

Focus Group Discussion

Stories and Situations of Senior Citizen Women In Butuan City Jail



Butuan City Jail
Libertad, Butuan City

August 28, 2019

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Documenter

BACKGROUND

The Commission on Human Rights is mandated to visit detention cells to know the situation of the persons committed inside, and to know issues and concerns if there are any, inside detention cells.

The focus discussion with senior citizen women inmates in Butuan City Jail is done by the CHR-Caraga Regional Office and the Center for Gender Equality and Women's Rights. This is in the belief that all women, rich or poor, educated or not educated, free or behind bars, have their stories to tell and are equal with their rights among each other.

The results of the conducted FGD will serve as basis for recommendations if there are any, focusing on the situation of senior citizen women in detention particularly in Butuan City Jail.

OBJECTIVES

Though this FGD the objectives are the following:

1. To get information regarding experiences of senior citizen women in detention.
2. To give senior citizen women the opportunity to tell their experiences in detention regarding a) situation in jail; b) protection and security from violence; c) health and well-being; d) mother and children relationship needs especially with their situation.
3. To check if the government has properly or efficiently dispensed its function in protecting and preventing violence against senior citizen women in detention.
4. To give the opportunity of senior citizen women inmates to express themselves through their artwork.

METHODOLOGY

After weeks of preparation and coordination with the administration of Butuan City Jail, CHR-Caraga visited Butuan City Jail and conducted the focus group discussion. There were three FGD sectors namely, for women, for senior citizen women, and LGBTQ. This documentation focuses on the FGD for senior citizen women in detention.

Questions were prepared by CHR Caraga beforehand, and each FGD has one facilitator and one documenter. After an informal introduction of the participants, the facilitator

briefed everyone on the background and purpose of the FGD. The participants were informed that their participation is voluntarily.

The discussion was free-flowing and informal, and anybody can answer questions to whatever and however they want it. Also, the participants were asked to talk one at a time so that communications or self-expressions will not be hindered and will be noted properly by the facilitator and the documenter.

FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

Sector: Senior Citizens

Number of Participants: 5

Facilitator: Atty. Reshiel C. Caseñas

Documenter: Dilbert P. Ciano

I. Introduction

Which of the following emotions do you associate daily in detention?

Choices: Naguol = Sad Nasuko = Angry
 Mingaw = Missing somebody Nahadlok = Scared
 Nabalaka= Anxious Nalipay = Happy

Inmates	Emotions
Senior Citizen 1	Sad ; Miss somebody
Senior Citizen 2	Miss somebody; sad
Senior Citizen 3	Miss Somebody; anxious
Senior Citizen 4	Happy; Sad
Senior Citizen 5	Angry; Miss somebody

Majority of the emotions manifested by the senior citizen women under detention is that they miss somebody or their relatives outside.



*Board where they have to stick a small yellow circle to show their emotions.
The board is being used by all participants of the FGD.*

As a senior citizen, what is your greatest issue or concern that you face inside jail?

“Our greatest concern is health because when we get sick, our families cannot take good care of us.”

II. Situations of Senior Citizens (Food, Water, Space)

Is the supply of food and water enough? What about the space?

“Senior Citizen 1: Sometimes, flow of water is slow.”

1. Water schedule runs for two hours in the morning and varies from 3:00am to 5:00am or 4:00am to 6:00am. They have to store water in their water containers.

In the afternoon, another two hours of water schedule and inmates take turns to get water.

For drinking water, they buy mineral water in jail since they will not drink tap water. Water coming from the water district is not potable.

2. Space is enough. We have good sleeping space and everything.

3. For those who are sickly, we are concerned of our cellmates and we store water for them since they cannot withstand getting up at dawn to fetch and store water.

Concerns:

1. As senior citizens, their concern is that at 3:00am or 4:00am schedule of water is very early for them. With their aging bodies, they would have a hard time taking a bath. At times, they choose not to take a bath because of coldness.
2. They need water containers especially for sickly elder citizens in order to have options in taking a bath not so early in the morning, and to wash clothes at a later time of the day.
3. Some of the senior citizens are doing livelihood such as bag making and they are very tired already. With their exhausted bodies, they will not take a bath at dawn. If they do, they will have fever or other ailments.

Senior Citizen 5: *"Gihilantan ko karon ma'am kay naligo ko ganihang kadlawon alas 3:00"*

"I have fever today because I took a bath at dawn 3:00am."

What is the condition of the comfort room and bathroom?

It is a square space divided into two for bathroom and for comfort room. The space is enough and it is clean because we clean it.

How are you affected as an elder woman on the conditions in jail?

Nothing much. All the senior citizen women are put in one cell together, so we support each other.

Do you have special treatment as senior citizens with regards to food, water, and space?

None. Everybody is of equal treatment.

III. Security

**Do you feel that you are secure from any form of violence or abuse in jail?
If not, why?**

Everybody feels secure and they have not experienced or are not aware of any violence or abuses done against an inmate.

Do you have any knowledge or experience of physical or sexual abuses done by an officer or by a fellow inmate? How can the jail officers address this?

None. All of them concurred that they have no knowledge whatsoever of any physical or sexual violence.

If there is an incident of violence or abuse, do you know where to address this concern and its process?

Yes. They will inform the SIC or the Shift in Charge of the officers.

If somebody violates a regulation, what are the punishments or penalties?

It depends on the violation. Sometimes you are restricted, meaning that you cannot get out of the cell. You cannot join any recreational activities. Sometimes, no one is permitted to visit you. It depends on the violation.

As senior citizen women, what do you fear most inside the jail?

When we get sick. Although your inmates will help you, but it's really different if the relatives or families are the ones taking care of you.

IV. Health

What are the medical services? What are the medicines or services given?

1. We can go to DOTS to ask for maintenance for high blood pressure, etc.
2. We don't have doctors, but nurse only.
3. If you want to get out for a certain check-up with doctors, you need court order to get out.

4. You can go to hospital if you are in a life and death situation. We take good care of our health to prevent a life and death situation.
5. For fever, colds, or common ailments, we can buy medicine inside the jail because we have fellow inmates that sell these medicines such as paracetamol. Sometimes, we ask from our relative to give us paracetamol and others.
6. There are NGOs who visit us and provide us groceries, sometimes feminine pads or napkins for women. However, we have no use for this, so we give the napkins to younger women.

Have you been sick in prison? How do officials address medical emergency? Are their medical response enough?

If it is a life and death situation, they send us to hospitals.

Are your health needs being addressed especially on medicines and check-ups?

They would provide medical check-up if we would request them, and the DOTS provide us maintenance for high blood pressure.

How about your psychosocial needs? Sometime you get depressed?

There are times when we cry, but we help and console each other. We joke at each other. We have Zumba to help us with boredom and for physical activities.

Do you have any inmate who is bedridden?

None.

Do you have regular medical check-ups?

No regular check-up. At first when we were committed, they have us on a thorough check-up. However, if somebody will ask for a high blood pressure check-up, they will accommodate us. When we request for one, they will do one. Sometimes, we have blood sugar tests.

Do you have 4Ps membership, SSS, Philhealth, and other social protection?

1. Before, we have SSS and the fund was deducted from our livelihood. This was stop because the contribution is getting bigger. This was stopped approximately three years ago.
2. For Philhealth, we are now automatic beneficiaries since we are senior citizens, covered by Philhealth.
3. One of the senior citizens is part of 4P's but was stopped when she was committed.

Concerns:

1. One senior citizen filed for SSS pension because she is 60 years old already. According to her, everything is approved from Manila, Cagayan and others. There is a receipt number for claim already. However, SSS Butuan hold the pension since she is detained. As to her story, they will only let her claim the pension once she is free or outside of detention.
(The facilitator promised to follow up and ask for further clarification on this case.)
2. As senior citizens, their concern is that 3:00 or 4:00 schedule of water is very early for them. With their aging bodies, they would have a hard time taking a bath. At times, they choose not to take a bath because of coldness.

V. Needs for Mother and Children

As a mother how does detention affects your relationship or your function as a mother?

1. Their families are saddened.
2. Senior Citizen 5: "They are constantly asking when will I get out."
3. Senior Citizen 2. "One of my grandchildren is orphaned already. My son died, and her partner got married to another person. So, I was left with the kid. I took care of the kid and sent him to school. Now that I'm here in prison, I sent the kid to my sister in Manila."

4. Senior Citizen 1. "Same thing. Since my daughter works abroad, I have to send my grandchild to my siblings. I should be the one taking care of my grandchildren."

How do you function as a mother? Do you regularly speak to them and your family?

Senior Citizen 1: When my husband was alive, he made it a point that they would visit me every Sunday. Now that he's deceased, I asked my kids and grandchildren to visit me every Sunday or else I might go crazy.

Senior Citizen 2: Once a month, sometimes once every two months since they are also concerned with their livelihood. I cry, but I have to understand them also.

Senior Citizen 3. No visit.

Senior Citizen 4. Once a month, sometimes none.

Senior Citizen 5. It has been three months, no visitation.

We would communicate through cell phones but very, very seldom. Only the most important concerns or communication will be granted by the in charge of cell phones. Inmates are not allowed to have cell phones. There are IWD in charge, Inmates Welfare Development who are in charge with cell phone communications. Once there was a wedding that a video call was allowed.

What are your needs as senior citizen women in jail?

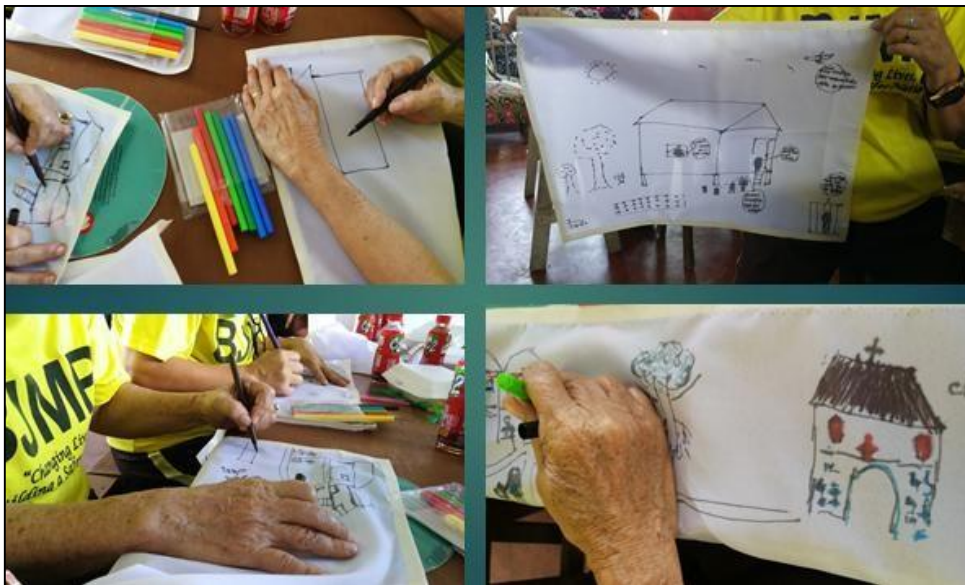
1. Maintenance for medicines.
2. Basic needs such as coffee, soap, shampoo, etc.
3. Regular medical check-up. Once a month would be good.
4. There are fellow inmates whom we would request for a massage for our aching bodies, but we have to pay them.

VI. Conclusion and Art Making

What do you think are the most important issues/concerns that should be addressed or needs immediate action?

1. Health and regular check-ups for senior citizens.
2. Most of us senior citizens have maintenance for high blood pressure. We appreciate that the jail admin gave us the free maintenance.
3. With our aging bodies, we feel weak and prone to ailments, that's why we need regular check-ups.

The senior citizen women are asked to draw on a piece of cloth and draw or make an artwork. The theme of the artwork is what gives them strength and/or hope while in detention.



Some of the artworks on process of drawing.

ADDITIONAL NON-SENIOR CITIZEN INMATES ON FGD

Almost at the end of the senior citizen women's FGD, three women inmates from Provincial Jail joined the FGD. They were not senior citizens, so the documenter opted not to focus on their stories since the scope of the documentation is for the conditions of the senior citizen women inmates.

However, the documenter noted that most of their concerns or answers were almost identical with the senior citizens. These are the following:

1. There were no concerns regarding food, water, and space.
2. They also felt secure in prison with no physical or sexual abuses, and their health concerns are being addressed by the provincial jail.
3. Most of their concerns is the slow progress of their case, which is a similar concern to the senior citizens.

SUMMARY OF ISSUES AND CONCERNS

The following are the summary of issues and concerns:

1. Regular medical check-up for senior citizens. According to them, check-ups are granted if there is a request from the inmates. With their aging bodies prone to exhaustion and ailments, they desired to have a regular monthly medical check-up.
2. Branch 4 has no judge assigned yet. This makes their cases pending or slow to proceed. The senior citizens desire for immediate trial of the court so that they can get out. Four out of five of the senior citizen cases are pending and their schedules are always cancelled or being reset.
3. Water in the early hours of morning. Senior citizens will have a hard time taking a bath since their aging bodies cannot withstand the coldness of early dawn. They asked for leniency of schedule if they can store water more or if they can have water schedule at a later hour in the morning.
4. There are no concerns in food, water, and space.
5. No concerns when it comes to any form of physical and sexual abuses.
6. There is one concern of the granting of SSS pension of one inmate, and the facilitator, Atty. Caseñas volunteered to make a query for it. Accordingly, the pension was approved nationally but it was held by SSS Butuan until such a time that the detained senior citizen woman can get out of jail.

Senior Citizen 1:

This 61-year-old woman was teary eyed because his husband just died a few weeks ago due to cancer. She was very sad because she was not there for her husband during his time of illness. As of today, nobody could follow up the documentations for the death of her husband and to take care of pertinent documents. She's also anxious to get out of detention so that she can take care of her grandchildren.

One of her prayers is that the August 30 court date will not be cancelled or reset so that she will be set free.

"Gusto nako nga makagawas nako kay ang akong apo nga ang inahan tua sa gawas, gusto ko nga akoy moatiman."

"I want to get out so that I can take care of my grandchild since her mother is working abroad."

Senior Citizen 2:

This 70-year-old woman was sad that her son outside went “crazy”. “I am sad and anxious that nobody is taking care of my son.” She wants to get out so that she could care for her son and take him to treatment. She added that she is having a hard time because her relatives seldom visit her, and she has no money to buy her basic needs such as soap, coffee, and others.

One of her concerns is that her case got assigned to Branch 4, which there is a vacancy of judge. Her case will not prosper because there is no judge in Branch 4 handling her case.

During the FGD, she had a fever but she claimed that she had taken paracetamol already.

“Maintain pod diri sa mga kape, maglisod. Mag-inom baya tag kape kay tiguwang nata.”

“Maintaining constant supply for coffee is hard. We drink coffee because we are old.”

Senior Citizen 3:

This 62-year-old woman claimed that she is innocent on her case and it was all mistaken identity. According to her, she is a resident of Cebu and went to Negros to sell clothes that she made. She was arrested in Negros by unidentified persons wearing plain clothes and was forced to go inside a vehicle and then got blindfolded. They arrested her with no warrant.

She claimed that her case is being heard in Bayugan City. She said that they accused her as a woman named Aurora, but it was all mistaken identity. Her attorney is from NUPL.

Nobody visits her because her family is in Cebu City. As of now, she is detained for more than one year in Butuan City Jail, and she manages the livelihood program of handmade bags of women in detention.

One of her concerns is that her court date is always cancelled, or if not, the schedules are reset. As of now, the judge in Bayugan handling her case retired and the judge who is now temporarily handling her case has very busy schedule.

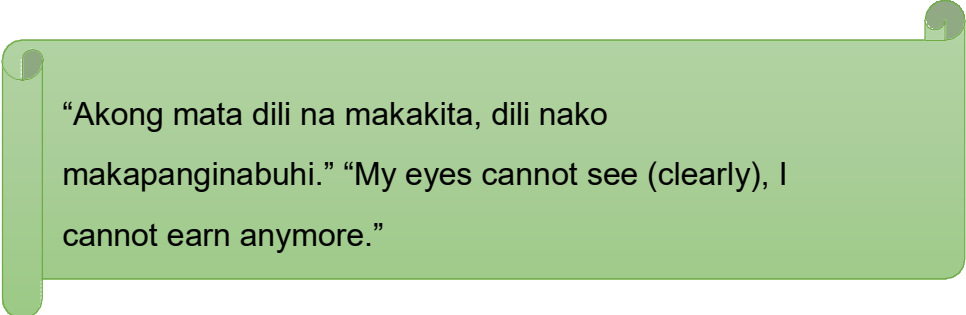
“Pasanginlan ka sa wala nimo gibuhat. Sala sa uban, ako ang nag-antos. Akong kaso arson pero ang pangutana kay wa ko kahibalo asa na dapit akong gisunog, asa dapit ang Bayugan. Kung wala ko kaabot diri, wa ko kahibalo diri diay ang Bayugan. ... bisan sa damgo, wa gyod na nako

“You get accused of things you did not do. It’s a sin done by others, and I am the one suffering. My case is arson, but the question is I don’t even know the place where the arson occurred. I don’t even know where is Bayugan. If I had not come here (detained), then I wouldn’t know where is Bayugan ... even in my dreams, I did not do it.”

Senior Citizen 4:

This 62-year-old woman is anxious because her health is deteriorating. She cannot see very well, and if ever she gets out, (hopefully in 2020), she cannot earn anymore. She complained that her case moves very slow, and she is detained for five years now.

Her children seldom visits her. They only visit once every two months, since they are also having a hard time in life also. They are tricycle and trisikad drivers.



“Akong mata dili na makakita, dili nako makapanginabuhi.” “My eyes cannot see (clearly), I cannot earn anymore.”

She said that her plea bargaining was denied by the judge, and the case dragged on so slowly, and she’s getting older. Her case is assigned to Branch 4

Senior Citizen 5:

According to Senior Citizen 5, her boss from Manila recruited minors, and she was charged of recruiting them even if she has no transaction with the minors.

She said that it is very heard to be in detention since her family is not visiting her. Health is also one of her concerns because nobody would really take care of her, and medicines are hard to come by because she has no money here in prison.

Allegedly, she paid money to somebody that would serve as bail for her case to secure her temporary freedom, but then they found out that her case is no bail. Allegedly, the money that was given was not returned to them.

“Kung naa ka sa kulungan lisod jud, kay ang tanan mahunahunaan nimo deperensya ra. Ug naa ka sa imong kaugalingon, makakita ka sa imong pamilya.”

“If you are inside the jail, all your thoughts are different. When you are at home you can see your family.”

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