

**The Role of Informal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in Minor Dispute Settlement and Peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis****Adams Princewill Emmanuel & Hauwa Saliu**Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Kaduna State University, Kaduna, Nigeria  
[affinahamazing@gmail.com](mailto:affinahamazing@gmail.com); [hauwa.saliu@kasu.edu.ng](mailto:hauwa.saliu@kasu.edu.ng)**Abstract**

This study examined the role of informal conflict resolution mechanisms in the settlement of minor disputes and in peacebuilding within Kaduna Metropolis. The study was guided by the Structural Functionalist Theory, which explains how social institutions perform functions that sustain social order and stability. A mixed-methods approach was adopted for the study and the population comprised adult residents of Kaduna Metropolis, including traditional rulers, religious leaders, community elders, and peace committee members, who also served as key informants. A multistage sampling technique was used to select 367 respondents from five purposively selected wards, while twelve key informants were chosen through purposive sampling. Data were collected using structured questionnaire and key informant interview guide. Quantitative data were analysed using frequencies and percentages, while qualitative data were analysed narratively. Findings showed that community elders, traditional rulers, and religious leaders were the informal mechanisms most frequently used by residents in settling minor disputes. Overall, Majority of the respondents preferred informal mechanisms, citing their role in preserving relationships between disputing parties, ease of access, and their capacity to prevent disputes from escalating. Informal mechanisms were also found to contribute to peacebuilding by preventing conflict escalation, promoting peaceful relationships, and encouraging cooperation among community members. The study concludes that informal conflict resolution mechanisms perform important social functions in sustaining community stability and supporting peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis. It recommends strengthening of underutilized mechanisms, particularly peace committees, alongside improved capacity-building for community-based conflict resolution actors, to enhance the effectiveness and acceptance of dispute settlement processes.

**Keywords:** Informal Conflict Resolution, Minor Disputes, Peacebuilding, Community Elders, Kaduna Metropolis

**INTRODUCTION**

Conflict is an inevitable feature of human interaction because individuals and groups differ in their interests, values, beliefs, and expectations. While some conflicts escalate into violence, many occur as everyday disputes involving family members, neighbours, landlords and tenants, traders, community associations, and other social groups. Although these disputes are often perceived as minor, they can disrupt interpersonal relationships, weaken social cohesion, and threaten community stability when left unresolved. Globally, access to timely and effective justice has become a critical component of sustainable peace and social development. Recognising this, the

United Nations emphasises that access to justice should extend beyond formal judicial institutions to include mechanisms that effectively address the everyday justice needs of citizens (United Nations, 2020). In many developing societies, where formal justice systems are frequently constrained by cost, delays, and limited accessibility, informal or customary justice institutions remain the primary avenue for resolving disputes. It is estimated that up to 60% of disputes in many developing countries are settled through customary or informal mechanisms rather than formal courts (United Nations, 2019). Consistent with this position, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) observes that people-centred justice systems require the integration and recognition of both formal and non-state justice providers because they offer accessible, culturally acceptable, and practical solutions to everyday conflicts.

The continued relevance of informal conflict resolution mechanisms is largely driven by the practical challenges associated with formal justice systems. Although courts remain the primary institutions for the administration of justice, litigation is often characterised by lengthy procedures, high financial costs, technical legal requirements, and procedural delays that discourage many individuals from seeking formal legal remedies, particularly for minor disputes. As a result, community members frequently turn to traditional rulers, religious leaders, elders, community associations, and other respected local actors to facilitate dispute resolution. Recognising this reality, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) advocates for people-centred justice systems that provide multiple pathways through which individuals can resolve legal and social problems, including mediation and community-based dispute resolution. In the same vein, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2015) maintains that informal justice mechanisms improve access to justice by providing flexible, affordable, accessible, and culturally acceptable avenues for resolving disputes, especially where formal institutions are inaccessible or overstretched. Consequently, rather than competing with formal courts, these mechanisms complement the formal justice system by addressing disputes at the community level before they escalate into more complex legal or social conflicts.

Across Africa, informal conflict resolution mechanisms have long served as important institutions for maintaining social order and promoting peaceful coexistence. Before the introduction of modern judicial systems, disputes relating to marriage, inheritance, land ownership, family relations, market transactions, and communal affairs were commonly resolved through traditional

authorities, councils of elders, clan leaders, and religious institutions. These indigenous institutions emphasised dialogue, reconciliation, restitution, and the restoration of social harmony rather than adversarial litigation or punitive sanctions. Despite the expansion of formal judicial institutions across the continent, customary and community-based mechanisms continue to enjoy widespread acceptance because they are deeply rooted in local cultural values, accessible to community members, and capable of resolving disputes promptly. This continued relevance has attracted increasing policy attention, with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023) emphasising that meaningful engagement with customary and informal justice systems is essential for advancing Sustainable Development Goal 16 on peace, justice, and strong institutions. Beyond improving access to justice, these mechanisms contribute to conflict prevention by encouraging dialogue, building consensus, restoring damaged relationships, and fostering voluntary compliance with mutually accepted decisions, thereby reducing the likelihood that minor disputes will escalate into wider communal conflicts.

In Nigeria, informal conflict resolution mechanisms remain an integral component of the justice delivery system, operating alongside formal legal institutions to address the everyday disputes that arise within communities. Despite the existence of statutory courts, many disputes relating to family relationships, neighbourhood misunderstandings, tenancy, inheritance, market transactions, and community affairs are frequently resolved through traditional rulers, religious leaders, councils of elders, community associations, peace committees, and other local mediation structures. Their continued use reflects not only the limitations of the formal justice system in handling all categories of disputes but also the public confidence placed in indigenous institutions because of their accessibility, affordability, cultural legitimacy, and emphasis on reconciliation. Beyond resolving disagreements, these mechanisms contribute to maintaining social order, strengthening community cohesion, and preventing the escalation of minor disputes into more serious conflicts.

This reality is particularly evident in Kaduna Metropolis, a cosmopolitan urban centre characterised by considerable ethnic, religious, and socio-economic diversity. The frequent interactions among diverse social groups inevitably generate disagreements over family matters, neighbourhood relations, tenancy, commerce, land, and other community issues that require timely and peaceful resolution. In response, traditional institutions, religious organisations, community leaders, and local mediation committees continue to play an active role in facilitating dialogue,

promoting reconciliation, and restoring harmonious relationships among disputing parties. However, although Kaduna State has attracted substantial scholarly attention because of its history of ethno-religious violence, communal conflicts, and insecurity, relatively little empirical attention has been devoted to examining how informal conflict resolution mechanisms address minor disputes and contribute to everyday peacebuilding within Kaduna Metropolis. This gap is particularly significant given the important role these mechanisms play in fostering social harmony at the community level. It is against this background that this study examines the role of informal conflict resolution mechanisms in the settlement of minor disputes and peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study aimed at examining the role of informal conflict resolution mechanisms in minor dispute settlement and peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis through the following specific objectives:

- i. To identify the informal conflict resolution mechanisms used in the settlement of minor disputes in Kaduna Metropolis.
- ii. To examine the contribution of informal conflict resolution mechanisms to peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Informal conflict resolution**

This refers to the processes by which disputes are settled outside formal judicial institutions, using culturally recognized community-based structures such as traditional rulers, religious leaders, family heads, community elders, and other respected local actors. It emphasises dialogue, mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, and consensus-building rather than adversarial litigation or coercive legal procedures. According to the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP, 2023), informal conflict resolution mechanisms are people-centered justice institutions that provide accessible, affordable, and culturally legitimate avenues for resolving everyday disputes, particularly where cost, delays, or limited accessibility constrain formal justice systems. Similarly, Akpomuvie and Forae (2024) describe informal conflict resolution as indigenous processes by which communities maintain social order, employing traditional institutions and customary practices to resolve disputes and restore harmonious relationships among disputing parties. Fasuan

*et al.*, (2024) further view informal conflict resolution as a reconciliation-oriented approach rooted in indigenous knowledge systems that prioritises healing, dialogue, voluntary compliance, and the preservation of social relationships over punitive sanctions. Likewise, Irene (2023) argues that informal conflict resolution constitutes community-driven efforts that utilize local peace structures and respected leaders to manage interpersonal disputes, strengthen trust, and prevent the escalation of conflicts. In the context of this study, informal conflict resolution refers to the use of community elders, traditional rulers, religious leaders, family heads, Community Development Associations, and peace committees to facilitate the peaceful settlement of minor disputes.

### **Minor disputes**

The concept of minor dispute is understood to mean everyday interpersonal disagreements or conflicts that arise between individuals or groups over relatively low-level issues and do not ordinarily require formal judicial intervention. Such disputes commonly involve family disagreements, neighbourhood misunderstandings, landlord-tenant issues, land boundary disagreements, marital conflicts, market transactions, and other community-related matters that can often be resolved through dialogue, mediation, or negotiation. According to the United Nations (2020), minor disputes constitute everyday justice problems that affect people's social and economic well-being and are most effectively addressed through accessible and community-based dispute resolution mechanisms. Similarly, the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2021) describes minor disputes as routine legal and social conflicts that arise in daily interactions and can be resolved through people-centred justice approaches without resorting to prolonged litigation. Akpomovie and Forae (2024) view minor disputes as localized interpersonal disagreements that emerge within families and communities and are best managed through indigenous conflict resolution institutions that emphasise reconciliation and social harmony. Likewise, Fasuan, Khoo, and Balakrishnan (2024) define minor disputes as non-violent conflicts involving individuals or households that are amenable to settlement through traditional mediation, dialogue, and consensus-building rather than formal court adjudication. In the context of this study, minor disputes refer to everyday conflicts occurring among residents of Kaduna Metropolis, including family disagreements, neighbourhood conflicts, tenancy disputes, land boundary disagreements, and other interpersonal misunderstandings that are settled through informal conflict resolution mechanisms to prevent escalation and promote peaceful coexistence.

### **Mediation**

Mediation is a voluntary process of dispute resolution in which a neutral third party assists disputing parties to communicate, negotiate, and reach a mutually acceptable agreement without imposing a decision on them. The mediator facilitates dialogue, clarifies issues, and encourages cooperation while allowing the parties to retain control over the outcome of the dispute. Moore (2014) defines mediation as the intervention of an acceptable, impartial, and neutral third party who has no authoritative decision-making power but helps disputants voluntarily reach a mutually acceptable settlement. Similarly, Boulle and Field (2018) describe mediation as a structured negotiation process in which an independent mediator facilitates constructive communication, identifies the interests of the parties, and promotes consensus-based solutions that preserve relationships. Folberg, Golann, Stipanowich, and Kloppenberg (2021) further view mediation as a collaborative conflict management process that emphasises dialogue, mutual understanding, problem-solving, and voluntary agreement rather than coercion or adjudication. Likewise, Menkel-Meadow (2022) argues that mediation is particularly effective in resolving interpersonal and community disputes because it encourages participation, fosters reconciliation, and produces outcomes that are more likely to be accepted and sustained by the disputing parties. In the context of this study, mediation refers to the process through which community elders, traditional rulers, religious leaders, family heads, and other community-based actors facilitate reconciliation to assist disputing parties in reaching mutually acceptable resolutions to minor disputes.

### **Empirical Review**

#### **Informal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms Used in the Settlement of Minor Disputes**

Salihu (2020) conducted a study on the incorporation of African indigenous procedures and mechanisms of dispute resolution into the administration of criminal justice in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine the possibility of integrating indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms into Nigeria's formal justice system to improve access to justice and enhance dispute resolution. The study was anchored on the Restorative Justice Theory, which emphasises reconciliation, mediation, restitution, and the restoration of relationships rather than punitive sanctions. A qualitative research design was adopted, while documentary analysis of statutes, judicial decisions, and scholarly literature constituted the major sources of data. The findings revealed that indigenous institutions such as traditional rulers, family heads, community elders,

and religious leaders continued to resolve disputes through mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, and consensus-building. The study further established that these mechanisms were effective in resolving disputes promptly, restoring relationships among disputing parties, reducing litigation costs, and strengthening social harmony. The study concluded that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms should complement the formal justice system because they enhance access to justice and promote community reconciliation. However, the study focused primarily on integrating indigenous mechanisms into the criminal justice system rather than examining their role in the settlement of minor disputes within communities. Furthermore, the study relied exclusively on documentary evidence without obtaining empirical data from community members who regularly utilize these mechanisms. These conceptual and methodological gaps justify the present study.

Fasuan, Khoo and Balakrishnan (2024) conducted a study on the reconciliatory mechanisms of Yoruba traditional approaches to conflict resolution in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine how indigenous reconciliation practices contribute to conflict resolution and the restoration of social relationships within Yoruba communities. The study was anchored on Indigenous Conflict Transformation Theory, which emphasises reconciliation, dialogue, healing, and the rebuilding of broken relationships after conflict. A qualitative research design was adopted using key informant interviews and naturalistic observation to obtain information from traditional rulers, community elders, and custodians of indigenous institutions. The findings revealed that mediation by elders, family intervention, reconciliation meetings, traditional arbitration, and community dialogue constituted the major mechanisms employed in resolving family disagreements, inheritance disputes, land conflicts, and neighbourhood disputes. The study concluded that indigenous reconciliation mechanisms remain effective because they restore damaged relationships, promote consensus, and encourage voluntary compliance with decisions reached by disputing parties. However, the study focused mainly on reconciliation practices among the Yoruba ethnic group without examining the broader range of informal conflict resolution mechanisms operating in culturally diverse urban centres. In addition, the study emphasised reconciliation but did not assess the effectiveness of these mechanisms in resolving minor disputes from the perspectives of community residents. These conceptual and contextual gaps provide justification for the present study.

Akpomuvie and Forae (2024) conducted a study on traditional conflict resolution and management mechanisms for communal peacebuilding in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine indigenous mechanisms employed in conflict resolution and their relevance to communal peacebuilding in Nigeria. The study was anchored on Indigenous Conflict Management Theory, which recognizes traditional institutions as effective mechanisms for maintaining social order and resolving disputes within communities. A qualitative research design based on documentary analysis was adopted, while journal articles, textbooks, government publications, and policy documents constituted the major sources of data. The findings indicated that mediation by traditional rulers, councils of elders, religious leaders, family meetings, oath administration, and community dialogue remained the dominant informal mechanisms used in resolving disputes across Nigerian communities. The study concluded that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms continue to complement the formal justice system because they provide culturally acceptable, accessible, and affordable means of dispute settlement. However, the study relied solely on secondary sources, making it difficult to establish the practical effectiveness of these mechanisms from the experiences of those directly involved in dispute settlement. Moreover, the study discussed communal conflict management generally without distinguishing between major communal conflicts and minor interpersonal disputes, which constitute the focus of the present study.

### **Contribution of Informal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms to Peacebuilding**

Irene (2023) conducted a study on building peace from the grassroots through informal peace infrastructures in Ojoo Community, Ibadan, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine the contribution of informal peace committees to grassroots peacebuilding and community conflict management. The study was anchored on the Local Peace Infrastructure Framework, which emphasises the importance of community institutions in sustaining peace and preventing conflict escalation. A participatory action research design was adopted, while data were collected through key informant interviews, focus group discussions, observation, and field notes involving members of informal peace committees, traditional leaders, women, and youth representatives. The findings revealed that informal peace committees contributed significantly to resolving domestic disputes, land disagreements, neighbourhood conflicts, and interpersonal disputes through mediation, dialogue, and reconciliation. The study further established that these mechanisms promoted trust

among community members, strengthened social cohesion, enhanced community participation, and prevented the escalation of disputes into violent conflicts. The study concluded that informal peace infrastructures remain important instruments for sustainable peacebuilding because they encourage local ownership of peace processes. However, the study focused specifically on informal peace committees without examining other informal conflict resolution mechanisms such as traditional rulers, religious leaders, and family heads. In addition, the study emphasised peacebuilding outcomes without assessing the effectiveness of different mechanisms in resolving minor disputes. These conceptual gaps justify the present study.

Akpomuvie and Forae (2024) conducted a study on traditional conflict resolution and management mechanisms for communal peacebuilding in Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine the contribution of indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms to communal peacebuilding in Nigeria. The study was anchored on Indigenous Conflict Management Theory. A qualitative documentary research design was adopted, and relevant secondary materials constituted the major sources of data. The findings showed that traditional rulers, councils of elders, religious leaders, family heads, mediation, reconciliation, and community dialogue promoted peaceful coexistence by restoring relationships, encouraging forgiveness, strengthening community participation, and reducing the recurrence of communal conflicts. The study concluded that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms remain relevant because they complement formal justice institutions and contribute to sustainable peacebuilding. However, the study depended entirely on documentary evidence and therefore did not capture the perceptions and experiences of community members who participate in informal dispute resolution processes. Furthermore, the study concentrated on communal peacebuilding generally without examining how informal mechanisms contribute to peacebuilding through the settlement of everyday minor disputes. These methodological and analytical gaps justify the present study.

Bamidele and Idowu (2023) conducted a study on land boundary dispute resolution and peacebuilding between the Erinle and Offa communities in Kwara State, Nigeria. The objective of the study was to examine dispute resolution processes and the prospects for sustainable peace between the two communities following recurrent land conflicts. The study was anchored on Peacebuilding Theory, which emphasises dialogue, reconciliation, and stakeholder participation in resolving conflicts. A qualitative research design was adopted. Data were collected through

unstructured interviews involving 120 respondents, including traditional rulers, political leaders, religious leaders, youth leaders, and community stakeholders, while secondary data were obtained from archival materials and relevant literature. The findings revealed that dialogue facilitated by traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community stakeholders improved communication between the communities and contributed to maintaining relative peace after previous violent clashes. The study concluded that inclusive community participation remains essential for sustaining peace after conflict resolution. However, the study focused on land boundary disputes involving organized communities rather than the settlement of minor interpersonal disputes occurring in everyday community life. In addition, the emphasis was on post-conflict peacebuilding instead of evaluating the routine contribution of informal conflict resolution mechanisms to peacebuilding within an urban setting.

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

Structural Functionalist Theory, principally advanced by Talcott Parsons in *The Social System* (1951). Although the foundations of functionalism were laid by Émile Durkheim in *The Division of Labour in Society* (1893) and later developed by Bronisław Malinowski (1944) and A.R. Radcliffe-Brown (1952), Parsons provided the most systematic explanation of society as an integrated system of interdependent institutions working together to maintain stability and social order. Structural Functionalism emerged during the first half of the twentieth century as an attempt to explain how societies maintain order despite differences in interests, beliefs, and values among individuals and groups. Parsons argued that society is composed of interconnected social institutions such as the family, religion, education, the legal system, the economy, and traditional institutions, each performing specific functions necessary for the survival and stability of society. According to Parsons (1951), social order is sustained when these institutions perform their expected roles effectively and when members of society conform to shared norms and values. Conflict, from the functionalist perspective, is not viewed as entirely abnormal; rather, it is considered a temporary disruption that can be managed through appropriate social institutions capable of restoring equilibrium.

The theory assumes that every society possesses formal and informal institutions established to regulate human behaviour, maintain social order, and resolve disagreements before they threaten social stability. It further assumes that informal institutions such as families, traditional rulers,

religious leaders, councils of elders, community associations, and other local structures perform important social functions by promoting dialogue, mediation, reconciliation, and consensus among disputing parties. These mechanisms encourage cooperation, strengthen social relationships, reinforce societal norms, and reduce the likelihood of recurring disputes. The theory also assumes that peacebuilding is achieved when institutions successfully restore trust, social integration, and collective solidarity after disputes have been settled. Consequently, conflict resolution is viewed not merely as ending disagreements but as restoring the normal functioning of society.

The relevance of the Structural Functionalist Theory to the present study lies in its explanation of how informal conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to the maintenance of social order and peaceful coexistence within communities. The theory provides a useful framework for understanding why community members often rely on traditional rulers, religious leaders, family heads, community elders, and neighbourhood associations to settle minor disputes outside the formal judicial system. These institutions perform important integrative functions by resolving disagreements through mediation, dialogue, negotiation, and reconciliation, thereby preventing the escalation of minor disputes into larger conflicts. The theory also explains the second objective of the study by demonstrating that effective informal dispute settlement strengthens trust, promotes cooperation, restores social relationships, and contributes to sustainable peacebuilding within Kaduna Metropolis.

Despite its usefulness, the Structural Functionalist Theory has attracted several criticisms. The theory has been criticized for placing excessive emphasis on social stability, consensus, and integration while paying limited attention to power inequalities, domination, and structural injustices that may influence dispute resolution processes. Critics such as C. Wright Mills (1959) argue that functionalism assumes all institutions operate for the benefit of society, whereas some institutions may reinforce unequal power relations and exclude marginalised groups from decision-making. Similarly, Ralf Dahrendorf (1959) contends that conflict is a normal and inevitable feature of society rather than merely a temporary disruption requiring restoration of equilibrium. Furthermore, the theory provides limited explanation of situations where informal conflict resolution mechanisms fail to achieve reconciliation or where traditional institutions themselves become sources of conflict.

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study was conducted in Kaduna Metropolis, Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study adopted a descriptive survey research design using a mixed-methods approach to examine the role of informal conflict resolution mechanisms in minor dispute settlement and peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis. The population of the study comprised adult residents of Kaduna Metropolis, while traditional rulers, religious leaders, community elders, and members of peace committees constituted the key informants because of their involvement in community dispute resolution. A multistage sampling technique was employed for the selection of respondents. In the first stage, five wards, namely Tudun Wada, Kabala, Sabon Gari, Ungwan Rimi, and Badarawa, were purposively selected because they are ethnically and religiously diverse and maintain household registers through their respective ward heads and Community Development Associations (CDAs), thereby providing a reliable sampling frame for the study. The household registers maintained by these communities contained a total of 4,500 registered adult residents, which constituted the sampling frame. Using the Taro Yamane formula at a 5% level of precision  $[n = N / (1 + N(e)^2)]$ , where  $N = 4,500$  and  $e = 0.05$ , a sample size of 367 respondents was obtained. The sample was proportionately distributed across the selected wards as follows: Tudun Wada (94 respondents), Kabala (73 respondents), Sabon Gari (78 respondents), Ungwan Rimi (65 respondents), and Badarawa (57 respondents). In the second stage, households within each ward were systematically identified, after which simple random sampling (balloting) was used to select one eligible adult respondent from each household until the allocated sample for each ward was attained. Where more than one eligible adult was present in a household, one respondent was selected at random. Purposive sampling was further used to select twelve key informants, comprising traditional rulers, religious leaders, community elders, and members of peace committees, based on their knowledge of and active involvement in community dispute settlement. Data for the study were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data were collected through the administration of 367 structured questionnaires and twelve key informant interviews, while secondary data were sourced from textbooks, scholarly journal articles, government publications, conference papers, dissertations, and other relevant documents. The questionnaire was subjected to expert validation to ensure its content validity, while its reliability was established using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. Quantitative data were coded and analysed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), employing

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descriptive statistics such as frequencies, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviations to address the research objectives. Qualitative data generated through the key informant interviews were transcribed narratively and used to corroborate the findings.

## FINDINGS

**Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Respondents (N = 367)**

| Variable                          | Category                    | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|-----------------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Sex                               | Male                        | 212        | 57.8           |
|                                   | Female                      | 155        | 42.2           |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>                | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Age                               | 18–27 years                 | 71         | 19.3           |
|                                   | 28–37 years                 | 104        | 28.3           |
|                                   | 38–47 years                 | 96         | 26.2           |
|                                   | 48–57 years                 | 58         | 15.8           |
|                                   | 58 years and above          | 38         | 10.4           |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>                | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Marital Status                    | Single                      | 109        | 29.7           |
|                                   | Married                     | 208        | 56.7           |
|                                   | Divorced                    | 28         | 7.6            |
|                                   | Widowed                     | 22         | 6.0            |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>                | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Highest Educational Qualification | No Formal Education         | 32         | 8.7            |
|                                   | Primary Education           | 61         | 16.6           |
|                                   | Secondary Education         | 123        | 33.5           |
|                                   | Tertiary Education          | 151        | 41.1           |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>                | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Occupation                        | Civil Servant               | 83         | 22.6           |
|                                   | Trader/Business             | 91         | 24.8           |
|                                   | Self-employed               | 74         | 20.2           |
|                                   | Artisan                     | 41         | 11.2           |
|                                   | Farmer                      | 18         | 4.9            |
|                                   | Unemployed                  | 46         | 12.5           |
|                                   | Others                      | 14         | 3.8            |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>                | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Religion                          | Islam                       | 227        | 61.9           |
|                                   | Christianity                | 136        | 37.1           |
|                                   | Traditional Religion/Others | 4          | 1.1            |
|                                   | <b>Total</b>                | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |
| Ethnicity                         | Hausa/Fulani                | 168        | 45.8           |
|                                   | Gbagyi                      | 56         | 15.3           |

|                     |                     |            |              |
|---------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------|
|                     | Bajju               | 34         | 9.3          |
|                     | Atyap               | 29         | 7.9          |
|                     | Yoruba              | 23         | 6.3          |
|                     | Igbo                | 21         | 5.7          |
|                     | Other Ethnic Groups | 36         | 9.8          |
|                     | <b>Total</b>        | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Ward of Residence   | Tudun Wada          | 94         | 25.6         |
|                     | Sabon Gari          | 78         | 21.3         |
|                     | Kabala              | 73         | 19.9         |
|                     | Ungwan Rimi         | 65         | 17.7         |
|                     | Badarawa            | 57         | 15.5         |
|                     | <b>Total</b>        | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b> |
| Length of Residence | Less than 5 years   | 52         | 14.2         |
|                     | 5–10 years          | 84         | 22.9         |
|                     | 11–20 years         | 109        | 29.7         |
|                     | Above 20 years      | 122        | 33.2         |
|                     | <b>Total</b>        | <b>367</b> | <b>100.0</b> |

Source: Field Survey, 2025

Table 1 shows that male respondents constituted the highest proportion of the study population with 212 (57.8%), while females accounted for the least proportion with 155 (42.2%). In terms of age, respondents aged 28–37 years formed the largest group with 104 (28.3%), whereas those aged 58 years and above constituted the smallest group with 38 (10.4%). Similarly, married respondents recorded the highest proportion with 208 (56.7%), while widowed respondents were the least represented with 22 (6.0%). With respect to educational qualification, respondents with tertiary education constituted the highest proportion with 151 (41.1%), whereas those with no formal education accounted for the least proportion with 32 (8.7%). Regarding occupation, traders and business owners formed the largest category with 91 (24.8%), while respondents in other occupations recorded the least proportion with 14 (3.8%). Furthermore, Islam had the highest representation with 227 (61.9%), while Traditional Religion and other faiths constituted the least proportion with 4 (1.1%). In terms of ethnicity, Hausa/Fulani respondents accounted for the highest proportion with 168 (45.8%), whereas Igbo respondents recorded the least proportion with 21 (5.7%). Based on ward of residence, Tudun Wada had the highest number of respondents with 94 (25.6%), while Badarawa recorded the least with 57 (15.5%). Finally, respondents who had resided in their communities for more than 20 years constituted the highest proportion with 122 (33.2%), whereas those who had lived in their communities for less than five years accounted for the least proportion with 52 (14.2%). This suggests that the study drew responses from individuals

with varied socio-demographic backgrounds, the majority of whom had lived in the selected communities long enough to possess adequate knowledge and experience of informal conflict resolution mechanisms and their contribution to peacebuilding.

**Table 2: Informal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms Used in the Settlement of Minor Disputes in Kaduna Metropolis (N = 367)**

| Item                                                                                             | Response                                | Frequency  | Percentage (%) |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------|------------|----------------|
| Have you ever been involved in a minor dispute in your community?                                | Yes                                     | 289        | 78.7           |
|                                                                                                  | No                                      | 78         | 21.3           |
| Have you sought assistance from an informal conflict resolution mechanism to settle the dispute? | Yes                                     | 247        | 85.5           |
|                                                                                                  | No                                      | 42         | 14.5           |
| Which informal conflict resolution mechanism was primarily used?                                 | Community elders                        | 73         | 29.6           |
|                                                                                                  | Traditional rulers                      | 62         | 25.1           |
|                                                                                                  | Religious leaders                       | 49         | 19.8           |
|                                                                                                  | Family heads                            | 36         | 14.6           |
|                                                                                                  | Community Development Association (CDA) | 17         | 6.9            |
|                                                                                                  | Peace committee                         | 10         | 4.0            |
|                                                                                                  | <b>Total</b>                            | <b>247</b> | <b>100.0</b>   |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Table 2 shows that 289 (78.7%) of the respondents indicated that they had been involved in a minor dispute within their community, while 78 (21.3%) reported that they had never experienced such disputes. Furthermore, of the 289 respondents who had experienced a minor dispute, 247 (85.5%) stated that they sought assistance from informal conflict resolution mechanisms, whereas 42 (14.5%) indicated that they did not. Among those who utilized informal conflict resolution mechanisms, intervention by community elders was the most commonly used mechanism, accounting for 73 (29.6%), while peace committees were the least utilized, with 10 (4.0%). This suggests that informal conflict resolution remains a widely accepted approach to the settlement of minor disputes in Kaduna Metropolis, with community elders serving as the primary mechanism through which such disputes are addressed. The quantitative findings were supported by the views expressed by some of the key informants. One community elder stated:

"Eh... most of the small-small problems people bring to us first. It may be misunderstanding between neighbours, land boundary matter, children fighting or husband and wife issue. We invite everybody, allow each person to talk, then we advise them until they agree. Most people don't like going to police because they believe once police enter the matter, it becomes something bigger."

Similarly, a traditional ruler explained:

"Mmm... in this community, when there is a minor dispute, people normally come to the palace. We listen to both sides and call respected elders if necessary. Many times, after talking to them, they settle the matter themselves. Court is usually the last option unless the matter is very serious."

A religious leader also observed:

"You see, ah... people have confidence in us because they know we will not collect money before listening to them. Sometimes after prayers we call both parties, remind them about forgiveness and living peacefully. Many of them go back as friends again because they know they will continue living in the same community."

However, one member of a peace committee noted that although peace committees play an important role, they are not frequently approached by community members:

"Honestly, many people don't even know what the peace committee does. They first meet family elders or the ward head. It is only when the matter continues or becomes difficult that they call us. That is why we don't handle as many cases as the traditional leaders."

The quantitative and qualitative findings showed areas of convergence and divergence. The quantitative data indicated that most respondents who had experienced minor disputes sought assistance through informal conflict resolution mechanisms, with community elders recording the highest level of utilization. The qualitative data supported this finding, as the key informants explained that community members often reported minor disputes to community elders, traditional rulers, and religious leaders because these individuals were readily available within the community and were trusted to facilitate dialogue between disputing parties. Both findings therefore indicate that informal conflict resolution mechanisms are commonly used in the settlement of minor disputes in Kaduna Metropolis. However, a point of divergence was observed in relation to peace committees. The quantitative findings showed that peace committees recorded the lowest level of utilization, whereas the qualitative data suggested that their low utilization was linked to limited public awareness and the tendency of community members to first seek the assistance of family heads, community elders, or traditional rulers before considering other mechanisms. This indicates

that the use of informal conflict resolution mechanisms differs according to the level of awareness, accessibility, and community preference for specific mechanisms.

**Table 3: Contribution of Informal Conflict Resolution Mechanisms to Peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis (n = 247)**

| S/N | Question                                                                                                | Response                                                   | Frequency | Percentage (%) |
|-----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|----------------|
| 1   | Which conflict resolution approach do you prefer for settling minor disputes?                           | Informal conflict resolution mechanisms                    | 176       | 71.3           |
|     |                                                                                                         | Formal legal institutions (Police/Court)                   | 42        | 17.0           |
|     |                                                                                                         | Both informal and formal mechanisms                        | 29        | 11.7           |
|     |                                                                                                         | <b>Total</b>                                               |           | <b>247</b>     |
| 2   | Which informal conflict resolution mechanism do you consider most effective in settling minor disputes? | Community elders                                           | 74        | 29.9           |
|     |                                                                                                         | Traditional rulers                                         | 63        | 25.5           |
|     |                                                                                                         | Religious leaders                                          | 45        | 18.2           |
|     |                                                                                                         | Family heads                                               | 38        | 15.4           |
|     |                                                                                                         | Community Development Associations/Peace committees        | 27        | 10.9           |
|     |                                                                                                         | <b>Total</b>                                               |           | <b>247</b>     |
| 3   | Why do you prefer informal conflict resolution mechanisms?                                              | They help maintain relationships between disputing parties | 69        | 27.9           |
|     |                                                                                                         | They are easily accessible within the community            | 61        | 24.7           |
|     |                                                                                                         | They resolve disputes faster                               | 46        | 18.6           |
|     |                                                                                                         | They are less costly compared to formal processes          | 43        | 17.4           |
|     |                                                                                                         | They follow community values and expectations              | 28        | 11.3           |
|     |                                                                                                         | <b>Total</b>                                               |           | <b>247</b>     |
| 4   | What was the major contribution of informal conflict resolution mechanisms to your community?           | Prevented disputes from escalating                         | 78        | 31.6           |

|  |  |                                                |    |            |
|--|--|------------------------------------------------|----|------------|
|  |  | Promoted peaceful relationships                | 66 | 26.7       |
|  |  | Encouraged cooperation among community members | 51 | 20.6       |
|  |  | Helped disputing parties forgive and reconcile | 39 | 15.8       |
|  |  | No major contribution                          | 13 | 5.3        |
|  |  | <b>Total</b>                                   |    | <b>247</b> |

**Source: Field Survey, 2025**

Table 3 presents the contribution of informal conflict resolution mechanisms to peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis. The findings show that 176 (71.3%) respondents preferred informal conflict resolution mechanisms for settling minor disputes, while 42 (17.0%) preferred formal legal institutions and 29 (11.7%) preferred a combination of both approaches. Regarding the most effective informal mechanism, community elders were reported as the most preferred, accounting for 74 (29.9%) respondents, while Community Development Associations and peace committees recorded the lowest preference with 27 (10.9%). Furthermore, the major reason for preferring informal conflict resolution mechanisms was their ability to maintain relationships between disputing parties, as indicated by 69 (27.9%) respondents, whereas following community values and expectations was the least reported reason with 28 (11.3%). In terms of their contribution to peacebuilding, 78 (31.6%) respondents reported that informal mechanisms help prevent disputes from escalating, while 13 (5.3%) indicated that they make no major contribution. This indicates that informal conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to peacebuilding by providing an avenue for settling disputes, preventing escalation, maintaining relationships, and supporting cooperation among community members.

The findings were further supported by the views of key informants who explained that community members often prefer informal mechanisms because they allow disputing parties to continue living together after conflicts have been addressed. One community elder stated:

"Eh... most people in this area, when they have small problems, they don't want to start with police or court. They will first come to elders because we know the people involved. Mmmm... if two neighbours fight today, they will still meet tomorrow, so we try to settle it in a way that they can continue their relationship."

Similarly, a traditional ruler explained:

"Ah... people come here because they believe we understand their culture and the way things are done in the community. We listen to both sides. Sometimes the issue is not very big, it is just misunderstanding. After talking, they agree and go back. If you take every small matter to court, sometimes the relationship between people will spoil."

A religious leader also noted:

"Mmm... many people prefer this kind of settlement because it is close to them. They can come and explain their problem without too much difficulty. We advise them and remind them that they are living together in the same place. The important thing is for peace to return."

However, a peace committee member highlighted some limitations in the use of informal mechanisms:

"Eh... the problem is that some people don't know much about the peace committee. They know the elders and traditional leaders more. So sometimes we are only called when the matter has already become serious. If people come earlier, some problems can be handled before they grow."

The quantitative and qualitative findings showed areas of convergence. The survey results indicated that most respondents preferred informal conflict resolution mechanisms because of their role in maintaining relationships, accessibility, and prevention of dispute escalation. The qualitative findings supported this by showing that community actors viewed informal mechanisms as useful because disputing parties continue to live together after settlement. However, the qualitative data revealed an additional issue concerning limited awareness and use of peace committees, which was less visible in the survey findings. This suggests that while informal conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to peacebuilding in Kaduna Metropolis, the level of utilization differs among the various mechanisms based on community familiarity and accessibility.

## **DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS**

The finding that community elders, traditional rulers, religious leaders, and family heads are the major informal conflict resolution mechanisms used in the settlement of minor disputes in Kaduna Metropolis agrees with Salihu (2020), who found that indigenous institutions such as traditional rulers, family heads, community elders, and religious leaders continue to resolve disputes through mediation, negotiation, reconciliation, and consensus-building. Similarly, Fasuan, Khoo and Balakrishnan (2024) reported that elder mediation, family intervention, reconciliation meetings,

and traditional arbitration remain important mechanisms for resolving community disputes. The present study therefore supports previous findings that informal institutions continue to serve as channels for addressing disputes within communities. However, unlike Salihu (2020) and Akpomuvie and Forae (2024), who relied mainly on documentary sources, the present study obtained data directly from community residents and key informants, providing evidence on how these mechanisms are experienced at the community level. The finding is explained by Structural Functionalist Theory, which views society as a system of interconnected institutions that perform functions necessary for maintaining order. From this perspective, informal conflict resolution institutions perform the function of regulating relationships, addressing disagreements, and restoring social balance within the community.

The finding that informal conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to peacebuilding through dispute settlement, prevention of escalation, restoration of relationships, and promotion of cooperation among community members is consistent with Irene (2023), who found that informal peace infrastructures contributed to grassroots peacebuilding by resolving domestic disputes, neighbourhood conflicts, and interpersonal disagreements while promoting trust and social cohesion. It also agrees with Akpomuvie and Forae (2024), who established that indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms contribute to peaceful coexistence by restoring relationships, encouraging forgiveness, and strengthening community participation. Similarly, Bamidele and Idowu (2023) found that dialogue involving traditional rulers, religious leaders, and community stakeholders contributed to maintaining peace after conflicts. However, the present study differs from Bamidele and Idowu (2023), which focused on land boundary disputes between communities, as this study examined everyday minor disputes within an urban setting. The finding supports Structural Functionalist Theory because the theory explains that social institutions contribute to stability by performing roles that prevent disorder and maintain cooperation among members of society. In this regard, informal conflict resolution mechanisms function as community institutions that address conflicts and support social continuity.

## **CONCLUSION**

The study concludes that informal conflict resolution mechanisms in Kaduna Metropolis are primarily driven by community elders, traditional rulers, religious leaders, and family heads, which are used by residents to settle minor disputes and contribute to peacebuilding through dispute

resolution, prevention of conflict escalation, restoration of relationships, and promotion of community cooperation. Based on these findings, the Structural Functionalist Theory is accepted because the informal institutions examined were found to perform social functions that maintain order, regulate relationships, and support stability within the community.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

- i. The study found that although informal conflict resolution mechanisms contributed to peacebuilding, peace committees recorded the lowest level of utilization among the identified mechanisms, indicating limited awareness and participation in their activities. Based on this finding, it is recommended that community leaders and relevant stakeholders should strengthen public awareness programmes on the role of peace committees and encourage wider community participation in their activities.
- ii. The study found that the effectiveness of informal conflict resolution mechanisms depends on the acceptance of decisions by disputing parties, while some respondents indicated that these mechanisms do not always produce lasting resolutions. Based on this finding, it is recommended that community-based conflict resolution actors should receive periodic training on inclusive dispute management practices to improve fairness, acceptance of decisions, and sustainability of settlements.

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