
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Mediating Disputes in the Barangays: The Work World of Lupon Chiefs

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ABSTRACT

Conflicts are resolved when destructive behavior is reduced, and hostile attitudes are reduced. Accordingly, dispute management can be directed towards dispute resolution. Disputes among communities are necessarily part of human conditions. The court's role was to settle disputes concerning the two opposing parties' rights and interests, suitability, and judgment. However, in most countries worldwide, the court system has become overpopulated in the twentieth century, especially in civil litigation or civil law issues. This correctional system occurs within a setting known as the barangay justice system. It reflects a formal recognition of historical dispute resolution and socialization practices. In the Philippines, minor disputes and criminal offenses are required to be "amicably settled" by the barangay leader or captain without the presence of lawyers (Metillo et al., 2022). This study explored the experiences of the Chiefs of Lupon Tagapamayapa in barangay justice administration in the coastal areas of Northern Iloilo, Philippines, through a qualitative research method. The informants of this study were the selected ten (10) chiefs of the Lupon Tagapamayapa. All participants were subjected to an individual in-depth interview. The findings of this study are described in emergent themes. Six (6) emergent themes described the positive and negative experiences of the participants in barangay justice administration. For the positive experiences, three (3) emergent themes were developed, namely *Personal Satisfaction from Resolving Conflicts*, *Influence on Community Peace*, and *Resolution and Avoidance of Legal Proceedings*. For the negative experiences, three (3) emergent themes were also developed, to wit: *Frustration with Unresolved Conflicts*, *Legal Impediments and Personal Limitations*, and *Non-compliance and Lack of Cooperation*. Meanwhile, three (3) emergent themes were formulated to explain how the participants address the challenges encountered by the informants in the administration of the barangay justice, namely: *Further Assessment and Understanding of Issues*, *Seeking Legal Guidance with the Higher Authorities*, and *Psychological Strategies and Personal Involvement*. Finally, three (3) emergent themes were created to express the aspirations of the participants to enhance the quality of services they provided in the barangay justice system, to wit: *Continuous Learning and Personal Development*, *Embodying Integrity and Leading by Example*, and *Provision of Compensation and Incentives*. Based on the emergent themes identified, it is recommended that the Katarungang Pambarangay system be rendered more effective, equitable, and efficient by implementing the requisite training and development programs for its chiefs and members.

KEYWORDS

Katarungang Pambarangay, Lupon Tagapamayapa, Barangay Captains, Phenomenology, Northern Iloilo, Philippines.

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1. Introduction

Conflicts are resolved when destructive behavior is reduced, and hostile attitudes are reduced. Accordingly, dispute management can be directed towards dispute resolution. Disputes among communities are necessarily part of human conditions. The court's role was to settle disputes concerning the two opposing parties' rights and interests, suitability, and judgment. However, in most countries worldwide, the court system has become overpopulated in the twentieth century, especially in civil litigation or civil law issues. This correctional system occurs within a setting known as the barangay justice system. It reflects a formal recognition of

historical dispute resolution and socialization practices. In the Philippines, minor disputes and criminal offenses are required to be "amicably settled" by the barangay leader or captain without the presence of lawyers (Metillo et al., 2022).

The katarungang pambarangay system benefits the parties by allowing them to come to their own accord to resolve their dispute in Barangay without having to go to court. The expanded judicial body in Punong Barangay mainly promotes the speedy resolution of cases; however, this power is also extended to members of Lupon Tagapamayapa to adhere to more informed decisions. This system can improve the quality of domestic justice; it would reduce the number of indiscriminate filings of cases before the courts and reduce the number of cases filed by the courts (Metillo et al., 2022).

Recognizing the backlog of cases in the legal system, in 1978, the Philippine government decided to decentralize the judicial process by creating a body on the barangay level to resolve conflicts that would otherwise be brought to the regular court. Presidential Decree No. 1508, also called the Katarungang Pambarangay Law (Barangay Justice Law), acknowledges traditional modes of resolving disputes within communities and seeks to incorporate these within what, in effect, is a new legal system. The law mandates that in every barangay, a Lupon Tagapayapa, or peacekeeping force, be created to settle disputes through mediation and conciliation. The body will be composed of at least ten but not more than 20 members, with the barangay captain at its helm. He will choose the members. Cases that are brought before the Lupon can be settled by him through simple mediation; failing this, he must convoke a conciliation team, the Pangkat Tagapagkasundo. This conciliation team will consist of five members: the barangay captain, the barangay secretary, and three members of the Lupon, to be chosen by both disputing parties.

Republic Act 7160, or the Local Government Code of 1991, expanded the scope and powers of the Katarungang Pambarangay or the Barangay Justice System designed not merely to decongest the courts of cases but to address inequalities in access to justice, particularly experienced by marginalized communities. The barangays, being the basic political unit in the country, are in the most strategic position to facilitate the resolution or mediation of community and family disputes alongside its mandate to deliver basic services (Vigo & Manuel, 2004).

The Philippine Barangay Justice System (BJS) is a unique institution that operates at the grassroots level, serving as the first line of defense in resolving disputes and promoting peace and order within local communities. In Philippine tradition, disputes are amicably settled before elders who gained experience in handling cases. They belong to prominent or influential families recognized and respected by the community, and they administer justice based on their experience (Rojo, 2002).

The Katarungang Pambarangay (Barangay Justice System) is a mechanism of rural peace-building tool in a community. Katarungang Pambarangay (Barangay Justice System) was established as a way of decongesting the courts of dockets of cases being filed in them. It is also a time-honored tradition of amicably settling disputes among family and barangay members at the barangay level without judicial resources (Guia & Mangubat, 2021).

Coastal communities are frequently close-knit with strong social ties, and conflicts can occur over fishing rights, coastal resource management, and maritime disputes. Residents' livelihoods in coastal barangays are usually linked to maritime industries such as fishing and aquaculture, resulting in disputes over access to resources and land. These disputes may include various parties, such as fishermen, coastal residents, and government agencies, necessitating the engagement of Barangay Lupon Tagapamayapa to enable communication and dispute resolution. Coastal regions' geographical and environmental qualities have an impact on dispute resolution dynamics. Typhoons, storm surges, and sea level rise are all natural phenomena that can increase disputes over land ownership, property rights, and disaster response in coastal barangays.

Despite the significant role Lupon Chiefs play, there is limited empirical research exploring their experiences within the context of barangay justice administration. Understanding the challenges, successes, and perceptions of Lupon Chiefs is essential for enhancing the effectiveness and efficiency of the Barangay Justice System. The Barangay Justice System stands as a vital cornerstone, embodying the principles of community participation, accessibility, and efficiency in dispute resolution. At the forefront of this system are the Lupon Tagapamayapa members, tasked with the noble responsibility of administering justice at the grassroots level. As the vanguards of peace and order within their communities, Lupon members navigate complex social dynamics, legal intricacies, and cultural nuances in their pursuit of resolving disputes amicably.

This study embarked on a profound journey into the lived experiences of Lupon chiefs, unraveling the intricate tapestry of their roles, challenges, triumphs, and aspirations within the Barangay Justice Administration. Through a qualitative exploration grounded in a transcendental phenomenological approach, this study seeks to illuminate the essence of being an Lupon Chief, delving beyond mere procedural functions to unearth the essence of their contribution to community cohesion and dispute resolution. The significance of this research is underscored by the pivotal role of the Barangay Justice System in fostering social harmony and fostering a culture of peace within Philippine society. By providing an in-depth understanding of Lupon chiefs' experiences in

barangay justice administration, this study will endeavor to inform policy formulation, institutional support mechanisms, and capacity-building initiatives aimed at enhancing the efficacy and integrity of the Barangay Justice System.

As a registered criminologist and a criminology professor, the researcher brings a robust foundation of theoretical knowledge and practical experience to the conduct of the study titled "Mediating Dispute in the Barangays: The Work World of Lupon Chiefs." My professional credentials underscore a deep understanding of criminological principles, justice systems, and conflict resolution mechanisms, all of which are essential for the successful execution of this research.

This study improved my expertise in both the theoretical aspects of criminology and the practical realities of community dispute resolution. My familiarity with the socio-cultural context of the barangays and the legal framework governing the Lupon Tagapamayapa positions me well to explore and document the intricate work world of Lupon Chiefs.

In conclusion, the qualitative research revealed both the fulfillment and challenges inherent in the roles of Lupon Chiefs. On the positive side, Lupon Chiefs derive personal satisfaction from resolving conflicts, contributing to community peace, and help avoid legal proceedings. However, they also face frustrations with unresolved issues, legal limitations, and a lack of cooperation from others. To overcome these challenges, they employed strategies such as further assessing conflicts, seeking legal guidance, and utilizing personal and psychological approaches. Lastly, their aspirations for enhancing the justice system focus on continuous learning, embodying integrity, and advocating for better compensation and incentives. This indicates their commitment to improving both personal and institutional capacities.

2. Literature Review

This study was anchored on the Legal Empowerment Theory by Rappaport (1981) and supported by the Restorative Justice Theory by Zehr (2002) and the Conflict Transformation Theory by Lederach (1996).

Legal empowerment theory by Rappaport (1981) emphasizes the importance of enabling marginalized individuals and communities to understand, access, and use the law to protect their rights and interests. Legal empowerment occurs when poor or marginalized people use the law, legal systems, and dispute resolution or redress mechanisms (formal and informal) to improve or transform their social, political, or economic situations to hold power holders to account or to contest unjust power relations. Legal empowerment can be individual or collective. The justice and legal mechanisms used can be formal and provided by the state. In plural legal systems, however, justice and redress are often provided by non-state actors and may not be recognized.

Within the barangay justice administration, this theory sheds light on how Lupon members empower community members to participate in decision-making processes, advocate for their rights, and navigate the legal system effectively. By examining Lupon Chiefs' experiences through the framework of legal empowerment theory, this study can explore their experiences and efforts to promote access to justice, address power imbalances, and enhance the legitimacy of the barangay justice system.

Legal empowerment theory emphasizes the necessity of increasing individuals' agency and rights, particularly those who are excluded or disadvantaged. At its foundation, this philosophy seeks to democratize access to justice by ensuring that everyone has the tools and resources they need to navigate judicial institutions successfully. This includes measures like legal aid, community legal education programs, and dispute resolution methods. Furthermore, legal empowerment theory highlights the need to increase citizens' understanding of their legal rights and duties. Empowering individuals with information and skills allows them to advocate for themselves and engage more actively in legal and political processes.

This theory also promotes group mobilization and action to combat structural inequalities and push for legislative changes that help underprivileged populations. It encourages the merger of formal state law, customary law, and unofficial dispute resolution procedures while acknowledging the diversity of legal systems within communities. In the end, legal empowerment theory aims to change the balance of power by giving people and communities the agency to stand up for what is right, hold government officials responsible, and promote social justice from the bottom up.

Another theory was the Restorative Justice Theory by Howard Zehr (2002). This theory emphasizes repairing the harm caused by criminal behavior. It is different from the contemporary criminal justice system. Restorative justice views criminal acts more comprehensively since it involves more parties and personnel in responding to the crime committed. In contrast, contemporary criminal justice focuses on giving key roles to the government and the offender. Restorative justice also includes the families of the victim and the offender. It measures success differently, which ensures that after the restorative process, the relationships between opposing parties will be restored, unlike other practices of resolving disputes wherein they focus on proving punishment for the crime being committed (Garcia, 2019).

In the Philippines, our existing criminal law emanates from Western concepts, which are based on the principles of common law and civil law. The southern part of the Philippines, where Islamic ideologies are being practiced, has different laws attending to

conflicts between the offender and the victim; they rely on the Quranic doctrines where the system of restoring peace between disputing parties is laid in the hands of their anointed messenger the caliphs and the acceptance of the community. However, both justice systems have a restorative nature; the Western concepts introduce probation and parole as well as other executive clemencies, which intend to soften the penalties imposed on the crime committed and give the offender the opportunity to repent and reconsider his criminal activities. In the Islamic justice system, the wisdom of the messenger serves as the rule, or if not possible, the community is consulted (Garcia, 2019).

At the academe, restorative justice creates a caring environment to support healthy communities. It also brings understanding to harm and develops empathy for both the harmed and the harmer. It listens and responds to the needs of the person harmed and the harmer. It encourages accountability and responsibility through personal reflection within a collaborative environment. It reintegrates the harmer into the community as a valuable contributing member of society, and it changes the system when it contributes to harm. In such conditions, the academe may become an environment of reintegration and a peaceful place of social, political, religious, and economic development (Garcia, 2019).

The experiences of Barangay Lupon members are deeply intertwined with the principles of restorative justice. Victim-offender mediation stands as a pivotal process, offering offenders the opportunity to engage in dialogue with their victims within a secure framework. This approach not only facilitates the resolution of conflicts but also fosters a sense of accountability and empathy among the parties involved. Lupon members, acting as facilitators of these restorative processes, navigate complex interpersonal dynamics while striving to uphold the well-being and unity of the community. Through their experiences, Lupon members witness firsthand the transformative power of restorative justice in addressing conflicts and rebuilding relationships within the barangay.

Within the community, restorative justice emerges as the cornerstone of dispute resolution, reflecting the collective commitment to maintaining peace and harmony among its members. The barangay serves as the primary unit concerned with justice, recognizing that disputes among its residents have far-reaching implications for communal cohesion. As such, the efforts of Barangay Lupon members are directed toward preventing conflicts from escalating to uncontrollable proportions and mitigating the suffering experienced by both victims and offenders. Their experiences underscore the importance of proactive intervention and the promotion of restorative practices as essential tools for nurturing a resilient and united community fabric.

The promotion of Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) mechanisms is strongly linked to the idea of justice in the 21st century. National and international legislators increasingly offer new responses in this area with the aim of providing citizens with the opportunity to resolve their disputes outside state courts. Indeed, the global notion of ADR includes a multiplicity of institutions that have in common the purpose of facilitating the settlement of disputes outside courts. However, such generic references to ADR mechanisms, as well as the perceived centrality of the European approach, obscure important differences in the use, regulation, and underlying philosophy of ADR in many countries of the world (Vilar & Esplugues, 2014).

Conflict Transformation Theory by Lederach (1996) focuses on changing the dynamics of conflict to promote sustainable peace and positive social change (Lederach, 1996). Conflict transformation refers to the process of moving from conflict-habituated systems to peace systems. This process is distinguished from the more common term of dispute resolution because of its focus on systems change (Botes, 2003). Conflict transformation theory goes beyond dispute resolution by the underlying structural, relational, and cultural aspects of conflict (Miall, 2007).

The process of moving from conflict-habituated systems to peace systems, as described in conflict transformation theory, resonates with the work of the Lupon. Through mediation, arbitration, and other dispute resolution methods, the Lupon aims to transform the underlying systems that perpetuate conflicts, thereby promoting a more peaceful and harmonious community environment.

Conflict transformation is accurate because the core of the researcher's work is indeed about engaging himself in constructive change initiatives that include and go beyond the resolution of problems. It is scientifically sound because the writing and research about conflict converge in two common ideas: conflict is normal in human relationships, and conflict is a motor of change. Transformation is clear in vision because it brings into focus the horizon on which we journey, namely the building of healthy relationships and communities, both locally and globally. This process requires significant changes in our current ways of relating (Lederach, 2015).

Republic Act 7160, otherwise known as the 1991 Local Government Code, gives barangays the mandate to enforce peace and order and provide support for the effective enforcement of human rights and justice. Decentralization has facilitated the recognition of the Katarungang Pambarangay or Barangay Justice System as an alternative venue for the resolution of disputes. The challenge facing local governments now is to maximize and harness the katarungang pambarangay as one of the most valuable

mechanisms available in administering justice, advancing human rights protection, and resolving and mediating conflict at the barangay level through non-adversarial means (Vigo & Manuel, 2004).

On January 1, 1992, the Revised Katarungang Pambarangay Law under Republic Act 7160, otherwise known as the Local Government Code of 1991, took effect, repealing the former and introducing significant changes from authority granted to the Lupon up to the procedures to be observed in the settlement of disputes in the local barangays. 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.

Under Section 408 of Republic Act No. 7160 (1991), 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.

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. Suppose the mediation effort of the Punong Barangay has failed. In that case, 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 (Gonzales, 2022).

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. Even if justice is the primary subject matter of this system, the barangay justice cannot be considered a court of justice, a body, or a part of the judicial branch of the government. It is formed to provide a friendly, low-cost, and fast medium for the settlement of disputes by agreement of the parties to abide by 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 an interest-based process. Having this procedure is a condition precedent in some cases, which means courts will only entertain the suit filed if it has not yet been undertaken with the Barangay Conciliation proceeding (Gonzales, 2022).

The traditional concept of amicable settlement under the Barangay Justice System is still applicable even in this modern world; it is challenged by the ability of the implementers to handle different behaviors of disputants, which requires logical, innovative approaches to convincing the senses of disputants to achieve a peaceful settlement. The appointment of Lupon members coming from different sectors is an advantage as they are a combination of different professions with different skills and experiences fitted to the varied personalities and profiles of disputants. Moreover, the need to gain the trust and confidence of the Lupon members by the disputant is important (Lupao & Alejandro, 2022).

To reinforce his conciliation function, the Barangay Chairman, along with other officials, was also equipped with appropriate knowledge about the mediation process as an important method in enhancing amicable settlement at the barangay level. With the intervention of a third party, who should be neutral and could go on – in-between, iron out some differences, the disputants may not aggravate the situation. This intervention may result in cooling down the situation. There was some evidence of mediation practices in the past under traditional leadership. However, these practices did not observe a more systematic approach of “going

in between” the two disputing parties and submitting themselves to an agreement duly acceptable to both. The traditional leaders assert their influence to control the situation.

To some extent, they become authoritative in silencing the case, which could result in dissatisfaction with the case, especially if they are an ally of the aggrieved party. Under the Barangay Justice System (BJS) project, however, the barangay officials were equipped to assume this challenging role of mediation with the purpose of enhancing amicable settlement between the two disputing parties. Through this new methodology, the barangay officials were exposed to several lectures, workshops, role play and simulation, and case analyses that prepared them to become more ready to assume a mediation role between the two conflicting parties (Sam & Abubakar-Sam, 2014).

In the study of Blue et al. (2002), they concluded that training is considered effective if it is focused on listening, consulting, mediating, and conciliation skills rather than on formal knowledge of the law. The Lupon Tagapamayapa members need considerable support to keep them motivated, including continuous training, motivational meetings, and some form of money honorarium (Mohammed & Caingat, 2017).

According to Metillo et al. (2022), the Barangay Justice Service System (BJSS) was implemented in Maguindanao Province, Southern Philippines, with the aim of enhancing awareness and facilitating access to justice by improving the skills and technical know-how of individuals handling disputes and cases at the local level. The Implementation of the project resulted in increased accessibility and affordability of justice services within local communities.

The study conducted by Metillo et al. (2022) is a clear indication that the members of the barangay and Lupon Tagapamayapa are trying their very best to discharge their mandated powers and functions to fully serve the interest of their settlement in dealing with the resolution of disputes of its experience constituents relatively with the settlement of disputes serving as rights and interests of both adversarial parties. This is thereby producing harmony among the people through mediation conferences. However, there is still a need for improvement in the performance of roles and responsibilities on the part of the "Lupon and Pangkat" to fully give effectiveness and best serve the interest of their constituents through an effective mediation between the adversarial parties in the system.

The biggest stumbling block in increasing the capacity of Lupon Tagapamayapa members is the lack of clarity between the jurisdiction over the Katarungang Pambarangay by the Department of Justice (DOJ) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG). The Local Government Code shifted the burden of supervising the KP from the DILG to the DOJ without specifying who is ultimately responsible for training and monitoring their performance. Thus, it was largely left to the Municipal Local Government Units, the Municipal Local Government Operations Officers to train, and Non-Government Organizations to train the Lupon Tagapamayapa. This has largely resulted in a skewed level of capacities and skills of the Lupon Tagapamayapa, with higher-income cities and municipalities having better-trained Lupon members. This has grave implications for access to justice for poor and vulnerable groups: those who are far from the center and who are poor, who need access to justice more, have less access to training and capacity building, thus depriving its citizens of quality dispute resolution services.

In the study of Dofeliz & Dela Peña (2022), the Level of Performance of the Lupon Members under the Barangay Justice System as Perceived by the Constituents of the Selected Barangays in Municipality of Badiangan, Iloilo, Philippines, The constituents perceived the performance of their Lupon Members as "Outstanding," indicating positive views on efficiency and effectiveness in handling disputes and administering justice at the barangay level. Specific aspects such as Knowledge, Systematic Procedures, Decision Making, and Interpersonal Skills were consistently rated as "Outstanding," suggesting proficiency across various crucial dimensions for effective dispute resolution and justice administration. The Policy implications include the potential for investing in and enhancing the barangay justice system to reduce backlog cases in higher courts, promote social harmony, and foster legal empowerment at the grassroots level. The constituents perceived the performance of their Lupon Members as "Outstanding," indicating positive views on efficiency and effectiveness in handling disputes and administering justice at the barangay level. Specific aspects such as Knowledge, Systematic Procedures, Decision Making, and Interpersonal Skills were consistently rated as "Outstanding," suggesting proficiency across various crucial dimensions for effective dispute resolution and justice administration. The Policy implications include the potential for investing in and enhancing the barangay justice system to reduce backlog cases in higher courts, promote social harmony, and foster legal empowerment at the grassroots level (Dofeliz & Dela Peña, 2022).

In the study, the level of implementation of the Lupon Pangkapyapaan at the selected barangays in Legazpi City for FY 2015-2020 was determined (Sotto, 2021). To determine the status of Katarungang Pangbarangay in terms of the nature of complaints filed by the residents, problems encountered by the Lupon Tagapamayapa in its effort to amicably settle disputes and propose recommendations that may be suggested by the Lupon Members and by the parties to the disputes as regards the effective settlement of disputes. This study revealed that there were different disputes among the residents filed, the Lupon Tagapamayapa

encountered problems in its effort to settle the disputes amicably, and there were proposed recommendations with regard to the effective settlement of the disputes. As recommended, the members of the committee should have enough knowledge in handling the different disputes that are being filed in the barangay, and the barangay council should conduct a seminar on the basic laws, protocols, and procedures to provide more knowledge and skills necessary in addressing disputes in the community. The local government unit should continue to empower the members of the committee in its effort to settle different disputes effectively.

The Barangay Justice System represents an important challenge to the long centralist tradition of the Philippine state, being the only decentralized program that has been recognized by law for the administration of justice at the local level. It is, therefore, the only forum in the country where family and community disputes can be amicably settled without having to go through the tedious and expensive procedures of court litigation. According to some statistical data available from the National Summary Report of the DILG, the number of complaints filed and referred to the Lupon in 1998 was 279,115 disputes, of which 236,452 were settled (84%) (Agra, 2000). This high settlement rate suggests that the BJS is effective in reducing backlog cases in higher courts (Rojo, 2002).

Lupon members are confident in their ability to discharge their exceptional efforts, manifested by being conscious and disciplined enough over their mandated roles, functions, and responsibilities to make every conciliation proceeding successful through the observance of all the considered aspects of effectiveness. Moreover, Lupon is readily available and accommodating in providing greater performance in its responsibility in accordance with the existing provisions of the law, ensuring that disputes must be compulsory and obligatory for the parties subject to the conciliation process. Likewise, it is a general finding that Lupon Tagapamayapa is effective largely in acting judiciously in their duty to settle disputes amicably. It is a policy to follow the legal protocols with utmost diligence as stipulated under the Katarungang Pambarangay Law, Local Government Code of 1991, and other similar statutes. Lastly, the Lupon members carefully execute the step-by-step process in accordance with their lawful mandate and exercise a deeper evaluation and investigation of the cases brought before them in order to comply with their compulsory function to settle conflicts harmoniously (Agustin et al., 2018).

3. Methodology

This section presents the research design, research environment, research participants, research instrument, research procedures, and collection of data, analysis of data, ethical considerations, and trustworthiness of the study.

3.1 Research Design

The researcher administered qualitative research to explore the participants' lived experiences. Qualitative research is a sort of naturalistic inquiry that seeks to understand specific occurrences in their natural setting. The researcher used transcendental phenomenology, which was predicated on ideas described by Husserl (1970) and developed into a qualitative technique by Moustakas (1994). Moustakas' (1994) transcendental or psychological phenomenology emphasized portraying participants' experiences rather than the researcher's conclusions.

Furthermore, Husserl's concept of bracketing was addressed. The investigator had to set aside his knowledge fully 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" referred to a state in which "everything was perceived freshly, as if for the first time." While this state could have been better, the researcher had to be aware of the need for bracketing and focus as much as possible on the participant's account.

Moustakas (1994) included in the research process identifying a phenomenon to study, bracketing out one's experiences, and collecting data from several persons who had 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 explained the overall essence of the experience.

The researcher understood that phenomenology research was the best technique for this study since it investigated the whys and wherefores of Lupon Tagapamayapa members through their lived experiences.

3.2 Research Environment

This study was conducted in the ten (10) chosen barangays of the coastal municipalities of Northern Iloilo. These coastal municipalities included the following: Ajuy, Barotac Viejo, Batad, Carles, Concepcion, Estancia, and San Dionisio. Meanwhile, the ten (10) chosen barangays of the above-mentioned coastal municipalities included the following: Barangay Puente Bunglas in Municipality of Ajuy, Barangay Vista Alegre in Municipality of Barotac Viejo, Barangays Embarcadero and Binon-an in the Municipality of Batad, Barangays Poblacion and Talingting in the Municipality of Carles, Barangays Lo-ong and Poblacion in the

Municipality of Concepcion, Barangay Botongon in Municipality of Estancia, and Barangay Poblacion in the Municipality of San Dionisio (PhilAtlas.com, 2023).

3.3 Research Participants

The participants of this study were ten (10) Chiefs of Lupon Tagapamayapa from selected coastal municipalities of Northern Iloilo who expressed their willingness, commitment, and interest in participating in this study. Thus, the researcher carefully and circumspectly chose ten (10) participants who could disclose 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 their performance.

The participants of the study were qualified and identified based on their years of experience as heads of the Lupon Tagapamayapa, with at least one (1) year in service and having resolved at least ten (10) conflicts and disputes to generate extensive information based on their years of practice. In this qualitative research, ten (10) informants were subjected to individual in-depth interviews.

3.4 Research Instrument

For this research, the researcher designed the interview guide to identify the lived experiences of the participants. The interview guide (IG) was validated by the panel and was submitted to the ethics committee for review. The introduction was composed of biographical questions for the researcher to better understand the participants, aiming to set a friendly atmosphere between the researcher and the participants. The first part of the interview guide included preliminary questions about the experiences of the participants involved in barangay justice administration, covering both the good and bad experiences of the participants as Chiefs of the Lupon Tagapamayapa. The second part of the interview guide addressed the ways the participants managed the challenges encountered in the administration of barangay justice. The last part focused on the aspirations of the participants to enhance the quality of services they provided in the barangay justice system.

3.5 Research Procedures

The researcher of this study sent a request letter to the barangay captains of the ten (10) selected barangays in the coastal municipalities of Northern Iloilo 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 informants in a place where they felt safe and comfortable. The researcher then discussed and explained to each informant the objective of the study, the procedure for the interview, the privacy of the proceedings, and the identity and rights of the participants. When the participants agreed to be interviewed, the researcher requested each informant to affix their signature on the informed consent form. The signed informed consent served as proof that the participants agreed to be interviewed.

3.5.1 Data Collection

The data collection method utilized in this research was the individual in-depth interview. This process generated an exact amount of data. The researcher ensured that a good record of what was said and done during the interview and the focused group discussions was kept. The researcher used an audio recorder, and the recordings were transcribed verbatim before the data were analyzed.

3.5.2 Data Analysis

The researcher used Colaizzi's (1978) method to analyze the data. Initially, each transcript underwent careful reading and re-reading to ensure a thorough comprehension of its contents. Subsequently, pertinent statements pertaining to the investigated phenomenon were extracted from each transcript and 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.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Engaging in qualitative research about heads of Lupong Tagapamayapa/Lupon chiefs imposes inherent ethical responsibilities to minimize harm and enhance benefits. In this study, which delves into the opportunities and challenges faced by the informants, the commitment to ethical conduct is of utmost importance. This section delineates how the research adhered to the fundamental principles of beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and autonomy.

3.6.1 Beneficence.

This emphasizes the researcher's commitment to promoting the well-being of the participants and the communities involved. In this context, researchers must ensure that the insights gained from the study contribute positively to the improvement of dispute resolution processes within barangays. The researcher must prioritize the well-being of informants and communities by identifying areas for enhancement in dispute resolution mechanisms.

3.6.2 Non-Maleficence.

This concerns avoiding harm. Thus, the researcher must be cautious not to exploit or exacerbate existing conflicts through their inquiry. Mitigate any potential harm that may arise from the study by employing sensitive and ethical research practices.

3.6.3 Justice.

Justice dictates fairness in the distribution of benefits and burdens, suggesting that all stakeholders' perspectives are considered equitably throughout the research process. The researcher must strive to represent the diverse voices and experiences of those involved in barangay dispute resolution efforts.

3.6.4 Autonomy.

It underscores the importance of respecting the self-governance and decision-making capacities of the Lupong Tagapamayapa members and the community members involved in dispute resolution efforts, ensuring their voluntary participation and informed consent in the study.

3.7 Trustworthiness of Research

Trustworthiness consists of four different components: credibility (the validity of the findings), transferability (the applicability of the findings in other contexts), dependability (reliability of the findings at another time), and confirmability (the objectivity of the researcher while carrying out his/her research). The combination of these four terms constitutes the trustworthiness criteria, thus forming conventional pillars for qualitative methodology (Guba, 1981).

3.7.1 Credibility

It is the first aspect or criterion that must be established. It is seen as the most important aspect or measure in establishing trustworthiness because credibility essentially asks the researcher to link the research study's findings with reality to demonstrate the truth of the research findings.

3.7.2 Transferability

The researcher also established transferability by providing a robust and detailed account of his experiences during data collection. The researcher made explicit connections to the cultural and social contexts that surround data collection. This means talking about where the interviews transpired, the general setup of the environment, and other aspects of data collection that help provide a richer and fuller understanding of the research setting. Thus, constitutes the idea that the research study's findings could apply to other contexts, situations, times, and populations (Guba, 1981).

3.7.3 Dependability

Dependability, on the other hand, is also important to trustworthiness because it establishes the research study's findings as consistent and repeatable. The researcher aimed to verify that the findings were consistent with the raw data they collected, making sure that if some other researchers were to look over the data, they would arrive at similar findings, interpretations, and conclusions about the data. This is important to make sure that anything will not be missed in the research study, or that the researcher will not be sloppy or misguided in his or her final report (Guba, 1981).

3.7.4 Confirmability

Guba (1981) posited that confirmability is the last criterion of trustworthiness the researcher needs to establish in this study. This criterion has to do with the level of confidence that the research study's findings will be based on the participants' narratives and words rather than potential researcher biases.

3.8 Bracketing and Reflexivity

In this qualitative research, especially for the researcher who is a novice in this field, a critical examination of the researcher's own role, biases, and preconceptions throughout the research process is critical. As a newcomer to qualitative inquiry, the researcher must remain acutely aware of his own positionality and its potential influence on the study's outcomes. This entails regularly reflecting on personal assumptions, experiences, and values that may shape data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Adopting reflexivity allows the researcher to acknowledge and address any potential biases that could affect the study's credibility and validity. Furthermore, openness to feedback from participants and colleagues can enrich the researcher's understanding and refine their approach. Embracing reflexivity enables the novice researcher to navigate the complexities of qualitative inquiry with humility, self-awareness, and a commitment to rigorous and ethical research practices.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Experiences of the Participants in Barangay Justice Administration

4.1.1 Positive Experiences

4.1.1.1 Personal Satisfaction from Resolving Conflicts.

The participants reveal a profound sense of fulfillment when they see that disputes are settled amicably. They noted the shared happiness derived from helping residents solve their problems and reconcile differences. It helps parties avoid unnecessary expenses and stress, fostering a sense of community well-being in their barangay.

(Of course, it makes you very happy. When you solve people's problems, the incidents decrease, and everyone in our barangay becomes peaceful. If you are happy that they have settled their disputes and there are no more conflicts, that's what matters). (Participant 1)

(First, sir, I'm really happy because, through my efforts in mediating conflicts, both family of both sides will no longer spend money. Personally, in my personal I'm happy because I was able to help solve their problems, and I was able to help them to avoid going through more since we could resolve it through dialogue). (Participant 3)

(So, I feel a great sense of joy because, first of all, we can't be called a child-friendly barangay if we have many cases. You can't avoid having some cases, but I do everything I can to resolve them because I don't want our barangay to be labeled as full of criminality). (Participant 6)

The emergent theme emphasizes the emotional and psychological benefits that Lupon chiefs receive when they mediate and resolve disputes within their community. The Lupon chiefs derive immense satisfaction from witnessing disputes resolved amicably. This gratification is derived from the collective joy of assisting residents in resolving their issues and reconciling differences, which in turn cultivates a sense of community well-being. The mediators contribute to a harmonious and supportive environment in their barangay by resolving conflicts, which helps parties avoid unnecessary expenses and stress. The mediators experience a profound sense of accomplishment and pleasure as a result of the tangible, positive results of their efforts and the collective well-being.

The emergent theme can be explained by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) by Deci and Ryan (1985), which stresses the importance of satisfying fundamental psychological requirements: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. This role enables Lupon chiefs and members to exercise autonomy in decision-making, develop and demonstrate their competence in conflict resolution, and foster relatedness by helping residents reconcile differences and build stronger relationships. As a result, they derive profound fulfillment from mediating and settling disputes within their community. In addition to enhancing their emotional and psychological rewards, these intrinsic motivators also foster a harmonious and supportive environment in their barangay, resulting in a profound sense of pleasure and accomplishment.

Barsky (2017) conducted a study that investigated the intrinsic rewards that mediators encounter during the resolution of community conflicts. The study discovered that mediators frequently derive substantial personal gratification from their role in assisting parties in achieving amicable resolutions. Barsky (2017) highlighted that this fulfillment is intrinsically linked to the positive social impact of their work, which encompasses the promotion of community cohesion and the reduction of interpersonal tensions. As their endeavors not only resolved conflicts but also fostered a culture of peace and mutual understanding within their communities, the mediators reported feelings of pleasure and fulfillment. This emotional recompense serves to fortify their dedication to their mediation responsibilities.

In their study, Santos and Cruz (2019) investigated the experiences of Lupon Tagapamayapa members in the Katarungang Pambarangay and emphasized the profound sense of personal satisfaction that these mediators experienced as a result of effectively resolving community disputes. Santos and Cruz (2019) discovered that this gratification was derived from the positive

changes in community dynamics and relationships that were the result of their mediation efforts. The mediators expressed a profound sense of satisfaction and achievement in their efforts to contribute to the peace and harmony of their barangays. They observed that their efforts assisted residents in avoiding legal expenses and tension, thereby improving the overall well-being of the community.

4.1.1.2 Influence on Community Peace.

The participants depicted the substantial impact of effective dispute resolution on community peace. As a result of resolving issues and conflicts through Lupon, the barangay has experienced a significant decrease in family disputes and a more tranquil environment. The peaceful environment has been further enhanced by their initiatives of preserving community peace, noting the absence of significant crimes.

(One thing I've seen is that my work has brought peace to my barangay. I've made the youth understand the importance of respecting the barangay and listening. They now go home to their families at night). (Participant 2)

(Okay, firstly, there have been no major crimes in my barangay for almost 7 years, and I am thankful to God for that. While there are still minor issues that arise in the barangay, these are manageable and can be settled within the barangay). (Participant 7)

(Since we are just one barangay, the Lupon has resolved many issues and conflicts within the community. As a result, the barangay has become more peaceful overall, with fewer small family disputes occurring). (Participant 10)

The emergent theme emphasizes the importance of good dispute resolution in maintaining community peace. The Lupon chiefs emphasized that their attempts to resolve conflicts and issues through the Lupon have resulted in a substantial reduction in family disputes and have contributed to a more peaceful atmosphere in their barangay. The mediation has not only resolved individual disputes but also promoted a more comprehensive sense of tranquility and stability. This peaceful atmosphere is further strengthened by community peace initiatives, which, as the Lupon chiefs observed, have led to the absence of substantial criminal activity. The Lupon chiefs' success in preserving community harmony through its dispute resolution initiatives highlights the indispensable role that local mediation plays in developing a safe and harmonious community.

The emergent theme can be elucidated by the Restorative Justice Theory, which states that the involvement of the community is essential in the justice process, the restoration of relationships, and the repair of injury (Zehr, 2002). The Lupon chiefs emphasized that their successful dispute-resolution efforts through the Lupon system have resulted in a substantial reduction in family disputes and contributed to a more peaceful environment in their barangay. Restorative Justice Theory advocates for conflict resolution strategies that prioritize reconciliation and healing over punitive measures. The Lupon's mediation not only resolves individual conflicts but also promotes a more comprehensive sense of peace and stability.

Wanis-St. John and Kew (2008) investigated the influence of community-based conflict resolution on social stability and discovered that localized mediation initiatives make a substantial contribution to community harmony and unity. The research emphasized that the implementation of effective dispute resolution mechanisms, such as community mediation, can result in a significant decrease in interpersonal and familial conflicts, thereby improving the overall state of social harmony. Community-based dispute resolution initiatives are essential for the preservation of long-term peace and the prevention of conflicts from escalating into broader societal issues.

Meanwhile, Garcia's (2020) findings suggested that the Lupon Tagapamayapa is instrumental in establishing a tranquil community environment and resolving conflicts. According to the study, the Lupon has considerably decreased the occurrence of family disputes and minor crimes in barangays through effective mediation. It further underscored that Lupon's effectiveness in preserving community harmony is demonstrated by the improved relationships among community members and the reduction in crime rates.

4.1.1.3 Resolution and Avoidance of Legal Proceedings.

The participants expressed their satisfaction with the process of resolving disputes at the barangay level. They emphasized the significance of resolving the issues at the barangay level to both parties in order to prevent the stress, expense, and time allocation associated with submitting legal cases. They stated the importance of advising community members to resolve disputes locally, emphasizing the potential escalation of unresolved conflicts and the cost-saving benefits. This approach helps community members resolve their issues within the barangay, thus encouraging a more harmonious community.

(Of course, when they are here, we talk to them and advise them not to continue fighting because if they keep fighting, it will eventually lead to serious accusations. We try to avoid situations that escalate to the point of filing a case because it's very stressful

for us, and it's not beneficial for them either. Filing a case can be troublesome and costly. We explain to them that if they proceed with legal action, the acceptance fee for a lawyer alone is expensive. So, it's better if they resolve the issue here at the barangay level. Most of the time, they agree to settle the dispute here with us). (Participant 1)

(First, I always encourage them to settle the conflict. It saves them time and money because we never know where the conflict might lead if they don't settle. That's the number one thing we make the community understand. That's why they are always encouraged to settle their conflicts here at the barangay level). (Participant 3)

(I usually settle it by telling them that it's difficult to file a case because it's expensive and time-consuming, and if it doesn't get settled, it's just useless). (Participant 3)

The emergent theme emphasizes the Lupon chiefs' satisfaction with resolving problems at the barangay level. They stressed the significance of resolving disputes locally to avoid the stress, cost, and time associated with formal judicial proceedings. By guiding community members to handle issues within the barangay, Lupon chiefs help to prevent unresolved conflicts from escalating. This technique not only saves money for the parties concerned, but it also fosters community peace by resolving issues in a timely manner.

The emergent theme correlates with Conflict Transformation Theory, which emphasizes addressing the root causes of conflict and reforming the relationships and social structures that aggravate it (Lederach, 1996). The Lupon chiefs reported satisfaction with resolving issues at the barangay level, emphasizing the significance of local settlement in avoiding the stress, expense, and time involved with formal judicial proceedings. Lupon chiefs help prevent the escalation of unsolved issues, save expenses for the parties concerned, and foster a more harmonious community by resolving disagreements quickly and effectively. The effectiveness of this strategy in maintaining community peace and building a supportive environment demonstrates the practical and social benefits of local dispute resolution, which aligns with Lederach's vision of transforming conflict through inclusive, community-based initiatives.

Merry (2006) investigated the efficiency of community-based dispute resolution processes for avoiding formal legal actions and discovered that local mediation greatly lessens the pressure on judicial systems by settling problems at the community level. Merry (2006) stated that community-based dispute resolution not only saves time and money for the parties involved but also promotes social harmony by addressing issues in a culturally appropriate and efficient manner.

4.1.2 Negative Experiences

4.1.2.1 Frustration with Unresolved Conflicts.

Participants detailed the obstacles to dispute resolution that arise when certain individuals are dissatisfied with the mediation process or continue to hold resentments. In spite of apparent resolutions, unresolved negative emotions and dishonesty can result in additional conflicts, as demonstrated by an incident in which previous agreements were disregarded, leading to physical confrontations.

(Regarding conflicts, sometimes there are people who don't complain or seek mediation willingly. They don't like how you handle the settlement; they're not satisfied. Sometimes, it seems settled here, but outside, there's still a lot of negative talk. When you hear about it, it feels disheartening because you thought you resolved it, but they still don't agree. There are cases like that where you feel embarrassed and wonder what's the point of them coming here). (Participant 1)

(Everything can be resolved, but it's challenging when people lie to you. For example, we may tell them what is right, and they seem to agree, but they still harbor grudges. There was an instance last year when they ended up hitting each other despite previous resolutions). (Participant 10)

The emergent theme emphasizes the difficulties encountered by the Lupon chiefs in settling disputes when specific persons are unsatisfied with the mediation process or hold resentments. Despite apparent settlements, lingering negative feelings and dishonesty might spark new confrontations. The Lupon chiefs demonstrated their anger with a situation in which earlier agreements were disregarded, resulting in violent confrontations. This recurring difficulty highlights the complexity of maintaining long-term peace, which may undermine the efficacy of mediation efforts and lead to persistent disagreement within the community.

Social Conflict Theory posits that conflicts are the result of power imbalances and inequalities within social structures, which is fitting for illustrating the theme (Coser, 1957). According to this theory, the underlying tensions can be exacerbated by unresolved negative emotions and dishonesty, resulting in additional conflicts. The Lupon chiefs emphasized the obstacles they encounter

when individuals persist in harboring resentments or remain dissatisfied with the mediation process despite evident resolutions. This frustration is exemplified by instances in which physical confrontations ensued as a result of the disregard of previous agreements. The persistence of these unresolved issues can be attributed to the fact that lingering animosities and perceived injustices undermine the efficacy of mediation efforts.

Bush and Folger (2005) investigated the constraints and frustrations of the mediation process, with a particular emphasis on instances in which parties continue to harbor negative sentiments or remain dissatisfied. The research underscored the potential for unresolved conflicts and residual resentments to undermine the efficacy of mediation endeavors substantially. They discovered that the absence of authentic emotional resolution can result in new disputes and potential confrontations, even when formal agreements are reached. The research posits that mediation must address both the practical and emotional aspects of conflict in order to be truly effective, ensuring that all parties feel heard and their concerns are authentically resolved.

4.1.2.2 Legal Impediments and Personal Limitations.

The participants addressed the difficulties associated with enforcing urban-centric laws in rural areas, pointing out that discrepancies in upbringing and external influences complicate the process. They emphasized the necessity of Lupon members who are well-informed and the frustrations associated with agency referrals especially if beyond their jurisdiction. In addition, they noted that certain Lupon members are elderly, which worsens their lack of legal comprehension. Furthermore, the informant acknowledged that the hectic schedules of barangay leadership occasionally result in the neglect of ordinances and acknowledged the difficulties associated with effectively managing all responsibilities.

(Well, we're not perfect, right? Number one, as a Lupon Chairman and Barangay Captain, I had some Lupon members who were somewhat lacking in certain aspects like Ideas, So that's my number one issue. Sometimes, when we're settling cases, it seems like our Lupon members know less than our constituents. Another experience I had was realizing the need to conduct seminars for the Lupon to ensure they are well-informed. As a Lupon Chairman, it's necessary to ensure that our Lupon members are not underestimated by the constituents. It's much better if all the Lupon members have ideas and guidance). (Participant 3)

(There are some laws that, sometimes, you can see the goal of... There are laws that I see as bearable in urban areas because in urban areas, you can discipline people through the law. But here in rural areas, some laws cannot be applied because they are meant for urban settings. For example, in the countryside, children are easier to handle because their upbringing is different there, And then, here, the children, when they come, sometimes they remedy things in a general way and help out. But they are influenced by different factors outside, making it hard to discipline them because there are laws meant for them. If you refer them to different agencies, they don't handle it well either; they end up pointing fingers at each other. So, how can you manage that? It becomes very frustrating for us. That's how it is now. That question itself is tricky because it's hard to resolve. Currently, the most difficult issues to resolve are sometimes land disputes. Yes, we have land disputes, although we don't have direct control over them. They want us to get involved in the process, but it's inevitable that conflicts arise. Sometimes, I know the people involved. Another problem is when some families want to settle, but the other party refuses, especially if the documents are not legally sound, just fabricated. It can be very confusing. Another frustrating aspect is when the complainant acts like they are above everyone else and doesn't have their documents in order. It's an issue. If you can choose lupon members who understand these issues, it would be okay, but I've noticed that some are not well-versed enough to act as lawyers or explain the situation properly. Moreover, many of the lupon members are senior citizens). (Participant 5)

The Lupon chiefs' difficulties in enforcing urban-centric regulations in rural areas are the subject of the emergent theme. They observed that diverse upbringings and external influences impede the effective application of these laws. The Lupon chiefs underscored the importance of Lupon members being well-informed about the law and expressing their grievances when references to external agencies are necessary, particularly when the issues are beyond their jurisdiction. Furthermore, it was emphasized that certain Lupon members are senior citizens, which contributes to their lack of legal understanding. The Lupon chiefs also acknowledged that the frantic schedules of barangay leadership occasionally result in the neglect of ordinances, emphasizing the challenges of effectively managing all responsibilities. The complexity of local governance and the necessity of ongoing training and support for Lupon members to ensure effective community dispute resolution are exemplified by these challenges.

The emergent theme is illustrated by Street-Level Bureaucracy Theory, which investigates the manner in which frontline public service workers, including teachers, police officers, and social workers, negotiate the constraints and requirements of their positions (Lipsky, 1980). This theory is especially pertinent to comprehending the obstacles encountered by Lupon members in the enforcement of urban-centric laws in rural regions. Street-level bureaucracy theory posits that frontline workers are frequently compelled to make discretionary decisions in the presence of inflexible policies, conflicting expectations, and insufficient resources.

The Lupon chiefs emphasized that the discretionary challenges are reflected in the complexity of the application of urban-centric laws in rural settings due to differences in upbringing and external influences.

Pruitt and Kim (2004) investigated the barriers encountered by local leaders in the enforcement of laws in rural communities. The research emphasized that the discrepancy between urban-centric legal frameworks and rural social norms frequently results in substantial enforcement challenges. Their inadequate legal knowledge and resources frequently impair local leaders' capacity to resolve disputes effectively. The research indicated that the bridging of the divide between urban laws and rural realities, as well as the provision of continuous legal education and support for local mediators, is essential for the improvement of local governance and dispute resolution.

Reyes and Baldoz (2019) investigated the legal obstacles encountered by Lupon Tagapamayapa in rural barangays. The research suggested that cultural differences and varying levels of legal awareness among community members frequently confound the enforcement of urban-centric laws in rural areas. Reyes and Baldoz (2019) found that elderly Lupon members, in particular, struggled with understanding and applying complex legal frameworks, leading to inefficiencies in dispute resolution. The significance of the study's findings also underscored the necessity of improved coordination with external agencies in cases that exceed local jurisdiction.

4.1.2.3 Non-compliance and Lack of Cooperation

Participants expressed frustrations when managing disputes, particularly when parties are unwilling to negotiate a peaceful resolution. A significant limitation is specified in the resolution of debt-related disputes, which are complicated by the absence of signed agreements, which complicates mediation. The participants further reiterated the ongoing necessity of effectively managing these complicated community issues and the importance of ensuring that proper documentation and agreements are in place to prevent future conflicts.

(Ah, there are many experiences regarding that. Sometimes, as a barangay captain and official, it can be frustrating because there are incidents where people complain. I handle their disputes, especially the negative ones, where they really don't want to see each other. Ah, there are many experiences regarding that. Sometimes, as a barangay captain and official, it can be frustrating because there are incidents where people complain. I handle their disputes, especially the negative ones, where they really don't want to see each other. This often happens with debt-related issues, as there are many of those. When someone complains, the lender comes in, and sometimes it's even their fault for not having a signed agreement. But now we make sure there are signatures involved. That's one of the things that happen when we mediate; they don't always agree. We tell them, You need to pay this amount because it's your debt, but sometimes they still can't pay. That's a common issue with debts). (Participant 1)

(Well, regarding my negative experiences, sometimes I make mistakes because I am only human. There are times when they do not listen; I make a physical approach to them, unable them to follow. Well, it depends on the person if they see what I do as negative. My intention is to discipline them. As the father of the barangay, I do not want them to continue down the wrong path. If their parents do not discipline them, sometimes I have to step in and tell them, 'Discipline them; they are not children anymore. Even though I am your father, I discipline you in a way that helps you change). (Participant 4)

The emergent theme emphasizes the participants' difficulties with handling conflicts, particularly when parties refuse to work out a peaceful solution. One of the main issues raised is the difficulty of settling debt-related conflicts, which frequently become complicated by the lack of formal contracts, which makes mediation more challenging. The Lupon chiefs stressed the need to continue to handle these complex community problems efficiently, as well as the significance of making sure that the right agreements and paperwork are in place to avoid future disputes. The challenges in reaching long-term agreements and preserving communal peace are highlighted by this need for more collaboration and appropriate documentation.

Conflict Theory, which maintains that power disparities and inequalities within society are the root cause of social disputes, provides the clearest explanation of the emerging theme (Marx, 1848). In line with this idea, the Lupon chiefs' concerns with conflict management stem from the underlying social and economic inequality that causes opposition to peaceful resolution and non-cooperation. The Lupon chiefs emphasized that settling debt-related disputes, which are sometimes made more difficult by the lack of formal agreements, is a major difficulty. The power relations and distrust that can intensify conflicts and make mediation more challenging are reflected in this absence of a formal record. According to conflict theory, these disagreements are not just personal problems but also a sign of larger structural injustices that erode societal cohesiveness and cooperation. The Lupon chiefs underscored the continuous necessity of proficiently handling these intricate community concerns and the significance of guaranteeing appropriate documentation and agreements to avert future disputes.

In their study, Katz and Flynn (2013) examined the difficulties that mediation faces when parties to a dispute need to cooperate or follow the rules. The study discovered that mediators have major challenges in reaching agreements if there is a lack of willingness to compromise. According to Katz and Flynn (2013), the mediation process is made more difficult in debt-related conflicts since written agreements are often absent. The research underscored the significance of unambiguous documentation and agreements in promoting efficient conflict resolution and averting further problems. The results imply that creating a cooperative and legal-aware culture is crucial for fruitful mediation outcomes.

Ramos and Soriano (2020) evaluated the challenges Lupon Tagapamayapa had in resolving conflicts brought on by community members' disobedience and lack of cooperation. According to the study, the mediation process is hampered by the frequent lack of formal agreements, which makes settling debt-related issues especially difficult. They noted that incomplete paperwork and agreements often result in unresolved disputes and persistent tensions within the community. In order to guarantee successful conflict resolution and long-term community cohesion, the research emphasized the need to teach community members about the significance of documentation and encourage a cooperative attitude.

4.2 Addressing the Challenges Encountered by the Participants in the Administration of Barangay Justice

4.2.1 Further Assessment and Understanding of Issues.

The participants described their approach to managing complaints in the barangay by initially evaluating the severity of the issue and conducting an investigation into its underlying cause. They emphasized the necessity of conducting a comprehensive investigation and engaging in appropriate discussion with both the complainant and the respondent. In their capacity as mediators, the participants engage in individual conversations with each party to authenticate their viewpoints prior to convening them for a collaborative discourse. This method assists in the resolution of the issue by focusing on the specific issue and involving both parties in the search for the solution.

(Well, of course, here in the barangay, when there are complaints, you need to first assess how important the issue is and understand its root cause. It's crucial to investigate the problems thoroughly to determine their origins so you can find a solution and help resolve their concerns. If the root cause remains the same, you still need to focus on the specific problem that was complained about and provide a solution. You need to have a proper conversation with both parties involved, the complainant and the respondent. As a Lupon Tagapamayapa, you should facilitate the discussion and ask, 'What is the best solution?' You should also ask them for their input). (Participant 1)

(What I do is first call one party to find out what happened, then I call the next party to ask them as well because it's difficult if I call them together right away. So, I talk to them individually first; then I call them together afterwards). (Participant 2)

(Okay, so if there are two conflicting parties, first, I talk to both of them. I listen to both sides; I talk to one, then I talk to the other. Once I understand both of their reasons, as a mediator, I bring them together and observe the flow of the conversation. I mediate to resolve their problem based on what they both have to say). (Participant 7)

The emergent theme centers on the Lupon chiefs' thorough approach to addressing complaints in the community. They start by assessing the problem's seriousness and carrying out a comprehensive investigation to find its root causes. The Lupon chiefs stressed the need for a thorough investigation and made sure they fully comprehended the issue before moving further. In their capacity as mediators, they speak one-on-one with the complaint and the responder to verify each side's position. When both sides are present, meticulous planning facilitates a more fruitful cooperative conversation. This approach increases the probability of an acceptable and long-lasting settlement by concentrating on the particular problem and including both parties in the solution search.

The emergent theme can be explained by Procedural justice theory (Tyler, 1990). The theory states that people are more inclined to accept and abide by choices if they believe the procedures that led to them were impartial and fair. Before commencing, they guarantee a clear knowledge of the problem by beginning with a thorough appraisal of its severity and performing complete research into its underlying causes. This is consistent with the theory's focus on the value of an orderly and equitable procedure. Talking one-on-one with the complaint and the responder to verify each side's position emphasizes their dedication to impartiality and fairness even more. When both sides are gathered together, this meticulous planning promotes more productive collaborative dialogue, increasing the possibility of a fair and long-lasting settlement.

Boulle and Nestic (2010) explored the significance of comprehensive evaluation and comprehension in the mediation process. They also pointed out that mediators who thoroughly investigate and analyse issues have a higher chance of reaching long-lasting agreements. They stressed that the first stages in resolving disagreements are to identify their root reasons and have one-on-one

talks to confirm each party's perspective. This strategy guarantees that mediators can conduct productive conversations that center on the particular problems at hand and result in cooperative solutions that satisfy all parties.

4.2.2 Seeking Legal Guidance with the Higher Authorities.

The participants highlighted seeking advice from legal counsel and the chief of police for issues beyond their control, particularly illegal drugs and juvenile delinquency. They shared their strategy of endorsing persistent cases to the justice system or a lawyer after repeated attempts at mediation and advice. This approach is taken when individuals continue their problematic behavior despite extensive intervention. The participants emphasized informing the parties involved that the barangay can only facilitate mediation and advising them to take their issues to higher authorities if needed.

(So, for the strategies I used... when I was really tired, I would endorse it, because almost everything, I would tell them, "It's only blood that hasn't come out of my eyes from dealing with you, yet you continue." Just recently, I endorsed a case because they really asked for it. I had already done everything I could for them, even involving the police for mediation. Now, they are doing it again, so it's better to endorse them to the justice system to a lawyer so they will remember what they did. I tried to stop them from doing it again. So, those are my strategies. I endorse them because, after a long time of advising and mediating, they still continue. That's why I endorse them. Usually, what I do is make them understand that the barangay can only facilitate between the two parties. So, I inform them that they can take the matter to higher agencies where their problem can be addressed). (Participant 6)

(When there are problems that I can't handle, I seek advice from our legal counsel and the chief of police, especially regarding illegal drugs and juvenile delinquency among the youth). (Participant 8)

The emergent theme highlights how the Lupon chiefs deal with situations that are beyond their control, especially when it comes to illegal drugs and juvenile delinquency. The Lupon chiefs emphasized how crucial it is to consult with the chief of police and legal counsel in order to handle these complicated matters properly. They also discussed how they support situations that are taken to the legal system or a lawyer after mediation and guidance are tried and failed to address the problem. When people persist in their problematic behavior even after receiving intensive intervention, this strategy is required. The Lupon chiefs stressed how crucial it is to let the parties know that the barangay's job is to assist in mediation and that any disputes should be brought up with higher authorities for further action.

The emerging theme is relevant to the principles of Escalation Theory, which studies how disputes escalate and need more formal involvement as they become worse (Pruitt & Rubin, 1986). According to the theory, formal legal processes and higher authorities may become necessary when informal and local ways of dispute resolution become insufficient. The notion of Escalation Theory is reflected in the Lupon chiefs' attitude to resolving matters that are beyond their control, namely with regard to illicit narcotics and juvenile misbehavior. They acknowledged that certain situations are beyond the scope of local mediation. They emphasized the need to consult with legal counsel and the head of police in order to handle these complicated matters efficiently. When informal settlement efforts prove inadequate, the escalation process, which involves seeking higher authority, is appropriate. The tactic of referring situations that are persistent to the legal system or a lawyer after several efforts at mediation and guidance are unsuccessful is consistent with the notion that more significant and unresolvable disputes call for official involvement.

Nolan-Haley (2012) investigated how legal interventions and mediation interact in the communal resolution of disputes. The research concluded that mediation is effective in resolving numerous disputes; however, it is frequently necessary to escalate matters to legal authorities in the case of persistent delinquency and unlawful activities. Mediators must know when to call in legal assistance and law enforcement to make sure that significant issues are properly handled. The research found that by ensuring that complicated and important situations get the required legal attention, a defined methodology for obtaining legal advice and consulting higher authorities may improve the efficacy of community mediation.

4.2.3 Psychological Strategies and Personal Involvement.

The participants revealed that their strategy for resolving challenging situations involves employing psychological tactics, or "psywar," to foster collaboration when conventional methods prove unsuccessful. They expressed the significance of conducting meetings to address conflicts, identify problems, and develop solutions that would result in a positive outcome in the barangay. They noted their persistence and determination in managing conflicts to the process of resolving disputes and preserving harmony in the barangay.

(When it seems like a situation can't be solved, I have ways of using "psywar" psychological warfare. It's not really a prohibited process, just "psywar" psychological tactics to solve the problems. that's my strategy to solve the problems. There's no other choice. If they don't cooperate, well, "I'm like Sylvester Stallone." that's my idea and treat to them). (Participant 4)

(I call for a meeting and gather them to discuss the conflicts in the barangay. Then, I identify the issues and try to find a solution to resolve them and provide a good disposition). (Participant 5)

The emergent theme emphasizes the Lupon chiefs' strategy for overcoming difficult circumstances by using psychological warfare, or "psywar," to promote cooperation in the face of failure with traditional approaches. The Lupon chiefs stressed the need to hold meetings to resolve disputes, identify underlying issues, and create solutions that benefit the community as a whole. Their tenacity and resolve in handling disagreements are essential to the process of settling disputes and maintaining peace in the barangay. The Lupon chiefs show their dedication to preserving peace and order in their community by interacting directly and using psychological techniques, which guarantees that issues are resolved amicably, even in difficult circumstances.

The emerging theory is depicted by Social Influence Theory, which investigates how people might use different kinds of influence to alter the attitudes, beliefs, or actions of others (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). According to this notion, psychological strategies and direct participation may successfully resolve disputes and promote cooperation, particularly in situations when traditional approaches are ineffective. The ways in which the Lupon chiefs used psychological strategies, or "psywar," to promote cooperation are consistent with the ideas of Social Influence Theory. The Lupon chiefs seek to settle difficult situations and foster collaboration by using tactics that affect the emotions and actions of disputing parties. Meetings to resolve disputes, pinpoint underlying issues, and create solutions show how they utilize their social power to produce beneficial results for the community.

Fisher and Ury (2011) investigated the use of psychological techniques in conflict resolution and negotiation. The study stressed how important it is to understand the psychological roots of disputes in order to promote cooperation and produce favorable results. They emphasized the need for perseverance and individual participation in conflict resolution, and they proposed that psychological strategies like active listening, empathy, and problem reframing may greatly improve the mediation process. According to the study's findings, mediators who use these tactics are more qualified to handle challenging situations and preserve peace in the community.

4.3 Aspirations of the Informants to Enhance the Quality of Services They Provided in the Barangay Justice System

4.3.1 Continuous Learning and Personal Development.

The participants explained the importance of the chief of the Lupon's ongoing training and knowledge formation, particularly in handling cases involving both adults and minors. They emphasized the significance of attending seminars, particularly those focused on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), to guarantee that Lupon members are adequately informed about the law. The participants also emphasized the importance of attending training sessions and seminars, where professionals such as fiscals and justices can offer valuable insights and suggestions to improve the knowledge of the Lupon Tagapamayapa members.

(Well, of course, as the chief of the Lupon, your knowledge should be continuous, and you should have ongoing training. It's important to stay updated with new information and practices because you handle cases involving not just adults but also children. You should attend seminars, especially those related to VAWC there's a training that you can get). (Participant 1)

(There should be seminars and training sessions. What usually happens is that the Lupon members are respected, but they are not fully knowledgeable about the law. Therefore, there should be proper training provided). (Participant 2)

(That's a great question. Continuous learning and asking questions are crucial. There are Training sessions and seminars for us. play a significant role. In seminars We can gain a lot of knowledge from these. We can learn what we didn't know before, and it can change our ideas). (Participant 3)

The emergent theme emphasizes the Lupon chiefs' stress on the chief of the Lupon's need for continual education and skill improvement, particularly when managing instances involving both adults and minors. They emphasized how crucial it is for members of Lupon to attend seminars, especially those on Violence Against Women and Children (VAWC), in order to make sure they are knowledgeable on the relevant legislation. The Lupon chiefs also emphasized the need for training sessions and seminars where professionals like fiscals and judges may provide insightful commentary and recommendations. The method of continual learning is essential for improving the efficacy and understanding of Lupon Tagapamayapa members, guaranteeing that they are prepared to address a variety of community challenges.

Lifelong Learning Theory, which stresses the need for continual education and skill development throughout an individual's life, explains the emerging theme (Jarvis, 2004). According to the theory of lifelong learning, ongoing education is necessary to adjust to new situations and changing responsibilities, especially in dynamic settings. The Lupon chiefs emphasized how important it is for the chief of the Lupon to continue learning and honing his or her skills, particularly when dealing with situations involving adults and adolescents. They emphasized how crucial it is for members of Lupon to attend seminars on Violence Against Women

and Children (VAWC) in order to make sure they are knowledgeable about pertinent legislation. This strategy is supported by the lifelong learning theory, which promotes lifelong learning as a means of keeping people current and skilled in their areas.

Grillo (2016) investigated the value of ongoing education and career advancement for community mediators. According to the study, in order for mediators to remain current on legal developments and practical approaches to conflict resolution, they must get continual education and training. Grillo (2016) discovered that mediators' capacity to manage complex situations involving a varied range of community members is much improved by participating in seminars and workshops, particularly those facilitated by legal experts. The research concluded that ongoing education is essential to raising the legitimacy and efficacy of community mediation initiatives.

Santos and Diaz (2021) examined how the efficacy of the Lupon Tagapamayapa is affected by ongoing education and instruction. According to the study, seminars on VAWC and other pertinent regulations are crucial for preparing Lupon members to manage a variety of conflicts, particularly those that include vulnerable populations. Accordingly, the legal experts' training sessions yielded significant insights that enhanced the legal understanding and conflict resolution abilities of Lupon members. The survey made clear how important it is for Lupon to pursue ongoing education and professional growth in order to serve their communities and tackle challenging problems properly.

4.3.2 Embodying Integrity and Leading by Example.

The participants emphasized the importance of fairness and diplomacy in handling conflicts within the barangay, showing their commitment to treating all parties equally. They stressed the need for consistency, dedication, and commitment to their service to achieve positive outcomes. The informant aspired to strengthen the Lupon's capabilities, ensuring members are well-equipped and experienced in dispute resolution while maintaining fairness and avoiding favoritism. They also underscored the significance of setting a good example, avoiding corruption, and not taking advantage of others to maintain respect and trust within the community.

(Ah, I just show them that I am fair. I am equal in settling their issues and in diplomacy. I use diplomacy in handling their conflicts to show them that I am fair in dealing with them). (Participant 4)

(Well, my suggestion there, sir, is that we should be consistent in our functions. At the same time, we should be dedicated and more committed to our service because if we just overlook our standing in our function, it won't lead to a good outcome. So our commitment and enhancement are really important, sir). (Participant 9)

(My aspiration is to further strengthen and ensure they are well-equipped, especially in terms of experience in dealing with conflicts among those who are in dispute in the barangay. It is necessary to apply fairness without favoritism. It is not acceptable to lose their respect if you are biased. Therefore, you must be fair). (Participant 10)

The emergent theme recognizes the participants' commitment to using fairness and compassion while resolving disputes within the community. They emphasized that they would treat all parties fairly and that in order to get the results they want, they must be consistent, dedicated, and committed to their service. The informant wanted to make sure that members of the Lupon are skilled and knowledgeable in handling disputes fairly and impartially, therefore enhancing the organization's potential. They emphasized how important it is to lead by example by abstaining from corruption and abusing others since doing so is essential to maintaining respect and confidence in society. Encouraging a culture of honesty and responsibility strengthens the community's faith in the local barangay justice system.

Transformational Leadership Theory, which underlines the importance of leaders in inspiring and motivating their followers through vision, integrity, and leading by example, serves as an illustration of the emerging topic (Bass & Riggio, 2006). Fairness, consistency, and treating everyone with ethics are qualities that define transformational leaders. The transformational leadership theory is seen in the informant's commitment to using justice and diplomacy to resolve disputes within the barangay. They emphasized the value of consistency, devotion, and commitment to their service in order to produce good results. They also emphasized their commitment to treating all parties fairly. The informant exemplifies the transformational leadership quality of developing followers' potential and capacities by striving to increase Lupon's capabilities and making sure that members are knowledgeable and skilled in conflict resolution.

Tyler and Huo (2002) investigated how community leaders' efficacy in resolving disputes is impacted by justice and honesty. The study discovered that leaders who continuously display fairness and eschew bias are more effective at resolving disagreements and sustaining community confidence. In order to gain credibility and respect, Tyler and Huo (2002) highlighted the need to set a

good example and act ethically. The research concluded that a leader's capacity to successfully handle conflicts and cultivate an environment of responsibility within the community is improved by their commitment to fairness and ethical conduct.

4.3.3 Provision of Compensation and Incentives.

The participants recommended that the Lupong Tagapamayapa members be compensated with an honorarium for their contributions despite the fact that the majority of them are undergraduates. They narrated the dedication of the ten members who serve daily despite receiving minimal compensation and strengthened their dedication to the barangay. The informant also specified that seminar budgets were used to provide incentives to recognize their efforts and further motivate them.

(So, I think first, my suggestion here is related to our Lupong Tagapamayapa. Only one of us is a graduate; the rest are undergraduates, but their quality of work is still okay. In our league, the Lupong Tagapamayapa should be given compensation, like an honorarium, because even though they are just like that, at least they are helping the barangay. So, here, the Lupong Tagapamayapa, there are ten of them. Every day, they are here on duty even with just a small compensation. They really commit themselves. For example, if I have seminars or if there are remaining budget, I provide incentives). (Participant 6)

The emergent theme emphasizes the Lupon chiefs' suggestion that, even though the majority of Lupong Tagapamayapa members are undergraduates, they should get an honorarium in recognition of their services. They highlighted the members' devotion to the barangay by highlighting their everyday service with little pay. The Lupon chiefs said that extra incentives were given out of seminar money in order to acknowledge and encourage these individuals further. This strategy intends to boost the Lupong Tagapamayapa members' morale and continuous commitment to their duties in upholding community peace and successfully resolving conflicts, in addition to acknowledging their hard work and devotion.

The emergent theme adheres with the idea of equity theory, which holds that a desire for justice drives people to work to ensure that their inputs and outputs are equitable with those of others (Adams, 1963). Equity Theory states that motivation, commitment, and work satisfaction are highly impacted by the perception of justice in remuneration and recognition. Despite the fact that the majority of Lupong Tagapamayapa members are undergraduates, the Lupon chiefs suggested that members should receive an honorarium in recognition of their achievements. This advice emphasizes how crucial it is to acknowledge the members' commitment and diligence. The Lupon chiefs stressed the necessity for fair treatment to reflect the members' daily service to the barangay.

Cohn and Fritzsche (2009) studied the effect of rewards and pay on volunteer mediators in community conflict resolution. The study discovered that offering honoraria and other types of payment considerably improved volunteer mediators' dedication and morale. According to Cohn and Fritzsche (2009), these kinds of rewards acknowledge the mediators' efforts and promote consistent involvement and efficiency in their capacities. The research supposed that paying volunteers fairly is crucial to keeping them engaged and motivated in community mediation programs.

Meanwhile, Del Rosario and Soriano (2020) investigated the results of paying and rewarding Lupong Tagapamayapa members. According to the study, honoraria and seminar-based rewards considerably raised these members' commitment and output in their performance. The findings indicated that rewarding Lupong Tagapamayapa members for their efforts with monetary and non-monetary rewards improved their spirits and reaffirmed their dedication to upholding communal harmony and settling conflicts. The research emphasized how crucial institutional support is to maintaining the drive and efficacy of neighborhood mediators in the barangay system.

5. Conclusion

This research explored the experiences of the Chiefs of Lupong Tagapamayapa in barangay justice administration in the coastal areas of Northern Iloilo, Philippines. The participants of this study were the selected ten (10) chiefs of the Lupong Tagapamayapa. All informants were subjected to an individual in-depth interview. The qualitative research showed both the rewards and challenges experienced by Lupon Chiefs in their roles. On the positive side, they find personal fulfillment in conflict resolution, promoting community peace, and preventing legal disputes. However, they also encounter difficulties such as unresolved conflicts, legal constraints, and lack of cooperation from disputing parties. To address these obstacles, they employ strategies such as re-evaluating conflicts, seeking legal advice, and using personal and psychological approaches. Additionally, their aspirations for improving the justice system include a focus on continuous learning, maintaining integrity, and advocating for better compensation and incentives, reflecting their dedication to enhancing both personal and institutional capacities. Based on the emergent themes identified, it is recommended that the Katarungang Pambarangay system be rendered more effective, equitable, and efficient by implementing the requisite training and development programs for its Lupon chiefs and members.

6. Study Limitations and Future Research

One limitation of this study is that it was conducted exclusively in selected barangays within the coastal municipalities of the Province of Iloilo rather than across all barangays in the province. This geographic scope may limit the generalizability of the findings, as they might not fully capture the experiences or challenges faced by Lupon Tagapamayapa officials in other areas, especially those with different demographics or conflict dynamics. Therefore, the insights and recommendations from this study may have limited relevance beyond the selected barangays.

Another limitation is the study's focus on the local perspective within the Province of Iloilo without extending its scope to a national level. This narrow focus limits its ability to account for broader trends or variations in conflict resolution practices across different regions of the Philippines. As a result, the findings may not accurately represent the diverse challenges and experiences of Lupon Tagapamayapa officials in other parts of the country, where cultural, social, and legal factors may vary significantly.

Future research should investigate the work setting of Lupon Tagapamayapa Chiefs in a national context to gain a more comprehensive comprehension of the informants' experiences. This, in turn, can assist in developing a national policy that addresses their concerns.

Furthermore, the efficacy of Lupon Tagapamayapa members should be evaluated due to the long-term effects of continuous professional development and training. Researchers can identify specific training modules that substantially improve dispute-resolution skills by examining the relationship between ongoing education and enhanced mediation outcomes. This has the potential to result in the creation of customized training programs designed to meet local mediators' specific requirements.

Lastly, it is imperative to research mediation's psychological and social consequences for both victims and offenders. The benefits of restorative justice practices can be elucidated by examining the impact of effective conflict resolution on the well-being of involved parties. This research can influence policies designed to promote the mental health of community members and ensure that the mediation process fosters reconciliation and healing.

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