

# LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SCHOOL SECURITY MANAGERS: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study explores the lived experiences of school security managers in Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) in Negros Oriental. Employing a qualitative phenomenological research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews (IDIs) and focus group discussions (FGDs). Fifteen security managers from eight HEIs in Dumaguete City, Negros Oriental, participated as informants. The collected data underwent transcription, coding, and interpretative analysis to uncover key insights and thematic patterns.*

*The analysis revealed eight emergent themes. Positive experiences were encapsulated in two themes: Experiences and Empowerment, and Exploration of Values, Time-Tested Principles, and Responsibility. Negative experiences were characterized by the themes Security Work Dilemma: A Survival for Success, and An Encounter with Rejections in the Work Environment. In terms of challenges, the study identified the themes Confrontational and Situational Opportunities: A Vehicle for Improvement, and The Threats of Security Scenarios in Schools. Regarding the impact of school safety initiatives, two themes emerged: Transforming Oneself: A Shift Toward Dynamic and Visionary Security Leadership, and The Dynamics of Security Measures.*

*Based on these findings, the study offers several suggestions and recommendations aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and responsiveness of school security management in HEIs..*

**Keywords:** security managers, school security, lived experience, higher educational institutions.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The primary objective of any academic institution is to create and maintain an environment that is as safe as possible, despite the uncontrollable nature of the external environment and the unpredictability of human behavior. A safe school is widely regarded as the foundation of quality education. Research consistently shows that when students feel secure, they are more likely to thrive academically. Similarly, teachers are better able to focus on instruction when they are confident that safety is under control. Conversely, incidents of violence and crime in schools can severely disrupt the learning process, leading to higher teacher turnover and academic deficiencies among students.

While schools strive to educate and nurture young minds, a closer look at reality reveals that colleges and universities face numerous threats that mirror those present in the broader society. These include terrorism, illegal drug activity, kidnapping, physical assault, violence, extortion, and theft. Additionally, issues such as fraternity hazing have at times led to tragic outcomes. School shooting incidents, although more prevalent in other countries such as the United States, have heightened awareness globally. In response, governments have introduced new safety strategies and protocols to protect students. Many states and countries have developed school security guidelines, launched specialized programs, and allocated funding to help institutions improve campus safety. There is a clear consensus that threats to campus security not only endanger lives but also erode the rule of law, perpetuate violence, and escalate conflict, posing serious risks to the entire school community.

In the Philippines, for example, several crimes were reported in the University Belt area of Metro Manila in 2012. These incidents included stabbings, shootings, robbery, theft, sexual harassment, bullying, and hazing [1]. The Philippine National Police-National Capital Region (PNP-NCR) identified the University Belt as the third most crime-prone area in Metro

Manila [2]. Meanwhile, in Negros Oriental, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) have also experienced crime and violence, albeit to a lesser extent. Reports from The Norsunian, the official student publication of Negros Oriental State University, documented incidents of violence and attacks on students across several years. A particularly alarming moment occurred on October 8, 2006, when The Negros Chronicle published an article titled "STOP KILLINGS OF STUDENTS." The article detailed how the academic community, led by Silliman University, organized a prayer rally attended by around 2,000 students and faculty to protest a string of student killings and a rape-murder case in Dumaguete City. On August 21, 2011, the same publication carried a column by Atty. Francisco D. Yap dubbing Dumaguete "The City of Unsolved Crimes," citing an increase in unresolved criminal cases, including the deaths of students from Foundation University and Silliman University. These unsettling developments have highlighted the urgent need for competent and well-trained safety and security personnel in schools. As threats continue to evolve, there is a growing demand for individuals who are not only dedicated but also professionally certified in school safety and security. This is where the role of the security manager becomes critical.

In light of these challenges, this study explores the lived experiences of school security managers through a qualitative phenomenological lens. Of particular interest are the personal, professional, and social dimensions of their experiences, as shaped by years of engagement in school security work. By involving these practitioners in the research, the study aims to identify and recommend best practices that can be adopted to enhance safety measures in their respective academic institutions.

Roeser's Risk Management Theory [3] provides a foundational methodological approach to identifying and assessing safety and security challenges. It emphasizes the

importance of identifying threats, conducting risk analysis, and selecting appropriate methods of risk management. This theory typically favors a repressive approach to ensuring safety and security, and it outlines core concepts such as threat, risk, damage, and impact. These basic terms serve as the conceptual building blocks for understanding and implementing security measures across various domains.

Roeser's theory is especially relevant to types of safety and security designed to protect a reference object—such as physical infrastructure, information systems, and administrative operations. The model is particularly applicable in guiding school building designers in identifying and quantifying security risks and in selecting the most cost-effective protective measures. It provides a structured way to evaluate threats and prioritize those with the most significant potential impact. Risk identification seeks to determine the worst-case consequences and propose mitigation strategies to either prevent these outcomes or minimize their effects.

O'Meara emphasized that emergency preparedness and response must be integrated into every aspect of the built learning environment[4]. The objective is to reduce risk and address a wide range of threats by creating concentric layers of protection. These include measures such as secure vestibules, remote-controlled access to doors, keyless entry systems, and surveillance cameras placed strategically inside and outside the school. Other elements include the use of bollards, proper lighting, line-of-sight visibility, high-security key systems, and fencing around school perimeters, including playgrounds and athletic fields. The design of school facilities should support the ability to shelter students quickly and effectively during emergencies.

Security, however, is not only about physical infrastructure but also involves mindset and management practices. As Dela Cruz (2014) explains, security management is often a decentralized system, designed to instill a culture of shared responsibility and accountability throughout the institution—from top-level administrators to staff at all levels [5]. This decentralized approach helps foster a proactive awareness of security risks and the need for preventive actions. Dela Cruz further notes that every risk has both social and procedural root causes, and addressing these underlying issues is key to ensuring the success of any educational institution.

The role of the security manager is thus multifaceted and vital. As Ortmeier outlines, the responsibilities of a security manager encompass managerial, preventive, investigative, and administrative functions[6]. They are tasked with hiring, training, supervising, evaluating, and scheduling security personnel while also addressing matters of morale, professional development, and productivity. To ensure effective school security, managers must set strategic goals and be well-versed in both theoretical and practical aspects of security work. Continuous professional development is essential, particularly through compliance with Republic Act No. 5487, known as the "Private Security Agency Law," and its 2003 Implementing Rules and Regulations, which guide professional standards in private security practice.

Orpinas *et al.* observed that safe schools implement effective teaching practices, understand genuine student concerns, and promote a culture of respect supported by adequate physical

resources [7]. Baginsky adds that the key goals of school safety include promoting students' psychological well-being, ensuring that students and teachers feel secure, fostering an enjoyable learning environment, motivating school communities, and helping students focus on long-term academic and personal success [8].

Following high-profile school shootings, such as those in the United States, many public schools have significantly increased visible security measures, including the use of security cameras and guards [9]. This response was largely driven by fear, leading to the adoption of a range of safety protocols. However, studies point out the lack of evaluative data on the effectiveness of these measures and raise concerns about their impact on students' civil liberties and sense of privacy. A deeper understanding of these dynamics is crucial for school administrators to make informed and balanced decisions.

Miller notes that school and campus violence remain pressing concerns for children, adolescents, and young adults, especially in contexts like the United States where such violence has often resulted in tragic deaths of students and faculty [10]. The Columbine High School massacre and other similar events have heightened awareness about the seriousness of violence in schools. As a result, school administrators are now compelled to address a broader range of issues, including weapons on campus, bullying, physical altercations, harassment, and sexual assault.

This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a phenomenological approach to explore the lived experiences, opinions, and perceptions of participants regarding the implementation of safety and security measures in their respective Higher Education Institutions (HEIs). Data collection was facilitated through the use of interviews and a voice recorder. Both in-depth individual interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) were conducted to obtain rich, narrative data rather than statistical outputs. The goal was to elicit detailed and meaningful insights related to participants' personal, social, and professional experiences with campus safety and security. As Pinson emphasized, qualitative research aims to understand the essence of experiences within a specific context [11]. It does not seek to predict future outcomes but rather provides in-depth understanding of events as experienced in a particular time and setting. This study was carried out during the academic year 2017–2018 across eight HEIs located in Negros Oriental, Central Visayas, Philippines. Dumaguete City, the capital of Negros Oriental, is often referred to as a "University Town" due to the concentration of academic institutions, including four universities and several colleges, contributing over PHP 2 billion annually to the local economy.

The study focused on HEIs including the Negros Oriental State University (NORSU) main campus and its seven external campuses in Guihulngan, Mabinay, Bais, Pamplona, Siaton, Bayawan, and Bajumpandan, Dumaguete. Other HEIs in the study included Silliman University, Foundation University, Saint Paul University Dumaguete, Colegio de Santa Catalina de Alejandria (COSCA), Metro Dumaguete College, Asian College of Science and Technology, and

Negros Maritime College Foundation, Inc. These institutions provided a total population of 24,797 students.

A total of 15 informants were purposively selected for this study, consisting entirely of security managers with a minimum of three years of experience in school security management, thus ensuring their ability to recall and reflect upon relevant experiences. The first nine informants participated in FGDs, while the remaining six were involved in individual interviews. Among the FGD participants, eight were from NORSU, and the rest represented the other HEIs mentioned above. The purposive sampling method, also known as judgmental or selective sampling, was employed to deliberately choose informants based on their expertise and experience, as authorized by the University of Cebu Graduate School.

An interview guide containing open-ended questions was used to facilitate the conversations. Prior to the interviews, participants were provided with informed consent forms explaining the nature of the study, the confidentiality of their responses, and their rights as participants. Each participant signed and dated the consent form, indicating their voluntary participation. The interview guide was reviewed and validated by a panel of examiners led by the University of Cebu Graduate School to ensure its relevance and appropriateness.

The research process included three main components: in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis. Document analysis involved transcriptions of interview recordings, which were then examined using Colaizzi's phenomenological method [12]. This rigorous process included reading and re-reading transcripts to gain a comprehensive understanding, identifying significant statements, formulating meanings, and organizing these into thematic clusters. From these clusters, eight unifying themes emerged, providing deep insight into the security managers' experiences.

To gain institutional approval, a transmittal letter was sent to the Graduate School of the University of Cebu and the presidents of the participating HEIs. These letters outlined the purpose and significance of the study and received approval from the respective school authorities. Selected participants were also given an introductory letter detailing the research objectives, the interview procedure, and assurances of confidentiality.

Participants were screened using a protocol designed for phenomenological research, ensuring that they had extensive experience with security work, the ability to articulate their insights, and a genuine interest in the topic. Gender was not a limiting factor in participant selection, although the sample happened to consist entirely of male informants. This, however, was not considered a limitation of the study.

Participation in the study was entirely voluntary. Informants were free to withdraw at any time without penalty. Consent forms confirmed that all participants were of legal age. Data gathered through the interviews and discussions were transcribed, coded, and analyzed by the primary researcher. Colaizzi's method ensured that each step—from data transcription to theme formulation—was conducted

thoroughly, enabling the development of well-founded and meaningful insights.

Throughout the research process, the confidentiality and welfare of participants were prioritized. Informed Consent Forms clearly outlined participants' rights, including access to support if they experienced discomfort. All data were stored securely, and participant identities were protected using pseudonyms. The researcher adhered strictly to ethical guidelines, ensuring the integrity and credibility of the research from start to finish.

## 2. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### The Emergent Themes from School Security Managers' Narratives

As a result of thorough and rigorous data analysis, eight major themes emerged from the initial 26 cluster categories. These themes highlight the personal, professional, and social dimensions of the lived experiences of the fifteen (15) school security managers. Each theme has been organized in alignment with the sub-problems identified in the study.

#### I. Positive Experiences of the Informants

##### 1. Empowerment Through Experience

This theme reflects the personal growth and empowerment experienced by the informants through their exposure to various learning opportunities, both formal and informal, within their school assignments. Most participants reported receiving institutional support in the form of training, seminars, and incentives. As their tenure in security work extended, they gained critical skills and knowledge necessary for effectively fulfilling their duties.

Many expressed that greater exposure to security-related tasks enabled them to perform more efficiently and with improved outcomes. Their previous experience in the police or military services further enhanced their competency in their current roles.

"We should prioritize personal development. You cannot guide or lead others unless you first develop yourself." – Informant 1 (FGD1:SS4)

"For my personal growth, I remain dedicated to my duties as a security manager. I even attend seminars outside my required hours." – Informant 6 (FGD6:SS50)

"I attended a four-day National Security and Safety Training in Manila. I then conducted an echo seminar for our security guards to share what I had learned." – Informant 15 (IDI6:SS158)

##### 2. Values, Integrity, and Responsibility

The participants highlighted the importance of personal values and leadership principles. Integrity, self-discipline, and responsibility emerged as key traits that security managers must embody. These traits are seen as foundational in managing personnel and ensuring operational effectiveness.

"A successful security manager must be a good leader—goal-oriented, adaptable to change, and a person of integrity." – Informant 1 (FGD1:SS2)

"Discipline, patience, perseverance, and commitment—especially happiness in your work—are essential." – Informant 10 (IDI1:SS76)

“This job taught me patience, which has become the backbone of my personal development.” – Informant 2 (FGD2:SS21)

“As a former police officer, I learned that a Chief Security Officer must show kindness and be accommodating to his personnel to foster good relationships.” – Informant 11 (IDI2:SS94)

## II. Negative Experiences of the Informants

### 1. The Dilemmas of Security Work

Security managers often face operational dilemmas due to limited resources, familiarity between guards and students, and ineffective policy enforcement. Prolonged assignments without rotation can lead to complacency and even breaches in security protocols. Informants emphasized the need for rotating assignments and stricter policy implementation.

“Relief guards often lack the commitment of regular staff. We face a constant challenge with staffing when graduates leave for PNP service.” – Informant 1 (FGD1:SS15)

“We requested CCTV installation to reduce incidents on campus. Some issues cannot be prevented, but monitoring helps manage them better.” – Informant 12 (IDI3:SS110)

“Our guards are sometimes provoked by students, even challenged to fights. We resolve conflicts by helping students understand that the guards are only doing their jobs.” – Informant 13 (IDI4:SS124)

### 2. Workplace Rejection and Operational Setbacks

Participants cited issues such as absenteeism, tardiness, lack of supervision, and delayed procurement processes. The lack of urgency from upper management in addressing resource-related concerns was also a recurring theme.

“Procurement is slow and often deprioritized. Requests go through many hurdles before being approved.” – Informant 4 (FGD4:SS42)

“If valuables go missing in offices, CCTV would help identify suspects. Surveillance is essential for transparency.” – Informant 12 (IDI3:SS111)

“We need more regular guards. I’ve raised this with management and called agency guards for monthly meetings to update them on policy changes.” – Informant 7 (FGD7:SS62)

## III. Challenges Faced by the Informants

### 1. Situational and Confrontational Challenges

Security managers encounter both soft (resource-based) and hard (conflict-based) challenges. Situational issues include budget limitations and understaffing, while confrontational problems involve altercations between students, faculty, and security personnel.

“There are no clear sanctions for policy violations involving faculty and students. The lack of guidelines makes it difficult to manage such conflicts.” – Informant 7 (FGD7:SS61)

“We sometimes face demanding parents. But as a former police officer, I implement policies impartially and with diplomacy.” – Informant 11 (IDI4:SS98)

“Resolving conflicts among students, faculty, and staff is crucial to maintaining peace and ensuring that work continues unhindered.” – Informant 4 (IDI3:SS118)

## 2. Threats to Campus Safety

Participants shared that schools face persistent threats such as theft, bullying, substance abuse, and even terrorism. These challenges require proactive strategies and well-equipped security personnel.

“My role is to monitor how effectively policies are implemented to ensure the safety of everyone on campus.” – Informant 5 (FGD5:SS44)

“Security guards must be trained to manage entry points and prevent unauthorized access, especially during large events.” – Informant 7 (FGD7:SS59)

“One of our guards was caught stealing a student’s cellphone. We discovered it through CCTV footage and terminated his contract immediately.” – Informant 10 (IDI1:SS81)

## IV. Impact of Initiatives on School Safety and Security

### 1. Transformational Leadership and Strategic Initiatives

Security managers have implemented initiatives such as installing CCTV systems, enhancing lighting, collaborating with police and ROTC units, and developing comprehensive safety plans. These efforts aim to promote dynamic and visionary leadership within the school security framework.

“We plan ahead, especially for high-risk events. Budget planning and equipping guards with firearms are also part of our initiatives.” – Informant 1 (FGD1:SS17)

“We’ve built partnerships with the PNP and other agencies to improve implementation of security policies.” – Informant 2 (FGD2:SS24)

“We don’t rely solely on our internal resources. We coordinate with ROTC and the PNP to help us maintain security.” – Informant 14 (IDI5:SS141)

### 2. Strengthening Security Measures

Initiatives also focus on strengthening physical security and anticipating potential threats. These include deploying criminology interns, securing equipment, and preparing for events through advance planning.

“We make use of criminology interns during the day to support our personnel. We also prioritize equipment procurement and planning.” – Informant 2 (FGD2:SS26)

“We don’t wait for orders from top management. We anticipate needs ahead of events like Founder’s Day and ensure all personnel are alert.” – Informant 15 (IDI6:SS159)

## 3. CONCLUSION

This study identified eight (8) emergent themes from the initial cluster of data categories. These themes directly addressed the study’s sub-problems and were categorized into four key areas:

1. *Positive Experiences of the Informants* – encompassing Empowerment Through Experience and An Exploration of Values, Time-Tested Principles, and Responsibility;
2. *Negative Experiences of the Informants* – including Security Work Dilemma: A Struggle for Success

- and Encounters with Rejection in the Work Environment;
3. Challenges Encountered by the Informants – captured in Confrontational and Situational Opportunities: A Vehicle for Improvement and The Threats of Security Scenarios in Schools;
  4. Impact of Initiatives on School Safety and Security – reflected in Transforming Oneself: A Shift for Dynamic and Visionary Security Leadership and The Dynamics of Security Measures.

These findings have significant theoretical and practical implications for the management of campus security in higher education institutions.

Clements emphasized the increasingly complex challenges facing educational leaders worldwide, including threats ranging from political violence and data breaches to terrorist activity and school lockdowns [13]. These issues underscore the need for proactive safety planning and robust protection protocols in both national and international schools.

Kelley argued that maintaining school safety is a delicate balancing act [14]. Security administrators must navigate partnerships with multiple agencies, manage both real and perceived threats, and implement effective measures without transforming campuses into prison-like environments. Common challenges include limited manpower, insufficient security equipment, poor communication infrastructure, misconduct by security personnel, and budgetary constraints—all of which complicate planning and prioritization in school security.

Heathfield highlighted empowerment as the most valuable gift a security manager can offer [15]. Empowerment involves clear communication of goals, appropriate delegation of authority, openness to feedback, and public and private recognition of excellent performance. These practices contribute to the morale and effectiveness of security personnel.

Ortmeier emphasized that regardless of organizational type, a security manager's role includes selecting, training, supervising, evaluating, and scheduling personnel [6]. Managers also address productivity, professional development, and morale. Effective school security leadership requires setting clear goals and understanding key management theories. Thus, the role of a security manager is integral, encompassing managerial, preventive, investigative, and administrative functions.

Bosworth, Ford, and Hernandez further asserted that ensuring school safety requires an understanding of both student and faculty perceptions. While students often associate safety with physical security features, faculty emphasize school climate and interpersonal relationships [16]. Notably, schools with a positive climate reported lower levels of violence and substance use. Conversely, poorly structured physical environments can increase the risk of unintentional injuries.

#### 4. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study's findings, it is recommended that universities establish a comprehensive security and safety plan. Prioritized procurement of essential security equipment—such as two-way radios, metal detectors, and fire/disaster alarm systems - is critical. These tools are foundational for protecting campus populations and should be treated as urgent procurement needs.

Additionally, regular training programs for security personnel should be institutionalized. These may include in-house seminars or workshops conducted by invited experts, as well as external training at accredited centers in Metro Manila or other urban areas. Providing opportunities for continuous learning ensures that security personnel remain updated with the latest security technologies and best practices.

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