

Criminal Mediation in the Police Investigation Phase: Implementation Challenges and Solutions for Restorative Justice in Thailand's Metropolitan Police *

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Abstract

This study aim to 1) examines the current operational challenges and obstacles facing criminal dispute mediation during police investigations, 2) develops practical approaches for enhancing these mediation processes to improve their effectiveness and implementation at the investigation stage. This study employed qualitative research through in-depth interviews with 58 samples, including 37 practitioners, 18 service recipients, 3 policy officers and supplemented by focus group discussions with 9 experts.

The findings revealed four categories of problems and limitations: 1) structural barriers, including inadequate legal frameworks and organizational constraints; 2) operational challenges in implementation procedures; 3) personnel issues encompassing training and capacity gaps; and 4) resource management obstacles, including budget and facility limitations. These barriers resulted in informal mediation processes that often replaced the formal legal procedures mandated by the Act. To systematically address operational problems and

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Received: September 5, 2025; Revised: December 4, 2025; Accepted: December 12, 2025



barriers, researchers proposed the B.R.I.D.G.E. model (Bureau Structure Reform, Regulatory Framework Enhancement, Integration and Coordination, Digital Transformation, Governance and Quality Assurance, Empowerment of Human Resources) synthesized from empirical findings, emphasizing digital transformation as crucial for bridging policy-to-practice gaps.

The research serves as a policy framework for developing restorative justice processes, recommending drafting new regulations encompassing online mediation and electronic systems, establishing mediator databases, case tracking systems, online mediation platforms, fostering inter-agency collaboration through memoranda of understanding, establishing mediator standards, curriculum development with educational institutions, and clear career advancement pathways to enhance dispute mediation effectiveness within the Metropolitan Police Bureau area.

Keywords: criminal mediation; restorative justice; police investigation; police-led dispute mediation; dispute mediation at investigation stage

1. Introduction

Thailand faces significant challenges within its criminal justice system, including excessive criminal cases, court backlogs, and prison overcrowding, which clearly indicate fundamental problems with mainstream justice processes (Ministry of Justice, 2021). Global justice systems adopt restorative justice principles emphasizing stakeholder participation, harm repair, and relationship restoration (Braithwaite, 2020; Kimbrell, Wilson, & Olaghere, 2022). Thailand responded by enacting the Dispute Mediation Act B.E. 2562 (2019), which empowers police investigators to facilitate criminal mediation during investigations. Implementation data shows promising results, with 8,634 cases entering mediation nationwide during 2020-2022, including 3,046 police-facilitated cases in 2023. The



Metropolitan Police Bureau handled 843 cases, representing 27.68% of the national caseload (Department of Rights and Liberties Protection, 2022). Despite these encouraging numbers, significant disparities exist between policy objectives and operational realities.

Research on criminal mediation during police investigations in Thailand spans seventeen years but remains limited in scope and depth. Only five major empirical studies have examined this practice, creating significant gaps in our understanding compared to the extensive international literature on post-trial restorative justice (Patchim, 2020; Pratheuangrattana, 2021; Chomluk, Limawirachapong, & Changkham, 2023). This research concentration within specific populations and institutions has prevented comprehensive longitudinal assessment of mediation effectiveness. Studies concentrate heavily on Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau, which handles 843 of the nation's 3,046 annual criminal mediation cases, representing 27.68% of total volume (Department of Rights and Liberties Protection, 2022). The most significant limitation across all studies is their compressed timeframes. Research periods rarely exceed twenty-four months, preventing adequate assessment of cyclical patterns, institutional learning, and sustainable implementation (Patchim, 2020; Pratheuangrattana, 2021; Chomluk, Limawirachapong, & Changkham, 2023).

The National Reconciliation Commission (2020) identified multiple barriers including incomplete regulations, inadequate budgeting, and staffing issues, indicating unrealized potential within the current approach. Existing scholarly literature reveals a notable concentration on restorative justice applications at pre-trial or post-conviction stages. This academic focus has created a considerable gap regarding mediation processes during investigations, precisely when early intervention could yield optimal judicial system efficiency. The absence of rigorous examination concerning police-facilitated mediation during investigations presents particular challenges given this intervention point's potential to reduce system



burden while maintaining appropriate accountability mechanisms. Addressing this oversight proves crucial for developing comprehensive understanding of restorative justice continuums within criminal proceedings (Patchim, 2020; Nascimento, Andrade, & Rodrigues, 2022; Procter-Legg, Hobson, & Quimby, 2024).

This gap becomes more critical considering the emergence of dual implementation systems where formal statutory processes operate alongside informal practices that better reflect community needs and organizational capacities. Structural constraints, operational challenges, and cultural factors have converged to create parallel systems, highlighting divergence between legislative intent and practical implementation. This research examines implementation challenges through extensive fieldwork within Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau jurisdiction. This setting proves particularly appropriate, having processed 843 mediation cases during fiscal year 2023. The investigation specifically addresses identified knowledge gaps by examining operational impediments in dispute mediation during investigations while developing appropriate management models for the Metropolitan Police Bureau area. This jurisdiction was selected for its significant urban population density and substantial case volume, making it particularly suitable for prototype solution development.

2. Research Objective

This research pursues two primary objectives within the Metropolitan Police Bureau jurisdiction. The first objective examines the current operational challenges and obstacles facing criminal dispute mediation during police investigations, including how these processes align with existing institutional responsibilities and restorative justice principles. The second objective develops practical approaches for enhancing these mediation processes to improve their effectiveness and implementation at the investigation stage.



3. Methodology

This research employs sequential qualitative methodology to address both research objectives through systematic data collection and validation. In-depth interviews examine operational challenges and management approaches for dispute mediation during the investigation phase within the Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau jurisdiction. Participants contained three groups that consisted of 37 Criminal Dispute Mediation Practitioners, 18 Recipients of Criminal Mediation Services and 3 Policy Officials from the Department of Rights and Liberties Protection, Legal and Case Office of the Royal Thai Police, and Thailand Institute of Justice. The research utilized purposive sampling of 58 stakeholders involved in dispute mediation during investigations, with subsequent random sampling for representative distribution. Participants contained three groups.

This study utilized in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to collect data. The research instrument was a semi-structured interview. The researcher conducted field research, including in-depth interviews (either by sending letters to key informants to solicit feedback), and focus group discussions to data and facts. The data and information was synthesized and recorded. Typological analysis was used to analyze the operations within the dispute mediation framework, including problems, obstacles, and appropriate management models for dispute mediation under the restorative justice process at the investigative level. The analysis was conducted after data collection until saturation was achieved. Analytical induction was then used to summarize the data and present the findings.



4. Results

4.1 The current operational challenges and obstacles facing criminal dispute mediation during police investigations

Criminal dispute mediation implementation under Thailand's Dispute Mediation Act of 2019 has evolved through three distinct phases within the Metropolitan Police Bureau jurisdiction. The preparatory phase experienced slow development until 2023, when metropolitan police stations became pilot units for establishing dispute mediation centers. Public understanding remained limited, with inadequate facilities often shared with other investigative units. The implementation phase revealed a dual-track system where informal mediation by investigation officers proved more popular than formal statutory procedures due to speed and simplicity. This informal approach, often termed "case deflection," effectively diverted 80-90% of eligible cases from the formal justice process. However, participation declined when victims were corporate entities with mandatory prosecution policies or when complainants sought legal retribution. The monitoring phase demonstrated mixed outcomes. While immediate settlement agreements created no compliance issues, conditional agreements requiring installment payments imposed additional monitoring burdens on investigation officers. Overall mediation statistics remained disproportionately low compared to total criminal prosecutions, with stakeholder attitudes polarized between those with successful experiences and those encountering implementation obstacles.

Furthermore, barrier of systematic implementation was found. Four primary barrier categories emerged from stakeholder analysis and illustrated as following.

4.1.1 Structural and legal limitations included restrictive case eligibility criteria that excluded civil damages and serious offenses like grievous bodily harm. Inconsistent inter-agency timeframes (7 days versus 14 days) created operational



confusion, while regulations failed to address modern requirements such as online mediation or fugitive defendant cases.

4.1.2 Operational challenges permeated every mediation phase. Mediator registration delays extended up to two years due to centralized approval processes. Investigation officers frequently failed to inform parties of mediation rights, while documentation requirements involved 14 complex forms that discouraged formal system usage. Post-mediation compliance monitoring proved particularly challenging for installment payment agreements.

4.1.3 Personnel issues affected both investigation officers and mediators. Officers demonstrated insufficient legal knowledge, negative attitudes toward system efficiency, and concerns about increased workloads without adequate compensation. Mediator shortages occurred both quantitatively and qualitatively, with limited practical training opportunities and occasional ethical violations involving percentage-based compensation schemes.

4.1.4 Resource management problems encompassed budget misalignment, poor inter-agency coordination, inadequate public relations, and insufficient technological integration. Budget allocation failed to recognize mediation as a primary mission, while coordination difficulties resulted in multiple document exchanges between agencies. Performance measurement systems remained underdeveloped without clear quality assurance mechanisms.

4.2 The development practical approaches for enhancing mediation processes to improve effectiveness in the investigation stage

The B.R.I.D.G.E. Conceptual Framework

The research culminated in developing the B.R.I.D.G.E. conceptual framework, representing both an operational acronym and symbolic bridge connecting victims and offenders through restorative processes. This framework addresses systematic problem-solving through six interconnected components that require coordinated implementation rather than isolated interventions.



4.2.1 Bureau Structure Reform involves establishing Criminal Case Dispute Mediation Coordination Centers at command levels, providing experienced mediators, legal experts, and psychological support for under-resourced police stations.

4.2.2 Regulatory Framework Enhancement encompasses central law development, expanded case eligibility, flexible timeframes, authority decentralization, and informal mediation regulation.

4.2.3 Integration and Coordination promotes inter-agency cooperation through memoranda of understanding, resource sharing, and standardized operating procedures.

4.2.4 Digital Transformation emphasizes comprehensive platform development from case receipt through result monitoring, online mediation capabilities, and secure database integration with existing systems.

4.2.5 Governance and Quality Assurance establishes performance indicators, monitoring systems, feedback mechanisms, professional mediation councils, and dedicated funding structures.

4.2.6 Empowerment of Human Resources focuses on professional qualification standards, specialized training curricula, and clear career advancement pathways for mediators and investigation officers.

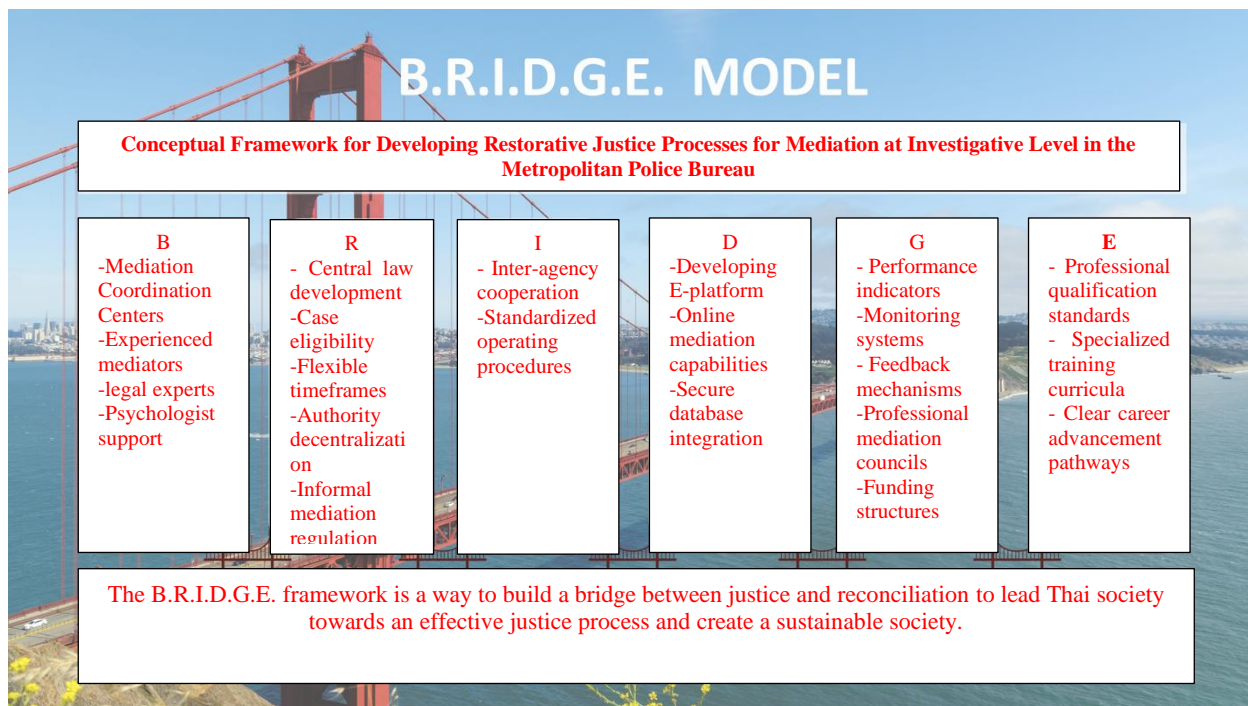


Figure 1. B.R.I.D.G.E. Model

The B.R.I.D.G.E. framework demonstrates that effective criminal dispute mediation requires coordinated solutions addressing interconnected challenges rather than isolated interventions. Each identified problem category demands 2-3 framework components working simultaneously for sustainable outcomes, reflecting the complexity of implementation barriers within Thailand's investigation-level criminal justice system.

Structural and legal limitations encompass fundamental obstacles including restricted case eligibility, inconsistent inter-agency timeframes, and outdated regulatory frameworks. These problems require regulatory improvements coupled with quality governance systems, frequently necessitating digital transformation to accommodate modern mediation formats such as online proceedings. Case eligibility expansion specifically demands regulatory changes paired with



governance quality standards, while inconsistent timeframes between the Royal Thai Police Office's 7-day requirement and the Department of Rights and Liberties Protection's 14-day framework require regulatory harmonization with digital flexibility.

Operational challenges span pre-mediation registration delays extending up to two years, failure to notify parties of mediation rights, excessive documentation burdens involving 14 complex forms, mediator safety concerns, and post-mediation compliance monitoring difficulties. These problems require diverse solutions combining digital transformation for documentation reduction and efficient monitoring systems, regulatory improvements for authority decentralization and procedure streamlining, inter-agency integration for shared documentation standards, and organizational reform for creating support units and coordination centers.

Personnel issues affect both investigation officers lacking correct legal knowledge and practical skills, and mediators facing quantitative and qualitative shortages with limited training opportunities. Officers demonstrate negative attitudes toward system efficiency, lacking confidence in statutory mediation processes while harboring concerns about increased workloads without adequate compensation. These challenges require human resource empowerment through comprehensive and continuous training programs, governance systems for professional standards and ethics establishment, and organizational reform for creating support units enabling more efficient personnel performance.

Resource management deficiencies span budget administration with misaligned request formats, coordination problems arising from unclear prosecutor office guidelines, inappropriate public relations with limited accessibility, equipment and facility limitations, and absent performance measurement systems. Solutions demand governance-directed funding mechanisms through specialized fund establishment, digital infrastructure enhancements including



integration with existing systems like the Daily Record System, and comprehensive evaluation frameworks for effective resource allocation and maximum benefits.

Priority attention should focus on Digital Transformation and Regulatory Framework Enhancement, as these components address challenges across all four problem categories most comprehensively. Digital transformation directly impacts documentation burden reduction, online mediation capabilities, monitoring system efficiency, and inter-agency information sharing. Regulatory framework enhancement enables authority decentralization, timeframe harmonization, case eligibility expansion, and informal mediation recognition. These foundational elements enable Thailand's criminal justice system to balance mainstream and restorative approaches while achieving modern international standards for dispute resolution processes that promote social peace and community restoration.

5. Discussion

The synthesis of all research findings provides a conceptual framework for developing a restorative justice process for mediation at the investigative level to the Metropolitan Police Bureau. This framework derived from the six-letter English acronym “B.R.I.D.G.E”. It can summarize and discussed as follows.

5.1 Bureau Structure Reform

This is the first foundation of the BRIDGE model, which emphasizes the establishment of a coordination center for criminal mediation at the investigation level to support inadequate resource of police stations. The center will provide and support experienced mediators, legal experts and psychologists to provide consultation and resolve issues that arise during the mediation process. This structural reform creates a strong support system for the mediation process at the operational level. The organizational structure reform through the establishment of a coordination center for criminal mediation at the divisional level that based



on the BRIDGE framework. This reflects a deep understanding of the unequal distribution of resources in the Thai police system. This correspond with international demonstration toward the importance of a strong support structure by The Czech Republic Probation Mediation Service Center. The Czech center assist in finding effective and socially beneficial solutions to crime-related conflicts. A coordinator assists both parties in finding a mutually beneficial solution. Meanwhile, Norway has a legal sector such Norwegian Mediation Service to employs approximately 600 coordinators and mediators in 22 districts (Chavez, Cinco & Drennan, 2015).

The idea of establishing this coordination center aligns with the recommendations of Chomluk, Limawirachapong, & Changkham, (2023), who proposed establishing mediators at police stations. Community leaders or other individuals shall be appointed as mediators and police officers, administrators, commanders and investigators shall be trained. In addition, budget shall increase the operation. Furthermore, Romero-Seseña's (2024) recommended investing in expert training, providing appropriate resources and developing a dedicated platform for mediation that integrates document management, identity verification and communication with justice agencies. This structural reform is consistent with the study of Thanyasiri (2022), who emphasized expanding the role of mediation at the investigator level and expanding the role of community justice centers through legal mediation center. Establishing a coordination center addresses the root causes of the system by creating a support network. This can provide comprehensive legal and psychological services. A study highlights the importance of addressing the inequities in resource distribution from field research. The study indicated that creating high-quality support systems to ensure fair access to mediation services.



5.2 Regulatory Framework Enhancement

This covers a multi-dimensional improvement of laws and regulations, including:

5.2.1 Developing a central law and interagency collaboration across justice processes;

5.2.2 Expanding the types of mediation cases that taking into account the nature of the offense and the relationship between the parties;

5.2.3 Revising flexible timeframe of meditation;

5.2.4 Decentralizing investigators and

Establishing clear regulations and guidelines for informal mediation to support the daily work of investigators and reduce workloads.

The research findings on regulatory framework enhancement reflect the urgent need for legal structural reform to support truly restorative justice processes. This is related to the concept of "criminology of trust, which viewing offenders and victims as human beings with the potential to resolve problems together. The legal integration and expansion of the types of cases for mediation have strong theoretical foundations based on "valuable assets". It should involve the community, victims and offenders in solving the problem (Walgrave, 2019).

Empirical evidence from a study by Glubwila, Lerwongrat, & Khruakham (2020) on the Barangay Justice System in the Philippines under Republic Act No. 7160 demonstrates the success of integrating a clear legal framework with community-level mediation processes. Meanwhile, research by Chomluk, Limawirachapong, & Changkham, (2023); Thanyasiri (2022) points to the lack of a comprehensive regulatory framework and the ambiguity in the practices of investigators in the Thai context. Decentralizing powers of mediation investigators and establishing regulations for informal mediation is therefore an approach consistent with Europe. The strict qualification and procedural complexity limit mediation to minor offenses or fragmented procedures. Such reforms would help bridge the gap between the philosophical principles of restorative justice and the



actual practice in the Thai justice system. This could create a legal environment to the development of mediation practices into formal and effective processes.

5.3 Integration and Coordination

Emphasis on building a collaborative network among relevant agencies include the Royal Thai Police, the Office of the Attorney General, the Courts of Justice, the Department of Rights and Liberties Protection, the Lawyers Council of Thailand and civil society organizations. This achieve through the preparation of clear memoranda of understanding (MOUs), integrating resources resource such as registered mediators with any agency to perform mediation duties without re-enroll. Also, it establish common operational standards through the development of a Standard Operating Procedure (SOP) that covering every step of the mediation process and monitoring compliance with the agreement. The research on integration and coordination reflect the strategic necessity of building a collaborative network among relevant agencies in the justice process.

This is consistent with the collaborative strategy in Thomas & Kilmann's (1976) that emphasizes working together to find mutually agreeable solutions. Coordination through memoranda of understanding (MOUs) between the Royal Thai Police, the Attorney General Office, the Courts of Justice and other agencies has a theoretical foundation from empirical evidence in overseas, particularly Canada. Canada has various mediation forms such as the Victim-Offender Mediation Programs have been in operation for over 25 years and Circle Sentencing and Community Conferencing require coordination between police, prosecutors, courts and communities. New Zealand has also demonstrated success in integration through Family Group Conferences that incorporate the Maori Hui Whakatika principle into its nationwide justice system. Meanwhile, the Philippines has seen success with its Barangay Justice System under Republic Act No. 7160 that demonstrate the integration of the primary justice system with community mechanisms.



In the Thai context, research by the National Reconciliation Commission (2020); Chomluk, Limawirachapong, & Changkham, (2023) highlighted the need to expand interagency coordination, particularly by linking district Damrongtham Centers, Community Justice Centers and Community Mediation Centers. Integrating resources by allowing registered mediators to work across agencies is therefore an approach to relate with Walgrave. The concept of Walgrave emphasis on the need to build countervailing forces to combat penal populism through collaborative networks between academia, civil society and practitioners that committed to the principles of mutual respect, peace, and participation (Walgrave, 2019). Establishing common operating standards addresses the challenges identified regarding cross-regional operational inconsistencies, creating a balance between the unique identities of individual agencies and supporting objectives of restorative justice processes.

5.4 Digital Transformation

This approach incorporates technology into the mediation process through the development of a comprehensive digital platform, covering from case reception, case screening, scheduling, mediation proceedings, memorandum of understanding, and follow-up. This approach also includes the development of an online mediation system that increases flexibility and accessibility, particularly in situations of face-to-face meeting. Furthermore, of a centralized database system must develop to link data between agencies, including the Daily Record (PDAR) system, prosecution and court information systems, and various mediator information systems with appropriate security and personal data protection measures. The research on digital transformation in mediation reflect a revolution in operating models driven by changes in the social and technological context, particularly after 2020.

A study by Romero-Seseña (2024) in Spain showed that over 96% of participants used online tools in the mediation process. Using smartphones via



messaging applications (WhatsApp, Telegram) and computers via video calling platforms (Zoom, Meet, Skype) become the primary means of communication. Although online mediation presents challenges in emotional communication and the recognition of non-verbal cues and it require facilitators to employ more strict structure than face-to-face meetings. However, technology has significantly increased accessibility, particularly for vulnerable victims or people with mobility limitations. In the Thai context, the development of information systems to support mediation support by justice system reforms. It is linking data between the police CRIMES system, the prosecution system and the court of justice information system along with the development of a PDAR system for recording critical events and a PSC system for the public to track case status.

This response to Royal Thai Police Order No. 732/2566 on reducing administrative procedures and adopting electronic procedures in investigation. The development of a comprehensive digital platform regarding case reception, case screening, scheduling, mediation, memorandum of understanding and follow-up is in line with the previous study for developing mediation platform. The digital platform integrates document management, identity verification, and communication with justice agencies that technology should complement but it is not replace the face-to-face meetings. The platform must conduct to the specific needs of each case with appropriate security and privacy protection measures. The success of digital transformation will depend on addressing the digital gap that may affect some users. This requires investment in expert training and the provision of appropriate resources to ensure effective and accessible option of online meditation for society.

5.5 Governance and Quality Assurance

This covers the establishment of clear performance indicators and Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) for formal and informal mediation. The development of an effective monitoring and evaluation system build confidence in the



mediation process and the a system for receiving user feedback and complaints must set as well as the establishment of a restorative justice fund to support financial resources for operations and personnel development. An analysis of the framework for governance and quality assurance in restorative justice reveals that the establishment of an effective governance system is a key factor in determining the success of implementing mediation at the investigative stage. This aligns with the B.R.I.D.G.E. framework, which emphasizes governance and quality assurance in establishing a governance framework through performance evaluation protocols, monitoring systems, feedback mechanisms, and professional standards. Research confirms that quality control measures are essential for successful restorative interventions. While well-established programs consistently produce superior results (Fulham, Blais, Rugge, & Schultheis, 2023). The establishment of a professional mediator council would institutionalize standards of practice while addressing inconsistencies in current service delivery.

5.6 Empowerment of Human Resources

It focuses on developing the potential of personnel involved in mediation through the establishment of standards for mediator qualifications that covering basic qualifications, selection processes, professional ethics, the development of specialized training courses, the development of specialized courses for mediation and the creation of clear career paths. This aligns with the issues identified by Chomluk, Limawirachapong, & Changkham, (2023) in their study of the effectiveness of the enforcement of the Mediation Act B.E. 2562 (2019) at the investigation stage. They identified a lack of legally qualified mediators and a lack of preparedness among investigators to conduct mediation. They also recommend that all investigators be provided with training on the mediation process and related laws.



6. Knowledge of Research

The present investigation reveals significant challenges confronting restorative justice implementation within police investigations throughout the Bangkok Metropolitan Police Bureau jurisdiction. Empirical findings identify four interrelated categories of implementation barriers: structural constraints, operational difficulties, personnel limitations and resource management deficiencies. These systemic obstacles collectively impede effective implementation of the Dispute Mediation Act B.E. 2562 (2019) despite its legislative intent. Such implementation difficulties correspond with theoretical propositions advanced by Braithwaite (2020) in his responsive regulation framework, wherein institutional preparedness constitutes an essential precondition for successful restorative justice interventions within established bureaucratic structures.

The emergence of a dual operational system wherein informal mediation practices are preferred over formal statutory processes represents a significant implementation gap undermining the Act's objectives. This phenomenon stems primarily from excessive documentation requirements, mediator availability concerns and workload pressures on investigating officers. Although potentially efficient in addressing immediate case resolution needs, this informal approach compromises the standardization, quality control, and data collection necessary for institutionalized restorative justice. This policy-practice divergence echoes Walgrave (2019) observations regarding the integration challenges of restorative principles within traditional criminal justice frameworks.

The B.R.I.D.G.E. model presented in this research constitutes a multifaceted framework that systematically addresses the identified implementation barriers through six interconnected components: administrative structure reconfiguration, legislative framework enhancement, institutional coordination protocols, technological infrastructure development, quality assurance mechanisms and professional capacity building. Whilst this investigation concentrates specifically



upon the Bangkok Metropolitan jurisdiction, the analytical conclusions potentially extend to comparable urban conurbations with similar administrative structures and demographic characteristics. It warrants noting, however, that rural applications would likely manifest distinct implementation patterns owing to significant variations in resource availability, institutional arrangements and community relationship structures characteristic of non-metropolitan contexts.

7. Suggestion

Policy recommendations for developing a restorative justice process for mediation at the investigative level within the Metropolitan Police Bureau include improving the legal and regulatory framework to accommodate digital technology and building interagency collaboration through the establishment of Memorandum of Understanding (MOUs). Human resource development to enhance the qualification standards of mediators and meet actual needs is a key strategy for developing a professional workforce.

The operational recommendations for developing a restorative justice process for mediation at the investigative level in the Metropolitan Police Bureau area include the development of a mentoring system. This an important approach for transferring knowledge and experience from successful coordination centers to new centers. Furthermore, the development of a work manual for investigators must carry out. The strengthening the legal and regulatory framework is a key component of the B.R.I.D.G.E. model, which aims to improve relevant laws and regulations to facilitate mediation. In addition, training to promote professional standards and ethics, and promoting professional standards and ethics for mediators are key components of supervision and quality assurance.



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