

A Mother's Unconditional Love: Experience of a Person's Deprived of Liberty (PDL)

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Abstract

This study aims to retell and comprehend the story of a mother in the Bureau of Corrections (BuCor) using a narrative approach, focusing on her life choices that reflect her unconditional love for her imprisoned children. The research seeks to explore the obstacles she encounters and the coping mechanisms she utilizes to survive behind bars, as well as any valuable life lessons she has learned. The research participant was selected through purposive sampling, and the researcher ensured the validity and pilot testing of the questionnaire guide. Throughout her journey, the mother faces both positive and negative events that challenge her ability to survive and overcome various obstacles. These challenges include the absence of family support, limited food availability, and the management system within BuCor. However, the study finds that these challenges can be overcome. Despite the difficulties, the mother actively participates in numerous BuCor activities, which allows her to gain profound insights and reflect on her own behavior. She has willingly made sacrifices in her life without any regrets, all for the sake of her children's survival.

Keywords: *PDLs story, mother's love, challenges experienced, coping mechanisms, learnings in life*

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Introduction

The Bureau of Corrections (BuCor), under the Department of Justice, is responsible for the incarceration and rehabilitation of national offenders sentenced to three years or more in jail (Jones & Narag, 2018). Additionally, the Correctional Institute for Women (CIW), established in 1931, serves as a separate facility to house female national violators, keeping them isolated from male inmates (Guitering et al., 2018).

Rehabilitation is a universally recognized objective of corrections, regardless of whether it is achieved through institutional or non-custodial methods (Nabigaba, 2018). To ensure successful reintegration into society, individuals released from detention facilities, jails, correctional institutions, and rehabilitation centers must receive support in reuniting with their families and

reintegrating into the community (Cooper-Sadlo et al., 2019). Therefore, it is crucial to extend ex-offender rehabilitation and promote community-based treatment for effective reintegration.

In the Philippines, prison conditions are often characterized by congestion, understaffing, and limited funding, leading to overcrowded cells where ten inmates may be squeezed into a space meant for one hundred (Narag & Jones, 2020). Inmates are unofficially deputized to assist with custodial, rehabilitation, and administrative tasks to manage these overcrowded conditions. Imprisonment itself creates a constrained and pressurized environment, and those serving longer sentences may experience even higher levels of pressure. Nevertheless, female prisoners have shown resilience in the face of sentencing, with self-acceptance and the presence of a significant other serving as protective factors (Hamzah & Kumalasari, 2018). Overpopulation, staff shortages, and budgetary constraints are common challenges faced by the Philippine correctional system, along with fragmented and inconsistent rehabilitation services (Annison, 2018; Dennett, 2019; Antonette, 2019). Moreover, previous studies have highlighted the traumatic experiences faced by persons deprived of liberty (PDLs) due to staff behavior and the prison atmosphere (Kelman et al., 2022).

The literature review aims to analyze and synthesize previous studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of the conceptual advancements, complexities of the theory, and existing gaps related to the theme of a mother's unconditional love within the context of incarcerated individuals.

Furthermore, the researcher aims to retell and understand the story of a mother's life decisions that exemplify her unconditional love for her children behind bars. The study seeks to explore the challenges she faces, her coping mechanisms for survival, and the lessons she learns. It examines how she demonstrates her love despite living differently and separately from her children. Awuor (2021) argues that when prisoners, historically seen as entities of punishment, are viewed as subjects of rehabilitation, valuable insights can be gained. One research question focuses on participants' perspectives as they discover new things about themselves and recognize the need for personal change, not only for themselves but also for the benefit of their family members and those around them.

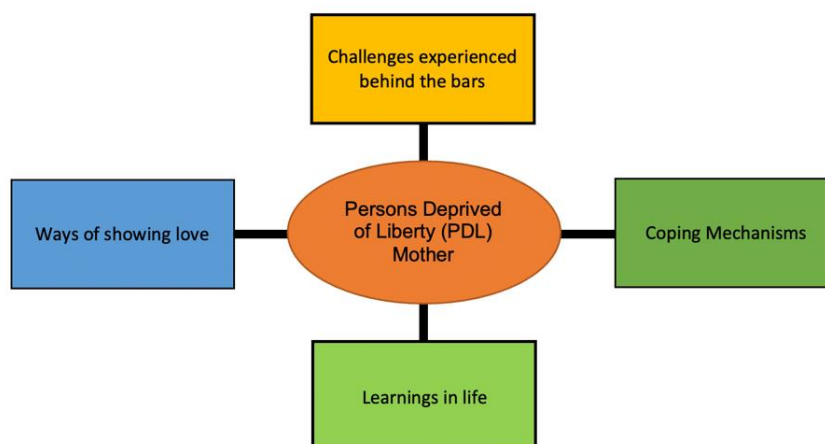
By exploring the mother's perspective from behind bars, readers can gain a profound understanding. The research investigates the lived experiences of a mother with seven children, shedding light on their situation. This can inspire reflection and encourage individuals to appreciate their parents' love and strive to do what is right for the betterment of those around them. Moreover, this study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by specifically examining the experiences of unconditional love among incarcerated mothers, employing a narrative inquiry methodology within the prison context, and providing insights into coping mechanisms and aspirations. These unique aspects enhance our understanding of parental affection and incarceration, offering novel perspectives and deeper insights into the lives of incarcerated mothers.

Research Problem

The researcher aims to retold and understand a story of a mother showing the love in her children living behind the bars.

Particularly, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the challenges experienced behind the bars?
2. What are the coping mechanisms behind the bars?
3. What are your learnings in life?
4. How did you show your love with your children even you are a prisoner?



The figure 1. Illustrates the relationships of the variables based on the narratives of the PDL mother.

The research explores the challenges faced within BuCor, the coping mechanisms employed for survival, the valuable lessons learned, and the diverse ways in which a mother expresses her love for her children. The study is primarily grounded in John Bowlby's Attachment Theory, which posits that early relationships and interactions with caregivers shape attachment styles and influence behavior and relationships throughout an individual's life. According to this theory, a secure attachment to a caregiver fosters feelings of confidence, security, and emotional support, promoting optimal development and well-being (Mikulincer & Shaver, 2020; Simpson et al., 2020). By integrating Attachment Theory into the narratives of incarcerated mothers, researchers can gain insight into the psychological and emotional dynamics underlying the challenges they face, their coping mechanisms, and the ways in which they express love. This framework can help elucidate the effects of separation, the significance of attachment relationships, and the capacity for resilience and adaptive strategies employed by individuals navigating the complexities of incarceration while maintaining connections with their loved ones.

Method

Design

The researcher utilized a qualitative research design employing the narrative approach. Narrative inquiry is a qualitative research method in which the narratives themselves serve as the primary data source. This method has been employed in various fields to gain insights into a writer's culture, historical events, identity, and way of life. The narrative approach involves inquiry focused on life experiences and generates data in narrative format (Sharp et al., 2019).

Participants

The participant in this study was a Person Deprived of Liberty (PDL), as defined in Republic Act 10575, also known as the Bureau of Corrections Act of 2013. PDLs are individuals who are detained, held captive, awaiting trial, and/or final judgment. This includes those who are detained, inmates, imprisoned, or arrested by the police, or otherwise in government custody.

The research participant was selected using purposive sampling and was a sixty-year-old senior citizen. She completed a vocational course at a prestigious university in Manila from 1981 to 1983 on her own initiative. The course lasted for two years. She is the fifth oldest among her eight

siblings and has seven children - two girls and five boys. She has been incarcerated since November 12, 2008, up to the present year.

Data Collection

In this study, the researcher served as the instrument for data collection in the qualitative study. The researcher is often the primary instrument for collecting and analyzing data. This means that the person conducting the study plays a crucial role in determining the study's design, collecting data, and analyzing the results. The researcher's skills, expertise, biases, and subjectivity may influence the study's process and outcomes (Wa-Mbaleka, 2020).

Additionally, the guide questions underwent validation to ensure that the interview guide covered all the necessary data for the study. Interviews provide information about respondents' viewpoints and experiences regarding a specific subject (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Prior to the study, the questionnaire was pilot-tested to identify any flaws, limitations, or other concerns in its design, allowing the researcher to make significant revisions (Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022). Moreover, employing appropriate data collection strategies and ensuring the researcher's impartiality enhance the study's trustworthiness. By validating the interview guide and conducting a pilot test of the questionnaire, the aim is to enhance the reliability and accuracy of the data collection process. These procedures ensure that the collected data accurately reflect the perspectives and experiences of the participants, thereby enhancing the overall credibility of the study's results.

Collection and Analysis of Data

Face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted to elicit responses to the guide questions. The questions were translated into the respondent's native language to facilitate comprehension. Participants were also allowed to respond in their vernacular to effectively communicate their opinions. Interviews are essential as structured interactions where the interviewer poses questions to the interviewee, and the interviewee provides answers that are crucial for the credibility of the research paper. Therefore, this study employed dialogical analysis, which examines the dialogues and conversations within a story (Seikkula, 2020). It focuses on the connections and exchanges between the writer and other characters, emphasizing the dynamics

and nuances of dialogue. It incorporates the heart and mind of the researchers, who strive to uncover and enrich the meanings of the phenomenon under study by addressing and responding to the needs of the participants, other researchers, and anticipated readers (Matusov et al., 2019).

Results

This study presents the results from the gathered data. The prisoner shared her all experiences that she remembered when the interviewer asked her various questions related to what happen to her behind the bars. The words coming from her feel the genuine love and loneliness on her everyday living as she stated that “...*the story of my life is beautiful*”.

What are the challenges experienced behind the bars?

There are a lot of challenges that she experienced in prison. She shared a good and bad experiences.

Good Experiences

Since she was admitted in the BuCor and sentenced her for 14 years, 8 months and 1 day, she has attended various religious groups and activities including bukas loob, cathedral king, spirit of love, and caritas. Different religious groups help her to win her faith and love in God. She also compared correctional and jail.

As she mentioned “...Correctional is better than jail”.

She reiterated that correctional reformation is good for PDLs. She also actively participating in Zumba Dance every day, activities and a member of senior citizens organization. She was very happy sharing her accomplishments inside the BuCor.

She stated that “...I have certificates of my completed vocational courses, membership and accomplishments in our activities here inside the prison”.

Explaining the process of joining activities and joining events were a big deal to them and feel the sense of accomplishments. In addition, one of the activities in BuCor which is mandatory every 6 in the evening is the activity like trivia, quotes of the day, prayers and entertainment.

She added that *"...I was able to give them trivia about coffee and we also won the entertainment. One of the guards was delighted, he gave 1 thousand pesos addition to our fund"*.

PDLs participate in activities or sports, dancing, as well as other livelihood initiatives. In addition, they expressed happiness regarding their physical activities due to the physiological, restorative, educational, mental, social, and artistic benefits.

Bad Experiences

On the other side of experiencing a good one, the prisoners also experienced challenges to survive. One of the primary challenges to them is the availability of foods is just ranch foods.

She stated that *"...There is nothing to eat here because of the type of management and the changes of directors"*.

She added that *"...There is no food to buy at the moment"*.

The type of management affects their lives inside the BuCor. They also experienced before that they have extra income from the visitors. They have a lot of rackets to selling of foods, beaded products, massage, manicure, pedicure and the others. However, their extra rackets stopped because of some changes in the management and they are strict in all prisoners.

She mentioned that ... *"We don't have extra income when they are strict with the inmates, the prisons are always searching now"*

She expressed her feelings that those who are incarcerated especially those who have no family to send food or food have faced the hardships of life.

The participant articulated that “... *You have to endure, persevere and believe in the Lord*”.

Everyone has their own calvary in life. It is in you how will you handle the situations to be able to survive in life. Challenges result in self-reflection as well as self-renewal, confidence in God, jail as a safe haven, and optimistic outlooks on life. The tasks were either beneficial or detrimental to the participants. In addition, the study found that in order to adapt to the jail environment, the participants opted to become subservient, accept the effects of their actions, keep themselves occupied, and engage in religious activities.

What are the coping mechanisms behind the bars?

There are a lot of things to do to cope up in all hardships experienced inside the BuCor. Missing the family, availability of foods, and management system of BuCor. However, all these challenges can surpass. Life inside the prison is difficult but if somebody can do it, everyone can also do it.

She stated that “...*Life here inside the prison is difficult but if they can do it, I can be strong even without a husband*”.

Her children grew up without a father and graduated on their own with no help from their mother. Three of her children just finished college and one is doing a doctorate. The lord has a purpose why she brought in that situation. The participant is so much thankful and cried why she sharing her all stories.

She mentioned that “...*I thank the Lord, only the Lord! he never left me!*”.

Moreover, the other challenge to her was when she missed her children, she just look at their pictures particularly in the time of pandemic that there is no visitation in the prison and no communication at all. She shared that she just pray for the health of them and be able to surpass this pandemic. Likewise, to survive in all hardships in food availability, they sell various products to earn extra money to have budget in all expenditure which is one of their coping mechanisms.

She shared that “...I sell fruits like papaya and pineapple. I slice in the early morning and deliver to my customers. This is where I got more expenses for my needs such as shampoo, coffee or help I could drop off at the church”.

All the money worked for you to live in prison, all expenditure and actions were need to pay. It's a big thing that she sell goods because she have extra income apart from what her children send to her.

She added that “...As a senior, I can no longer fetch water and lift, so I pay for the water for my laundry. When I pick up, the fee is 10 pesos, there is also a fee for queuing up for food, when you re-cook food, there is also a fee of 10 pesos, even heated water in a cup is 2 pesos, everything has a fee!”.

In addition, she shared that if you borrow money inside the jail, you have to pay within 24 days, that's their due date, then when you borrow, they immediately remove the interest, so it makes even more difficult for them. They didn't get enough food and we only ate ranch foods, so their life there was very difficult, especially that the participant is old and part of the senior citizens.

What are your learnings in life?

In terms of learning, she realized a lot and reflect on her doings as she participated in different activities in BuCor. She doesn't have any regrets in her life even though it was her decision to sell illegal drugs for her children so that they can survive. She have not used any kinds of drugs and only sold for her children to earn enough money for them to provide all their essential needs and wants in life.

As she mentioned “...I have learned a lot in life, from my decisions to prison which is the result of what I have done for me and my children”.

She proudly says that she can sacrifice her life for her children. She can do everything to live her children to the fullest. She also shared that what she couldn't do when she was free, she can do in prison. She added that every day she was having fear with the Lord almighty.

She stated that “...I learned to be patient, get along and be humble”.

The PDL mother learned to be patient, get along and be humble. She articulated the patience, unity and fellowship with others. She also have no violations in prison and she can do this by following the rules that are given to me because her life outside of prison is not the same as this.

She stated that “...*We always prayed and I followed the rules*”.

From this statement, it is very evident that she opens her arms and accept the things happen to her. She learned crochet (basic and advanced), baking, and dress making. She studied in prison for five years. She reiterated that it's good and she have studied in prison. This is the reformation of the bureau on our Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL) are proven that the sentenced prisoners can change and can do better for their lives. They have work assignments there, and those with sanctions are cleaning while she was a bead maker in BuCor. She experienced these kind of stuff that she didn't do outside the prison.

She also learned that “...*It was a wrong decision to sell drugs, but when I'm free, I won't look back on anything bad, I'll forget everything and I've moved on. When I am free, I will only take care of my grandchildren and children. I want to wash their clothes and cook their food*”.

In the hardships of life, she believe that it is the only way to alleviate poverty. She stated that “...*no regrets at first, everything at last*”. She thank the lord that he brought her to this situation, here in prison and she learned a lot from it.

As the inmate demonstrate sorrow for their past crimes, they begin to focus on their flaws and see their need to reform. The results indicate that informants have a high value for families and their friends and relatives, and that they strive to regain their former position as a family. These informants, who have a moderate degree of intimacy with family members, wish to restore a formerly happy household. Nonetheless, several inmates were becoming aware and noticed that just being locked up in prison had brought them closer to their family than ever before.

Moreover, widely accepted topics that emerged from actual experiences of seven incarcerated mothers have been drugs as a cause of prison sentences; incapability to undertake parenting

responsibilities; missing relatives and families; economic and inspiration provider; absence in the family physically; religious activities as coping mechanism; compassion coping; encompassing a good mindset through spirituality; having a pleasant family by turning into a better person and mother; a great future; and learning from “within the bars”.

How did you show your love with your children even you are a prisoner?

The are many ways to show love to children but her ways are incomparable. The actions and ambitions to her children showing unconditional love is the best thing that she can be proud of even she have been through in her life.

Actions Showing Unconditional Love

The actions of the PDL mother to show her unconditional love to her children was she wanted to give comfort to her children's lives. She wanted her children to go to good schools. She built a house with her income so that her children would not be separated. She also fixed the land of her parents so that she could say that they have their own property and her children are not separately. They are together in their own house. However, not everything that was planned went according to everyone's wishes. But one thing is for sure, she does her best to live her children.

She stated that “...*I raised all my children*”.

Ambitions For Children

In terms of ambitions, she has many and good dreams for her children, she has high ambitions for them. She did what was forbidden by the law, so that she could provide for their needs. One of it is to finish their studies.

As she mentioned that “...*Be able to graduate from a good school, get a good job and have a good family without being separated like what happened to me*”.

She wanted that her children be able to graduate from a good school, be able to find decent work and have a good and bonded family without being separated like what happened to her. Education is the only thing that she can pass on her children.

She believes that “...*Even if I disappear from the world, all of you will live well because I did my obligation properly even though it was difficult and forbidden*”.

In addition, she always tells to her co-PDLs what her children finished and achieved in life. She showed the pictures of her children why she telling all her stories with her co-PDLs. They envy her because even though she was in prison, her children grew up well and finished school. Consequently, life will be fine. She was very proud of her children. She can proudly that one of them will become a doctor of philosophy. She can raise the flag and be proud of all she sacrificed for the children.

Discussions

The results shed light on both the positive and negative experiences of PDLs. This study is limited to a mother of 7 children who is also a senior citizen and imprisoned for almost 15 years. These experiences provide insights into the challenges faced by the participant and her coping strategies. Religious organizations and activities played a significant role in providing comfort and support to the participants. Her mentioned their participation in various religious gatherings, such as bukas loob, cathedral monarch, spirit of love, and caritas, which helped them maintain their faith and experience God's love in a meaningful way. This finding aligns with previous research that highlights the importance of faith and spirituality in offering comfort, optimism, and a sense of purpose to prisoners (Flores-Barolo & Vicente, 2019).

Furthermore, the participant expressed satisfaction with the correctional facilities compared to incarceration. She believed that PDLs would benefit from correctional reformation. Engaging in activities like Zumba Dance, being part of senior citizens' organizations, and participating in various activities within the penitentiary brought a sense of achievement and joy to the participants. Additionally, participating in activities or watching television reduced misconduct among PDLs (Vuk & Dolezal, 2020). These activities and sports events are modestly and positively associated with the mental and relaxation aspects of physical activities for PDLs (Baldonado et al., 2022).

However, the findings also highlight the barriers and challenges faced by prisoners, including the availability of food. The participant noted that changes in management and shifts in directors had an impact on the food situation within the prison. Both the variety of food options and the ability to purchase additional food were limited. This finding aligns with previous research that emphasizes the significance of adequate nutrition and dietary security for the well-being and overall health of prisoners (Flores-Barolo & Vicente, 2019). Additionally, the participants mentioned the strictness of prison administration hindering their participation in income-generating activities. They faced restrictions when selling food and other products, resulting in a loss of supplemental income. This finding highlights the influence of management procedures and regulations on detainees' access to economic opportunities and their ability to support themselves financially (Flores-Barolo & Vicente, 2019).

The study also illuminates the coping mechanisms employed by the participant to navigate the challenges of the prison environment. These coping mechanisms reveal strategies for addressing issues such as missing family, limited food availability, and the management system of the BuCor. One of the coping mechanisms mentioned by the participating mother is finding strength in the harsh prison environment. Despite the absence of her family and the challenges she faces, she expresses her determination to be courageous and overcome obstacles. This resilience and inner strength align with previous research that emphasizes the significance of psychological fortitude and the ability to adapt to challenging circumstances in prison settings (Teng & Gordon, 2021).

Moreover, the participant finds comfort and strength in her faith in God. She expresses gratitude to the Lord for never abandoning her and attributes her ability to cope with the challenges of prison life to her faith. This finding is consistent with studies (Gueta et al., 2022) that highlight the importance of religious beliefs and practices in providing emotional support, optimism, and a sense of purpose to incarcerated individuals. Additionally, the participant describes her experience in engaging in entrepreneurial activities, such as selling fruits and other items, to supplement her income and meet her needs. This adaptable coping strategy showcases resourcefulness and a proactive approach to overcoming financial difficulties in a prison setting. Larroulet et al. (2023) found that involvement in business ventures and income-generating endeavors can contribute to the well-being, autonomy, and financial stability of detainees.

Furthermore, the findings underscore the financial burdens endured by prisoners. The participant discusses various costs and fees for essential amenities, including water, food lines, and water heating. Obtaining money within the prison system comes with interest and due dates, exacerbating their financial difficulties. The results emphasize the financial burden experienced by inmates and the challenges they face in meeting their basic needs in prison. This is consistent with previous research that highlights the economic vulnerability and financial struggles of incarcerated individuals (Masson, 2019).

Additionally, the participant demonstrates self-awareness and introspection regarding her past decisions, particularly her involvement in drug sales. Despite the regretful nature of her actions, she focuses on the lessons learned and her opportunity for self-improvement and redemption. The participant emphasizes her sacrifice and devotion to her children, indicating her willingness to do anything to provide for them. This demonstrates the strong bond between incarcerated parents and their children, as well as their desire for improved conditions for their families. Existing literature supports this finding, showing that incarcerated individuals often prioritize the well-being of their families and express regret for any harm their actions may have caused (Kendall et al., 2020).

Moreover, the participant describes her engagement in various activities and educational opportunities within the institution. She highlights the positive aspects of her prison experience, such as learning crochet, cookery, and dressmaking. This finding aligns with research that emphasizes the importance of providing vocational and educational opportunities in correctional settings to enhance prisoners' skills, self-esteem, and prospects for successful reintegration into society (Villanueva & Gayoles, 2019). The participant also mentions religious activities as a coping mechanism during her time in detention. This is consistent with existing literature, which recognizes the significance of spirituality and religious practices in fostering resilience, personal development, and a sense of purpose among PDLs (Guitering et al., 2018). The data also reveals the participant's determination to leave her past behind and focus on a promising future upon her release. She expresses a desire to provide and care for her grandchildren and children, demonstrating her commitment to restoring a stable and peaceful family life. This highlights the

importance of family reunification and the transformative potential of prison for individuals seeking to rebuild their relationships and lead productive lives (Villanueva & Gayoles, 2019).

Furthermore, the findings emphasize the mother's unwavering love and devotion to her children despite her incarceration. She took various steps to ensure their well-being and pursued goals for their future. The participant's actions demonstrate her unconditional love for her children. By providing them with a home and acquiring property to keep them together, she prioritized their comfort and education. Her determination to meet her children's needs and ensure they receive a quality education showcases her commitment to their well-being. Existing literature emphasizes the importance of parental affection and support in shaping children's lives, even in challenging circumstances such as incarceration (Eddy et al., 2019). Additionally, the participant's aspirations for her children's success and happiness are reflected in her hopes for them (Wilderman et al., 2018). She desires that they graduate from reputable schools, secure respectable employment, and form strong and united families. Her hopes for her children's future reflect her belief in the transformative impact of education and their ability to overcome the challenges they face. The positive influence of parental goals and desires on children's academic achievement and overall well-being is well-documented (Nomaguchi & Milkie, 2020). Consequently, the participant takes pride in her role as a mother and finds joy in her children's accomplishments, even though physically separated from them. This underscores the enduring bond between incarcerated parents and their children and the significance of family support in the lives of children (Hardy, 2018).

Conclusion

In the recollections of the PDL mother, she highlights the challenges faced within the BuCor, coping strategies for survival, valuable life lessons, and various ways she expresses her love for her children. In response to the interviewer's questions about her time behind bars, the PDL shared her experiences, conveying genuine emotions of love and sadness in her daily life. She has encountered both positive and negative experiences that have tested her resilience and determination within the prison walls. The absence of family, limited food access, and the management system of the BuCor pose significant obstacles, but she firmly believes that these

challenges can be overcome. Life in prison is harsh, but her story serves as an inspiration that anyone can persevere.

Moreover, the PDL mother actively participated in a variety of BuCor events, which allowed her to gain valuable insights and reflect on her actions. While she made the choice to sell drugs to provide for her children's basic needs, she has no regrets about the sacrifices she made. Her unique ways of expressing love for her children are unparalleled. Despite the hardships she has faced, her greatest source of pride lies in her unwavering love and devotion to her children. She firmly believes that nothing is impossible with the Lord's help. She sees every experience as having a purpose and encourages gratitude in all circumstances, knowing that the Lord has great plans for everyone. Imperfection and mistakes are part of being human, but the important thing is to learn from them. Let us strive to do what is right and humane, and share goodness with others.

The BuCor and/or the government should allocate sufficient budget to meet the essential needs of PDLs, ensuring their survival. The establishment of a standardized policy for communication between PDLs and their families, friends, and colleagues is crucial. It is also important to continue organizing engaging activities for PDLs. For PDLs, perseverance, trust in the Lord, and holding onto dreams and love for family are essential. For those who are free, let us learn from the experiences of others and make choices that will leave no room for regrets. Future studies could explore the experiences of fathers in similar circumstances, comparing them with the present study using qualitative methods. Additionally, examining the perspectives of officials involved in handling PDLs could provide valuable insights and understanding.

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