Achieving gender equality in policing is not simply about adding more women. It is about transforming the institutional setups that sustain gender inequality. It is about respecting the human rights of all people and creating an effective and productive work environment where all employees feel secure and valued, and where they can use their skills and competencies to the fullest. Working towards a gender-equal and gender-friendly law enforcement force is essential for police services given their international and domestic legal obligations (Interpol, UN Women and UNODC Publication, 2020).

Moreover, studies have consistently found that women possess a number of traits that make them trusted partners to their communities, ultimately helping to improve police-community relations. According to an article published in the IACP’s Police Chief Magazine, “women are consistently rated as trusted by their communities. Women have high levels of interpersonal communication skills, are less likely to use force, use excessive force, or be named in a lawsuit than male officers.” (Fritzvold, n.d.) Thus, they are the ones in charge of the wives, mothers, and children of the arrested drug personalities.

Perceived Special Treatment. When the participants were asked if they felt there is gender discrimination and inequality in the performance of their duty, they said that there are times where they are exempted in the conduct of specific situations but they do not perceive it as discrimination and inequality but more of special treatment or that the male protects them from danger.

One situation where they feel that the male drug enforcers protect them from danger is during

the conduct of marijuana eradication. In going to areas with reported marijuana plantation, participants said that usually, it will take several hours for them to reach the location since marijuana are usually planted in mountainous and far-flung areas. Because of the given situation, the male drug enforcers opt to go to the area without the presence of females. According to the participants, they reason of not bringing them is because, according to the males, females usually is slower when walking, get tired easily, and cannot excrete anywhere. Although the participants were aware of these reasons, they said that they did not perceive it as discrimination.

According to Agent Tutz “Well, we do not see it as inequality but more of a protection or special treatment. Every time we have marijuana eradication, usually they do not bring us because of the location and it will take days of walking to reach the area. So, the male DEOs or the team decides not to bring us. They said that is to prevent untoward incidents.”

Also, in conducting operations, another situation where females receive special treatment is when drug enforcement officers have to enter a drug den or a house where the target is located. Usually, in this instance, female drug enforcement officers are not the one who enters first or they are not part of the Entering Team. According to Agent L, “If there is a Search Warrant operation or dismantling of a drug den, or any operation where the target is inside the house or any establishment, usually we are not part of the entering team. Men always go in first. Usually, we are the last to enter. But we do not perceive it as gender discrimination but more of protection for us. I never think of it as gender discrimination.”

This sub-theme is contrary to the studies and findings that gender discrimination is common in law enforcement agencies. According to Carmen and Greene (2002) discrimination and sexual harassment are pervasive in police departments and supervisors and commanders not only tolerate such practices by others but also are frequently perpetrators themselves. In a study conducted by Gossett (1989), women reported that they felt they were discriminated against, and those who reported that they did not feel discriminated against, knew of other female officers who had experienced discrimination.

In PDEA RO XII, the participants did not experience any discrimination starting from the recruitment, training, and even when they are already conducting anti-illegal drug operations as drug enforcement officers. Hence, their omission to perform specific situations are perceived as special treatment and protection.

Physical Barriers as a Female

The necessity of adapting to the unique subculture of the police is a common experience for all new officers, but female police officers face different expectations and thus additional barriers in making this adaptation (Martin, 1980). As a whole, female officers have made very slow progress toward full integration in policing due to barriers such as the attitudes of male officers, the training of female officers, the employment practices of police departments, and questions regarding the physical capabilities of women in general or those of a particular female (Heidensohn, 1992).

One of the core themes that emerged in the analysis was the physical factors that serve as barriers in the performance of the duties as female drug enforcement officers. The biological make-up of women, compared to men, is a factor that was identified by the participants that affects their jobs. The sub-themes that emerged from the analysis under this core theme include the physiologic aspects such as hunger and urination, physical strength as a female, and pregnancy and menstruation. Although the participants emphasized and perceived that there is gender equality in their organization, it cannot be denied that there are factors and barriers that affect their performance as drug enforcement officers.

Physiological aspects. All of the participants revealed that when they conduct operations or conduct monitoring and surveillance, there are times that they have to wait and spend for several hours before the go signal to arrest their targets. With this, the challenge of the urge of urination is one of the situations they perceive as a barrier to the performance of their work. According to Agent Crying Lady, “*Ang struggle _alaki pag nag-operate, minsan kapag mag stake-out for pila ka hours. Minsan 3 hours to more than half a day. Pag nasa loob ka ng car or naka station ka if nasaan ang suspect, bawal ka talaga lumabas or bumaba ng sasakyan. So if makaihi ka na, pugngan jud nimu. Unlike sa lalaki nga maski asa ra man na sila mag*

ih. Pag babae, dili man pwede maski asa (One of our struggles, when we conduct anti-illegal drug operations, is when we have to stay for several hours for stake-out. At times, it will take three hours to more than half a day. When you are inside the car or if you are stationed to where the suspect is located, you cannot go out of the car or leave the area. So, if you have the urge to urinate, you really have to hold it out. Unlike for males that they can just urinate everywhere. If you are a female, you cannot do that). All of them stated that in every anti-illegal drug operation where they have to stay for several hours, most likely, this is a common setup.

Moreover, hunger, tiredness, and lack of sleep are also situations that are physically and physiologically challenging to them. They said that tiredness sinks into them if there are consecutive days that they have to be in the field for the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations. Same with the urge of urination, if there are longer hours of stake-out to arrest the suspect, they lack sleep and at times hungry. According to Agent MC “*Gutom, pagod, puyat. Yan talaga ang mga challenges pag nag-operate. Akala kasi ng mga tao pag nag operate kmi, madali lang at mabilis. Pero* behind every successful operation, are sleepless nights *ng pag build-up ng case, pag implement ng operation, plus pag file ng kaso. Mahaba ang process, kaya dapat talaga healthy ka palagi. Plus, nag COVID pa.* We are exposed *sa mga targets na hindi naman _alaki alam* if positive *yan* or negative. *Malaman _alak lang after paghuli na, pag na subject na* for test, positive *pala. Wala na, na exposed ka na ah.* (Hunger, fatigue, sleepless nights. Those are the challenges when we conduct operations. People usually think that when we conduct operations, it will not take so much of our time. But behind every successful anti-illegal drug operation are sleepless nights of case build-up, implementation of the operation, and filing of a case. It’s a long process, so you have to be healthy always. Then another challenge is the COVID-19 pandemic. We are exposed to our targets and we do not know if they are Covid positive or negative. You will just know after the arrest and if it turns out that he is positive, it’s already late).

The exposure to the virus is experienced by both male and female drug enforcers in the performance of their duty. However, the female

gender is less vulnerable to COVID-19 infection compared to the male. According to Bwire (2020), several possible factors such as higher expression of angiotensin-converting enzyme-2 (ACE 2; receptors for coronavirus) in male than female, sex-based immunological differences driven by sex hormone and X chromosome contributes to why men have higher morbidity and mortality compared to women. Furthermore, a large part of this difference in the number of deaths is caused by gender behavior or lifestyle, i.e., higher levels of smoking and drinking among men compared to women, and women had more responsible attitudes toward the Covid-19 pandemic than men. Despite the challenges and experiences that the female drug enforcement officers in the field, the participants have adjusted and coped with the said barriers through time and after numerous anti-illegal drug operations that they have been into.

Strength is Overpowered. The glorification of physical strength and violence is central to the masculine culture of policing, and so, female officers generally fail to meet the masculine, crime-fighting image. In an attempt to integrate with their male counterparts, female officers either maintain their femininity — allow themselves to be limited to gender-appropriate roles, and accept the glass ceiling with regards to promotion; or abandon femininity — accept ridicule, and create a subculture of authoritative women with opportunities leading to promotion (Krimmel and Gormley, 2003)

Another sub-theme that emerged as a physical barrier for females in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations is the physical strength of women as compared to men. According to the participants, they admit that men are really physically stronger than women and there are times that their strength is overpowered especially if the targets are male. More so, if the targets are under the influence of illegal drugs.

According to the participants, though they have undergone rigid training, they cannot deny the fact that there are drug personalities who are bigger in build and are stronger in force. Agent Queeny shared one of her experiences in the field where she really felt that women are not as physically strong as men, “There was this operation in Tampakan where *dalawa kami na babae ang nag penetrate sa* area. When we were inside the house already, we

were expecting *na tatlo lang ang targets* but *pagpasok, anim pala sila na lalaki lahat* and they were doing pot session. Yes, we were trained how to handle those kinds of situations *pero* that time, our strength was overpowered. After hearing that the arresting officers were approaching, the three suspects were able to elude the arrest. We tried to grab the three who ran, *pero wala eh, mas malakas talaga ang lalaki. Nagka sugat sugat pa nga ako and naiwan tsinelas ko* because of that particular situation. (There was this operation in Tampakan where my female colleague and I were assigned to go inside the drug den to operate. When we were inside the house already, we were expecting three targets, unfortunately there were six men inside doing pot session. Yes, we were trained to handle those kinds of situations but at that time, our strength was overpowered. After hearing that the arresting officers were approaching, the three suspects were able to elude the arrest. We tried to grab the three who ran but they were really strong. I even got wounded and left my slippers during that particular situation).

Another situation shared by the participants where their physical strength affects the performance of their roles in operations is in pinning down a male suspect. According to them, if the drug personality to be arrested is a male, the one who will be assigned as arresting officer is a male drug enforcer. It is rare that they are assigned as arresting officer for male suspects, unless if it is really needed already or if there is no other choice. Agent Crying Lady shared that “*Pag nag-operate, if lalaki ang target ang mag pin down talaga nyan, as much as possible, ay lalaki din. Kasi if babae ang mag pin down sa lalaki baka di kayanin lalo na if _alaki ang target, tapos minsan naka suyop pa, so malakas talaga sila. Pero if kailangan na talaga na babae ang mag pin down, then i-pindown _alak lang*” (When we conduct anti-illegal drug operations, if the target is male, as much as possible, a male agent should pin him down. Because if a female drug enforcer

Will be assigned to pin the suspect down, she may not do it especially if the target is big and under the influence of illegal drugs. But if the situation really calls for it, then we'll just have to pin the suspect down).

Though physical strength is a challenge perceived by the participants, they said that they

regularly train and equip themselves with the skills so that their targets and male colleagues will not see them as the weaker link in the organization.

Pregnancy and Menstruation. Another barrier and challenge for female drug enforcers in the performance of their duty is their hormonal makeup. It is given that the female body has other unique functions that are not present in males, such as pregnancy and menstruation. This is another sub-theme that emerged from the data analysis on the physical barriers of female enforcers in their jobs.

Six out of ten participants are married and already have children. According to them, when they were pregnant, especially during their second to third trimester of pregnancy, they were really exempted to conduct anti-illegal drug operations. They said that during their pregnancy, they were assigned in office work and in jobs that did not require much strength and effort.

One participant shared her experience during the conduct of operation wherein she was pregnant during that time. According to Agent MC ““I remember this one operation where I was pregnant at that time. *Nakatakas ang target, tapos ako, nakalimutan ko na buntis ako kasi maliit man ang tiyan ko. So sumakay ako sa motor kasabay ang lalaki na agent. Tapos* while we were travelling *na para habulin ang suspect, na remember ng kasama ko na buntis pala ako, ayun sabi nya baba daw ako. Hindi na _alaki hinabol yung target. Pero* later on *nahuli naman. Hehe. Yun lang pag buntis ka limited talaga ang galaw _alak. Pag _alaki na tiyan mo then di ka na talaga maka operate* (I remember this one operation where I was pregnant at that time. Our suspect was able to ran and it was not in my mind that I was pregnant because I have a really small tummy. So, I rode the motorcycle with my male colleague to chase the suspect. Then my colleague suddenly remembered that I was pregnant, so he instructed me to go down. We did not pursue the chase. But later on the suspect eventually got arrested. That's the challenge, if you are pregnant, your movement will be limited especially if your tummy is big already”).

Another challenge that the participants shared is when they have their monthly period. Some of them shared that it is really a struggle every time they have menstruation when they conduct operations, especially if they have to stay long in the area. Also, four of them experience

dysmenorrhea every menstruation, so if there are operations, they do not have a choice but to go with the team. According to Agent YY “Struggle *din pag may regla uy*, especially if *dugay mo sa area, tapos naa pa mo sa kasulok-sulukan na barangay. Di ka talaga comfortable gumalaw, tumakbo takbo* (It is really a struggle if you have menstruation, especially if you are in the area for long hours. More so if you are in a far-flung barangay. It is really uncomfortable to move and run)”.

This sub-theme is rarely found in studies, since most of the research focuses on gender discrimination, sexual harassment, and gender inequality. However, organizational challenges in the field of law enforcement experienced by female operatives include physical limitations, policing is a “man’s job”, approval from male police officers, society, intra-gender relationships, promotion process, and administration (Brinser, 2016). This theme emphasizes that although female drug enforcers have physical limitations and differences as compared to their male counterparts, they are still performing their jobs.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of the female drug enforcement officers in the conduct of their duty and how these experiences impact their job satisfaction and career and their perception on the treatment of their male counterparts towards them. It is concluded in this study that female drug enforcers have different reasons why they entered drug law enforcement and that includes job security, influence from family and friends, and the desire to help the country solve the problem on illegal drugs. Moreover, after their entry and several years of experience in the PDEA ROXII and in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations, there are several factors that influence their job satisfaction and career. These factors include the successful performance of their duties by arresting high-value targets, a conviction of drug personalities, and their perception that they have a challenging and exciting job.

Through this study, it is also concluded that female drug enforcement officers have physical and physiological barriers in the performance of their duty and that at some point in their career, they have contemplated for a career change because of

safety and security, the number of cases handled and the desire to practice their professions.

However, unlike other research in the field of law enforcement where gender inequality, gender discrimination, and sexual harassment as the emerging themes, in this study, there is gender equality perceived by the female drug enforcers in PDEA ROXII. The differences in roles and their exemptions in certain situations in the conduct of anti-illegal drug operations were not perceived as inequality but more of special treatment and protection of their male counterparts to them.

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