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### Research Article

# Milf Integrees In The Philippine National Police: A Multiple Case Approach

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### ABSTRACT

The study was conducted to identify key aspects of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) Combatants' experiences during the integration process into the Philippine National Police. Specifically, this involves defining the MILF's lived experiences of reintegration without disarmament and demobilization, as well as assessing the elements that contributed to the integration process' satisfaction among the integrees. The study was conducted at the cities of Cotabato, Marawi, and the Municipalities of Parang and Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao. Seven selected respondents were coming from the MILF Integrees in the PNP. The qualitative multiple case study design method of research was employed. Interviews and focus group discussions, and document analysis were the principal techniques for data gathering. The interview guide schedule was used to gather data on respondents' profiles, problems encountered, and policies drawn from the study. Findings show that the experiences of the respondents, particularly on emotional feelings during the selection process, were excitement, apprehension, fear, and surprise. Other experiences of the respondents during the selection process were hardship in obtaining and accessing personal documents, and a lack of educational qualifications. Methodologies of the training were easy for the MILF integrees, and they were satisfied with the performance of their trainers. Support from the national Government is the Continuing Education Program, livelihood program, provision of arms, ammunition, and other combat paraphernalia, and training program. Finally, the peace brought about by the 1996 Final Peace Agreement (FA), including MILF integration, was only tentative. It was effective in the MILF areas of South Western Mindanao not in MILF-controlled areas in central Mindanao.

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## INTRODUCTION

Studies of peace agreements indicate that arrangements involving power-sharing in security institutions (such as absorbing former rebels into the police or military) greatly enhance the credibility and success of peace deals. When an armed conflict ends, either by peace negotiations or a military victory the succeeding phase, characterized as post-conflict or post-war peacebuilding depending on how and why the fighting stopped, often strives to deal with ex-combatants who are perceived as a threat to the peace stability and post-conflict development (Hall & Deinla, 2021; Joshi & Quinn, 2020; Nathan, 2020).

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), one of the most prominent separatist movements in the Philippines, has been at the forefront of addressing long-standing issues of marginalization, underdevelopment, and socio-political inequality faced by the Bangsamoro people. For decades, the MILF has engaged in armed struggles to advocate for greater autonomy, justice, and recognition of their cultural and political identity. However, such a protracted conflict has resulted in significant human, social, and economic costs, including the displacement of communities, loss of lives, and deterioration of trust between Bangsamoro communities and the Philippine government (Baquiano, 2019). The Moro struggle in the Philippines has persistently challenged the state's authority over the Muslim ethnic minorities in the southern part of the archipelago. Given that the general populace

is still divided on the key components of the peace agreement, the potential for relapsing into another major armed conflict looms large (Dy, 2022; Nelson, 2019).

Some studies found that peace agreements that include military power-sharing provisions are more likely to be followed by peace. Others, however, have provided a more skeptical view of military power-sharing, showing that a military merger is not a successful strategy. Moreover, if the security institutions are not being reformed, there is a danger that these may turn against the population and sow the seeds for further conflicts (Diaz, 2020; Nelson, 2021).

In the Philippine context, the 2014 Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) marked a watershed for peace. It laid the groundwork for establishing BARMM and included provisions for the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration of MILF forces into civilian life. Among the CAB's key mechanisms is the integration of qualified MILF members into the PNP.

The signing of the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) in 2014 marked a pivotal milestone toward peace, laying the groundwork for the establishment of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) and mechanisms for the reintegration of MILF combatants into

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civilian and governmental roles (Lidasan & Manaligod, 2021) Among these mechanisms is the inclusion of MILF Integrees into the Philippine National Police (PNP). This initiative, aimed at fostering trust and partnership, acknowledges the MILF's pivotal role in achieving long-term peace and seeks to enhance representation and diversity in national law enforcement institutions (Deinla & Dressel, 2019). The inclusion of MILF integrees is seen as a cornerstone of post-conflict peacebuilding in BARMM, promoting reconciliation, inclusive governance, and local ownership of the peace process.

Considering the past successes and failures of similar peace agreements, there is a need to evaluate the MILF Integrees' experiences to be used as a guide in assessing the policy direction of the current rebel integration program, which addresses the largest and the last remaining secessionist group in the Philippines, MILF. This is an essential research study as it will develop a prognosis about future problems and opportunities in the implementation of the DDR program specified in the 2014 CAB entered into by the GRP and MILF.

Despite the clear rationale for integrating MILF members into the police, there is a noticeable gap in scholarly research on how this policy unfolds on the ground. Most studies on the Philippine peace process focus on broad political and security arrangements in BARMM, but few have examined the lived experiences and challenges of the MILF integrees within the PNP. As such, the

researcher has not come across a qualitative study about the lived experiences of MILF Integrees in the Philippine National Police. Existing studies only examine the rebel reintegration programs of the peace agreement between the government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) and their combatant experiences.

To address this gap, this study adopts a *multiple case study* approach to deeply explore the experiences of MILF integrees in the PNP, shedding light on their motivations, integration processes, and the obstacles and opportunities they encounter. By doing so, the research aims to generate insights that can inform ongoing peacebuilding efforts and ensure that the integration program contributes effectively to long-term peace and security in BARMM.

Furthermore, there is an urgency to conduct this study since it is a given fact that the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program follows a different path of reintegrating the rebels from previous agreements, making the rebel integration program the determining factor in the outcome of the peace agreement to increase the prospect of success because an inevitable failure of such a law would only recruit more people into the secessionist rebellion (Ayissi, 2021).

The Moro struggle in the Philippines has persistently challenged the state's authority over Muslim ethnic minorities in the southern part of the nation. This conflict,

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rooted in an ethno-nationalist revolution that began in the 1970s, has led to decades of violence. Despite ongoing peace talks between the Philippine government (GRP) and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which have largely reduced armed skirmishes, violence persists due to groups like Abu Sayyaf and other ISIS-affiliated organizations. However, the resolution of the Moro issue remains uncertain, as public opinion remains divided on key components of the peace agreement, increasing the risk of renewed conflict (Santos & Santos, 2019).

Jarstad and Nilsson (2018) stated that for peace agreements to be credible and encourage rebels to disarm, they must include power-sharing provisions. Research indicates that agreements incorporating variables such as shared governance, territorial autonomy, and military power-sharing are more likely to succeed (Hartzell & Hoddie, 2003; 2015, 2020). These measures address historical discrimination, recognize the rebels' legitimacy, and grant them authority in governance and security structures (Olson & DeRouen, 2024).

Rebel integration programs further enhance stability by reducing insecurity among former combatants. These programs provide ex-rebels with opportunities for self-enforcement and employment, thus fostering trust in the government's commitment to peace agreements like the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB) (Estrera & Lai, 2017). Military integration, in particular, absorbs

former rebels into the state's armed forces, reducing their numerical strength and ability to initiate new conflicts. This process reassures the MILF that the government will uphold its commitments.

Reintegration efforts extend beyond military inclusion to encompass social, political, and economic support for ex-combatants transitioning to civilian life. Programs often include skills training, temporary financial assistance, educational support, and medical or job referrals. These initiatives, combined with disarmament and demobilization, are part of the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) processes. DDR involves disarming combatants, dismantling command structures, and registering individuals for potential roles in state institutions. Whether implemented through peace agreements or international peace operations, DDR programs are critical in dismantling rebel factions, preventing renewed conflict, and supporting the long-term reintegration of ex-combatants into society (Rodríguez-Castellón, 2024).

The integration of former Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) combatants into the Philippine National Police (PNP) is part of the broader peacebuilding initiatives outlined in the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). Garcia, Santos, & Velasquez (2020) said that reintegration programs aim to transform ex-combatants into productive members of society, reducing their reliance on violence. These efforts also promote stability and socio-political inclusion. However, such initiatives face

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challenges like community acceptance, cultural adaptation, and institutional reforms. Reintegration into police forces is a common approach in post-conflict settings. Studies suggest that integrating ex-combatants into law enforcement helps build trust between communities and the state, as well as between former adversaries (Baez et al., 2019).

The adaptation process, however, requires addressing disparities in training, culture, and operational expectations. In the Philippines, the cultural diversity of MILF Integrees and existing PNP personnel necessitates efforts to foster mutual understanding and shared purpose (Labrador & Candelaria, 2020). Cultural integration remains one of the most challenging aspects of reintegration. MILF Integrates face challenges adjusting to the organizational culture of the PNP, which operates within the framework of the Philippine government. Ayson (2021) emphasizes that the differing ideologies and histories between the MILF and state institutions complicate the transition, especially in balancing personal beliefs with professional obligations. Training programs are crucial to bridging these gaps, particularly in ensuring that Integrees align with PNP values and protocols.

A study by Macapado (2018) on the reintegration of ex-combatants in Mindanao highlights that public perception is a critical factor in successful reintegration. Community acceptance of MILF members in public service, such as in the police force, hinges on their ability to demonstrate

impartiality, professionalism, and a commitment to public welfare. Resistance from certain sectors may hinder their full assimilation into the PNP.

A case study by Garcia et al. (2020) examined the integration of former rebels into the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and PNP. The study found that capacity-building initiatives, such as comprehensive training programs and workshops on human rights and peacebuilding, significantly improved the performance and community relations of ex-combatants in law enforcement. However, it also noted the need for psychological support to address trauma and mental health challenges among integrees.

The reintegration of MILF combatants into public service, including the police force, has led to mixed outcomes. While some Integrees successfully foster peace and cooperation, others face stigmatization or feel marginalized within the system. The study underscores the importance of providing continuous support to Integrees to ensure their personal and professional development (Lidasan and Manaligod 2021).

A series of case studies concludes that rebel integration into the military reduces the risk of a return to conflict, especially when combined with other conflict settlement components such as political, economic, and territorial power-sharing. Contemporary conflict management experts also argue that "provisions for military integration will significantly reduce the likelihood of peace failure in a meaningful and statistically

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significant way"(Hoddie & Hartzell, 2003; Mattes & Savun, 2010).

The study "MILF Integrees in the Philippine National Police: Experiences and Outcomes" is a complex and significant research topic that intersects themes of integration, peacebuilding, identity, and organizational behavior. Relatedly, various theories are discussed in support of this study, such as Social Integration Theory, Conflict Transformation, Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding, and Social Identity Theory.

Social Integration Theory (Ware et al., 2008) emphasizes the process through which individuals from diverse backgrounds are incorporated into a group or society, fostering shared values and social cohesion. In the context of the study, this theory can serve as the foundation to explore how MILF Integrees adapt to the organizational culture of the Philippine National Police (PNP) and how they contribute to or are influenced by the collective identity and functioning of the organization. In the aspect that analyzes the sense of acceptance, MILF Integrees experience within the PNP is cohesion and belongingness. This investigates how their values and identities align or conflict with the PNP's institutional culture, and there are adaptation challenges that examine barriers that hinder their successful integration and how these impact their experiences and outcomes. Using Social Integration Theory as the anchor provides a comprehensive lens to explore the integration experiences of MILF Integrees, while the supporting theories enrich the understanding of specific

dimensions, such as identity, conflict transformation, and peacebuilding outcomes. This combination ensures a holistic approach to examining their lived experiences and the broader implications for peace and development in the Philippines.

John Paul Lederach's "Conflict Transformation", (Gumbo and Shava, 2021) espoused the "as a support theory as it is most appropriate on the ground that conflict transformation is the process by which conflicts are transformed into peaceful outcomes. Conflict Transformation is therefore a process of engaging with and transforming the relationship, interests, discourses, and if necessary, the very constitutions of society that support the continuation of violent conflict. General & Makalingkang (2022) cited that transformation directs us toward change, to how things move from\ one shape to a different one. The change process is fundamental to this guiding language. By its nature, when we add "trans" to "form, "we must contemplate both the presenting situation and a new one.

John Paul Lederach's Integrated Framework for Peacebuilding can be used to contextualize the integration of former combatants into state institutions as part of post-conflict peace agreements. The theory highlights the importance of sustainable structures that foster reconciliation, trust-building, and long-term peace. Assess how the integration of MILF Integrees contributes to the peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF, and

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examine the role of the PNP as a peacebuilding institution, ensuring inclusivity and conflict resolution.

The Social Identity Theory, proposed by Scheepers, & Ellemers (2019), explores how individuals derive their identity from group membership and how this influences their organizational behavior and interaction. Investigate how MILF Integreees balance their identities as former members of the MILF and current members of the PNP, and explore the potential for intergroup dynamics, such as discrimination or in-group favoritism, within the PNP.

For everyone to understand what these terms represent in connection to the relevant terminology used in this study, they have been legally defined as follows:

The term MILF Integreees refers to former combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who are integrated into the Philippine National Police (PNP) as part of the peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF. This integration is a provision under the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), signed in 2014, to ensure that members of the MILF can transition from armed struggle to active participation in governance and public service.

The Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) is a separatist group that fought for Moro self-determination and autonomy in Mindanao. The integration of MILF combatants into the police force is part of

the normalization track of the peace process. The goal is to transform former combatants into law-abiding citizens and contributors to maintaining peace and order in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM). It was established in the late 1970s as a splinter group from the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF).

The Philippine National Police (PNP) is the national civilian police force of the Philippines, tasked with law enforcement, crime prevention, and maintaining peace and order. It operates under the administrative control of the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). In the context of this study, the PNP serves as the organization where former combatants of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) are integrated as part of the peace agreements between the Philippine government and the MILF.

Challenges in the context of the MILF Integreees in the PNP refer to the obstacles and difficulties encountered during their integration process. These challenges may include the adjustment of MILF Integreees to the institutional culture of the PNP, which may differ significantly from their experiences as members of a revolutionary group. Experiences of bias or prejudice from PNP personnel or the general public due to their history as MILF members. Differences in formal law enforcement training and skills compared to their PNP counterparts, and difficulties in adapting to the protocols, chain of command, and expectations of the PNP as a structured organization.

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Outcomes in the study refer to the results or impacts of integrating MILF members into the PNP. These outcomes may include the acquisition of new skills, training, and professional growth of MILF Integrees in their roles within the PNP. The influence of MILF Integrees on improving trust and collaboration between the PNP and Muslim communities in conflict-affected areas, and the role of Integrees in promoting peace, reducing tensions, and facilitating the implementation of peace agreements.

These definitions are crucial in framing the study and understanding the broader implications of integrating former combatants into a national law enforcement institution.

The integration of former combatants, particularly members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), into state institutions like the Philippine National Police (PNP) is a critical component of the peace process between the Philippine government and the MILF. While there has been extensive research on post-conflict integration, peacebuilding, and organizational adaptation, several gaps remain that justify this study.

Existing literature on the peace process in the Philippines primarily focuses on the broader aspects of the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM), the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB), and political frameworks of autonomy. Few studies have specifically examined the lived experiences,

challenges, and outcomes of MILF Integrees within the PNP, a key institution in maintaining law and order in the post-conflict landscape. The unique challenges of integrating individuals from a historically marginalized and insurgent background into a national security institution remain understudied, particularly in the Philippine context.

Moreover, there is a lack of exploration into how the PNP, with its established institutional culture, adapts its practices to accommodate MILF Integrees and how these individuals navigate their dual identities as former combatants and current law enforcers.

The purpose of this qualitative multiple case study is to explore and understand the lived experiences of former members of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who have integrated into the Philippine National Police (PNP). This study aims to examine their journey through integration, their challenges and successes, and the personal and professional outcomes of this transition.

By capturing their narratives and the multiple facets of their integration into the police force, the study seeks to provide insights into how this integration impacts individual Integrees, the organization, and the broader goal of sustaining peace and stability in Mindanao. Furthermore, the study aims to identify lessons and recommendations that could inform future integration initiatives, promote inclusive policies, and contribute to the ongoing

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peacebuilding efforts in the Philippines. Moreover, this study aims to know the following: First, to describe how and why the former MILF combatants have been integrated into the Philippine National Police as part of the peace process; Second: To determine the motivations of ex-MILF combatants for joining the PNP after the peace agreement; and, third: To illustrate the challenges faced and the strategies applied to overcome the challenges by the MILF Integrees in the integration as PNP personnel. Lastly, to determine the similarities and differences in the experiences of the MILF Integrees.

This study holds global significance as it contributes to the growing body of knowledge on post-conflict reconciliation and the reintegration of former combatants into state institutions. Lessons learned from the Philippine context can serve as a model or point of reference for other nations grappling with the complexities of peacebuilding and conflict resolution, particularly in regions affected by separatist movements or insurgencies. Countries emerging from armed conflict can adapt strategies highlighted in this research to facilitate the successful integration of former combatants into government roles, fostering national unity.

This study has profound social importance as it highlights the human and communal dimensions of conflict resolution and integration efforts, such as understanding the experiences of MILF Integrees sheds light on how trust and collaboration can be

fostered between former adversaries, leading to stronger social bonds and a shared sense of purpose. By amplifying the voices of Integrees, this study acknowledges their struggles, triumphs, and aspirations, helping combat stigma and encouraging societal acceptance. The MILF Integrees can share success stories and lessons learned from the integration process and can inspire communities, particularly in conflict-affected regions, to actively support peacebuilding initiatives.

The study on MILF (Moro Islamic Liberation Front) Integrees in the Philippine National Police (PNP) carries substantial significance for the PNP as an institution because the integration of MILF members into the PNP symbolizes a critical step in the peace process outlined in the Bangsamoro Organic Law (BOL) and the Comprehensive Agreement on the Bangsamoro (CAB). This study provides insights into the challenges and successes of such integration, which is key for strengthening trust and collaboration between the PNP and former combatants. By understanding the experiences and challenges faced by MILF Integrees, the PNP can identify areas where institutional reforms or policy adjustments are needed to ensure seamless integration and improve workplace relationships between Integrees and existing PNP personnel. This study highlights how diversity and inclusion, particularly of historically marginalized groups, can contribute to the PNP's legitimacy and effectiveness in serving all sectors of society.

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This research enriches the academic literature on post-conflict integration, peacebuilding, and institutional reform. It provides a case study of how former combatants navigate their reintegration into civilian and state roles, offering valuable lessons for similar contexts worldwide. This study provides a baseline for exploring the broader implications of integrating former rebels into civilian institutions.

Future researchers can build on this to investigate similar processes in other regions or organizations. Findings can enrich the literature on post-conflict transitions, security sector reform, and the role of law enforcement in peacebuilding. Future scholars can use the study's findings to propose evidence-based recommendations for policymakers aiming to improve peacebuilding initiatives in conflict-affected areas.

This study aligns closely with SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, which aims to promote peaceful and inclusive societies, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable, and inclusive institutions. Specifically, the research contributes to reducing all forms of violence and related death rates by promoting peaceful reintegration, promoting the rule of law, and ensuring equal access to justice for all by integrating former rebels into lawful institutions like the PNP and ensuring responsive, inclusive, and representative decision-making at all levels by advocating

for the voices of Integreees and understanding their experiences.

The study mainly focuses on the experiences and outcomes of the MILF Integreees in the PNP and is limited to MILF Integreees currently serving in the PNP, excluding those who may have left the organization or those undergoing training. Data collection is constrained to specific regions where MILF Integreees are deployed, primarily in conflict-affected areas of Mindanao. The findings may not fully represent the experiences of MILF Integreees in other regions. The study depends on the willingness of respondents to share their experiences. Sensitive issues, such as political and security concerns, may limit the depth of responses or result in bias.

The study specifically examines MILF Integreees in the PNP, excluding other groups or individuals integrated from other organizations (e.g., former MNLF combatants). The research focuses solely on the PNP and does not include other security forces such as the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) or the Bureau of Jail Management and Penology (BJMP). The study is delimited to explore the integration process, challenges faced by Integreees, and their contributions to the PNP, excluding broader political or socio-economic implications of the peace process.

## METHODS

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This section outlines the approach used in studying the integration of MILF Integrees into the Philippine National Police (PNP). The

methodology includes the study participants, materials and instruments, research design, and procedures.

### Study Participants

The participants of the study are former MILF combatants who have been integrated into the PNP as part of the peace agreements between the Philippine government and the MILF. In particular, at least seven distinct cases were covered, corresponding to integrees with varied profiles and backgrounds. These include: 1. Former female MILF commander who have transitioned into leadership or commissioned roles within the PNP; 2. Former female MILF member, a combatant under the Bangsamoro Women Auxiliary Brigade (BWAB) 3. A male Integree who was a former MILF combatant who had college education prior to or after their MILF involvement; 4. A professional Former MILF who joined at a young age not holding higher command ranks. 5. Male MILF integrees in the PNP served as a brigade commander in the MILF. 6. Male MILF integree in the PNP served as a platoon leader. 7. Another former female MILF member, formerly served as a battalion commander.

At least one participant from each of these categories was included, ensuring that the sample spans a wide cross-section of the MILF integree population. Each selected participant constitutes a case in the study, representing the experiences of that particular subgroup. In total, the research

envisions conducting roughly seven in-depth interviews (IDIs) with individual integrees (one from each of the seven categories above). This sample size balances the need for comprehensive, in-depth insights with practical manageability in a qualitative study setting

The participants for this study were chosen through purposive sampling. The purposive sampling method is helpful in studies focusing on understanding complex phenomena, as it allows researchers to target individuals or groups who possess the knowledge or experiences necessary to address the research questions effectively (Campbell, 2020).

The following inclusion criteria was used to select the participants to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the recruitment process: First, the participants must have a minimum of two years of service in the PNP; and second, the participants must be former members of the MILF. The selection process was conducted with specific details to guarantee transparency and fairness. This focus ensures that the participants possess direct experience and involvement as MILF Integrees, providing valuable insights into the procedures,

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challenges, and dynamics of the reintegration program.

MILF Integrees with less than two years of service were excluded from the study as they may lack sufficient experience in the reintegration program. Current MILF Integrees in the PNP who have faced disciplinary actions related to the reintegration program, as this could bias

### Materials/Instruments

The primary instrument used in the study is the in-depth interview (IDI) guide. This guide consists of a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed and comprehensive responses from participants during IDI. The first part of the open-ended questions covered the questions on the MILF Integree's perception regarding their role and responsibilities as PNP personnel; the second part consists of questions on their experiences encountered as personnel for the PNP; the third part include questions on the challenges faced by the MILF Integrees as PNP personnel; and fourth part consists of questions on strategies employed to

### Design and Procedure

This study employed a qualitative multiple case study design to explore the phenomenon of MILF integrees in the PNP. A multiple-case approach involves examining several distinct cases in order to compare and discern patterns across them. The approach remains qualitative and exploratory, aiming for deep insight into each

their perspective. Participation in the study was voluntary, with participants providing informed consent. The researcher encouraged voluntary participation as it allows for a more diverse range of perspectives, enriching the insights gathered. This ensures that ethical standards are upheld, and participants are willingly sharing their experiences and insights.

overcome challenges and ensure successful as PNP personnel.

The questions were structured to explore specific themes or topics related to the research study, while also allowing for flexibility to probe deeper into interesting or unexpected areas that arise during the conversation. The questionnaire were subjected to validation by the experts for reliability and verification testing, the draft was sent to the research adviser for any comments, corrections, and revisions needed.

integree's story, the within-case analysis, as well as an analytic synthesis of themes and contrasts across all cases. This methodological choice aligns with the study's goal of describing lived experiences in detail while also drawing out broader implications for peacebuilding and organizational integration.

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In a multiple case study, the researcher selects multiple cases to illustrate the one issue or concern (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The goal of a multiple case study is to compare cases to identify common patterns, relationships, or similarities. In a multiple case study, the cases may be similar in nature, or they may be diverse, but the researcher is looking for patterns or relationships across cases (Yin, 2017). This method is often used when the phenomenon being studied is rare or difficult to observe, each “case” is an individual MILF Integree with a particular profile, and their experiences serve as a bounded system for in-depth analysis. By using multiple cases, the research can capture variability in experiences and context, which strengthens the robustness of findings through cross-case comparison.

The researcher employed a coding process to categorize the data into meaningful units and themes. As the transcripts are coded, additional inductive codes were added to capture emergent ideas or unexpected topics that arise from the participants’ narratives. For each case (participant), a within-case analysis was conducted: the coded data was organized to construct a coherent narrative or profile of that Integree’s experience. This within-case analysis might involve writing a summary of each participant’s story, noting the key themes for that person, and how they answer each research question in their context. Next, a cross-case analysis was undertaken to compare and contrast findings across all the cases. This involves looking for

common patterns as well as divergences. The researcher systematically examine how each identified theme manifests in each case and then synthesize the results. Similarly, challenges might be universally experienced or might differ, perhaps only female Integrees cite a particular challenge such as gender bias. By comparing different participants’ perspectives and experiences side by side, the study can validate recurring patterns and identify outliers or unique cases.

In conducting research with MILF Integrees in the Philippine National Police (PNP), it is essential to establish trust, maintain ethical integrity, and ensure confidentiality to produce credible findings. The data-gathering process should begin by arranging prior appointments with participants to communicate the purpose of the study, outline the research process, and explain the measures in place to protect their confidentiality. Participants must be fully informed about their rights through the process of obtaining informed consent, emphasizing the voluntary nature of their participation and their right to withdraw at any time without repercussions.

To build trust and encourage openness, the researcher must guarantee that all personal information and sensitive details were anonymized and securely stored. A calm, private, and distraction-free interview environment should be chosen to allow participants to feel comfortable sharing their experiences. This setting helped foster

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candid discussions while ensuring their emotional and psychological safety.

During interviews, the researcher should adopt a sensitive, non-judgmental, and empathetic approach to acknowledge the potentially delicate nature of the topics being discussed. To further safeguard participants' well-being, they should be given the option to skip questions, take breaks, or terminate the interview at any point. Semi-structured interviews would be employed, offering flexibility while ensuring the study addresses key research questions. Audio recordings, if consented to, would be securely stored, and all transcripts anonymized to maintain participants' privacy.

Given the legal and institutional considerations that may apply to working with individuals who were former rebels, the researcher must comply fully with applicable policies and regulations. These include adherence to institutional ethics review board guidelines and laws relevant to the research environment. The researcher must also be vigilant about ensuring that the rights and dignity of participants are upheld throughout the study.

The analysis of qualitative data in this multiple case study proceed in several stages,

### **Ethical Consideration**

All conversations and interactions with participants were conducted confidentially; their real identities will always be concealed by the use of pseudonyms. This encourages

following a thematic analysis approach augmented by cross-case comparative techniques. First, each interview transcript was reviewed thoroughly to gain an overall familiarity with the content

The data analysis process begins by thoroughly reviewing interview transcripts and field notes to gain an overall understanding of the content. The next step involves categorizing the data by coding it into key themes and patterns, particularly those related to participants' experiences, motivations, and challenges as PNP personnel. Initial codes were developed based on the research questions and systematically organized to identify and merge recurring or emerging themes.

To ensure accuracy and reliability, the researcher compared different perspectives, experiences, and viewpoints, cross-checking patterns to validate findings. The results were then summarized, offering a clear and detailed presentation of participants' experiences. Practical recommendations were crafted based on these findings, aimed at improving existing policies and practices related to MILF Integrees.

openness and trust in the credibility of our participants. Possibly, they are reluctant to share the information out of fear and withheld data because my research topic

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concerns former rebels who are now PNP personnel. To allay their anxieties and promote trust, a few precautions must be implemented as part of thorough research. Respect for people necessitates a duty to safeguard people from being exploited because of their limitations and to ensure the freedom of research participants. Informed and voluntary consent guarantees that subjects are aware of the significance of taking part in a research study and enables them to consciously choose to do so.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents a comprehensive account of the findings derived from the research, followed by a detailed discussion of the emerging themes. Structured analysis from the results provides a through

### Profile of the Research Key – Informants

The research involved seven integrees of the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) who are now part of the Philippine National Police (PNP). These key informants vary in age, gender, educational background, and former roles within the MILF, reflecting a diverse pool of experiences and leadership capacities. PNP-IN1, a 28-year-old female from Buldon, Maguindanao del Norte, previously served as Company Commander under the Inner Guard Base Command (BIWAB 1st Company), where she actively served as a member. A college graduate, her educational achievement complements her involvement in the movement, underscoring

By adhering to these ethical practices, the researcher aims to create a supportive and respectful research environment that encourages honest and meaningful participation, ultimately contributing to the production of reliable and impactful findings. The study was submitted and approved by the UMERC with Protocol No. UMERC-2025-302.

descriptive tables corresponding to each research question posed at the beginning of the study. The discussion centers on the lived experiences of the seven (7) MILF Integrees in the Philippine National Police willingly participated in this research.

the role of women in both combat and community-based operations. Her profile highlights the increasing participation of women in the peace and security sector.

Same shared own experiences, challenges, and insights during her time as combatant under the Bangsamoro Women Auxiliary Brigade (BWAB) of the MILF is PNP-IN2, where she actively served as a member, is a 35-year-old female from Marawi City. A college graduate, her educational achievement complements her involvement in the movement, underscoring the role of women in both combat and

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community-based operations. Her profile highlights the increasing participation of women in the peace and security sector, exemplifying the growing involvement of women in both community-based and security-related roles

Similarly, PNP-IN3, a 33-year-old male from Datu Odin Sinsuat, Maguindanao, served as a combatant under the Bangsamoro Auxiliary Brigade of the MILF, holding the position of member. With a college degree, he combines educational attainment with military field experience, representing the new generation of integrees who place value on both academic and organizational pursuits. He represents younger integrees who blend

academic achievement with organizational commitment.

Leadership experience is highlighted in PNP-IN4, a 29-year-old male from Sultan Kudarat, Maguindanao, he held leadership positions in the MILF as a platoon leader and later as a base commander. A college graduate, he demonstrates how grassroots leadership and academic preparation converge, equipping him with resilience and decision-making skills that support his role in formal law enforcement.

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Table 1. Profile of the Research Key – Informants

Higher command responsibility is evident in PNP-IN5, a 30-year-old male from Parang, Maguindanao del Norte, who served as a brigade commander in the Profile of the

currently an Integree in the PNP. This portion delves into the lived experiences of MILF integrees into the PNP in their journey from armed combat to public service that

| Code     | Pseudonym     | Address                                 | Former MILF Position                     | PNP Rank    | Years in Service |
|----------|---------------|---|--|-------------|------------------|
| PNP-I N1 | Sittie Shaima | Buldon Maguindanao Del Norte            | Company Commander                        | Patrolwoman | 2 years          |
| PNP-I N2 | Alya          | Marawi City                             | Bangsamoro Women Auxiliary Brigade       | Patrolwoman | 2 years          |
| PNP-I N3 | Saddam        | Datu Odin Sinsuat Maguindanao           | Combatant – Bangsamoro Auxiliary Brigade | Patrolman   | 2 years          |
| PNP-I N4 | Sahud         | Sultan Kudarat Maguindanao              | Base Commander                           | Patrolman   | 2 years          |
| PNP-I N5 | Abubakar      | Parang Maguindanao Del Norte            | Brigade Commander                        | Patrolman   | 2 years          |
| PNP-I N6 | Al-shihab     | Zamboanga Sibugay                       | Element Member of MILF                   | Patrolman   | 2 years          |
| PNP-I N7 | Baitina       | Datu Odin Sinsuat Maguindanao Del Norte | Battalion Commander                      | Patrolwoman | 2 years          |

Respondents.

**Lived experiences of MILF Integrees during integration into the PNP**

Table 2 provides an overview of the (7) seven male and female participants in this study, all

represented a deeply personal and transformative process shaped by various emotional, social, and institutional factors. Their narratives reflect a collective aspiration to normalize relations between the state and the Bangsamoro people, validating earlier findings that

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security-sector integration promotes reconciliation and trust.

Through these interviews, the research uncovered themes such as path to peacebuilding, fulfillment of peace agreement transformation of identity and role, acceptance, and alignment with Islamic and Bangsamoro principles. These narratives shed light on the opportunity to feel welcome in the government. That serve as a bridge between the old conflict and the new relationship where integration is not only technical but also political and social. To gather comprehensive and meaningful data,

each participant responded to the research questions through in-depth interviews. Ultimately, conceptualizing the chance to MILF members to continue their dreams of becoming police who serve and protect the people, with the perception that this will be the time that peace is fully felt by the people.

To gather comprehensive and meaningful data, each participant responded to the research questions through in-depth interviews. These interviews served as the primary method for collecting rich, qualitative information that forms the foundation of this study's findings.

Table 2

*Lived Experiences of MILF Integrees during Integration into the PNP*

| Theme                                     | Illustrative Statements  |
|---|--|
| Emotional Journey in Selection & Training | Findings show... emotional feeling during the selection process were excitement, apprehension, fear, and surprise. (PNP-IN4)<br>The recruitment process is very smooth and transparent... thousands applied and only 103 survived. (C1)<br>I accepted the hardship of training and used it as motivation to finish.” (PNP-IN1)<br>Training... helped me learn discipline, respect, and proper conduct. (PNP-IN2)<br>I have been physically, mentally, and emotionally transformed. (PNP-IN5) |
| Motivation & Purpose                      | A chance to continue their dreams of becoming police who serve and protect the people. (PNP-IN3)<br>To become an instrument for long-lasting peace in our country. (PNP-IN3)<br>I joined because I believe it will be good for me and my family. (PNP-IN5)<br>My father inspired me to pursue this dream of becoming a policeman. (PNP-IN4)<br>My uncle encouraged me... it was for a change of life to become better. (PNP-IN7)   |

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|  |   |
|--|---|
| <p>From Combatant to Peacekeeper</p>     | <p>Integration is shifting from armed struggle to peacebuilding. (PNP-IN2)<br/>                 This is not just acceptance, but a symbol of trust between former enemies. PNP-IN(5)<br/>                 As a former rebel, I am now expected to be a law-abiding police officer. (PNP-IN7)<br/>                 I see myself as an ambassador of peace. (PNP-IN3)<br/>                 We are now guardians of the community instead of warriors. (PNP-IN5)</p>   |
| <p>Comparing MILF &amp; PNP Cultures</p> | <p>In the PNP they instill law and discipline, but MILF taught me bravery and survival. (PNP-IN1)<br/>                 My MILF experience helped me adapt to the PNP culture. (PNP-IN2)<br/>                 Both MILF and PNP fight for peace, only the methods differ.” (PNP-IN5)<br/>                 At first it was difficult because the two were opposite, but I learned to accept all the changes. (PNP-IN6)<br/>                 My past MILF training gave me courage to face PNP challenges. (PNP-IN3)</p> |

### Emotional Journey in Selection and Training

The participants described their entry into the PNP as an emotional journey marked by excitement, apprehension, fear, and surprise. The integratees commonly perceived integration as a continuation of their struggle, but this time redirected toward peace and governance. For them, shifting from armed combat to public service symbolizes a transformative journey from resistance to reconciliation. As (PNP-IN1) recalled,

*“The recruitment process is very smooth and transparent... thousands applied and only 103 survived” . It’s a way to continue the fight, this time through service and discipline.”*

For others, the intensity of training served as both a challenge and a source of motivation:

*“I accepted the hardship of training and used it as motivation to finish”. The rigid training became transformative, instilling discipline, respect, and professional conduct. As another integratee explained, “I have been physically, mentally, and emotionally transformed” (PNP-IN5).*

This resonates with transformative learning theory, wherein difficult experiences become opportunities for personal growth. Moreover, as Garcia, Santos, and Velasquez (2020) noted, capacity-building programs are vital in professionalizing ex-combatants and building public trust in their new roles. The integratees’ narratives reflect a collective aspiration to normalize relations between the state and the Bangsamoro people, validating earlier findings that

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security-sector integration promotes reconciliation and trust (Estrera & Lai, 2017).

### Motivation and Purpose

One of the strongest motivations of the integratees was their commitment to peace and service. For them, joining the PNP symbolized continuity of their struggle, but through lawful and constructive means. For most integratees, integration into the PNP was not merely employment but a fulfillment of personal aspirations and collective peace goals. Integration was framed not only as a personal opportunity but as a fulfillment of the government's legal and moral obligations under the Bangsamoro Organic Law (RA 11054). Several emphasized their commitment to serve: As (PNP-IN3) explained;

*“To become an instrument for long-lasting peace in our country” (PNP-IN3). peace here in Bangsamoro.”* Likewise, others joined to achieve family dreams and economic stability *“My father inspired me to pursue this dream of becoming a policeman” (PNP-IN4).”*

*“My main motivation for joining the PNP was the desire to serve the nation and contribute to true peace and order, especially in my community.” (PNP-IN2)*

Such accounts reflect findings in Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) literature, where reintegration is sustained when it meets both societal peacebuilding and individual livelihood objectives (Rodríguez-Castellón,

2024). The integratees' motivations highlight the dual nature of integration: advancing the peace process while uplifting personal and family welfare. This indicates that the integratees view their motivation as a tangible symbol of the state honoring its promises. Literature underscores that the success of (DDR) processes depends on governments delivering on peace commitments. Their emphasis on the legal basis of their integration reflects both their awareness of institutional processes and their expectation of accountability from the government

### From Combatant to Peacekeeper

A recurring theme was the shift in identity from rebel fighters to state-recognized peacekeepers. For them, shifting from armed combat to public service symbolizes a transformative journey from resistance to reconciliation. Participants highlighted integration as a transformative process of redefining their identities, from insurgents to state actors. (PNP-IN2) shared;

*“Integration is shifting from armed struggle to peacebuilding This... is a way to demonstrate the purpose of the Bangsamoro Government... from being warriors to being guardians of their community.”*

Likewise, (PNP-IN5) said, we are now guardians of the community instead of warriors” described himself as *“an ambassador of peace,”* while PNP-IN6 acknowledged the need *“to be law-abiding police and to implement the law unconditionally.”*

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This identity shift echoes Lederach's Conflict Transformation Theory, which stresses turning adversarial relationships into constructive engagement (Gumbo & Shava, 2021). Similarly, Social Identity Theory explains that reintegration involves renegotiating belonging within a new institutional group (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). For integratees, becoming "ambassadors of peace" (PNP-IN3) not only legitimized their transformation but also symbolized reconciliation between the state and the Bangsamoro. This identity shift is crucial not only for individual reintegration but also for legitimizing the PNP as an inclusive institution that represents Bangsamoro interests. demonstrates the dual process of personal transformation and institutional accommodation.

### Comparing MILF and PNP Cultures

Participants frequently compared their former and current organizational cultures. MILF experience emphasized bravery and survival, while the PNP demanded discipline, legality, and rule-based service. (PNP-IN1) articulated that:

*"In the PNP they instill law and discipline, but MILF taught me bravery and survival" This is not just a simple acceptance... but a symbol of acceptance as a legitimate part of our government and the building of trust with former enemies."*

This sentiment was reinforced by (PNP-IN6), that although the adjustment was difficult,

*"At first it was difficult because the two were opposite, but I learned to accept all the changes". Many viewed their MILF training as a foundation for success: "My past MILF training gave me courage to face PNP challenges" (PNP-IN3).*

This illustrates what Ayson (2021) calls cultural continuity, where aspects of past identity are reinterpreted rather than erased, enabling smoother adaptation in to new institutions. Trust-building is a cornerstone of sustainable peace agreements. The participants' narratives affirm findings by Macapado (2018), which highlight that community and institutional acceptance are critical for successful reintegration. Moreover, seeing themselves as bridges between "the old conflict and the new relationship" (PNP-IN5) illustrates their role as peace ambassadors within and beyond the PNP.

### Perceptions of Equal Treatment, Inclusion, and Acceptance within the PNP

Table 3 presents the emerging themes and core ideas related to their perceptions of equal treatment, inclusion, and acceptance in the integration of MILF members into the PNP. while serving their specific tasks assigned in the PNP. This table captures the recurring patterns and common experiences drawn from the participants' narratives, highlighting the emotional, physical, and psychological struggles they faced as members of the MILF.

### Capability and Equal Duties

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Integrees asserted their ability to perform equally alongside regular recruits. This reflects efforts to challenge stereotypes and validates Hartzell & Hoddie’s (2015) argument that shared institutional responsibilities foster inclusion and legitimacy. Finally, participants drew on their MILF background to help them capable to their new roles. As (PNP-IN1) described;

*“We can do what the regular applicant in PNP can do... we deserve the quota” In the PNP they instill law and discipline, but MILF taught me bravery and survival”*

*Some also emphasized women’s participation: “As a female combatant, I also contribute to planning and decision-making” (PNP-IN4).*

Table 3.

*Perceptions of Equal Treatment, Inclusion, and Acceptance within the PNP*

| Theme                         | Illustrative Statements  |
|-------------------------------|--|
| Capability & Equal Duties     | <p>We can do what the regular applicant in PNP can do... we deserve the quota. (PNP-IN1)</p> <p>MILF taught us to be God-fearing, same as in PNP. (PNP-IN3)</p> <p>We bring peace like the PNP, only the methods differ. (PNP-IN5)</p> <p>As a female combatant, I also contribute to planning and decision-making. (PNP-IN4)</p> <p>Our knowledge and talent are more than enough to prove we belong. (PNP-IN1)</p> |
| Early Stigma & Discrimination | <p>Colleagues showed lack of acceptance and trust because of my MILF background. (PNP-IN2)</p> <p>They looked down on us as uneducated and weak. (PNP-IN3)</p> <p>Non-Muslims sometimes felt jealous, thinking we entered easily. (PNP-IN7)</p> <p>Coming from MILF, people saw us as poorly educated and incompetent. (PNP-IN5)</p>   |

This reflects efforts to challenge stereotypes and validates Hartzell & Hoddie’s (2015) argument that shared institutional responsibilities foster inclusion and legitimacy. These testimonies reflect the challenge of transitioning from a revolutionary background into a disciplined police force. Still, their persistence shows adaptability and resilience. Social Integration Theory emphasizes that belonging is achieved when individuals overcome structural and cultural barriers in institutions (Ware et al., 2008). The integrees’ perseverance demonstrates how resilience bridges this integration gap.

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|--|--|
|  | Some thought MILFs lacked qualifications, but we proved ourselves. (PNP-IN4)   |
| Gradual Acceptance through Performance | At first it was difficult to accept us, but because we show our abilities, they gradually accepted us. (PNP-IN5)<br>Through proper behavior we earned respect. (PNP-IN3)<br>By proving myself in training, I gained trust from colleagues. (PNP-IN7)<br>Discipline and obedience helped me fit in with the PNP. PNP-IN2()<br>We now share the same rules and responsibilities. (PNP-IN1)               |
| Belonging in Government                | Integration gave us the opportunity to feel welcome in the PNP. (PNP-IN1)<br>It is a gesture of willingness to commit to the peace agreement. (PNP-IN7)<br>This serves as a bridge between old conflict and new relationships. (PNP-IN5)<br>Being accepted into PNP means being recognized as legitimate part of government. (PNP-IN3)<br>We are now bound by the same identity as law enforcers. (C4) |

### Early Stigma and Discrimination

Despite their confidence, integreees initially faced stigma from colleagues who questioned their competence. Interestingly, participants also drew on their MILF background as a source of strength in coping with challenges. Notable divergences emerged in terms of educational attainment and skillsets. Some integreees acknowledged their limitations compared to regular recruits. As PNP-IN3 shared:

*“They looked down on us as uneducated and weak”.* Some non-Muslims expressed

jealousy, assuming MILF integreees entered without difficulty.

Similarly, (PNP-IN7) emphasized personal determination: *“As a former MILF with a low education and weak foundation... I will do everything to keep up with my colleagues.”*

These perceptions mirror integration challenges noted in DDR research, where ex-combatants often encounter mistrust unless their capabilities are publicly demonstrated (Rodríguez-Castellón, 2024).

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Such differences underscore structural inequalities that shape reintegration. However, DDR literature stresses that differences in backgrounds should be addressed through capacity-building and equal opportunities (Garcia et al., 2020). Despite their educational gaps, integratees bring unique combat and leadership experience that, if harnessed properly, can complement the PNP's professional framework.

### Gradual Acceptance through Performance

Acceptance gradually emerged as integratees proved their worth through discipline and commitment. Participants also drew on their MILF background as a source of strength in coping with challenges to be accepted for their performance. PNP-IN5 shared:

*"At first it was difficult to accept us, but because we show our abilities, they gradually accepted us" "My personality has changed a lot... discipline in everything... do everything in order."*

(PNP-IN2) reflected, *"Everything I learned... was a huge boost because it changed my perspective on life."*

This highlights performance-based legitimacy, whereby sustained professionalism fosters organizational trust. As Macapado (2018) stressed, institutional acceptance of ex-combatants is contingent on their ability to demonstrate competence and reliability. These statements indicate that integration into the PNP has been

transformative, not only in professional but also personal dimensions.

### Belonging in Government

Eventually, integratees perceived their inclusion as symbolic recognition of their legitimacy. Joining the PNP symbolized continuity of their struggle, but through lawful and constructive means. The integratees' view of integration as a symbol of trust between former enemies and being belong now to the government. PNP-IN7 said:

*"Integration gave us the opportunity to feel welcome in the PNP" Others framed it as a bridge between conflict and peace: "This serves as a bridge between old conflict and new relationships" (PNP-IN5).*

This sentiment was reinforced by (PNP-IN6), *"This is not just a simple acceptance... but a symbol of acceptance as a legitimate part of our government and the building of trust with former enemies."*

Such reflections demonstrate how institutional integration supports reconciliation, aligning with Estrera & Lai (2017), who argue that security sector inclusion is central to long-term trust-building in post-conflict societies. Trust-building is a cornerstone of sustainable peace agreements. The participants' narratives affirm findings by Macapado (2018), which highlight that community and institutional acceptance are critical for successful reintegration.

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### Challenges Faced by MILF Integrees

Table 4 presents the emerging themes and core ideas related to the challenges faced by MILF Integrees in the integration of MILF members into the PNP. while serving their specific tasks assigned in the PNP. This table captures the recurring patterns and common challenges drawn from the participants' narratives, highlighting the emotional, physical, and psychological struggles they faced as members of the MILF.

### Organizational and Cultural Adjustment

Participants also underscored the difficulty of recruitment and training, yet they framed these struggles as opportunities to build

resilience. Transitioning from MILF to PNP culture required significant adaptation. Finally, integrees emphasized their determination to prove themselves worthy of the opportunity granted through integration. (PNP-IN1) expressed; *“From MILF discipline to PNP discipline, it was a big change”* Others stressed the difficulty of embracing unfamiliar procedures and rules.

*“We are more than enough to prove that the quota given to us... we deserve and are destined for that.”*

(PNP-IN2) recalled; *“At first, it is difficult to accept us... but because we show our abilities... they gradually accept who and what we are,”* as observed by (PNP-IN5).

Table 4  
Challenges Faced by MILF Integrees

| Theme                                | Illustrative Statements   |
|--------------------------------------|---|
| Organizational & Cultural Adjustment | A big adjustment... embracing the new system, culture and environment. (PNP-IN5)<br>At first it was difficult, but I learned to accept and follow PNP rules. (PNP-IN7)<br>From MILF discipline to PNP discipline, it was a big change. (PNP-IN2)<br>I needed to adapt to the new culture and procedures. (PNP-IN4)<br>Joining PNP was a challenge, but I endured for my dream and family. (PNP-IN7) |
| Discrimination & Trust Issues        | Colleagues showed lack of acceptance and trust as I was a former MILF. (PNP-IN2)<br>They looked down on us as uneducated and weak. (PNP-IN3)  |

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|   |  |
|---|--|
|   | <p>Non-Muslims sometimes felt jealous, thinking we entered easily. (PNP-IN1)<br/>                 Coming from MILF, people saw us as poorly educated and incompetent. (PNP-IN5)</p>  |
| <p>Financial &amp; Physical Hardships</p> | <p>I faced lack of money for support, sleepless nights, missed meals. (PNP-IN4)<br/>                 Training was rigid and difficult, but I used it as motivation. (PNP-IN1)<br/>                 Being away from family was the hardest part. (PNP-IN7)<br/>                 It was difficult not seeing family while doing exercises and duties. (PNP-IN6)<br/>                 Hard training and discipline sometimes led to low morale. (PNP-IN5)</p> |

This theme reflects the dual challenge of external skepticism and internal self-discipline. DDR literature warns that reintegration may provoke mistrust unless ex-combatants demonstrate competence and commitment (Rodríguez-Castellón, 2024). By actively proving their worth, integratees not only counter stigma but also solidify their role as symbols of peace and reconciliation in Mindanao.

**Discrimination and Trust Issues**

Stigma remained a persistent challenge and some colleagues associated integratees with poor education or incompetence. Another recurring theme is the integratees’ view of integration as a symbol of trust between former enemies. (PNP-IN5) articulated that:

*“This is not just a simple acceptance... but a symbol of acceptance as a legitimate part of our*

*government and the building of trust with former enemies.”*

Similarly, (PNP-IN3) reiterated: *“Coming from MILF, people saw us as poorly educated and incompetent”*

Trust-building is a cornerstone of sustainable peace agreements. Such perceptions highlight the fragile nature of trust in security-sector integration. The participants’ narratives affirm findings by Macapado (2018), which highlight that community and institutional acceptance are critical for successful reintegration. Moreover, seeing themselves as bridges between “the old conflict and the new relationship” (PNP-IN5) illustrates their role as peace ambassadors within and beyond the PNP.

**Financial and Physical Hardships**

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Beyond peacebuilding, economic stability was also a central driver. Economic strain, distance from family, and physically demanding training also posed obstacles. (PNP-IN6) noted;

*“Hardships in life and the ability to lift my family out of poverty... gave me hope of becoming a police officer.”* Likewise, (PNP-IN7) admitted, *“What motivated me to join... was to meet my family’s daily expenses and needs.”*

These experiences underscore how reintegration is not only political but also deeply personal and material. This highlights the dual nature of integration: peacebuilding on one hand, and socioeconomic upliftment on the other. As DDR studies point out, livelihood opportunities are essential for ex-combatants to avoid a return to armed conflict (Estrera & Lai, 2017). By integrating into the PNP, these individuals gained stable employment and a sense of dignity, enabling them to secure both personal and familial advancement.

**Coping Mechanisms Employed**

Table 5 presents the emerging themes and core ideas on the significant insights shared  
Table 5

*Coping Mechanisms of MILF Integrees in the PNP*

| Theme                        | Illustrative Statements   |
|------------------------------|---|
| Faith & Spiritual Resilience | Prayer... nothing is impossible for God. (PNP-IN1)<br>The strong faith to God... is my coping mechanism. (PNP-IN6)<br>I will just pray that God guides me in everything I do. (PNP-IN2)<br>Further strengthening the spiritual aspect helps me fulfill my duty. (PNP-IN7) |

by the former MILF with the researcher throughout their journey toward their integration. These insights reflect the participants' coping mechanisms during their integration, which they often communicated to others as a way of encouraging positive change and moral growth within their community.

**Faith and Spiritual Resilience**

Faith emerged as a dominant coping mechanism for the integrees, serving as their main source of strength and resilience. For many, prayer became both a shield and an anchor amidst the challenges of training and integration. As (PNP-IN1) emphasized;

*“Mostly, prayer... there is no possible for the Almighty God.”* Furthermore, (PNP-IN6) shared, *“Prayer is what strengthens my courage.”*

Spirituality was the most cited coping mechanism. *“Prayer... nothing is impossible for God”*

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|  |  |
|--|--|
| <p>Family Support</p>                          | <p>My family gave me spiritual, emotional, and financial support. (PNP-IN1)<br/>                 Their guidance and moral support became my backbone. (PNP-IN2)<br/>                 Support of my parents gave me courage to face challenges. PNP-IN(5)<br/>                 The untiring support of my family helps me a lot. (PNP-IN6)</p>  |
| <p>Mentorship &amp; Peer Support</p>           | <p>I sought advice from experienced officers for guidance and confidence.” (PNP-IN4)<br/>                 Talking to trusted individuals gave me emotional comfort. (PNP-IN3)<br/>                 I asked people who had experience in recruitment and training. (PNP-IN2) Colleagues supported me in fulfilling my tasks. (PNP-IN5)</p>  |
| <p>Personal Determination &amp; Acceptance</p> | <p>“Maintain self-confidence and determination to overcome challenges. (PNP-IN1)<br/>                 I conditioned myself for tasks because of my dreams and family. (PNP-IN2)<br/>                 I wholeheartedly accepted change in attitude and service. (PNP-IN1)<br/>                 Open your heart to embrace the new world of the PNP. (PNP-IN7)<br/>                 Always think positive. (PNP-IN3)</p> |

This reveals the central role of spirituality in sustaining their mental and emotional well-being. According to Johnson and Larson (2003), spiritual practices such as prayer reduce stress and encourage resilience among individuals under pressure. The integrees’ reliance on faith resonates with their Bangsamoro identity, reflecting how religiosity provides continuity as they transition into state service.

**Family Support**

Family support and motivation were also key coping strategies. Many participants framed their perseverance as rooted in their desire to uplift their families. (PNP-IN3) admitted;

*“Because of my dreams and helping my family... I can handle the challenges.”* Correspondingly, (PNP-IN1) explained, *“The support of my family... motivates me to surpass challenges.”*

Family encouragement not only served as emotional support but also as a reminder of their higher purpose. Macapado (2018)

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found that strong family ties are critical for successful reintegration, providing ex-combatants with both moral guidance and practical support. The participants' narratives reflect how familial inspiration anchors them amidst systemic and cultural adjustments.

### **Mentorship and Peer Support**

Mentorship and peer camaraderie were also central coping mechanisms. Support from mentors and peers was equally significant. As (PNP-IN1) shared;

*"Seek advice to our mentor... support the collaborative camaraderie by our classmates inside the camp."*

(PNP-IN4) added that *"Open communication and sharing experiences... mentors provide valuable guidance and advice."*

These narratives demonstrate the importance of social networks in navigating institutional change. Research on reintegration programs emphasizes that peer and mentor support fosters confidence and reduces the feeling of isolation (Garcia et al., 2020). For the integreees, peer solidarity within the PNP training context helped normalize their experience and build resilience.

### **Personal Determination and Acceptance**

Finally, coping was also framed as a conscious alignment with their professional

responsibilities as police officers and emphasized self-confidence and openness to change (PNP-IN2) reflected;

*"I am trying to adapt what I have to the PNP Culture and Environment... to fulfill my duty as a law enforcer."* A statement from, (PNP-IN6), *"Recognize and accept the new future and leave the past behind."*

*"I wholeheartedly accepted change in attitude and service"* (PNP-IP4)

This shift reflects a deliberate effort to balance their MILF identity with their new identity as PNP officers. Social Identity Theory (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019) explains that individuals adopt new group roles while negotiating their past affiliations. For the integreees, fulfilling professional duties became both a coping mechanism and a marker of their transformation from combatants to peace enforcers.

### **Convergence and Divergence of Lived Experiences as MILF Integreees in the PNP**

Table 6 presents the emerging themes and core ideas related to the convergence and divergence of lived experiences as MILF Integreees in the PNP. while serving their specific tasks assigned in the PNP. This table captures the recurring patterns and common experiences drawn from the participants' narratives, highlighting the emotional, physical, and psychological struggles they faced as members of the MILF.

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**Table 6**  
**Convergence and Divergence of Lived Experiences as MILF Integrees in the PNP**

| Theme  | Illustrative Statements   |
|--|---|
| Adaptation to PNP Culture and Environment        | <p>As a member of the MILF and now in the PNP organization... I will try to adapt to the culture and environment that the PNP has. (PNP-C2)</p> <p>When I came to the PNP... I learned how to do something... adapt to new tasks and follow them naturally. (PNP-C3)</p> <p>Accepting the culture and environment of the PNP and adapting to the people around you. (PNP-C10)</p> <p>Adapting to what the PNP has and showing respect and understanding to colleagues." (PNP-C11)</p>   |
| Shared Goals of Peace and Public Service         | <p>Many integrees express a desire to contribute for the lasting peace and stability in Mindanao. (PNP-C4)</p> <p>The similarities between the MILF and the PNP are how to bring peace to the people. (PNP-C5)</p> <p>The goal of the MILF and the PNP is the same, which is to ensure the security of the people and achieve peace. (PNP-C10)</p> <p>MILF taught us to be God fearing... same as in PNP. (PNP-C3)</p> <p>Most MILFs aspire to make a positive contribution to their communities by maintaining peace and order. (PNP-C6)</p>                 |
| Differences in Education, Skills, and Background | <p>There is a difference because we in the MILF really lack education... unlike those in the PNP, college graduates. (PNP-C2)</p> <p>Integrees with extensive combat experience... may have different preparedness on policing compared to those with limited or no combat experience. (PNP-C4)</p> <p>Higher education may make it easier for some... while it may take longer for others to get used to them. (PNP-C9)</p> <p>As a former MILF with a low education and weak foundation... I will do everything to keep up with my colleagues. (PNP-C7)</p> |
| Discipline, Obedience, and Self-Improvement      | <p>Do your best, pray and God will do the rest. (PNP-C1)</p> <p>My advice... discipline, health, always condition your body... adapt and learn. (PNP-C2)</p> <p>Follow the PNP's rules and regulations and submit themselves to change. (PNP-C5)</p> <p>Always do what is right... improving discipline in oneself and others to create peace and order. (PNP-C8)</p> <p>Joining the PNP... changed my perspective on the situation, discipline, and respect. (PNP-C10)</p>   |
| Personal Growth and Transformation               | <p>This can give me more chances and opportunities... inspire more youth... help the Philippine Government to secure the land. (PNP-C1)</p> <p>My personality has changed a lot... discipline in everything... do everything in order. (PNP-C2)</p> <p>I have learned a lot... being disciplined, being humble towards people, and being brave. (PNP-C3)</p> <p>Everything I learned... was a huge boost because it changed my perspective on life. (PNP-C5)</p> <p>What I learned... teamwork, adaptability, cooperation, and respect. (PNP-C11)</p>         |
| Overcoming Challenges and Proving Worth          | <p>Overcoming obstacles throughout the integration process... and handling pressure to prove oneself. (PNP-C9)</p> <p>We are more than enough to prove that the quota given to us... we deserve and are destined for that. (PNP-C1)</p>   |

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|  |   |
|--|---|
|  | <p>The experience of every MILF is the same... difference is in self-discipline and obedience to duty. (PNP-C3)</p> <p>At first, it is difficult to accept us... but because we show our abilities... they gradually accept who and what we are. (PNP-C5)</p> <p>I will do everything to make up for the help given to me. (PNP-C8)</p> |
|--|---|

### Adaptation to PNP Culture and Environment

Adapting to the organizational culture of the PNP was a shared experience among integrees. Many emphasized the importance of learning new practices, following routines, and respecting colleagues. (PNP-IN3) reflected;

*“When I came to the PNP... I learned how to do something... adapt to new tasks and follow them naturally.”* (PNP-IN1) shared, *“Accepting the culture and environment of the PNP and adapting to the people around you.”*

This illustrates that while the transition was not without challenges, integrees displayed willingness to embrace institutional culture. Social Integration Theory underscores the significance of belongingness through adaptation to new norms (Ware et al., 2008). By aligning themselves with PNP practices, the integrees demonstrated their readiness to leave behind adversarial relations and foster mutual trust within the organization.

### Shared Goals of Peace and Public Service

Despite different backgrounds, integrees and their PNP colleagues converge in their goal of ensuring peace and security. (PNP-IN5) emphasized;

*“The similarities between the MILF and the PNP are how to bring peace to the people.”*

As noted by (PNP-IN1), *“The goal of the MILF and the PNP is the same, which is to ensure the security of the people and achieve peace.”*

This theme reflects that while methods may differ, the underlying mission of peacebuilding provides common ground. Lederach’s Conflict Transformation Framework explains that peace is sustained when former adversaries identify shared values and common objectives (Gumbo & Shava, 2021). For integrees, joining the PNP provided not only employment but a continuation of their advocacy for community safety and harmony.

### Differences in Education, Skills, and Background

Notable divergences emerged in terms of educational attainment and skillsets. Some integrees acknowledged their limitations compared to regular recruits. As (PNP-IN2) admitted;

*“There is a difference because we in the MILF really lack education... unlike those in the PNP, college graduates.”* Similarly, (PNP-IN7) emphasized personal determination: *“As a former MILF with a low education and weak*

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*foundation... I will do everything to keep up with my colleagues."*

Such differences underscore structural inequalities that shape reintegration. However, DDR literature stresses that differences in backgrounds should be addressed through capacity-building and equal opportunities (Garcia et al., 2020). Despite their educational gaps, integratees bring unique combat and leadership experience that, if harnessed properly, can complement the PNP's professional framework.

### **Discipline, Obedience, and Self-Improvement**

Discipline was consistently highlighted as both a MILF and PNP value, reflecting convergence in organizational expectations. (PNP-IN2) stressed;

*"My advice... discipline, health, always condition your body... adapt and learn."* Moreover, PNP-IN6 noted, *"Always do what is right... improving discipline in oneself and others to create peace and order."*

These testimonies reflect how integratees internalized discipline as a foundation for their professional transformation. According to Hartzell & Hoddie (2015), shared institutional values like discipline and obedience are key to reconciling rebel groups with state institutions. By emphasizing discipline, integratees reinforce their legitimacy as law enforcers while proving their capacity to embody PNP standards.

### **Personal Growth and Transformation**

Another major point of convergence was the recognition of personal growth. (PNP-IN2) explained;

*"My personality has changed a lot... discipline in everything... do everything in order."* Similarly, (PNP-IN5) reflected, *"Everything I learned... was a huge boost because it changed my perspective on life."*

These statements indicate that integration into the PNP has been transformative, not only in professional but also personal dimensions. Social Identity Theory explains such transformation as a process of renegotiating identity within a new social group (Scheepers & Ellemers, 2019). For integratees, the PNP became both a training ground and a pathway for character development, reshaping their sense of purpose and responsibility.

### **Overcoming Challenges and Proving Worth**

Finally, integratees emphasized their determination to prove themselves worthy of the opportunity granted through integration. (PNP-IN1) expressed;

*"We are more than enough to prove that the quota given to us... we deserve and are destined for that."*

*"At first, it is difficult to accept us... but because we show our abilities... they gradually accept who and what we are,"* as observed by (PNP-IN5).

This theme reflects the dual challenge of external skepticism and internal

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self-discipline. DDR literature warns that reintegration may provoke mistrust unless ex-combatants demonstrate competence and commitment (Rodríguez-Castellón, 2024). By actively proving their worth, integratees not only counter stigma but also

## **IMPLICATION AND CONCLUDING REMARKS**

### **Implication for Practice**

The integration of MILF integratees into the PNP offers valuable lessons for peacebuilding and institutional reform in the Philippines. First, the findings highlight that integration is not only a fulfillment of the Bangsamoro peace agreements but also a crucial mechanism for strengthening reconciliation and sustaining stability in Mindanao. Policymakers and implementers must therefore ensure the continuity and sustainability of integration programs by providing institutional support, resources, and follow-through mechanisms. Training and orientation, in particular, emerged as transformative for integratees, instilling discipline, professionalism, and respect for human rights. The PNP can further institutionalize such programs by emphasizing not only technical policing skills but also peace education and intercultural sensitivity to enhance legitimacy among diverse communities. Moreover, the divergence in educational attainment and professional preparedness underscores the need for bridging mechanisms such as supplementary learning, mentoring, and professional development programs to place integratees on equal footing with their peers.

solidify their role as symbols of peace and reconciliation in Mindanao.

Finally, the study revealed that family and community support played a vital role in sustaining integratees' motivation. As such, reintegration should not be viewed solely as an individual endeavor but as a collective process where families and communities are engaged as partners. Allowing integratees to retain positive cultural values from their MILF background, such as discipline, resilience, and faith, while embracing their PNP role, also points to the importance of cultural continuity in fostering inclusivity and unity within national institutions.

### **Implication for Future Research**

While this study contributes significantly to understanding the lived experiences of MILF integratees in the PNP, it also opens avenues for further exploration. One important direction is longitudinal research that tracks integratees over time to assess how their careers, identities, and community relations evolve in the long term. Such studies would provide insight into the sustainability of integration and its impact on both the individuals and the institution. Comparative analyses would also be valuable, particularly between MILF integratees and ex-combatants from other groups or peace processes, both within the Philippines and abroad.

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This would allow for cross-contextual learning and the identification of best practices in security-sector reintegration. Moreover, while this research focused on the integratees' perspectives, future inquiries could explore the views of communities, colleagues, and local government units to better understand how legitimacy and trust are negotiated in practice. Another important area for investigation lies in the gendered dimensions of integration. The experiences of female ex-combatants or the spouses and families of integratees remain underexplored, yet they are critical to understanding the full scope of reintegration. Lastly, researchers may examine not only how integratees adapt to the PNP but also how the institution itself is shaped and transformed by their inclusion, particularly in terms of organizational culture, representation, and policy reform.

### Concluding Remarks

The integration of former Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF) combatants into the Philippine National Police (PNP) is a crucial, yet complex, component of the Bangsamoro peace process. While representing a

significant stride toward lasting peace and societal reconciliation in Mindanao, its success is a product of specific policy frameworks and faces ongoing operational challenges.

The program is largely viewed as an indicator that the peace process is working, transforming former rebels into public servants and bridging the gap between security forces and the community.

The long-term success of the integration relies on continuous training, sufficient resource allocation, community involvement, and the effective resolution of the identified challenges to ensure the "integratees" can serve with competence and the appointments transition from temporary to permanent status.

In conclusion, while the integration initiative has made a major leap in achieving a long-lasting peace in Mindanao, its sustained success requires continuous refinement of policies, robust support systems, and a commitment to overcoming deeply ingrained systemic and cultural barriers.

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