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THE CRIMINOLOGISTS IN THE POLICE SERVICE: REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD

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Abstract

This study looked into the experience of Registered Criminologists employed in the Philippine National Police (PNP) from recruitment to placement. Using qualitative research approach, the following themes were generated: 1) **“Fulfilling the Dream”** (they saw themselves working in the law enforcement profession long before they actually landed on the job); 2) **“Living the Dream”** (they enjoyed the perks provided by their professional license and confronted limitations missing from the curriculum); and 3) **“Embracing the Dream”** (they took pride of their status in the society). Implications to theory, practice and policy were drawn to address the issues raised in the study.

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Introduction:-

In 2013, dismissed PNP Chief PDG Allan LM Purisima said a statement which seemed to undermine the competencies of Criminology graduates. In his view, graduates of Criminology “...are just fit to become workers at the crime laboratory” (Felipe, 2013). The same newspaper article quoted him as saying,

“he wants graduates of education, psychology, social work, mass communications and other professionals to become police officers. He expressed belief that teachers, psychologists, social workers, journalists, and other professionals could serve the PNP better than **criminology graduates** (Felipe,2013). (Emphasis supplied)”

Republic Act No. 6506 (1972) defines a Criminologist as “any person who is a graduate of the Degree of Criminology, who has passed the examination for criminologists and is registered as such by the Board [of Criminology].”

The law likewise recognizes the expertise of Criminology graduates which includes, among others, a “law enforcement administrator, executive, adviser, consultant or agent in any government...agency” and as “technician in dactyloscopy, ballistics, questioned documents, police photography, lie detection, forensic chemistry and other scientific aspects of crime detection.” (RA 6506)

Largely because of this legal definition, Sta. Teresa (2010) observed that,

[the] criminology profession became the major client of the Philippine National Police in the early 90s until early 2000s. The focus of criminology graduates then is employment in the police service. From the big cities to the countryside, nine out of ten students in criminology school anchored their dreams for employment in the police service.

Reeling from a military past, the newly-instituted national in scope and civilian in character police organization rose from the ashes of the Philippine Constabulary-Integrated National Police (PC-INP)(RA 6975, 1990). At that time, police applicants must have at least 72 baccalaureate units along with other physical and legal requirements.

By 1998, professionalization in the organization became a trend. RA 8551 (1998) amended RA 6975 requiring PNP applicants to obtain baccalaureate degree, government eligibility and other physical and legal requirements. The enactment of the PNP law defining the minimum qualification standards for its members, has in effect, opened the law enforcement profession, to all professionals possessing the minimum qualifications. In effect, Criminology loses its grip on law enforcement jobs particularly in the PNP.

In recent years, the lack of employment opportunities for nursing professionals in the hospitals led them to seek employment in the PNP. As such, Criminologists faced stiff competition against nursing professionals and graduates.

P/Supt. Elmer Soria (cited in PDI, 6/24/2012) reported that in 2011, 106 out of 800 applicants turned out to be nursing graduates and registered nurses. Forty-three of them, mostly women, were hired (cited in PDI, 6/24/2012). Recent observations, as further confirmed by Mojares et al. (2015) confirm this scenario in the recruitment and placement of new police trainees. Sta. Teresa (2010) described this phenomenon as a “creeping invasion by noncriminology graduates” in the PNP.

As regards motivations of non-Criminology graduates in joining the PNP, Mojares and her colleagues (2015) discovered the “internal and external factors” that affect their motivation and decision in entering the PNP.

In terms of internal factors, the study revealed the top three reasons of non-Criminology graduates in joining the police service. They “feel satisfied of being able to help other people” (Rank 1); “enjoy the nature of being a police officer and member of the PNP” (Rank 2); and “curious on how to handle criminal cases, criminal behavior and juvenile delinquents” (Rank 3). In terms of external factors, the top three reasons were the following: “There is future career opportunities as PNP member or higher rank in PNP organization” (Rank1); “There is recognition of the society for function as PNP member” (rank 2); and “There is security of tenure in the PNP profession” (Rank 3). In view of this development in the Philippine National Police, this qualitative research examined the views and concepts of Criminologists employed as police officers relative to their motivations, competencies and aspirations while in the active service. Particular focus was given to these issues: 1) Motivations for being in Criminology; 2) Competencies of Criminology graduates relevant to law enforcement; and 3) Aspirations in choosing the law enforcement career.

Method:-

This is a qualitative research. The nature of the questions asked in this research demands that qualitative paradigm be selected. For the ontological assumption, qualitative research entails subjective and multiple realities presented on the experiences of, in this case, Criminologists serving the PNP. As regards the epistemological assumption, there was an interaction between the researchers and the police officers as the researched through interview, storytelling and written statements. With regard to the role of values, the axiological assumption, this research is value-laden and biased as it dealt with the perspective of the police officers and the interpretive process made by the researchers. For the methodological assumption, the research followed an inductive process in order to get the perspectives of police officers. This is demonstrated by the emergence of themes from raw data through Thematic Qualitative Text Analysis described by Kuckartz (2014).

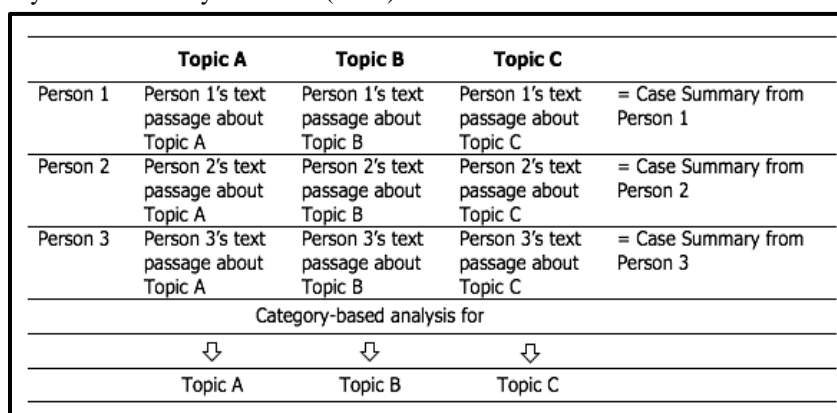


Figure 1. Thematic Qualitative Text Analysis (Kuckartz, 2014)

Setting of the Study. The study was conducted in the Philippines with participants coming from Western Visayas.



Figure 2. Map of the Philippines

(Source: <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/philippines/images/map-regions-2.jpg>)

Rationale for purposeful sampling in this study. Qualitative researchers engaged in purposive sampling (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2006). In this study, snowball sampling technique was used. Snowball sampling also known as chain referral sampling is used to identify cases of interest from people who know people who know what cases are information-rich key informants or critical cases (Patton cited in Arnilla, 2015; Creswell, 2007).

Participants. The participants were selected purposively based on the following criteria: 1) a Registered Criminologist; and 2) an active member of the Philippine National Police (PNP) for at least eight (8) years. Twelve (12) police officers agreed to participate in the study. Of this number, ten officer-participants had Criminology as their first baccalaureate degree when they joined the police organization. One officer has earned a bachelor's degree in political science when he joined the PNP and received another bachelor's degree in Criminology through the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEAAP). It qualified him to take and pass the Criminology Licensure Examination. Another officer-participant studied Criminology in college. He is a former member of the defunct Philippine Constabulary (PC) until he was absorbed by the newly-organized PNP in 1992.

Invitation Procedure. In recruiting participants for this study, the researchers invited police officers known to them personally. Contacting them required phone call, text messaging and formal correspondence. The researchers discussed the nature and purpose of the study to the potential participants. In some case, the procedure was explained to the channel who identified the potential participants.

Data Collection. This study used recorded interviews, storytelling and open ended questionnaire. The original proposal was to conduct face-to-face interview. However, the channel was excused due to tight schedules. At the time of the data collection, the PNP was busy with APEC preparations. Hence, the channel suggested to put the questions in a questionnaire form so that they would be able to distribute it to qualified police officers. The study leader transformed the interview schedule into an appropriate format. The college dean was also requested to sign the endorsement letters attached to each form. These forms were delivered to the provincial police office and received by the channel. After a week, the filled up forms were returned to the researchers. As a whole, three (3) officers were interviewed while the remaining nine (9) officers wrote their answers in the form.

Interview Schedule. For the face-to-face interview, an interview schedule was prepared. Patton (cited in Arnilla, 2015) describes an interview schedule is the structure of questions with preset follow-up questions that researchers

ask during an interview. The structure of an interview schedule begins with small talk that is designed to build rapport and put the participants at ease (Bogdan & Biklen cited in Arnilla, 2015). This research used an interview strategy that included open-ended questions so that the participants could share their experiences freely. Truly open-ended interviews allow the interviewees to respond on their own terms (Patton cited in Arnilla, 2015).

Procedures of the Interview. For the face-to-face interview, the officer-participants were reminded that the study is voluntary. Researchers then asked their permission to audio record the interview. The interview followed a general structure. First, the interviewers thanked them for their participation. Second, they stated the purpose of the research and assured them of the confidentiality of the proceedings and also their anonymity (Bogdan & Biklen cited in Arnilla, 2015). The semi-structured interview included the following: (a) collecting background information from the participant to build rapport, (b) asking open-ended questions from a predetermined script, and (c) focusing follow-up questions to gather in-depth information from the participant.

Smith & Osborn (cited in Arnilla, 2015) stated that with semi-structured interviews, the investigator will have a set of questions on an interview schedule, but the interview will be guided by the schedule rather than be dictated by it. The interview schedule began with small talk to build rapport and then led to open-ended questions. The interview schedule is found in Appendix B. In ending the interview, the interviewers were guided by Lofland's (cited in Arnilla, 2015) commonsense rules on disengagement which includes: 1) avoiding to leave abruptly, 2) saying goodbye personally, 3) promising to keep in touch and 4) keeping in touch as a situation dictated.

As regards the open-ended questionnaire sent to the police provincial office, the researchers informed the channel regarding the purpose of the research. The content, specially the questions, were explained to her.

Data Analysis. The data were analyzed using Thematic Qualitative Text Analysis Kuckartz (2014). Guided by Ryan & Bernard (2003), we were on the lookout for the following things on each transcript: repetitions, indigenous typologies or categories, metaphors and analogies, transitions, similarities and differences, linguistic connectors, missing data and theory-related materials.

All direct quotations said in the vernacular and were used in this report were translated to English for clarity of discussion. Responses written or spoken in English were retained. Statements were also grammar-checked for clarity without altering the meaning of the statements.

Validity. To optimize the validity of this study, member-checking was used. It was the study leader who facilitated this process. When the report was completed, the results and discussion were presented to three officer-participants. One officer-participant said, "You have a good description of the motivations of Criminologists employed in the PNP. I agree with you."

Limitations. The participants were fully informed of the research procedures and purpose of the study. The researchers told the channels that they could only guarantee anonymity through the use of pseudonyms throughout this research. In this study, letter "P" representing "police" and a number were adopted as aliases for each officer-participants. Hence, "P1," "P2," "P3" and so on.

Ethical Consideration. As the participants in this study were police officers, all of them were of legal age. They were also advised of their privilege to withdraw from the study at any time.

Results and Discussion:-

This section presents the themes that emerged from the qualitative data analysis. The researchers found the word "dream" as pervasive in the statements of the officer-participants. Hence, "dream" became the foundation from which the research framework was built and the themes were organized. The themes include "Fulfilling the Dream," "Living the Dream," and "Embracing the Dream."

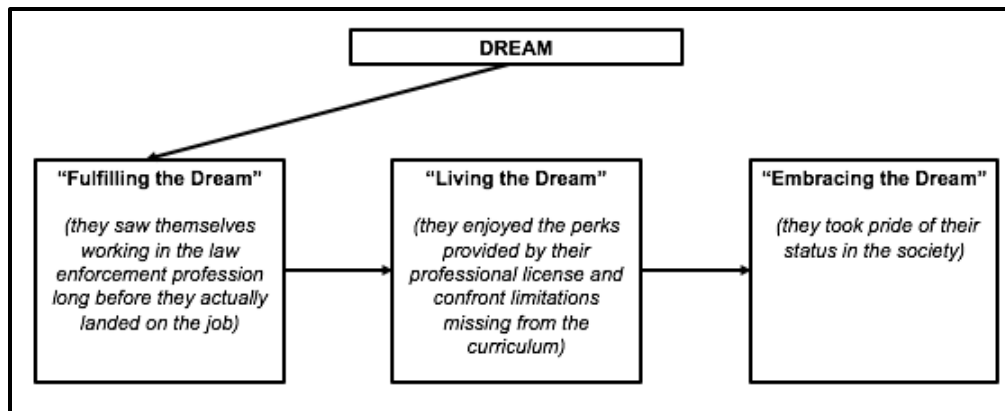


Figure 3. Themes

Fulfilling the Dream:-

The first theme that emerged is **“Fulfilling the Dream.”** It tells the story of police officers seeing themselves working in the law enforcement profession long before they actually landed on the job. P6, for instance, shared: “When I was 11 years old, I saw a uniformed personnel of the Philippine Constabulary, I told myself I’d be a cop.”

It is fascinating to note that some officer-participant like P9, without second thoughts, blurted out that his ambition was to become a police officer (“Ah, to become a policeman”). This statement is reminiscent of Sta. Teresa’s findings which divulged that “nine out of ten students in criminology schools anchored their dreams for employment in the police service.”

Others like P7 had a model among his relatives. He imparted that his dream is to become a policeman because most of his relatives are PNP members. And these persons had influenced him when he was young.

Fulfilling the ambition of becoming a police officer is not a walk in the park. The participants described the application process as “difficult” owing to the financial, physical and emotional demands. P6 described his financial struggles: “I was a struggling applicant because for almost two months, I stayed in the camp from 7am to 5pm, Monday to Friday. I did not have enough money.” As regards physical struggle, P7 recounted his difficulties on the the screening process. In terms of emotional struggle, P4 said “nervous, exhausted and pressured that I might fail in the application process.”

P10 has a more colorful story to share on his application to the PNP.

It’s very exciting because when I was a PNP applicant, I thought I was applying for a work abroad because of the numerous requirements. The recruitment process also tested my patience like waiting for my time to be called at the Regional Personnel Human Resource Development Division and at the Regional Medical Office.

When asked to described their feeling as regards their appointment in the Philippine National Police, codes like “happy,” fulfilled a dream,” “grateful,” “very proud,” and “excited to serve” were generated.

P7 was ecstatic in his description: I feel very proud of myself. As a PNP member, I succeeded in pursuing my dream career in spite of all the challenges. P11 also shared an almost similar reaction. “I felt very happy, satisfied, overwhelmed and confident to face new challenges when I became a member of the PNP.”

Echoing the internal and external factors revealed by Mojares, et al. (2015), the Criminologists who joined the PNP exuded “satisfaction” like the non-Criminology graduates.

Living the Dream:-

The second theme is **“Living the Dream”** which narrates that the participants enjoy the perks provided by their professional license, and at the same time confront the limitations of the curriculum.

As a registered criminologist serving the PNP is more than fulfilling a dream. The license they possess gives them a feeling of pride. In fact, a participant claimed that being criminologists in the PNP provides a number of privileges like: a) respect from colleagues; 2) assigned in key positions; and 3) priority in promotion (P1).

Despite “creeping invasion” from other professionals joining law enforcement, they remain “superior” as the skills and competencies received in college are aligned with police work such as investigation. This was echoed by P4 when he said, “Basically, Criminology graduates are already equipped with knowledge relevant to police work specially in the field of investigation.” The content of the Criminology curriculum prepares them for the job.

In hindsight, the statements of the officer-participants fulfill the definition of Criminology as a profession in the Philippines as reflected in Republic Act 6506 which practically customized the program for jobs related to law enforcement.

This prevailing notion among in-service Criminologists is a contradiction to the ongoing phenomenon in the recruitment and placement of PNP members which turned out to be nursing graduates and registered nurses as confirmed by Soria (cited in PDI, 6/24/2012).

As this study involved police officers who have served the PNP for at least 8 years, the participants have graduated at least more than a decade earlier. When asked of their recommendations on the Criminology curriculum, they talked about information technology/computer operation. They advised that present students of Criminology should learn and be taught computer operations. This could be understood in the context of rapid changes in computer software and hardware.

They also mentioned the improvement of “communication skills” in English which is essential in communicating with the public and report writing. In the context of Purisima’s statement (Felipe, 2013) undermining the competence of Criminology graduates and professionals in this two areas, information technology and communication skills, which need attention of the curricularists of Criminology.

Embracing the Dream:-

The third theme is “**Embracing the Dream**” which reveals the participants’ pride of their status in society. Despite the difficulties met in performing their assignments, issues like “good salary,” “stable employment” and “honor and respect from the community” motivate them to continue serving the bureau.

P9 has this to say: “It’s a stable job. What I’m saying is, it helps the family.” This response is reminiscent of Mojares, et al. (2015) who said that “There is security of tenure in the PNP profession” and “There is future career opportunities as PNP member or higher rank in PNP organization.”

P6 supports P9 when he said,

“I stayed in the police service for almost 20 years because of two things. First, I have a permanent job with high salary and benefits. Second, I can impart to my children the learning I gained while in the police service.”

Likewise, responses like “Honor and respect from the community” confirms Mojares, et al. (2015) which claimed that police officers enjoy the “recognition of the society for function as PNP member.”

These motivations led them to conclude that the law enforcement service, the PNP in particular, is better if not the best employer as shown by their responses on the hypothetical question. The most senior and highest ranking among the officer- participants has this to say: “My salary is commensurate to my qualification and skills. What I am receiving is sufficient for our needs. And I intend to finish my service in the Philippine National Police. And then I will look for another job.” (P12)

P11 provided an excellent response to encapsulate the rest of the answers on the hypothetical question.

If given the opportunity to choose an employer, I would still choose the PNP. Working in the PNP is difficult but rewarding, not only in terms of benefits, but also in the satisfaction of helping others. (P11)

Analysis of the responses indicate that officer-participants were drawn to the compensation available to them in the organization.

Conclusion:-

To work in the police organization is a childhood dream for in-service Criminologists. Interestingly, the themes generated in the study hovered around the concept of dream such as **“Fulfilling the Dream,” “Living the Dream,”** and **“Embracing the Dream.”** Owing to the curriculum design of criminology in the Philippines, the Criminologists in the PNP are workers equipped with appropriate skills and competencies intended for the law enforcement work. Their motivations in getting employed and continued employment with the PNP have not changed through the years, particularly the desire to serve their community and the country.

Implications to theory, practice and policy:-

The following implications to theory, practice and policy were drawn to address the issues raised in the present study.

1. In terms of theory, salary and benefits remain to be the biggest consideration for the majority of the participants in choosing the PNP as their employer and for choosing to remain employed with the organization. However, there are motivating factors other than compensation. Idealistic as it may seem, the pleasure to serve the community and the country should be highlighted if not placed on top of the priority.
2. In terms of practice, the Criminology professionals should remain updated with the demands of the changing times brought about by technological and societal advances. The “creeping invasion” of non-Criminology graduates in the PNP suggests that the curriculum has failed to address the changing and increasing demands of the law enforcement profession. Hence, this fact should be emphasized to Criminology students who dream of becoming a member of the PNP in order to arm them with the right motivations to obtain other relevant skills and competencies.
3. In terms of policy, enhancing the communications skills and computer operation skills of the Criminology students is a priority in curricular revisions of the program. Taking cue from the pronouncement of the PNP organization, other than expert workers in the forensic laboratories and stations, Criminologists should be able to communicate well with his audience either face-to-face or in the cyberspace. Hence, police executives/managers should encourage the in-service Criminologists to improve their communication skills in English and computer operation/information technology skills by attending in-service trainings, graduate studies or self-teaching. As regards the Criminology education institutions, competencies in English and information technology should be emphasized in the curriculum revision and implementation.

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