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RESEARCH ARTICLE

UNVEILING THE DYNAMICS: EXPLORING POLICE TRAINEES' FIELD TRAINING EXPERIENCES IN THE CORDILLERA REGION

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Abstract

The Field Training Program involved the experience and assignment in patrol, traffic, and investigation in the police stations as active observers and passive performers. With this, the study aimed to determine the experiences of the Philippine National Police Field Training Program trainees of Cordillera. Specifically, it investigated the learning experiences of the Field Training Program trainees in Investigation, Traffic, and Patrol and common problems encountered by FTP during their Field Training Program. A qualitative descriptive design was used for the inquiry. Data collection involved using an interview guide. 70 Police Trainees from the Cordillera Administrative Region Training Center. Most of the key informants stated that the major learnings they have acquired during their assignment at the Investigation unit include the proper way to accomplish the blotter entry and incident report form, the Basic Process of Crime Investigation, how to make basic investigation reports, and modes of filing criminal cases. On their duty at the Traffic Management Unit, the police trainees learned how to conduct traffic direction and control effectively. They learned the value or importance of courtesy, discipline, and maximum tolerance when directing, controlling, and managing traffic and how to engage the members of the community effectively. Another is that police trainees have learned the importance of police visibility relative to crime prevention. The common problems encountered by FTP trainees during their Field Training Program include Unclear and conflicting Instructions, lack of equipment for mobility in responding to police assistance or incidents, the lack of enhancement lectures and table tap exercises rendered to police trainees on OJT is another challenge encountered and Lack of Communication and Coordination among trainees.

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Introduction:-

Police training plays a crucial role in the development of police officers. Because the training of police officers combines various educational components and is governed by organizational guidelines, police training is a complex, multifaceted topic. (Kleygrewe, L., Oudejans, R. R., Koedijk, M., & Hutter, R. I. 2022). Section 19 of Republic Act 8551 says, "All uniformed members of the PNP shall undergo a Field Training Program for 12

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months involving experience and assignment in patrol, traffic, and investigation as a requirement for permanency of their appointment (Dapitan, H. K. C., Naranja, W. P., Sagum, X. A. B., Insong, J. A., & Cuevas Jr, J. F. 2023).

The training program is designed to equip and develop the PNP recruits with the knowledge, attitudes, skills, habits, and values required for a law enforcement officer. In short, they are designed to expose trainees and recruits to the police community and actual police work. Field Training Officers (FTO) or Supervisors are responsible for training newly hired police officers. They are tasked to produce competent, skilled, and dedicated policemen capable of working in an assigned area. Coaching, counseling, and mentoring are the three major processes that support effective Training and Development. (PNP Field Training Program Manual for Police Officer 1 2006).

A positive training experience can lead to greater job satisfaction and a more positive attitude toward the profession (Anderson & Cresswell, 2018). Positive relationships and effective communication between the two groups can lead to a more positive training experience (King, 2020). Emotional intelligence was positively associated with officers' ability to adapt to new situations and handle stress (Savicki & Cooley, 2020). Experiences can improve the quality of law enforcement services provided to the community. When recruits receive adequate training, support, and positive reinforcement, they are more likely to develop the necessary skills, knowledge, and attitudes to carry out their duties effectively and professionally... (Tad-awan, F. P., Almanza, V. N., Austria, E. E., Casing, N. G., Dela Luna, M. A., Espada, R. V., ... & Ochoa, D. M. 2022). Similarly, Rigorous and structured training programs focus on developing the cognitive and behavioral skills necessary for effective policing. Such training programs can help recruits succeed and improve their performanceTad-awan, F.P., Rillera-Laroya, A. C., & Fernandez, J. M. A 2022).

When recruits are trained equally and properly during training, they are more likely to feel valued and respected and are, therefore, more likely to remain in the profession and perform better in their task. Training Programs provide comprehensive guidelines and structured learning content to facilitate newly assigned police officers transitioning from an academic setting to field training, where they gain hands-on experience to form the foundation of their careers (Fridell, L., Semler, S., & Rosenbaum, K. 2021). The training is designed to equip and develop the PNP recruits with the knowledge, attitudes, skills, habits, and values required for a law enforcement officer in responding to different scenarios. (Capdos, M. J. M., Herida, R. T. ,& Tad-awan, F. P. 2023).

The Police Trainees (PTs), go through the phases of the Public Safety Basic Recruit Course under the Patrol, Traffic, and Investigation. Police Trainees (PTs) under their respective Field Training Officers (FTOs) for two months each. The FTP Patrol Phase deals with patrol concepts, training goals, objectives, and processes. It also deals with the task of a PT to accept the challenges that go with the life of a trainee. They should imbibe all ideas about effective policing. The next phase is the Traffic Phase. In this Phase, Police Trainees are equipped with the knowledge, understanding, and skills to address setbacks and provide innovative traffic management services for a more coordinated, better, and safer community. This Phase will have an actual performance in the field focusing on the standard traffic management procedures and processes in the locality. (Standard Training Package (STP) for Field Training Officers of the Field Training Program for PO1 Manual 2014).

The next phase is devoted to the Investigation with eight modules that have been exceptionally designed for the Field Training Officers to be taught to the PTs. This will teach the police trainees about selected penal laws being enforced by the PNP and selected rules on criminal procedures, as well as the procedures to be undertaken by the new police officers in conducting police investigations. Apart from the main topics, this guide is also complemented with knowledge on how to accomplish the blotter properly and the introduction of the Incident Report Form in the evolving world of policing. Likewise, report writing, making an affidavit of arrest, experience through observation in different court hearings, and fusion of the Barangay Justice System were added to complete this package on basic investigation (Standard Training Package (STP) for Field Training Officers of the Field Training Program for PO1 Manual 2014).

On the other hand, PTs will be exposed to different scenarios through simulation exercises, tabletop exercises, and even actual experiences in the field to reinforce their knowledge and develop their skills. In this way, PNPs will produce better PTs who are more effective, credible, and capable police officers in the field of investigation.

Objectives of the Study:-

The study's main objective is to determine the experiences of the PNP Field Training Program trainees of Cordillera. Specifically, it looked into the:

- 1. learning experiences of the FTP trainees in Investigation, Traffic, and Police Community Relations during their Field Training Program.
- 2. common problems encountered by FTP trainees during their Field Training Program.

Methodology:-

This study utilized a qualitative descriptive-interpretive research design. The study was conducted at the PNP Regional Training Center – Cordillera. A total of 70 key informants from the PNP were recruited under the Field Training Program. A semi-structured interview guide, composed of specific questions, was used for the researcher to seek answers on the experiences of the responders from the PNP FTP trainees Cordillera. The questions were intended to determine their experiences and problems encountered during their field training program deployment and their ideas on potential courses of action that could be implemented to alleviate the difficulties in carrying out their roles as police officers. First, signed consent was given by the Cordillera Regional Training Chief through communication letters before proceeding with the study. After the proper authorization had been given, semi-structured hybrid one-on-one and Focused group discussions were held face-to-face and online and were administered on a schedule that worked best for the participants. The totality of such interviews was conducted for a few days to give the participants ample time to formulate their answers and provide complete details. Based on the participants' preferences, interviews were scheduled face-to-face and online. During the face-to-face interview, the researchers went to the office of the informants and conducted the interview there. While for the online setting, Zoom was utilized to execute the interview.

The research employed Braun and Clarke's Reflexive Thematic Analysis method to treat the answers by the key informants of the research questions. Codes were added, removed, combined, and separated as the researchers read along the data. The names of the key informant's names were not published in the manuscript as strict confidentiality was implemented using pseudonyms like "Key Informant 1" and "Key Informant 2". The researchers abided by the rules of voluntary participation, with key informants free to withdraw their participation at any time. The participants were fully informed about the purpose of the research and how the findings would be used before the interview. The researcher also asked for the permission of the key informants before recording or putting into notes the information they would be about to share.

Results and Discussions:-

The Learning Experiences of the FTP Trainees in Investigation, Traffic, and Patrol during their Field Training Program.

Based on the study, the following were the results of the interview on the learning experiences of the FTP trainees in Investigation, Traffic, and Police Community Relations during their Field Training Program.

A. Investigation

Proper Blotter Entry and Incident Report Form

Most of the key informants stated that one of the major learning they have acquired during their assignment at the Investigation unit is the proper way to accomplish the blotter entry and incident report form. This is usually one of the basic duties of the desk officer assigned at the police station or the investigation unit when someone reports an incident or goes to the police station to file a complaint. This aligns with the compliance of every police station and police officer on the PNP Police Operational Procedures (POP) number 2012-01, standard operating procedures in recording incident reports in the police blotter. As espoused by the key informant, "We have learned the ways and means to effectively accomplish the blotter form, which is used to compile statistical information, identify problems in the community, or identify police training needs. These reports are needed to facilitate investigations, prepare court cases, or defend cases in court." This is helpful for the police trainees to have direct actual practice of one of the primary jobs of police officers assigned in the investigation unit.

Basic Process of Crime Investigation

Another learning experience for the police trainees is on Basic Process of Crime Investigation, as the key informants have mentioned during the interview. "We have learned the basic process of crime investigation from the time the incident was reported and the ways and means on how to effectively conduct the investigation." This was possible with the help of some of the police investigators who shared tips on the real McCoy's of investigation. They have taught us how to conduct interviews and interrogation and effectively gather information vital to the case under investigation." This implies that the Police trainees have acquired knowledge of the basic principles of investigation

and were trained on how to conduct the investigation properly. This will ensure that police officers will effectively and efficiently solve the crimes under investigation.

Similarly, the police trainees have gained insights into the basic purpose of investigations and that cases not investigated well can be dismissed outright when filed. With this, the capability enhancement program of the PNP through the basic FTP will guide all police officers in comprehending and carrying out the appropriate mechanics and procedures in the discharge of their functions. This aims to lay down all fundamental duties, functions, and basic procedures in a manner easily understood by every police officer. This ensures the need that all investigation procedures are in place and strictly followed by our investigators.

This will improve the competency of police investigators as part of the PNP's focus on the field of investigation. Similarly, it would somewhat address one common problem that needs immediate attention: the lack of competent and effective field investigators with the skills and right attitude to work on a case and pursue it until the courts resolve it.

Basic Investigation Reports

Another learning experience for the trainees is in basic investigation reports. As espoused by the trainees, they were trained and equipped with the skills to conduct thorough and accurate investigations. They learn to gather evidence effectively, interview witnesses, analyze information, and make reports. Likewise, the trainees were made to understand the protocols, procedural, and legal requirements necessary for conducting investigations and making investigative reports within the boundaries of the law. This helps maintain the integrity of evidence and reports, reducing the likelihood of procedural errors or violations. The significant learnings they have acquired were responding to incidents, entering a blotter and incident report form, conducting interviews, collecting evidence, and making reports.

Filing of Case

Police trainees have also gained knowledge of filing criminal cases. The police trainees were taught the protocols and legal procedures for filing criminal complaints on cases investigated. Trainees mentioned that one of their key learning was on the manner of filing criminal cases when the person was arrested under a warrant of arrest, through warrantless arrest and cases of direct filing to the court.

With this, the police trainees were taught proper filing cases, which involves gathering and documenting evidence to ensure its admissibility in court. They were made to understand what constitutes admissible evidence, how to collect it lawfully, and how to document it correctly to support a case. This is very important to ensure that police officers know the importance of properly filing a case, which provides prosecutors with the necessary information and evidence to support a successful prosecution. It enables them to present a coherent and compelling case in court, increasing the likelihood of securing convictions or favorable outcomes.

B. Traffic

Management of Traffic Direction and Control

On their duty at the Traffic Management Unit, the police trainees learned how to conduct traffic direction and control effectively. This involved directing the movements of people and vehicles and ensuring the smooth flow of traffic. Likewise, the police trainees gained knowledge and some skills in simple management of people and vehicles, especially during traffic direction and traffic congestions, and learned that maximum tolerance is needed when directing traffic. They learned proper hand signal traffic incidents and only deputized PNP to issue TOP and citation tickets. Also, the Police trainees have gained knowledge of basic traffic laws, rules, and regulations and how to respond to and investigate non-vehicular and vehicular traffic accidents and related reports.

Observance of Maximum Tolerance, Courtesy and Discipline

The police trainees have espoused that they have learned the value or importance of courtesy, discipline, and maximum tolerance when directing, controlling, and managing traffic. These are virtues that they have learned since they are confronted with different kinds of people and motorists. an important aspect of police functions since observing maximum tolerance reduces confrontations between law enforcement and drivers. Thus, the police trainees learned that instead of escalating tensions during routine traffic stops for minor violations, officers can use discretion and communication to address issues without unnecessary conflict. They encourage compliance through personal talk and education among road users. Instead of solely relying on punitive measures, maximum tolerance

allows officers to use traffic stops as opportunities for educating drivers about the importance of adhering to traffic laws.

C. Patrol

Community Engagement

In the patrol stage, the police trainees have learned how to engage the community members effectively. They have learned how to communicate and develop a good relationship with the community through constant patrol in their area of responsibility. As one of the police trainees stressed, "I have learned to promote the image of PNP and deal with the community with their trust." This emphasized that the police trainees were given the opportunity to interact and communicate with the community, familiarize themselves with the AOR, and build rapport with the people. This provided an avenue also for the police trainees to share some of the programs of the PNP relative to crime prevention, public safety, and services that they can give to the community.

Importance of Police Visibility and Keen Observation

Another is that police trainees have learned the importance of police visibility relative to crime prevention. They have espoused that "Visible police presence acts as a deterrent to criminal activity. Criminals are less likely to engage in illegal behavior when they know law enforcement officers are actively patrolling and monitoring an area". Similarly, they have mentioned that "Increased police visibility allows officers to interact with community members regularly. This engagement builds trust, fosters positive relationships, and encourages citizens to collaborate with law enforcement in addressing local concerns".

This is beyond deterrence, and visible policing allows officers to actively identify and address potential crime hotspots, suspicious activities, or behavioral patterns that could lead to criminal incidents before they escalate. The Increased visibility fosters transparency and accountability within law enforcement. When officers are visible and accessible, it enhances public trust as communities witness law enforcement's commitment to their safety. Lastly, The Police trainees mentioned that "Visible policing encourages a problem-solving approach to community issues. Officers can collaborate with residents, local organizations, and stakeholders to identify and address underlying problems contributing to crime or safety concerns".

The common problems encountered by FTP trainees during their Field Training Program. Unclear and Conflicting Instructions

One of the challenges encountered by the police trainees during their OJT is unclear instructions. According to them, there were some instructions by the handlers and some senior police officers that needed to be clarified and specific, and there were also conflicting instructions given to them by the Field Training Officers and other police officers. This needs to be clarified what orders will be followed and the non-attainment of such orders' supposed goals or objectives. Conflicting instructions can confuse trainees, leading to misunderstandings about proper procedures or protocols. This confusion results in inconsistent or incorrect actions when they are on duty. Trainees might become hesitant or lack confidence in their decision-making abilities due to unclear instructions. This hesitation can be detrimental in critical situations where quick and decisive actions are necessary. Conflicting instructions increase the likelihood of errors or mistakes during training exercises or real-life scenarios. This could endanger the trainees themselves or others in their care. Inconsistent instructions could lead to actions that might have legal or ethical implications. This might result in lawsuits, disciplinary actions, or negative public perception.

Lack of vehicles for mobility during response to police assistance/incidents.

Another challenge encountered by the police trainees during their OJT is the lack of equipment for mobility in responding to police assistance or incidents. As mentioned by the Police trainees, there need to be more vehicles to respond faster to any assistance and incidents, especially when other police officers use the only one assigned mobile for official duty. Without proper mobility equipment such as vehicles, bicycles, or even sufficient fuel for patrol cars, police face delays in reaching the scene of an incident. This delay can be critical in emergencies where swift action is necessary. Likewise, Inadequate equipment limited the geographical reach of law enforcement officers. This also limited the visibility of law enforcement in communities, affecting their ability to deter crime through presence and patrols. This is supported by the study of Capdos, M. J. M., Herida, R. T., & Tad-awan, F. P. in 2023 which states that the lack of mobility equipment can reduce the effectiveness of police officers' responses, hindering their ability to handle situations promptly and appropriately. The factors affecting the response of the police officers are inaccuracy of details given by the caller, distance, location, and accessibility of the place of incident, understaffing of police personnel, traffic congestion and availability of mobile cars. The problems or

challenges encountered are uncooperative victims and witnesses, insufficient personnel, presence of bystanders crowding the area, delayed arrival of EMS or ambulance, dangerous/armed suspects, severe weather conditions, time pressure, and difficulty in locating the area of the incident.

In the study of Tad-awan, F. P., Almanza, V. N., Austria, E. E., Casing, N. G., Dela Luna, M. A., Espada, R. V., ... & Ochoa, D. M. (2022), found that the disaster response mainly lacked sufficient resources, manpower, and funding. Aside from this, limitations for DVI training, emotional toll, cultural differences, and challenges in identification also pose a problem. Possible actions suggested by the key informants also revolved around funding, training, and an increase in manpower. Identifying key issues and ways to mitigate such is the first step in improving the state of DVI in the country; this study can be used as a basis for the region of Cordillera.

Lack of enhancement lectures and tabletop exercises.

The lack of enhancement lectures and table tap exercises rendered to police trainees on OJT is another challenge encountered. This further limits the ability of the trainees to acquire further knowledge, skills, and values in each training unit. Police Trainees emphasized that there were limited enhancement activities during their OJT. Lack of enhanced training could result in officers being ill-prepared to handle high-stress or dangerous situations, risking their safety and that of the public.

Emerging issues such as cybercrime, mental health crises, or community policing techniques require updated training. Trainees might need more adaptability and resilience to address these challenges with enhancement opportunities. The absence of ongoing lectures and opportunities for enhancement in police training can have significant repercussions for trainees and subsequent law enforcement practices.

Lack of Communication and Coordination among Trainees

Another challenge is the lack of communication and coordination among trainees. They have encountered a communication problem relative to orders, cascading information between and among them. This is due to a need for more centralized cascading of information and orders from more than one person. This led to confusion or errors on what task to perform and what orders to follow. With proper communication and coordination, trainees can work together smoothly during operations, causing delays or ineffective responses to incidents. This also led to misunderstandings about procedures, protocols, or instructions, resulting in some errors during their OJT. If trainees cannot communicate or coordinate effectively, it can disrupt team dynamics, decreasing morale and productivity. OJT is a crucial phase for trainees to learn from each other's experiences. Lack of communication and coordination might limit knowledge exchange and hinder their learning process.

Financial Problems

Police Recruits sometimes must deal with financial problems. Not only for themselves but for their families as well. They may not be paid very well, and they may have to pay for their equipment and training. Some also used their finances to deal with any incident during their time of duty, like taxis, food, and other essential duty needs.

PTSD and Other Mental Health Problems

Police Recruits are oftentimes at an increased risk for Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and other mental health problems, due to the nature of police work they experience daily, which makes it difficult for them to function in their everyday life.

Conclusion:-

The major learnings they have acquired during their assignment at the Investigation unit include the proper way to accomplish the blotter entry and incident report form, the Basic Process of Crime Investigation, how to make basic investigation reports and modes of filing criminal cases. On their duty at the Traffic Management Unit, the police trainees learned how to conduct traffic direction and control effectively. They learned the value or importance of courtesy, discipline, and maximum tolerance when directing, controlling, and managing traffic and how to engage the community members effectively. Another is that police trainees have learned the importance of police visibility relative to crime prevention. The common problems encountered by FTP trainees during their Field Training Program include Unclear and conflicting Instructions, lack of equipment for mobility in responding to police assistance or incidents, the lack of enhancement lectures and table tap exercises rendered to police trainees on OJT is another challenge encountered and Lack of Communication and Coordination among trainees.

Considering a career in the world of law enforcement you must be aware of the challenges that police officers face day and night. However, it is also very important to remember that becoming and being a police officer can be a rewarding and fulfilling experience throughout your life.

Recommendations:-

- 1. The Training Instructors and Senior Police Officers should have clarity and consistency in their instructions and aligned across all training modules and Daily Timetable Instructions.
- 2. There should be a single but coordinated line of communication between and among the Police Trainees.
- 3. The Training package for each phase must be fully implemented to include tabletop exercises for the Police Trainees to fully be equipped with the needed skills, values, and attitudes needed in the police service.
- 4. There should be issuance of an honest Assessment and Evaluation rating from the Field Training Officers and Senior Officers handling the Police Recruits for learning process and improvement.
- 5. The Training Instructors and FTOs should be knowledgeable of the current trends in managing police work and to provide work innovation for the Police Recruits for them to easily coupe-up.
- 6. There should be proper selection and training of Field Training Officers before handling of Police Recruits and must also be evaluated by the Police Recruits on their handling performance.

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