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**BEYOND THE PRISONS OF STRESS: EXPLORING THE STRESS  
AND COPING STRATEGIES OF THE JAIL OFFICERS OF THE  
BUREAU OF JAIL MANAGEMENT AND PENOLOGY**

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**ABSTRACT**

The study was conducted to explore the perceived stress levels and the overall Filipino coping strategies of the jail officers of the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology. Utilizing the G\*Power application to determine the number of respondents and purposeful sampling for the qualitative phase, a total of 103 respondents were gathered from five (5) selected jails within the National Capital Region and ten (10) participants for the qualitative phase. Using the overall mean and Pearson Correlation Coefficient, results from the quantitative phase indicated that the overall Filipino coping strategy of the jail officers was Religiosity and the perceived stress was at a moderate level. Furthermore, there was no significant relationship between the overall coping strategy and the perceived stress levels. For the qualitative aspect, the themes emerged were Expectation and Realities of the Career, Appraising Stress, Primary Appraisal of Stress/Internal and External Demands, Primary Appraisal of Stress, Knowledge on Coping Mechanisms, Secondary Appraisal, Beyond/Breaking Free from the Prisons of Stress. In conclusion, Religiosity was the overall Filipino coping strategy of the jail officers and their perceived stress levels was at a moderate level. As an output of the study, a mental health program was proposed for the jail officers.

Keywords: stress, coping strategies, jail officers

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## INTRODUCTION

Jail and correctional officials are in charge of prisons, and they keep a tight grip on everything. They are in responsibility of keeping the peace, supervising inmates, and enforcing the law, among other things. Because prison officials are required to work around the clock, they frequently work rotating shifts that include weekends and holidays.

According to Chamberlain and Hompe (2020), officials in municipal and city jails are prone to huge levels of stress in their everyday work. The amassing of stress comes from their very nature of work which includes interacting with the detainees, their environment and the consequential home life. Various types of stress have been reported to have an impact on psychological and physical well-being, ranging from daily pressures to major life events (Heizomi et al., 2018).

As discussed by the Mental Health Foundation (2021), stress is the body's natural response against pressure. Each individual deals stress in their own ways. Our capacity to cope depends usually on our genetics, life events and other circumstances. Too much exposure to stress can cause negative effects in our daily lives. It can leave an individual be in a state of fight and flight for a long time which can be overwhelming and not be able to cope. This can also affect the mental and physical health of an individual in the long run.

As stated by Pittaro (2017), corrections officers who operate in highly volatile and dangerous circumstances must learn how to manage stress. Increased amounts of stress can have a negative impact on an officer's work and personal life. Working in overcrowded, understaffed jails is one of the leading sources of stress for correctional employees. Officers are frequently required to work forced overtime and shifts that are not always constant under such circumstances. Furthermore, officers are constantly confronted with perceived and actual threats of physical assault. To make matters worse, continual and ever-changing administrative duties lead to conflict with coworkers and/or bosses, which add to the stress level.

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According to Good Therapy (2021), these are the approaches that individuals regularly apply to aid in managing challenging or problematic emotions during stress and/or trauma. Coping strategies can aid people in regulating emotions during stressful situations while sustaining their well-being. Algorani & Gupta (2020) discussed that the mobilization of thoughts and behaviors to control external and internal events which can cause stress to an individual are known as coping mechanisms. This is a concept utilized to differentiate mindful and premeditated mobilization of actions from 'defense mechanisms,' which are unconscious or subconscious adaptive reactions intended at decreasing or enduring stress.

Lastly, Fort Myers (2021) indicated that jail officers are in charge of keeping order and security in our country's prisons. A jail officer's primary responsibility is to safely escort inmates in and out of their cells, as well as when they visit facilities outside the jail, such as medical clinics or courtrooms. A jail officer's key goal is to prevent fights, escapes, and other types of disturbances. This include patrolling on rounds, searching cells for signs of security breaches, looking for contraband, and reviewing surveillance footage. Correctional officers are obliged to preserve accurate and detailed records, including any unusual incidents that occurred during their shift. Viotti (2016) conducted a qualitative study of 28 correctional officers on work-related stress. The officers were at a significant risk of stress, according to the findings. The most stressful aspect of the officers' job, according to them, was their interaction with the inmates.

In this sense, the researcher aimed to determine the perceived stress levels and the overall Filipino coping strategy of the jail officers. In addition, the study also investigated the relationship of the perceived stress and the Filipino coping strategies and the factors contributing to the stress of the jail officers.

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## MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized a mixed methods research design, specifically using the sequential-explanatory mixed methods research design. The study also utilized questionnaires namely: Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and the Filipino Coping Strategies Scale (FCSS) to collect data from 103 jail officers from selected jails through simple random sampling. A semi-structured interview guide was created and used to gather data from 10 participants from the quantitative part through purposeful sampling. Using sample post-hoc analysis through the G\*Power application, it was determined that sample size of 103 respondents achieved a statistical power of .999 with a large size effect, making the sample size sufficient for the study. Overall mean and Pearson Correlation Coefficient was used to analyze the quantitative results. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was also used to analyze the qualitative data results.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Table 1: Summary on the Filipino Coping Strategies**

Domains	Mean	Interpretation	Rank
<b>Religiosity (Pagkarelihiyoso)</b>	<b>3.58</b>	<b>Always</b>	<b>1</b>
Problem Solving (Pagtugon)	3.56	Always	2
Cognitive Reappraisal (Pagsusuri)	3.17	Most of the time	3
Relaxation/Recreation (Paglilibang)	3.13	Most of the time	4
Social Support (Paghingi ng tulong)	2.64	Most of the time	5
Tolerance (Pagtitiis)	2.50	Most of the time	6
Overactivity (Pagmamalabis)	2.31	Sometimes	7
Emotional Release (Paglabas ng Saloobin)	1.84	Sometimes	8
Substance Use (Pagbibisyo)	1.29	Never	9
<b>Overall Coping</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>Most of the time</b>	

Legend: 1.00 – 1.49 Never, 1.50 – 2.49 Sometimes, 2.50 – 3.49 Most of the time and 3.50 – 4 Always

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Based on Table 1, the domain Religiosity was the overall Filipino coping strategies of the jail officers with the mean of 3.58 interpreted as Always. Problem Solving obtained a mean score of 3.56 interpreted as Always. Cognitive Reappraisal attained a mean score of 3.17 which is interpreted as Most of the time while the domain Relaxation/Recreation got a mean score of 3.13 also interpreted as Most of the time. Social Support attained a mean score of 2.64 and Tolerance got 2.50, both are interpreted as Most of the time respectively. Moreover, Overactivity obtained a mean of 2.31 and Emotional Release with 1.84 interpreted as Sometimes. The domain Substance Use attained a mean of 1.29 interpreted as Never. Lastly, the overall coping of the jail officers got a mean of 2.67 interpreted as Most of the time.

The results imply that despite the stress experienced in their career, the respondents engage in religious actions such as having the time to pray, trusting all things to God, considering own's fate and God's will and application of religious ideas or behaviors to problem-solving in order to prevent or mitigate the negative emotional consequences of stressful life events. Furthermore, most of the respondents believe and held on that God will help them in many ways in regards to confront stress.

To support this, Fatima and colleagues (2022) argued that one of the available instruments for dealing with stress and the undesirable consequences of life difficulties and illnesses is religious and spiritual coping mechanisms. Maladaptive coping through religion is associated with increased levels of stress, while proper religious coping is linked to decreased levels of stress. Rotas and Cahapay (2021) amassed 32 Filipino students in a study placing emphasis on coping and remote learning amidst the pandemic. Online survey was used in order to obtain data which was then analyzed through content analysis. Appropriate space and time, gathering of resources, support from friends, managing of time self-regulation and praying were the coping strategies utilized by the participants.

To further discuss the importance of coping mechanisms to combat stress, prior to the researcher's knowledge, there were no other studies in regards to stress and coping strategies of

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jail officers at present, but results from other studies shared some similarities that the utilization of coping mechanisms can help relieve stress levels, as discussed by Good Therapy (2021) and Algorani & Gupta (2020). This was understood that the use of coping strategies can be beneficial to an individual experiencing stress in certain situations.

**Table 2. Perceived Stress Levels among the Jail Officers**

Item Statements	Mean	Interpretation
<b>P.1</b> In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	1.71	Sometimes
<b>P.2</b> In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	1.52	Sometimes
<b>P.3</b> In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?	1.92	Sometimes
<b>P.4</b> In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?	1.22	Almost Never
<b>P.5</b> In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?	1.45	Almost Never
<b>P.6</b> In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	1.52	Sometimes
<b>P.7</b> In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?	1.63	Sometimes
<b>P.8</b> In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?	1.78	Sometimes
<b>P.9</b> In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?	1.50	Sometimes
<b>P.10</b> In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	1.45	Almost Never
<b>OVERALL PERCEIVED STRESS</b>	<b>15.70</b>	<b>Moderate Perceived Stress</b>

Legend: 0 – 0.9 Never 1.00 – 1.49 Almost Never, 1.50 – 2.49 Sometimes, 2.50 – 3.49 Fairly Often and 3.50 – 4 Very Often

Based on Table 2, then overall perceived stress of the jail officers obtained an overall mean score of 15.70 indicating that the respondents have Moderate Perceived Stress levels. Item statement “In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?” obtained a mean

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score of 1.92 interpreted as Sometimes and item statement "In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?" attained a mean of 1.78 also interpreted as Sometimes. From the data represented, a moderate stress level is still manageable. Also, it is required in order for us to move forward in our own life. Stress can help you make positive, beneficial changes. By taking responsibility for how we respond to difficult situations and everyday obstacles, we may turn stress into a constructive force. Moreover, Greenberg (2016) said that one can develop oneself and enhance their stress management talents by exposing oneself to a modest level of stress that one can master. It was similar to how a vaccine containing a small quantity of the bug can protect them against contracting the sickness. A modest stressor (such as relocating event breaking a limb) may help people develop new abilities (such as sociability or patience) that they can utilize later in life.

**Table 3. Test of Significant Relationship between the level of Perceived Stress and the overall Filipino coping strategies**

Domain	r value	p value	Decision	Interpretation
Cognitive Reappraisal	-.341**	.000	Reject Ho	Moderate Negative
Problem Solving	-.247*	.012	Reject Ho	Weak Negative
Religiosity	-.282*	.004	Reject Ho	Weak Negative
Emotional Release	-.202*	.040	Reject Ho	Weak Positive
Overactivity	.130	.192	Retain Ho	No Relationship
Relaxation/Recreation	-.087	.380	Retain Ho	No Relationship
Substance Use	.323**	.001	Reject Ho	Moderate Positive
Social Support	-.033	.737	Retain Ho	No Relationship
Tolerance	-.006	.953	Retain Ho	No Relationship
Overall Filipino Coping	-.055	.579	Retain Ho	No Relationship

Legend (r-value): .70 or Higher-Very Strong, .40 - .69 Strong, .30 - .39 moderate, .20 - .29 weak, .19 and below Negligible

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Based on Table 3, a correlation analysis through Pearson's  $r$  determined that there was no association among the over-all Filipino coping strategy and perceived stress among the participants. The null hypothesis was not rejected since the computed  $p$ -value of .579 was greater than the level of significance of .05. This is also true to the specific Filipino coping strategies of overactivity ( $p=.192$ ), relaxation ( $p=.380$ ), social support ( $p=.737$ ), and tolerance ( $p=.953$ ) as the calculated values are all greater than the level of significance. It can be said that the use of overactivity, relaxation, social support and tolerance as Filipino coping strategies do not tend to be associated with their perceived level of stress.

Moreover, since the calculated  $p$ -values for cognitive reappraisal ( $p=.000$ ), problem solving ( $p=.012$ ), religiosity ( $p=.004$ ), emotional release ( $p=.040$ ), and substance use ( $p=.001$ ) are all lesser than the level of significance of .05, the decision is rejecting the null hypothesis. Therefore, the utilization of cognitive reappraisal, problem solving, religiosity, emotional release and substance use as Filipino coping strategies. Hence, it may imply that the use of cognitive reappraisal, problem-solving, religiosity, emotional release help the respondents cope from the stress they experience.

According to the findings, there is no direct association between perceived stress levels and respondents' general Filipino coping mechanism. Moreover, the Filipino coping strategies Overactivity, Relaxation/Recreation, Social Support and Tolerance exceed the level of significance which indicates that there is no correlation with perceived stress levels. However, the coping strategies Problem Solving, Cognitive Reappraisal, Religiosity, Emotional Release and Substance Use are all lesser than the level of significance which implies that these coping strategies are related with the perceived stress levels of the respondents. It indicates that when the respondents use these coping strategies to combat stress, their perceived levels of stress decreases and it can be said that these strategies are effective enough to confront stress in their line of work.

To support this, Tamang, Rai, and Mao (2020) studied perceived stress, stressors, and coping mechanisms in 280 undergraduate health professional students. The stress levels of the

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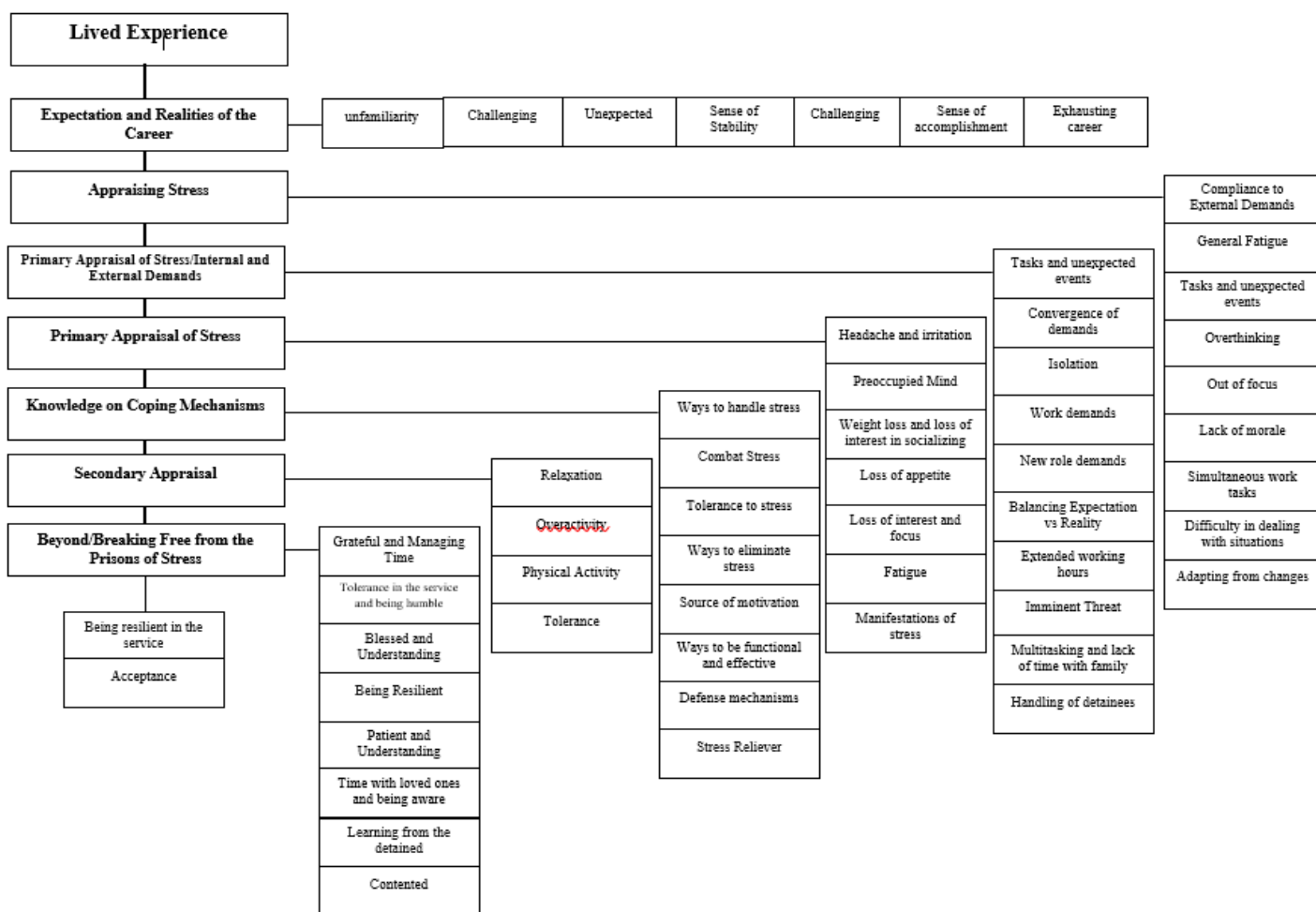
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 study population were higher than those of typical college students. Participants reported preferring adaptive coping mechanisms over avoidant coping mechanisms. There was a link between avoidant coping and reported stress, but not between adaptive coping and perceived stress.

Figure 1. Themes and Their Respective Subordinate Themes



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Figure 1 shows the superordinate themes and their subordinate themes taken from the statements of the participants. In order to find out the lived experience of the jail officers, seven guide interview questions were used and was analyzed through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis.

To support this, Buck et al. (2021) piloted a study among criminal justice practitioners with lived experience in the United Kingdom. The study was exciting to read since it revealed the contrasting emotional experiences of a rising number of people working in the criminal justice voluntary sector through focus group interviews. According to the findings, "user participation" labor in this sector may be both safe and exclusionary, shameful and unstable.

From the participants' statements, it can be said that even if the job is stressful and draining, the officers need to accept the roles of a jail officer and must live the mandate given to them which is to aid in the rehabilitation of the Persons Deprived of Liberty (PDL). It can also be seen that whatever the harsh experiences they have gone through, the participants have to accept it and take it as their lessons for their development as officers. Most of the participants did not regret entering the bureau despite the difference of profession and it is not really easy in the service of jail management and penology. Officers learned to be resilient and must humble themselves to strive hard while carrying the rank of Jail Officer due to the fact that being resilient and humble is a characteristic of a uniformed personnel maintaining public safety for the Filipino people.

However, it can be observed that the participants utilize coping mechanisms which can help them relieve themselves from the stress they experienced in their career. In line with this, Koh et al. (2015) conducted a study on the prevalence of burnout, psychological disorders, and the use of coping techniques among palliative care practitioners. The findings revealed that psychological morbidity and burnout were common in the comforting care community, emphasizing the significance of limiting extended hours of work and employing stress-reduction techniques. Smith et al. (2015) studied 424 undergraduates' coping mechanisms and

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psychological outcomes on personal resiliency. According to the findings, enhanced personal resiliency is associated with extensive use of task-oriented coping, which leads in adaptive outcomes. In participants with low personal resiliency, proactive task-oriented coping was related with higher negative affect.

To the researcher's knowledge, local studies regarding jail officers are limited in the Philippines. Literature on jail officers are more likely to be found in western countries. Also, majority of the studies on uniformed personnel are about firefighters and police officers. Data collected from international studies might not be applicable to our country due to the different factors to be considered such as culture, experiences and interests that are different from those of the jail officers from other countries.

As an output, a proposed mental health program composed of four areas of focus: Awareness on Mental Health, Acknowledging Stress and the Use of Coping Mechanisms, Workplace Wellness Within the Jails and Public Awareness on Jail Officers. In regards to this proposed program, this will help the jail officers gain more knowledge on the importance of mental health and how to take care of it. This will also help acknowledge their stress and engage them in discovering and using various coping mechanisms in order to eliminate their stress and their stressors. Since wellness in the workplace is much needed, this can also aid in combating stress not just by the incentives the officers received, but by acknowledging their individual accomplishments and others can also help them relieve of their stress and make them more motivated in order for them to do their responsibilities in the bureau. Awareness of the public regarding the life of a jail officer is also added so the general public can gain insights on the duties of a jail officer and their mandate. This will also help applicants who are willing to join the service to prepare themselves before dedicating their lives for public service and safety for the Filipino people.

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## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the aforementioned results of the study, the subsequent conclusions were formulated:

1. That the overall Filipino coping strategy is Religiosity. It can be concluded that the respondents engage in religious activities such as praying, relying on God, and attending church because the Philippines is a religious country. And that Substance Use ranks the lowest mean score among the coping strategies and this implies that the respondents engage less in using and consuming substances that can relieve stress and at the same time, can damage certain parts of the body and may worsen the stress experienced.
2. That the jail officers, despite the heavy workloads and multiple responsibilities within the bureau, can manage their stress since their perceived stress levels are Moderate Perceived Stress and from the statements that emerged from the interviews.
3. That there is no relationship between the perceived stress levels and the overall Filipino coping strategy of the jail officers. The scale's domains, Overactivity, Relaxation/Recreation, Social Support plus Tolerance are also not associated with the perceived levels of stress. The domains Cognitive Reappraisal, Problem Solving, Religiosity, Emotional Release and Substance Use are associated with their perceived stress levels. Furthermore, problem-solving, religiosity, emotional release, substance use, and stress perception all have weak to moderate significant associations.
4. That the life and career of a Jail Officer are hard and stressful, but also utilize coping strategies in order to eliminate stress.
5. That the proposed mental health program is essential and is a great way to promote mental health among Jail Officers.

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## RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the bureau may take initiatives towards guiding the jail officers to maintain and improve their mental health with the use of coping mechanisms. The reported perceived stress levels were moderately stressed, meaning the jail officers can still manage their stress despite the work and tasks assigned to them. The Jail Wardens, Psychometricians, and Psychologists Officers of each city, district, and municipal jail. By acknowledging and recognizing their hard work and service, this can also help reduce the stress of the officers. Upon recruitment, the bureau can also add more tests in the psychological aspect of the recruit to see if they can withstand the hardships and stresses of the bureau.

Since the mental health of the jail officers is important to the bureau in order for the officers to effectively and efficiently render their services, the jails may encourage collaborative efforts to their respective Regional Headquarters, National Headquarters of the BJMP, the Department of Interior and Local Government and mental health professionals to maximize their efforts for the benefit of the jail officers. The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology and its institution, the National Jail Management, and Penology, may utilize the proposed mental health program to ensure that it fits well. Other agencies from the tri-bureau may also use the program as a basis for the formulating of policies and services to further improve the mental health of the uniformed personnel.

Future researchers may utilize other tools that can also measure stress and coping mechanisms or any framework or model to determine the stress levels and coping strategies of the jail officers. They may also use this study as reference for future research regarding the jail officers of the bureau.

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