

## DEFENSE MECHANISM FOR CORRUPTION CONVICTS TO INCREASE MOTIVATION IN PARTICIPATING PERSONALITY DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS IN CLASS IIA CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION



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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study was conducted at the Class IIA Correctional Institution in Bengkulu to explore how inmates convicted of corruption (tipikor) experience their sentences from a psychological and personality development perspective. Using a qualitative approach, the findings reveal that inmates employ various defense mechanisms to cope with the pressures of incarceration. These mechanisms can be categorized into three types: mature, neurotic, and immature. Mature defense mechanisms such as sublimation, anticipation, suppression, and humor enable inmates to remain positive, active, and cooperative, particularly in participating in programs like religious activities, gardening, and social interaction. Neurotic mechanisms, including pseudo-altruism and undoing, are used to reduce inner conflict by engaging in helpful or religious behaviors. However, less adaptive (immature) mechanisms, such as projection, passive-aggression, and idealization, are also observed among some inmates, indicating that not all individuals are able to regulate their emotions effectively. The study concludes that understanding these psychological coping strategies is essential for developing more targeted and effective rehabilitation programs. This is particularly important for corruption offenders, who often come from relatively high social and educational backgrounds, requiring more nuanced and psychologically informed approaches to support their personal transformation and reintegration into society.*

**Keywords:** *Defense Mechanism; Personality Development; Corruption Inmates*

## INTRODUCTION

The concept of prison known during the colonial era served as a place for deterrence, exile, and a means of revenge against individuals who violated laws and government regulations. However, as times have evolved, the prison system is considered to be becoming irrelevant. The change occurred when, at that time, the Minister of Justice, Dr. Saharjo, on April 27, 1964, initiated the shift from the prison system to the community corrections system, which was the result of the Lembang Conference and became a significant milestone in the reform of the criminal justice system in Indonesia (Darwis, 2020).

According to Yulianto and Muhammad (2021), the purpose of community corrections is to restore social relationships, focusing on restoring the lives and livelihoods of inmates. The integrated coaching system between officers, coaches, inmates, and the community is intended by the community. The system doesn't just focus on punishing convicts, but also helps them repent and become useful members of society again. In its application, the sentencing process is no longer about retribution or punishment that is contrary to human ethics. However, the approach used emphasizes rehabilitation, which is the process of improvement and healing for prisoners. The main goal is for inmates not only to be aware of their mistakes and not repeat criminal acts, but also to protect society from potential future crimes.

Corruption in Indonesia has become a phenomenon that not only financially harms the country but also shakes the moral and social foundations of society. As a form of extraordinary crime, corruption has a very wide-ranging impact because it touches on political and economic aspects, as well as public trust in state officials. Perpetrators of corruption generally come from highly educated backgrounds, hold important social status, and have previously held strategic positions, making their psychological situation during their prison sentences far more complex than that of other inmates (Sutawijaya, 2020). This condition demands a more targeted training model, different from the training programs for general inmates, so that the goal of social reintegration can be achieved optimally. Without a contextual approach that considers the backgrounds of corruption convicts, rehabilitation programs are feared to be merely formalities and not produce the desired behavioral changes.

Since the enactment of Law Number 22 of 2022 concerning Corrections, the orientation of correctional institutions (prisons) is no longer solely to carry out the function of imprisonment, but rather to prioritize guidance and rehabilitation. This law affirms that the purpose of corrections is to restore social relationships, improve behavior, and prepare inmates to reintegrate into society. However, the reality on the ground shows that the effectiveness of the coaching program is still hampered by both internal and external factors. One of the dominant internal factors is the emergence of defense mechanisms as a form of psychological response to the shame, regret, and stigma inherent due to acts of corruption (Noor et al., 2020). If this mechanism is not deeply understood by correctional officers, the rehabilitation strategies developed risk not being suitable for the psychosocial needs of corruption convicts.

Defense mechanisms are natural psychological processes that work automatically to protect individuals from anxiety and the stresses of life. Freud (1967) explained this mechanism as a psychological "fortress" that serves to reduce tension caused by internal drives or external pressures. Their forms are diverse, ranging from denial, rationalization, and projection to more constructive sublimation (Schimmel, 2013). Although it serves as a protective tool, excessive use of self-defense mechanisms can hinder the emotional rehabilitation process, which is the goal of prisoner training.

Musyrifin & Setiawan (2020) showed that unhealthy defense mechanisms often lead to compulsive and defensive behaviors, making it difficult for officers to provide effective coaching interventions.

Previous research has shown that corruption convicts tend to isolate themselves, feel different from other inmates, and find it difficult to adapt to rehabilitation programs. This difference lies not only in their economic and intellectual backgrounds, but also in their perspectives on the prison sentences they are serving (Sutawijaya, 2020). They often view punishment as a period of "waiting" rather than an opportunity for self-improvement, resulting in relatively low participation rates in rehabilitation activities. In other words, the unique characteristics of corruption convicts demand a coaching approach that is not only administrative but also touches on psychological and emotional aspects so that they have intrinsic motivation to change.

The phenomenon of defense mechanisms not only occurs at the individual level but is also reflected in the social dynamics within prisons. The stressful environment, limited facilities, and overcrowding trigger the emergence of prison subcultures as a form of collective adaptation and defense. These subcultures are usually formed based on ethnic similarities, place of origin, or specific backgrounds to cope with threats or pressures from the prison environment itself. Mubarokah & Larasati (2023) note that while the formation of such groups can indeed provide a sense of security, it also has the potential to trigger intergroup conflict, violence, and security disturbances. This situation further strengthens the urgency of guidance that prioritizes an empathetic, integrative approach and considers the dynamics of social groups so that negative self-defense mechanisms can be minimized.

Research conducted at the Class IIA Correctional Institution in Bengkulu found that corruption convicts use three categories of defense mechanisms: mature, neurotic, and immature. Mature mechanisms such as sublimation, anticipation, suppression, and humor help them stay positive, active, and cooperative during the rehabilitation program, for example, religious activities, gardening, and social interaction. Meanwhile, neurotic and immature mechanisms such as pseudo-altruism, projection, passive-aggression, and idealization indicate that not all inmates are able to manage their emotions positively. This finding confirms the need for differentiated coaching methods to accommodate the variety of self-defense mechanisms that emerge.

In addition to forms of self-defense mechanisms, the research also identified a number of obstacles that affect the motivation of corruption convicts to participate in guidance, such as social stigma, shame, and the limited understanding of officers about the psychology of convicts. The stigma from outside the prison makes inmates feel unworthy of participating in rehabilitation programs because they worry about being judged or not accepted back after their release. On the other hand, the lack of training for officers on psychological approaches leads to coaching programs being uniform without considering individual needs. This condition erodes the self-confidence and motivation of inmates to change, making it difficult to achieve optimal correctional goals.

Based on the description, it is important to understand the self-defense mechanisms of corruption convicts as a basis for designing more effective rehabilitation programs. This understanding allows officers to develop strategies that are not only curative but also preventive, for example, thru counselling, mental and spiritual guidance, or individual needs-based empowerment. Research on "Defense Mechanisms of Corruption Prisoners to Increase Motivation in Participating in Personality Development Programs at Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Institution" aims to provide a scientific contribution to the development of more humanistic training policies. The results are

expected to serve as an evaluation reference for the Directorate General of Corrections and as a reference for further research on strategies for rehabilitating corruption convicts.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

This research utilizes the theory of defense mechanisms, first introduced by Sigmund Freud as a concept in psychoanalysis to explain how individuals cope with anxiety, internal conflict, and external pressure. According to Freud, defense mechanisms operate unconsciously to reduce anxiety and maintain ego stability when individuals are faced with unpleasant situations. Their forms are diverse, ranging from denial, rationalization, projection, to sublimation, each having different functions and impacts on individual behavior (Schimmel, 2013). In the context of correctional institutions, it is important to understand this mechanism because it can influence how inmates respond to the rehabilitation programs offered to them.

Vaillant (1992) expanded on Freud's concept by classifying defense mechanisms into three broad categories: mature defense mechanisms, neurotic defense mechanisms, and immature defense mechanisms. The first category, mature defense mechanisms, includes sublimation, anticipation, suppression, and humor, which are relatively healthy and constructive. The second category, neurotic defense mechanisms, encompasses pseudo-altruism, undoing, reaction formation, and idealization, indicating moderate cognitive distortion. The third category, immature defense mechanisms, includes projection, passive aggression, acting out, isolation, devaluation, autistic fantasy, denial, displacement, dissociation, splitting, rationalization, and somatization, which tend to be maladaptive and indicate less healthy psychological conditions. This classification provides a systematic framework for analyzing how corruption convicts manage emotional stress during their sentences.

Self-defense mechanism theory is relevant to Indonesia's correctional system, which is oriented toward guidance and rehabilitation. Personality development programs aim to build better character, improve mental health, and prepare inmates for reintegration into society (Law No. 22 of 2022; Government Regulation No. 31 of 1999). Understanding self-defense mechanisms allows correctional officers to design more adaptive and humanistic rehabilitation approaches, such as psychological counselling, spiritual guidance, or empowerment based on individual needs. Thus, this theory becomes an important foundation for explaining the phenomenon of low motivation among corruption convicts in participating in rehabilitation programs, as well as for developing more effective rehabilitation strategies that are oriented toward social reintegration.

## **METHOD**

This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of the self-defense mechanisms of inmates convicted of corruption offenses in participating in the personality development program at Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Institution. The qualitative approach was chosen because it is suitable for exploring complex, multifaceted, and meaningful phenomena, allowing researchers to capture participants' perspectives in their entirety as well as the social context in which these phenomena occur (Creswell, 2014).

The researcher serves as the primary instrument, directly entering the field to collect data thru in-depth interviews with corruption convicts and correctional officers who were purposively selected as informants because they were considered to best

understand the phenomenon being studied. Data was also obtained thru direct observation of the implementation of the personality development program, as well as a documentary study of official archives, regulations, activity reports, and supporting photos.

All collected data was analyzed interactively with data reduction steps to filter important information, data presentation in the form of descriptive narratives to identify patterns, and inductive conclusion drawing. The validity and reliability of the findings are maintained thru source and method triangulation, ensuring that the research results provide a rich, comprehensive, and scientifically accountable overview.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The research findings show that inmates convicted of corruption in the Class IIA Penitentiary in Bengkulu have characteristics that clearly distinguish them from inmates convicted of other crimes. They generally come from backgrounds with high levels of education, have held important positions in government or the private sector, and had established social and economic status before serving their sentences. When they enter the correctional environment, the loss of status, position, and social networks that have supported their self-identity creates significant psychological pressure. Feelings of shame, disappointment, worry about the family's future, and guilt mixed together to create a complex emotional burden.

This condition then influences their behavior patterns and the way they interact with the coaching programs available in prison. This finding supports Sutawijaya (2020) view that the unique characteristics of corruption convicts necessitate a different coaching model to optimally achieve the goal of social reintegration. Field data shows that most corruption convicts attempt to channel their negative feelings into more positive activities. Many of them choose to spend their time exercising, reading books, discussing, worshipping, reciting the Quran, and participating in various training programs such as gardening or intensive study programs. This activity isn't just about filling time; it's a strategy for maintaining mental health, reducing stress, and restoring self-confidence. Spiritual approaches such as prayer and regular worship are one of the most widely used coping mechanisms because they provide inner peace, reduce feelings of guilt, and offer hope for the future. Thru these activities, they also try to avoid conflict with other inmates, maintain good relationships with officers, and focus on self-reflection to be better prepared for life after release.

Based on Vaillant's classification, the self-defense mechanisms of corruption convicts are divided into three broad categories: mature defense mechanisms, neurotic defense mechanisms, and immature defense mechanisms. Mature mechanisms such as sublimation, anticipation, suppression, and humor dominate their daily behavior. They tend to channel negative energy into beneficial activities, such as helping officers during visits, learning gardening skills for after release, or choosing silence and introspection when feeling angry to avoid causing problems. Humor is also often used to lighten the mood and reduce the monotony of life inside prison.

This finding suggests that despite being in a high-pressure situation, most corruption convicts attempt to use healthier coping mechanisms to maintain their emotional stability. In addition to mature mechanisms, this study also found the use of defense mechanisms categorized as neurotic defense mechanisms. Examples include pseudo-altruism and undoing. Many corruption convicts attempt to alleviate feelings of guilt and inner conflict by helping other inmates. They often share food or cigarettes, help sick inmates to the clinic, regularly participate in religious activities, and are willing to

help others during visits. This behavior can on the one hand boost self-esteem and build more positive social relationships in prison, but on the other hand, it's also a way to compensate for lingering feelings of guilt. This mechanism shows that although they try to project a positive attitude, the inner conflict resulting from the crimes they committed has not been fully resolved.

However, not all self-defense mechanisms used are constructive. Immature defense mechanisms such as projection, passive-aggression, idealization, devaluation, splitting, rationalization, and somatization were also found in a number of inmates. For example, some tend to blame external parties for their mistakes, suppress their emotions excessively to the point of becoming passive, or exhibit ambivalent behavior when following coaching. These mechanisms, tho not always apparent on the surface, can hinder the process of emotional rehabilitation and character development. If left unchecked, this behavior could potentially reduce the effectiveness of coaching programs aimed at fostering personal awareness and responsibility.

The research results also show the phenomenon of the formation of prison subcultures as a form of collective self-defense mechanism. Convicted criminals tend to gather and form groups based on similarities in their region of origin, work background, or previous experiences. This group provides a sense of security and emotional support amidst the environmental pressures of prison. However, this kind of group dynamics also has the potential to create exclusivity and intergroup conflict, which can ultimately disrupt security stability and hinder the development process. This condition requires officers to have good group management skills and an empathetic approach so that social dynamics do not become an obstacle to achieving training goals.

One of the main barriers identified in this study is deep-seated social stigma and shame. Most corruption convicts feel their social status has collapsed and their self-esteem has plummeted. They are worried about being labeled, judged, or becoming the subject of gossip by fellow inmates, officers, or the outside community. These thoughts create a heavy mental burden, making them likely to become withdrawn, reluctant to interact, and not proactive in seeking coaching. In fact, the success of the coaching program heavily depends on active involvement, an open attitude, and a willingness to change. This finding highlights the importance of a coaching approach that focuses not only on legal aspects but also on psychological and social recovery. Another obstacle is the limited understanding of correctional officers regarding the psychological aspects of corruption convicts. Many officers have not received specific training on psychological approaches, so the coaching program is implemented uniformly and formally without considering individual needs. As a result, some inmates participate in the rehabilitation program only superficially without experiencing significant inner change. This condition indicates the need for capacity building for officers, both thru correctional psychology training, counselling techniques, and prisoner stress management, so that rehabilitation can touch their emotional and spiritual dimensions.

The legal awareness training program implemented at Bengkulu Class IIA Penitentiary thru counselling, interactive dialogs, and religious activities actually plays an important role in instilling the values of integrity, ethics, and legal compliance. However, the effectiveness of this program still faces challenges such as a shortage of skilled human resources, a lack of supporting facilities, and diverse prisoner motivations. The coaching program needs to be specifically and contextually designed so that the legal message can be delivered effectively and bring about real changes in attitude. Only with a targeted approach can legal awareness training become a gateway for corruption convicts to truly internalize positive values during their sentence.

Overall, the results of this study confirm the importance of understanding the self-defense mechanisms of corruption convicts as a basis for designing more effective and humane rehabilitation programs. With a more personal approach, training officers on prisoner psychology, facilitating positive activities appropriate for their backgrounds, and regularly evaluating the effectiveness of guidance, it is hoped that prisoners' motivation to participate in guidance can increase. The results of this study also provide theoretical and practical contributions: theoretically, they enrich the study of the self-defense mechanisms of corruption convicts; practically, they serve as a reference for the Directorate General of Corrections in formulating rehabilitation policies based on psychosocial needs. Thus, the goals of community corrections, namely social reintegration and the formation of productive inmates, can be more easily achieved.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION**

This study concludes that inmates convicted of corruption in Bengkulu Class IIA Correctional Institution have unique psychosocial characteristics, requiring a different rehabilitation approach than inmates in other cases. Field findings indicate that they employ various defense mechanisms to cope with psychological stress during their sentences, ranging from mature defense mechanisms like sublimation, anticipation, suppression, and humor to neurotic and immature mechanisms such as pseudo-altruism, projection, passive-aggression, and idealization.

This mechanism serves as a strategy to cope with shame, loss of status, and anxiety, but at the same time, it can become an obstacle if not managed properly. Additionally, the study also identified barriers that affect the motivation of corruption convicts to participate in rehabilitation programs, such as social stigma, deep-seated shame, and the limited understanding of officers regarding the psychological aspects of convicts. This condition underscores the importance of a coaching approach that is not only administrative but also touches on emotional, social, and spiritual aspects so that the goal of social reintegration can be achieved optimally. By understanding these self-defense mechanisms, correctional institutions can develop more effective, adaptive, and sustainable rehabilitation programs.

Based on the research findings, it is recommended that the Class IIA Correctional Institution in Bengkulu and other correctional units enhance the capacity of their officers in the field of correctional psychology thru training, workshops, or collaboration with professional psychologists. This approach is expected to help officers understand the psychological dynamics of corruption convicts, identify maladaptive defense mechanisms, and provide more appropriate interventions. Additionally, the coaching program should be designed to be more varied, creative, and relevant to the background of corruption convicts so that they feel valued, motivated, and actively involved. It is also recommended that the Directorate General of Corrections conduct periodic evaluations of the effectiveness of personality development programs for corruption convicts and strengthen mental, spiritual, and legal awareness aspects.

Further research could expand the focus on developing a psychosocial needs-based coaching model and economic empowerment so that corruption convicts not only recover emotionally but also gain skills and readiness to face life after release. With these steps, it is hoped that the personality development program for corruption convicts will truly function as a means of rehabilitation and social reintegration.

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