
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Managing Disputes at the Grassroots: Experiences of Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs

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ABSTRACT

Conflict and disagreement between members of a community can occur for a variety of reasons, including irreconcilable ideals and expectations, personality conflicts, misunderstanding, unequal power distribution, and moral or cultural differences, among others. Often, communities lack qualified professionals to successfully handle disputes or are ignorant of certain abilities and techniques. This study explored the lived experiences of Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs in resolving barangay conflicts in Bacolod City, Negros Occidental through a qualitative research method. The informants of this study were ten (10) Lupon Chiefs of the ten (10) most populated barangays in Bacolod City. All participants were subjected to an individual in-depth interview. The findings of this study are described in emergent themes. Four (4) emergent themes described the positive and negative experiences of the participants in resolving barangay conflicts. For the positive experiences, two (2) emergent themes were developed, namely: *Fulfillment through Dispute Resolution* and *Mediator's Commitment to Peacekeeping*. For the negative experiences, two (2) emergent themes were also developed: *Barriers to Mediation* and *Behavioral Issues of Antagonizing Parties*. Meanwhile, two (2) emergent themes were formulated to explain how the participants address the challenges encountered in resolving barangay conflicts, namely: *Establish Rapport between Disputing Parties* and *Dynamic Management of Disputes*. Finally, two (2) emergent themes were created to express the aspirations of the participants to improve the quality of their duties: *Continuous Training and Seminar on Dispute Resolution* and *Desire for Improved Mediation Skills*. Based on the emergent themes identified, it is recommended to implement continuous training and professional development programs be implemented for Lupong Tagapamayapa members to enhance their mediation skills, communication techniques, and legal knowledge for more effective conflict resolution.

KEYWORDS

Katarungang Pambarangay, Lupong Tagapamayapa, Barangay Captains, Phenomenology, Bacolod, Philippines.

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1. Introduction

Dispute resolution refers to the processes by which conflicts and disagreements are managed and resolved between parties. It involves a range of methods, including negotiation, mediation, arbitration, and litigation. Each method varies in formality, cost, and involvement of third parties, offering distinct advantages depending on the nature of the dispute. Negotiation involves direct discussions between the parties to reach a mutually agreeable solution, while mediation introduces a neutral third party to facilitate dialogue. Arbitration, on the other hand, involves a binding decision made by an arbitrator, and litigation is the process of resolving disputes through the courts. Effective dispute resolution seeks to achieve a fair and equitable outcome while minimizing the time, cost, and stress associated with prolonged conflicts.

Conflict and disagreement between members of a community can occur for a variety of reasons, including irreconcilable ideals and expectations, personality conflicts, misunderstanding, unequal power distribution, and moral or cultural differences, among

others. Often, communities lack qualified professionals to successfully handle disputes or are ignorant of certain abilities and techniques.

As a result, good communication between or among the aggrieved parties can be critical to the success of any conflict resolution process. Any mediator should strive to manage communication while fostering healthy and nonviolent dispute resolution. This is why there is a global feeling of urgency to raise knowledge about the use of communications for peacebuilding, as well as to conduct studies and research in this field.

Furthermore, the involvement of a professional mediator/s may assist in guaranteeing that the disagreement is addressed while also protecting the interests of both opposing parties from potential legal action if the case is not handled correctly. Fortunately, in many barangays in the Philippines, there is a constituted group of mediators called the Lupon Tagapamayapa, which was created by virtue of Republic Act No. 7160, also known as the "Local Government Code of 1991," wherein Article 387 (b) of the law states that "there shall be in every barangay a Lupon Tagapamayapa." This organized body has the authority to gather opposing parties and attempt to resolve conflicts at the barangay level as much as possible.

The Lupon Tagapamayapa is a community-based arbitration system unique to the Philippines. It was created with the goal of resolving disputes at the barangay level quickly, efficiently, and economically. According to Republic Act No. 7160 (1991), community members who have been elected to serve as mediators are responsible for settling minor conflicts among individuals residing within their jurisdiction (Bueno, 2018). Even while this system has the potential to alleviate the burden on regular courts and build community relations, its usefulness and efficiency have been questioned throughout the years for a variety of reasons. While various studies have been conducted on the Lupon Tagapamayapa system, most of them have focused on its influence and efficacy in decreasing the burden on formal courts, with little attention devoted to the problems experienced by participants (Jumalon et al., 2018). A better knowledge of these issues is required for any solution, including training, to be effective. Anecdotal accounts and preliminary study indicate issues ranging from a lack of comprehension of legal ideas to challenges maintaining neutrality owing to the arbitrators' embeddedness in the society they serve.

However, these difficulties have not been thoroughly researched and recorded in scholarly literature, resulting in an immense gap. Furthermore, while there is a clear need for a training program for Lupon Tagapamayapa arbitrators, there has been no detailed investigation into what this program should include. Some preliminary studies offer generic capacity development measures (Sobradil, 2019), but the academic discourse lacks a specific, concrete strategy that considers the peculiarities of the Lupon Tagapamayapa's cultural, social, and legal setting.

Local news reports emphasize the importance of conducting more studies in these areas. It described a situation in which a debate developed into violence owing to a perceived lack of impartiality in the Lupon Tagapamayapa's handling of the issue. Elizaga-Pagalilauan (2022) said that many arbitrators fail to grasp and apply complicated law rules owing to a lack of professional legal training. These real-world examples highlight the need to address the gaps noted in the research literature.

While there has been study on the effectiveness of the Lupon Tagapamayapa method, there are still substantial gaps in the existing corpus of knowledge. The opportunities, challenges, and obstacles that informants face have not been thoroughly examined, especially in terms of enhancing participants' capacities. Furthermore, there is a lack of qualitative research that provides clear and realistic overview of the lived experiences of members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa. The proposed study aims to fill these gaps by undertaking a thorough assessment of the informants' possibilities and problems, as well as digging into their lived experiences.

As a criminologist, I was interested in conducting the study to explore the worklife of the Chiefs of the Lupon Tagapamayapa. This research shed light on the lived experiences of the informants, addressing the challenges they face, and the informants' aspirations to improve the quality of the performance of their duties.

2. Literature Review

This research is primarily anchored on the following theories, namely: Decision Theory by Hansson (2005), the Procedural Justice Theory by Bennett et al. (2018), and the Restorative Justice Theory by Zehr & Umbreit (1996).

In his decision theory, Hansson (2005) outlined the fundamental principles and concepts of decision theory, which serves as a framework for rational decision-making under uncertainty. Decision theory is grounded in the notion of an agent facing choices between alternative courses of action, each associated with different outcomes and probabilities. The objective of decision theory is to provide a systematic approach for making optimal decisions that maximize expected utility or achieve other desired objectives.

Hansson begins by introducing the concept of a decision problem, which involves identifying the available options, assessing the potential outcomes of each option, and evaluating the associated probabilities. Central to decision theory is the notion of utility, representing the desirability or value assigned to each outcome. Rational decision-making involves selecting the option that maximizes expected utility, where the expected utility of an option is calculated by weighting the utility of each possible outcome by its probability of occurrence (Hansson, 2005).

Hansson (2005) explained that one key aspect of decision theory is the distinction between risk and uncertainty. Risk refers to situations where the probabilities of different outcomes are known or can be estimated, allowing for quantitative analysis and calculation of expected utility. In contrast, uncertainty arises when probabilities are unknown or cannot be reliably estimated, making decision-making more challenging. Decision theorists employ various strategies, such as sensitivity analysis and scenario planning, to address uncertainty and make informed decisions in the face of incomplete information.

Hansson (2005) also discussed different decision criteria and preferences, emphasizing that decision-making is often influenced by subjective factors, including individual values, beliefs, and attitudes toward risk. He highlighted the importance of considering decision-maker preferences and risk attitudes when formulating decision strategies. Overall, Hansson's decision theory provides a comprehensive framework for understanding and addressing complex decision problems, offering valuable insights for individuals and organizations navigating uncertain environments.

Meanwhile, the Procedural Justice theory by Bennet et al. (2018) is a framework that examines the fairness and transparency of procedures within legal systems, law enforcement, and other institutional contexts. At its core, procedural justice emphasizes the importance of individuals' perceptions of fairness in their interactions with authorities. This concept extends beyond mere outcomes to encompass the processes through which decisions are made and actions are carried out. According to the authors, when individuals perceive procedures as fair, they are more likely to accept outcomes, comply with rules, and cooperate with authorities, even if they are unfavorable to them personally.

Central to the notion of procedural justice are four key components: voice, neutrality, respect, and trustworthiness. Voice refers to individuals' opportunities to express their concerns, opinions, and perspectives during decision-making processes. Neutrality emphasizes the impartiality and lack of bias in procedures, ensuring that decisions are based on objective criteria rather than personal interests or prejudices. Respect involves treating individuals with dignity and consideration, acknowledging their rights and autonomy. Trustworthiness relates to the credibility and reliability of authorities, with trust being a crucial factor in individuals' willingness to adhere to rules and cooperate with legal systems (Bennet et al., 2018).

Bennet et al. (2018) argued that procedural justice is not only relevant to legal and law enforcement contexts but also holds implications for broader societal interactions and governance. When institutions prioritize procedural justice principles, they contribute to the development of social trust, cohesion, and legitimacy. Moreover, procedural justice can serve as a mechanism for reducing conflict, enhancing social order, and promoting positive social outcomes. By fostering perceptions of fairness and respect among individuals, procedural justice frameworks can mitigate feelings of injustice, resentment, and alienation, ultimately contributing to more harmonious and equitable societies.

Meanwhile, the Restorative Justice theory, as articulated by Zehr & Umbreit (1996) is a transformative approach to addressing harm in the criminal justice system. At its core, restorative justice seeks to repair the harm caused by crime by focusing on the needs of victims, offenders, and the affected community. Unlike traditional punitive approaches that emphasize punishment and retribution, restorative justice centers on accountability, healing, and restoring relationships. They advocated for a shift from viewing crime as primarily an offense against the state to recognizing it as a violation of relationships and the social fabric.

One key principle of restorative justice is the involvement of all stakeholders in the resolution process. This includes facilitating dialogue between victims and offenders, allowing them to express their feelings, ask questions, and work together to find mutually acceptable solutions. Through this process, both parties can gain a deeper understanding of the impact of the crime and take responsibility for their actions. Additionally, the community plays an active role in supporting the healing process and holding offenders accountable for their behavior, fostering a sense of collective responsibility and solidarity (Zehr & Umbreit, 1996).

Central to the restorative justice framework is the concept of repairing harm and addressing the underlying causes of criminal behavior. Rather than simply punishing offenders through incarceration, restorative justice seeks to address the root causes of crime, such as poverty, inequality, and trauma. This may involve providing offenders with access to resources and support services to address their needs and prevent future harm. By focusing on rehabilitation and reintegration, restorative justice aims to break the cycle of reoffending and promote long-term healing and transformation (Zehr & Umbreit, 1996).

Ultimately, restorative justice is grounded in principles of respect, empathy, and human dignity. It emphasizes the importance of recognizing the humanity of both victims and offenders and restoring their sense of agency and worth. Through meaningful dialogue, collaboration, and accountability, restorative justice offers a more holistic and inclusive approach to justice that seeks to heal individuals and communities affected by crime while promoting reconciliation and positive social change (Zehr & Umbreit, 1996).

Republic Act No. 7160, also known as the Local Government Code of 1991, finds its legal basis primarily in the mandate to decentralize governance and empower local communities. The Code aims to promote local autonomy and empower barangays, the smallest administrative units in the Philippines, by granting them the authority to settle disputes through their respective Katarungang Pambarangay. This legal framework is grounded in Section 384 of Republic Act 7160, which specifically mandates the establishment of a system for amicable settlement of disputes at the barangay level. This provision recognizes the inherent capacity of barangays to address conflicts within their jurisdiction and underscores the importance of local participation in conflict resolution processes (Local Government Code, 1991).

Furthermore, the legal basis for the creation of Katarungang Pambarangay is rooted in the constitutional principle of promoting alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. Article III, Section 15 of the 1987 Philippine Constitution emphasizes the state's duty to recognize the vital role of mediation and conciliation in resolving disputes. By establishing Katarungang Pambarangay, Republic Act No. 7160 (1991) aligns with this constitutional mandate by institutionalizing a grassroots mechanism for resolving conflicts without resorting to formal litigation. This legal framework underscores the importance of fostering a culture of peace and harmony within communities, which is fundamental to the principles of social justice and the rule of law (Philippine Constitution, 1987).

Moreover, Katarungang Pambarangay is reinforced by international commitments to promote access to justice and strengthen dispute resolution mechanisms. The Philippines is a signatory to various international agreements and conventions, such as the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women, which emphasize the importance of providing accessible and effective avenues for resolving disputes. By establishing Katarungang Pambarangay, Republic Act No. 7160 (1991) demonstrates the country's commitment to fulfilling its international obligations by promoting community-based mechanisms for conflict resolution.

Katarungang Pambarangay's creation under Republic Act No. 7160 (1991) is firmly grounded in the principles of local autonomy, alternative dispute resolution, and international commitments to promote access to justice. By empowering barangays to settle disputes through their respective Katarungang Pambarangay, the law recognizes the capacity of local communities to address conflicts in a manner that is efficient, accessible, and culturally sensitive. This legal framework reflects a broader commitment to promoting peace, social cohesion, and the rule of law at the grassroots level, thereby contributing to the overall stability and development of Philippine society.

The Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) are mechanisms for solving disputes or/and conflicts between parties without recourse to the courts. The methods used in the ADR processes include mediation, negotiation, and wherever possible reconciliation. Through Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR), the conflicting parties are brought together to dialogue and agree on a voluntary basis to forge a way forward. The focus of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms is for now primarily on civil cases (Guia & Mangubat, 2021).

The Barangay Justice System or Katarungang Pambarangay is the preferred alternative dispute resolution among Filipinos. It is a preferred option for mediation among Filipinos in a barangay level. The Katarungang Pambarangay is a method for the amicable settlement of disputes at the barangay level. The main purpose of this method is to promote fast and effective administration of disputes and to decongest the local courts of conciliable criminal and civil cases. Philippine local courts are severely crowded (Mohammed & Caingat, 2017). The perception of this crisis in the civil justice system had been the perception of some Filipinos that a "justice delayed is a justice denied."

Further, Mohammed & Caingat (2017) mentions that Katarungang Pambarangay is an administrative body at the barangay level where community members may resolve their differences without going to courts, and therefore preventing the lengthy and expensive process of settling disputes before the court. Promoting amicable settlement at the local level is an alternative mechanism adopted to expedite the resolution of cases filed by disputing parties at the local level. This is also used an option to reduce the thousands of cases filed in the Philippine regular courts which are unattended and seemed to be dormant. The lack of court judges and inability of the disputing parties to pay the lucrative lawyers' fees are the common reasons used to explain the slow pace of justice in the Philippine justice system (Sam & Abubakar-Sam, 2013).

Community is considered as something intangible to which everyone wants to belong. The community secures our wellbeing, security, and knowledge. However, it also has a coercive and repressive function which clashes with individual freedoms, since being part of a community involves compromising and complying with the rules of that community. Community conflicts arise when the customs and rules of a particular group or community do not permit individuals to pursue their own needs and interests (Carrasco, 2016). Conflicts may also happen between two members of the community.

The “community” has often proven to be resilient in such contexts, providing survival and coping mechanisms for insecurity and fragility. Experience has shown that even in areas of sheer desolation, social life and organizational systems can readily re-emerge within community networks. Growing attention has been paid in recent years to the adoption of community-based approaches to help address the extensive needs in conflict-affected and fragile contexts.

Community-based approaches to peace building seek to empower local community groups and institutions by giving the community direct control over investment decisions, project planning, execution, and monitoring, through a process that emphasizes inclusive participation and management. The basic premise for demand-led approaches is that local communities are better placed to identify their shared needs and the actions necessary to meet them. The community-based approach has been adopted in fragile and conflict-affected societies. It can be an effective approach to peacebuilding.

Early Filipinos had a system of settling disputes peacefully among members of communal organizations called barangay. The barangay serves as the primary planning and implementing unit of government policies and activities in the community (Boysillo, 2017). It serves as a forum where disputes may be amicably settled through the implementation of the Katarungang Pambarangay law or the Barangay Justice System. Under this is the Lupon Tagapamayapa, a barangay-level peacekeeping body mandated by the Philippine Local Government Code 1991 (Avenido & Tabucanon, 2020).

Lupon Tagapamayapa under the barangay justice system has been working and operating in the Philippines for more than a decade (Villamor & Dagohoy, 2020). The Lupon Tagapamayapa, which is composed of ten (10) to twenty (20) members chosen by the Punong Barangay, acts as Chairman (Kilip, 2021). The body is typically elected every three years and serves until a new body is elected the following year. Other than honoraria, allowances, and other emoluments as permitted by law by barangay, municipal, or city rule, they are not paid (Viray & Wekke, 2021). The procedure is applied to almost all civil disputes and numerous offenses with potential prison sentences of less than one year or penalties of less than P5,000.00 (Agustin et al., 2018).

Since Lupon Tagapamayapa is an institution unique to the Philippines, it cannot be found anywhere else. The government of the Philippines founded the organization to help in conflict resolution outside of the court system, which can be very costly and time-consuming (Singer, 2018). The Lupon Tagapamayapa volunteers must successfully finish a training program before they are authorized to work (Adonis & Couch, 2018). A recent study has shown that the training needs of the Lupon Tagapamayapa in dealing with community disputes are immense (Jumalon et al., 2018). Lupon Tagapamayapa members need to be better trained to effectively manage and resolve disputes (Metillo et al., 2022). They should better be educated to understand their traditional rights and customs (Magni, 2017). The Tagapamayapa should also be trained in mediation and conflict resolution (Avenido & Tabucanon, 2020). The ways to accomplish this, such as through workshops or seminars.

Further, the Lupon Tagapamayapa while resolving conflicts had trouble settling disputes with the locals. The challenges faced by the Lupon Tagapamayapa can be summarized into two main points. The first challenge is the lack of clarity on the mandate of the barangay justice system (Floranza, 2021). The second challenge is the lack of resources to carry out its functions. The system has been criticized because outsiders cannot know who is involved in the decision-making process (Corburn, 2018). This makes it difficult for people to have faith in the system. However, the system is still used by many barangays because the Lupon Tagapamayapa is an asset to the community. After all, it allows people to resolve disputes without resorting to violence. Given the situation above the people of the barangay always think that only the barangay chairperson can resolve a conflict in a barangay, but they did not know that Lupon Tagapamayapa exists.

Following the rules specifically provided in sec. 399 to sec. 422 of Republic Act 7160 also known as The Local Government Code Of 1991, there be no less than ten and not more than twenty members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa, possessing the qualifications and none of the disqualifications in order that he/she becomes a member. The term of the members is coterminous to that of the Punong Barangay, and subject to dismissal when he/she can no longer perform his duties and responsibilities as a member.

The conciliation process includes not merely the settlement by reconciliation between parties; it starts with the mediation stage, where parties are assisted by the Punong Barangay, as the Lupon Chairman, to settle the dispute brought before him in the very first attempt as a mediator. If the mediation effort of the Punong Barangay has failed, the dispute will now be subjected to conciliation before the Pangkat Tagapagkasundo, which includes any three members of the Lupon Tagapamayapa acting as the

conciliation panel thereby chosen by the parties, for further discourse towards arriving at an amicable settlement of their dispute. Disagreements may, however also be settled through arbitration; it is when parties seek the assistance of a third party as an arbitrator where the two conflicting parties agree that whatever the decision of the arbitrator shall be strictly abided by them.

The barangay justice system is created for the possible enforcement of justice to every individual who seeks relief from conflicts without the burden of costly application of cases in courts and securing the services of a lawyer. In the process of conciliation, the law prohibits the participation of lawyers except in cases where he may be one of the parties. Because, even if justice is the primary subject matter of this system, the barangay justice cannot be considered as a court of justice nor a body or a part of the judicial branch of the government. It is formed for the purpose of providing friendly, low-cost, and fast medium for the settlement of disputes by agreement of the parties to abide with some terms and conditions arranged by and with them without resorting to the courts. This system of amicable settlement includes all cases unless otherwise provided in the law. To undergo conciliation proceedings must be deliberate, confidential, and personal; it is interest-based process. Having this procedure is a condition precedent in some cases which means courts will not entertain the suit filed if it yet not been undertaken with the Barangay Conciliation proceeding.

Filipinos are known to be fervent with history and culture. That even in this advance world we still carry these basic principles of ours from the customs we inherited from the past. Thus, customs and traditions are the most prevalent laws in the land. The phrase "barangay conciliation" already existed in the country even before the colonizers came unto the Philippine shores.

While it is not to introduce in the Philippines the practice of amicable settlement, we are amenable that this kind of system had long been used in the history and had always been part of the Filipino tradition (Pe, 1986). Prof. Cecilio Pe affirmed further that the barangay conciliation system has the vision to strengthen family relations, promote speedy trial, and quality enhancement of justice in the Philippines. Thus, a peace-making council was created with the brand: Lupon Tagapamayapa composed of the Barangay Captain as the Lupon Chairperson and not less than ten nor more than twenty members. Though considered as conciliation body, they cannot be reflected as a judicial tribunal or a court of justice because of the primary purpose it was created. It is only for the amicable settlement of disputes. It is that they are given authority to bring parties together, who are natural persons, residing in the same city or municipality.

The Lupon shall not act as a whole body in the conciliation proceeding but only through a pangkat or a panel with three members from the Lupon. In the operation of the Lupon, they may accept donations as funds, and it will be unto their discretion if they will or will not collect fees in relation to the rendering of their service.

Gamboa (1980) had explained that a significant number of disputes are settled by making tacit accommodations required by the customs and traditions. Historians have noted the time-honored customs of bringing disputes to the barangay of tribal chief, or before some respected elder for amicable settlement of differences. Today, that custom of seeking mediation of conflicts, survives not only among the remote rural population but also in the small communities of the urban region. The official comment of the Technical Committee on PD 1508 (1979), states that in contrast of the concept of judicial neutrality and impartiality is not of such importance to the conciliation process. For unlike the judicial process, the hope for outcome of conciliation is not a judgment or decision imposed upon the parties, but a settlement freely agreed upon by them.

As discussed by Pe & Tadiar (1986), it is conciliation, not adjudication. The Lupon is not a judicial tribunal, rather, a conciliation body. The authority is to bring parties together for peaceful and friendly settlement not to render judgment. With the initiation of oral or written complaint, the proceedings for conciliation may be immediately pursued. Complaint must free, personal, and voluntary. With prior notice to the complainant and summon to the respondent or respondents of the date, time, and place for the meeting of the parties, the parties shall meet in thereby specified details for the settlement of their conflict. If minors, or persons under the age of twenty-one, and incompetents, which includes those that has illness, diseases, unable, and people with unsound mind, there being involved in some cases and occasions, they may be assisted by their next of kin who are not lawyers. If the parties agreed to certain terms and conditions and abide with the result of the settlement, then it would be deemed successful; but if there be repudiation due to vitiated consent by fraud, violence, or intimidation, parties may go to the courts for relief instead. Katarungang Pambarangay had been more effective in almost all of the Barangays due to the wider and better knowledge, but there are somehow people who still don't know these processes. Many people still not understand that all cases, as a general rule, are subject to barangay conciliation before going to court.

As provided in section 408 of The Local Government Code of 1991 with the title "Subject Matter for Amicable Settlement; Exception Thereto". That the Lupon Tagapamayapa of every barangay shall bear the authority to conduct assistance to the individuals or parties residing within the same city or municipality for amicable settlement, except in cases: (a) Where one party is the government, or any subdivision or instrumentality thereof; (b) Where one party is a public officer or employee, and the dispute

relates to the performance of his official functions; (c) Offenses punishable by imprisonment exceeding one (1) year or a fine exceeding Five thousand pesos (P5,000.00); (d) Offenses where there is no private offended party; (e) Where the dispute involves real properties located in different cities or municipalities unless the parties thereto agree to submit their differences to amicable settlement by an appropriate lupon; (f) Disputes involving parties who actually reside in barangays of different cities or municipalities, except where such barangay units adjoin each other and the parties thereto agree to submit their differences to amicable settlement by an appropriate lupon; and (g) Such other classes of disputes which the President may determine in the interest of Justice or upon the recommendation of the Secretary of Justice.

In addition to this, juridical persons are not also included because the law states that only natural persons may undergo conciliation. It is also interesting to note the idea that the barangays are the smallest political subdivisions and smallest unit of government in the Philippines. It is small in area but so big that they are actually the nearest to the people making the easiest way to address the problems of the society. He further discussed that administration of justice is the given mandate to the barangays with the essential duty of conciliating both civil and criminal cases with the qualification that penalty on the case thereto is not more than a year or has a fine not exceeding five thousand pesos, before it may be filed before the court.

The creation and composition of Lupon Tagapamayapa is mandatory to every barangay, and it is in the Punong Barangay that carries the burden of choosing the members who may compose the Lupon Tagapamayapa, in doing so, the Punong Barangay may consider the following guides: (a) While following the rules, the Punong Barangay must choose the best and may seek advice, suggestions, and recommendations of the Sangguniang Barangay so that he may establish a good list of potential members; (b) The Lupon is a collective body, the success or failure of the panel is the reflection of Punong Barangay's acts; and (c) In the selection of members, politics must be set aside. If political aspect were the basis of selection, it may ruin the Lupon because the members shall view the disputes brought before them in their personal interest and understanding without consideration to essential purpose of their creation.

In this certain point, every individual, therefore, must be a participant in this advocacy to bring hope for progressive and problem-free community by carrying out the responsibility to make an upright living. That whenever there will be disputes and conflicts, for so long as the barangay justice system can settle them, then barangay conciliation should always be the first choice; besides, it is the only setting where all people can avail justice with all the means and limitations of the Lupon Tagapamayapa. There are some areas where access to court is next to impossible because of some factors, thus, the only way that they may resolve their disputes is to go through barangay conciliation. It is an offer not only for the speedy administration of justice but also for an inexpensive filing and hearing of cases, assuring that all is fair in justice.

The Philippine Barangay Justice System (BJS) is weakened by the lack of strengthening support for the system, the need to review the role of the Punong barangay/barangay captain in view of the fact that he is an elective/political official, surveys and literature also reveal that many residents do not use the system because of the lack of credibility on the Punong Barangay to render judgment or facilitate dispute resolution in an impartial manner. Also, literatures suggest the need to review the composition of the Lupon, members should be elected to raise awareness on its existence while interviews and other literature point to the fact that there is a need to depoliticize the whole system and divert cases away from political figures into more credible members of the community Aquino (2013).

The Lupon Tagapamayapa in the Philippines handles disputes that fall under the Katarungang Pambarangay. This includes cases such as conflicts between neighbors, family disputes, minor offenses, and other community-related issues that do not require formal court intervention. The goal is to mediate and resolve these disputes amicably at the community level, promoting harmony and preventing escalation to the formal judicial system. The Lupon Tagapamayapa plays a crucial role in maintaining peace by facilitating dialogue and agreement between parties.

The lupon of each barangay shall have authority to bring together the parties actually residing in the same city or municipality for amicable settlement of all disputes except: (a) Where one party is the government, or any subdivision or instrumentality thereof; (b) Where one party is a public officer or employee, and the dispute relates to the performance of his official functions; (c) Offenses punishable by imprisonment exceeding one (1) year or a fine exceeding Five thousand pesos (P5,000.00); (d) Offenses where there is no private offended party; (e) Where the dispute involves real properties located in different cities or municipalities unless the parties thereto agree to submit their differences to amicable settlement by an appropriate lupon; (f) Disputes involving parties who actually reside in barangays of different cities or municipalities, except where such barangay units adjoin each other and the parties thereto agree to submit their differences to amicable settlement by an appropriate lupon; and (g) Such other classes of disputes which the President may determine in the interest of justice or upon the recommendation of the Secretary of Justice. The court in which non-criminal cases not falling within the authority of the lupon under this Code are filed may, at any time before trial, motu proprio refer the case to the lupon concerned for amicable settlement (Republic Act No. 7160, 1991).

Although the law provides the legal procedure that guide the mediators on the steps in the settlement of dispute, Lupon members most of the time, should do their functions by discretion, use art and skills to successfully mediate so that both parties must settle and agree for actions that satisfies their demands. This implies that any situation or circumstances that arise not covered by the provisions of the law will be taken into action by discretion. There are studies conducted on the performance of the Lupon members in the settlement of dispute, problems encountered in dispute settlement and factors affecting successful mediation however most of these studies are quantitative in nature while only few was conducted in a qualitative design.

It is therefore the duty of the Lupon to ensure that all disagreements brought before them shall be conciliated through suitable mediation or arbitration. Hence, this study sought to explore the opportunities and challenges face by the Lupon Tagapamayapa in the administration of their duties as conciliators in the conflicts of their fellow community-members.

3. Methodology

The researcher conducted qualitative research that explored the participants' life experiences. Qualitative research is a sort of naturalistic inquiry that seeks to understand specific occurrences in their natural setting. The researcher employed transcendental phenomenology, which was predicated on ideas described by Husserl (1931) and developed into a qualitative technique by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' (1994) transcendental or psychological phenomenology emphasizes portraying participants' experiences rather than the researcher's conclusions.

Furthermore, Husserl's concept of bracketing is addressed. The investigator fully set aside his knowledge to acquire a new perspective on the phenomena under investigation based on the description of the participant's lived experience presented in the research project. The term transcendental refers to a state in which everything is perceived freshly, as if for the first time. While this state is seldom perfect, the researcher must be aware of the need for bracketing and focus as much as possible on the participant's account.

Moustakas (1994), includes in the research process, identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who have experienced the phenomenon. The researcher then analyzed the data to identify significant statements or quotes and combined the statements into themes. Then, the researcher provided a list of various experiences of the persons (what participants experienced), a structural description of their experiences (how they experienced it in terms of the conditions, situations, or context), and a description that explains the overall essence of the experience. I understood that phenomenology research is the best technique for this study since it investigates the work world of Lupon Tagapamayapa members through their lived experiences.

The researcher of this study sent a request letter to the barangay captains of the ten (10) most populated barangays in Bacolod City and waited for their approval. The letter included a brief introduction about the researcher, the study's title, and purpose, as well as details about the participants, research design, and significance. It requested permission to conduct individual in-depth interviews with ten (10) Lupon Tagapamayapa Chiefs and ensured the confidentiality of the gathered data. The letter also included the interview guide and informed consent form. Following approval, the researcher waited for approval from the ethics committee.

Once the ethics committee approved the conduct of the interview, the researcher asked for a schedule of the individual in-depth interviews. Once the schedule was finalized, the researcher conducted a courtesy call to the barangay captains. Subsequently, the researcher met the participants in a place where they would feel safe and comfortable. Then, the researcher discussed and explained to each participant the objective of the study, the procedure in which the interview will run through, the privacy of the proceedings, and the identity and rights of the participants. When the participants agreed to be interviewed, the researcher requested each participant to affix their signature on the informed consent form. The signed informed consent served as proof that the participants agreed to be interviewed.

The data collection method that was utilized in this research is the individual in-depth interview. This process has involved the generation of an exact amount of data. The researcher ensured that it would keep a good record of what is said and done during the individual in-depth interviews. The researcher used an audio recorder, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim before the data are analyzed.

The researcher used Colaizzi's (1978) method in analyzing the data. Initially, each transcript undergoes careful reading and re-reading to ensure a thorough comprehension of its contents. Subsequently, pertinent statements about the investigated phenomenon were extracted from each transcript, noted separately with their corresponding page and line references. Following this, meanings were formulated based on these significant statements, and each meaning was categorized to provide a comprehensive description. These formulated meanings were then grouped into categories, clusters of themes, and emergent

themes. The study's conclusions synthesized the findings into a comprehensive representation of the phenomenon. The fundamental structure of the phenomenon was delineated, and the findings were condensed to remove redundant, misinterpreted, or overly detailed descriptions. Lastly, the validity of the findings was affirmed through feedback from the research participants, ensuring that the descriptive results aligned with their lived experiences.

The participants of this study were ten (10) Chiefs of Lupong Tagapamayapa of the ten (10) most populated barangays in Bacolod City who expressed their willingness, commitment, and interest in partaking in this study. Thus, the researcher carefully and circumspectly chose ten (10) participants who disclosed their positive and negative experiences in resolving barangay conflicts, how they addressed the challenges faced in resolving barangay conflicts, and the aspirations of the participants to improve the quality of the performance of their duties.

The participants of the study were qualified and identified based on their years of experience as head of the Lupong Tagapamayapa which is at least one (1) year in service and have resolved at least (10) conflicts and disputes to generate lots of information based on the years they have in practice. Under this qualitative research, the ten (10) participants were subjected to an individual in-depth interview.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1 Lived Experiences of the Participants in Resolving Barangay Conflicts

4.1.1 Positive Experiences

4.1.1.1 Fulfillment through Dispute Resolution.

The participants find immense fulfillment and joy in their roles including the emotional rewards of resolving disputes and restoring community harmony, which they value more than monetary rewards. They express satisfaction and contentment from helping their constituents and maintaining a peaceful environment in the barangay. Despite the challenges, they take pride in their ability to mediate conflicts and foster harmonious relationships within the community.

(It's truly rewarding, not just in terms of money. Every time a dispute is settled, we feel fulfilled knowing we've done our part. It's also a joy for us to see the people in our community solving their problems and restoring harmony and peace). (Participant 1)

(Of course, we are happy. It is fulfilling for us whenever we successfully resolve conflicts in our barangay). (Participant 2)

(You know, being the Chief Executive of this barangay, the most fulfilling moment is to resolve problems. There can be no beautiful barangay if there is conflict. Resolving disputes, especially when they involve relatives from both parties, is the most fulfilling moment for me). (Participant 3)

(Some of the positive experiences I've had while performing my duties as part of the Lupong Tagapamayapa include the fulfillment of helping to maintain peace in a community where everyone lives harmoniously. When conflicts arise, it's our responsibility to mediate and assist in resolving differences in the best way possible). (Participant 5)

(I feel happy and contented with my desire, of course, to help our constituents here in Barangay Mansilingan. I feel happy as if my heart is enlightened). (Participant 6)

(As mentioned, I am happy to be able to assist them and help repair their relationship so that neither the plaintiff nor the defendant harbors animosity towards each other). (Participant 9)

This emergent theme explains how participants find immense fulfillment and joy in their roles, valuing the emotional rewards of resolving disputes and restoring community harmony over monetary gains. They express satisfaction and contentment from helping their constituents and maintaining a peaceful environment in the barangay. Despite the challenges, they take pride in their ability to mediate conflicts and foster harmonious relationships within the community. Their experiences showcase the intrinsic rewards of their work, demonstrating a deep commitment to their roles and a sense of accomplishment from contributing to communal peace and stability.

The support theory of the study which is the Restorative Justice theory by Zehr & Umbreit (1996) explains the fulfillment experienced by the Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs through its emphasis on repairing harm and restoring relationships. This theory advocates for a justice system that focuses on healing and reconciliation rather than punishment. The Lupon Chiefs' sense of fulfillment aligns with the restorative justice principles, where satisfaction comes from seeing the community resolve conflicts, rebuild relationships, and maintain peace. This approach fosters a sense of community and mutual respect and provides emotional rewards that surpass monetary compensation.

A study by Braithwaite (2002) on restorative justice practices supports the experiences of the informants. It explains how restorative justice can lead to high levels of satisfaction among those involved in the process. Braithwaite (2002) found that individuals who participate in restorative justice practices often report feelings of fulfillment and contentment, as these practices emphasize healing and community building. This relates to the informants' descriptions of their emotional rewards and the joy they derive from successfully mediating conflicts and restoring harmony within their communities.

4.1.1.2 Mediator's Commitment to Peacekeeping.

Participants of the study expressed their commitment to maintaining peace and order in the barangay through successful dispute resolution. They are committed to serving both parties impartially and aim to settle disputes amicably to prevent escalation and alleviate the burden on higher courts. Their dedication to continuous improvement and respect during mediation is central to their role in maintaining community order and peace.

(As I said a while ago, we must maintain peace and order in our barangay through successful conflict resolution which will lead to a harmonious environment and positive relationships among our people). (Participant 2)

(I am committed to attain peace. Committed to serving and assisting both the complainant and the respondent in resolving conflicts positively and finding mutually acceptable solutions). (Participant 3)

(The good things? Of course, when I first applied here, I did not hold the position of Chairman; I started as a member, particularly a secretary. However, due to my experience, I was eventually promoted to Chairman. I have held this position for many years. One of the most rewarding aspects of this role is the opportunity to peacefully resolve conflicts among the residents of Mansilingan, if possible. Because of this desire, I believe that these matters have been resolved by God's grace. We used to motivate and encourage the residents to settle their differences, as escalating the issue to higher authorities would cost them time, money, and effort. We aim to reach a peaceful resolution whenever possible, and the residents have been receptive to this approach). (Participant 6)

(One of the positive experiences I have had as a member of the peacekeeping council is the opportunity to resolve conflicts without biases and to mediate using my wisdom. Being part of the mediation process and receiving respect from the members involved in conflict resolution is very meaningful to me). (Participant 7)

(Of course, we are committed to our job, which includes resolving conflicts as part of our role as a member of the "lupong tagapamayapa" in our barangay. This is essential for maintaining peace and order in our community. Not only is it important for the overall peace in the barangay, but it also contributes to our peace of mind). (Participant 8)

(I believe that one of my main goals as a member of the lupon, not only in Tangub but in different barangays as well, is to resolve cases in a peaceful manner. Some people are quick to escalate a case because they have a lawyer or money to spend, but I find it satisfying to reach a settlement without escalating the situation. By doing so, we can help alleviate the workload of higher offices, as they have many other cases to deal with. As part of the lupon, our aim is to address and resolve problems before they escalate, and we strive to encourage both parties to avoid escalating the issue if possible). (Participant 9)

The participants expressed a strong commitment to maintaining peace and order in their barangays through effective mediation and dispute resolution. They aim to serve impartially, helping both parties to reach amicable solutions and prevent conflicts from escalating to higher courts. Their dedication to continuous improvement, mutual respect during mediation, and a desire to restore harmony in the community are central to their roles.

Procedural Justice theory by Bennett et al. (2018), which is a support theory of the study, explains this theme well. This theory emphasizes the importance of fair and transparent processes in dispute resolution. Mediators' commitment to impartiality and fairness ensures that both parties feel heard and respected, which is crucial for maintaining peace and community trust. This alignment with fair procedures enhances the effectiveness of their peacekeeping efforts (Bennett et al., 2018).

A study by Tyler (2006) on the impact of procedural justice in community dispute resolution found that when mediators engage in fair practices, including giving all parties a voice and treating them with respect, it leads to higher satisfaction with the resolution process and increased compliance with mediated agreements. This supports the informants' emphasis on fair and respectful mediation to maintain peace and order in their barangays (Tyler, 2006).

4.1.2 Negative Experiences

4.1.2.1 Barriers to Mediation.

The Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs express frustration and discouragement when complainants back out or become uncooperative, which hinders effective conflict resolution. Non-appearance from both parties further complicates the mediation process, making it difficult to achieve settlements. Despite their efforts, the chiefs often feel ineffective when faced with these barriers, but they continue to stress the importance of full participation to avoid clogging the system with unresolved cases.

(Most of the problems we encounter is people refusing to attend scheduled hearings. We have sent multiple summons to the individuals to come to the barangay for a hearing, but some are stubbornly refusing. Despite our efforts to convince them to attend, they continue to refuse. This poses a significant challenge because we do not have the authority to force them to attend. In cases of stubborn refusal, our only option is to issue a certificate to the complainant, who can then bring the matter to court and request a summons. If the person still refuses to comply, the court may issue a warrant of arrest, which is something we do not have the power to do). (Participant 1)

(There are some cases that discourages us to continue and exert effort to resolve conflicts in our barangay. Often, a complainant files a complaint but then becomes uninterested in continuing the process, eventually backing out of the filed cases. This is a waste of our time, effort, and resources. As I mentioned earlier, frustration in the mediation process can arise from uncooperative parties resisting during mediation meetings, making it difficult to settle conflicts. Additionally, sudden withdrawal by the complainant in filed cases can leave us feeling ineffective in our job. One of the barriers that hinder us from performing our best as a Lupon is when the respondent and complainant do not appear during the mediation process. If one party does not participate, it can hinder the chance of reaching a settlement and resolving the dispute). (Participant 2)

(The most frustrating part is when I assure to resolve the problem, yet both parties are not cooperating. Despite everything I do to resolve disputes, I could say that I am not a very effective Chief Executive. When both parties are uncooperative, that is the most frustrating part of my job). (Participant 3)

(The respondent did not appear, and both parties were uncooperative and prideful). (Participant 4)

(One of the challenges we are facing as part of the lupon, especially during the process, is when the recipient and the respondent or complainant don't appear. This causes problems during the mediation or conciliation process). (Participant 5)

(Well, if one party waives his complaint, there's nothing to settle here. See? That thing is just a waste of time. Although it's a waste of time for them and for us, still, it helps in the clogging of cases on the porch. That's why we sometimes make it clear that if they come over, they have to give their best to settle the differences). (Participant 10)

The Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs face significant challenges when complainants and respondents refuse to participate in the mediation process, leading to frustration and a sense of ineffectiveness. The Lupon Chiefs express discouragement as non-appearance from either party complicates the resolution process and often results in unresolved cases that clog the system. Despite their efforts to engage all parties and ensure participation, the lack of authority to enforce attendance hinders their ability to achieve timely conflict resolution.

This emergent theme connects with the anchored theory of the study which is the Decision theory, as described by Hansson (2005). The theory focuses on the principles and processes involved in making choices under conditions of uncertainty. This theory can help explain the barriers faced by the Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs, as the non-participation of parties might stem from their uncertainty about the outcomes or perceived benefits of the mediation process. When parties are unsure or skeptical about the process, they may decide not to engage and create significant barriers to timely conflict resolution (Hansson, 2005).

A study by Kahneman & Tversky (1979) on Prospect theory, a subset of Decision theory, illustrates how people make decisions based on potential gains or losses rather than the outcome. Their research indicates that individuals tend to avoid risks when a positive outcome is perceived and take risks to avoid negative outcomes. Applying this to the context of mediation, parties might avoid participation because they perceive the risks (e.g., unfavorable outcomes, wasted time) to outweigh the benefits, thereby complicating the efforts of the Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs to resolve conflicts effectively (Kahneman & Tversky, 1979).

4.1.2.2 Behavioral Issues of Antagonizing Parties.

The Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs face significant challenges in resolving disputes due to the arrogance, conceit, lack of empathy, and closed-mindedness of some individuals, which often hinder fair and timely resolutions. These problematic behaviors are particularly frustrating when individuals in positions of power exploit less fortunate neighbors and refuse to consider others'

interests. Despite their efforts to encourage empathy and cooperation, the Chiefs often find it difficult to reach amicable settlements, leading to a sense of discouragement and the need for self-motivation.

(Some people are very conceited and proud, which makes it difficult to connect with their emotions. I've noticed that some individuals take advantage of their less fortunate neighbors, especially if they hold a position of power or influence. It's challenging for them to admit when they're wrong, and they often resort to ridiculing others. It's disheartening to see such arrogance. Even when we try to explain things to them, they can be very closed-minded, focusing only on their own interests. We always try to encourage them to consider the interests of others, but it's often tough to reach a fair agreement because some people are solely interested in serving their own needs. This can be quite disappointing at times. As I mentioned earlier, this is one of our frustrations. There are people who are stubborn and seem to lack empathy for others. As local members, we often make suggestions to resolve issues, but some individuals are very closed-minded, making it difficult to make progress. At times, it feels like we are trying to solve problems that are not our own. Despite this, we continue to motivate ourselves as it's just a part of life. It's impossible to please everyone).
(Participant 1)

(The frustrations and the shortcomings are coming from the unsettled cases, and both the complainant and respondents are being arrogant). (Participant 6)

The Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs face significant challenges in resolving disputes due to the arrogance, conceit, lack of empathy, and closed-mindedness of some individuals, which often hinder fair and timely resolutions. These problematic behaviors are particularly frustrating when individuals in positions of power exploit less fortunate neighbors and refuse to consider others' interests. Despite their efforts to encourage empathy and cooperation, the Lupon Chiefs often find it difficult to reach amicable settlements, leading to a sense of discouragement and the need for self-motivation.

The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) by Ajzen (1991) explains how individuals' attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control influence their intentions and behaviors. In the context of the Lupong Tagapamayapa, the arrogance, conceit, and lack of empathy observed in antagonizing parties can be understood through the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB). These behaviors reflect the individuals' attitudes and perceived norms, shaped by their social environment and personal beliefs. The difficulty in changing these behaviors highlights the challenge of influencing the perceived control and norms of these individuals which affects the conflict resolution process.

A study by De Dreu et al. (2001) explored the impact of interpersonal conflict on group processes and performance. The research found that behavioral issues such as arrogance and lack of empathy significantly disrupt conflict resolution and group cohesion. It emphasized the importance of addressing these behavioral problems to improve cooperation and effective conflict management. This connects with the experiences of the Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs, who face similar challenges in mediating disputes due to the detrimental behaviors of conflicting parties.

4.2 Addressing the Challenges Encountered by the Informants in Resolving Barangay Conflicts

4.2.1 Establish Rapport between Disputing Parties.

Good communication is essential in resolving conflicts because ensures both parties understand the purpose of their meeting and the decisions made. Maintaining neutrality and addressing each party individually, heated arguments can be diffused and will lead to reconciliation. Mediation involves listening without judgment, providing ample time, and using necessary interventions to avoid escalating cases to court.

(Usually, all the parties involved are unfriendly when they enter the room; it's clear that they are at odds with each other. However, it's comforting to imagine that after the hearing, they leave the room embracing each other, having reached a reconciliation. Sometimes, this is our strategy. In the case of a very heated argument, we try to ascertain who is right and who is in the wrong. However, we don't explicitly point this out. We don't state "You're wrong and she's right" because we aim to remain neutral. If an individual insists on something they believe is incorrect, we call for a recess. We ask the other party to step out for a while because we prefer to speak to each party separately. This approach allows us to confront someone directly without the other party being present. This is one of our strategies. We attempt to explain to them that pursuing their preferred course of action may not be beneficial for both parties. I always elucidate the advantages and disadvantages of the decision they want and offer some alternative ideas. I highlight that adopting a particular decision should be advantageous for both of them. This is always our strategy).
(Participant 1)

(Every problem can be resolved with good communication. I make sure both parties understand the purpose of their meeting at my office, which is to settle their conflict. I speak to each person individually to prevent further aggression and help them understand that the decisions made by the Lupon are for the good of both parties). (Participant 2)

(During mediation, we simply listen to both sides. It's important to tell them that the Lupong Tagapamayapa cannot judge who is right or wrong; its role is only to mediate. The reason we have a Lupong Tagapayapa is to avoid escalating the case to court, which would be a waste of time and money. We give them ample time - if the first hearing is not successful, we schedule a second one. Then, our intervention involves hiring a surveyor or engineers if necessary. Additionally, our barangay tanods visit and conduct inspections to provide us with guidance). (Participant 8)

Effective communication and rapport-building between conflicting parties are crucial in resolving disputes within the Barangay context. This involves ensuring that both parties understand the purpose of their mediation sessions and fostering an environment where they feel heard and respected. Mediators strive to maintain neutrality and address each party's concerns individually to diffuse tensions and promote reconciliation.

The Communication Accommodation theory by Giles et al. (1991) provides insights into how individuals adjust their communication styles to align with those of others which enhances interpersonal communication and rapport. Communication Accommodation theory posits that mediators can facilitate understanding and trust by adapting their communication to match the cultural, emotional, and psychological needs of disputing parties. Demonstrating empathy, active listening, and respect for cultural differences can effectively establish rapport and create a conducive environment for conflict resolution.

Research by Tracy and Robins (2007) explored the role of empathy and communication in conflict resolution processes. Their study found that empathetic communication, characterized by understanding and validating the emotions and perspectives of conflicting parties, significantly contributes to resolving disputes amicably. The findings show the importance of mediators adopting empathetic communication strategies to build rapport and trust, which are essential for achieving positive outcomes in conflict mediation sessions.

4.2.2 Dynamic Management of Disputes.

The informants address barangay problems through weekly meetings where members share ideas and discuss solutions. In difficult cases, they explain the process to the parties, calm them down, and ensure everyone has a chance to speak to control the situation. If a resolution isn't reached in the first hearing, they reschedule and allow a "cooling period" for reflection and further consultation among themselves.

(There are problems we encounter where we are divided into different groups called pangkat. We discuss and address problems within and between groups during weekly meetings. Every week, all the lupon members gather to talk about the issues encountered by different groups. This is a time for sharing ideas and discussing solutions. For example, the person who leads the Monday session might encounter a problem that they need help with, and during our Wednesday meetings, we gather as a group to discuss these problems and ask for suggestions. This way, we can share our ideas and support each other. In our case, if we are unable to resolve a case in one hearing, we will reschedule it. Sometimes it takes three to four hearings to reach a resolution. Our strategy is to allow a "cooling period" if the first hearing does not result in a settlement. We encourage the parties involved to think about the proceedings and the suggestions made so that when they return for the next hearing, they are in a less confrontational state of mind. If we still cannot reach a resolution in the second hearing, we reschedule for another time. Additionally, we take time to consult with each other before the hearing to determine the steps to be taken). (Participant 1)

(The first thing we do, especially if the cases are difficult and people are hard to handle, is to explain to them the reason why they are here in the barangay and part of the Lupon process. After explaining, we need to calm them down. Then, we give each person an opportunity to speak while the others listen so that we can control the situation. As I've said, the first thing is to explain to them the reason why they are here in the barangay and why they are facing the lupong tagapamayapa. Our goal is to assist them in resolving their conflict, so it's crucial to encourage them to pray and support each other in learning to listen and control their emotions. This will ensure that the cases are handled smoothly). (Participant 5)

The emergent theme involves structured approaches to handling disputes within the barangay. Informants emphasized the use of weekly meetings where all members gather to discuss and share ideas on resolving various conflicts. This practice allows for collective brainstorming and support among members from different groups (pangkat), fostering a collaborative environment for problem-solving. Additionally, when faced with difficult cases that cannot be resolved immediately, the informants described a strategic approach of rescheduling hearings to allow for a "cooling period." During this time, parties are encouraged to reflect on the proceedings and suggestions made, aiming to reduce tensions and promote a more constructive dialogue in subsequent hearings.

The emergent theme can be elucidated through Conflict Resolution theory, particularly the Integrative or Collaborative Approach by Fisher, Ury, & Patton (1991). This theory emphasizes the importance of seeking mutually beneficial solutions to conflicts

through open communication, cooperative problem-solving, and understanding the underlying interests of all parties involved. Lupon Chiefs described a structured process of resolving disputes, which involves group discussions to address issues openly and collaboratively. This approach not only promotes unity within their team but also enhances their ability to manage conflicts effectively in community interactions. The informants can utilize the principles of Conflict Resolution theory to improve their conflict management skills and overall team effectiveness.

A study by Folger & Poole (1984) explored the effectiveness of procedural strategies in managing conflicts, the role of structured communication and process management in conflict resolution. Their findings support the notion that systematic approaches, like those described by the informants, contribute to more successful outcomes in resolving disputes. Providing opportunities for parties to share perspectives, calm tensions, and engage in reflective practices, these procedural strategies align with Conflict Management Theory's principles.

4.3 Aspirations of the Participants to Improve the Quality of the Performance of their Duties

4.3.1 Continuous Training on Dispute Resolution.

The participants stressed the need for ongoing training to improve their skills in resolving conflicts within their communities effectively. They also expressed the importance of team building and proactive approaches to strengthen their group and handle disputes more efficiently.

(I believe that trainings and seminars are very important for us. We continuously update ourselves on our development within the lupon. Recently, we conducted a team-building seminar. Most of our local members are young, and only a few of us are older members. We felt it was necessary for us, the older members, to update and orient our new members about the rules concerning lupon. So, we just had the team-building seminar, which was facilitated by the older lupon members because we want to build a cohesive group that works as a team. It's our practice in the barangay to always share common ideas, especially when we don't have hearings. Every day, we come here even with or without hearings. When we have free time, that's when we discuss important things that need to be addressed). (Participant 1)

(In order to improve our performance as Lupon Tagapamayapa, there should be regular training sessions for all members. These training sessions will focus on improving our mediation skills, conflict resolution techniques, legal knowledge, and communication skills. We should also facilitate group discussions between different barangays to share information and best practices for resolving conflicts effectively. For me to grow professionally as a Lupon Tagapamayapa, there should be regular training and seminars for us to stay updated on current and effective practices and to acquire more skills in conflict mediation and resolution). (Participant 2)

(Suggestion? As I mentioned, by attending seminars and training. Thus, we will be improving our skills in conducting Lupon Tagapamayapa. Before the case is given to the Lupon, we have the mediation. If the mediation cannot solve the dispute, it goes to the Lupon Tagapamayapa). (Participant 6)

(When we talk about aspirations, we are envisioning a barangay with a justice system that upholds the values of Makatao, Maka-Diyos, honesty, and integrity. I have three aspirations. First, I want to ensure that our members receive more training and develop the necessary skills to effectively settle cases, especially as new scenarios arise. Second, I aspire to have the opportunity to solve cases at the grassroots level by allowing our purok officials to intervene and pre-mediate filed cases. Thirdly, I aspire to strengthen and empower our purok officials, while also making our barangay justice system accessible and safe for all, regardless of gender, class, or status. Thank you). (Participant 7)

This emergent theme is crucial for the informants to keep learning and improving their conflict resolution skills in their communities. They emphasized that ongoing training helps them handle disputes better. They also expressed the importance of team-building activities and taking proactive steps to strengthen their group. This approach helps them work together more effectively when resolving conflicts.

Another theory that can help explain the theme is the Goal Setting theory by Locke & Latham (1990). According to this theory, setting specific and challenging goals leads to higher performance compared to vague or easy goals. Lupon Chiefs are driven by the desire to improve their skills and abilities, and goal setting provides them with a structured approach to achieving their objectives. Through setting specific goals related to skill enhancement, such as improving marksmanship accuracy or mastering new tactical techniques, informants channel their motivation and efforts toward continuous improvement.

Thompson (2020) investigated the motivations driving law enforcement tactical operators, to pursue skill development. Through qualitative interviews with tactical operators, he found that a central motivation for skill development was the desire for mastery

and proficiency in their roles. Participants expressed a strong craving for continuous improvement, seeking to refine their existing skills and acquire new ones to enhance their effectiveness in high-pressure situations.

4.3.2 Desire for Improved Mediation Skills.

The participants emphasized the importance of enhancing mediation skills and techniques beyond procedural knowledge. They stressed the critical role of communication, conflict resolution techniques, and legal knowledge in effectively mediating disputes within their communities. As Lupong Chiefs, the necessity of continuous learning and innovation to serve their constituents better and address evolving challenges are paramount.

(The focus should be on the art of mediation. The members of the lupong are already familiar with the protocols of what needs to be done. However, what we really need is more guidance on the art of mediation. We should include some techniques on how to mediate, as that is what we need the most). (Participant 1)

(I would like to enhance my communication skills, conflict resolution techniques, and legal knowledge, which are essential in the field of conflict mediation and resolution). (Participant 2)

(Being the Chief Executive, you have to study and learn regularly. You have to make something new and make it relevant to your duty as a public servant. You should be hungry to learn because, at the end of the day, you'll realize that you'd be able to apply your expertise in helping your constituents). (Participant 3)

(As a member of the lupong tagapamayapa, I aspire to always give my best in settling differences and promoting peace and harmony within our barangay. I believe we can improve by seeking guidance and wisdom from other experienced individuals, government agencies, or organizations. This will help us enhance our skills and perform at our best). (Participant 5)

In this emergent theme, the informants are very eager to get better at resolving conflicts. They want to go beyond just knowing the basic rules. They see how important it is to communicate well, use effective ways to solve problems and understand the law better when helping their community settle disputes. As leaders of the Lupong, they know they must keep learning and find new ways to help people. This helps them serve their community better, especially as problems change and become more complex over time.

Social Learning theory by Albert Bandura (1977) explains how people learn through observation, imitation, and modeling. The theory proposes that individuals actively seek out and acquire new skills and behaviors by observing others and the outcomes of their actions. In relation to Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs, their emphasis on continuous learning and skill enhancement reflects Bandura's theory. They recognize the importance of observing effective mediation techniques from others, learning through practice and experience, and applying these skills to effectively resolve disputes in their communities.

Studies by Stulberg and Love (2016) further support the informants' aspirations by demonstrating that ongoing education and skill enhancement are vital for mediators to navigate complex conflicts and achieve lasting resolutions. This research underscores the importance of continually updating mediation techniques and adapting to changing community dynamics. Seeking guidance from experienced practitioners and relevant organizations, the Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs show their aim to improve their mediation skills and effectively promote peace and harmony within their barangays.

5. Conclusion

The study explored crucial work of the Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs in managing conflicts within Bacolod City's most populated barangays. Talking directly to the chiefs involved, the research revealed both the ups and downs they face like the satisfaction of helping people resolve disputes and the frustration of dealing with delays and difficult parties. These insights point to the need for better training and stronger community ties to help these officials do their jobs more effectively.

Improving the Katarungang Pambarangay system isn't just about the officials themselves. It's about ensuring they have the right tools and support to handle conflicts well. Regular training sessions, sharing best practices, and involving the community more deeply in the process can make a big difference. Focusing on these areas can help create a system that not only resolves disputes more smoothly but also builds a stronger sense of peace and unity in the community.

In the end, this study reminds us that conflict resolution at the local level is a team effort. Everyone from barangay officials to community members plays a role in making it work. If we can implement the recommendations from this study, like boosting training, improving support for victims, and encouraging restorative justice we'll be on the right path to a more peaceful and connected community.

6. Study Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is that it was conducted solely within selected barangays in Bacolod City, rather than across all barangays in the area. This geographic limitation means that the findings may not fully represent the experiences or challenges faced by Lupong Tagapamayapa officials in other barangays, especially those with different demographics or conflict dynamics. As a result, the insights and recommendations derived from this study may have limited applicability outside the selected barangays.

Another limitation is that the study focused exclusively on the local perspective within Bacolod City and did not extend its scope to a national level. This local focus restricts the study's ability to capture broader trends or variations in conflict resolution practices across different regions of the Philippines. Consequently, the findings might not reflect the diverse challenges and experiences of Lupong Tagapamayapa officials working in other parts of the country, where cultural, social, and legal factors could significantly differ.

Future studies should explore the long-term impact of continuous training and professional development on the effectiveness of Lupong Tagapamayapa members. Examining the relationship between ongoing education and improved mediation outcomes can help researchers identify specific training modules that significantly enhance dispute resolution skills. This can lead to the development of tailored training programs that address the unique needs of local mediators.

Research should also focus on the role of community engagement in the success of barangay conflict resolution mechanisms. Understanding how community participation influences the mediation process can provide insights into creating a more collaborative environment. Studies could examine different strategies for increasing community involvement, such as public awareness campaigns, community workshops, and the integration of local customs and traditions into the mediation process.

Another important area for future research is the evaluation of the psychological and social effects of mediation on both victims and offenders. Investigating how effective conflict resolution impacts the well-being of involved parties can explain the benefits of restorative justice practices. This research can inform policies aimed at supporting the mental health of community members and making sure that the mediation process promotes healing and reconciliation.

In addition, qualitative research about the work world of Lupong Tagapamayapa Chiefs in a national setting can provide a broader understanding of the experiences of the informants, which in return, can help in crafting a national policy to address their concerns.

Finally, a comparative analysis of conflict resolution practices across different regions and cultures within the Philippines can provide a broader understanding of effective mediation strategies. Identifying best practices and successful models from various contexts can be a guide for future studies to contribute to the standardization and improvement of the Lupong Tagapamayapa system nationwide. This comprehensive approach can help policymakers and community leaders develop more effective and culturally sensitive conflict resolution frameworks.

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