
VISITING EXPERT'S PAPER

PAROLE AND PROBATION IN THE PHILIPPINES: TOWARD EVIDENCE-BASED AND CULTURALLY GROUNDED REFORM

*Raymund E. Narag**

ABSTRACT

The Philippine criminal justice system suffers from chronic jail and prison overcrowding, inefficiency and neglect. Established in 1976 to provide community-based alternatives, the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA) has struggled with overwhelming caseloads, outdated models and the absence of validated tools. In response, the PPA partnered with the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) and the United Nations Asia and Far East Institute (UNAFEI) to introduce the Principles of Effective Probation and Parole Investigation and Supervision (PEPPIS). This initiative represents a paradigm shift toward a more structured, evidence-based, and culturally grounded probation and parole practice.

Drawing from criminological theories—strain, social learning, labelling and cognitive-behavioural approaches—and anchored in the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework, PEPPIS was piloted in eight sites nationwide. Reform unfolded through leadership training, creation of technical working groups, development of manuals and tools, training of trainers, pilot implementation and continuous mentoring. Core components included the Classification and Risk Assessment Tool (CARAT), a differentiated supervision framework, structured programmes (I-Care, Hulagpos, LEAP), and standardized case management and documentation.

Findings revealed both promise and fragility. Over 2,700 CARAT assessments allowed officers to rationalize caseloads and link interventions to criminogenic needs. Clients engaged positively in modular programmes, reporting improvements in problem-solving, relapse prevention and livelihood. Documentation improved accountability and transparency, though it remained burdensome. Yet challenges persisted: inconsistent fidelity, limited resources, uneven adoption and cultural barriers to family engagement.

Evaluation underscored that reform is possible but fragile, thriving as a pilot yet vulnerable without institutionalization. Lessons emphasize that evidence-based practice must be localized, mentoring must complement training, documentation must be streamlined, families must be engaged and reforms must be embedded in law, policy and budgets.

PEPPIS demonstrates that parole and probation can become central solutions to mass incarceration in the Philippines. It redefines justice not merely as punishment but as accountability that enables reintegration and human dignity.

I. INTRODUCTION

At the heart of every criminal justice system lies a paradox. The State is expected to deter crime by imposing sanctions, yet it is also obliged to uphold human dignity by offering opportunities for reform. To simply lock people away is to risk further dehumanization; to release them without accountability is to mock justice. It is in this fragile balance between punishment and redemption that community corrections—parole and probation—find their purpose. Rather than consigning individuals to overcrowded and criminogenic institutions, parole and probation attempt to reintegrate them into their communities while still demanding

* PhD, Professor of Criminology and Criminal Justice, School of Justice and Public Safety, Southern Illinois University Carbondale.

responsibility for their actions. But such aims can only be realized when supervision is guided by clear principles, grounded in science and embedded in consistent practices (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Modern criminological research identifies four interlocking pillars that sustain effective parole and probation: classification and risk assessment, structured programming, supervision and case management, and systematic documentation (Taxman, 2008; Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005). These are not isolated domains but mutually reinforcing components of a coherent system.

The first pillar—classification and risk assessment—provides a scientific compass of decision-making. Decades of studies confirm that not all clients present the same likelihood of reoffending; some require minimal guidance, while others demand intensive monitoring and targeted interventions (Andrews et al., 1990; Bonta & Andrews, 2017). Validated assessment tools allow officers to classify clients into categories, identify criminogenic needs and tailor supervision accordingly, ensuring that scarce resources are invested where they yield the greatest reduction in recidivism.

The second pillar—programming—refers to deliberate, structured interventions designed to alter behaviour. Effective programmes are built upon the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework: matching intervention intensity to risk, targeting dynamic criminogenic needs such as substance use and antisocial peers, and ensuring cultural and cognitive responsiveness (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990; Cullen, 2013). Programmes that ignore these principles risk either over-intervening with low-risk clients or failing to reach those most in need.

The third pillar—supervision and case management—bridges assessment and intervention. Supervision cannot be reduced to surveillance or counting contacts. It must engage clients through problem-solving, goal setting and referral to supportive services. Effective case management translates assessment data into concrete strategies, sets measurable objectives and adjusts intensity as circumstances change. Differentiated supervision recognizes that high-risk clients may require electronic monitoring and frequent visits, while low-risk clients may need only supportive counselling and community ties.

The fourth pillar—documentation—though often neglected, is central to accountability and learning. Without consistent records, even the best assessments and programmes cannot be evaluated or improved (Latessa & Lovins, 2019). Standardized forms, digital databases and integrated management systems allow officers to track progress, managers to monitor implementation and policymakers to allocate resources with confidence.

Together, these four pillars create a cycle: assessments inform programming; programming is delivered through supervision; supervision is tracked through documentation; and documentation feeds back into assessments. This cycle defines evidence-based corrections, a model now widely adopted in North America, Australia and Europe.

In the Philippines, the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA), in partnership with UNODC and the UNAFEI, has sought to graft these principles into its operations through the Principles of Effective Probation and Parole Investigation and Supervision (PEPPIS) initiative. PEPPIS represents a paradigm shift away from personality-driven, discretionary supervision toward structured, evidence-based and culturally sensitive practice (Narag & Jones, 2019). Its development and pilot implementation provide a unique opportunity to test how global theories of offender management can be localized, evaluated and refined on Philippine soil.

This paper follows that effort. It traces the intellectual foundations, describes the processes of implementation, examines evaluation findings and reflects on policy implications. It begins with the history of parole and probation in the Philippines, then turns to the theories underpinning modern reform, the methodology of the PEPPIS initiative, its results in practice, and the lessons it offers not only for the Philippines but for other developing nations grappling with the same dilemmas of punishment and reintegration.

II. THE CONTEXT OF PAROLE AND PROBATION IN THE PHILIPPINES

The Philippine criminal justice system has long been burdened with inefficiency, overcrowding and neglect. Nowhere is this more evident than in its prisons and jails, where the State has failed to provide humane conditions for those awaiting trial or serving their sentences. It was in response to these realities that Presidential Decree No. 968 established the Parole and Probation Administration (PPA) in 1976. Its mandate was ambitious: relieve prison congestion, save scarce government resources and offer offenders a second chance at rehabilitation within their communities. Yet almost fifty years later, the promise was only partly fulfilled.

A. Prison and Jail Congestion

The Philippines continues to rank among the world's most overcrowded prison systems, with occupancy rates exceeding 300 per cent in many facilities (ICPR, 2018; BJMP, 2022). In some jails, cells built for ten now hold eighty to a hundred people (Narag, 2018). More than 65 per cent of those confined are not yet convicted but are still awaiting trial, languishing for years in prolonged pretrial detention. In theory, probation and parole were created to ease this congestion, but in practice these alternatives remain underutilized. Courts and agencies often hesitate to impose community supervision, fearing that probation or parole cannot guarantee accountability.

B. High Caseloads and Scarce Resources

Even when granted, parole and probation are undermined by overwhelming caseloads. A single officer may handle 200 or more clients, leaving little time for meaningful case management or rehabilitation work. These officers are expected to investigate, supervise, counsel, document and administer, all with minimal staffing and support. Transportation allowances are insufficient, office facilities are poor and supervision often collapses into paper compliance rather than real engagement. In such conditions, rehabilitation remains more rhetoric than reality.

C. Outdated Models of Supervision

For decades, the Therapeutic Community (TC) Modality dominated Philippine community corrections. While TC offered a structure for group rehabilitation, they often hardened into rigid, one-size-fits-all templates. Officers were evaluated more on the number of sessions delivered than on whether those sessions actually reduced criminogenic risks. Low-risk clients were subjected to unnecessary interventions, while high-risk individuals often failed to receive the intensive services they required. Compliance became the measure of success: did the client report, did the officer record? The deeper work of addressing distorted thinking, substance use or unemployment was often left untouched. Documentation, moreover, remained fragmented, reliant on outdated paper-based systems.

D. Lack of Scientific Tools

Perhaps the most glaring weakness has been the absence of validated scientific instruments. Probation and parole officers were forced to rely on intuition, gut feeling or years of experience when deciding supervision levels and programme assignments. Without structured tools, decisions were inconsistent, interventions mismatched and outcomes difficult to measure. This absence of reliable data also meant that PPA struggled to advocate for reforms, since policymakers lacked hard evidence of its effectiveness.

E. Cultural and Organizational Resistance

Even when reform efforts were introduced, the bureaucracy proved resistant. Many officers remained more comfortable with traditional practices than with evidence-based approaches. A rigid hierarchy and outdated performance metrics discouraged innovation, while limited training opportunities hindered professional development. Institutional memory was weak: once reform-minded officers were transferred, promoted or retired, old practices quickly reemerged. Reform thus became cyclical—introduced with promise, only to wither under organizational inertia.

III. THE RATIONALE FOR INTERVENTION

These systemic weaknesses created an urgent rationale for intervention. Recognizing both the failures and the potential of Philippine community corrections, the PPA partnered with the UNODC and UNAFEI to design a reform agenda that would graft international best practices onto local realities. The goal was not to import foreign models wholesale but to adapt the Risk-Need-Responsivity framework and evidence-based programming into a system sensitive to Filipino culture, resource constraints and community values (Andrews et al., 1990). From this effort emerged the Principles of Effective Probation and Parole Investigation and Supervision (PEPPIS)—a bold attempt to transform Philippine parole and probation into a modern, evidence-driven and culturally grounded alternative to incarceration.

A. Theoretical Foundations and Current Trends in Offender Theories

No criminal justice reform is born in a vacuum. Every tool, programme or supervision model reflects assumptions—whether explicit or implicit—about why people commit crimes and how they can change. For much of the twentieth century, Philippine probation and parole operated less on theory than on tradition and improvisation. Officers leaned on intuition, personal judgment or institutional habits rather than systematic frameworks. Yet the global field of corrections has steadily shifted toward evidence-based practice, anchored in criminological theories that explain offending and guide rehabilitation (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Cullen, 2013).

The PEPPIS initiative represents the Philippines' attempt to align with these global currents. Drawing heavily from theories developed in the West, it situates them in local realities, producing a hybrid model—global in inspiration, Filipino in application. Four strands in particular—strain theory, social learning theory, labelling theory and cognitive-behavioural approaches—are consolidated within the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) framework, which provides the operational scaffolding (Andrews, Bonta, & Hoge, 1990).

B. Strain Theory and Socioeconomic Pressures

Robert Merton's strain theory argued that crime arises when individuals are blocked from achieving legitimate goals through conventional means (Merton, 1938). In a country like the Philippines, where economic inequality is stark and opportunities scarce, this framework resonates deeply. Many clients under probation and parole supervision report disrupted schooling, unemployment and financial instability. The Livelihood and Employment Assistance Program (LEAP) operationalizes this insight by providing vocational skills and linking clients to jobs or small businesses. LEAP acknowledges poverty as a criminogenic driver and seeks to relieve it through legitimate survival avenues.

C. Social Learning and Peer Influence

If strain explains why some turn to crime, social learning explains how. Edwin Sutherland's differential association theory and Albert Bandura's modelling framework contend that behaviour is learned through interactions with peers who reinforce either criminality or conformity (Sutherland, et al 1992; Bandura & Walters 1977). In a collectivist society like the Philippines, these processes are particularly powerful. The iCare programme embodies this theory: a structured cognitive-behavioural intervention that challenges distorted cognitions, promotes prosocial skills and builds supportive peer environments. By involving families and communities in supervision through Volunteer Probation Assistants and family-based reporting, PEPPIS seeks to replace criminogenic associations with prosocial ties.

D. Labelling, Stigma and Criminal Identity

Howard Becker's labelling theory warned that justice systems can deepen deviance by stigmatizing offenders, who then internalize a criminal identity (Becker, 1963). In the Philippines, where shame and social standing carry enormous weight, this risk is acute. PEPPIS mitigates it through individualized case management and proportional supervision. Clients assessed as low-risk are spared unnecessary interventions that might expose them to higher-risk peers. Structured documentation and the Classification and Risk Assessment Tool (CARAT) replace arbitrary judgments with evidence-based classification. This not only rationalizes decision-making but also reduces the harmful effects of labelling.

E. Cognitive-Behavioural Approaches and Criminogenic Thinking

Among the most empirically supported approaches in modern corrections are cognitive-behavioural

interventions (Lipsey, Landenberger, & Wilson, 2007). Offending is often rooted in distorted beliefs, impulsive choices and poor problem-solving. Programmes grounded in CBT teach clients to recognize risky thoughts, challenge them and practice prosocial alternatives. PEPPIS integrates these principles through iCare and Hulagpos. Hulagpos (“to break free”) incorporates relapse prevention strategies for substance use, while iCare helps clients identify “thinking traps” and develop new scripts. These programmes embody international evidence while contextualizing delivery in Filipino idioms and narratives (Narang & Jones, 2019).

F. The Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) Model

Tying these theories together is the RNR model, developed by Andrews and Bonta, which synthesizes decades of correctional research (Andrews et al., 1990; Bonta & Andrews, 2017). Risk means matching intervention intensity to reoffending likelihood; Need means targeting dynamic criminogenic factors; Responsivity means tailoring interventions to the client’s learning style, motivation and culture. PEPPIS embodies RNR through CARAT risk scoring, modular programmes (iCare, Hulagpos, LEAP) and supervision tables that prescribe frequency and mode of contact. Responsivity is localized: tools are translated into major Philippine languages, content is adjusted to cultural idioms and families are woven into supervision.

IV. CURRENT TRENDS IN OFFENDER THEORIES

Globally, correctional theory is shifting from deficit-oriented models toward strengths-based and desistance perspectives (Ward & Brown, 2004; Maruna, 2001). While RNR remains central, newer approaches stress human flourishing, identity change and natural desistance. The Good Lives Model (GLM), for instance, emphasizes building on strengths rather than just reducing risks (Ward, Mann, & Gannon, 2007). Elements of this are visible in PEPPIS: LEAP restores dignity by empowering clients with legal literacy; supervision incentivizes progress through early discharge mechanisms. Such measures align with desistance research, which highlights the role of positive reinforcement, social bonds and pro-social identities in sustaining change (McNeill, 2006).

A. Theoretical Integration in PEPPIS

What distinguishes PEPPIS is its theoretical pluralism. Strain informs LEAP’s focus on employment, social learning undergirds iCare, labelling guides risk-based supervision, and CBT permeates Hulagpos and iCare. These are held together by the operational logic of RNR. In a context as complex as the Philippines—where poverty, peer networks, stigma and cognitive distortions intersect—no single theory suffices. By integrating multiple strands, PEPPIS provides a holistic, evidence-based and culturally adapted framework for offender management.

B. Steps in Implementation

Reform in probation and parole cannot be declared by fiat; it must be built, tested and refined in practice. The PEPPIS initiative exemplifies this slow but deliberate process of institutional transformation. Its methodology combined international expertise with local participation, theory with practice, and planning with feedback. Reform unfolded in phases—each reinforcing the other—designed to ensure that innovation was not only technically sound but also culturally relevant and operationally feasible (Taxman, 2008).

The methodology can best be seen as a continuum: beginning with the capacity-building of leadership, moving into the creation of technical working groups (TWGs), followed by the development of manuals and tools, the designation of pilot sites, and finally, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. At every stage, participatory design, mentoring and iterative refinement were central principles (Latessa & Lovins, 2019).

C. Introductory Training and Capacity-Building

The first phase focused on building awareness and capacity among leadership. Between February and March 2021, thirty-five senior officials—including central office heads and regional directors—underwent intensive online training with support from the UNODC and UNAFEI. These sessions introduced participants to criminological theories, the Risk-Need-Responsivity model, the “Big Eight” criminogenic factors, and international models of risk assessment and supervision (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

This training served two purposes. First, it familiarized leaders with the logic of evidence-based corrections,

ensuring they grasped the rationale for reform. Second, it cultivated ownership, creating champions of change within their regions. Participants were not passive recipients: they completed examinations, reflections and group outputs, presenting visions for reform across the four pillars of effective probation and parole management—classification and risk assessment, supervision, programming and documentation. Reform began with empowerment rather than imposition.

D. Creation of Technical Working Groups (TWGs)

Following this foundation, TWGs were formed to translate principles into practice. Each group was tasked with one of four domains: risk and needs assessment (CARAT tool), supervision (Supervision Table), programming (Hulagpos, iCare, LEAP) and case management with documentation. The fifty-one TWG members included both the thirty-five trained leaders and sixteen frontline officers, ensuring that reform design reflected both management priorities and ground-level realities.

The TWGs met weekly in what came to be known as the “Wednesday Club,” while a smaller group—the “Friday Club”—met to consolidate outputs. Over sixteen weeks, these groups logged ninety-six hours of mentoring, drafting and refining core components of PEPPIS. Crucially, the TWGs were not asked to import ready-made tools but to adapt international models to Philippine realities. The CARAT tool, for example, was grounded in RNR but translated into Filipino languages and adjusted to capture local conditions. The supervision framework incorporated family involvement, consistent with Filipino norms of collective accountability.

E. Development of Tools and Manuals

The TWGs’ outputs were consolidated into practical manuals: the CARAT manual for risk assessment, the Supervision Manual for translating scores into supervision intensity, the Programming Manual for structured delivery of interventions and the Case Management and Documentation Manual for standardized record-keeping. These were later refined through a Training of Trainers (TOT) programme conducted from October to December 2021. The same TWG members facilitated nine three-hour sessions, amounting to twenty-seven hours of mentoring. Their modules were critiqued, refined and finalized into training packages for the pilot sites.

F. Selection of Pilot Sites

To test reform in practice, eight pilot sites were selected to represent diverse contexts: Tuguegarao City and Cagayan Province in Luzon, Quezon City and City of Manila in the National Capital Region, Iloilo City and Ormoc City in the Visayas, and Pagadian City and Davao City in Mindanao. Selection criteria included geographic spread, caseload diversity and willingness to innovate. The pilots were designed not merely as testing grounds but as laboratories for learning—allowing reform to be evaluated across urban and rural settings, resource-rich and resource-poor contexts, and progressive versus conservative institutional climates.

G. Pilot Site Training

Between January and May 2022, staff in the pilot sites underwent a four-month training programme, one three-hour session each week, totalling forty-eight hours. Participants studied criminological theories, RNR principles, CARAT administration, supervision models and programme facilitation. They practiced administering the CARAT, conducting sessions and completing documentation. Outputs were incorporated back into the manuals, grounding tools further in practitioner experience.

H. Implementation and Launch

The official launch of the pilot took place in Tagaytay in June 2022, attended by sixty-five participants. From July 2022, the eight sites formally began implementation, each conducting “echo trainings” to cascade learning across their offices. Mentoring and monitoring became defining features of implementation. Over eighteen months, officers logged seventy-five hours of group mentoring and 360 hours of individualized online mentoring. This combination of collective and personalized support-built confidence, allowed local adaptation and promoted fidelity to reform.

I. Site Visits and Data Collection

Mentoring was complemented by site visits to Tuguegarao City, Quezon City, the City of Manila, Ormoc City, and Davao City between late 2022 and early 2023. During these visits, UNODC experts observed programme delivery, reviewed records, and interviewed staff and clients. Focus group discussions captured

qualitative feedback, while records were digitized using Google Forms and Google Sheets for ease of entry. Although convenient, the system revealed its limits: redundancy, lack of integration and data security risks. These lessons later informed calls for a dedicated case management platform.

J. Continuous Review and Refinement

From February 2023 to January 2024, weekly monitoring sessions allowed officers to share challenges and innovations. Issues such as client reluctance to disclose risk factors, scoring inconsistencies in CARAT, and programme attendance difficulties were discussed and addressed. Best practices—such as Davao City's CARAT “dashboard”—were shared across sites. Feedback loops ensured tools were continuously revised, manuals updated, and programmes adapted. This process culminated in a national conference in August 2024, where findings were consolidated and reforms refined: CARAT was translated into five languages, LEP rebranded as LEAP, manuals streamlined and documentation forms simplified.

V. METHODOLOGICAL PRINCIPLES

The methodology of PEPPIS rested on five principles: participatory design (ownership by officers), capacity-building (continuous training), pilot testing (before scale-up), iterative refinement (based on feedback) and evidence-based practice (data-driven decision-making). Together, these ensured that PEPPIS was not a top-down imposition but a collaborative reform grounded in theory, practice and cultural context.

A. Process Evaluation

The implementation of PEPPIS across eight pilot sites generated rich insights into how evidence-based probation and parole can take root in the Philippine context. The findings reveal both promise and growing pains. They show that with training, mentoring and institutional support, probation and parole officers can shift from discretionary, personality-driven supervision toward structured, evidence-based practice. Yet they also expose the operational and cultural challenges that must be addressed before scale-up.

B. Classification and Risk Assessment (CARAT)

The introduction of the Classification and Risk Assessment Tool (CARAT) marked a watershed moment. For the first time, officers had a validated instrument to classify clients by risk level and identify criminogenic needs. Over 2,700 assessments were completed during the pilot phase, yielding data that confirmed global findings: most probationers fell into low (around 60 per cent) or moderate (around 30 per cent) risk categories, while only a small proportion scored high-risk (around 10 per cent) (Andrews & Bonta, 2010).

Additionally, the participants who were initially assessed were followed up after two years, with a cut-off date of 1 January 2024. During this follow-up, parole and probation officers evaluated whether participants had been rearrested, tested positive for drug use or were recommended for programme revocation. Any client who met at least one of these conditions was classified as a failure.

The results reveal a clear gradient of outcomes by risk level. Among low-risk clients, the failure rate was only 3 per cent, compared to 6 per cent for medium-risk clients and 9 per cent for high-risk clients. This means that clients identified as high risk by the CARAT tool were three times more likely to fail compared to low-risk clients. The pattern was particularly pronounced in urban areas and among male participants, underscoring the predictive value of the tool in identifying populations most vulnerable to reoffending or relapse.

This pattern underscored the importance of differentiating supervision intensity, ensuring low-risk clients were not overburdened with intrusive interventions (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005).

Furthermore, officers reported that CARAT sharpened their understanding of clients, highlighting needs around substance use, antisocial peers and unemployment. However, implementation revealed challenges. Some clients resisted disclosing sensitive information, leading to incomplete scoring. Others underreported problems to avoid more strict supervision. Officers themselves required continuous mentoring to apply scoring consistently. Despite these hurdles, CARAT was widely seen as an essential step toward evidence-based classification and a foundation for rational case planning (Latessa & Lovins, 2019).

C. Supervision Practices

The supervision manual translated CARAT scores into differentiated contact levels, introducing a structured framework for frequency and mode of supervision. Officers reported that this improved workload management by focusing resources where most needed. High-risk clients received more frequent visits (twice a month) and programme referrals, while low-risk clients were monitored with a lighter touch (once in two months). This shift represented a break from “one-size-fits-all” supervision that had previously consumed resources inefficiently (Taxman, 2008).

Yet adaptation was uneven. Some officers reverted to old habits, applying uniform supervision regardless of risk level. Others struggled with family involvement, a feature deliberately built into PEPPIS to align with Filipino collectivist culture (Narag & Jones, 2019). Families were expected to co-monitor compliance, but stigma and logistical barriers often limited participation. Despite these challenges, most officers agreed that the supervision framework gave structure to their work and clarified expectations for both staff and clients.

D. Programming (iCare, Hulagpos, LEAP)

The PEPPIS pilot tested three modular programmes: iCare, Hulagpos and the Livelihood and Employment Program (LEP, later rebranded LEAP or Livelihood and Employment Assistance Program). Each targeted specific criminogenic needs while embedding cultural responsiveness.

- *Hulagpos* (“to break free”) was designed as a cognitive-behavioral intervention for substance abuse. Participants reported learning relapse prevention strategies, emotional regulation and problem-solving skills. Officers praised its structured manual but noted that some modules required adaptation to Filipino idioms and examples. Group dynamics proved powerful, confirming social learning theory’s emphasis on peer reinforcement.
- *iCare* addressed distorted cognitions, teaching clients to identify “thinking traps” and adopt prosocial scripts. The programme drew heavily on cognitive-behavioural principles, and early evaluations suggested improvements in self-reflection and decision-making. Officers noted that its title resonated with clients, symbolizing hope for change, consistent with desistance research that emphasizes identity transformation (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006).
- *LEAP* focused on strain-related needs by providing vocational skills, financial literacy and employment linkages. In sites like Iloilo City and Ormoc City, clients completed small livelihood projects ranging from food vending to carpentry. Participants emphasized that gainful activity gave them dignity and reduced reliance on illicit survival strategies, echoing strain theory’s logic (Merton, 1938). However, LEAP’s impact was constrained by weak labour markets and limited government partnerships.

Together, these programmes reflected the Risk-Need-Responsivity (RNR) principle: intensive, targeted interventions for high-risk clients, while sparing low-risk ones from unnecessary intrusion (Bonta & Andrews, 2017).

E. Case Management and Documentation

One of the most visible shifts under PEPPIS was in documentation. Officers were trained to develop individualized case management plans linking CARAT scores to programme referrals and supervision schedules. Records were standardized through Google Forms and Google Sheets, allowing for digitized entry and cross-site comparison. This was a dramatic departure from the fragmented, paper-based records of the past.

Still, documentation revealed systemic weaknesses. The reliance on non-integrated spreadsheets led to redundancy, security risks and delays. Internet connectivity in remote areas further limited data entry. Officers complained that paperwork consumed valuable time, reducing direct client engagement. Yet despite these frustrations, standardized documentation was widely acknowledged as an essential step toward accountability, transparency and performance monitoring.

F. Client Engagement and Responsivity

A striking feature of the pilot was the variation in client engagement. Some embraced programmes enthusiastically, reporting improvements in relationships, employment and sobriety. Others resisted

participation, citing stigma, work conflicts or transportation costs. Officers noted that family involvement was critical: clients with supportive relatives showed stronger progress. This confirmed responsivity theory, which stresses the importance of tailoring interventions to individual motivation and context (Ward & Brown, 2004).

Overall, the PEPPIS pilot demonstrated that structured, evidence-based probation and parole is both feasible and effective in the Philippines. CARAT provided a scientific basis for classification, supervision frameworks rationalized workloads, programmes addressed criminogenic needs and documentation enhanced accountability. At the same time, challenges of training, consistency, cultural adaptation, family engagement and resource constraints underscored the need for sustained investment. The pilot confirmed that reform is possible but fragile—requiring continuous mentoring, institutional buy-in and cultural sensitivity.

Evaluating the PEPPIS initiative reveals both its achievements and its vulnerabilities. On one hand, the programme demonstrated that probation and parole in the Philippines can be anchored on evidence, structure and cultural responsiveness. On the other, it exposed the institutional fragility of reforms that depend on sustained resources, consistent mentoring and organizational buy-in. In many ways, the evaluation confirms a paradox: PEPPIS succeeded precisely because it was insulated as a pilot project but scaling it to the entire system risks diluting its strengths.

G. Successes

The most visible achievement of PEPPIS was the introduction of structured, scientific practices into a system long driven by discretion. CARAT replaced guesswork with validated risk assessments, providing a rational basis for differentiating supervision levels. This ensured that low-risk clients were spared unnecessary interventions, while high-risk clients received intensive services—consistent with the Risk-Need-Responsivity principle (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Bonta & Andrews, 2017).

Programme delivery also marked a breakthrough. iCare, Hulagpos and LEAP translated criminological theory into practical interventions that clients could understand and apply. Early outcome data, though limited, indicated improvements in problem-solving, relapse prevention and employment readiness. Officers themselves reported increased confidence in facilitating programmes, underscoring the value of structured manuals and ongoing mentoring (Latessa & Lovins, 2019).

Documentation and case management were also significantly improved. Standardized forms, digitized reporting and structured supervision plans enhanced accountability and transparency. For the first time, officers could systematically link assessment results to supervision and programme referrals, producing a visible chain of decision-making. This allowed for better monitoring of fidelity, progress tracking and policy-level evaluation.

H. Challenges

Yet evaluation also exposed recurring challenges. First, consistency in CARAT administration was uneven. Officers sometimes varied in scoring the same case, reflecting the need for continuous training and calibration. Clients, too, resisted disclosing sensitive information, especially regarding substance use or antisocial peers. This produced underreporting, weakening accuracy (Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005).

Second, supervision practices were not uniformly adopted. While some officers embraced differentiated contact levels, others defaulted to one-size-fits-all supervision. Cultural barriers complicated family involvement: in collectivist contexts, family monitoring was intended to strengthen accountability, but stigma and logistical obstacles often limited participation (Narag & Jones, 2019).

Third, programme delivery encountered structural limits. In resource-poor areas, LEAP's promise of employment or livelihood was undermined by weak labour markets and insufficient partnerships with local government units or private employers. Hulagpos and iCare required time, space and transportation for group sessions, which were not always feasible in far-flung regions. Officers also reported workload fatigue, noting that programme facilitation added to already heavy caseloads (Taxman, 2008).

Fourth, documentation, though improved, remained burdensome. Officers expressed frustration that digitized forms were redundant, lacked integration and consumed excessive time. Weak internet connectivity

in rural areas further disrupted data entry. As one officer put it, “We are spending more time with the forms than with the clients”—a reminder that technology must support, not replace, human engagement (Latessa, Cullen, & Gendreau, 2002).

I. Institutional and Cultural Lessons

Perhaps the most critical lesson is that reform cannot rely on individual champions alone. PEPPIS thrived because of continuous mentoring, the dedication of TWG members, and the support of UNODC and UNAFEI experts. But without institutionalization, reforms risk collapse once champions are transferred or political winds shift. Embedding PEPPIS into training academies, operational manuals and performance metrics is essential to avoid the cycle of reform and relapse.

Cultural adaptation also emerged as a decisive factor. Programmes resonated because they were contextualized: Hulagpos spoke in Filipino idioms, LEAP targeted livelihood in local markets and supervision integrated families. These are aligned with desistance research, which emphasizes identity change, prosocial roles and cultural meaning (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006). The lesson is clear: global models cannot be transplanted wholesale but must be localized to thrive.

In sum, PEPPIS was evaluated as a promising, evidence-based reform that demonstrated feasibility and effectiveness in pilot sites. Its core strengths were structured assessment, differentiated supervision, modular programming and standardized documentation. Its weaknesses lie in training gaps, uneven fidelity, resource shortages and bureaucratic inertia. For reform to endure, the challenge is twofold: to sustain fidelity while scaling up, and to embed practices into institutional routines rather than relying on temporary projects.

VI. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

The PEPPIS pilot generated more than operational insights; it revealed enduring lessons about how reform can take root in a fragile justice system. These lessons underscore that evidence-based practice is not merely about importing tools but about embedding values, adapting to culture and sustaining change in the face of institutional inertia. They also yield policy implications not only for the Philippines but for other developing countries struggling with overcrowded prisons, underfunded probation services and public scepticism about alternatives to incarceration.

Lesson 1: Reform must be evidence-based and localized

Reform succeeds when grounded in science yet sensitive to context. CARAT, iCare, Hulagpos and LEAP all drew from international models but were translated into local languages, infused with Filipino idioms and adapted to resource constraints. Policy implication: future reforms must be anchored in validated frameworks but indigenized for Filipino realities (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Ward & Brown, 2004).

Lesson 2: Mentoring is as important as training

Classroom training introduced officers to new concepts, but it was weekly mentoring—via the “Wednesday Club” and site visits—that sustained fidelity. Officers needed guidance in applying tools, calibrating scores and troubleshooting obstacles. Policy implication: institutionalize mentoring as a permanent feature of probation and parole.

Lesson 3: Documentation is both burden and backbone

Standardized forms enhanced accountability, yet they also consumed officer time and strained resources. The challenge is to streamline documentation without sacrificing rigor. Policy implication: invest in integrated case management systems that reduce redundancy and enhance usability.

Lesson 4: Family and community engagement are decisive

Community corrections cannot succeed without families and communities. Filipino collectivist culture

VISITING EXPERT'S PAPER

makes family engagement essential. Policy implication: expand family-focused interventions, strengthen volunteer networks, and partner with civil society to reduce stigma and foster reintegration.

Lesson 5: Reform is fragile without institutionalization

PEPPIS thrived because of pilot resources and UNODC and UNAFEI support, but reforms risk erosion without institutional embedding. Policy implication: enshrine PEPPIS in law, training curricula, performance standards and budgets.

Lesson 6: Probation and parole are critical to reducing mass incarceration

Overcrowding cannot be solved by building more prisons but by strengthening credible community alternatives. Policy implication: scale up PEPPIS nationwide and use it as a template for regional reforms.

The story of PEPPIS is both a reminder of what is broken in Philippine community corrections and a glimpse of what is possible when reform is pursued with science, culture and commitment. For decades, parole and probation were treated as afterthoughts—underfunded, understaffed and overshadowed by prisons and jails. Officers improvised, relying on discretion and tradition rather than validated tools or structured programmes. Clients cycled through a system that promised rehabilitation but delivered little more than surveillance and stigma (Becker, 1963).

PEPPIS changed that pattern. By introducing CARAT for risk assessment, supervision frameworks tied to criminogenic needs, structured programmes like iCare, Hulagpos and LEAP, and standardized documentation, the pilot demonstrated that probation and parole can be rebuilt on evidence-based foundations. More than technical innovation, PEPPIS showed the value of mentoring, cultural adaptation and family engagement. It proved that reforms succeed when they honour local contexts while drawing from global best practices (Andrews & Bonta, 2010; Narag & Jones, 2019).

At the same time, PEPPIS revealed the fragility of reform. Implementation was uneven, resource shortages were acute, and bureaucratic inertia remained strong. Programmes resonated with clients but were limited by weak labour markets, poor digital infrastructure, and stigma from communities. Above all, the pilot highlighted that reforms dependent on individual champions and external support can falter unless institutionalized.

The implications are clear. If community corrections are to play a decisive role in addressing prison and jail overcrowding, reforms must be scaled up, embedded in policy and sustained through budgets, training, and performance standards. The Philippines cannot build its way out of congestion; it must supervise its way out through credible, evidence-based alternatives. Probation and parole, once treated as secondary, must become central to criminal justice reform.

Ultimately, the conclusion of PEPPIS is not merely technical but ethical. It reaffirms that persons deprived of liberty are more than cases to be processed; they are human beings capable of change. Effective community corrections recognize this dignity while safeguarding public safety. In doing so, they redefine justice: not as endless punishment but as accountability that leads to reintegration. In the Philippines and beyond, the challenge is to ensure that the cycle of reform does not end with a pilot, but becomes a permanent feature of a more humane, more rational and more hopeful justice system (Maruna, 2001; McNeill, 2006).

REFERENCES

- Andrews, D. A., Bonta, J., & Hoge, R. D. (1990). Classification for effective rehabilitation. *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, 17(1), 19-52.
- Andrews, D. A., & Bonta, J. (2010). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct*.
- Bandura, A., & Walters, R. H. (1977). *Social learning theory* (Vol. 1, pp. 141-154). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Becker, H. (1963). *Outsiders: Studies in the Sociology of Deviance*.
- BJMP. (2022). *Annual Jail Report*.
- Bonta, J., & Andrews, D. A. (2017). *The Psychology of Criminal Conduct* (6th ed.).
- Cullen, F. T. (2013). Rehabilitation: Beyond “nothing works.” *Crime and Justice*, 42(1), 299-376.
- Cullen, F. T., & Gendreau, P. (2000). Assessing correctional rehabilitation: Policy, practice, and prospects.
- ICPR. (2018). *World Prison Brief*.
- Latessa, E. J., & Lovins, B. (2019). *Corrections in the Community*. Routledge.
- Lipsey, M. W., Landenberger, N. A., & Wilson, S. J. (2007). Effects of cognitive-behavioral programs for criminal offenders. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 3(1), 1-27.
- Lowenkamp, C. T., & Latessa, E. J. (2005). Increasing effectiveness of correctional programming through the risk principle. *Crime & Delinquency*, 51(3), 327-338.
- Maruna, S. (2001). Making good: How ex-convicts reform and rebuild their lives. *American Psychological Association*.
- McNeill, F. (2006). A desistance paradigm for offender management. *Criminology & Criminal Justice*, 6(1), 39-62.
- Merton, R. K. (1938). Social structure and anomie. *American Sociological Review*, 3(5), 672-682.
- Narag, R. E. (2018). Understanding factors related to prolonged trial of detained defendants in the Philippines. *International Journal of Offender Therapy and Comparative Criminology*, 62(8), 2461-2487.
- Narag, R. E., & Jones, C. (2019). How inmates help run prisons: Self-governance in the Philippines. *The Prison Journal*, 99(4), 419-441.
- Sutherland, E. H., Cressey, D. R., & Luckenbill, D. F. (1992). *Principles of criminology*. Altamira Press.
- Taxman, F. S. (2008). No illusions: Offender and organizational change in Maryland's proactive community supervision efforts. *Criminology & Public Policy*, 7(2), 275-302.
- Ward, T., & Brown, M. (2004). The Good Lives Model and conceptual issues in offender rehabilitation. *Psychology, Crime & Law*, 10(3), 243-257.
- Ward, T., Mann, R. E., & Gannon, T. A. (2007). The good lives model of offender rehabilitation: Clinical implications. *Aggression and violent behavior*, 12(1), 87-107.