

Where Chains No Longer Bind: A Narrative Study of the Emotional Experiences of Children in Conflict with the Law

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Date received: March 10, 2025

Date revised: March 29, 2025

Date accepted: April 19, 2025

Originality: 96%

Grammarly Score: 99%

Similarity: 4%

Recommended citation:

Castromayor, P.A., Guevarra, J.J., Buday, F.H., Mondrano, F., & Ignacio, D. (2025). Where chains no longer bind: A narrative study of the emotional experiences of children in conflict with the law. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 3(5), 289-299. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2025.154>

Abstract. This explored the emotional experiences of Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL), focusing on their past and present emotional states and their anticipations for life after leaving the shelter. The study utilized a qualitative narrative research design, conducting semi-structured interviews among three (3) CICLs at the Marcellin Foundation Center in General Santos City. The findings revealed a range of emotional experiences among the CICL. Before staying in the shelter, their experiences included moments of emotional distress and satisfaction. During their time in the shelter, they faced emotional discomfort in adapting to a new environment, a longing for familial connection, satisfaction with their living conditions, and signs of emotional maturity. Finally, the CICL expressed intrinsic motivations and anticipated personal growth. These findings provide important insights and indicate a need for better support systems, such as strengthening counseling services and rehabilitation programs, to help understand and deal with the challenges children face in conflict with the law.

Keywords: Children in conflict with the law (CICL); Emotional experiences; Narrative research; Shelter experiences.

1.0 Introduction

One's perception and response to the world profoundly shape emotions; however, navigating these emotions within the law's confines can hinder their exploration pathway. Children in Conflict with the Law (CICL) are minors who have committed criminal offenses, often shaped by childhood adversities such as trauma, peer pressure, and prior experiences with the juvenile justice system (Young et al., 2017). CICL are youth incarcerated for violations of the law, and they face categorization within the legal system that significantly impacts their outlook on the future, depending on the level of care and guidance they receive. They are frequently viewed as products of societal constructs, shaped by their unique perspectives and life experiences (Ahmad et al., 2022). As such, CICLs are influenced by their actions and the experiential factors that shape their behaviors and emotions. Furthermore, providing shelters for CICL is essential for enhancing their psychological, emotional, and psychosocial well-being (Department of Social Welfare and Development Field Office [DSWD], 2013) and for facilitating their reintegration into society (Elemia, 2016). When emotional experiences are acknowledged and needs are met, a call for understanding arises.

Legal conflicts may influence children's lives. Their overwhelming emotions would lead to challenging behaviors affecting their personal lives and those around them. These behaviors manifest as emotional outbursts, petty theft, substance abuse, aggression, and even more serious criminal activities initiated early in life (Vikaspedia, 2020). CICLs are particularly susceptible to negative influences and challenging situations, which increases their likelihood of engaging in illegal activities and violent behavior from a young age. As such, Marlina et al. (2018) identified various contributing factors, including family dynamics, environmental conditions, economic status, educational levels, and substance use, that lead children to commit crimes. Various influences contribute to the involvement of CICL in criminal activities, often resulting in their placement in shelters. Most children who face legal challenges are deprived of their liberty in observation homes, rehabilitation centers, or specialized facilities, often isolated from their families (Rawanda L. & Rawanda M., 2021). Being separated from their families at a young age is an incredibly challenging experience. They are placed in unfamiliar environments that strip away their sense of liberty and freedom.

Every child deserves to be heard, including those whose stories are often untold and unrecognized. In the Philippines, there were 15,892 cases of CICL in 2020 (Philippine Center for Investigative Journalism [PCIJ], 2022), and in Region 12 alone, 206 cases were reported in 2018 (POLITIKO, 2018). Frequently, these children are victims of circumstances beyond their control (Branzuela et al., 2023), who have faced complex challenges due to factors they cannot change or prevent. To address this crucial need, children in conflict with the law (CICL) must be granted access to environments that adhere to international protection standards (Balanay et al., 2019). Promoting their well-being through safe spaces allows them to heal and thrive while empowering them to build a better future. In General Santos City, the Marcellin Foundation Center is operating as a non-government organization dedicated to addressing the unique challenges of CICL (Marists of Champagnat, 2020), where education, therapy, and vocational training to enhance future opportunities for CICL (GracesList, 2016). It serves as more than just a shelter; it provides comfort, stability, and support. Still, the emotional experiences of many children there often remain overlooked.

Marginalized children, like CICL, need a platform to express themselves and assert their place in society. The challenges faced occur globally, with the Philippines being no exception. The field of psychology must expand its knowledge base by exploring the narrative of the lives of CICL, explicitly delving into their emotional experiences to understand their upbringing. As the exploration occurs, the study aims to grasp a new perception and decrease the stigma towards them. Consequently, this study seeks to fill the research gap, emphasizing the distinct emotional experiences of CICL residents who reside in an unfamiliar environment away from home, an aspect that previous studies on CICL have often overlooked. By doing so, this study delves into the narratives of CICL by describing the different struggles they were experiencing and their ability to cope and adapt while under the care of the Marcellin Foundation Center.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

The study is qualitative, utilizing narrative analysis. Qualitative research delves into the lives of the research participants through their insights and perceptions of real-world problems (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Additionally, the narrative approach is a qualitative research method from the humanities that involves the collection of stories from individuals about their experiences (Riessman, 2008, as cited in Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Narrative research offers a unique lens through which to view the multifaceted nature of reality, capturing the nuances and dynamics that define human existence. This approach is suitable for the research, as it focuses on the in-depth subjective experiences of CICL, which comprehensively answers the question surrounding their emotional experiences. Consequently, the study aims to unveil CICL's narrative about their past and present emotional experiences to comprehend the circumstances that led them to their choices and how they envision themselves and their emotions for their anticipated future.

2.2 Research Participants

The study was conducted in a selected shelter facility in the locale of General Santos City, the Marcellin Foundation Center. Selecting this locale for the research study includes the convenience, availability, and willingness of the shelter to participate with assurance of safeguarding the participants' anonymity and confidentiality. It is also an all-male facility, with diverse youths with different life experiences involving emotional experiences and life

anticipation for their future. Moreover, this study employed purposive sampling to select participants capable of providing detailed and relevant information aligned with the research objectives. Creswell (2014) defines purposive sampling as the deliberate selection of individuals or groups by researchers to gain insight into the central phenomenon of the study. This sampling method ensures depth and quality in exploring the experiences and perspectives of the study's three (3) CICL male participants. Focusing on the three (3) participants gave the researchers an in-depth understanding of their emotional experiences as to how they came to be, the reason for their stay at the shelter, what they look forward to doing, and delving into their unique narratives. According to Bekele and Ago (2022), in narrative research, since the focus is on the experiences of individuals, the interview sample typically consists of one (1) or two (2) participants. To provide a subjective and comprehensive story of CICL, this study included one (1) additional participant to offer a broader range of perspectives and enrich the understanding of their emotional experiences. Providing three (3) participants in this study ensures a diverse perspective on the emotional experiences of CICL. Focusing on three (3) CICL male participants encourages the researchers to gain an insight into individual differences rather than the generalizability of the population. As a result, the choice of participants was based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria.

For the inclusion criteria, participants should belong to the ages fourteen (14) to seventeen (17) years old, as it signified that they were in their adolescent stage as based on the Philippine Justice System. Additionally, the CICL must have stayed in the facility for at least one (1) year to two (2) years to ensure sufficient exposure to the shelter environment for meaningful insights. During this stay, the participants experienced a wide range of situations that may differ from what they experienced before they went there. This experience includes personal development, which may be negative or positive. Thus, the duration of stay is sufficient to gain the necessary data that circulates the shelter and the emotional experience of the population. Furthermore, inclusion necessitates involvement in juvenile delinquency offenses ranging from low-severity cases like petty theft, minor assault, or possession of illegal substances to high-severity cases like robbery, burglary, aggravated assault, using drugs, or murder.

Specific exclusions were applied to ensure the accuracy and depth of insights regarding emotional experiences. CICL with less than one (1) year of residency in the shelter to ensure that participants had sufficient experience within the shelter environment to provide meaningful insights. Individuals recently entering the shelter might not fully acclimate to the setting, potentially impacting their perspectives and responses. By focusing on participants who had resided in the facility for at least one year, the study sought to minimize potential confounding factors and enhance the reliability of the findings.

2.3 Research Instrument

The researchers conducted a semi-structured interview, a data collection method commonly used in qualitative research. This approach involves asking open-ended questions within a predetermined thematic framework. According to Adams (2015), a semi-structured interview allows flexibility and encourages two-way communication between the interviewer and the interviewee. It transforms the interview into more of a dialogue rather than a strict question-and-answer session.

To ensure effective communication, the researchers translated the questionnaire into the interviewees' desired Bisaya and Tagalog languages by one (1) Institutional Professor. The interview guide was specifically designed to explore the positive and negative emotional experiences of CICL, focusing on their past and present emotional experiences and their emotional anticipations for the future. It consists of twelve (12) open-ended questions, providing a flexible framework that encourages interviewees to share their in-depth experiences. Based on their responses, the researchers could probe further, uncovering more perspectives and gaining deeper insights into the participants' emotional experiences, which enriched the study's objective.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the research instrument, the interview questions and procedure underwent a pilot interview at the Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth at Tantangan, South Cotabato. This pilot interview involved one (1) CICL participant and has helped refine the interview questions and procedure. Additionally, the researchers enlisted three (3) validators, one (1) Psychometrician, one (1) Guidance Counselor, and one (1) Psychologist. These experts were chosen for their extensive knowledge and expertise in the field,

ensuring that the interview questions met the required validity, reliability, appropriateness, and credibility standards.

The flexibility of this method allows for the exploration of new ideas and themes that may emerge during the interview, offering valuable insights into the emotional experiences of the CICL. The questions were thoughtfully crafted to encourage responses that authentically reflect the interviewees' emotions and thoughts, ensuring the data's validity. By applying this interviewing method, the researchers could engage with the interviewees' responses and ask follow-up questions based on their answers, fostering a deeper understanding of their experiences, specifically their emotions. This flexibility enabled the researchers to gain a richer perspective on the emotional experiences of CICL, including their primary and secondary appraisals, various strains, negative emotions, and coping strategies.

2.4 Data Gathering Procedure

After establishing the criteria for selecting the participants, the researchers prepared a letter of request addressed to the Dean's office to ask permission to conduct the study with three (3) CICLs residing at the Marcellin Foundation Center. The letter includes the research objectives, methodology, and reason for conducting the study in the chosen locale and institution, duly signed by the Dean and research adviser. Then, the researchers prepared a permission letter addressed to Bro. Crispin P. Betita, FMS, the executive director of the institution. Once approved, the researchers prepared questions for the semi-structured interview related to the emotional experiences of the CICL from their history up to the present, which the research adviser verified. The research instrument was validated by three (3) experts, one (1) Guidance Facilitator, one (1) Guidance Counselor, and one (1) Psychologist. This ensures the validity and reliability of the interview questions. Also, one (1) Institutional Professor translated the interview guide into Bisaya and Tagalog for better communication between the interviewer and the participants. To ensure the appropriateness and credibility of the questions, a pilot interview was conducted with one (1) participant at the Regional Rehabilitation Center for Youth.

After the pilot interview, the interview guide was revised and improved to address any ambiguities, wording issues, or improvement areas where questions might be removed or revised. Before the actual conduct of the study, the researchers distributed the assent and consent form to the participants as part of the ethical consideration of anonymity and confidentiality. Assent forms were given to the participants under the legal age who agreed to participate in the study. At the same time, the consent form was given to the legal guardian of CICL, in which Bro. Crispin P. Betita, FMS permits the participation of the participants with full knowledge of the study's objectives, purpose, and method. Before conducting the interview, the researchers asked for the participants' permission to collect data through audio recording, reassuring them that their privacy and confidentiality would not be compromised as part of the content of the assent and consent form. Upon conducting the interview, the researchers built rapport with the participants through active listening and reflecting on the responses.

Furthermore, the researchers analyzed and interpreted the data from the induction-deduction method. This five-phase process helped researchers plan, explain, and do qualitative data analysis clearly and systematically. Moreover, to ensure data storage security, the researchers secured digital databases with appropriate access controls to protect confidentiality and prevent unauthorized access through cloud-based storage solutions such as Google Drive and researcher-owned flash drives. In the post-handling of data, the researchers followed a step-by-step rule from gathering to discarding the collected data. In discarding the data, collected files such as physical copies and cloud files were discarded after the transcription to ensure that ethical considerations were met after the collection. Physical copies such as interview notes and forms were destroyed or shed, thus securing the disposal. Central and backup storage was deleted for the cloud files to ensure security, and disposal documentation must be presented.

2.5 Data Analysis

The Bingham Induction-Deduction Method was utilized as it is suitable for narrative research because of its capability to analyze individual stories systematically, uncover emerging themes, and integrate broader theoretical frameworks, facilitating a comprehensive understanding of the life narratives of CICL on their emotional experiences. This process can be used fully or partially, depending on the research needs and methods

used (Bingham, 2023). The researcher employed the following during the data analysis. The first phase entails developing codes, which means the researchers created labels for data and focused on comprehensively understanding all the participants' collected data before delving into individual data. In the second phase, the researchers created data categories based on the study's goals and questions, which are the positive and negative emotional experiences of CICL. The researchers carefully reviewed the data and assigned relevant codes to different segments to categorize and arrange the information according to key themes and concepts. This process of coding and organizing the data to conduct a thorough analysis that aligns with our research objectives and allows for deeper insights into the emotional experiences of CICL. The third phase focused on identifying significant elements contributing to children's emotional experiences of CICL. The researchers generated themes based on participants' statements expressing similar meanings, ensuring these themes accurately represent the data. The themes, such as positive and negative emotional experiences, were derived from the data analysis process. In the fourth phase, the researchers looked for common patterns and themes across data sources to develop findings. This involved validating the emerged themes to ensure the data's credibility. Furthermore, newly emerging themes were validated and consulted with the research adviser. Finally, in the fifth phase, researchers connected these themes to existing literature and theoretical frameworks, applying the earlier codes to create a cohesive and insightful analysis. The researchers classified the topics of CICL's positive and negative emotional experiences.

The Bingham induction-deduction method enriches the exploration of emotional experiences among CICLs within their life narratives. Codes and data categorization were used to organize the collected data, focusing on positive and negative emotional experiences. Thus, significant elements and themes based on participants' statements were identified, ensuring accuracy through pattern recognition and validation techniques. These themes were connected to existing literature, providing a cohesive analysis of CICL's emotional experiences and contributing to a deeper understanding of their well-being.

2.6 Ethical Considerations

Safeguarding the anonymity of respondents is an essential aspect of conducting ethical research. By refraining from including personal names or identities during data collection, analysis, and dissemination, researchers ensure that the privacy and confidentiality of participants are upheld (Lavrakas, 2008). Researchers must handle the data carefully throughout the interview and ensure it is stored securely. Additionally, maintaining anonymity helps to create a safe and secure environment for participants to share their thoughts, opinions, and experiences without the fear of being identified (Principe, 2024). It encourages honest and open responses, leading to more accurate and reliable research findings. Maintaining anonymity creates a safe space for participants to share openly, fostering honest responses and ensuring accurate, reliable findings. The researchers carefully handled and securely stored the data to uphold anonymity.

Before participating in the interview, all research participants were allowed to read their informed consent, in which the researcher provided adequate information about the study, its risks, and benefits, and the participants voluntarily agreed to participate (Hassan, 2023). It ensures that individuals have the necessary information to make an informed decision about their participation, and it promotes transparency and trust between researchers and participants. Before conducting an interview, respondents were afforded ample time to ask questions, and the researchers addressed any inquiries they had to ensure that they clearly understood the research study and could make an informed decision about their participation.

Confidentiality protects sensitive information obtained from or shared by research participants (Bos, 2020). It is an essential ethical principle that ensures the privacy and anonymity of research study participants. Researchers must safeguard the confidentiality of participants and ensure that any use of the collected data respects their dignity and autonomy. Additionally, breaching confidentiality can violate the researchers' and the participant's trust, compromising the validity and reliability of the research findings. In compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012, the researchers ensured the confidentiality of respondents by restricting access to collected information, preventing unauthorized disclosure, and safeguarding participants' data. They prioritized privacy rights by obtaining informed consent, securely handling data, and ensuring no personally identifiable information was shared without explicit consent.

3.0 Results and Discussion

In this section, the researchers comprehensively explained and discussed the study's data and key findings to offer the readers valuable insights and information. The researchers incorporated tables to enhance understanding and illustrate significant data. Additionally, the textual analysis offered a detailed examination of the results, connecting them to the research questions and highlighting their implications for future practice.

3.1 Emotional Experiences Before Staying in the Shelter

This section shows various themes that reflect the different emotional experiences of CICL. In total, the researchers derived two (2) themes from their emotional experiences before arriving at the shelter.

Theme 1. Emotional Distress

Experiencing distress appears to be overwhelming towards CICL, contributed to being aware of feelings of distress, as it is a vital factor of their past. The statements gathered from Bohol and Makati revealed that familial connection is essential for emotional growth. Without it, negative feelings subside. Adebajo and Aborisade (2024) suggest that family structure greatly affects juvenile delinquency, as difficulties and trauma within the family contribute to these behaviors, where juveniles feel unequal love, parental neglect, and misplaced priorities, which are significant influences on their behavior. This may result in harboring negative feelings towards their family, such as sibling envy and bitterness, further contributing to delinquency. CICL, who committed crimes, described their environment in general as chaotic, and the attention they expected to receive was unmet (Barnert et al., 2015). This encapsulates Bohol's struggle due to the favoritism they experienced from their mother and the actions towards them that suggest favoritism from the other, resulting in sibling envy.

Similarly, Mariano (2022) finds that negative interactions with parents can severely affect children's emotional and psychological development, increasing the likelihood of aggression, delinquency, social withdrawal, and conduct disorder behaviors. These harmful family dynamics may significantly shape the behaviors that eventually lead them into legal trouble. The primary factor influencing children's engagement in criminal activities is the social circle they associate with, often driven by peer pressure and the intrinsic need for recognition and attention (Damm & Dustmann, 2014). Such pressure is driven by decisions made to accommodate the need to belong. CICL exhibited shame through embarrassment, guilt, or remorse for their actions. Internalizing or repressing their anger leads to guilt for not being able to express it outwardly (Aguilar, 2016). Experiencing regret after committing the crime and being taken inside the shelter is a reflection of Makati while asking himself why he did it in the first place.

Hence, the statements strongly indicate that the emotional growth and development of CICL were redirected to various feelings leading to distress. In such cases, the participants displayed negative feelings toward their families due to biased treatment. This feeling eventually led to behavior in which they sought companionship despite the odds of criminal involvement.

Theme 2. Emotional Satisfaction

A persistent requirement for the emotional aspect is the consistency that allows growth to occur. Given its significance, the study found that despite the adverse experiences that the CICL had, their needs were met. In the study of Valiente and Ignacio (2018), the CICL enjoyed a supportive environment, as their family and friends usually treated them, allowing them to maintain strong relationships and a sense of belonging that positively influenced their well-being. When children feel accepted by their community, family, and friends, it enhances their confidence in reintegrating into everyday life and aids in their recovery. Thus, CICL needs consistent emotional support where the positivity their family brings can overcome negativity.

The satisfaction and contentment of CICL's emotional needs contribute to better well-being. The past experiences of these children show a sense of connectedness wherein feelings of happiness and joy are evident despite the odds. As noted by Dealagdon et al. (2016), joining a gang provided a sense of belonging, acceptance, and identity for CICL, offering them the emotional support and accomplishment they lacked at home, leading to stronger attachments to their peers. Their involvement in such a group reflects the joy they have found away from the problems they are facing from their family. These positive feelings towards their peers are derived from the need to escape the negativity, seeking positive feelings that ease their feelings.

3.2 Emotional Experiences During the Stay in the Shelter

Upon arriving at the shelter, CICL encountered various emotional experiences, from living conditions to social encounters. The researchers gathered relevant responses from the participants and derived four (4) themes that correspond to their experiences within the shelter:

Theme 1. Emotional Discomforts

Transitioning into a new environment requires adjustment to people and the place. This experience may become unpleasant as Bohol, Makati, and Surigao are only young when they have to move due to legal circumstances that leave them with no choice but to comply. Children in orphanages suffer from behavioral and emotional problems (Qamar et al., 2022). Such problems arise due to the adverse history of each CICL, where they may have struggled with their emotions and in dealing with their behavior. Hence, CICL in the youth care facility faced challenges, including feelings of loneliness and a longing for their families, as well as issues like theft, initiation rituals for newcomers, and conflicts with some peers (Solmayor & Embornas, 2024). This may manifest by feeling anxious about the environment and their peers in terms of bullying, interaction, and longing for their family. Ultimately, the emotional burden becomes a silent companion as they navigate an unfamiliar space full of uncertainty, hoping for a sense of belonging that feels just out of reach.

Theme 2. Longing for Familial Connection

Like every child, CICL longs for the presence of a familiar figure. Being away means leaving the comfort of home for an unfamiliar place. According to Abhishek and Balamurugan (2024), social factors significantly influence juvenile delinquency, highlighting the critical role of cheerful family and peer relationships; lacking these connections can lead to a yearning for belonging and social interaction. The presence of supportive social connections, especially within families and peer groups, plays a crucial role in mitigating the likelihood of juvenile delinquency. In this context, Urbano et al. (2023) further explain that CICL experience homesickness when separated from their familiar environment, often triggered by being away from family, encountering culture shock, or facing new responsibilities. Yearning for a social connection outside of the shelter is a familiar feeling that CICL experienced, feeling homesick and longing for familial presence. Furthermore, a lack of connection hinders them from strengthening the bond they have created outside, which could lead to a strained relationship. Having a new kind of responsibility is overwhelming, as it bears the consequence of the action that brought them to the shelter in the first place.

Moreover, the findings of Urbano et al. (2023) indicate that CICL experiences loneliness, homesickness, and social difficulties inside the facility. CICL, with the necessary resources, learn to handle emotional and social obstacles in their new environment. In this regard, Dealagdon et al. (2016) emphasize the importance of emotional support from siblings, highlighting that CICL often seek comfort and reassurance during difficult times, which can further aid their adjustment and resilience. On top of that, having strong emotional support from the family, which includes care, affection, and their physical presence through visits and eagerly waiting for updates from the hometown, provides adolescents with the resilience needed to survive in orphanages (Mekeama et al., 2019). This underscores the idea that the presence of family plays a crucial role in the emotional well-being of CICL, and they may feel a sense of loneliness or insecurity without that support. Thus, maintaining their relationship outside strengthens their resilience as they endure their time in the shelter. This proves that there is resiliency among CICL, braving the uncertainty and awaiting the end of their stay in the shelter.

Theme 3. Satisfaction in Living Conditions

Throughout their stay, the CICL has already gained satisfaction in their living condition in the shelter, simultaneously managing the changes. Adjusting to new situations or environments is crucial for the development and growth of CICL (Urbano et al., 2023). Transitioning into a new situation and environment is a massive leap in the changes experienced by CICL, especially since it is vital for their development in their behavior and ability to manage daily challenges. In this context, Bulatao (2023) reveals that the CICL expressed how the rehabilitation center and its staff provided them with hope, comfort, guidance, and support, emphasizing that their time at the center was highly beneficial, helping them develop good character and improve their lives. As a result, CICL, like Bohol, found hope among the residents, who offered acceptance and support throughout their rehabilitation journey, fostering a sense of belonging and encouragement. Hence, these experiences highlight the importance of having a supportive environment in promoting positive change and fostering satisfaction for CICL.

Theme 4. Emotional Maturity

As time progresses, CICL undergoes a rigorous journey of overcoming challenges, leading to significant emotional development and personal growth. Urbano et al. (2023) stated that instead of fighting, they redirect their energy into playing basketball whenever a misunderstanding arises. Diverting conflict into a positive behavior where reflecting emotional change occurs as CICL improves their self-awareness by controlling themselves with guidance from their peers to be humble and inspired by their family to change. Moreover, by allowing themselves to cool down before engaging with their fellow CICLs, they demonstrate that they can effectively tackle challenges and apply the lessons learned at Bahay Pag-Asa (Urbano et al., 2023). Such behavior of choosing how to engage peacefully suggests an emotional growth occurring in the shelter. CICLs are motivated to make positive changes within the shelter by improving their self-awareness and emotional endurance.

3.3 Emotional Anticipations After Leaving the Shelter

While at the shelter, CICL developed a sense of emotional anticipation after leaving the Marcellin Foundation Center, looking forward to growth and renewal. From the gathered data, two (2) themes of emotional anticipation of CICL after leaving the shelter emerged:

Theme 1. Intrinsic Motivation

Experiencing isolation from the outside world, Bohol, Makati, and Surigao often express mixed emotions when anticipating their release from the shelter. The study found that CICL still have hope in their heart for themselves and their future, envisioning new opportunities for growth, stability, and success after leaving the shelter. Specifically, Bohol and Makati desire to continue and complete their education after their stay in the shelter. Grounded in the findings of Bulatao (2023), CICL faces significant challenges; however, they maintain diverse perspectives on the hope that empower them to strive for career success, financial stability, personal growth, acceptance, better relationships, and a positive contribution to their community.

Subsequently, CICL understand the value of education and are determined to complete their schooling, believing it is the pathway to a better future and gives their lives purpose (Dealagdon et al., 2016). Regardless of what they have gone through, they still prioritize finishing their studies, recognizing the value of gaining knowledge for their future. Thus, in challenging circumstances, such as their emotions within the shelter and past experiences, CICL demonstrates remarkable hope and motivation for a brighter future and a better version of themselves, fueled by their aspirations.

CICL often encounter unique challenges stemming from their past and current experiences within the shelter, which profoundly influence their emotions and personal growth. Their aspirations extend beyond simply overcoming past mistakes; they aim to become better individuals hoping for a better future, drawing on the lessons learned during their time in the shelter. Highly resilient adolescents can overcome obstacles and look forward to a brighter future despite hardships (Rahmawati & Amalia, 2020). The study found that CICLs have future goals for themselves outside the shelter and are determined to pursue their education and eager to finish to achieve those goals. CICL is embracing and acknowledging personal change through its commitment to being morally aware and happy to leave the shelter to see its family again.

In addition, the findings indicated that while the CICL anticipate happiness after leaving the shelter, they also experience strong emotional ties to their peers and house parents within the shelter. They also look forward to reuniting with their families outside the shelter. From the evidence gathered by Solmayor and Embornas (2024), CICLs have different self-awareness and decision-making, shaped by their reflections, personal reasoning, and inner motivations, ultimately influencing their choices for their future. Hence, CICL anticipates happiness mixed with sentiment for the shelter and the people who taught them values. As CICL will be stepping beyond the shelter, they carry a blend of hope, sentiment, and a renewed sense of self, ready to embrace the future with resilience and joy.

Theme 2. Personal Growth

Emotions are closely tied to motivation for personal growth, driving Bohol, Makati, and Surigao to act, pursue goals, and meet their needs. This eagerness to leave fuels their desire to strive for personal growth, guiding how they navigate daily life. CICL recognizes that once they leave the shelter, they will be better individuals because

the shelter and the people within it have prepared them for this change. Based on the findings of Batará (2017), CICL often lacks support, which contributes to their offenses; however, these children can change, grow, build relationships, and positively impact their communities, using their challenges as motivation to pursue their dreams despite their struggles. Facing difficulties can disrupt how CICL manages their emotions and personal growth. However, they recognize that when they leave the shelter, they will have grown and be prepared to face the greater challenges that await them outside. From struggle to strength, CICL transforms its challenges into growth, emerging from the shelter ready to face the world with resilience and hope.

4.0 Conclusion

Emotional experiences played a pivotal role in the development of CICL as they navigated a broad spectrum of emotions throughout their lives. This study explored the unique and shared emotional experiences of CICL, transcending their distinct geographical backgrounds and childhood circumstances. By openly expressing these emotions, the study provided deeper insights into how CICL perceived their lives across the past, present, and future. Before their stay in the shelter, Bohol, Makati, and Surigao shared positive experiences and moments of distress. Their narratives revealed feelings of satisfaction and hardship tied to their living situations, relationships, and past experiences. During their time in the shelter, they encountered emotional challenges, such as adjusting to an unfamiliar environment and coping with longing for their families. Over time, they adapted to their new living conditions and expressed a growing sense of satisfaction. This adjustment period enabled them to develop a stronger sense of self and foster positive behavioral changes.

In the present, these changes have nurtured an emotional anticipation of a brighter future. CICL exhibited a heightened capacity for self-reflection, expressing aspirations to achieve personal goals upon reuniting with their families. They aimed to reintegrate into society while pursuing their education, just as they continued their learning journey within the shelter. This aspiration for a positive future is profoundly shaped by their emotional experiences, which have influenced how they interpret their past and navigate their present. These findings directly address the research question by uncovering the complex spectrum of emotions they experienced before, during, and after their stay in the shelter.

Furthermore, the emotional experiences of CICL from their past and present have significantly impacted the way they perceive their future. Agnew's Theory (1999) examines how social influences and psychological dynamics drive individuals toward delinquent behavior. Accordingly, many of these children faced significant strains, such as broken family dynamics, poverty, and peer influence, which contributed to feelings of isolation, frustration, and anger. Understanding these past emotional encounters is crucial in recognizing how these strains influenced their delinquent behavior, which eventually led to their placement in the shelter. One notable response to these strains was coping by resorting to joining a fraternity. This behavior reflects how CICL might turn to groups for validation or comfort in their search for belonging and support. Despite facing these challenges, their interactions with peers were a source of joy, with their relationships emitting joy, possibly as a means to counterbalance the emotional burden of strained family relationships. This withdrawing negative feelings stem from their conflicts at home – was an essential coping mechanism for many. Furthermore, in the face of adversity, they still derived joy from helping others within their support system, reflecting the resilience and sense of purpose that such acts provided. The security of having consistent meals, which was a tangible source of stability, also contributed to their emotional well-being, offering them comfort and a sense of relief amid their struggles.

Hence, in their present emotional experiences, Lazarus' Theory (1991) offers a deeper understanding of how CICL emotionally responds to their experiences while residing at shelters like the Marcellin Foundation Center. Their emotional responses are shaped through three stages of appraisal. In primary appraisal, CICL assesses whether the shelter environment poses a threat to their well-being. Many perceive it as threatening their stability, leading to feelings of intimidation, isolation, or homesickness. This shapes their initial emotional reactions to shelter life, thus creating doubt in adapting to survive. During secondary appraisal, they evaluate their coping ability, relying on available resources like caregiver support and forming friendships. Some manage well, while others feel helpless due to inadequate coping strategies. Finally, after understanding their appraisal, individuals will identify coping strategies. In coping, CICL chooses how to manage their emotional responses. Some use problem-focused strategies to improve their situation and are encouraged by peers to be humble. In contrast, others rely on emotion-focused coping, such as controlling themselves in conflict.

The narratives shared by CICL revealed profound insights into their emotional experiences, highlighting themes about adjustment, resilience, and aspirations for the future. Hence, in their present emotional experiences, Lazarus' Theory (1991) provides insight into how CICL respond emotionally to shelter life through stages of appraisal, from assessing threats to their well-being, evaluating coping abilities, and ultimately managing their emotional responses through various strategies. These findings underscore the critical role of emotional development in shaping the reintegration processes for CICL, aligning with Agnew's Strain Theory (1999), which emphasizes the connection between emotional strain and behavioral outcomes. By reflecting on these implications, this study not only enhances our understanding of CICL's emotional experiences and opens pathways for future research and practical applications. In recognizing these diverse emotional experiences, CSWDO could create updated services facilitating these children's reintegration into the society through open dialogues extending to the community among its residents, parents, and children, fostering non-judgmental and inclusive environment that acknowledges CICL's emotional needs.

CICL are more than their past actions; as they reflect on their emotions in the present, they have developed remarkable resilience that few can truly understand, equipping themselves for future challenges beyond the safety of the shelter. CICL like Bohol, Makati, and Surigao, serve as living examples of how despite the overwhelming odds, they encountered at such a young age. Their journey toward a better life begins with the crucial understanding and processing of their emotions and the conscious effort to avoid the mistakes that once led them down destructive paths. Emotions, while often overlooked, are vital for growth and development, even for those confined behind the gates of the Marcellin Foundation Center. For CICL, being behind these gates can make it easy to feel as if the world has forgotten them. However, it is precisely within these walls that self-awareness begins to take root. In the quiet moments of reflection, these children learn to cope, grow, and prepare for a future beyond the confines of their past.

5.0 Contributions of Authors

Pat took the lead in managing the entire study. Alongside JJ, Farrah, and Fernan, each member contributed equally to the research. Together, they outlined the research, gathered relevant literature, identified research participants, conducted interviews, and extracted themes from the discussions. Darwin, serving as the research adviser, supervised the overall execution of the study.

6.0 Funding

The research does not receive any funding in its whole conduct from any organization.

7.0 Conflict of Interests

There is no conflict of interest in the conduct of the study.

8.0 Acknowledgment

The researchers want to thank everyone who helped make this study successful. We appreciate the examiners for their valuable feedback, as well as the experts who evaluated our research tools. We also thank our families for their constant support and, most importantly, the participants for their enthusiastic and voluntary involvement in the study.

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