



Strengths and Difficulties of Children in Conflict with the Law: Basis for Guidance and Counseling Program

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Abstract

This study investigated the psychological strengths and challenges of Children in Conflict with the Law residing at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. By utilizing an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design, the research started with the quantitative data collection using the Strengths and Difficulties Questionnaire to assess the emotional symptoms, conduct problems, hyperactivity/inattention, peer relationship problems, and prosocial behavior, along with describing respondents' backgrounds. A subsequent in-depth interview gave a qualitative insight to elaborate on these survey findings. Results indicated that most of the CICL exhibited generally manageable behavior, with average levels of conduct problems and hyperactivity. However, emotional difficulties and peer relationship issues emerged as key areas of concern. Positively, the prosocial behavior was identified as a significant strength in the study, as many respondents demonstrated their capacity for helping others, cooperation while inside the institution, and empathy despite their challenging circumstances. The qualitative data shows that these patterns with participants described emotional detachment from family, and struggles in trusting their peers, thus clarifying that the SDQ's findings on emotional and peer problems are present. Concurrently, the narratives of social support within the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center and a strong desire for family reconciliation reinforced the positive findings regarding the prosocial behavior of the respondents.

Based on these findings, a tailored guidance and counseling program was developed. This program is designed to help CICL manage emotions, foster healthier peer relationships, reinforce positive behaviors, and facilitate family reconnection. The study underscores the importance of compassionate, evidence-based interventions that address both the challenges and inherent strengths of the CICL.

Keywords: Children in Conflict with the Law, Psychological Well-being, Guidance and Counseling Program.

INTRODUCTION

The growing number of juvenile delinquency cases requires a re-evaluation of current intervention strategies, particularly those focusing on Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) (Lasambouw & Nurussakinah, 2023). The overall advancement and successful reintegration of CICLs primarily rely on their mental and emotional health (Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). These young individuals often face serious challenges, including public stigmatization and mistreatment, identifying that severely compromise their psychological well-being and standard of living (Khan, 2020). Such challenges significantly hinder their social and personal growth, as well as their capacity for successful reintegration into society (Pertiwi & Saimima, 2022).

Children's mental and emotional health throughout court trials can have lasting impacts on their lives (Cauffman

et al., 2023). Beyond legal burdens, many children under legal care come from backgrounds marked by hardship and deprivation, pushing them to the margins of society (Qu, 2023). These circumstances often include limited educational opportunities, poverty, neglect, and family conflict, all of which greatly affect daily functioning and the ability to reintegrate meaningfully into communities (Atrey & Singh, 2024). The stressful experience of confinement can also lead to negative psychological effects and emotional deterioration (Ackerman et al., 2024).

Research indicates that CICLs can develop resilience and achieve successful reintegration through structured rehabilitation programs integrating counseling, mental health services, and values formation (Rubio et al., 2024). However, existing programs frequently fail to address deeper psychosocial concerns, resulting in overlooked emotional and psychological needs (Hasanath K. P. et al., 2024). Even

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institutional programs in the Philippines sometimes fall short in meeting the mental health needs of youth under supervision (Wu et al., 2025). Comprehensive approaches including mental health support, family engagement, counseling, and structured daily routines are crucial in fostering accountability and healing alongside vocational and recreational initiatives (Majdak et al., 2023).

The effective integration of these programs within the juvenile justice system is essential in addressing underlying psychosocial factors that contribute to offending behavior and in promoting long-term healthy development (Nautan & Manda, 2025). A holistic focus on psychological well-being remains vital for social reintegration and rehabilitation, ensuring optimal growth and development among CICLs (Pidlao-Palitayan, 2023). While structured environments provide stability, adolescents' narratives reveal a persistent desire for independence and improved living conditions, reflecting their longing for freedom despite available institutional support (Arab et al., 2024).

This study aims to outline the needs of the CICL by focusing on the value of early intervention and support in enhancing the quality of life and life satisfaction of youth offenders at the institution. Understanding the dynamics between mental wellness, overall well-being, and legal safeguards for children in custody will provide numerous opportunities for their overall progress and help the CICL thrive as they reintegrate into society. Giving support to these young people often requires discipline, yet programs that prioritize healing, continued education, and dependable environmental support ensure positive change and successful rehabilitation. There is a growing awareness that rehabilitation in the Philippines should involve more than just behavior control. Many of these youth are trapped in harmful cycles by unaddressed internal wounds (Mallillin, 2022).

Observations from the researcher's experience have revealed that many CICL carry significant emotional burdens that are often not taken into account. Grief and confusion frequently manifest as anger or defiant behavior, highlighting that these painful feelings require attention and healing rather than despair. Given their situation, these young people need to be acknowledged and provided with appropriate guidance (Mallillin, & Lopez, 2024, pp. 97-108).

At the detention area, the CICLs express their yearnings and unmet expectations, but also demonstrate their strength of character. Many speak of their need for behavioral change, difficulties experienced with family and peers, and feelings of distress (Mallillin, et al. 2020). A significant aspect of their coping and structured living involves engaging in specific daily routines such as waking up at specific time, communal meals, personal hygiene, participating in prayers, attending study sessions, and sometimes watching television or engaging in other supervised activities. Many find joy and a

sense of normal living in these routines, given ample time for reflections. They depend heavily on the support they receive from their environment. Despite all their struggles, they still hope for change (Mallillin, & Dolba, 2026, pp. 1845-1854).

They long for the ability to study again with their peers, to eventually secure a job, or to help their parents when they are out. Positive adjustments often emerge through gained trust, friendships with others, and the everyday routines at the institution implementation and readiness (Mallillin, et al. 2020). Reintegration into society is never easy, but with the help of a supportive guidance program, family encouragement, and positive influences, they have a chance to rebuild their lives, grow positively, and create a better future. They ought to be recognized for their potential rather than their past mistakes. This fact emphasizes the necessity of an orderly and structured yet caring guidance and counseling approach. What CICL frequently requires more than services are individuals who have faith in their ability to change. Such faith, combined with genuine concern and consistent guidance, has been shown to foster cooperative behavior and personal transformation among CICL in rehabilitation settings (Patalinghug, 2021).

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

This study investigated the psychological well-being of children in conflict with the law (CICL) to develop a guidance and counseling framework that strengthens their mental health. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What is the demographic profile of the respondents in terms of
 - 1.1 age,
 - 1.2 gender, and
 - 1.3 educational background?
2. What are the levels of psychological strengths and difficulties of the respondents across the following domains as to
 - 2.1 emotional problems,
 - 2.2 conduct problems,
 - 2.3 hyperactivity/inattention,
 - 2.4 peer relationship problems, and
 - 2.5 prosocial behavior?
3. Is there a significant differences in the respondents' levels of strengths and difficulties when grouped according to their demographic profile?
4. How do the lived experiences of CICL at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center provide context or explanations for the levels of strengths and difficulties identified in Phase I?

5. What specific challenges, support systems, and personal transformations does CICL describe regarding

5.1 life before and upon entering the institution,

5.2 perception of current interventions and institutional support, and

5.3 future goals, values, and motivations?

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research utilized an explanatory sequential mixed-methods design in order to explore and understand the overall condition of children in conflict with the law in terms of their mental health and overall well-being. The explanatory research aims to address previously under-researched problems and provide a detailed explanation of the study’s aspects (Yousaf, 2017).

The explanatory sequential mixed-methods design is characterized by an initial quantitative phase involving survey administration and analysis, followed by a qualitative phase consisting of in-depth interviews to further explain the quantitative findings.

Setting and Participants of the Study

The study was conducted at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center under the Manila Department of Social Welfare. It is located at Arroceros Street in the central district of Ermita, Manila. The the institution is a government-run shelter for street children and children in conflict with the law in Metro Manila. It was established in October 2014 to address reported cases of child abuse and violence and to provide appropriate intervention and protection for affected children.

The center provides social services such as medical, dietary,

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Age Distribution of Children in Conflict with the Law at the institution

Age	Frequency	Percent
11-12	-	-
13-14	-	-
15-16	15	35.71
17-18	27	64.29
Total	42	100.00

Table 1 indicates that most of the respondents are between 17–18 years old, which makes up 64.29% of the total sample. The remaining 35.71% belong to the 15–16 years old group, and none fall under the 11–14 years old range at the time the research was conducted.

This distribution shows that the majority of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center are in the late adolescent stage. This is a period wherein young people struggle with emotional control and decision-making, and as such is considered a critical stage of their development, as these young people become more aware of themselves and their environment. It is a stage where structured support and consistent guidance can have a significant impact on shaping their personal growth and rehabilitation.

educational, vocational, and psychosocial support. It also ensures the proper disposition and evaluation of court cases and social data of children under its custody. The study included 42 CICL respondents residing at the institution during the data collection period.

Sampling Strategy and Sample Size

The study used a purposive sampling method. Participants who met the criteria and provided consent and assent were included. This sampling technique is used because it is suitable for obtaining in-depth and meaningful information from the respondents. It was ensured that risks are minimized and the participants are ready to take part in the study.

Sample Size and Sampling Technique

The study utilized purposive sampling in selecting the respondents. Initially, 50 residents were identified as potential participants; however, only those who met the inclusion criterion of having resided at the institution for at least six (6) months and who consented to participate were included, resulting in a final sample of 42 respondents.

Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants possessed the specific characteristics relevant to the objectives of the study and were capable of providing meaningful data. The final number of respondents was determined in coordination with the institution administrators. Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study, particularly in working with minors.

Hence, purposive sampling is a systematic approach in the analysis of collected data and involvement in the organization, such as the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. It provides a better analysis, interpretation, and conclusion of the data (Obilor, 2023, pp. 1–7).

Table 2. Sex Distribution of the Children in Conflict with the Law at the institution

	Frequency	Percent
Female	4	9.52%
Male	38	90.48%
Total	42	100.00%

Table 2 indicates that most of the respondents are male (90.48%), while only 9.52% are female. This shows that the population of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center is largely comprised of boys.

This pattern mirrors broader national and international findings where juvenile offenses are more frequently associated with male adolescents. Several studies suggest that this may be linked to factors such as peer pressure, exposure to violence in their environment, insufficient adult supervision, and a lack of positive role models. These influences may contribute to risk-taking behaviors that increase the likelihood of legal trouble. Further, reports from the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC, 2021) also reflect a consistently higher number of male youth offenders worldwide, these were often explained by gendered social expectations and differences in opportunities and exposure to risk.

Table 3. Educational Background of Children in Conflict with the Law at the institution

	Frequency	Percent
Elementary	12	28.57%
Secondary	30	71.43%
Total	42	100.00%

Table 3 shows that 71.43% of the respondents have reached the secondary level of education, while the remaining 28.57% attained elementary education. This means that most of the Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center were either in high school or had already reached that level before they were brought to the facility.

This further displays that many adolescents who have come into contact with the justice system have encountered setbacks and difficulties in completing their studies as they are constantly faced with irregular attendance, disengagement, and loss of interest in the educational system. This also reflects a common pattern in studies involving youth in conflict with the law, where the latter's educational experiences are often marked by interruptions, which would then lead them to drop out of school. Factors like poverty, family instability, and negative peer influence are frequently linked to challenges, which can limit access to consistent schooling and increase vulnerability to risky behaviors. In the Philippine context, these issues continue to shape the educational concerns of many youth who are at-risk.

Table 4. Levels of Psychological Strengths and Difficulties of the Children in Conflict with the Law at the institution

	Close to Average		Slightly raised (Slightly lowered)		High (Low)		Very high (Very low)	
	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%
Emotional Symptoms	16	38.10%	13	30.95%	5	11.90%	8	19.05%
Conduct Problems	31	73.81%	6	14.29%	5	11.90%		
Hyperactivity/ Inattention	38	90.48%	4	9.52%				
Peer Relationship Problem	4	9.52%	9	21.43%	16	38.10%	13	30.95%
Prosocial Behavior	28	66.67%	5	11.90%	5	11.90%	4	9.52%
Total Difficulties Score	23	54.76%	9	21.43%	6	14.29%	4	9.52%

Table 4 shows the levels of psychological strengths and difficulties of the CICL at the the institution based on the SDQ results.

The findings in the total difficulties are, indicate that more than half of the respondents (54.76%) fall within the close-to-average level. However, almost half of the CICL respondents (45.24%) show slightly raised to very high levels of difficulties, suggesting that many of them continue to experience emotional and behavioral concerns while in the rehabilitation center.

In terms of emotional problems, a considerable number of respondents show elevated levels (30.95%). Possible feelings of sadness, worry, or emotional stress, may be reflected which are common among CICL due to separation from family, past experiences, and adjustment to the the institution environment.

For conduct problems, most respondents fall within the close-to-average range (73.81%), indicating that many of the CICL are able to manage their behavior while inside the center. This may be influenced by the structured rules, supervision, and guidance provided by the the institution staff.

With regard to hyperactivity, the majority of respondents show close-to-average levels (90.48), suggesting that attention and overactivity are not major concerns among most CICL in the facility.

However, peer problems emerged as the most prominent difficulty. A large proportion of the respondents fall under high to very high levels, indicating difficulties in getting along with peers, forming friendships, and maintaining positive social relationships within the center. This may be due to trust issues, past conflicts, or adjustment challenges among CICL coming from different backgrounds.

In terms of prosocial behavior, most respondents show average levels with (66.67%), demonstrating that many CICL are capable of helping, sharing, and showing concern for others. Nevertheless, a portion of the respondents show lowered prosocial behavior, suggesting the need for continued values formation and social skills development activities in the institution.

Overall, the results highlight that while some CICL reveal adequate adjustment within the the institution, many still experience emotional and peer-related difficulties, which is consistent with recent studies showing that detained youth may adapt to structured environments yet continue to struggle with emotional distress and social relationships (Boering et al., 2024).

Table 5. Comparison of the Levels of Psychological Strengths and Difficulties of the Respondents when Grouped According to Age

	Age	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value	Sig
Emotional problems Scale	15-16	4.87	1.552	-.107	P = 0.915 > 0.05	NS
	17-18	4.93	1.796			
Conduct problems Scale	15-16	2.87	1.598	.753	P = 0.456 > 0.05	NS
	17-18	2.52	1.341			
Hyperactivity Scale	15-16	2.40	1.920	-2.223	P = 0.032 < 0.05	S
	17-18	3.56	1.423			
Peer Problems Scale	15-16	3.80	1.612	-.850	P = 0.400 > 0.05	NS
	17-18	4.22	1.502			
Prosocial	15-16	8.13	1.356	2.448	P = 0.019 < 0.05	S
	17-18	6.74	2.330			
Total Difficulties	15-16	13.93	3.240	-1.027	P = 0.311 > 0.05	NS
	17-18	15.22	4.209			

Table 5 shows the comparison of psychological strengths and difficulties of the CICL when grouped according to age.

Results reveal that there are no significant differences in emotional problems, conduct problems, peer problems, and total difficulties between the age groups. This indicates that psychological concerns are commonly experienced by CICL regardless of age while in the the institution.

However, significant differences were found in hyperactivity and prosocial behavior. The CICL with age ranges from 17-18 exhibited higher levels of hyperactivity compared to younger respondents, which suggest greater difficulty in attention and behavioral regulation. On the other hand, younger CICL whose age are from 15-16 demonstrated higher prosocial behavior, which indicates better helping and cooperative behaviors while inside the center.

These findings imply that while most psychological difficulties are similar across ages, age-specific interventions may be necessary in the the institution, as recent studies emphasize that developmental stage influences coping capacity, emotional regulation, and responsiveness to rehabilitation programs among justice-involved youth (Arega, 2023).

Table 6. Comparison of the Levels of Psychological Strengths and Difficulties of the Respondents when Grouped According to their Sex

	Sex	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value	Sig
Emotional Problems	Male	4.84	1.685	-.735	P = 0.467 > 0.05	NS
	Female	5.50	1.915			
Conduct Problems	Male	2.63	1.478	-.156	P = 0.877 > 0.05	NS
	Female	2.75	.957			
Hyperactivity / Inattention	Male	3.11	1.737	-.440	P = 0.662 > 0.05	NS
	Female	3.50	1.291			

Peer Relationship Problems	Male	4.13	1.597	.778	P = 0.441 > 0.05	NS
	Female	3.50	.577			
Prosocial	Male	7.34	2.109	.976	P = 0.335 > 0.05	NS
	Female	6.25	2.363			
Total Difficulties	Male	14.71	4.033	-.260	P = 0.796 > 0.05	NS
	Female	15.25	2.630			

Table 6 presents the comparison of the psychological strengths and difficulties of the CICL when grouped according to sex.

The results show that there are no significant differences among the male and female respondents across all SDQ domains. Emotional problems, conduct problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, prosocial behavior, and total difficulties yielded p-values greater than 0.05, indicating that sex does not significantly influence the psychological strengths and difficulties of the respondents. Although slight differences were observed in the mean scores, such as higher emotional problems and total difficulties among female respondents and slightly higher peer problems and prosocial behavior among male respondents, these differences were not statistically significant.

This may be influenced by the unequal distribution of participants across sex groups, which can affect statistical comparison. Nevertheless, the finding is consistent with studies indicating that youth in detention often experience similar emotional and behavioral challenges due to shared environmental stressors such as separation from family, structured routines, and exposure to institutional conditions (Dardas et al., 2025). These common experiences may reduce observable psychological differences between male and female residents. The findings therefore suggest that both male and female CICL in the institution face comparable psychosocial concerns, supporting the need for rehabilitation and support programs that address the needs of all residents while remaining sensitive to individual differences.

Table 7. Comparison of the Levels of Psychological Strengths and Difficulties of the Respondents when Grouped According to Educational Background

	Educational Background	Mean	S.D.	t-value	p-value	Sig
Emotional Problems	Elementary	4.42	2.151	-1.187	P = 0.242 > 0.05	NS
	Secondary	5.10	1.470			
Conduct Problems	Elementary	3.33	1.614	2.058	P = 0.046 < 0.05	S
	Secondary	2.37	1.273			
Hyperactivity / Inattention	Elementary	3.00	2.174	-.343	P = 0.734 > 0.05	NS
	Secondary	3.20	1.495			
Peer Relationship Problems	Elementary	4.75	1.055	1.864	P = 0.070 > 0.05	NS
	Secondary	3.80	1.627			
Prosocial	Elementary	6.75	2.301	-.939	P = 0.353 > 0.05	NS
	Secondary	7.43	2.063			
Total Difficulties	Elementary	15.50	3.261	.772	P = 0.445 > 0.05	NS
	Secondary	14.47	4.142			

Table 7 presents the comparison of the psychological strengths and difficulties of the CICL when grouped according to their educational background.

The results indicate that no significant differences were found in emotional problems, hyperactivity, peer problems, prosocial behavior, and total difficulties, as all corresponding p-values were greater than 0.05. This suggests that these psychological concerns are similarly experienced by CICL regardless of whether they reached elementary or secondary education.

However, a significant difference was found in conduct problems scale ($p = 0.046 < 0.05$). The CICL with an elementary educational background obtained a higher mean score compared to those with a secondary background. This indicates that respondents with lower educational attainment tend to exhibit greater conduct-related difficulties, such as problems with rule-following and behavior regulation.

The findings suggest that while most psychological strengths and difficulties are similar across educational levels, conduct problems vary significantly depending on educational background. This supports previous studies indicating that limited educational attainment is associated with higher behavioral difficulties, as schooling provides structure, socialization, and opportunities to develop self-regulation and decision-making skills among at-risk youth (De Guzman & Sarmiento, 2022).

The results therefore highlight the importance of strengthening educational support, structured learning activities, and behavior-focused interventions at the institution, particularly for CICL who were unable to progress beyond the elementary level.

Table 8. Theme on Incidental Peer Involvement

Significant Statement	Theme
P1: <i>“Nadamay lang po ako sa pandudukot po. Nadamay lang po ako sa kaibigan ko kasi pinasa lang po sa akin yung cellphone.”</i>	Incidental Peer Involvement
P7: <i>“Nag nakaw po e. nadamay ako sa pag nanakaw po. Snatching po ng cellphone.”</i>	
P8: <i>“Ano po kaso naming, gang rape po. Ano po, nag inuman po kami, kasama ko po sila, ayun nadamay po ako sa kanila.”</i>	

The theme highlights how some of the Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) became involved in offenses not as primary initiators, but because of incidental participation with peers. The participants’ stories reveal that their involvement in illegal activities happened within peer settings where in their presence, association, or being passively compliant led to legal consequences.

Participant 1 shared, *“Nadamay lang po ako sa pandudukot... pinasa lang po sa akin yung cellphone,”* indicating that the offense happened through association rather than the intention. Similarly, Participant 7 stated, *“Nadamay ako sa pagnanakaw... snatching po ng cellphone,”* reinforcing the pattern of being drawn into criminal acts because of being close to peers engaged in wrongdoing. Participant 8 further explained, *“Nag inuman po kami... kasama ko po sila, ayun nadamay po ako sa kanila,”* illustrating how group activities and peer presence paved way to serious offenses.

The findings explain how observation and imitation within their peers shape behavior. When actions that are prohibited were modeled and reinforced in a group, adolescents may participate because of perceived group norms, fear of being excluded, or due to the lack of assertive decision-making skills. This is particularly relevant during adolescence, a developmental stage marked by heightened sensitivity to peer approval and belongingness.

Table 9. Theme on Sustained Peer Influence

Significant Statement	Theme
P2: <i>“Puro away po sa mga tambay. Saksak po ang kaso ko.”</i>	Sustained Peer Influence
P4: <i>“Nabuyo po ako ng aking mga kaibigan...naturuan magbenta ng drugs, marijuana... hanggang sa nahuli po ako.”</i>	
P5: <i>“Broken family po kami...lumipat ako sa mga barkada na gumagamit ng bisyo...napunta dito dahil lang sa barkada.”</i>	

These reflects a pattern of ongoing and repeated exposure to negative peer influence, where involvement in delinquent behavior was not incidental but developed through continuous association with peer groups who shows antisocial behavior.

Participant 2 stated, *“Puro away po sa mga tambay. Saksak po ang kaso ko,”* suggesting a routine environment where violence was normalized through constant interaction with peer groups who are dwelling in the streets. The repeated confrontations with these groups indicate that aggression became part of everyday social interaction rather than a one-time occurrence. Similarly, Participant 4 shared, *“Nabuyo po ako ng aking mga kaibigan... naturuan magbenta ng drugs, marijuana... hanggang sa nahuli po ako,”* highlighting how peers not only influenced behavior but also taught and reinforced illegal activities over time.

Participant 5 further strengthens this theme by connecting sustained peer influence with family instability. As expressed in the statement, *“Broken family po kami... lumipat ako sa mga barkada na gumagamit ng bisyo... napunta dito dahil lang sa barkada,”* the absence of stable family support pushed the participant to seek belonging and acceptance within peer groups who are engaged in substance use. This suggests that sustained peer influence usually fills in the emotional and social gaps made by disrupted family relationships, which is increasing the vulnerability to possible negative behaviors.

These narratives strongly align with Sutherland’s Differential Association Theory (1947), which explains that delinquent behavior develops through prolonged and everyday interaction with individuals who support or model criminal conduct. The theory shows that when definitions favorable to crime outweigh definitions unfavorable to crime, individuals are more likely to engage in unlawful behavior. In this case, sustained peer contact created an environment where violence and drug-related activities were perceived as acceptable or even expected.

Table 10. Theme on Family Support Disruption

Significant Statement	Theme
P3: <i>“Yung kapatid ko po, ako po yung nagdidisiplina sa kanya... mama abroad, tatay wala na... may sarili nang pamilya.”</i>	Family Support Disruption
P6: <i>“Napunta po ako dito dahil sa tito ko... siya ang nagsimula ng gulo... gusto nila ako ipakulong.”</i>	

The participants’ narratives reveal that family instability, role confusion, and conflict within the household created emotional strain and weakened guidance during critical developmental periods of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL).

Participant 3 shared, *“Yung kapatid ko po, ako po yung nagdidisiplina sa kanya... mama abroad, tatay wala na... may sarili nang pamilya,”* which illustrates a situation of parental absence and role reversal. With the mother working abroad and the father no longer present, the participant was forced to assume adult responsibilities early in life. This lack of parental guidance deprived the youth of consistent supervision and emotional support, increasing vulnerability to stress and maladaptive coping behaviors.

Similarly, Participant 6 stated, *“Napunta po ako dito dahil sa tito ko... siya ang nagsimula ng gulo... gusto nila ako ipakulong,”* highlighting intra-family conflict and betrayal. Rather than being the source of protection and support, the extended family became a contributor to the participant’s legal difficulties. Such experiences can affect the young person’s sense of trust, security, and belonging within the family system.

These findings are supported by Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), which emphasizes that stable and responsive caregiving relationships are essential for healthy emotional and behavioral development. When primary attachment figures are absent or inconsistent, children may experience insecurity, emotional distress, and difficulty regulating behavior

Table 11. Theme on Emotional Separation Challenges

Significant Statement	Theme
P2: <i>“Lungkot tapos isip lang ng isip sa pamilya po.”</i>	Emotional Separation
P6: <i>“Nalulungkot po ako na malayo ako sa kanila.”</i>	
P8: <i>“Ano po napalayo po sa mga magulang. Hindi ko po sila nakakasama araw-araw.”</i>	

The findings under this theme shows that the emotional challenges experienced by Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) as a result of being separated from their families during their stay at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center.

As shared by Participant 2, *“Lungkot tapos isip lang ng isip sa pamilya po,”* this statement reflects sadness about family members. Similarly, Participant 6 stated, *“Nalulungkot po ako na malayo ako sa kanila,”* emphasizing the emotional burden of being away from loved ones. Participant 8 further expressed this distress by saying, *“Hindi ko po sila nakakasama araw-araw,”* highlighting the impact of not being around them and the disrupted family routines affects emotional well-being.

These experiences align with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1969), which emphasizes that prolonged separation from primary attachment figures can lead to emotional insecurity, sadness, and anxiety, particularly among adolescents who are still dependent on familial emotional support.

In addition, Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory (1968) explains that adolescents are in the stage of *identity versus role confusion*, where family presence plays a vital role in emotional grounding and identity formation. The absence of family support during detention may disrupt this process, resulting in heightened emotional distress and feelings of instability.

Table 12. Theme on Adaptive Coping Challenges

Significant Statement	Theme
P1: <i>“Tinutulog ko nalang po ito.”</i>	Adaptive Coping
P1: <i>“Pinagdadasal ko lang po ‘yung magulang ko.”</i>	
P5: <i>“Nilalaban ko po...”</i>	

The theme highlights the coping strategies employed by Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) as they manage emotional stress and challenges during their stay at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center.

Participant 1 shared, *“Tinutulog ko na lang po ito,”* indicating that sleep as a coping response to emotional distress. While this strategy may appear avoidant, it can also serve as a short-term feel good mechanism that helps reduce overwhelming emotions. In institutional settings like the institution, such behavior may function as a temporary protective response when youth does not have emotional outlet.

The same participant also stated, *“Pinagdadasal ko lang po ‘yung magulang ko,”* which reflects faith-based coping. Prayer allows the youth to express concern, hope, and emotional connection to family members even with physical separation. Spiritual coping has been shown to promote emotional regulation and resilience, especially with adolescents experiencing uncertainty.

Participant 5 expressed, *“Nilalaban ko po...,”* suggesting perseverance and inner strength. This response reflects active coping through endurance and determination, indicating the youth’s effort to confront emotional hardship rather than surrendering to distress.

These findings are supported by Lazarus and Folkman’s Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984), which explains coping as a cognitive and behavioral process used to manage stressful situations. The participants’ strategies such as rest, prayer, and perseverance, represent emotion-focused coping methods that help reduce psychological strain when stressors cannot be immediately changed.

Table 13. Theme on Spiritual Empowerment

Significant Statement	Theme
P1: <i>“Tuwing linggo nagdadasal po kami... ayon po ang program naming dito sa baba, nagdadasal po kami ng mabuti.”</i>	Spiritual Empowerment
P3: <i>“Yung Divine Mercy po, yung bible study, iba’t ibang church... mga salita ng Diyos.”</i>	
P4: <i>“Pag may activity po, nalilibang naman kahit paano... Divine Mercy Angels, Saksi ni Jehovah.”</i>	
P7: <i>“Pagdarasal po. Gabi gabi po kami nagdadasal po na sana makalaya na po.”</i>	
P8: <i>“Ano po, yung pagdadasal po, pagsisimba din po.”</i>	

The role of spiritual practices and faith-based activities in supporting the emotional well-being of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) during their stay at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center are shown here. The participants’ statements reflect that prayer, religious activities, and exposure to spiritual guidance provide comfort, hope, and a sense of inner strength amid confinement and uncertainty.

Participant 1 shared, *“Tuwing linggo nagdadasal po kami... ayon po ang program naming dito sa baba, nagdadasal po kami ng mabuti,”* showing that regular, structured prayer activities serve as a meaningful routine. This practice not only offers spiritual nourishment but also provides emotional stability and a sense of order in daily life. Similarly, Participant 7 stated, *“Pagdarasal po. Gabi gabi po kami nagdadasal po na sana makalaya na po,”* reflecting how prayer becomes a way for expressing hope and managing anxiety about the future.

Participant 8 further reinforced this theme by stating, *“Ano po, yung pagdadasal po, pagsisimba din po,”* which suggests that both personal prayer and formal religious worship contribute to comfort and spiritual. This indicates that engaging in faith practices whether individually or through communal worship helps CICL cope with stress and maintain a sense of peace.

Participant 3 emphasized engagement in organized religious learning, stating, *“Yung Divine Mercy po, yung bible study, iba’t ibang church... mga salita ng Diyos.”* This response suggests that spiritual education and exposure to religious teachings help participants find meaning, guidance, and moral direction. Meanwhile, Participant 4 shared, *“Pag may activity po, nalilibang naman kahit paano... Divine Mercy Angels, Saksi ni Jehovah,”* highlighting that visits and activities led by religious groups also provide emotional relief and a break from the stress of confinement.

These findings align with Pargament’s Theory of Religious Coping (1997), which explains that spirituality can function as a powerful coping resource, especially during times of crisis, loss, and lack of control. Through prayer and faith-based engagement, individuals are able to reinterpret their experiences in a more hopeful and meaningful way. Additionally, Frankl’s Logotherapy (1963) emphasizes that finding meaning even in difficult circumstances can strengthen resilience and psychological survival.

Table 14. Theme on Functional Assistance

Significant Statement	Theme
P2: <i>“Pag may dumadalaw po... may binigay na pagkain, biscuit... pagkain sa araw-araw po.”</i>	Functional Assistance
P5: <i>“Mga hindi ko po nagawa sa labas, nagagawa ko po dito... schooling, activity, bible study.”</i>	
P6: <i>“mga activities po na nag tuturo sa amin, gaya ng schooling.”</i>	

The theme shows the importance of practical, day-to-day support and structured programs in helping Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) cope and function effectively during their stay at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center.

Participant 2 shared, *“Pag may dumadalaw po... may binigay na pagkain, biscuit... pagkain sa araw-araw po,”* highlighting how material assistance and visits from outside support contribute to meeting basic needs such as food. This form of support provides not only physical nourishment but also reinforcements that they are remembered and cared for despite being in detention.

Participants 5 and 6 emphasized the role of structured learning and activities within the institution. Participant 5 stated, *“Mga hindi ko po nagawa sa labas, nagagawa ko po dito... schooling, activity, bible study,”* while Participant 6 added, *“Mga activities po na nag tuturo sa amin, gaya ng schooling.”* These responses suggest that the alternative learning system (ALS), although restrictive inside the institution, also offers opportunities for growth that were previously unavailable to them. Engagement in schooling and developmental activities allows CICL to build skills, establish routines, and experience a sense of productivity.

These findings align with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which proposes that the fulfillment of basic physiological and safety needs is essential before higher-level psychological growth can occur. The provision of food, routine activities, and educational programs helps create a stable foundation that enables CICL to focus on learning, self-improvement, and future planning. Additionally, Bronfenbrenner’s Ecological Systems Theory (1979) explains how supportive institutional environments can positively influence development by compensating for deficits in family or community systems.

Table 15. Theme on Academic Ambition

Significant Statement	Theme
P1: <i>“Makapag tapos po sa pag-aaral. Bago po ako gumawa ng ibang pangarap makapag tapos po muna.”</i>	Academic Ambition
P4: <i>“Mag aaral po muna ako ng mabuti. Tatapusin ko po muna ang pag-aaral.”</i>	
P6: <i>“Pag titibayan ko po ang loob ko, tatatagan ko pa po. Mag aaral po ako mabuti para makamtan ko po yung sarili ko. At saka gusto ko po maka bawi sa pamilya ko.”</i>	

The theme highlights education as a central aspiration and source of motivation among Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. The participants’ statements reflect a strong desire to complete their schooling, viewing education not only as a personal goal but also as a pathway in self-improvement and family responsibility.

Participant 1 emphasized the importance of prioritizing education, stating, *“Makapag tapos po sa pag-aaral. Bago po ako gumawa ng ibang pangarap makapag tapos po muna.”* This response suggests that education is seen as the first step before pursuing other life goals. Similarly, Participant 4 expressed determination by saying, *“Mag aaral po muna ako ng mabuti. Tatapusin ko po muna ang pag-aaral,”* reflecting focus and commitment to academic completion while being in rehabilitation.

Participant 6 further connected academic ambition with personal growth and family responsibility, sharing, *“Mag aaral po ako mabuti para makamtan ko po yung sarili ko. At saka gusto ko po maka bawi sa pamilya ko.”* This statement shows how education is linked not only to self-development but also to moral responsibility and the desire to restore trust with the family. For this participant, schooling represents a means of correcting past mistakes and building a more responsible future.

These findings align with Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory (1968), particularly the stage of *identity versus role confusion*, where adolescents seek direction and meaning in their lives. Academic engagement provides CICL with a constructive identity and a sense of purpose, helping them redefine themselves beyond their legal involvement. Additionally, Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) explains that the participants’ motivation to pursue education reflects intrinsic needs for competence, autonomy, and relatedness, especially when learning is tied to personal values and family aspirations.

Table 16. Theme on Vocational Aspiration

Significant Statement	Theme
P2: <i>“Ano po, gusto ko po mag seaman.”</i>	Vocational Aspiration
P3: <i>“Opo gusto ko po maging business owner ng isangrestaurant.”</i>	
P5: <i>“Maging isang lawyer po.”</i>	
P7: <i>“Hindi ko po masasabi, pero gusto ko po maging pulis.”</i>	
P8: <i>“Gusto ko po mag sundalo.”</i>	

The theme reflects the participants’ emerging career-oriented goals, shows that Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center are beginning to envision purposeful and socially meaningful futures.

Several participants articulated clear occupational goals. Participant 2 shared, *“Gusto ko po mag seaman,”* indicating an interest in a structured profession that offers financial stability and opportunities. Participant 3 expressed entrepreneurial ambition, stating, *“Gusto ko po maging business owner ng isang restaurant.”* Meanwhile, Participant 5 stated, *“Maging isang lawyer po,”* showing a desire to pursue a skilled profession advocating justice and social responsibility.

Other participants expressed aspirations toward service to people. Participant 7 said, *“Gusto ko po maging pulis,”* while Participant 8 shared, *“Gusto ko po mag sundalo.”* These aspirations suggest a reorientation toward discipline, order, and public service, which values that contrast with their prior experiences of legal conflict. Such goals may reflect a desire to restore social trust and contribute positively to society.

These findings are consistent with Super’s Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development (1990), which emphasizes that adolescents begin forming vocational self-concepts by exploring possible careers aligned with their values, abilities, and life experiences. The participants’ aspirations illustrate an active process of identity reconstruction, where they reimagine themselves in roles that offer legitimacy, structure, and social contribution.

Table 17. Theme on Familial Restoration

Significant Statement	Theme
P6: <i>“Maka-bawi sa pamilya”</i>	Familial Restoration

This strong desire of the Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) to repair and restore family relationships after leaving the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. Although expressed by a single participant, this theme remains significant because it reflects a deeply personal and value-laden motivation that often drives long-term behavioral change.

Participant 6 explicitly stated, *“Maka-bawi sa pamilya,”* which conveys a clear intention to make amends, regain trust, and fulfill perceived responsibilities toward family members. This statement suggests a deep reflection and the recognition of the emotional impact that past actions may have caused within the family unit. Rather than focusing solely on personal success, the participant envisions future goals in terms of relationships, emphasizing accountability and responsibility.

This finding aligns with Erikson’s Psychosocial Theory (1968), particularly the stage of identity versus role confusion, where adolescents seek meaning, direction, and a sense of purpose. For justice-involved youth, family restoration often becomes a central component of identity reconstruction, as reconnecting with family provides emotional grounding and social belonging.

Table 18. Theme on Foundational Needs

Significant Statement	Theme
P1: <i>“Yung ano po, nakakakain po ako dito sa tamang oras po. Ok naman ako dito po.”</i>	Foundational Needs
P7: <i>“Mga gamit at damit na maiiwan ko po dito sa the institution pag lumaya po ako dito.”</i>	

The theme emphasizes the importance of basic care and material stability in shaping the well-being and adjustment of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) during their stay at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. The participants’ responses reflect an appreciation for having their fundamental needs consistently met, which contributes to a sense of safety, stability, and comfort.

Participant 1 stated, *“nakakakain po ako dito sa tamang oras po. Ok naman ako dito po,”* showing the significance of regular meals and structured daily care. This suggests that predictability in basic routines provides reassurance and reduces stress for youth who may have experienced instability or neglect prior to admission. Similarly, Participant 7 shared, *“Mga gamit at damit na maiiwan ko po dito sa the institution pag lumaya po ako dito,”* reflecting gratitude for material support and being provided even during confinement.

These findings align with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs (1943), which posits that physiological and safety needs must be satisfied before individuals can focus on higher-level psychological growth and self-actualization. In the context of detained youth, meeting these foundational needs is critical because consistent access to food, clothing, and safe routines supports emotional stability and engagement in rehabilitation programs (Bracken & Theodore, 2023). For CICL, such provisions create the necessary base upon which counseling, education, and behavioral change can occur.

Table 19. Theme on Relational Prioritization

Significant Statement	Theme
P2: <i>“Pag laya ko, babawi ako sa mga magulang ko. Sila po kasi nag aasikaso sa akin at mga kapatid ko po.”</i>	Relational Prioritazion
P8: <i>“Mahalaga po sakin yung pamilya ko po tsaka yung mga kasama ko po.”</i>	
P3: <i>“Bibigyan ko po ng kahalagahan yung kapatid ko po... hindi na palagi iinit ang ulo.”</i>	
P4: <i>“Yung hindi ko po hahayaan na yung anak ko ay matulad sa akin.”</i>	
P6: <i>“Kung бага po lahat ng pagkaka mali ko sa laya, lahat po iyon ay itatama ko na at saka babawi ako sa mga tao na nagawan ko ng mali. Gusto ko po bumawi sa kanila.”</i>	

The participants’ narratives reveal a shift in priorities from self-focused or being involoved with peers, shift to responsibility, care, and emotional accountability in relation to their families and social connections.

Participant 2 expressed a strong desire to make amends, stating, *“Pag laya ko, babawi ako sa mga magulang ko,”* which reflects gratitude and recognition of parental sacrifice. Similarly, Participant 8 emphasized emotional attachment by sharing, *“Mahalaga po sakin yung pamilya ko po tsaka yung mga kasama ko po,”* indicating that both family and supportive relationships within the institution have been a source of meaning. Participant 3’s intention to exercise patience and understanding toward a sibling—*“hindi na palagi iinit ang ulo”* suggests growth in emotional regulation and awareness.

For participants with parental roles, relational prioritization becomes even more strengthened. Participant 4 stated, *“hindi ko po hahayaan na yung anak ko ay matulad sa akin,”* showing a desire to break negative cycles and protect the following generation. Likewise, Participant 6’s commitment to correcting past mistakes and making amends *“lahat po iyon ay itatama ko na”*, shows reflection and accountability to others.

These findings align with Erikson’s Psychosocial Development Theory, particularly the stage of identity formation and responsibility, where adolescents begin redefining values and relationships. Detention appears to function as a reflective place that allows CICL to reassess their priorities and recognize the importance of meaningful connections. Additionally, Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988) supports the idea that strong emotional bonds with family and caregivers serve as protective factors that motivate positive behavioral change.

Table 20. Theme on Personal Contentment

Significant Statement	Theme
P1: <i>“Ano po, ok naman po kami dito, wala naman po kami problema. Kain tulog lang po kami dito. Itinutulog ko lang po dito.”</i>	Personal Contentment
P5: <i>“Ano po, dito po natutunan ko po maging kontento sa mga bagay.”</i>	

The theme reflects how some Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) experience a sense of personal contentment during their stay at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. The participants’ statements suggest that having a stable routine and a predictable daily structure contributes to feelings of calmness, acceptance, and reduced stress.

Participant 1 shared, *“ok naman po kami dito, wala naman po kami problema. Kain tulog lang po kami dito,”* indicating satisfaction with basic daily routines such as eating and resting. This response suggests that the consistency and order within the institution provide a sense of relief from the instability they may have experienced prior to admission. Similarly, Participant 5 stated, *“dito po natutunan ko po maging kontento sa mga bagay,”* reflecting a developing attitude of acceptance and appreciation in receiving support for their essentials.

These findings align with Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, which emphasizes that fulfillment of basic physiological and safety needs creates a foundation for emotional stability. When essential needs such as food, rest, and structure are consistently met, individuals are more likely to experience contentment and reduced anxiety.

Table 21. Theme on Personal Development

Significant Statement	Theme
P7: <i>“Pag dasal po at pag exercise po dito araw-araw. Nag jogging po kami.”</i>	Personal Development
P8: <i>“Yung pag-aaral po... madaming natutunan.”</i>	

The theme highlights how participation in structured activities at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center supports the personal development of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL). The participants’ statements indicate that daily routines involving

spiritual practices, physical activity, and education contribute to self-improvement, discipline, and a renewed sense of purpose.

Participant 7 shared, *“pag dadasal po at pag exercise po dito araw-araw. Nag jogging po kami,”* showing that regular prayer and physical exercise help establish healthy habits and self-discipline. These activities appear to support emotional regulation and stress management, particularly in a confined setting. Meanwhile, Participant 8 stated, *“yung pag-aaral po... madaming natutunan,”* emphasizing the value of education as a means of growth and learning while being in detention.

These findings align with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which emphasizes that personal growth is fostered when individuals engage in activities that support competence, routine, and self-direction. Through structured programs such as schooling, exercise, and prayer, CICL are given opportunities to rebuild confidence and experience personal achievement.

Table 22. Theme on Social Support

Significant Statement	Theme
P2: <i>“Minsan po mapapa isip din dito sa loob yung mga bagay na nagawa ko. Pero mababait naman po ang mga kasama ko.”</i>	Social Support
P3: <i>“Yung pagkakaroon po ng kaibigan. Naranasan ko po na pag naiyak po ako may taong kumakausap po sa akin... mga house parents nagbibigay ng payo.”</i>	
P4: <i>“Yung ano magkaron ng maraming kaibigan, yung makisama po, makihalubilo kasi mahiyain po talaga ako.”</i>	

The theme highlights the importance of social support as a positive experience for Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) during their stay at the Juvenile Rehabilitation Center. The participants’ narratives show that supportive relationships with peers and caregivers play a significant role in helping them cope emotionally, reflect on their past actions, and build confidence in social interactions.

Participant 2 shared, *“minsan po mapapa isip din dito sa loob yung mga bagay na nagawa ko. Pero mababait naman po ang mga kasama ko,”* indicating that while confinement encourages self-reflection, the presence of kind and supportive peers makes this process less overwhelming. This suggests that peer acceptance provides emotional safety during periods of introspection.

Similarly, Participant 3 stated, *“pag naiyak po ako may taong kumakausap po sa akin... mga house parents nagbibigay ng payo,”* emphasizing the role of both peers and house parents as sources of comfort and guidance. This highlights how adult caregivers within the institution are seen as protective figures, offering emotional reassurance and advice when CICL experience distress. Participant 4 added, *“magkaron ng maraming kaibigan... makisama po, makihalubilo kasi mahiyain po talaga ako,”* showing that social interaction within the center helps reduce shyness and improves social confidence.

These findings are consistent with Attachment Theory (Bowlby, 1988), which posits that supportive relationships provide a secure base that enables individuals to manage stress and develop healthy emotional regulation. In addition, Social Support Theory suggests that emotional and relational support reduces psychological distress and strengthens coping capacity, particularly among vulnerable populations such as detained youth.

CONCLUSIONS

It shows that peer relationship problems and emotional difficulties emerged as the most prominent concerns among the Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), which indicates challenges in social interaction, emotional adjustment, and everyday functioning within the institution.

It shows that despite the presence of emotional and behavioral difficulties, many CICL demonstrated intact prosocial behavior, suggesting existing strengths such as empathy, cooperation, and willingness to help others, which may serve as positive foundations for rehabilitation.

It shows that psychological strengths and difficulties were generally not influenced by demographic variables, except for selected areas such as hyperactivity by age and conduct problems by educational background, highlighting the

need for targeted yet inclusive guidance and counseling interventions.

RECOMMENDATIONS

There is a need for the DSWD, the institution, and Guidance Counselors to strengthen the implementation of an integrated guidance and counseling program that focuses on emotional regulation, peer relationship development, and values formation among CICL, provide structured peer-support and group counseling activities to address emotional distress and peer-related difficulties, and establish continuous monitoring and follow-up mechanisms to sustain positive coping and psychosocial adjustment during rehabilitation.

Government agencies need to continue allocating resources to mental health programs in juvenile facilities, including the provision of trained guidance counselors, psychologists,

and mental health professionals and strengthens inter-agency collaboration among DSWD, DepEd, LGUs, and partner organizations to support holistic rehabilitation and community reintegration of CICL.

Families and communities need to encourage active family involvement through counseling, communication sessions, and participation in reintegration planning and promote community-based support systems that reduce stigma and provide educational, livelihood, and social support opportunities for CICL after discharge.

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