

Behind the Badge: Lived Experience of Drug Enforcement Agents in Law Enforcement

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Abstract. The study delved into the real-life encounters of drug enforcement agents. It documented informant experiences in their duties, addressing related issues, and identifying needs to enhance their capabilities. The research employed a phenomenological approach within the qualitative methodology. Ten drug enforcement agents underwent in-depth interviews and focus group discussions guided by validated open-ended questions. The study commenced at Guihulngan City Police Station. Transcribed statements were analyzed to extract themes from individual experiences. Ten themes emerged: "The Windtalkers," "Service to Humanity's Value," "Lack of Logistic Support," "Challenges of High-Value Targets," "Race Against Time," "Inevitable Need for Prayer," "Collective Police Efforts," "Ingenuity in Achievements," "Training's Role in Victory," and "Logistics' Role in Warfare." There is a need to bolster support for law enforcement units, offer equitable training opportunities, emphasize effective law enforcement, encourage criminologists and researchers to contribute to enforcement practices, and encourage community cooperation in supporting law enforcement efforts.

Keywords: Drug enforcement; Informant experiences; Law enforcement support.

1.0 Introduction

The pervasive issue of illicit drug sales and consumption is deeply concerning in every nation. This phenomenon spurs global leaders to initiate significant reforms in crime management, implement stringent adjustments in sentencing protocols, and engage in an intensive campaign against it (Maurer & King, 2002). The "war on drugs" represents a progressively forceful endeavor in drug control (Taylor et al., 2009), driven by the fact that individuals under the influence of drugs and alcohol often engage in criminal activities, thereby increasing their likelihood of encountering the law enforcement system (Maurer & King, 2002; Hodgins & Lightfoot, 1988).

Drug law enforcement unquestionably stands as a pivotal element within global drug policy aimed at countering the illicit use of drugs. Since the early 1980s, several nations have embarked on an extensive and costly "War on Drugs" campaign. Estimates indicate that the United States has expended over \$300 billion from state and federal resources designated for drug-related operations and initiatives (Moore, 2008). Austria allocated \$1.3 billion toward proactive drug control strategies (Skolnick, 1994), the Netherlands channeled \$185 billion from its This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).

resources into drug control policies (Caulkins & Reuter, 2010), and numerous countries' economies have suffered due to the repercussions of illegal drug trafficking and consumption (Howard, 2000).

The Philippines has pledged its support as a signatory to the primary United Nations (U.N.) drug control treaties, according to the Asian Network of People who Use Drugs (ANPUD) and the International Network of People who Use Drugs (INPUD). These conventions are designed to establish regulatory measures for certain psychoactive substances to restrict their availability and consumption solely for medical or scientific intentions. The Philippines employs the Comprehensive Dangerous Drugs Act of 2002 (R.A. 9165) and Executive Order No. 15 as key instruments to combat illicit drugs. These legislative measures created the inter-agency committee on anti-illegal drugs (ICAD) and an anti-illegal drug task force, respectively, to effectively handle the drug problem in the nation.

Despite its adherence to these conventions stringent measures under the act and executive order, there are still around 1.3 million drug users in the Philippines. Methamphetamine, cannabis, and inhalants are the primary illicit substances of concern, per the Dangerous Drugs Board's 2014 statistics. Over a million individuals surrendered during the inception of Operation Tokhang from July 2016 to January 31, 2017, not including the thousands who lost their lives during the operation.

President Rodrigo R. Duterte started an unprecedented anti-drug campaign in the Philippines upon assuming office in 2016. The drug problem in the country has been intricately associated with police enforcement and criminal behavior. President Duterte committed to addressing the widespread issue of illicit drugs, which he saw as causing significant harm to Filipino households and hurting the country's younger generation. In response, the government implemented rigorous measures by mobilizing the Philippine National Police (PNP) and local government units throughout the country. Following the directives of the President, law enforcement officials conducted comprehensive door-to-door operations, taking the responsibility of enforcing the law (Estacio et al., 2019).

This stark reality of the Philippines' drug dilemma directly impacts law enforcement, especially drug enforcement agents. More disconcerting is people's inventive strategies to continue drug use while evading authorities, employing drug consumption as a tactical element in their daily lives. Lasco (2017) suggests that a sense of hypocrisy and perceived injustice, stemming from personal experiences, shapes their view of law enforcers, whom they label as "kalaban" (enemies). Drug users' antagonism toward the police fundamentally acknowledges their role as adversaries in a war against them.

This research focuses on a significant aspect within a city classified as a fifth (5th) class, such as Guihulngan. Within this context, it is disconcerting to observe that out of the total population of 95,969 individuals (based on the 2015 census conducted by the Commission on Population), a substantial 1,388 individuals are implicated in illicit drug activities. Surprisingly, despite this notable involvement in illegal drug operations, only 106 drug-related individuals are currently detained at the Guihulngan District Jail. This stark disparity between the number of individuals associated with illegal drug activities and the relatively small proportion of incarcerated drug offenders underscores a significant discrepancy within the city's approach to addressing drug-related issues. This discrepancy prompts a critical examination of the existing strategies, enforcement measures, and overall effectiveness of the legal system's response to the pervasive challenge of illegal drug operations in Guihulngan.

Drug law enforcement involves the efforts of law enforcement agencies to enforce laws related to illegal drugs, including investigating drug trafficking, making arrests, and prosecuting offenders. Several studies have considered various drug law enforcement programs, interdictions, and operations involving diverse methods, strategies, and approaches. For instance, Operation Just Cause (OJC) is an example of U.S. intervention aimed at General Manuel Noriega of Panama, charged with illegal drug trafficking in the United States (Brady et al., 2010). Similarly, the Operation Pressure Point (OPP) of the New York City Police Department is a proactive endeavor designed to supplement its predominantly reactive system, disrupting drug traffic expanding on the streets of Manhattan's Lower East Side (Letwin, 1990). The two-year investigation known as Operation Adam Bomb (OAB), led by the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), with significant contributions from various entities such as the Netherlands Regional Police Force Flevoland, prosecutors from the International Legal Assistance Center North

East Netherlands, the DOJ's Office of International Affairs, the United States Postal Service, and the Scottish Crime and Drug Enforcement Agency, is cited in the DEA report on Performance Budget Congressional Submission (2014). Another notable initiative is PROJECT DARE, the collaboration between enforcement agents and schools aimed at helping children resist drugs at the street level (Hayeslip, 1989).

Several studies have also sought to evaluate the efficacy of various techniques and strategies. Mazerolle, Soole, and Rombouts (2007) performed a comprehensive meta-analysis to assess the effectiveness of street-level drug law enforcement programs. Weisburd and Eck (2004) use a conceptual framework to analyze and differentiate four distinct drug law enforcement strategies: community-wide policing activities, problem-oriented policing activities, hotspots policing, and conventional, traditional ways. According to a study conducted by Mazerolle, Soole, and Rombouts (2007), the findings from eleven meta-analyses revealed that drug law enforcement initiatives had a noteworthy and favorable influence on drug-related calls for service, crimes against individuals, and overall calls for service.

Further research indicates that law enforcement is an exceptionally demanding profession, primarily stemming from various internal factors within the organizational structure. These include role ambiguity, role conflict, insufficient supervisor support, a need for more group cohesiveness, and limited opportunities for advancement (Gaines & Jermier, 1983; LaVan & Welsch, 1981). The absence of essential resources such as equipment, mobility, budget, and tools poses a significant hurdle, impacting the proficiency and efficiency of officers in executing their responsibilities. These logistical elements distinctly enhance the efficiency of police service when they are provided and sustained (Brady et al., 2010).

The drug enforcement program and prior law enforcement studies have yet to pinpoint a foolproof strategy to ensure effective crime reduction. Increasingly, scholars concur that the mere enlargement of conventional policing methods will yield minimal or no impact on crime rates. They posit that for police departments to address crime and citizens' apprehensions better, fresh policing strategies must be devised. These gaps serve as the focus of this study, aiming to substantiate that the effectiveness of these strategies is not solely contingent on governmental capabilities but crucially hinges on the competence of individual agents to implement these programs and approaches.

This research study is built upon three key theories: social control theory, expectancy theory, and routine activity theory. These frameworks are pivotal in investigating the experiences of drug enforcement agents during their operational duties. Travis Hirschi's Social Control Theory (1969) illuminates delinquency by proposing that individuals abstain from deviant behaviors due to their societal connections. These connections involve attachment to conventional figures, commitment to objectives, involvement in mainstream activities, and belief in societal norms. These internal factors foster conformity, acting as deterrents against deviant behavior. The theory explores commitment, involvement, and belief, which collectively discourage participation in criminal acts.

Moreover, Vroom's Expectancy Theory (1964) suggests that individuals make choices based on perceptions to maximize pleasure and minimize discomfort. This theory is relevant in work motivation, focusing on valence, instrumentality, and expectancy within the VIE model. Cohen and Felson's Routine Activity Theory (1979) examines crime as a contextual event shaped by spatial and temporal factors. The theory emphasizes potential offenders, suitable targets, and capable guardians. It underscores how these elements influence criminal opportunities. These theories underpin the study's exploration of drug enforcement agents' experiences. The research aims to reveal insights into their actions, motivations, and challenges within their roles, illuminating the intricate dynamics of law enforcement engagement.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate the direct experiences of drug enforcement agents in Guihulngan City to reveal the changes and advancements in their responsibilities as operatives involved in drug enforcement. Furthermore, the research aimed to get valuable perspectives on the drug problem from those often known as "drug dragnet makers." The research suggests that by empowering and providing government assistance to law enforcement officers, especially in addressing their professional needs, the efficiency of drug law enforcement may be improved. In the present setting, the study sought to investigate the following research questions: What are the experiences of the drug enforcement agents throughout their responsibilities? How do

these drug enforcement agents effectively address and manage the issues and concerns during their duties? What are the requirements of drug enforcement agents to improve their competence?

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The phenomenological approach, guided by Husserl's (1970) approach, was employed to explore the lived experiences of drug enforcement agents, allowing their authentic voices to emerge. By gathering detailed, personal narratives from these individuals, the research captured their actions, thoughts, emotions, and perceptions. This method provided a deep and nuanced understanding of how these agents experienced and interpreted their work, ensuring the findings were closely connected to their real human experiences.

2.2 Research Site

The research was carried out in Guihulngan City, located in Negros Oriental, an area that has documented a total of 106 instances of drug-related crimes. The city is situated roughly 2 kilometers from Negros Oriental State University-Guihulngan Campus. Guihulngan City comprises 33 barangays, most located in hilly regions, presenting difficulties in law enforcement accessibility. The city is situated 116 kilometers from Dumaguete City, which serves as the provincial capital of Negros Oriental. The Municipality of Vallehermoso is situated to the north, while the Municipality of La Libertad is located to the south. To the west is the Municipality of Isabela, and to the east is Tañon Strait.

2.3 Research Respondents

Given the challenge of identifying and verifying drug enforcement agents, a non-probability sampling method called snowball sampling was employed. Snowball sampling proves particularly beneficial for sensitive and secretive subjects like drug enforcement agents, who maintain low profiles for security reasons. The participants in this research were members of the local drug enforcement unit of the PNP operating in Guihulngan City, Negros Oriental. These individuals actively enforce drug-related laws in the field and demonstrate willingness, commitment, and interest in participating in this study. The study comprised ten (10) drug enforcement agents divided into two (2) distinct interview groups. The first group consisted of four (4) drug enforcement agents participating in in-depth interviews, while the second group included six (6) drug enforcement agents engaging in a focus group discussion.

2.4 Research Instrument

The researcher conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups using an interview guide. This interview guide used free-form questions to understand the good and the bad. The researcher recorded the interviews with a voice recorder and made notes for later transcription. The interview guide was designed with a framework consisting of three primary inquiries: the drug enforcement agents' experiences, comprising both good and negative elements; their tactics for handling unpleasant experiences; and their stated requirements for boosting their performance. In addition, sub-questions were used as further prompts to delve deeper into the replies provided by the drug enforcement agents.

2.5 Data Collection

The researcher employed an interview guide to extract the lived experiences of each informant as a drug enforcement agent. The interview questions were thoughtfully crafted to facilitate in-depth individual interviews and focused group discussions, aligning with three main research inquiries. Once potential drug enforcement agents agreed to participate, they were individually presented with questions by the researcher, which took about 40-60 minutes. The research methodology used for data collection included conducting in-depth interviews and focus group discussions on carefully selected settings to ensure the participants' comfort. The interviews were recorded using audio equipment after obtaining consent, allowing for subsequent transcription and facilitating the examination of remarks made by the drug enforcement agents within their original context.

2.6 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was conducted on the data collected through in-depth interviews and focus groups, with the insights from drug enforcement agents forming the core of the analysis. The data was coded to help the researcher

identify and manage key information. As a result, distinct patterns and categories emerged from the responses. The identified themes were then subjected to expert validation to ensure their relevance and accuracy.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

Confidentiality in terms of identity and security, individual rights, and privacy of information were the major ethical considerations at the very start of this study. The drug enforcement agents were informed that their responses would be confidential and could not be disclosed to anybody. An informed consent form was signed outlining interview purposes, procedures, subject rights, and the researcher's responsibilities. Their participation was voluntary, with no impact on current or future relationships. Participants could withdraw anytime without repercussions and were empowered to skip questions deemed too personal. The researcher assured participants that the data collected would be returned or destroyed upon withdrawal or study completion, as per their preference. The study posed no known risks, and participant identity remained safeguarded. Ethics clearance was acquired before the conduct of this research.

3.0 Results and Discussion

3.1 Experience of Drug Enforcement Agents in the Performance of Duty

Five distinct themes surfaced that depict the drug enforcement agents' encounters fulfilling their responsibilities. These themes were categorized into two sections: the first relates to their duty, labeled "The Windtalkers." At the same time, the remaining four pertain to their actual experiences, including "Value of Service to Humanity," "Lack of Logistical Support," "Challenges of High-Value Targets (HVT)," and "Race Against Time," as shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Experiences of the drug enforcement agents in the performance of duty

Themes	Sample Responses
The Windtalkers	As a member of the drug enforcement unit, I sometimes conduct surveillance. Then, sometimes, I am the arresting officer, act as a poseur-buyer, and file the case. So that is our work (IDII4:SS24).
Value of Service to Humanity	Ah, the good thing was that every time we performed our duties, we considered it good and took our responsibilities as unit members seriously (IDII2:SS9).
The dearth of Logistical Support	We lack personnel and a budget; I guess it is like that. In vehicles like vehicles, we do not have any to use instantly. We encounter that problem concerning the operations (FGDI5:SS53).
Adversities of HVT (High-Value Target)	Sometimes, we encounter difficulties with the subject person itself, like those influential persons. There is a greater possibility that they will get back to us anytime. That is our biggest problem that affects our work because they will do anything to eliminate the arresting officer so that the case can be dismissed since one of the bases for dismissing the case is if there is no complainant (IDII2:SS11).
Racing Against the Time	The hardest thing, as I have said, is if our superior gives a member of the drug enforcement unit an exact date or time to effect arrest to target personalities. We cannot give that exact time our superior gave to arrest the said personalities. We consider it hard if we are given time to accomplish our target (IDII1:SS4).

Theme 1: The Windtalkers

Agents in the drug war use covert tactics and surveillance methods akin to those used by military intelligence. This subject is consistent with expectation theory, which contends that these covert acts are carried out to obtain favorable results through trustworthy information. The importance of covert operations and surveillance in law enforcement is supported by numerous research.

All of the authors, including Joh (2009), John and Maguirre (1995), Ratcliffe (2005), and John and Maguirre (2006), underline the importance of monitoring in obtaining information and improving crime rates and public trust. Knol, Koppen, and Vredevelde (2015) offer a global view of specialist surveillance teams. Due to resource constraints, the Philippine National Police's drug enforcement unit interacts with the PDEA. Duterte's 2017 edict demonstrates a concerted effort to address drug-related issues. Malinao and Torino's (2019) study emphasizes the ethical and practical value of intelligence gathering in averting unlawful arrests.

Theme 2: Value of Service to Humanity

This concern refers to the drug enforcement agents' extraordinary dedication to their jobs as drug enforcement operatives. Their passion extends to forsaking personal goods and jeopardizing personal security to provide just and righteous police service to the community. Using expectancy theory's idea of valence, the drug enforcement agents' dedication and sacrifices represent the importance, attractiveness, and desirability they place on their chosen vocation. This dedication is consistent with their belief that their activities will result in meaningful outcomes.

Previous studies back up this claim. Figley (1999) outlined the incentives for officers to join law enforcement, highlighting the desire to have a positive effect and assist others. According to Charles and Smith (2010), law enforcement professionals frequently perceive their employment as a benefit to society. Bradford, Jackson, and Stanko (2009) emphasized the importance of public trust in police performance and reform efforts. Murphy (1965), Kanungo (1982), and Celoy-Sagpaey (2012) all conducted studies that emphasized commitment, job involvement, professionalism, and moral ideals within the police service. Obrera (2001) discovered that non-commissioned officers' commitment is influenced by field duty and difficult circumstances. These studies show that devotion, professionalism, and dedication are essential in law enforcement, with officers frequently going above and beyond their formal duty hours.

Theme 3: The Dearth of Logistical Support

This issue reveals a key obstacle drug enforcement agents encounter in their tasks. It focuses on problems caused by insufficient funds, movement restrictions, and the need for more tools, equipment, communication means, and facilities. These impediments hamper their effective and timely work completion. Using social control theory, logistical support is identified as an external variable outside the control of the drug enforcement agents. Despite their desires for excellence, the absence of crucial facilities negatively influences job performance.

Brady et al. (2010) confirm this theme by underlining logistical challenges the US Marshall Services encountered during the Noriega extradition effort. A need for more resources, such as surveillance equipment and communication tools, impeded operations. Similarly, Atabakhsh et al. (2002) discovered that insufficient resources made it difficult for Los Angeles County law enforcement to share information efficiently, allowing criminals to exploit communication gaps. Dangani and Tamayo (2017) revealed that in drug operations, more equipment is needed to improve the capability of anti-drug personnel. Poor instruments, such as surveillance equipment, reduce their effectiveness despite preparation. The research presented here emphasizes the critical importance of adequate resources in effective law enforcement operations.

Theme 4: Adversities of HVT (High Valued Target)

This issue heightens law enforcement officers' difficulties when dealing with high-value targets. These powerful persons pose a significant threat to effective duty performance. Their ability to jeopardize personal security and disrupt operations exacerbates these obstacles. This subject, which is based on social control theory, stresses the impact of external influences on informant behavior. The unknown dangers posed by high-value targets instill fear and jeopardize informant efficiency.

The research of Felbab-Brown (2013) highlights the limitations of high-value targeting against organized crime, emphasizing its ineffectiveness in specific instances. Choi et al. (2009) and Akerlof and Yellen (1994) shed light on the complexities of targeting high-value persons due to affiliations and the difficulties of dealing with large drug traffickers. The PDEA and PNP's anti-drug operations pose significant hazards in the Philippines, with countless arrests and casualties. The Parojinog case shows the difficulties of dealing with narco-politicians. The increased involvement of officials in the drug trade highlights the importance of strong central policies (Mutiarin, 2019; Arambala, 2018). This theme also emphasizes the inevitable danger and stress in police enforcement, echoing the perspectives of Jaramillo, Nixon, and Sams (2005) and Anderson, Litzernberger, and Plecas (1995). It emphasizes the complicated and perilous nature of confronting high-value targets in the field.

Theme 5: Racing Against the Time

This concern highlights the significant influence that time limitations have on law enforcement agents. Managing such pressures adds a weight that makes efficient duty fulfillment difficult. Using social control theory, this subject emphasizes how external factors such as time influence informant behavior. The pressure of time limits has a big impact on their performance.

Perlmutter's (1962) viewpoint emphasizes the importance of time in police operations, with quick resolutions taking precedence. Law enforcement must be adaptable because criminal networks are dynamic (Atabakhsh et al., 2005). Legal judgments that must be made quickly (Risinger & Saks, 2003) and limited resources (Mastrofski et al., 1998) present hurdles to innovation. A six-month deadline from the President complicates matters for

narcotics agents (Gecer & Mahinay, 2017). Salazar (2018) observes that increased operations pressure the justice system. This subject emphasizes the importance of time in influencing law enforcement methods and difficulties.

3.2 Strategies in Addressing the Issues and Concerns Relating to the Performance of Duty

The researcher has identified three emergent themes based on informant statements about addressing various issues related to their duties: "Prayer as an Inevitable Necessity," "Police Service as a Collaborative Effort," and "Achievements Through Human Ingenuity." These themes reflect the coping strategies drug enforcement agents employ to ensure their performance remains unaffected, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Drug enforcement agents' performance concerns and issues

Themes	Sample Responses
Prayer is an Inevitable Necessity	For me, sir, even though we have no bullet vest, we must trust the Lord that He will not abandon us. We will just pray that He will take us away from danger, and then we will also pray that the subject will surrender peacefully (IDII3:SS20).
Police Service is Not a One-Man Job.	We cannot do it alone. We need backup forces, like our adjacent friendly forces in the PPSC (Philippine et al. Company), the provincial mobile company, and our provincial drug enforcement unit (IDII1:SS5).
Achievements Require Human Ingenuity	As part of the said unit, we will contribute our things. We will rely on our teammates and nothing else. We will spend our effort and money on accomplishing our mission (IDII1:SS6).

Theme 6: Prayer is an Inevitable Necessity

This practice emphasizes the drug enforcement agents' reliance on faith and prayer to accomplish their tasks and objectives while remaining true to their spiritual beliefs. Moral considerations function as external forces influencing individual actions. Hence, the moral dimension of social control theory is crucial here. Prayer is utilized in this context to protect moral ideals and prevent the use of excessive force during operations.

Charles' (2005) research of seasoned law enforcement personnel discovered that frequent spiritual practices, such as prayer, improved professional performance. According to Charles and Smith's (2010) research, spiritual alignment with broader ideals positively impacts police work by ensuring safety, creating peace, and linking officers to their communities. Tait's (2013) research on veterans found that praying helps them cope with trauma and PTSD experiences from combat. Similarly, Felipe (2017) emphasized the widespread practice of prayer, fasting, and penance in Philippine police and military camps to promote anti-drug initiatives. This theme emphasizes the importance of faith and prayer as coping methods that fit with moral principles and contribute to law enforcement agents' well-being and effectiveness.

Theme 7: Police Service is Not a One-Man Job

This trend emphasizes the importance of teamwork, coordination, and cooperation in overcoming problems faced by drug enforcement agents. The maxim "No Man is an Island" highlights the value of working together to achieve common goals. As the link between support and operational performance becomes clear, this notion corresponds with the instrumentality concept of expectation theory. The achievements of drug enforcement agents are linked to the assistance they receive.

Deborah's (2006) study emphasizes the continued need for cross-sector coordination in the context of effective homeland security. Similarly, Murphy's (1965) findings underscore the good influence of police and district attorney coordination on public trust. Vecchi's conclusion (2002) emphasizes the need for teamwork in dispute resolution and reaching common goals in law enforcement. McGarrell's (2005) research shows successful collaborations that use evidence-based techniques to address concerns, such as Project Safe Neighborhoods. The police and the military place a premium on effectively using government-sanctioned force (Cowper, 2000). Romualdo's (2018) advice emphasizes the importance of coordinated efforts across agencies, local governments, and communities for efficient drug-clearing operations. Notably, local government assistance is critical in anti-drug activities (Dangani & Tamayo, 2017), underlining the importance of collaboration between the PNP and local governments. Overall, this topic emphasizes the critical role of collaborative tactics in addressing law enforcement concerns.

Theme 8: Achievements Require Human Ingenuity

This issue showcases drug enforcement agents' coping strategy involving their initiative and willingness to address challenges. It highlights the importance of creativity and resourcefulness in achieving goals. Expectancy

theory's instrumentality concept applies here, indicating that the outcomes of drug enforcement agents' initiative or resourcefulness lead to a higher probability of mission accomplishment.

Deborah's study (2006) supports this, emphasizing individual initiative in community policing success. Burton (2000) highlights the DEA's efforts to retain staff through training modules. Ponsaers (2001) agrees, noting how Police Community Relations enhance community well-being. Patterson and Cooperrider (2008) show that voluntary initiative drives action based on shared values. Fredrickson's positive emotion theory (2000), backed by Schaulfeli et al. (2001) and Sonnentag (2003), aligns with this theme, indicating that positive emotions foster creativity and optimal functioning. The PNP's "TapHang" campaign in the Philippines involves gathering communities to combat drugs (Romualdo, 2018). Dangani and Tamayo (2017) highlight challenges in Cavite City's anti-drug efforts due to limited funding from the police station and LGU. This theme underscores the value of initiative and creativity in tackling challenges, exemplifying their pivotal role in law enforcement strategies.

3.3 Needs of Drug Enforcement Agents to Strengthen Their Competence

Two themes were developed to address the drug enforcement agents' needs and enhance their proficiency in drug enforcement. "Producing Victors through Intensive Training and Professionalization" and "Superior Logistics, Not Just Men, Win Wars" themes derived from the drug enforcement agents' statements reflect their aspirations for improved performance. These themes also underscore the significance of rigorous training and effective logistics in mission accomplishments, as presented in Table 3 below.

Table 3. Drug enforcement agents' competence needs

Themes	Sample Responses
Intensive Training and Professionalization produce victors	There is a saying that education is a continuous process. If we have already learned something, it is better to undergo other schooling or seminars to enhance our careers. Then, we also need a refresher (course) because sometimes we need to remember Standard Operating Procedure [SOP] (FGDI2:SS40).
War is Not Only Won by Men but by Superior Logistics	Sometimes, we produce and provide our equipment because we cannot deny that the organization cannot meet our needs individually because there are so many, and then, of course, the budget is given little by little (IDI2:SS15).

Theme 9: Intensive Training and Professionalization Produce Victors

This demonstrates the drug enforcement agents' desire for relevant training to help them improve their abilities and knowledge as narcotics enforcement officers. Training becomes necessary for advancement in a certain sector, emphasizing that leaders are made, not born. Using the concept of guardianship from Routine Activity Theory, this topic emphasizes that competence is not easily achieved; it requires effort. The targeted training and professionalization are expected to improve their knowledge and skills, increasing their capacities.

This theme is supported by Chermak, Freilich, and Shemtob's (2009) study, which focuses on how U.S. law enforcement agencies increased readiness after 9/11 through training and scenario analysis. Ebling's research (2002) supports this by emphasizing the FBI's fitness emphasis for improved job performance. Brereton (1961) highlights the importance of strong educational and training standards in law enforcement for effective operation. Woodward's (2000) study demonstrates how U.K. special forces receive tailored training for effective engagement. Periodic training improves the capacities of anti-drug enforcement officers in the Philippines (Dangani & Tamayo, 2017). Due to the respondents' lack of expertise, Dulin and Guadamor (2017) propose seminars and specialized training in the fight against illegal drugs. This subject emphasizes the critical importance of training in increasing the efficiency and effectiveness of law enforcement.

Theme 10: War is Not Only Won by Men but by Superior Logistics

This stresses the need for logistical support in improving the competence of drug enforcement agents. Budgets, armaments, vehicles, communication technologies, staff, and facilities are critical to mission accomplishment. Because a lack of these resources jeopardizes operation outcomes, logistical support is critical for timely and successful drug enforcement services. The concept of guardianship from Routine Activity Theory applies here since logistics demonstrate an organization's capabilities. Drug enforcement agents require adequate and satisfactory logistics to prevent prospective criminal acts.

Nunn's (2003) study backs this up, highlighting the role of modern technologies in law enforcement for terrorist and narcotics campaigns. Gal's (2004) research highlights the significance of effective tools for credible law enforcement, which necessitates financial and human resources. The study by Chen and Xu (2005) supports accurate data and analytical methodologies for comprehending criminal networks, whereas Brown and Hagen (1999) highlight automated tools that aid in various law enforcement duties. Drug enforcement is a difficult police career that necessitates large resources. This theme emphasizes the necessity of human resources, logistics, and individual proficiency in attaining effective and efficient drug enforcement while admitting the phenomenon's continual struggle.

4.0 Conclusion

This article focuses on real-life contacts with narcotics enforcement officials in Guihulngan City. Its main purpose was to record these agents' direct experiences while performing their responsibilities, addressing relevant concerns, identifying opportunities for improving their abilities, and filling the identified gaps in drug law enforcement. This paper confirms the theories of social control, expectancy, and routine activity. These frameworks are pivotal in investigating the experiences of drug enforcement agents during their operational duties. The main goal is strengthening support for all law enforcement units engaged in policing. Local government units should provide the necessary resources to empower units fighting illegal drug activities. This result is vital for effective performance, as weak support hampers results.

Next, the Philippine National Police should train all officers through relevant workshops and seminars, avoiding selective choices. Many drug enforcement agents must gain skills and wish for training opportunities. Compulsory methods, not selective ones, should be used for development. Also, directives' timing should match mission challenges, as targeting moving objectives is tough. Units' strengths and challenges should determine time limits. The PNP must prioritize swift, efficient law enforcement by learning from successful global strategies. Old methods and technology are outdated. Reimbursement processes should be quicker to encourage initiative. Drug enforcement agents often accomplish missions through personal initiative despite reimbursement delays. Criminologists and researchers should continuously research to modernize law enforcement. Lastly, communities must collaborate with law enforcement for prompt and effective services.

The study's limitations include key informant availability and interview time constraints, which may impact data comprehensiveness. Focusing on a subset of drug enforcement agents may limit the extent of the findings. To address these constraints, future studies might involve a broader, more diverse sample of key drug enforcement agents, providing a more complete picture. Extending the scope to include the full drug enforcement program and including various workers would improve understanding of dealing with drug usage issues.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Philner P. Salindo -writing and editing of manuscript, Orlando Bantolinao, Jr - conception of research, conduct of research, Richard B. Osumo - supervising, data analysis, Miñerva Lariosa - data gathering, encoding, Dominic Lariosa - data gathering proofreading,

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7.0 Conflict of Interests

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