

Exploring the Lived Experiences of Criminology Students in Coping with Academic and Training Demands

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ABSTRACT

Criminology education requires students to balance rigorous academic requirements with physically demanding training activities. This study explored the lived experiences of criminology students in coping with academic pressure and training demands in a higher education institution in Lanao del Norte. Using phenomenological research design, the study explored how students manage the overlapping demands of academic coursework and quasi-military style training. Ten third-year criminology students who were selected through purposive sampling participated in the study. Data was collected through in-depth interviews and analyzed using Moustakas' phenomenological method of data analysis. The findings revealed six themes describing students' coping experiences: embodied strain and self-regulation; peer support and social influence; time management and prioritization; adaptation to different learning and training environments; institutional policies and resources; and motivation driven by personal and professional aspirations. The study concludes that criminology students experience significant academic and training pressures but develop coping strategies and resilience that help them adapt and persist in their educational journey. Hence, the administration ensures that criminology programs strengthen institutional support systems and student wellness initiatives to help learners effectively manage academic and training demands.

Keywords: academic pressure, criminology students, coping strategies, resilience, training demands

INTRODUCTION

Higher education plays a vital role in preparing students for professional practice, but it also presents significant challenges due to academic pressures, financial constraints, and social adjustments (Molina-Espinosa et al., 2024). In the Philippines, criminology has emerged as one of the fastest-growing academic programs, attracting students who aspire to careers in law enforcement, corrections, and public safety (Oblianda, 2024). Unlike most undergraduate programs, criminology is distinct in that it integrates rigorous academic coursework with quasi-military-style training (Reynaldo et al., 2025). This combination of intellectual rigor and physically demanding training creates a dual burden that often leads to heightened stress, fatigue, and psychological strain among students, as they struggle to maintain academic performance while meeting strict physical and disciplinary standards (Heyrosa & Jr., 2025; Lumingkit et al., 2024). These overlapping demands significantly influence students' coping mechanisms and motivation, as the constant pressure to excel academically and perform physically can either foster resilience and self-discipline or contribute to burnout and declining engagement, depending on their personal and institutional support systems (Stanislav Sabaliauskas et al., 2025; Chong et al., 2025).

Criminology education is designed to equip students with both theoretical knowledge and practical discipline (Heyrosa & Jr, 2025). Local studies, such as Nel et al. (2024), have highlighted that criminology students often experience emotional stress and nervousness during internships, academic pressure from demanding coursework, and physical strain from intensive training components. Internationally, similar patterns have been observed in other training-intensive programs such as nursing and medicine, where students are required to balance rigorous academic study with hands-on training, often resulting in mental fatigue and reduced motivation (Watson, 2024). However, the institutional culture of criminology programs, characterized by strict discipline, hierarchical authority, and adherence to quasi-military norms, creates a unique form of stress that extends beyond

academics, as students must constantly navigate the psychological demands of conformity, obedience, and performance under pressure (Hughes, 2024).

Academic pressure in Higher Education remains one of the most frequently reported stressors among university students, particularly in programs with rigorous requirements. A study by Alkhalaf et al. (2023) found that excessive workloads and academic overload are primary stressors, often leading to mental fatigue. In the Philippine context, Sarmiento (2022) reported that criminology students cite academic overload, research requirements, and strict faculty expectations as frequent sources of pressure. These findings align with broader research showing that students in professional programs such as medicine and law experience high levels of academic anxiety due to the competitive, rigorous nature of their curricula (Mohamed et al., 2024). In criminology education, the relationship between academic overload and coping strategies is particularly significant, as students often rely on adaptive coping mechanisms such as time management, peer support, and resilience-building to manage stress. In contrast, others may resort to maladaptive behaviors, such as avoidance or withdrawal, when demands exceed their capacity to cope (Sula-sula, 2024).

The implementation of Republic Act No. 11131, also known as the Philippine Criminology Profession Act of 2018, has further intensified the academic and training expectations placed upon criminology students. This law professionalized the practice of criminology, established stricter licensure standards, and aligned criminology education with the competencies required in law enforcement and public safety professions. Consequently, higher academic rigor, updated curriculum standards, and enhanced board examination requirements were introduced to ensure the production of competent criminologists (Lapuebla, 2025). Recent institutional findings revealed that the first cohort examined under RA 11131 and its updated curriculum achieved a national passing rate of only 33.14%, reflecting elevated standards and increased academic pressure (Bel & Bel, 2025). While these reforms aimed to elevate the professional credibility of criminologists, they have also contributed to heightened academic demands, as students must now balance heavier workloads with intensive review and training requirements (Saloma et al., 2024; Manuel & Palinawan, 2025). This amplified pressure underscores the need to understand how criminology students cope with such overlapping academic and physical demands, particularly as these experiences shape their academic performance, resilience, and overall well-being.

In addition to academic responsibilities, criminology students face training demands that resemble quasi-military systems, which add another layer of stress to their academic journey. Lumingkit et al. (2024) noted that formations, physical fitness tests, and tactical drills contribute to exhaustion and decreased motivation. Internationally, comparable findings have been documented among Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) and military academy cadets, in which balancing classroom learning with training responsibilities led to high stress, sleep deprivation, and burnout (Ricardel, 2023). Such studies suggest that criminology students face unique stressors that combine the intellectual rigor of higher education with the physical intensity of law enforcement training. However, these training-oriented environments also foster psychological adaptation and resilience, as students gradually develop self-discipline, emotional regulation, and stress tolerance traits that are essential for future law enforcement professionals facing high-pressure situations (Jennifer et al., 2022; Zueger et al., 2022).

Moreover, research on coping and resilience shows that students rely on a combination of problem-focused and emotion-focused strategies to manage stress. Pérez-Jorge et al. (2025) emphasized the importance of problem-focused approaches such as time management, academic support, and planning. On the other hand, Ling et al. (2024) identified emotion-focused strategies such as avoidance, distraction, and religious reliance as common responses among students under heavy stress. Hamadi et al. (2021), in a study of nursing students, concluded that a balance of both strategies is essential to maintain well-being and academic success. Locally, Philippine students often turn to peer support, family encouragement, and spirituality for strength when facing academic and training demands (Vergara et al., 2025). In this context, the coping strategies of criminology students may also reflect deeply rooted Filipino cultural values such as collectivism, interpersonal connectedness, and spirituality, which emphasize social harmony, mutual support, and faith-based endurance in times of stress (Diane & Chan, 2022).

However, year-level differences reveal that students' experiences of stress often vary depending on their academic standing. McLean et al. (2022) observed that first-year students struggle with adjusting to

independence and workload, while senior students face greater pressure from graduation requirements and professional preparation. Lavoie-Tremblay et al. (2021) reported that stress levels peak during practicum or clinical placements, when students must balance field responsibilities with academic tasks. For criminology students, this progression is comparable: underclassmen struggle with academic adjustment, while upperclassmen face heavier coursework, internships, and professional-readiness expectations. These variations also highlight developmental differences in coping and resilience across academic levels, wherein lower-year students tend to rely more on emotional and social support systems, while upper-year students demonstrate more adaptive and problem-focused coping mechanisms shaped by accumulated experience, maturity, and exposure to institutional demands (Cai & Meng, 2025; Nordstokke & Hindes, 2025).

Furthermore, prolonged exposure to stress without adequate coping mechanisms can have detrimental psychological and academic consequences. Watson et al. (2025) found that maladaptive coping strategies such as withdrawal, substance use, and avoidance are strongly associated with burnout, depression, and attrition among students in demanding programs. Adaptive strategies such as time management, cognitive reframing, and seeking social support are linked to improved academic performance and greater psychological resilience. Similarly, Valentin et al. (2023) emphasized that resilience and self-efficacy function as critical protective factors, enabling students to maintain motivation, persistence, and overall well-being despite academic and training pressures. Institutional and environmental supports such as faculty mentorship, peer networks, counseling services, and supportive academic environments also play a vital role in strengthening adaptive coping among students, helping them manage stress more effectively and sustain engagement in their studies (Shan & Xu, 2025; Mohamed & Jeilani, 2025). In the context of criminology education, fostering these personal and institutional resources is essential, as students must simultaneously navigate intellectual rigor, physical discipline, and organizational expectations.

Although existing research has established the prevalence of stress in practice-oriented fields, studies in criminology education, particularly in the Philippine context, have largely relied on quantitative methods that emphasize measurable variables, such as stress levels and coping frequencies. While these approaches provide valuable statistical insights, they often overlook students' deeper, subjective, and nuanced experiences (Lacanilao, 2024). This methodological gap in this study on the limited use of qualitative approaches in examining stress and coping among criminology students is addressed in this study. This gap arises from the dominance of quantitative research, which is commonly preferred for its objectivity, efficiency, and generalizability, thereby marginalizing qualitative methods that require more time and interpretive analysis. The personal meanings, perceptions, and lived experiences of criminology students remain underexplored. Furthermore, there is a lack of localized qualitative studies that account for the unique sociocultural and educational conditions of Filipino learners, which differ significantly from those in other contexts (Eduardo & Gabriel, 2021; Tesfaye et al., 2025). This study addresses this limitation by employing a qualitative approach that captures the richness of students' lived experiences, offering a more holistic and context-sensitive understanding of stress and coping, and contributing to more responsive pedagogical and institutional interventions.

The purpose of this study is to explore the lived experiences of criminology students in coping with academic pressure and training demands. The research seeks to uncover how students describe, interpret, and respond to their challenges; what coping strategies they employ; and what meanings they attach to their educational journey. This approach provides a more holistic understanding of the student's experience, emphasizing not only struggles but also resilience and adaptation.

The significance of this study lies in its potential contributions to various stakeholders. For students, the findings validate their struggles and present strategies that may foster resilience and adaptation. For faculty, the study may inform teaching approaches and training methods that are more responsive to students' needs. Administrators can use the results to design policies and interventions that balance academic rigor with student welfare. Guidance and counseling services may also draw on the findings to strengthen wellness programs tailored to criminology students' unique challenges. Finally, curriculum developers may find insights that help improve criminology education nationwide, ensuring that it not only produces competent graduates but also nurtures students' overall well-being.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Resilience Theory by Ann Masten (2001), which provide a framework for understanding how students experience and manage academic and training-related stress.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) explains stress as a dynamic interaction between individuals and their environment, where stress arises from the cognitive appraisal of demands relative to available coping resources. Stress occurs when academic and training demands are perceived to exceed one's capacity to cope, prompting the use of problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies. In addition, this model explains how criminology students cognitively appraise overlapping academic requirements and training demands, interpreting them as either manageable challenges or overwhelming stressors. Through this appraisal process, students' perceptions directly influence their emotional and behavioral responses to these demands. The theory further provides a framework for understanding how different coping strategies, whether problem-focused (such as effective time management and task prioritization) or emotion-focused (such as seeking social support and stress regulation), shape their overall lived experiences. The model helps clarify why some students can adapt and function effectively despite pressures. In contrast, others struggle to balance the intellectual and physically demanding requirements of the criminology program.

In the context of this study, this model provides a clear explanation of how criminology students interpret and respond to the simultaneous pressures of academic coursework and intensive training requirements. Through primary appraisal, students evaluate whether these demands are threatening, challenging, or manageable, while secondary appraisal involves assessing their available resources, such as time, skills, peer support, and personal resilience. When students perceive their resources as insufficient, they are more likely to experience stress; however, the coping strategy they employ significantly influences their overall experience. For instance, some students may adopt problem-focused strategies such as time management, discipline, and active engagement in training. In contrast, others may rely on emotion-focused strategies, such as seeking social support or managing stress through relaxation techniques. Thus, the theory is highly relevant as it helps explain the variation in students' lived experiences, highlighting how their perceptions and coping mechanisms shape their ability to balance the intellectual and physical demands of criminology education.

Several studies have already been using this model. Lumingkit et al. (2024) found that criminology students experienced heightened stress due to the combined demands of academic workload and quasi-military training. Watson et al. (2025) reported that students' stress responses are largely influenced by their cognitive appraisal of academic and training demands and their perceived control over these stressors. Mohamed et al. (2024) demonstrated that students in professional programs rely on both problem-focused and emotion-focused coping strategies when academic responsibilities overlap with intensive practical training. These studies support the core assumptions of the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping.

Resilience Theory, grounded in the foundational works of Garmezy (1971), Werner and Smith (1982), and Rutter (1987) and further advanced by Masten (2001), emphasizes individuals' capacity to adapt, recover, and grow despite exposure to stress and adversity. The theory views resilience not as a fixed trait but as a dynamic, developmental process shaped by the interaction of internal strengths such as self-discipline, motivation, and problem-solving skills and external support systems, including peers, mentors, and institutional structures. It highlights how individuals maintain psychological functioning, develop competence, and achieve positive outcomes even in the face of significant challenges. Resilience is strengthened through repeated exposure to manageable stress, which fosters coping strategies, adaptability, and confidence. In this way, resilience involves not only "bouncing back" from difficulties but also "bouncing forward," enabling individuals to grow, learn, and thrive in demanding environments over time.

This theory is highly relevant to the present study as it explains how criminology students move beyond immediate stress responses toward sustained adaptation while facing continuous academic pressure and intensive training demands. Rather than reacting to stress, students gradually develop resilience through repeated exposure to challenging situations within the criminology program. This includes building discipline, emotional regulation, perseverance, and a sense of professional identity. Furthermore, the theory helps explain how support

systems, such as peers, instructors, and institutional structures, strengthen students' ability to cope and succeed. In this context, resilience frames coping as a long-term developmental process, enabling students not only to endure the demands of their program but also to grow personally and professionally from these experiences.

Espulgar et al. (2024) found that resilience significantly reduced the negative effects of stress on academic performance among students in high-demand professional programs. Amoroso (2025) reported that personal resources such as self-efficacy, emotional regulation, and time management skills strengthened students' resilience and coping effectiveness. Copley (2025) emphasized that resilience enables students to reinterpret stressors as opportunities for growth, reinforcing its relevance to students navigating academically and physically demanding environments.

Conceptual Framework

This part of the study presents the concepts derived from the identified themes, based on participants' responses to the in-depth interviews. Guided by the existential lifeworld dimensions of phenomenology, the following themes were derived: Embodied Strain and Self-Regulation Amid Academic and Training Pressures; Peer Support, Shared Struggles, and Social Influence as Foundations of Coping and Motivation; Managing Overlapping Academic and Training Demands Through Strategic Time Prioritization; Transformative Learning and Discipline Across Classroom, Training Ground, and Home; Institutional Structures as Sources of Discipline, Support, and Pressure in Shaping Academic and Training Experiences; and Driven by Family Responsibility, Personal Aspirations, and Future Professional Identity.

Embodied Strain and Self-Regulation Amid Academic and Training Pressures. This theme reflects the lived bodily experience of stress, exhaustion, and physical strain resulting from the dual demands of academic coursework and rigid training routines. Within the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, these experiences represent the participants' primary appraisal of stressors, where demands are perceived as taxing or overwhelming, and their secondary appraisal, where they evaluate their ability to regulate and respond to these pressures. According to Dixon (2022), the use of self-discipline, emotional control, and physical endurance demonstrates coping strategies that may be both problem-focused (managing tasks) and emotion-focused (managing distress). As emphasized by Masten (2021), resilience does not imply the absence of stress but rather the capacity of individuals to regulate themselves and maintain functioning amid persistent pressure.

Peer Support, Shared Struggles, and Social Influence as Foundations of Coping and Motivation. This theme stresses the relational dimension of the lifeworld, emphasizing how peer relationships shape coping processes. Acoba (2024) notes that social support functions as a protective coping resource, buffering the impact of stressors. Shared struggles among peers normalize experiences of difficulty and reduce the psychological burden associated with academic and training demands. The presence of collective encouragement transforms stress into shared growth rather than isolated hardship. Within the Filipino cultural context, collectivism and interpersonal connectedness further reinforce peer-based coping mechanisms (Bistis-Nadala, 2024). Thus, relational networks function as important protective factors in students' coping experiences.

Managing Overlapping Academic and Training Demands Through Strategic Time Prioritization. The theme illustrates how participants actively organized their schedules and responsibilities to balance competing demands. Jeszel et al. (2025) describe how participants developed structured routines, prioritized important tasks, and sacrificed leisure time in order to meet both academic deadlines and training obligations. These strategies enabled them to maintain productivity while preventing overwhelming stress. Individuals actively manage stressful situations by altering their behaviors or environments. Lomotey (2025) explains that through time management and prioritization, individuals demonstrate proactive coping behaviors that mitigate the negative effects of multiple responsibilities. Such adaptive behaviors emphasize individuals' ability to develop effective strategies that allow them to function successfully despite demanding circumstances.

Transformative Learning and Discipline Across Classroom, Training Ground, and Home. The theme captures how participants experienced personal growth and behavioral transformation through their combined academic and training experiences. Kumar Shivam (2024) notes that the challenges students encounter encourage the development of discipline, responsibility, and stronger self-regulation not only in school but also in daily life.

Participants described how the values and lessons learned in training environments influenced their behavior at home and in other areas of life. This transformation reflects the adaptive processes where individuals gradually reinterpret stressors and develop more effective coping strategies over time. Moreover, the development of discipline and personal growth aligns with Resilience Theory, which emphasizes that resilience often leads to positive developmental outcomes, enabling individuals to emerge stronger and more capable after overcoming challenges.

Institutional Structures as Sources of Discipline, Support, and Pressure in Shaping Academic and Training Experiences. The theme focuses on how institutional policies, training requirements, and academic expectations shape participants' experiences. While these structures provide guidance, discipline, and opportunities for skill development, they may also generate pressure due to strict standards and high expectations (Martin, 2024). Participants acknowledged that institutional systems play a crucial role in shaping their academic routines, behaviors, and professional development. This theme recognizes that environmental factors influence how individuals perceive and respond to stress. Institutional demands act as external stressors that participants must evaluate and manage through coping strategies. At the same time, institutional support systems, such as mentorship and structured training programs serve as protective factors that foster resilience, consistent with the principles of Resilience Theory.

Driven by Family Responsibility, Personal Aspirations, and Future Professional Identity. This theme, emphasizes the motivational forces that sustain participants' perseverance despite the challenges they face. Koçak et al. (2021) explain that students are often motivated by their desire to support their families, achieve personal ambitions, and establish a future professional career. These goals provide meaning and direction, enabling individuals to endure challenges and remain committed to their academic journey. Participants who perceived their struggles as meaningful steps toward long-term goals were more likely to maintain motivation and resilience. This perspective emphasizes that strong personal aspirations and supportive family relationships function as protective factors that enhance individuals' capacity to overcome adversity and pursue success.

This study posits that criminology students' coping experiences are shaped by the dynamic interaction between academic and training demands. Through this interaction, students develop adaptive coping strategies such as time management, reliance on peer support, self-regulation, internalization of discipline, and meaning-focused perseverance. Ultimately, the framework suggests that coping among criminology students is not merely a response to stress but a developmental process that strengthens resilience, reinforces discipline, and shapes the emergence of a professional identity within the field of criminal justice.

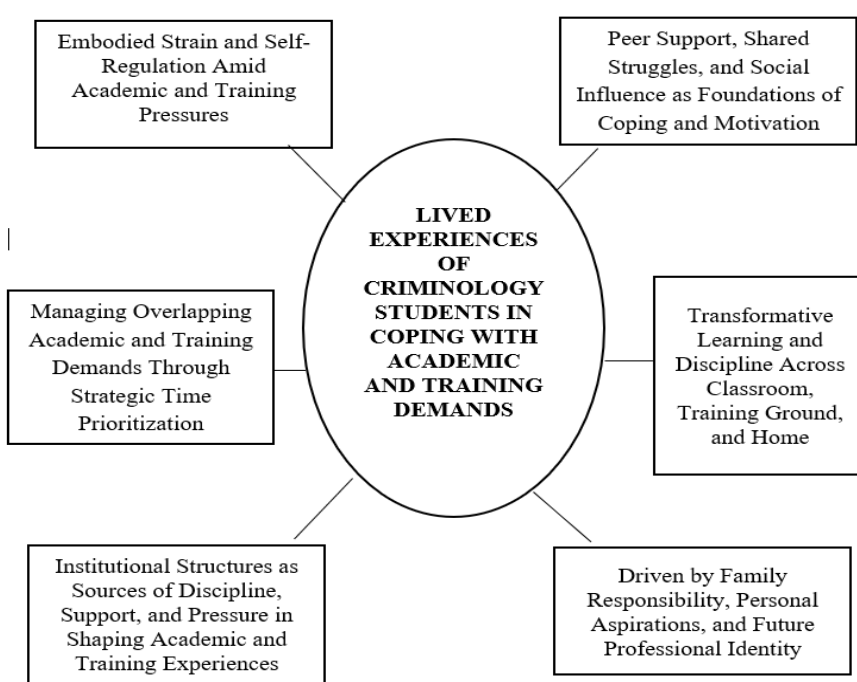


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of the Study

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore the lived experiences of criminology students in coping with academic pressure and training demands, specifically examining the challenges they face, the coping mechanisms they develop, and the meanings they attach to their educational journey. The study answered the following questions:

1. What are the experiences of Criminology students in coping with academic pressure and training demands?
2. How do relationships with peers, instructors, and training officers shape criminology students' coping mechanisms and motivation?
3. How do criminology students experience and manage time pressures from overlapping academic schedules, training drills, and personal responsibilities?
4. How do different learning and training spaces (classroom, training ground, and home) influence criminology students' cope experiences?
5. How do institutional policies, resources, and situational constraints shape the sources and intensity of academic and training stress?
6. Why do they remain committed to their goals despite the pressures of academic and training demands?

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Design

The study utilized phenomenological research design. The phenomenological method was well-suited for this study because it allows for a deep exploration of criminology students' lived experiences of coping with academic pressure and training demands. The method's structured steps, such as horizontalization, clustering into themes, imaginative variation, and textural-structural synthesis, ensure rigor in capturing participants' perspectives (Moustakas, 1994). This design is deemed appropriate in exploring the lived experiences of criminology students in coping with academic pressure and training demands.

Setting

The study was conducted in one of the higher education institutions in Lanao del Norte that offers a Bachelor of Science in Criminology program. Lanao del Norte is a province in Northern Mindanao, bordered by Iligan Bay to the north and by the Bohol Sea, Macajalar Bay, Agusan del Norte, Agusan del Sur, Bukidnon, and Lanao del Sur. The province comprises 22 municipalities and 1 component city, which are further subdivided into several barangays. The College is a rural-based institution that provides both academic coursework and quasi-military style training, making it an appropriate setting for exploring how criminology students manage academic and training-related pressures.

Participants of the study

The participants in this study are ten (10) third year students enrolled in the Criminology Department of a local college in Lanao del Norte. They were selected through purposive sampling. The inclusion criteria are as follows: (1) officially enrolled as third-year students in the criminology program for the School Year 2025–2026, (2) actively participating in both academic coursework and training requirements, and (3) willing to voluntarily participate in the study. The selection of third-year students is intentional, as they are typically at a stage in the program where both academic and training demands are at their peak. At this level, students are simultaneously engaged in advanced theoretical coursework and intensive quasi-military or field-based training, making them well-positioned to articulate their lived experiences of coping with these dual demands. These participants are expected to provide meaningful insights into their lived experiences of coping with the academic pressures and training requirements inherent in criminology education.

Instruments

The research instrument for this study was semi-structured interview questions carefully crafted to explore the lived experiences of criminology students in coping with academic pressures and training demands. These questions, aligned with the research objectives, aim to elicit comprehensive insights into the participants' challenges, coping strategies, and the support systems that help them manage the dual demands of academics and training. The questions were open-ended, allowing participants to articulate their thoughts and provide detailed responses.

The interview protocol begins with general inquiries designed to establish rapport with participants and create a comfortable environment for discussion. Subsequently, the questions were progressively more specific, focusing on areas such as academic pressure, physical training requirements, coping mechanisms, encountered difficulties, and the role of institutional and social support.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before commencing the interviews for this research study, the researcher obtained permission from the Dean of the Graduate School and secured approval from the Ethics Review Committee to ensure adherence to ethical standards and institutional guidelines. In addition, authorization was requested from the Dean of the Department of Criminology. Upon obtaining the necessary approvals, the researcher identified potential participants based on predetermined inclusion criteria, specifically criminology students who are officially enrolled during the Academic Year 2025–2026.

After the selection process, the researcher scheduled and conducted in-depth, semi-structured interviews with the participants. Each interview was conducted in a private and conducive environment to encourage openness and honesty. Prior to the interview, participants were fully briefed about the purpose of the study, their rights as participants, and the voluntary nature of their participation. They are also informed that they may decline to answer any question or withdraw from the interview at any time without penalty.

The interviews typically lasted 20-30 minutes, depending on the depth of participants' responses. To ensure accuracy, participants are asked for their consent to use an audio recorder to supplement the researcher's notetaking. During the interviews, the researchers read questions aloud in a consistent manner to minimize misinterpretations while remaining flexible to probe further when necessary to capture richer insights.

Throughout the entire process, the researcher maintained a respectful and supportive stance, addressing any clarifications or concerns raised by participants to promote transparency and comfort. This structured yet flexible approach ensures ethical conduct, prioritizes participant welfare, and enables the collection of meaningful, high-quality qualitative data that reflect the lived experiences of criminology students in coping with academic pressure and training demands.

Ethical Considerations

This research strictly adhered to ethical standards in the conduct of interviews and the protection of participants. The researcher complied with the ethical protocols set by the MU Research Ethics Committee (MUREC) and ensured that participation was entirely voluntary. Prior to data collection, each participant was asked to read and sign an informed consent form outlining the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Participants were also informed of their right to refuse participation or withdraw from the study at any time without penalty or loss of benefits.

The signing of the consent form did not, in any way, waive participants' legal claims, rights, or remedies related to their involvement in the study. To safeguard privacy, participants' identities remained anonymous throughout the entire research process. No names were mentioned in the interview, transcripts, or final manuscript. Instead, participants were given codes or pseudonyms to maintain confidentiality. All consent forms and documents containing personal identifiers are securely stored in a locked cabinet accessible only to the researcher.

Since the study explores students' lived experiences of academic pressure and training demands, the researcher recognizes that some questions may trigger emotional distress or discomfort. To address this, participants were reminded that they may pause, skip questions, or stop the interview at any point. Should a participant experience distress, the researcher provided immediate emotional support by pausing the session and, if necessary, referring the participant to available counseling services within the institution.

After the completion of the study, all collected data—including audio recordings, transcripts, and notes were carefully disposed of to further protect participants' confidentiality. The researcher also prioritized participants' well-being during interviews by ensuring a safe, respectful, and non-coercive environment. Additionally, the study observes the provisions of Republic Act No. 10173, also known as the Data Privacy Act of 2012, in the handling, processing, and protection of all participants' personal information.

Data Analysis

Data analysis in this study adopted Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach, which emphasizes describing participants' lived experiences through systematic processes of epoche (bracketing), phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis of meanings and essences. This method is particularly appropriate, as it seeks to uncover the essence of how criminology students experience and cope with the intertwined demands of academic and training pressures.

The analysis was also guided by the core lifeworld dimensions of existential phenomenology, which provide a deeper lens for interpreting human experience. These dimensions include Embodiment, as students encounter physical exhaustion, stress, and emotional strain brought by simultaneous academic and field training requirements; Relationality, as they engage with peers, instructors, and training officers who influence their coping and motivation; Temporality, as they experience time pressures from overlapping schedules, deadlines, and limited rest; Spatiality, as their experiences unfold across various settings such as classrooms, training grounds, and home environments; Materiality and Causality, as institutional structures, resources, and situational constraints shape their sources of stress; and Intentionality, as their consciousness remains directed toward achieving academic success, fulfilling training competencies, and developing a professional identity within the field of criminology. Through these dimensions, the analysis aims to illuminate the complex meanings embedded in criminology students' coping experiences and the essence of their being as learners navigating the dual demands of academic and practical contexts.

In conducting the analysis, the process begins with epoche (bracketing), wherein the researcher consciously sets aside personal biases, experiences, and assumptions as a criminology educator to engage openly and objectively with participants' accounts. This involves repeatedly reading the interview transcripts and listening to audio recordings to capture emotional tones, expressions, and nuances within their narratives. Following this, phenomenological reduction was undertaken by identifying significant statements—words, phrases, or sentences that vividly describe the phenomenon of coping with academic and training pressures. These statements were treated with equal value, then clustered into meaning units representing related ideas or experiences. Through this process, emergent themes were organized to reflect the essential aspects of the students' lived experiences.

The next step, imaginative variation, involved exploring how individuals experience the phenomenon differently. The process seeks to uncover the structural conditions that shape these experiences, taking into account factors such as academic year level, institutional support, and personal motivation. Through this approach, the researcher aimed to reveal how various contextual and psychological factors influence students' perceptions and coping responses.

Subsequently, textural descriptions were constructed to illustrate what the participants experienced, while structural descriptions explain how they experienced it within particular contexts and circumstances. Finally, both descriptions were synthesized into a composite essence, which encapsulates the fundamental meaning of the lived experience of criminology students as they navigate academic pressures—and training demands. This synthesis provided a holistic understanding of the phenomenon, reflecting both the individual and shared realities of the participants, consistent with Moustakas' (1994) transcendental phenomenological approach.

To aid in organization, coding, and thematic development, the qualitative data were processed and analyzed using NVivo. This tool systematically categorizes significant statements and identifies recurring patterns across participants' narratives, thereby enhancing the accuracy, transparency, and credibility of the data analysis process.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants in this study were all enrolled in the Criminology program and concurrently serving as active officers. To ensure confidentiality and data privacy, their identities were anonymized. Participants were aged 19–25 years at the time of the interviews. All participants were actively balancing the demands of academic coursework and professional responsibilities during the 2025–2026 academic year.

Based on their responses, six major themes emerged: embodied strain and self-regulation amid academic and training pressures; peer support and social influence in coping; managing overlapping academic and training schedules; adapting to different learning and training spaces; navigating institutional policies and resources; and sustaining motivation through personal and professional aspirations.

Embodied Strain and Self-Regulation Amid Academic and Training Pressures

The findings indicate that criminology students experience academic pressure and training demands, resulting in embodied physical and emotional strain. Participants reported exhaustion, sleep deprivation, and emotional stress resulting from the overlapping demands of academic coursework and paramilitary training activities. For instance, Participant 7 described attending classes immediately after completing acceptance training, while Participant 8 explained that their sleep was compromised to keep up with academic requirements. These experiences demonstrate how academic stress manifests physically, affecting students' energy levels, mental focus, and emotional stability.

The following are the responses of the participants:

“I had just finished our acceptance training and immediately went to the classroom to have class, and I felt so tired.” (P7)

“I was disappointed with myself at that time, and my sleep was compromised in order for me to cope with my academics. I was exhausted at that time.” (P8)

Despite these pressures, participants demonstrated various forms of self-regulation to manage stress. Activities such as exercising, completing tasks early, resting, praying, or engaging in relaxing routines were commonly mentioned coping strategies. These behaviors align with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which explains that individuals respond to stress through cognitive appraisal and the use of coping strategies aimed at either addressing the source of stress or regulating emotional responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Salahuddin et al., 2025). Coping strategies are typically categorized into problem-focused coping, which addresses the source of stress, and emotion-focused coping, which helps regulate emotional responses to stressors (Fluharty et al., 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this theme is also supported by the existential phenomenological concept of the lived body (Embodiment), which emphasizes that human experiences are encountered not only cognitively but also physically and emotionally (van Manen, 1990). Within the lifeworld framework of phenomenology, the body serves as the medium through which individuals experience and interpret their environment. In the context of criminology education, students' fatigue, exhaustion, and emotional strain reflect how academic and training pressures are physically embodied in their daily routines. The physical demands of training and the intellectual demands of coursework converge to produce a form of embodied stress that shapes students' perception of their academic journey. At the same time, their efforts to regulate fatigue, manage sleep, and maintain discipline illustrate the dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment described in the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Obbarius et al., 2021). Through repeated exposure to

these pressures, students gradually develop coping patterns that enable them to maintain functioning despite demanding circumstances.

These findings also suggest that students develop resilience through repeated exposure to demanding academic and training conditions. Research on university students shows that coping strategies and resilience are closely interconnected, as adaptive coping mechanisms help individuals adjust to stressful academic environments (De la Fuente et al., 2021; Meléndez et al., 2022). As students learn to regulate their physical and emotional responses, they begin to internalize discipline, perseverance, and stress tolerance, qualities that are essential in professional fields such as law enforcement.

The presence of embodied strain among criminology students stresses the importance of institutional support systems that recognize the physical and psychological demands of combining academic coursework with quasi-military training. Educational institutions offering criminology programs should consider implementing a balanced schedule for training and academic activities to minimize excessive fatigue and burnout. Faculty members and training officers can also play a vital role by fostering supportive learning environments that encourage self-regulation, resilience, and responsible time management. By addressing the embodied nature of students' stress experiences, criminology programs can promote a more sustainable learning environment that prepares students not only for academic success but also for the physical and psychological demands of future careers in law enforcement.

Peer Support, Shared Struggles, and Social Influence as Foundations of Coping and Motivation

Peer relationships emerged as a central factor shaping students' coping mechanisms. Participants described classmates as sources of encouragement, advice, and practical academic assistance. For example, Participant 3 shared that classmates often help with projects, while Participant 5 described friends as individuals who motivate them during moments of doubt. These responses illustrate that peer relationships extend beyond casual friendships; they serve as emotional and academic support systems that help students navigate the pressures of criminology education. Within demanding programs that combine academic coursework and quasi-military training, peers often become immediate sources of reassurance and practical assistance, allowing students to share burdens and maintain motivation.

The following are the responses of the participants:

“My classmates and I bond all the time, so whenever we are pressured with school and training, we just go out together.” (P2)

“My classmates are approachable, and I share with them most of the time my problems... they also help me especially with my projects.” (P3)

“My classmates, especially my friends, are the ones who motivate me and always cheer me up whenever I doubt myself in training or academics.” (P5)

“Sometimes I feel like my classmates add pressure because most of them are a bad influence.” (P10)

The responses reveal that shared struggles within the criminology program create opportunities for collective coping. Spending time together outside the classroom, as Participant 2 mentioned, helps relieve stress and strengthen emotional bonds. Such interactions allow students to openly discuss their challenges, normalize feelings of pressure, and exchange strategies for managing academic and training demands. Studies on student coping emphasize that peer interactions provide emotional validation and practical strategies that help individuals manage academic stress (Arunima Baidya & Mukherjee, 2025). Participant 3's experience further demonstrates how peer relationships provide practical support, particularly in completing academic tasks such as projects and assignments. According to Jacobs (2024), peer collaboration becomes an important academic resource that enables students to remain productive despite the demanding nature of their program. Meanwhile,

the encouragement described by Participant 5 reflects the motivational role of peers in reinforcing self-confidence and persistence during periods of self-doubt. Through these interactions, Lan et al. (2023) stated that peer networks foster a sense of belonging and solidarity, helping reduce feelings of isolation often experienced in high-pressure educational environments.

Shared experiences among criminology students also contribute to collective coping practices. Participant 2 mentioned spending time with classmates outside school as a way of relieving academic and training pressure. Such activities create opportunities for emotional expression, stress normalization, and mutual encouragement (Buton et al., 2022). According to Lacanilao (2024), seeking social support is one of the most effective coping strategies among students, as it helps individuals regulate emotional distress and facilitate collaborative problem-solving in academic tasks.

However, relational experiences were not always positive. Participant 10 reported that some classmates contributed to additional pressure due to negative influence. This observation highlights the complex, dual nature of peer relationships in student environments. Pravin Bhuiyan & Verma's (2024) research emphasizes that supportive peer networks can serve as protective factors that promote well-being and academic persistence. In contrast, negative peer influences may intensify stress and distract students from their academic responsibilities. Carapeto et al. (2025) noted that peer groups may either encourage positive behaviors, such as cooperation and perseverance, or promote maladaptive behaviors that hinder academic engagement. This finding suggests that while peer support can strengthen coping mechanisms, it may also present challenges when social dynamics create additional sources of pressure.

This theme is supported by the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which identifies social support as an important coping resource that helps individuals manage stressful situations. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the availability of supportive relationships can influence how individuals appraise stressors and determine their coping responses. When students perceive that they have reliable peers who can provide assistance, encouragement, or advice, they are more likely to evaluate academic and training pressures as manageable challenges rather than overwhelming threats. Furthermore, this theme aligns with Resilience Theory, which emphasizes that supportive relationships function as protective systems that strengthen individuals' ability to adapt to adversity. Masten (2021) describes resilience as a dynamic process, supported by interpersonal connections, that fosters motivation, emotional stability, and persistence during challenging experiences. In the context of criminology education, peer relationships provide emotional reassurance, shared understanding, and collaborative learning opportunities that reinforce students' resilience as they navigate the demands of academic and training environments.

The findings imply the importance of fostering positive peer relationships within criminology programs to strengthen students' coping mechanisms and motivation. Educational institutions should promote collaborative learning, peer mentoring, and teamwork to encourage mutual support among students. Faculty members and training officers can further cultivate a culture of cooperation by emphasizing shared responsibility in both academic and training settings. At the same time, institutions should address negative peer influences by reinforcing discipline, accountability, and positive leadership. Through supportive peer networks and constructive social environments, criminology programs can enhance students' resilience and their ability to manage academic and training pressures.

Managing Overlapping Academic and Training Demands

Through Strategic Time Prioritization

Participants consistently described their experiences through the lens of time pressure. The simultaneous demands of academic coursework, training drills, and personal responsibilities required them to develop effective time-management strategies. Participant 1 described using break times during training to complete academic tasks, while Participant 3 explained that they carefully divide their time to ensure academic responsibilities are prioritized. These responses indicate that students actively adjust their daily routines to accommodate the competing demands of their academic and training obligations.

The following are the responses of the participants:

“When my academics and training overlap, I practice time management... During training, when I have breaks, I do my homework or activities. I study during break time and avoid wasting time on leisure...” (P1)

“It’s difficult managing my time, but I divide my time and prioritize my studies before my training demands.” (P3)

“I prioritize my studies more than my training... Sometimes I sleep late at night because of studying and I have little energy the next day in training.” (P9)

The participants’ responses illustrate how students adopt practical strategies to manage overlapping academic and training responsibilities. Participant 1’s experience demonstrates a proactive approach to time management, with even short breaks during training used for academic tasks. This behavior reflects a strong sense of discipline and productivity, as students attempt to maximize limited time resources (Fu et al., 2025). Similarly, Participant 3 acknowledged the difficulty of balancing these responsibilities but emphasized the importance of carefully dividing time between academic requirements and training commitments. Such strategies indicate that students are aware of the competing demands placed upon them and attempt to regulate their schedules to maintain academic performance while fulfilling training expectations (Reaghan Gittin 2025).

Meanwhile, Participant 9’s experience highlights the personal sacrifices that often accompany such strategies. Although prioritizing academic responsibilities may support academic success, it can also result in sleep deprivation and physical exhaustion (Găgilă et al., 2024). Lacanilao’s (2024) study states that the need to stay up late to complete academic work illustrates the temporal strain faced by criminology students, as limited time forces them to compromise on rest and recovery. This situation demonstrates the constant negotiation between academic achievement and physical endurance required in programs that combine intellectual and quasi-military training components. These findings suggest that while time prioritization serves as an effective coping strategy, it may also create additional stress when students continuously operate under constrained schedules. Many students reported prioritizing academic work over training activities because academic performance determines graduation and professional eligibility. This reflects a strategic coping response where students assess competing demands and allocate time based on perceived importance (Jadia et al., 2023). The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping explains that individuals respond to stress by evaluating the demands of a situation and adjusting their behavior to manage those demands effectively (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Obbarius et al., 2021).

From a theoretical perspective, this theme can be further explained through the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which emphasizes the role of cognitive appraisal in determining how individuals respond to stressful situations. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), individuals first evaluate the significance of a stressor (primary appraisal) and then assess the resources available to cope with it (secondary appraisal). For criminology students, overlapping academic and training schedules are perceived as significant stressors that require strategic responses. Students respond by adopting problem-focused coping strategies such as scheduling tasks, prioritizing academic work, and maximizing available time during breaks. These actions demonstrate how students actively attempt to manage environmental demands rather than simply reacting to stress. Furthermore, this theme aligns with Resilience Theory, which emphasizes that individuals develop adaptive strategies that allow them to function effectively despite challenging circumstances. Through repeated exposure to time pressures, students gradually strengthen their ability to organize tasks, regulate responsibilities, and maintain commitment to their academic goals despite physical and mental fatigue.

However, participants also acknowledged the personal costs of maintaining such time management strategies. Participant 9 reported sleeping late to complete academic work, resulting in fatigue during the following day’s training sessions. These experiences illustrate the temporal tension inherent in criminology education, where students must constantly negotiate limited time resources while fulfilling multiple responsibilities (Pérez-Jorge et al., 2025; Majerová & Sokolová, 2025).

The findings emphasize the importance of institutional support in helping criminology students effectively manage overlapping academic and training responsibilities. Educational institutions should consider

implementing structured time management workshops, academic planning support, and balanced scheduling of training and classroom activities to minimize excessive workload and fatigue. Faculty members and training officers can also coordinate academic deadlines and training schedules to reduce unnecessary time conflicts that place additional strain on students. Additionally, promoting awareness of healthy study habits, adequate rest, and effective time prioritization may help students sustain productivity without compromising their physical well-being. By recognizing the temporal challenges faced by criminology students, institutions can develop supportive systems that enable students to maintain academic performance while preserving their health and resilience.

Transformative Learning and Discipline Across the Classroom,

Training Ground, and Home

Participants' experiences were also shaped by the different spaces in which learning and training occur. The classroom, training ground, and home each impose unique expectations and emotional experiences. Students described the classroom as a space for intellectual engagement, while the training ground represents a physically demanding environment characterized by discipline and strict authority. Participant 3 stated that they felt more relaxed in the classroom and at home than on the training ground, where physical activities caused additional fatigue. Conversely, Participant 1 explained that the discipline learned during training improved their productivity in both academic and home environments.

The following are the responses of the participants:

“As a battalion commander, my experience shapes me through discipline. In my classroom, I am more disciplined with my studies... At home, I am able to do many tasks at the same time because of these experiences.” (P1)

“In the classroom and at home, I feel more relaxed, unlike in the field during training, because the physical activities make me feel more tired.” (P3)

The participants' responses illustrate how criminology students navigate and adapt to multiple environments that require different forms of engagement. Participant 1's experience demonstrates how the discipline cultivated in the training ground can extend beyond the physical field and influence behavior in academic and personal contexts. According to Alixandrescu, (2025) the responsibilities associated with leadership roles, such as being a battalion commander, appear to strengthen students' ability to organize tasks, maintain focus, and manage responsibilities effectively. This suggests that the training environment does not merely impose physical demands but also fosters behavioral discipline that supports academic productivity and personal organization.

On the other hand, Participant 3's response highlights the emotional and physical differences between learning environments. The classroom and home are perceived as spaces that allow relaxation and cognitive focus, while the training ground is associated with physical exhaustion and strict regulation (Van der Smee et al., 2024). This distinction reflects how students experience varying levels of pressure depending on the environment in which activities occur. The training ground demands physical endurance and adherence to authority, whereas the classroom encourages intellectual engagement and structured learning (Skage et al., 2022). As a result, students must constantly adjust their mindset and energy levels when transitioning between environments.

These findings are consistent with the existing literature, which emphasizes that training environments can significantly influence students' behavior and personal development. Heemskerk et al. (2022) indicate that training experiences often cultivate discipline, responsibility, and behavioral regulation that extend beyond the training context into academic and personal life. Similarly, research by Kolb (2023) on experiential learning suggests that practical training environments promote the internalization of discipline and reflective learning, enabling students to apply lessons from training to other aspects of their lives. Studies on military and quasi-military education have also found that structured training environments contribute to the development of leadership skills, time management, and self-discipline among students (Ricardel, 2023; Watson et al., 2024). In

criminology programs that incorporate paramilitary training, these environments play a crucial role in shaping students' professional attitudes and behavioral competencies.

Moreover, phenomenological research emphasizes that individuals interpret their experiences through the contexts in which they occur. Haque and Ahmad (2025) explain that the meaning individuals assign to their experiences is influenced by the social and physical environments they inhabit. Within the phenomenological perspective, the concept of the lifeworld highlights how human experiences are shaped by spatial, relational, and embodied dimensions of everyday life (Pértega et al., 2025). The spatial dimension is particularly relevant in this study, as criminology students navigate multiple spaces—classrooms, training grounds, and home environments—each of which requires different behaviors and emotional responses. Nasri et al. (2022) further emphasize that moving across different environments requires individuals to adapt their coping strategies and behavioral patterns to meet the expectations of each setting.

This theme can be explained through both the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and Resilience Theory. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), environmental contexts influence how individuals appraise stressors and select coping strategies. For criminology students, the training ground may be perceived as a physically demanding stressor. In contrast, the classroom and home are more manageable environments that support cognitive focus and emotional recovery. Students respond to these varying conditions by adjusting their behavior, energy levels, and coping strategies to meet situational demands. At the same time, Resilience Theory suggests that repeated exposure to diverse challenges strengthens individuals' adaptive capacity. Masten (2021) emphasizes that resilience develops through individuals' ability to adapt effectively across changing contexts. In this case, the ability of criminology students to transition between the structured discipline of training environments and the cognitive demands of academic settings reflects their growing resilience and adaptability.

The findings imply that recognizing how different learning and training environments shape students' experiences and coping mechanisms within criminology programs is very important. Educational institutions should ensure that academic and training spaces are structured to support both intellectual development and physical well-being. Faculty members and training officers may collaborate to create balanced learning environments that allow students to recover from physically demanding training while maintaining academic engagement. Additionally, integrating reflective learning activities may help students connect the discipline and leadership skills acquired in training with their academic and personal development. By acknowledging the influence of multiple learning environments, criminology programs can foster holistic student development that prepares learners for both academic success and the practical demands of professional law enforcement careers.

Institutional Policies and Resources as Sources of Discipline and Pressure

Institutional structures, including academic policies, training schedules, and available resources, significantly influenced students' experiences of stress and coping. Participants acknowledged that strict deadlines and structured training programs encouraged discipline and responsibility. For example, Participant 3 noted that institutional expectations motivated them to complete tasks early in order to avoid procrastination. At the same time, institutional demands were also described as sources of pressure. Participant 9 reported feeling overwhelmed by multiple deadlines, which sometimes made it difficult to concentrate.

The following are the responses of the participants:

“It motivates me to complete my tasks early because of the rules and schedules. I don't want to procrastinate, and this shapes me because sometimes I no longer feel pressure and just do my work ahead of time.” (P3)

“So far, the institutional resources of the school, such as handouts and the library... help in coping with academic pressure because our resources are complete. The school has provided the students with what they need.” (P7)

“Deadlines add pressure and stress to me because I can no longer focus properly because I feel overwhelmed.” (P9)

The participants' responses illustrate how institutional systems simultaneously serve as sources of structure and stress. Participant 3's statement suggests that clear rules, schedules, and expectations can foster self-discipline and proactivity. The presence of structured academic policies appears to motivate students to develop responsible habits such as completing tasks early and avoiding procrastination (Elizondo et al., 2023). In this sense, institutional policies may foster productive routines that enable students to manage their academic responsibilities more efficiently. The structured environment of criminology education, which often includes strict training schedules and academic deadlines, appears to cultivate a sense of accountability and personal responsibility among students.

Participant 7's response highlights the supportive role of institutional resources in helping students cope with academic demands. Access to educational materials, handouts, and library facilities provides students with the tools necessary to complete academic tasks and manage course requirements effectively. When students perceive that adequate institutional support is available, their ability to cope with academic stress improves, as they are equipped with the necessary resources to complete their work (Osman, M., & Ahmed, A., 2021). This finding suggests that supportive academic infrastructure can reduce stress by making academic tasks more manageable.

However, the experience shared by Participant 9 reveals the other side of institutional structures, where strict deadlines and multiple academic requirements can become overwhelming. The accumulation of deadlines can create cognitive overload, making it difficult for students to maintain focus and manage their tasks effectively. This experience demonstrates how institutional expectations, while intended to promote discipline and academic productivity, may also intensify stress when students perceive that the demands exceed their available time and coping capacity (Xu & Chai, 2025). The pressure associated with meeting multiple deadlines can therefore contribute to emotional strain and reduced concentration, particularly in programs where students must also fulfill training responsibilities.

These findings illustrate the dual role of institutional structures: they can promote discipline and productivity while simultaneously contributing to stress (Kovács et al., 2024). Access to academic resources also influenced coping experiences. Participant 7 emphasized the importance of school facilities such as libraries and learning materials in reducing academic pressure. The research of Pérez-Jorge et al. (2025) on university students supports the idea that environmental and institutional factors play a significant role in shaping stress experiences and coping capacities. Similarly, studies by Shan and Xu (2025) indicate that institutional support systems, including academic resources and structured learning environments, can enhance students' ability to manage stress and maintain academic engagement.

From a theoretical perspective, this theme can be explained through the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which emphasizes the interaction between individuals and their environments in shaping stress experiences. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), environmental demands, such as institutional rules, deadlines, and training schedules, serve as external stressors that individuals must appraise cognitively. When students perceive these demands as manageable and supported by adequate resources, they are more likely to adopt problem-focused coping strategies such as planning, task prioritization, and proactive preparation, as illustrated in Participant 3's response. However, when institutional demands are perceived as excessive or overwhelming, students may experience emotional strain and reduced concentration, as reflected in Participant 9's experience. Furthermore, Resilience Theory explains how supportive institutional environments can function as protective systems that strengthen individuals' ability to adapt to challenging circumstances. Masten (2021) emphasizes that resilience is not solely an individual trait but is also supported by external systems such as schools, mentors, and learning resources that help individuals manage stress and maintain functioning despite adversity. In this study, institutional resources, such as libraries, academic materials, and structured learning environments, contribute to students' resilience by providing the support needed to navigate academic and training pressures.

The findings highlight the importance of balancing institutional discipline with supportive academic structures in criminology education. While strict policies and training schedules can promote responsibility and time management, institutions must also ensure that academic workloads and deadlines remain manageable for students who are simultaneously engaged in physically demanding training. Educational administrators may

consider coordinating academic deadlines with training schedules to reduce unnecessary pressure and prevent cognitive overload. Additionally, maintaining accessible academic resources, such as libraries, learning materials, and academic support services, can significantly help students manage their responsibilities. By creating institutional environments that combine structured discipline with adequate support systems, criminology programs can help students develop resilience, maintain academic performance, and cope more effectively with the combined pressures of academic and training demands.

Commitment Driven by Family Responsibility, Personal

Aspirations and Professional Identity

Despite experiencing significant academic and training pressures, participants demonstrated a strong commitment to completing their criminology education. Their persistence was primarily driven by personal goals, family responsibilities, and aspirations to become law enforcement professionals. These motivations served as powerful sources of determination, helping them endure academic stress, physical training demands, and other challenges associated with their program.

Participant 1 expressed the desire to become the first criminologist in their family, while Participant 2 emphasized the goal of entering the tri-bureau and providing financial support for their family. Participant 3 explained that completing their studies was especially important because their mother was the sole provider due to their father's illness. These responses reveal how students' motivations extend beyond personal achievement, reflecting deeper commitments to family pride, financial stability, and future professional roles. The aspiration to become a law enforcer further reinforces students' commitment to endure academic and training challenges. This professional identity provides meaning to their struggles and frames their educational journey as preparation for future service and responsibility.

The following are the responses of the participants:

“My personal goal is to become the first criminologist in my family. I want my family to be proud of me and for them to know that I am not a quitter when it comes to pursuing my goals. I am determined to prove to others who undermine me that I will become a law enforcer someday.” (P1)

“My goal is to enter the tri-bureau, and I want to have a decent job and provide for my family.” (P2)

“My goal is to finish on time because my father is ill, and my mother is the only one who is working.” (P3)

The responses demonstrate how personal aspirations and family responsibilities function as powerful motivational forces that sustain students' persistence despite challenges. Participant 1's response highlights the role of personal determination and the desire for recognition and pride within the family. Becoming the first criminologist in the family represents not only personal success but also a symbol of achievement that reflects the family's collective aspirations. Participant 2's statement emphasizes financial motivation and the goal of achieving stability through a career in law enforcement. The desire to enter the tri-bureau reflects a clear professional pathway and long-term career goal that encourages perseverance throughout the educational journey. Meanwhile, Participant 3's response reflects a sense of responsibility toward family members, particularly when financial and emotional support is needed. The pressure to finish school on time becomes stronger when students feel accountable for their family's welfare.

These narratives illustrate how criminology students interpret their educational journey as a pathway to fulfilling both personal dreams and family expectations. The study by Orhan Koçak et al. (2021) on student motivation suggests that strong career aspirations and family-oriented goals significantly influence persistence and academic engagement among university students. According to Duckworth (2026), long-term goals and passion for a chosen career contribute to perseverance, often described as “grit,” which enables students to remain committed despite setbacks and challenges. Similarly, Yeager and Walton (2021) explain that students who

connect their academic tasks to meaningful long-term purposes are more likely to sustain motivation and overcome obstacles. Research by Tugade and Fredrickson (2022) further suggests that individuals with strong personal purpose tend to interpret stressful experiences as opportunities for growth rather than barriers to success. In the context of criminology education, the desire to serve the community and pursue a career in law enforcement provides students with a clear sense of purpose, strengthening their determination to complete their studies.

This theme is strongly supported by Resilience Theory, which explains how individuals adapt positively despite experiencing adversity or stress. According to Masten (2021), resilience develops through protective factors such as personal goals, supportive relationships, and a sense of purpose. Among criminology students, aspirations to become law enforcers and the desire to support their families serve as internal protective factors that strengthen persistence. These motivations enable students to maintain focus on their long-term goals even when they encounter academic pressure and training difficulties. In this study, intrinsic motivation is reflected in students' passion to become law enforcement professionals and demonstrate their capabilities. In contrast, extrinsic motivation is reflected in their desire to support their families and achieve financial stability. The combination of these motivational factors helps sustain students' commitment and perseverance throughout their educational journey.

Furthermore, criminology students' experiences of academic pressure and training demands can also be understood through van Manen's lifeworld dimensions, which emphasize how individuals experience reality through lived body, lived time, lived space, and lived relations. Students experience physical fatigue through demanding training, time pressure from academic deadlines, relational influences from family expectations, and environmental influences from institutional structures. Despite these pressures, personal meaning and professional identity enable them to interpret their struggles as part of their preparation for future roles in law enforcement.

The findings suggest that criminology students' persistence is strongly influenced by their personal aspirations, family responsibilities, and professional identity. Educational institutions can support students' commitment by strengthening career-oriented guidance, mentorship programs, and motivational support systems that reinforce the meaningfulness of their chosen profession. Recognizing students' personal and family motivations may also help educators design supportive learning environments that acknowledge the challenges students face while encouraging resilience and determination. By fostering a strong sense of professional identity and purpose, criminology programs can help students remain motivated, overcome academic difficulties, and complete their education, preparing them for future service in law enforcement.

SUMMARY, FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

This study explored the lived experiences of Criminology Program students in coping with academic and training demands. It answered the following questions: (1) What are the experiences of Criminology students in coping with academic pressure and training demands? (2.) How do relationships with peers, instructors, and training officers shape criminology students' coping mechanisms and motivation? (3) How do criminology students experience and manage time pressures from overlapping academic schedules, training drills, and personal responsibilities? (4) How do different learning and training spaces (classroom, training ground, and home) influence criminology students' coping experiences? (5). How do institutional policies, resources, and situational constraints shape the sources and intensity of academic and training stress? (6). Why do they remain committed to their goals despite the pressures of academic and training demands?

The study was conducted within a higher education institution in Lanao del Norte. Van Manen's existential lifeworld dimensions guided the analysis, and 10 criminology students participated in the study. Through in-depth semi-structured interviews, participants shared their personal experiences of managing overlapping academic and training demands.

FINDINGS

The following are the findings of the study:

1. **Embodied Strain and Self-Regulation Amid Academic and Training Pressures.** Criminology students face physical and emotional strain from overlapping academic and training demands, including fatigue, sleep deprivation, and stress. To cope, they use strategies such as resting, exercising, praying, and completing tasks early to manage stress and maintain performance.
2. **Peer Support and Social Influence in Coping with Academic and Training Demands.** Peer relationships help students cope by providing emotional support, motivation, and academic assistance, though they can also add pressure through competition or high expectations.
3. **Time Prioritization as a Strategy for Managing Academic and Training Responsibilities.** Students use time management and task prioritization to balance academic and training demands, which helps meet deadlines but can lead to reduced rest and fatigue.
4. **Navigating Multiple Learning and Training Environments.** Students adapt to different learning and training spaces—classrooms, training grounds, and home—which fosters discipline, responsibility, and adaptability.
5. **Institutional Structures as Both Sources of Discipline and Pressure.** Institutional policies, schedules, and requirements promote discipline and accountability but can also increase stress when workloads and expectations become overwhelming.
6. **Commitment Driven by Family Responsibility, Personal Aspirations, and Professional Identity.** Students stay committed to their criminology education despite challenges, motivated by personal goals, family responsibilities, and aspirations for careers in law enforcement.

Conclusions

Based on the findings of the study, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Criminology students experience significant physical and emotional strain due to the combined demands of coursework and paramilitary-style training. Their coping strategies, such as resting, exercising, prayer, and task management, help them regulate stress and maintain performance despite fatigue and emotional challenges.
2. Peer relationships serve as critical sources of emotional support, motivation, and academic assistance. While positive peer interactions enhance coping and a sense of belonging, negative influences can increase stress, demonstrating that social relationships act as both protective and risk factors in students' educational experiences.
3. Students employ strategic time management to balance academic and training demands, often prioritizing coursework to meet deadlines. While effective at maintaining academic performance, these strategies can also lead to reduced rest and physical fatigue, highlighting the challenges of managing overlapping responsibilities.
4. Different learning and training spaces, including classrooms, training grounds, and home environments, shape students' experiences of stress and coping. Adapting behavior to these environments fosters discipline, responsibility, and flexibility, allowing students to meet both academic and physical expectations.
5. Academic policies, schedules, and available resources influence how students cope with program demands. While institutional structures promote discipline and responsibility, strict deadlines and high expectations can also contribute to stress, showing a dual role of institutional frameworks in shaping students' coping experiences.

6. Students' persistence is motivated by personal goals, family responsibilities, and professional aspirations to become law enforcement officers. These motivations provide meaning and purpose, enabling them to endure challenges, sustain resilience, and remain focused on long-term educational and career objectives.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, it is recommended to:

1. Implement wellness programs, stress management initiatives, and self-care strategies to help students cope with the physical and emotional strain from academic and training demands.
2. Encourage positive peer interactions through mentoring, group activities, and support networks to enhance emotional support, motivation, and collaboration while reducing negative peer pressure.
3. Provide workshops on time management, academic planning, and study strategies to help students balance coursework and training responsibilities effectively.
4. Ensure classrooms, training grounds, and study spaces are safe, well-equipped, and conducive to both academic and physical development.
5. Regularly assess academic schedules, program requirements, and available resources to prevent overwhelming stress while maintaining discipline and accountability.
6. Offer mentorship, career guidance, and goal-setting programs to reinforce students' commitment, resilience, and long-term aspirations in law enforcement.

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