

Control and Care Inside the Walls: Workworld of Custodial Officers in a Jail Facility

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the lived experiences of custodial officers, highlighting the tension between professional fulfillment and severe operational challenges within a correctional facility. The findings reveal that officers derive a profound sense of professional satisfaction from proactive preparedness and the strict enforcement of security protocols, successfully achieving institutional goals such as maintaining zero escapes, preventing contraband entry, and establishing order. However, these positive experiences are heavily countered by systemic and workplace stressors, including severe jail overcrowding, prolonged headcount tallies, and aggressive, uncooperative visitors who resist safety screenings. To navigate these intense daily demands, personnel employ coping mechanisms rooted in protocol-driven crisis management and strategic preparedness. They utilize structured operational frameworks, tactical containment strategies, and grouping mechanisms such as counting inmates by tens to mitigate the psychological and physical risks of being vastly outnumbered, while continuously practicing "maximum tolerance." Looking forward, the institutional aspirations of the officers' center on comprehensive advancement. They collectively emphasize an urgent need for resource modernization, stricter protocol compliance, and capacity building. Ultimately, the study concludes that upgrading structural facilities and enhancing specialized training for disaster readiness and operational security are vital interventions needed to alleviate systemic strain and elevate institutional safety.

Keywords: Custodial officers, Professional fulfillment, Jail overcrowding, Maximum tolerance, Resource modernization

INTRODUCTION

Globally, jail custodial officers serve as a crucial component of the criminal justice and correctional systems, ensuring that detention facilities operate safely and effectively. Their responsibilities encompass maintaining security and order within jails or prisons, preventing escapes, and minimizing incidents of violence or misconduct among inmates. These officers are trained to enforce institutional rules and regulations while remaining alert to potential threats such as contraband smuggling, gang activity, or mental health crises. The role demands constant vigilance and professionalism, as custodial officers often work in unpredictable and high-stress conditions that require quick decision-making and emotional resilience (Clear, T. R., Reisig, M. D., & Cole, G. F. 2019).

In many countries, the scope of a custodial officer's duties extends beyond mere supervision and control to include administrative and procedural tasks. They are responsible for monitoring inmate movements, ensuring attendance at court hearings, medical appointments, and maintaining detailed records of inmate conduct and incidents. These records not only support institutional accountability but also contribute to broader efforts in justice administration and inmate management. Moreover, with increasing global attention on human rights

standards, custodial officers must adhere to legal frameworks and international guidelines, such as those set by the United Nations Standard Minimum Rules for the Treatment of Prisoners (the Nelson Mandela Rules), which emphasize dignity, fairness, and humane treatment.

At the national level, jail custodial officers in the Philippines serve as the backbone of the country's correctional and rehabilitation framework under the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP). They are tasked with the critical responsibility of ensuring the safe and secure management of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) across hundreds of jail facilities nationwide. Their work extends beyond mere supervision; they uphold national laws and standards that promote order, discipline, and justice within detention centers. By maintaining peace and stability inside these facilities, custodial officers help preserve public confidence in the justice system and contribute to the broader goal of national security.

Furthermore, jail custodial officers play a pivotal role in advancing the government's rehabilitation agenda, which seeks to transform PDLs into productive members of society upon release. The BJMP, guided by national correctional policies and human rights frameworks, implements programs on education, livelihood training, moral recovery, and spiritual enrichment initiatives that are often facilitated and monitored by these officers. Through their participation in such programs, jail custodial officers act as mentors and agents of change, helping inmates rebuild their lives while reducing the risk of recidivism. Their involvement directly supports the Philippine government's commitment to restorative justice and inclusive social development (Bureau of Jail Management and Penology, 2023).

Custodial officers at the Argao District Jail are uniformed personnel under the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP), the national agency tasked with the safekeeping, rehabilitation, and welfare of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) in local jail facilities across the Philippines. The Argao District Jail itself was established on June 26, 2018 and began operations on March 15, 2019, serving detainees from Argao and nearby areas. The officers' primary role is to ensure security and orderly custody of detainees while upholding their rights and dignity in accordance with national jail management standards.

Beyond security functions, custodial officers often serve as the first point of contact between the inmates and institutional systems such as counseling, medical care, and rehabilitation initiatives. Their work supports not only confinement but also the welfare and potential reintegration of detainees through programs that may focus on education, skills, and conduct improvement. Because the BJMP emphasizes humane treatment and rehabilitation alongside secure custody, these officers are trained to balance firm supervision with efforts that uphold the legal and human rights of the persons in their care.

This study is anchored in Total Institution Theory (Goffman, 1961) and supported by Social Control Theory (Hirschi, 1969) and Role Theory (Biddle, 1986).

Total Institution Theory explains how certain organizations exercise comprehensive control over the lives of the people within them. (Goffman, 1961) described total institutions as places where individuals live and work in the same enclosed setting, cut off from the wider society for a significant period, and where daily activities are tightly scheduled and administered by an authority. Examples include prisons, jails, mental hospitals, military boot camps, and monasteries. These institutions are designed to manage large groups of people in a highly regulated manner, prioritizing order, discipline, and uniformity.

Social Control Theory in his influential work *Causes of Delinquency*, proposing that delinquent behavior occurs when an individual's bond to society is weakened or broken. Unlike other criminological perspectives that focus on the motivations behind deviance, (Hirschi, 1969) shifted the focus to why most individuals conform to societal norms. He argued that conformity is maintained through social bonds that connect individuals to conventional institutions and people, thereby restraining impulses toward deviance.

Role Theory offers a framework for understanding how individuals behave in social contexts based on the expectations tied to their social positions. According to Biddle, social roles are sets of norms that guide individuals' behaviors and interactions within specific contexts, such as workplaces, families, or communities. The theory emphasizes that behavior is largely a function of the roles people occupy and the expectations others

have of them, thereby linking individual actions to broader social structures (Biddle, 1986). This perspective highlights that conformity to role expectations maintains social order, while role conflict and ambiguity can lead to stress and dysfunction.

A Jail Custodial Officer in the Philippines plays a vital role in the administration of justice by ensuring the safe, secure, and humane custody of persons deprived of liberty (PDLs). Their duties are anchored on Republic Act No. 6975, which established the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP) under the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). These laws mandate custodial officers to maintain peace and order within jails, oversee rehabilitation programs, and uphold the rights and welfare of detainees in accordance with the 1987 Philippine Constitution and international human rights standards.

Moreover, under Rule 113 of the Rules of Criminal Procedure and Article 124 of the Revised Penal Code, custodial officers are legally bound to prevent unlawful detention and ensure that all prisoners are treated with dignity and fairness. Through discipline, integrity, and adherence to the rule of law, jail custodial officers serve as essential agents of public safety and justice reform in the Philippines.

Likewise, Comprehensive Operations Manual which is based on Republic Act No. 6975 (Department of the Interior and Local Government Act, 1990) the bureau exercises administrative and operational supervision over all city, district, and municipal jails, ensuring that custodial personnel perform duties such as inmate accounting, routine inspections, and security measures to prevent escapes and disturbances. Custodial officers also assist in upholding jail discipline and implementing rehabilitation programs as part of the overall safekeeping mission. The manual specifically outlines that personnel must comply with legal orders, policies, rules, and regulations governing jail operations, reporting incidents, and breaches appropriately to higher authority, which forms part of their official functions and responsibilities.

This study explored the workworld of custodial officers in Argao District Jail, Cebu, Philippines. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of the informants in the performance of their duties?
2. How do the informants cope with the challenges they encountered in the performance of their duties?
3. What are the aspirations of the informants to improve the performance of their duties?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employed a qualitative research design and gained an in-depth understanding of informants lived experiences and perspectives regarding their workworld. This aimed to set aside the researcher's own assumptions and instead focus entirely on the workworld of the informants. Phenomenology, which has its roots in philosophy, is a research approach that explores how people experience a particular phenomenon, as told in their own words (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Research Informants

The research informants of this study were Custodial Officers (COs) assigned at Argao District Jail. The selection of informants were guided by specific criteria to ensure relevant and credible insights into the work experiences of Custodial Officers. To qualify, each informant must have served as a custodial officer for at least three (3) years. A total of ten (10) respondents were selected, consisting of participants from both In-Depth Interviews (IDI) and Focus Group Discussions (FGD), six (6) for Focus Group Discussions and four (4) for In-Depth Interview. Their perspectives collectively provide a comprehensive understanding of the workworld of custodial officers in Argao District Jail, highlighting their daily experiences, challenges, coping with the challenges, and aspirations of their occupational roles.

Data Collection Instruments

For data collection, the researcher utilized an in-depth and focus group discussion interview guide for the selected informants. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions that deal with the following aspects: Part 1, is on the live experiences of the informants in the performance of their duties; Part 2, is on the informants' coping with the challenges encountered in the performance of their duties and; Part 3, is on the aspirations of the informants to improve the performance of their duties. In the conduct of the focus group discussion the informants were gathered in one setting with guided questions. In the validation process to validate the interview guide, it was reviewed by the adviser and board panels.

Data Collection Procedure

The primary method of data collection for this study were qualitative in-depth (IDI) and Focus Group Discussion (FGD) interviews, utilized a semi-structured interview guide to ensure consistency while allowing for rich, open-ended responses. Interviews were conducted face-to-face to foster rapport. To ensure informants' comfort and encourage authentic dialogue, interviews were conducted in English, Cebuano, or Tagalog, depending on the participant's language preference. Each interview lasted between 30 to 60 minutes. With the participant's informed consent, interviews were audio recorded to ensure accurate data capture. Ethical considerations were strictly observed, with confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation emphasized throughout the research process.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using (Braun and Clarke, 2006) thematic analysis, a qualitative method aimed at identifying, analyzing, and interpreting patterns of meaning within data. First, all interview recordings were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy and preserve the richness of participant responses. The transcripts were then coded systematically, with recurring ideas and expressions grouped into emerging themes. These themes were reviewed and refined in relation to the study's research questions, allowing for the identification of patterns across the data-set. Finally, the themes were interpreted within their broader context, considering both the explicit content and underlying meanings, to generate a comprehensive understanding of participants' perspectives and experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Are fundamental in ensuring that research upholds moral integrity and protects participants' rights and well-being.

Beneficence. Requires researchers to actively pursue the well-being of participants and society by designing and conducting studies that maximize potential benefits while minimizing possible harms. This ethical principle emphasizes the importance of producing knowledge that meaningfully contributes to human development, scientific progress, and social good. Researchers are expected to carefully weigh the anticipated gains of their work such as improved understanding, better treatments, or enhanced technologies against any risks participants may face, ensuring that the overall impact of the research is positive. In doing so, beneficence guides researchers to act with compassion, responsibility, and a commitment to advancing both individual welfare and the broader interests of society.

Non-maleficence. Obliges researchers to take deliberate steps to avoid causing harm, ensuring that the safety and well-being of participants remain paramount throughout every stage of a study. This means carefully assessing potential risks, minimizing any possibility of physical, psychological, or social injury, and refraining from procedures that could expose individuals to unnecessary discomfort or danger. Researchers must thoughtfully design their methodologies, use the least invasive methods possible, and provide appropriate safeguards to protect participants from foreseeable harm. By prioritizing caution and ethical responsibility, non-maleficence serves as a foundational guideline that promotes responsible research practices and reinforces trust between researchers and the individuals who contribute to scientific advancement.

Justice. In research ethics requires that participants be selected fairly and that the benefits and burdens of research are distributed equitably across all groups, ensuring that no population is disproportionately exposed to risk or systematically excluded from potential advantages. This principle protects vulnerable individuals such as those with limited autonomy, socioeconomic disadvantages, or restricted access to healthcare from being exploited simply because they are easily accessible or less able to refuse participation. By mandating thoughtful recruitment practices and careful consideration of who stands to gain or bear risk, justice helps maintain public trust in research, promotes social responsibility, and supports the ethical integrity of scientific inquiry.

Autonomy. Respects the participants' right to make informed decisions about their involvement, which is achieved through clear communication and obtaining informed consent. Together, these ethical principles guide researchers in maintaining integrity, protecting human dignity, and ensuring the responsible conduct of research.

Trustworthiness of Research

The trustworthiness of this research is grounded in the rigorous application of qualitative standards, particularly credibility, confirmability, dependability, transferability, bracketing, and reflexivity. This research ensures that the study's findings are credible, authentic, and ethically sound.

Credibility. This is achieved by explicitly outlining a clear auditable trail and employing strict methodological safeguards. First, the researcher utilizes bracketing the active process of setting aside personal biases, theories, and assumptions to ensure the phenomenon is viewed through a completely fresh lens. Credibility is further solidified through member-checking, where preliminary findings or transcripts are returned to participants to verify that the interpreted themes accurately capture their psychological reality.

Confirmability. Focuses on ensuring that a study's findings genuinely reflect the perspectives, experiences, and realities of the participants rather than the researcher's personal beliefs, assumptions, or biases. It emphasizes the importance of maintaining objectivity throughout the research process by documenting decisions, using audit trails, and engaging in reflexive practices that make the researcher's influence transparent. Through these strategies, confirmability strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of qualitative research by demonstrating that the conclusions are firmly rooted in the data and not shaped by the researcher's subjective interpretations.

Dependability. Refers to the stability, consistency, and reliability of a research process over time, ensuring that the study's findings are shaped by the participants' experiences rather than by random or fluctuating research conditions. It is achieved through careful and transparent documentation of every methodological choice, procedural step, and analytical decision made throughout the study, allowing others to clearly understand how the research unfolded. By maintaining detailed records such as audit trails, memos, and justifications for changes the researcher demonstrates that the process was logical, traceable, and grounded in sound reasoning. This transparency not only strengthens the credibility of the study but also enables other researchers to assess or even replicate the procedures, reinforcing the overall trustworthiness of the research.

Transferability. Refers to how well research findings can be applied or adapted to other contexts, settings, or groups beyond those directly studied. In qualitative research, this doesn't mean making broad generalizations; instead, it involves providing sufficiently rich, thick, and detailed descriptions of the research context, participants, processes, and findings so that readers can judge for themselves whether the insights are relevant to their own situations. By clearly portraying the circumstances under which the study was conducted such as cultural, social, organizational, or environmental factors the researcher enables others to compare those conditions with their own and make informed decisions about whether the findings can meaningfully "transfer." In this way, the responsibility for determining applicability rests partly with the reader, supported by the completeness and depth of the researcher's descriptions.

Bracketing and Reflexivity. Bracketing requires the researcher to deliberately set aside their personal preconceptions and biases, while reflexivity demands an ongoing, critical self-awareness of how their background and presence actively shape the collection and interpretation of data. **Bracketing.** is a research process commonly used in qualitative studies, particularly in phenomenological research, where the researcher intentionally sets aside personal beliefs, assumptions, experiences, and biases about the topic being studied. In

research, bracketing helps ensure that findings are grounded in the participants' perspectives rather than influenced by the researcher's prior knowledge or expectations. By consciously acknowledging and setting aside preconceived ideas, the researcher promotes objectivity, credibility, and authenticity in data collection and interpretation.

Reflexivity. on the other hand, refers to the researcher's ongoing process of self-examination and critical reflection about how their background, values, position, and interactions may influence the research process. Unlike bracketing, which focuses on temporarily setting aside biases, reflexivity involves continuously examining and making transparent how the researcher's role shapes the study. Through reflexive journaling, discussions, and methodological transparency, researchers enhance the trustworthiness and integrity of their work while acknowledging that complete objectivity is not always possible.

RESULTS

This study explored the experiences, coping with the challenges, and aspirations of custodial officers in the performance of their duties. The following themes emerged from a comprehensive thematic analysis and directly align with the current workworld and perceptions of the informants.

I. Experiences of the Informants in the Performance of their Duties

A. Positive Experiences

1. Strict Enforcement of Security and Safety Protocols. The provided narratives highlight that for Custodial Officers, the most rewarding and fulfilling aspect of their duty is the successful, strict enforcement of security and safety protocols. Across various roles whether performing thorough physical and baggage searches of visitors, monitoring the perimeter, or managing daily inmate interactions the officers share a unified commitment to achieving zero escapes, preventing the entry of contraband, and maintaining absolute order with zero untoward disturbances. They emphasize a strong sense of collective responsibility, recognizing that a security lapse by a single individual "boomerang" to negatively impact the entire unit. Ultimately, their job satisfaction is deeply rooted in flawlessly executing the Bureau's mandate to ensure a secure, controlled, and safe environment.

Supporting Literatures and studies directly supports that their ultimate job satisfaction is rooted in "flawlessly executing the Bureau's mandate to ensure a secure, controlled, and safe environment. Conover and Glaister's works validate why strict enforcement is so rewarding: because the environment is inherently volatile and risky. By establishing that routine tasks can instantly turn dangerous, these literatures prove that maintaining absolute order and achieving zero untoward disturbances is an active, high-stakes triumph rather than a passive routine. (Conover, 2000) details the relentless routine of supervising inmates and the constant pressure to maintain order within a highly controlled and often volatile environment. (Glaister, 2024) documents a workplace defined by constant uncertainty and risk, where routine tasks can rapidly escalate into dangerous situations while supervising serious and volatile offenders.

Moreover, this theme notes that officers feel a strong sense of collective responsibility, knowing a single individual's lapse will boomerang and negatively impact the whole unit. Baldwin et al. reinforces that operational safety is achieved through this exact type of baseline collaboration and shared responsibility. (Baldwin et al., 2021) notes that active engagement and collaboration among custodial staff fostered a sense of shared responsibility.

2. Proactive Preparedness and Institutional Duty. Based on the accounts of the Custodial Officers, Proactive Preparedness and Institutional Duty centers on the strict, highly organized execution of BJMP protocols to guarantee safety, order, and control within the facility. Custodial officers maintain a secure environment by conducting rigorous daily headcounts up to six times a day, performing constant structural inspections of cell bars and perimeter walls to spot vulnerabilities, and continuous CCTV monitoring. These routine security efforts are further reinforced by thorough "greyhound" searching operations to eliminate contrabands, as well as strict visitor screening processes to verify legitimate family identities. Crucially, this proactive stance extends to disaster readiness, where personnel actively practice operational plans (OPLANs) for fires, typhoons, and

earthquakes. This culture of constant alertness ensures that even off-duty officers instinctively jump into action during emergencies. Ultimately, this unwavering dedication to institutional duty fosters mutual respect and automatic compliance from the Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL), boosting the officers' confidence and creating a highly secure, peaceful, and prepared institution.

Supporting Literatures and studies supports this theme that focuses on the strict, highly organized execution of protocols. O'Toole and Eyland show that routine security enforcement is not just automated robot-work; it is the fundamental mechanism through which an institution achieves operational stability and control. The daily headcounts, greyhound operations, and constant monitoring mentioned in your theme are the real-world execution of the security protocols these authors highlight as necessary to maintain institutional equilibrium. The scholarly collection by (O'Toole and Eyland, 2012), as noted by Dr. Maria Thompson, establishes that modern correctional work relies heavily on systematic institutional security and standards. They argue that custodial officers are central agents who sustain an equilibrium within the facility.

Furthermore, these studies provide empirical justification for the theme's emphasis on proactive measures. Schultz, Ricciardelli, and Reilly establish that correctional environments are inherently volatile. Therefore, the routine security efforts detailed by the BJMP officers such as structural inspections of cell bars, visitor screening, and practicing OPLANs for disasters are not just bureaucratic chores; they are mandatory, proactive interventions designed to mitigate the extreme operational risks and structural vulnerabilities detailed in the literature. The research by (Schultz and Ricciardelli, 2024) highlights that the heightened security risks and demanding nature of prison work have far-reaching implications for institutional safety. They argue that when operational safety and protocol are neglected, it leads to conflict and operational instability. Similarly, (Reilly et al., 2024) emphasize the high-risk nature of custodial environments and argue for specialized training programs and workplace policies tailored specifically to handling the physical demands and altercations in prisons.

B. Negative Experiences

1. Operational Difficulties on Visitors and Headcount. The operational difficulties regarding headcount and visitor management in the facility stem primarily from overcrowding, non-compliance, and the high volume of individuals relative to limited Custodial Officers. When conducting headcounts, officers must exercise extreme vigilance due to jail congestion and the sheer volume of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), which restricts their ability to perform individualized monitoring and exposes them to security risks. This process is further complicated by prolonged tallying times in packed cells, the strict protocol requiring a complete restart from zero if an accounting error occurs or if "under instruction" PDLs disrupt the count, and the tendency of newly admitted remands to improperly line up due to a lack of adaptation to jail regulations. Parallel to these internal headcount challenges, the visitor screening process serves as a major source of stress for personnel, who frequently encounter uncooperative, aggressive, and frequent visitors who openly defy contraband regulations despite knowing the rules.

Supporting Literatures and studies directly supports this theme that highlights a severe resource deficit: a high volume of individuals relative to limited Custodial Officers. Thompson's literature perfectly supports this by illustrating the reality of an overstretched system where limited staff must stretch themselves thin across multiple roles. Furthermore, your theme mentions the operational friction caused by visitors who openly defy rules; Thompson's focus on the tension of balancing control with care and managing bruising confrontations provides a direct conceptual match for the emotional labor officers endure when screening uncooperative, aggressive visitors. (Thompson, 2008) provides a candid account of working within an overstretched correctional system, dealing with unpredictable environments and rigid bureaucracies. Crucially, he and Whitmore detail how officers must absorb expanded, overlapping roles acting simultaneously as enforcers, disciplinarians, counselors, and gatekeepers frequently without adequate training or resources.

In addition, the headcount protocol is arguably the most rigid relentless routine in a prison, requiring absolute precision restarting from zero if interrupted by under instruction PDLs. Conover's literature supports the theme by highlighting the invisible psychological pressure of this task. It explains the extreme vigilance your theme mentions, illustrating how enforcing strict regulations in an uncooperative or congested environment induces deep professional anxiety. (Ted Conover, 2000) details the relentless routine of supervising inmates and the

silent anxieties officers carry while enforcing strict rules within highly controlled, volatile, and crowded environments.

2. Difficulties in the Implementation of Routine Duties. Implementing routine duties within jail facilities presents significant operational difficulties, primarily driven by severe overcrowding and uncooperative visitors. As shared by Custodial Officers, the sheer volume of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) and their packed belongings turn standard contraband searches into highly stressful, time-consuming tasks. This operational strain is further aggravated by visitors particularly those claiming high social or professional status who frequently resist mandatory security protocols, such as signing consent waivers, undergoing body searches, or adhering to restrictions on prohibited food. Despite facing verbal entitlement, defiance, and even threats of political retaliation, jail staff must continuously practice "maximum tolerance," maintaining a calm, professional demeanor while strictly enforcing jail rules to successfully prevent the smuggling of contrabands.

Supporting Literatures and studies directly supports that enforcing contraband rules against resistant visitors requires jail staff to be unyielding enforcers of security, yet they are simultaneously required to display maximum tolerance care and professionalism. O'Toole and Eyland's research directly supports this operational duality. It shows that the difficulty in implementing routine duties stems from the fact that guards cannot just be rigid rule-enforcers; they must constantly balance strict administrative authority with the diplomatic interpersonal skills needed to manage hostile civilians. (O'Toole & Eyland, 2012) Dr. Maria Thompson: Detail how officers operate at the difficult intersection of security enforcement and human service delivery, acting as key agents who must sustain an exact equilibrium between authority and care.

Likewise, this theme highlights the immense pressure on jail staff to practice maximum tolerance when confronting verbal entitlement, defiance, and threats from high-status visitors. Thompson and Whitmore's concepts of emotional labor and emotionally charged negotiations perfectly describe the psychological effort required to maintain a calm demeanor during these confrontations. Furthermore, Ricciardelli et al. explain the underlying danger of this requirement forcing officers to absorb verbal abuse while strictly enforcing rules causes a deep, invisible emotional exhaustion that makes executing routine tasks highly draining. (Thompson, 2008; Whitmore, 2008): Focus on the hidden weight and emotional labor of custodial work. They describe emotionally charged negotiations and the constant struggle to act with fairness and humanity in environments marked by chronic strain. (Ricciardelli et al., 2024) Dr. Elena Marquez: Examines the cumulative effects of moral distress and emotional exhaustion that officers face daily, which can erode professional effectiveness over time.

II. Coping with the Challenges Encountered in the Performance of their duties

1. Protocol-Driven Crisis Management. This theme highlights the structured, tactical, and psychological framework utilized by Custodial Officers to maintain order, handle security breaches, and defuse internal conflicts. Rather than relying on ad-hoc reactions, the personnel emphasize a highly systematic approach to emergencies, which can be broken down into three core components: Structured Operational Frameworks, Tactical and Proactive Containment, and Psychological Control and Conflict Resolution.

Supporting Literatures and studies directly supports that this theme highlights the physical demands, constant vigilance, and structured response systems used to mitigate security breaches, handle volatile offenders, and manage immediate occupational hazards. (Genevieve Glaister, 2024; Jordan Reeves, 2024): Glaister documents a workplace defined by constant uncertainty where routine tasks can rapidly escalate into dangerous situations with volatile offenders. This directly underscores the need for proactive containment protocols. When safety depends on immediate, reliable reactions, tactical training and peer solidarity become the frontline defense against sudden containment failures. (Louis Reilly et al., 2024): This study focuses heavily on the physical, tactical reality of the job, mapping out occupational injuries resulting from physical altercations and musculoskeletal strain. Reilly argues for the critical need for workplace policies and training programs specifically tailored to the realities of correctional work. This supports the theme by proving that containment cannot be ad-hoc; it requires physically tactical, data-driven safety protocols to protect both the institution and the officers. (Ted Conover, 2000; Officer Ramirez, 2000): Conover details the intense training academy and the relentless routine required to supervise inmates in volatile environments. This routines-based vigilance is the definition of proactive containment using daily, highly systematized habits to prevent crises before they erupt.

Nevertheless, this theme also focuses on the internal, emotional, and communicative frameworks officers use to de-escalate crises, manage mental health emergencies, and maintain internal psychological resilience under extreme duress. (Rosemary Ricciardelli et al., 2024) & Dr. Elena Marquez: This literature focuses on the invisible stressors moral distress, emotional exhaustion, and psychological burdens. It supports the theme by showing that crisis management isn't just physical containment; it requires a psychological framework. To defuse conflicts effectively, officers must operate within supportive organizational policies that preserve their own psychological stability and professional effectiveness. (William J. Schultz and Rosemary Ricciardelli, 2024): The authors note that an officer's psychological strain and burnout directly impair their decision-making and interactions with inmates, increasing the risk of conflict and operational instability. Therefore, systematic wellness protocols are not just perks they are fundamental tools for conflict resolution. Healthy officers maintain the psychological control necessary to de-escalate tense situations peacefully. (Baldwin et al., 2021) & Jordan Matthews: This study introduces a progressive angle to psychological control and conflict resolution: collaborative action research. By involving officers as active partners in institutional change to improve conditions such as for pregnant incarcerated women, it establishes a psychological framework of shared responsibility and humane practice, shifting the environment away from hostile dominance and toward systematic, communicative conflict resolution.

2. Execution of Strategic Preparedness. The Execution of Strategic Preparedness within jail facilities relies on a continuous, proactive combination of strict security protocols, behavioral observation, and collective accountability to maintain order despite severe understaffing. Jail personnel manage high-risk environments through comprehensive initial orientations and continuous 24-hour WE ARE critical alertness, which is necessitated by a constant influx of rehabilitation and stakeholder activities. To combat being vastly outnumbered during routine tasks, officers utilize tactical efficiency and safety mechanisms, such as grouping inmates by tens for faster headcounts, executing cell inspections with back-up officers stationed outside secure gates, and relying on personal courage and professional respect.

Supporting Literatures and studies directly supports that using smart, calculated protocols like grouping inmates, back-up positioning, and structured team tactics to safely maintain order and overcome being vastly outnumbered. Glaister's findings underscore why safety mechanisms such as executing cell inspections with back-up officers stationed outside secure gates are mandatory. Because routine tasks can instantly turn dangerous, strategic preparedness cannot rely on a single officer. The camaraderie and mutual reliance mentioned in the study manifest practically as the tactical back-up and coordinated teamwork required to execute safety protocols safely when outnumbered. (Glaister, 2024) with reflections by (Reeves, 2024): Documents a high-risk workplace defined by constant uncertainty where routine tasks can rapidly escalate into dangerous situations. It highlights the deep camaraderie and solidarity that develops as officers implicitly rely on one another for physical safety and emotional survival.

Nonetheless, relying on internal resilience, professional boundaries, and mutual respect to maintain authority and institutional stability. this theme highlights that officers must ultimately rely on personal courage and professional respect. The research by Schultz, Ricciardelli, and Reilly provides the empirical backing for why this courage and respect are vital: the job takes a massive physical and psychological toll. If an officer lacks personal resilience or fails to command professional respect from inmates, operational instability and conflict occur. Professional respect acts as a non-physical shield that allows outnumbered officers to execute commands safely. (Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2024): Explains that the severe physical and psychological strain of prison work impacts decision-making and officer-inmate interactions. They argue that protecting staff wellness is directly linked to organizational resilience and institutional safety. (Ricciardelli et al., 2024) with analysis by (Dr. Marquez, 2024): Focuses on the cumulative effects of moral distress and emotional exhaustion, highlighting the need for personal resilience to maintain professional effectiveness. (Reilly et al., 2024): Highlights the high-risk nature of the physical environment, including physical altercations and musculoskeletal strain, which demands specialized physical preparedness and tailored training.

III. Aspirations of the Informants to Improve the Performance of their Duties

1. Enhancing Resource Modernization and Protocol Compliance. The statements provided by the Custodial Officers collectively highlight a critical need to fortify the security, control, and overall functionality of jail

facilities. This unified theme revolves around two main pillars: structural/resource modernization and strict adherence to operational protocols.

Supporting Literatures and studies supports that modernizing resources goes beyond physical architecture; it includes upgrading health/wellness infrastructure, structural support systems, and data-reporting tools to reduce institutional volatility. (Thompson, 2008) details the everyday realities of working within an overstretched correctional system marked by institutional limitations. He explicitly notes that officers are forced to take on overlapping roles (e.g., nurses, counselors) without adequate training or resources, demonstrating how a lack of structural resources directly undermines the ability to maintain order. (Glaister, 2024) highlights a distinct structural failure: the strain caused by collapsed or inadequate mental-health supports. This supports the argument that modernizing institutional resources specifically mental health frameworks and backend backing is vital to managing volatile environments safely. (Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2024) connect resource deficiencies (overcrowded facilities, lack of wellness infrastructure) directly to conflict and operational instability. They argue that modernizing resources through comprehensive wellness programs and targeted health interventions is a prerequisite for strengthening institutional safety and operational effectiveness. (Reilly et al., 2024) focuses on a critical administrative and technological gap: gaps in injury reporting and data consistency and a lack of standardized injury surveillance systems. Modernizing these data resources and reporting tools is shown to be essential for creating evidence-based safety interventions and protecting staff.

2. Capacity Building for Disaster Readiness and Operational Security. The shared sentiment among the informants highlights a critical and urgent need for comprehensive capacity building, encompassing both human resource development (skills and training) and institutional support (logistical resources). Rather than viewing their roles through a static lens, the custodial officers express a proactive desire to elevate their readiness for emergencies, natural disasters, and daily operational challenges.

Supporting Literatures and studies supports that a critical and urgent need for institutional support (logistical resources) to handle emergencies and daily operational challenges. The following studies support this by documenting the systemic failures, lack of resources, and institutional limitations currently plaguing correctional staff: (Thompson, 2008) explicitly critiques the overstretched correctional system and the chronic strain and institutional limitations officers face. He highlights that officers are forced to take on expanded, critical roles such as acting as nurses during medical emergencies often without adequate training or resources, which directly mirrors your informants call for enhanced logistical support. (Sociologist Karen Whitmore, 2008) Commentary on Thompson: Whitmore reinforces this by arguing that officers absorb multi-faceted emergency roles frequently without sufficient institutional support, directly validating your findings regarding an urgent need for institutional backing. (Glaister, 2024) depicts a workplace defined by constant uncertainty and risk where routine tasks rapidly escalate into dangerous emergencies. She explicitly points out that officers are left to manage complex crises with limited institutional backing and points out systemic shortcomings a finding that perfectly aligns with your informants' desire to move away from these limitations via resource enhancement.

Likewise, (Schultz & Ricciardelli, 2024) argues that to mitigate severe operational risks, conflict, and instability, meaningful policy reforms are essential. They note that prioritizing resources and staff well-being is required to strengthen organizational resilience, providing strong literary backing for your paragraph's focus on operational security.

Furthermore, supporting literatures and studies highlights that officers reject a static lens and instead express a proactive desire to elevate their readiness for emergencies, natural disasters, and daily operational challenges through skills and training. These studies support the necessity of specialized capacity building: (Matthews, 2024) Commentary on (Baldwin et al., 2021) Correctional Officers as Participants: Action Research in Prisons. This is the strongest piece of literature supporting your finding that officers do not view their roles through a static lens. Matthews emphasizes moving beyond the traditional view of custodial staff as mere security enforcers, instead presenting them as key actors who significantly influence the daily environment. It directly supports your finding that officers proactively want to be active, well-trained participants in driving institutional readiness and reform.

Lastly, (Reilly et al., 2024) outlines the high-risk physical environment of custodial work (musculoskeletal

strain, altercations). The authors conclude there is a strict need for training programs and workplace policies that are specifically tailored to the realities of correctional work. This directly justifies your informants' request for specialized capacity building to handle daily operational and physical challenges. (Das, Light, & Verma, 2001) argue that regular enforcement training is insufficient for custodial complexities. They explicitly state that custodial duties require specialized training to manage the physical and psychological well-being of the institution. This supports your text's emphasis on comprehensive human resource development for specialized readiness. (O'Toole & Eyland, 2012) highlights that officers operate at a complex intersection of security enforcement and human service delivery (risk control, health management, and safety protocols). This multifaceted reality requires advanced capacity building, supporting your argument that comprehensive training is needed to handle diverse operational challenges.

DISCUSSION

Based on the shared experiences of the custodial officers, the research findings reveal that Custodial Officers experience a profound sense of professional fulfillment rooted in proactive preparedness and the strict enforcement of security protocols. Officers find great satisfaction in successfully maintaining zero escapes, preventing contraband entry, and achieving order through rigorous routine duties like frequent headcounts, structural inspections, and emergency drill practices. However, these positive experiences are heavily countered by severe operational difficulties. Officers face immense stress due to jail overcrowding, prolonged and complex headcount tallies, and highly uncooperative or aggressive visitors who actively resist safety screenings and exploit social status to bypass rules. To manage these routine challenges, staff must continuously practice "maximum tolerance" while strictly upholding institutional mandates.

To cope with these intense workplace demands, jail personnel rely on protocol-driven crisis management and strategic preparedness. By utilizing structured operational frameworks, tactical containment strategies, and grouping mechanisms such as counting inmates by tens to mitigate the risks of being vastly outnumbered officers maintain control and psychological composure. Looking forward, the informants' aspirations focus heavily on institutional advancement. They collectively emphasize an urgent need for resource modernization, stricter protocol compliance, and comprehensive capacity building. Ultimately, the officers desire upgraded structural facilities and enhanced training for disaster readiness and operational security, which are vital to mitigating current systemic strains and elevating the overall safety of the institution.

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on these findings, the primary implication for correctional management is the urgent need to formalize and support the "professional duality" experienced by custodial officers. Since operational success relies equally on strict security enforcement and humanistic rehabilitation, institutional policies should move away from viewing these two mandates as competing forces. Instead, training programs should be redesigned to integrate psychological counseling and interpersonal communication skills directly alongside tactical defense and security protocols. By validating and equipping officers for those quiet, impactful moments of mentorship, correctional facilities can transform standard guarding into a structured vehicle for genuine rehabilitation, ultimately lowering recidivism rates when Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs) re-enter society.

Investigating these critical areas offers a vital roadmap for modernizing correctional governance by bridging the gap between frontline operational realities and structural policy reform. By examining the psychological toll of professional duality, the ethical boundaries of the jail aide system, and institutional continuity during crises, future research shifts the focus from temporary fixes to sustainable, systemic solutions. Ultimately, these lines of inquiry provide jail bureaus with the empirical evidence needed to safeguard staff well-being, protect the rights and security of Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDLs), and fortify facility resilience against systemic vulnerabilities.

CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the findings reveal that while custodial officers derive deep professional fulfillment from maintaining security and order, their efforts are severely strained by systemic operational challenges like jail

overcrowding, prolonged headcount routines, and aggressive visitors. To survive and manage these intense daily demands, personnel must constantly balance protocol-driven crisis management and maximum tolerance with strategic, practical coping mechanisms. Looking ahead, addressing these severe workplace pressures requires a decisive shift toward institutional modernization. Securing upgraded structural facilities, resource modernization, and comprehensive capacity building is no longer just an aspiration, but an urgent necessity to alleviate systemic strain and guarantee the long-term safety and security of both the staff and the institution.

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The study Control and Care Inside the Walls: Workworld of Custodial Officers in a Jail Facility was reviewed and approved by the University of Cebu Research Ethics Committee (UCREC) under Protocol Code: GS (1)-2026-04-092. The ethics application was submitted on February 26, 2026, and formal approval was granted on April 21, 2026. In accordance with institutional, national, and international research ethics standard, the researchers are authorized to conduct data-gathering procedures for a period of one (1) year from the date of issuance, valid until April 21, 2027.

Informed consent was obtained from all informants involved in the study, ensuring voluntary participation, confidentiality, privacy protection, and the freedom to withdraw from the research at any point without penalty.

Conflicts of Interest:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

Competing Interest:

The authors declare no competing interest.

Data Availability Statement:

Data will be made available by the corresponding author upon request.

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