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The Meaning Of Self-Esteem Among Hazing Perpetrators At The Class Iib Brebes Correctional Institution: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis Study

Alwi Djener Al Zaqhino[1]*, Denny Nazaria Rifani[2], Umar Anwar[3]

[1,2,3] Program Studi Manajemen Pemasyarakatan, Politeknik Imigrasi dan Pemasyarakatan Indonesia, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

This qualitative study uses Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to explore how hazing perpetrators interpret self-esteem in the Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution. Based on semi-structured interviews with eight informants - comprising three perpetrators, two victims, and three correctional officers - analyzed through NVivo 12, the research identified eight superordinate themes dominated by a culture of violence, informal hierarchy, and a victim-to-perpetrator cycle. Findings reveal that perpetrators view self-esteem as a fragile construct vulnerable to perceived threats, utilizing violence as a strategy for self-esteem restoration, social validation, and a rite of passage within the prison subculture. Driven by multidimensional factors - structural overcrowding, cultural norms, and psychological needs for recognition - hazing inflicts severe physical, psychological, and social harm on victims, though family support and spirituality offer potential pathways to break the cycle, underscoring the urgent need for multi-level systemic interventions.

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* *Corresponding author: alwidjener2@gmail.com, Dedenkriv@gmail.com*

INTRODUCTION

Correctional institutions function as facilities for rehabilitating inmates, yet violence frequently accompanies daily life within them. Physical, psychological, and even sexual violence against inmates in Indonesian correctional facilities frequently occurs and remains inadequately addressed due to punitive staff attitudes and minimal understanding of human rights (Yuska et al., 2022). A penal system prioritizing retributive punishment also causes violence in detention facilities to be viewed as a common form of sanction, thereby hindering social reintegration programs (Kartini, 2024). Such violence grows within an ecosystem characterized by informal power hierarchies, minimal formal supervision, and continuous psychological pressure (Mubarokah & Larasati, 2023).

The prison subculture emerges as inmates' adaptive response to deprivative living conditions. Inmates simultaneously experience the deprivation of liberty, goods and services, heterosexual relationships, autonomy, and security (Angkasa, 2020; Sykes, 1958). These deprivations encourage the formation of defensive behavioral patterns. In such environments, occupants may view violence as a legitimate mechanism of social control (Mubarokah & Larasati, 2023). Overcrowding exacerbates these conditions. A prisoner population exceeding ideal capacity weakens staff supervision capabilities, allowing informal power mechanisms, including violence, to fill the vacuum left by formal control (Saputra & Mahardika, 2020). Limited resources are allocated more heavily toward security rather than rehabilitation (Nenda et al., 2022). Housing density also correlates with increased stress, riots, and physical and emotional violence among inmates (Munir et al., 2024; Ramiga et al., 2025). Article 4 letter n of the Minister of Law and Human Rights Regulation Number 6 of 2013 prohibits inmates from committing physical or psychological violence against fellow inmates, staff, or visitors, categorizing violations as severe disciplinary breaches (Kementerian Hukum dan Hak Asasi Manusia Republik Indonesia, 2013). Nevertheless, enforcing these rules continues to face major challenges in overcrowded institutions.

One form of violence under such conditions is hazing. Nuwer (2019) defines hazing as brutal, degrading, and dangerous activities required by senior members of newcomers as a condition for group acceptance. This practice occurs in schools, the military, and workplaces (Kröger et al., 2023; Thomas et al., 2021). In prisons, this practice takes place in enclosed spaces with minimal external oversight and without effective reporting mechanisms. Senior inmates use receptions as a guise for violent rituals laden with dominance, control, and status testing toward newcomers (Allen et al., 2018). Within total institutions, hazing has the potential to cause severe physical and psychological harm, and under uncontrolled conditions, it can lead to fatalities (Kröger et al., 2023).

The Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution experiences severe overcrowding. On February 21, 2026, this institution housed 373 occupants against an ideal capacity of 161, representing an over-capacity of 212 people or 131.68%. The researchers uncovered patterns of hazing directed at newcomers during Community Service (KKN) in 2025 and in 2026 incident reports. One newcomer was forced to provide massages for two consecutive days before experiencing physical violence in the quarantine block. Another newcomer faced

financial extortion accompanied by threats and physical assaults in the residential block. Victims tend not to report immediately due to the pressure of the "no snitching" culture and fear of unofficial hierarchies.

Prior studies have mapped the prevalence and structural mechanisms of hazing in the military (Kröger et al., 2023), uncovered young military members' perceptions of hazing (Metzger et al., 2022), and offered conceptual frameworks regarding the social functions of workplace hazing (Thomas et al., 2021). In Indonesia, studies show that subcultures of violence and informal power hierarchies are structural realities of prisons (Febrian & Rahayu, 2025; Mubarokah & Larasati, 2023). Phenomenological and symbolic interactionist studies outside Indonesia have also uncovered identity work, emotion work, and prison masculinity among inmates (King et al., 2025; O'Rourke et al., 2025; Umamaheswar, 2021). However, these studies focus on structural and sociological aspects or on the perspectives of victims and institutions. No study has positioned hazing perpetrators as the primary unit of analysis to understand how perpetrators interpret their actions in relation to self-esteem within Indonesian prisons. This research fills that gap.

This study utilizes a set of sensitizing concepts rather than a fixed model being tested. Rosenberg (1965) defines self-esteem as an individual's overall evaluation of themselves, encompassing dimensions of self-worth and self-deprecation. According to Sociometer Theory, self-esteem functions as a monitor of social acceptance levels (Leary & Baumeister, 2000). According to Threatened Egotism Theory, aggression arises more frequently from threatened positive self-evaluations than from genuine low self-esteem (Baumeister et al., 1996), and the concept of fragile high self-esteem explains high self-esteem that is brittle and reactive to threats (Kernis, 2003). In the prison context, the concepts of pains of imprisonment (Sykes, 1958), total institutions (Goffman, 1961), prison subculture and prisonization (Clemmer, 1940), and rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960) explain conditions that threaten self-esteem and give rise to reception rituals. The concept of post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) helps interpret victims' opportunities to break the cycle of violence.

This study does not assume that every perpetrator experiences a crisis of fragile self-esteem. Prison behavior can also be driven by instrumental motives, such as economic extortion or adherence to subculture, and perpetrators may interpret hazing as a challenge or legitimate ritual (Thomas et al., 2021). This study aims to deeply understand and describe how hazing perpetrators at the Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution interpret self-esteem through an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) approach.

METHOD

This research employed a qualitative approach utilizing Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The qualitative approach was selected because the research focus centers on the subjective meaning that perpetrators attach to their self-esteem—a psychological dimension that cannot be reduced to numbers (Creswell, 2014). Prison hazing is also closed, sensitive, and layered both psychologically and socially, thus requiring a flexible approach sensitive to context. IPA aims to examine participants' personal lived

experiences in detail. Grounded in phenomenology, hermeneutics, and idiography, IPA utilizes a double hermeneutic, where researchers endeavor to understand how participants make sense of their world (Smith et al., 2010). This study does not measure hazing prevalence, but rather understands how perpetrators experience self-esteem within their experienced context.

The research was conducted at the Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution, Brebes Regency, Central Java Province. Location selection considered three factors: first, researchers possessed initial empirical access through KKN in 2025; second, the institution experiences high overcrowding; and third, documented security incident records ensured the availability of participants meeting inclusion criteria. Data collection took place during the researchers' internship from July 1 to September 28, 2026.

Informants were selected via homogeneous purposive sampling (Sugiyono, 2019), a strategy intentionally targeting participants with similar characteristics relevant to the research focus to obtain information-rich cases (Herdiansyah, 2010; Moleong, 2017). Inclusion criteria included: (1) inmates currently serving sentences at Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution; (2) inmates proven or known to have been involved as hazing perpetrators based on security incident records or staff statements; and (3) inmates willing to provide information voluntarily by signing an informed consent form. Smith et al. (2010) recommend 3 to 6 participants for IPA studies. This study established three inmate perpetrators as primary informants alongside two inmate victims and three correctional officers as supporting informants (Table 1). The identities of all informants were masked using codes: H1–H3 for perpetrators, K1–K2 for victims, and M, S, and U for officers.

Tabel 1. Characteristics of Research Informants

Code	Category	Age / Tenure	Education	Occupation / Position	Role in Hazing
H1	Perpetrator (Primary)	25 years	Elementary	Merchant	Threats and debt-related intimidation
H2	Perpetrator (Primary)	35 years	Elementary	Merchant	Physical violence
H3	Perpetrator (Primary)	30 years	Elementary	Entrepreneur	Threats, intimidation, and monetary demands
K1	Victim (Supporting)	22 years	Did not finish elementary	Freelance laborer	Victim of physical violence and forced massage labor
K2	Victim (Supporting)	35 years	Junior high	Freelance laborer	Victim of threats and intimidation

M	Officer (Supporting)	± 7 years	–	Guard Squad Member Rupam 3 (block officer)	Block officer informant
S	Officer (Supporting)	21 years	–	Security Squad Commander (Ka Rupam)	Security Squad Commander informant
U	Officer (Supporting)	24 years	–	Security Squad Commander (Ka Rupam)	Security Squad Commander informant

Source: Primary research data, 2026

Primary data were collected through semi-structured interviews guided by interview questions while allowing space for probing. Interview guides were constructed from theoretical constructs covering participants' committed hazing experiences, meaning attached to actions regarding self-esteem, positive and negative dimensions of self-esteem, perceptions of informal social hierarchies, and experiences of identity and self-esteem in prison. Interviews took place face-to-face in rooms provided by the institution, observing participant privacy and security, lasting 60 to 90 minutes per session. With participant consent, interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim (Smith et al., 2010). Non-participant observation complemented interviews to record interaction patterns between senior and junior inmates, informal hierarchy dynamics, and physical conditions. Document studies included security incident records, disciplinary regulations, new inmate reception procedures, and Public Database System (SDP) data.

Data analysis followed IPA procedures integrated within the interactive flow of Miles and Huberman: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1992), supported by NVivo 12. Transcripts were read repeatedly (reading and re-reading) to generate initial notes, followed by developing emergent themes for each participant idiographically. Cross-theme connections were then sought, repeating the process for subsequent cases to develop cross-case superordinate themes (Smith et al., 2010). Word frequency queries, matrix coding, and NVivo hierarchy charts were utilized. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation (interviews, documents, and observations), interview guide readability testing prior to collection, and initial/final member checking.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Contextual Overview and Initial Research Data

On February 21, 2026, the Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution housed 373 occupants consisting of 321 convicts and 52 detainees (Table 2). Overcrowding reached 212 people or 131.68%, with the convict group experiencing the highest over-capacity (147%). Researcher documentation in September 2026 displayed occupants sleeping and moving about in cramped residential blocks, personal belongings hanging on walls and pillars, and severely restricted movement space.

Table 2. Occupant Data of Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution as of February 21, 2026

Occupant Category	Count (people)	Ideal Capacity	Excess	% Overcrowded
Convicts (Narapidana)	321	130	191	147%
Detainees (Tahanan)	52	31	21	68%
Total	**373**	**161**	**212**	**131.68%**

Source: Registration Sub-Section of Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution, February 2026

Word frequency query results across eight interview transcripts (Figure 1) showed that the word *"diri"* (self) appeared 219 times, *"narapidana"* (inmates) 209 times, *"hazing"* 198 times, *"kamar"* (room/cell) 187 times, *"lapas"* (prison) 158 times, *"harga"* (value/self-esteem) 119 times, *"pelaku"* (perpetrator) 113 times, and *"kekerasan"* (violence) 93 times. Word frequencies were treated not merely as statistics, but as initial indicators of frequently discussed topics. The word *"diri"* appeared most frequently because interviews centered on informants' meanings of self-esteem, identity, and threats to the self. The word *"kamar"* appeared more frequently than *"lapas"*, reflecting that hazing occurs not in an abstract prison concept, but in micro-spaces like residential cells, sanitation duties, debts, cell commander (Palkam) positions, and inter-inmate hierarchies. The word *"harga"* primarily appeared within the phrase *"harga diri"* (self-esteem). The sequence of *"harga"*, *"pelaku"*, and *"kekerasan"* depicts the thematic thread: self-esteem is threatened, perpetrators react, and violence becomes their reaction.



Figure 1. Interview Results Based on Word Frequency
Source: NVivo 12 data processing, October 2026

Analysis produced eight superordinate themes comprising a total of 654 references (Table 3). The theme of the culture of violence and informal hierarchy held the highest frequency (173 references; 26.4%), followed by the victim-to-perpetrator cycle (127 references; 19.4%) and trauma and victims' psychological impacts (97 references; 14.8%).

Table 3. Superordinate Themes and Reference Frequencies

No	Superordinate Theme	Reference Count	File Count	% References
1	Culture of Violence and Informal Hierarchy	173	8	26.4%
2	Victim-to-Perpetrator Cycle	127	5	19.4%
3	Trauma and Victims' Psychological Impacts	97	2	14.8%
4	Economic Pressure and Survival Strategies	70	6	10.7%
5	No Snitching and Powerlessness	50	5	7.6%
6	Threats to Self-Esteem as Triggers for Violence	48	3	7.3%
7	Prevention Strategies and Staff Roles	46	3	7.0%
8	Spirituality and Family Support as Coping Mechanisms	43	3	6.6%
	Total	**654**		**100%**

Source: NVivo 12 data processing, 2026

Figure 2 illustrates that each superordinate theme houses interconnected sub-themes. The culture of violence and informal hierarchy theme houses senior-junior relations, hazing processes, normalization of violence, and quarantine. The victim-to-perpetrator cycle houses legal contexts, reconciliation, remorse, and identity. Trauma and psychological impacts house physical violence, sexual violence, fear, and psychological consequences. This tiered structure demonstrates the interrelation of the eightsuperordinate themes in explaining self-esteem meanings among hazing perpetrators.



Figure 2. Hierarchy Chart of Superordinate Themes
Source: NVivo 12 data processing, 2026

Thematic Findings: Perspectives of Perpetrators, Victims, and Officers

Motives and Chronology of Violence

All three perpetrators committed violence after feeling their self-esteem was threatened. H1 felt belittled because K2 continuously delayed debt repayment: *"He acted as if he was mocking me, Sir... Like taking things lightly"* (H1, interview, 2026). H2 assaulted K1 after orders regarding personal hygiene and clothing upkeep were ignored, describing his action as *"Well, it's just momentary emotion, Sir."* (H2, interview, 2026). H3, serving as Palkam, felt deceived because repeated repayment promises failed, stating, *"He didn't respect me as Palkam"* (H3, interview, 2026).

Officers provided parallel observations. M assessed that perpetrators sought to demonstrate dominance and gain recognition from other inmates. S distinguished two perpetrator types: genuinely dominant individuals with calm, measured demeanors, and insecure individuals prone to overcompensation, stating, *"Not a few actually possess deep self-insecurity."* (S, interview, 2026). Although perpetrators' motives varied, their behavioral trajectories matched: non-compliance or broken promises were interpreted as insults, emotions escalated, and violence was deployed to restore self-image.

Economic Pressure and Survival Strategies

Money served as both a source of power and a threat to self-esteem. H1 offered services to a donor to secure business capital due to difficulties contacting his family, stating, *"Just to find food and survive here"* (H1, interview, 2026). This role provided status but rendered him

vulnerable when the donor pressured him to collect debts: *"Because I was confused, I pressured him first."* (H1, interview, 2026). K2 noted that upon entering his cell, he was demanded a "social fee" of Rp1,500,000: *"They said there is a social fee, I have to pay Rp1,500,000"* (K2, interview, 2026). After a Rp1,000,000 remittance from family was confiscated, K2 was still pressed to pay by evening, suffered assaults upon failing, and still felt rib pain during interviews. Pressures cascaded downward: donors pressured H1, H1 pressured K2, and financially destitute newcomers became targets. This pattern aligns with property deprivations within Sykes' pains of imprisonment (1958).

Remorse, Guilt, and Reconciliation

H1 and H2 expressed remorse after emotions subsided. H1 recalled asking himself in his cell, *"Like, 'Oh God, why did I do this?'"* (H1, interview, 2026) before apologizing to K2. H2 stated, *"In essence, I felt deeply guilty."* (H2, interview, 2026), especially since K1 rarely received family visits, though their relationship had since improved. Remorse coexisted with self-justifying rationales—feeling mocked in H1's case and momentary emotional lapse in H2's. Remorse thus functioned as identity work to restore a good self-image post-violence rather than outright rejection of violence, aligning with Snow and Anderson (1987) and Hochschild (1983).

Prior Hazing Experiences at Police Stations (Polres)

Perpetrators and victims noted experiencing hazing during prior detention at police resorts. H2 described the Polres as an introductory venue: *"at the Polres it's, you know, just an introduction"* (H2, interview, 2026). Inmates charged with child sexual offenses (Article 81) faced mandatory harsh treatment, while others were treated based on attitude. H2 mentioned a week-long phase experienced by most newcomers involving degrading, painful orders within perceived acceptable limits: *"As long as nobody dies."* (H2, interview, 2026). H3 recalled milder forms like duck-walking, singing, and push-ups, viewing them as entertainment. Conversely, K1 experienced carpet beatings starting at the Polres: *"I was in pain, Sir."* (K1, interview, 2026). Perpetrators framed Polres hazing as initiation, entertainment, or a natural phase, whereas victims experienced it as physical pain and degradation, illustrating the normalization of violence across detention facilities in line with rites of passage (Van Gennep, 1960) and prisonization (Clemmer, 1940).

Victims' Physical and Psychological Impacts

Victims suffered layered impacts. K1 experienced cell beatings to the point of fainting. K2 suffered severe initial fear: *"even wanting to sleep I was afraid, seeing anyone approach made me afraid"* (K2, interview, 2026), though support from his child via phone later empowered him to resist. Victims reported lingering physical injuries, sleep-disrupting fear, hypervigilance, and anger toward perpetrators.

Threats, Intimidation, and No Snitching

Victims and perpetrators shared motives for silence. K2 faced ongoing threats in quarantine, was accused of snitching, and bought cigarettes for perpetrators out of fear. K1

was punished with 200 push-ups, squat jumps, and rolling until his stomach was stepped on after reporting H2, and was reassaulted post-reporting. Perpetrators typically denied allegations, framing actions as jokes or traditions. Staff noted complete denials because admissions triggered disciplinary isolation or withheld remissions. Reporting staff risked retaliation, reinforcing the "no snitching" prison subculture norm (Rosenfeld et al., 2003).

Coping, Spirituality, and Family Support

Family support and spirituality emerged as vital coping resources. K2 found solace in incarceration: *"who outside never prayed, here thank God I pray constantly"* (K2, interview, 2026), engaging in Quranic recitation and aspiring to be an imam at home. Conversely, K1 lacked family contact, not knowing his mother's phone number. Similar communication barriers affected H1, hindering divergent responses.

Overcrowding and Informal Hierarchies

Daily interactions generally proceeded normally, but senior inmates held dominance. Seniors understood unwritten rules, and economically capable seniors held control. Limited space intensified stress, conflict, and competition for comfortable bedding and attention. Overcrowding acted as an arena for competition over resources rather than an isolated cause.

Staff Roles and Constraints

Staff applied preventive steps—initial orientations, cell mapping, safe reporting channels, rapid response, and patrols—but operated under staffing, infrastructural, and recidivist resistance constraints.

Cell Commander (Palkam) Leadership

H3 viewed his Palkam position as an elected duty aiming for fairness, whereas H2 rejected nomination, fearing power corruption and risks to his family.

Victim-to-Perpetrator Cycle

K1 admitted to previously beating newcomers in prior detention, whereas K2 utilized his victimization experience to protect and guide new inmates, exemplifying divergent pathways.

DISCUSSION: MEANING OF SELF-ESTEEM AMONG HAZING PERPETRATORS

Self-Esteem as a Fragile and Threat-Reactive Construct

These findings align with Threatened Egotism Theory, indicating aggression stems from fragile positive self-views (Baumeister et al., 1996; Kernis, 2003). Perpetrators attacked not from low self-esteem, but when their constructed self-images faced collapse. H1's debt-collector image, H2's cell cleanliness standard, and H3's Palkam authority were defended through emotional outbursts and violence.

Self-Esteem as Social Currency in Prison Subculture

Lacking external status symbols, physical strength, courage, and dominance became primary self-worth currencies (Clemmer, 1940; Sykes, 1958). Roles as lenders or cell

commanders provided status and peer validation aligned with Sociometer Theory (Leary & Baumeister, 2000).

Two Perpetrator Profiles and Identity Work

Staff observations revealed dominant, calm perpetrators versus insecure, overcompensating ones, expanding fragile high self-esteem concepts (Kernis, 2003). Remorse expressed by H1 and H2 represented identity work to restore positive self-identities post-violence (Snow & Anderson, 1987).

Multidimensional Causes

Causes spanned structural overcrowding (131.68%), cultural normalization of violence originating from police detention, and psychological recognition needs, reinforcing intergroup distinctions (Tajfel & Turner, 1979).

Victim Impacts and Breaking the Cycle

K1 experienced severe dehumanization (Haslam, 2006) and repeated victimization, while K2 demonstrated post-traumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996) by protecting newcomers, mediated by family support and spiritual coping.

Table 4. Synthesis of Findings, Theories, and Implications

No	Main Finding	Relevant Theory	Implication	Level
1	Perpetrator self-esteem is fragile and threat-reactive	Threatened Egotism; Fragile High Self-Esteem	Psychological interventions on self-esteem and emotional regulation	Individual
2	Hazing functions as rite of passage and social validation	Rite of Passage; Sociometer Theory	Alternative newcomer reception rituals	Group
3	Overcrowding forms structural arena for violence	Pains of Imprisonment; Total Institution	Density reduction and cell rotation	System
4	Economic pressures flow from donors to perpetrators to victims	Pains of Imprisonment	Legal economic access and loan transparency	System
5	No snitching and victim powerlessness	Prison Subculture	Anonymous reporting and whistleblower protection	Group & System

No	Main Finding	Relevant Theory	Implication	Level
6	Remorse as identity restoration	Identity Work; Emotion Work	Reconciliation and positive identity building	Individual
7	Spirituality and family support as coping	Religious Coping; Family Resilience	Strengthened family ties and spiritual guidance	Individual & Family
8	Victim-to-perpetrator cycle is breakable	Post-Traumatic Growth	Victim support and mentoring programs	Individual & Group

Source: Processed by researchers, 2026

CONCLUSION

Perpetrators at the Class IIB Brebes Correctional Institution interpret self-esteem as a fragile, threat-reactive construct, deploying violence to restore self-image. Hazing operates as a rite of passage and social validation mechanism driven by multidimensional structural, cultural, and psychological factors. While victims suffer profound physical and psychological harm, family support and spirituality offer pathways to break the cycle. Systemic interventions across individual, group, and institutional levels are urgently required.

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