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Research Article

Restoring Victim-Offender Relationship: A Qualitative Study of Restorative Justice in the Philippine Barangay System

*^{1,2}Rona Leigh Argueza Addun

About Article

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About Author

¹ Criminal Justice With Specialization In Criminology (MACJ), College of Advance Education, Ifugao State University, Ifugao, Philippines

² College of Criminal Justice Education, Ifugao State University - Potia Campus Contract of Service, Ifugao, Philippines

Contact @ Rona Leigh Argueza Addun
addunronaleigh@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the processes of restorative justice in the criminal justice system, with a focus on the barangay officials perspectives of offenders and victims in the 11 municipalities in the province of Ifugao. As a means of fostering healing and achieving a feeling of justice, it emphasizes how critical it is to recognize victims, offenders, and barangay official's viewpoint and their critical involvement in the restorative process. The research is grounded by restorative justice theory, which focuses on repairing the harm caused by crime and restoring the relationship between the victim and the offender. Using a qualitative approach, participants were intentionally selected from the 11 municipalities in Ifugao province. Data collection involved self-developed guide questions, with the responses subsequently transcribed, translated, and analyzed thematically. The findings uncovered a variety of strategies from the perspectives of victims, offenders, and barangay officials, including fostering mutual understanding, engaging in dispute resolution, expression of feelings, rebuilding relationship through seeking forgiveness and reconciliation, repairing harm through making amends, use of cultural practices and religion values, promotion of fairness and neutrality and identification of solution. A key outcome of the research was the development of a proposed intervention program aimed at addressing the identified challenges and supporting effective restorative practices within the Ifugao community.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Relationships form the center of a happy life and are among the most important factors in developing community well-being. Nonetheless, preserving and fostering these relationships can be challenging (Mertika *et al.*, 2020). Disagreements have the potential to disrupt not only interpersonal relationships but also the overall peace within the community, leading to feelings of loneliness, animosity, and mistrust (Guenther *et al.*, 2016).

To address these tensions, alternative mechanisms for resolving social conflicts and crimes have gained prominence in many nations. These approaches are driven by a renewed interest in historic customary laws and practices and growing dissatisfaction with traditional forms of justice. Such alternatives often empower not only those directly affected but also the wider community to actively participate in conflict resolution and its aftermath (Clayton & Dorussen, 2021).

Restorative justice programs are founded on the idea that parties involved in a disagreement should play an active role in resolving it and minimizing harm. These programs can sometimes enhance community cohesion and strengthen local decision-making skills. Such methods are viewed as means to support amicable conflict resolution, embrace diversity, tolerate differences, and contribute responsibly and constructively to the community (Fulham *et al.*, 2023).

In the United States, restorative justice programs have been implemented in several states and have shown promise in reducing recidivism rates. One example is the Victim Offender Mediation program in Vermont, which bring together the victims and offenders to discuss the harm that has been caused and to develop a plan for making amends. The program has been credited with reducing recidivism rates among offenders who participate and has been used as a model for other states looking to implement similar programs (Lanni, 2022).

Restorative Justice in the Philippines is increasingly recognized as a viable approach to addressing criminal behavior, particularly among children in conflict with the law. This method emphasizes rehabilitation over punishment, aiming to restore relationships between offenders, victims, and the community (Omowon & Kunlere, 2024). In Ifugao Province, where cultural practices emphasize collective well-being and strong familial ties, there is a noticeable gap in research regarding the restoration of relationships between victims, offenders, and the barangay officials. Understanding both perspectives on restoring relationships is essential, as it may uncover culturally specific approaches to conflict resolution and reconciliation that could be more effective in the Ifugao community.

The findings of the study provide significant ideas and information to law enforcement agencies, community leaders, social welfare policy makers, and future researchers. This study can benefit police and other law enforcement agencies from understanding how restorative justice practices can complement traditional policing methods. It can also guide them handling cases involving minor offenses. The study can empower community leaders to advocate and implement restorative justice practices. It highlights how these practices can strengthen community bond, resolve disputes, and promote a culture of peace and understanding. They can leverage the study to create support systems that aid both victims and

offenders during and after restorative justice processes. It ensures holistic support, from emotional counseling to community reintegration services. The study serves as a valuable resource for exploring restorative justice, particularly in victim-offender mediation. It highlights gaps in existing literature, paving the way for studies that can explore new dimensions.

1.1. Theoretical/conceptual framework

The framework of this study is built on a collaboration of various resources and research derived from books, prior studies, and other relevant writings that the researcher deemed important. This study follows a conceptual model based on Coomb's System Approach, which includes three components: Input, Process, and Output.

The first stage emphasizes the importance of input. In this phase victims, offenders, and Barangay officials from eleven municipalities in Ifugao Province need to understand the strategies they implemented to restore social relationships.

Moving on to the second stage, the process method involves gathering, analyzing, and interpreting data to identify the strategies experienced by victims offenders, and Barangay officials. This is done through self-constructed guide questions and in-depth interviews.

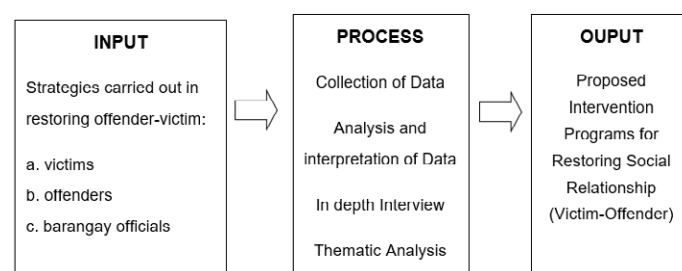


Figure 1. Paradigm of the Study

1.2. Statement of the problem

The primary goal of the study was to explore the strategies that participants encountered and utilized in the restorative relationship, as seen from the perspectives of the victim, offender and barangay officials.

Specifically, this study answered the following:

i. What are the strategies carried out by the following in restoring offender-victim relationship:

- victims;
- offenders;
- barangay officials?

ii. What intervention program can be proposed to ensure restoration of offender-victim relationship

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

A study by McQuade (2014) emphasized that understanding the relationship between victims and offenders may help to shed light on certain stereotypes of crime, the offenders who commit those crimes, and the outcomes of those crimes when they go to any court. Issues revolving around trials with victim-offender relationships include defendant culpability and what efforts to be done, victim provocation, and charge reductions. In this regard, many countries have constructed a Criminal Justice



System that incorporates a restorative justice approach to help both parties in resolving the aftermath (Co, 2021). Restorative justice approach is a type of justice that personalizes the crime by allowing victims and offenders to work out a restitution deal that meets their needs while also including the community. Restorative Justice is a worldwide phenomenon (Maculan & Gil, 2020).

In India, the legal system is mostly about retributive process. There are these traces of traditional ways of settling disputes as part of the restorative justice. "Panchayats", or Lo'k Adalats" is one of the best examples of it, it focusses more on mediation, reconciliation instead of punishing the respondent or the criminal (Baug, 2025).

In Bangladesh, there are existing legal institution that mandated to oversee the lower levels of society where constituents have also daily disputes. the role of the restorative justice is important because it allows victims and offenders to negotiate an agreement in a way that both parties will benefit, and future harm is caused from either of the parties. Through the help of a trained facilitator or mediator to resolve wrongdoing, to prevent a reoccurrence in a safe and controlled environment since they in the same community. Restorative justice process in Bangladesh brings together the victim, the offender, relatives, neighborhoods both in deciding how to address the aftermath of the crime which is part of the good restoration of relationship and giving the victim an opportunity to be directly involved in responding to the crime, harm or emotional physical damages while on the part of the offender, there is an increasing awareness of the impact of the behavior and providing an opportunity to take responsibility, engaging the support system for making amends (Biswas, 2018).

However, the success of Restorative Justice is not universal and is heavily influenced by cultural and systemic contexts. In India, hierarchal relationship between the groups or social system complicate victim-offender dialogues, with Dalit youth often feeling pressured to excessively apologize to upper social groups victims without receiving reciprocal accountability. In contrast, Nagaland's tribal communities have successfully integrated Restorative Justice with traditional elderly mediation in the community (Vanzara & Gupta, 2025).

In the Philippines, Katarungang Pambarangay is an innovation of Philippine Justice. It resolves conflicts at the barangay level to foster community balance and tranquility and give people from the community an effective and convenient form of justice (Damayon, 2022). The Katarungang Pambarangay System is intended to improve the access to justice to those who would opt not to go through the traditional, adversarial, and adjudicative litigation in the court and to allow petty disputes arising from the Barangay level to be immediately resolved. It has four-fold benefits: to unclog court dockets, achieve speedy disposition of cases, enhance access to justice, and to involve the community in dispute resolution (Pila, 2021).

The Katarungang Pambarangay System benefits the parties by affording them the discretion to make their own arrangements to resolve their dispute in the Barangay without resorting to filing a case in court. Thus, the Barangay serves as a government unit that not only involves executive and legislative functions but also judicial functions as well (Lim, 2019).

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research method

The researcher employed qualitative research method to capture the perspectives, strategies of victims, offenders, and barangay officials involved in the process of restoring social relationships through restorative justice. This method enables the researcher to analyze the subjective experiences of the participants, providing a comprehensive analysis of the role of barangay officials in facilitating restorative justice, personal perceptions and narratives of victims, offenders and uncovered the strategies that influence how individuals navigate social cohesion, accountability, and forgiveness within the community which cannot be quantified through other research approaches or cannot be understood through mere numerical data.

3.2. Research environment

The study was conducted in 11 Municipality of Ifugao, Province. Ifugao Province is located in the northern part of Luzon, Philippines, and is part of the Cordillera Administrative Region. This area is home to a diverse population composed of several prominent tribes, hence the researcher found it most suitable to conduct the study in this area. The study areas were selected based on those where many amicable settlements occur between parties from the same barangay in the 11 Municipalities of Ifugao as they strive to restore harmonious relationships. Additionally, barangays with the highest reported crime rates were included.

3.3. Participants

Purposive sampling is a technique in qualitative research where a specific group of individuals or units is selected for analysis. Participants are chosen intentionally rather than randomly (Crossman, 2020). In this method, the researcher has a clear purpose or objective when selecting the sample, focusing on the characteristics or attributes relevant to the perspectives of the victim, offender, and barangay officials. The participants comprised 11 victims, 11 offenders, and 11 Barangay officials from the 11 selected barangays in the Ifugao Province. They were purposely selected as they were directly involved in the conciliation process, with both victims and offenders recommended for interviews by the Barangay officials who played a role in the amicable settlement of both parties. These chosen participants are regarded as the most reliable sources for restoring social relationships. Moreover, inclusion and exclusion criteria were applied to ensure the appropriate selection of participants in this study. The inclusion criteria required that all participants be of legal age and bonafide residents of the chosen barangay, ensuring that individuals had personal experience to the case filed and undergone amicable settlement in the barangay. Exclusion criteria were applied to eliminate participants who did not meet these basic requirements, ensuring a relevant and focused on this study. In the data analysis, participants were labelled as labeled as Participants (P1-11) for victims, (O12-22) for Offenders and (B.O 23-33) for Barangay Officials.

3.4. Data gathering tool

The researcher used a series of interview questions and



conducted in-depth interviews to collect qualitative data. This method provided valuable insights into the views, efforts strategies of offenders, victims, and Barangay officials in mending social relationships. To ensure the accuracy and completeness of the data, a mobile phone was used to audio-record the interviews while detailed notes were simultaneously taken in a notebook. The interviews explored the process of reconciliation, the identification of the causes of conflicts, proposed recommendations, strategies from the perspectives of the victims, offenders, and Barangay officials. Probing questions were also asked to better understand the context and details of each scenario discussed.

3.5. Data gathering procedure

After an approval is granted by the Dean and Program Chairperson of Master of Arts in Criminal Justice with Specialization in Criminology (MACJ), the panel, and the research adviser, the researcher proceeded with the actual data collection phase of the study. The researcher carried out interview guide questions with in-depth interviews designed to elicit comprehensive and reflective responses from participants. These interviews were carried out from September to October 2024, with the primary objective of understanding the perspectives of victims, offenders, and Barangay officials in restoring social relationships in Ifugao.

Prior to the interviews, the researcher visited each municipality in Ifugao and identified the barangay with the highest number of amicably settled cases. A formal letter was submitted to the Punong Barangays, requesting access to two cases resolved through the Katarungang Pambarangay System. The Punong Barangays granted the request, selected the specific case to be used for the interview, and personally assisted the researcher in the data-gathering process.

The researcher conducted an orientation session with participants to explain the objectives, scope, and significance of the study. Ethical considerations were strictly observed. Participants were informed of their rights to confidentiality, voluntary participation, and the ability to withdraw at any time for any reason. To formalize this process, participants were requested to read and sign a Consent and Debriefing Letter, which also clarified how their data would be used and protected.

3.6. Treatment of the data

In analyzing the data, the researcher employed the thematic analysis framework developed by Braun and Clarke (2006), to illustrate and describe the perspectives on the strategies involved in restoring relationships between victims and offenders, including insights from the Barangay officials. The researcher became well-acquainted with the findings by thoroughly reading and re-reading the interview transcripts. In addition, the researcher listened to the recorded interviews and reflected on handwritten notes to evaluate, confirm, verify, and scrutinize the information gathered from victims, offenders, and barangay officials during each session. The audio materials were later transcribed manually, with the transcripts reviewed and validated multiple times by the researcher to ensure precision and integrity of the recorded content. The collected data were organized into tables with corresponding

codes. After identifying and naming the themes, presenting the findings, and interpreting the data, the researcher began drafting the final report. The codes were formulated based on the interview transcripts and categorized separately from the participants insights. These were then pooled from the research questions presented to discuss concurrently the strategies and recommendations in restoring social relationships.

3.7. Ethical considerations

Participants were approached for one-on-one interviews and informed about the study's objectives, which were conducted at their convenience and with their willingness to participate. The researcher clearly communicated that all their responses would be solely used for academic purposes and reassuring participants that the data gathered would be handled with the utmost respect for confidentiality. The participants were encouraged to share their personal experiences and perspectives on the strategies involved in restoring social relationships, using their own language they comfortable with.

Moreover, the researcher followed guidelines compliance with the Data Privacy Act ensured that any identifying information, such as names or specific locations, would not be included. Pseudonyms or codes were used to protect the identities of participants, maintaining anonymity throughout the study. All recordings, transcriptions, and written notes were securely stored, password-protected digital formats to prevent unauthorized access.

To further safeguard confidentiality, participants were given the opportunity to review the findings or transcripts relevant to their interviews before the final manuscript were published, providing them with the option to request edits or omissions if they felt their privacy had not been adequately protected. This ensured that their confidentiality was maintained throughout the study.

After the completion of the study, the researcher will dispose of all collected data. All digital recordings, transcripts, and documents containing identifiable information will be permanently deleted from password-protected storage devices within six months after the final thesis submission and approval. Physical materials, such as printed notes or signed consent forms, will be securely stored for one year and then destroyed using appropriate methods such as shredding. This ensures that no unauthorized person will gain access to sensitive information and that participant confidentiality is continuously protected even after the research concludes.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This chapter presents a detailed discussion of data analysis and interpretation of the study. The researcher's findings included a discussion on the strategies and approaches taken from the perspective of the offender, the victim, and barangay officials, focusing on their efforts towards seeking forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoring relationships. It also offers insights into their perspective and engagement with the restorative justice process.

Strategies carried out in the restoring offender-victim relationships

Restoring relationships between victims and offenders within



the context of restorative justice involves a multifaceted approach with the support of barangay officials. The strategies employed by the participants contribute to the healing and reconciliation of relationships. These strategies address both the emotional, psychological and social aspects of the conflict, ensuring that both victims and offenders are given the opportunity to understand each perspective, take accountability for their actions, and work towards meaningful resolutions.

4.1. Victims strategies

This section focuses on the strategies and actions taken from the viewpoint of the victims or Participants. It explores how the victims sought to address the problem with the offenders and work towards the restoration of their relationships:

4.1.1. Fostering mutual understanding

Fostering Mutual understanding allows victims to express the harm they have suffered, while offenders are given the opportunity to understand the emotional and social impact of their actions. This shared understanding is essential for promoting accountability, healing, and reconciliation.

As pointed out in the participants' answers, it can be inferred that they tried to comprehend why and what such offenders did. For instance, Participant 12 said, *"I went to ask her why she moved the boundary marker that was cleaned, but she said her relative told her to do that because he knows."* As specified by Paterson (2022), the victim and offender undergo such process through participative dialogue and responds to present and future needs and obligations of stakeholders. The participants strategy showed that they preferred dialogue to confrontation and tried to identify the reason for the offender's behavior. Moreover, one of the key components of restorative justice is the participant's openness to attempting to comprehend the offender's perspective.

Similarly, the utterance of Participant 16 showed respect for the approach with trying to understand the behavior: *"I went to talk to him and kindly asked if it is true that he took it."* According to Littman et.al (2023) victim-offender dialogue may facilitate restorative justice because it brings together people affected by crime, enabling them to understand each other and heal. The participant highlighted a concern for keeping the conversation constructive, a factor that needs to be in place in restorative practice. In this situation, aside from clarifying the situation, the participant helped in creating an environment where the offender feels safe enough to respond as truthfully as one can. Meanwhile, the statement by Participant 17 revealed a direct approach to seeking understanding, *"What I did was confront him/her and ask why he/she said that, even though he/she was angry at me."* As stated by El-Kady (2024), seeking understanding through dialogue in victim-offender mediation fosters empathy, facilitates confession, and aids in repairing harm, ultimately contributing to the restoration of their relationship. The tone is confrontational, but the very act of questioning shows there was an intention to understand the meaning of the miscommunication.

The aforementioned analysis demonstrated the importance of pursuing comprehension within the context of restorative justice. It emphasized the value of communication as a means

of resolving issues by means of discussion and demonstrating a readiness to comprehend the viewpoints of offenders. Hence, it allows victims to express their feelings, share their own experiences, and get clarification on the behaviors that resulted in harm. Speaking is very important for fostering empathy and accountability as well as for resolving individual issues.

As an example of the restorative justice process in dialogue, the following discussion explored how participants carry out this concept as they attempt to convince offenders to have discussions about issues that the latter bring. Participant 14 stated, *"I often visit their house to ask about the debt from five years ago. We had agreed to pay it back after a year, but it's been many years since then."* As stated by Grieger (2015) there will always be disagreement and differences of opinion of one kind or another. However, to avoid a loss of trust, damage to intimacy, or behavior that further upsets the relationship both individual who are involved to such conflict must try or exert efforts to resolve the transgression or conflict. The participant's response showed immense efforts in trying to reach out to the offender. In that the repeated visits at various levels were in themselves an indication of the need for a resolution but also depicted the importance of having a dialogue transcending with time, Participant 14 is seen to represent the restorative justice principle that ongoing communication itself can be a means of establishing understanding and trust.

On the other hand, Participant 15 accounted, *"At first, I talked to him while also complaining about what he was doing to me and my business."* Participant 15 displayed a more direct approach regarding the dialogue, as the participant is complaining in addition to wanting to talk. Although the complaint may be part of the first discussion, the fact that they are talking is the absolute first step in the process. It is in restorative justice that the victims' sentiments and concerns can also be expressed through discourse or other means of venting frustration. Lynn (2018) stated that engaging in dialogue, particularly through personal narratives, can facilitate restorative justice by fostering understanding and addressing historical inequalities among marginalized groups in the context of re-entry. In this regard, the analysis revealed that the fact that dialogue is not only for the momentary solutions but that which creates an understanding and re-establishes relationships. Both participants by actively communicating with the offenders showed their commitment to addressing grievances constructively, thus underlining the importance of dialogue for the restorative outcome in the community and nourishing social bond.

4.1.2. Engaging in dispute resolution

Dispute resolution is not just about finding an immediate solution but also addressing underlying issues, fostering empathy, and ensuring that all parties involved are given the opportunity especially the victims or participants to voice out their feelings, acknowledge the harm caused, and actively participate in the process of conflict resolution.

The efforts made by participants or victims to connect with offenders and to seek external support are reflective of wanting to resolve a grievance while also healing relationships within the community. They demonstrated an understanding that effective conflict resolution may sometimes depend on



approaches that work together in healing and holding people accountable. Seeking Mediation can be seen obviously in the answers given by the offenders, with the commitment to handle issues based on community engagement and dialogue. Participant 13 stated, *"I went to report the incident because he threw a knife (buneng) at me, which made me feel like he wanted to harm me."* Understanding the perspectives of victims, offenders the barangay officials is paramount in constructing effective interventions that foster healing and reintegration within communities (Co, 2021). In this instance, there was a very key step towards mediation. Reporting the incident means that there's a need for intervention and accountability, while the desire to resolve the conflict is an indication of commitment to maintaining the relationship.

In the case of Participant 20, barangay involvement also indicated an approach to mediation when direct negotiation fails. As Participant 21 himself confided, *"Since we weren't able to negotiate and settle his debt, I decided to take the matter to the barangay, not to hurt him, but to encourage him to pay."* The response revealed that the participant was conscious of the role of the community in facilitating accountability and resolution. The participant was motivated to seek help from the barangay because he wanted mediation in a manner that would point out cooperation rather than punishment. Participant 22 added, *"I informed the barangay that my chicken had died from poisoning, and that first, we had misunderstood each other."* Further, Participant 22 sought collaborative resolution, recognizing that effective mediation often requires external support to clarify conflicts and restore relationships. In general, the answers pointed out the necessity of seeking mediation in restorative justice. As stated by Achmad (2023), when the victim and the offender voluntarily engage in mediation process, restorative justice can be accomplished, emphasizing reconciliation and avoiding recurrence while protecting rights and well-being. To develop empathy and comprehend the effects of the crime, mediation promotes open discussion between victims and offenders (Shardakova & Soroka, 2024). Communication efforts, as well as engagement with the community and incorrect beliefs removal, all point to finding constructive ways of dealing with the issue. As a result, it addresses specific issues and promotes healing and the restoration of social bonds in the community, further strengthening the mediation effectively toward achievement of restorative outcomes.

In the theme of restorative justice, proposed solutions are essential in providing resolution and healing both to victims and offenders. In line with that, it helps people come together and find constructive means for the resolution of disputes and attempt at preventing future conflicts. Now, in proposing solutions, victims present their needs, and at the same time, they provide an atmosphere filled with empathy and cooperation in partnership with the offender. Participants 15 response. *"I suggested that he sell something different so we wouldn't end up fighting."* According to Richmond and Visoka (2021), Reconciliation refers to the process by which the two cultures learn to live together in the post-conflict environment, as opposed to conflict resolution, which refers to creating a mutually satisfying and long-lasting agreement between the two societies. The core element of restorative justice is

the cooperative process integrating all stakeholders, which means people can propose solutions and take responsibility for repairing harm caused by their actions. The participant implied the conflict and took the initiative of putting forward an end to it, which is very vitally significant in restorative justice because it elicits collaboration and mutual understanding rather than fighting. The offer to sell something else suggested that the underlying problem of possible future competition or conflict over resources is something to be discussed while at the same time to be made peace ahead.

4.1.3. Expression of feelings

Expression of emotions can take on the role of a vital vehicle for healing and reconciliation between the victims and offenders. Open expression of emotions clarifies the impact of the harmed cause, thus creating room for accountability and dialogue.

Expression, as observed below, allows for easy clarification of the situation and brings about empathy and insight from the offender. The following analysis discussed how participants enacted this theme. In the answer of Participant 17, *"I told him not to repeat it because I was scared of what he said, so I went to the barangay to report it, so that if anything happens to me, he will be the one responsible."* As stated by Geunter et al. (2016) Disagreements had the potential to disrupt not only interpersonal relationships but also the overall peace within the community. This upheaval could lead to feelings of loneliness, animosity, and mistrust. There was an evident expression of fear and concern from the participant. The words of the offender disturbed the participant, revealing an evident sense of vulnerability and this brought focus on the gravity of the incident and the need for responsibility. The report to the barangay finds one means of protection with another mechanism which serves to make the offender realize that these actions mean consequences.

On the other hand, Participant 22 answered, *"When I first spoke with him, explained to him that it wasn't our dog into his yard but the army dog, but he didn't believe me."* The participant's explanation to clear the situation demonstrated the need for understanding and acceptance from the respondent. Victims can express pain and frustration, but offenders can also be able to reveal feelings of remorse and motivations for actions. Thus providing emotional resolution and even reconciliation (Farkas et al., 2020; Williams, 2008). The frustration that arises from being believed is an important emotional phase of the conflict as it points out the distresses that may happen in conflicts. An expression of feelings is a vital element in the process of restorative justice for healing the relationships between victims and offenders. This will offer opportunities for communication where both parties can express their feelings, leading to mutual understanding and compassion.

In summary, the importance of mutual understanding, communication, and emotional expression in restorative justice processes. Victims often sought to clarify misunderstandings with offenders, emphasizing that open dialogue fosters healing and reconciliation. Participants in dispute resolution stressed the value of proposing constructive solutions, which build empathy, cooperation, and relationship restoration. According to Meeners (2020), understanding enhances empathy an



essential element in mending victim-offender relationships. Additionally, the expression of emotions plays a key role in the healing process, as it allows victims to convey the impact of the crime and his is fundamental healing, as it will make the offender aware of the emotional effects that his actions bring about and opens space for accountability and reconciliation.

4.2. Offenders strategies

This section discussed the strategies and approaches taken from the perspective of the offenders, highlighting their efforts towards seeking forgiveness, reconciliation, and restoration of relationships:

4.2.1. Rebuilding relationships through seeking forgiveness and reconciliation.

The process of rebuilding relationships between victims and offenders is a fundamental aspect of restorative justice. Forgiveness and reconciliation are not merely emotional or symbolic actions it is strategies that enable victims and offenders to transcend their grievances, heal emotional wounds, and reintegrate into the community allowing both individuals to move forward with a renewed sense of connection and shared responsibility.

As evidenced in the participants responses, it can be deduced that they actively engage in the process of seeking forgiveness and restoring relationships with the victims of their actions. For instance, O-1 stated *"I ask for apologies because I thought that that the dog was the one destroying the flowers and fence in my garden."* As stated by Worthington *et al.* (2018), such processes promote personal development and restore social bonds-again in line with the stories of remorse and correcting wrongs presented by the participants. It was clear that the participant wanted to express regret for blaming the victim for the damage in their garden. This admission of miscommunication is important because it shows that he is prepared to accept accountability for his deeds.

Similarly, O-2's admission of aggression, followed by an apology, illustrated the importance of recognizing how violent actions can disrupt social bonds as clearly exemplified in his response, *"I apologized for slapping him with a a large knife (buneng). I also apologized to my friends for going and hitting the post where the passengers usually wait."* The narratives also revealed emotional depth, as seen in O-7, *"I cried for forgiveness because I had threatened to kill him/her out of my anger towards him/her. I didn't just ask for forgiveness, but I also fixed a way for me to go and have coffee at their house since we became relatives again."* Vicente and Raza (2023) point out that efforts to address the consequences of criminal behavior should, where possible, involve the offender alongside those affected. The act of crying for forgiveness is a sign of real intention to mend things back together, indicating that emotional exposure can sometimes be the best remedy for healing. Such reflects the essence of restorative justice in terms of putting emphasis on empathy and understanding in the resolution of conflicts.

Similarly to O-4's response, *"I apologize for saying that to him, which affected his small business. I admit I feel jealous because he has so many customers, and I worry I'll lose them*

to others, so I'm hesitant to recommend his delicious products." Komiya *et al.* (2018) found out in their study that the inhibiting factors associated with the characteristics of justice-involved persons, include neutralization and insincere apology. In this context, the participant's relationship with a peer suffered as a result of their emotions. Admitting that jealousy is harmful to relationships is some degree of self-awareness that helps in healing relationships and enabling personal development.

Moreover, the descriptions of the participants shed light on the depth of human emotions and the different steps that go into forgiving someone. Willingness to admit mistakes, apologize, and seek redress may well be an indication of a deep interest in reconciliation and restoring social bonds. Emotional ties coupled with a willingness to take responsibility are fundamental keys to recovery in interpersonal conflicts. It also falls well within the themes of broader dimensions of the restorative justice framework, which perhaps focuses more on understanding and reconciliation rather than on punishment.

Additionally, rebuilding relationships through seeking forgives forms a core foundation of restorative justice because it enables understanding and empathy, which are important components of repairing relationships. Initiating communication emerged as an essential theme based on the responses from the participants. It can be inferred that the participant perceived the need for starting the dialogue to solve their problems.

O3 reported, *"I spoke to him calmly to ask for the return of the bike that had been missing for three days. He was the one who punched me first when I confronted him. I hope it will be alright because we were both guilty."* As supported by Wenzel *et al.* (2023) victims expressions of forgiveness can facilitate offenders self-forgiveness, allowing them to reclaim their moral integrity and acknowledge shared values with the victim. In this context, the participant showed that there was a commitment to maintaining composure and respect even at the very peaks of conflict.

4.2.2. Repairing harm through making amends

Making amends entails the commitment of offenders to fulfil their legal obligations, which are integral to the restorative justice process. However, these obligations go beyond mere legal requirements. They are viewed as part of a broader effort of the offenders involving proactive steps to repair the harm done, which can include compensating the victim by returning what was lost or providing restitution. In this way, making amends is not only about satisfying legal duties but also about demonstrating genuine remorse and taking responsibility on the victims and community.

Responses from participants showed that offenders are actively taking significant steps to make amends for their past wrongdoings. O-1 stated, *"I offered to pay for all the costs or replace all the chickens that were killed."* As mentioned by Maculan and Gil (2020) restorative justice approach is a type of justice that personalizes the crime by allowing victims and offenders to work out a restitution deal that meets their needs while also including the community. The participant's readiness to take on financial costs indicates a recognition of the misconduct and the need to replace what was destroyed. These behaviors are in line with the principles of restorative



justice, which place a strong emphasis on making amends with victims through reparations.

Similarly, O-5's answer, *"To make things right, I talked to him kindly and explained that I didn't really owe him anything."*, an aspect of clarity and peace of mind in communication was indicated. In addressing the miscommunication on a respectful basis, the participant clarified his position but also created an environment likely to lead to resolution. O-11 echoed the same message when he said, *"I humbly asked him if he really has seen me take the slab of wood as I was among the suspects."*

The participants' responses suggested that the emphasis was on inquiry rather than processing a long debate into a question. It encouraged listening without making people defensive, which eventually leads to a productive discussion that aims to address the current problem. As supported by Paul and Borton (2017), effective communication in restorative justice involves asking good questions, listening empathically, and facilitating face-to-face discussions among stakeholders to address harm and reparations collaboratively as part of the reconciliation process. Thus, it could probably infer that the initiation of communication is a vital component of this type of restorative justice. Having the process play out respectfully and calmly through all aspects of the conversation proved that participants have interest in striving toward resolution and have a stake in understanding the other party's perspective.

Comparably, O-6 stated, *"What I did was pay my debt and expressed my hope that he understood me."* In general, these findings showed that the process of making amends is an integral part of restorative justice as it involves responsible parties performing reasonable conciliatory gestures to victims, emphasizing victim control and the moral obligation to repair relational wrongs (Encarnacion, 2014). When participants take active roles in making amends, it shows they are working towards healing and reconciliation. It importantly shows that accountability and efforts toward restoring social bonds are the first steps to emotional recovery. The participant demonstrated that paying the debt is more than just paying back money rather it is a sincere attempt to restore harmony between two people and move forward in life.

In summary, Restoration or rebuilding of relationships stood out as one of the highlights, the fact that reconciliation must be a process of communication and trust-building and forgiveness of past actions. Thus, according to the fundamental principles of restorative justice, the offender must make amends for the harm that their wrongdoing has caused. The theme embraced the narrative accounts presented by participants in recognition of past wrongdoing as they actively seek reconciliation such a procedure allows for the emotional recovery of both the victims and offenders. In addition, forgiving and seeking forgiveness have healing value on the emotional level for both parties affected by the situation.

4.3. Barangay officials' strategies

This section outlines the role and strategies employed by the barangay officials in addressing the problem between the offender and victim. It highlights the official's approach to facilitating dialogue, promoting understanding, and guiding the restoration of the offender-victim relationship:

4.3.1. Use of cultural practices and religious values

The integration of cultural practices and religious values plays a pivotal role in the resolution of conflicts within restorative justice frameworks. In the context of restorative justice, barangay officials have shown a profound understanding of the importance of local cultural customs and religious beliefs in resolving disputes between victims and offenders. These values are deeply ingrained in the community and influence the ways in which conflicts are addressed, promoting reconciliation, forgiveness, and healing.

The responses of barangay officials showed a high level of engagement with people's cultural customs and religious beliefs when it comes to settling problems involving both victims and offenders. Through shared values and local customs, this method resolves conflicts and more significantly heals relationships.

A significant highlight of this conversation is the statement made by B.O-27, on the cultural custom known as *"Hidit,"* which reads, *"I also applied our cultural practices of 'hidit' involving the elder to settle their broken relationship so that after the conversation they can still go back to their relationship."* The participant highlighted the elders' importance in community mediations especially in the Ifugao culture, a process which is locally termed as *"hidit"*. It is defined as a peace-pact rite performed to ensure reconciliation between two parties after a conflict. This rite is conducted in the presence of a mediator and other witnesses. In the context of the statement provided, the cultural practice of *"hidit"* is applied to mend a broken relationship by involving an elder, who acts as a mediator. The process demonstrated a strong regard for established traditions and lend legitimacy to the process as it clearly appeared that the community as a whole facilitates healing since this method promotes a sense of community and shared responsibility.

As stated by B.O-23, *"I informed them about what they had done by using word of god/devotion."* The authority's call not only discussed the offenses but also challenged both parties to consider their behavior in light of their own worldviews. It made them consider the morality of their actions and instills in them a sense of responsibility that goes beyond simply following the law. Because it appeals to values that both the victim and the offender likely hold, this strategy forged a stronger emotional connection. B.O-24 added, *"I advised them using words from the Bible, sharing stories to help them see how to handle the conflict."* The barangay official gave specific examples that can be relatable to individuals engaged in conflict when giving biblical testimonies. The example illustrated how to make amends as well as the results of actions. The usefulness of the lessons is increased by transforming the theoretical idea of morality into true stories from which people can learn moral guidelines for acting and realizing in their lives. This practice is then reiterated by B.O-26 when he stated, *"I used the word of God to help them understand their mistakes, as both had made errors in the situation."* Since both parties have committed to the disagreement, a fair method is necessary. This representation made by the official looks for shared fault when one party should bear all the burden. Both the victim and the perpetrator may be able to ponder and then find a mutually agreeable way for reconciliation with this mindset.



Lastly, B.O-28 acknowledged, *"I used the word of God so that they could understand their faults better, allowing for a good conversation, and I provided suggestions to help resolve their issues."* The participant's response implied the significance of effective communication in conflict resolution as created a safe environment where they can express their feelings and ideas as freely as possible. The respect and development of empathy and understanding, which are fundamental to restorative justice, depend on this kind of transparency. The action, made by the barangay authorities demonstrated a culture that is attentive to members' needs and receptive to their concerns, preserving the religious values in sync with cultural traditions.

In summary, in the responses of the barangay officials, there is that approach or strategy to promote peace, that is, through compassion and sensitivity to culture. Cultural practices and religious values put together not only resolve the immediate issues but, accordingly, try to reconstruct relationships and reinforce bonds among members in a community. This analysis was in line with the study conducted by Hamlin and Hokamura (2014) where cultural practices and religious values highly influence the restorative justice processes since they undertake to shape concepts such as control, choice, reconciliation, and hence influence the implementation within specific communities. This form of humanizing the approach towards restorative justice deplores the fact that healing and reconciliation may actually be carried out because of shared beliefs and traditions that resonate through the community.

4.3.2. Promotion of fairness and neutrality

A fair and neutral approach is essential to fostering of trust, collaboration ensuring that the process done by the barangay officials are just, unbiased, and effective to all parties involved. Barangay officials emphasis on fairness demonstrates how they uphold the restorative justice tenets. Setting open communication and mediation as a top priority fosters a healing and understanding atmosphere. B.O-32 stated: *"What I did to assist them in solving their problem was to act as a mediator between them to ensure fairness and neutrality so that things won't get worse."* The barangay official opened the dialogue rather than enforce the decision. In this case, both parties' views seem to hold equal amount of importance. This way, people will feel free to talk because there is no bias and judgment there is the concept of fairness. B.O-33 said: *"As Punong Barangay, I acted as a middleman between them, for me to remain fair and neutral. In this way, I made them see the good aspects of each other and kept a good relationship."* According to Umbreit (2007), fairness and neutrality are essential in restorative justice, as they enhance participant satisfaction, perceptions of justice, and the overall effectiveness of mediation and dialogue processes. In addition to resolving immediate problems, this method of conflict resolution-built community relationships and supported the idea that empathy and respect are the foundations of successful conflict resolution. Now that the effects of promoting fairness and neutrality are seen, the ability to make both parties see each other's points allowed feelings of compassion and empathy to come through.

Neutrality is essential for the legitimacy of mediation processes, as it helps maintain fairness and trust among participants

(Astor, 2007). Responses from the barangay officials reflected a shared dedication to fairness and impartiality in resolving disputes. All of the victims and offenders who undergone amicable settlement emphasized their mediatory role at the beginning by attempting to establish a fair atmosphere that would aid in comprehending and resolving the issue. B.O-27 puts emphasis on neutrality: *"What I did to make them flow is as punong barangay I am in between them so that there is fairness and neutrality so that it does not get worse."* The official's neutrality of approach further demonstrated awareness of sensitive conflict. Being *"in between"* deterred the situation from escalating, therefore making the situation manageable. Keeping a good relationship places the barangay officials on the long view that conflict resolution entails holding fast to community relations.

4.3.3. Identification of solutions

Through solutions, it collaboratively finds ways to repair the damage done, restore relationships, and prevent future harm. This approach empowers both victims and offenders to participate in the resolution of the conflict, ensuring that the solutions reached are meaningful and sustainable for all parties involved.

The responses of the barangay officials indicated a proactive mode about seeking solutions to conflicts. A reflection of a healthy adherence to the principles of restorative justice. In general, each participant centered their response on concrete steps which tend to foster reconciliation and repair relationships. B.O-30 placed a strong emphasis on the relationship's building: *"I told them to improve the relationship, and how they could do it together so that they could regain the good connection."* This was a forward-looking approach, looking at ways to resolve the current conflict while also using it to strengthen the relationship as a whole. Identified solutions in restorative justice facilitate mediation and reconciliation among victims, offenders and the community, enabling effective resolution of customs and excise violations without court involvement (Amrullah *et al.*, 2022). Rebuilding trust and connection requires shared experiences, as the official is observing to the parties.

This comparison is similar to restorative justice, which prioritizes healing and relationship restoration over punishment. B.O-31 and Participant 32 or BO-32 sum up their observations, where one said: *"To solve the money problem, I acted as a conciliator and offered them ideas on how to remit the amount."* While the other supplemented: *I also gave them ideas that can make them closer."* Lehmann (2022) said the solution-focused brief therapy can further support restorative justice since it eventually strengthened restorative justice with goal-setting and reconciliation, engaged offenders and their families in collaborative processes to foster non-violent futures, and also improved relationships. The participants role in handling in disputes over financial issues appeared to facilitate very practically productive solutions that are reasonably fair and workable for all. The weight put on suggesting ways of payment deal with the most basic concerns there are fostered. Strengthening relations also means that fights often initiate with deeper issues. Giving suggestions for strengthening connection implied that officials engage in emotional and relational healing with practical resolutions.



Overall, these responses showed a commitment toward solutions that promote reconciliation and work on relations. Barangay official's approach through actionable advice and mediation showed commitment to restorative justice ideals through a focus on collaboration, understanding, and healing. The role of barangay officials in mediation process further strengthens these restorative strategies by integrating cultural sensitivity, religious values, and neutrality. By involving local traditions such as the "hidit" and referencing biblical teachings, officials anchor their interventions within the community's shared beliefs and customs. This culturally grounded approach lends sincerity and acceptance to the resolution process, making the outcomes more sustainable.

5. CONCLUSION

In light of the findings of the study, the following conclusions of this researched were reached:

Effective restoration of the victim-offender relationship in the selected barangays of the 11 municipality of Ifugao Province is grounded in the strategies of mutual engagement and understanding, open dialogue, and emotional expression. Both parties involved benefit from the process. Victims through being acknowledged and validated, and offenders through taking accountability and actively seeking reconciliation. This process is strengthened within the cultural context of mediation, particularly through the involvement of Barangay officials, who play an essential role in guiding and facilitating restoration of social relationship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations are offered:

i. Barangay Officials may develop structured support systems like counseling services and mediation resources that address the emotional and communication challenges faced by victims during the restorative process. By supporting emotional healing and reducing power imbalances it may remove barriers to communication and promote a more effective resolution of conflicts.

ii. Barangay officials may develop financial assistance programs to address the financial challenges faced by offenders in the restorative process during the annual meetings for the review and analysis and partnerships. For those unable to provide monetary restitution, alternative options such as community service or other non-monetary forms of amends may be available. Additionally, Barangay officials may strengthen resource sharing and referral systems partnership with Local Government Unit (LGUs) to connect offenders with local aid programs, livelihood support, or skills training opportunities. These initiatives help ensure that financial limitations do not hinder accountability or participation in the restorative process. The barangay may consider adopting the proposed intervention program to ensure restoration of offender-victim relationship.

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