



EXPLORING THE TESTIMONIAL EXPERIENCES, INFLUENCE ON LEGAL OUTCOMES, AND PROFESSIONAL GOALS OF FORENSIC DOCUMENT EXAMINERS

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ABSTRACT

The integrity of the Philippine judicial system depends on objective forensic science, yet Questioned Document Examination (QDE) encounters a persistent "subjectivity vs. science" gap, especially under rigorous courtroom cross-examination. This descriptive phenomenological study, guided by Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), explored the lived experiences, legal impacts, challenges, and professional goals of Forensic Document Examiners (FDEs) from the Philippine National Police (PNP) Forensic Group. Through purposive sampling, verbatim transcripts from in-depth interviews and focus group discussions with active uniformed and non-uniformed examiners were analyzed using Colaizzi's seven-step method. Findings reveal that FDEs engage in strict pre-trial "mental tuning" to maintain focus and manage operational fatigue. On the witness stand, they endure adversarial questioning and personal attacks, finding refuge by grounding their testimony in micro-evidence and the official PNP manual. Their reports often serve as decisive tie-breakers in trials, shaping judicial outcomes by translating scientific findings into legal verdicts. Nevertheless, examiners experience significant communication fatigue, as they must convert technical data into layman's terms and counter myths of perfect signature uniformity. Motivated by scientific neutrality, adherence to international standards (ISO/ASTM/INTERPOL), and a humanitarian mission to protect innocent lives, FDEs require greater systemic support. In response, the study proposes the Forensic Testimonial Excellence Initiative (FTEI), which includes mandatory quarterly moot courts, standardized Forensic Visual Discovery Kits, joint judicial seminars with PHILJA, and a "No-Lab Shift Mandate" granting 12–18 hours of rest before court testimonies to safeguard examiner well-being and enhance forensic justice.

KEYWORDS: Forensic Document Examination, Lived Experiences, Courtroom Testimony, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), Judicial Educator Model, PNP Forensic Group, SMART Framework.

I. INTRODUCTION

This study examines the practical and testimonial challenges encountered by Filipino Questioned Document Examiners (QDEs) during judicial proceedings, with particular attention to their experiences in courtroom testimony and cross-examination. The objective analysis of physical evidence central to the integrity of the judicial system positions QDE as a critical component in resolving cases of fraud, forgery, and disputed identity (Vastrick et al., 2024). Although international frameworks increasingly emphasize scientific rigor, cognitive bias mitigation, and transparent communication (NIST/OSAC, 2024; PCAST, 2016), Filipino QDEs continue to confront unique systemic and operational constraints (RSIS International, 2025). Literature reveals that, while QDEs generally achieve higher accuracy than laypersons, their findings are frequently challenged as subjective in comparison to "hard sciences" like DNA or ballistics (Osborne et al., 2020; Gantz et al., 2021).

The adversarial nature of legal systems often results in a "Battle of the Experts," with conflicting conclusions and the added difficulty for courts in interpreting probabilistic statements (Dror & Scurich, 2022; Dror et al., 2024). Furthermore, QDEs are subject to psychological stress from laboratory backlogs and courtroom pressures, which can hinder clear communication of findings (Almazrouei, 2022; Sarwar &

Akram, 2025), while the emergence of AI-based tools introduces a "transparency gap" in defending digital methodologies (Gless & Whalen, 2023). Locally, examiners face heavy caseloads, limited resources, and logistical hurdles (De Ungria & Rodrigo, 2023; Hilario & Pido, 2023), despite efforts by the PNP Forensic Group to implement quality management and advanced tools (NAPOLCOM Resolution No. 2021-1275; Bureau of Immigration, 2024).

Procedural issues, such as reliance on photocopies and courtroom code-switching, further complicate the communication of technical findings (Madrurnio & Martin, 2023), and the advisory not binding nature of expert testimony in Philippine courts (Supreme Court G.R. No. 216491, 2021) increases the burden on QDEs to persuasively convey their analyses. Despite advancements in training and laboratory protocols, a significant Practical-Knowledge and Testimonial Gap persists due to the lack of empirical research on the lived courtroom experiences of Filipino QDEs specifically regarding cross-examination, judicial skepticism, and effective translation of scientific findings for lay judges (Maristela & Dalugdog, 2021; PIFSAI, 2023).

To address this, the present study proposes an empirical investigation focused on QDEs' strategies for bridging communication gaps, managing high caseloads, and responding

to cross-examination, aiming to inform interventions such as moot court training and enhanced communication protocols. These efforts seek to strengthen the evidentiary value of QDE testimony in Philippine courts, advance judicial integrity, foster public trust, and safeguard marginalized litigants.

Conceptual Framework

The figure above shows the conceptual framework of the research. As illustrated, the Input phase encompasses the foundational elements that shape an examiner's courtroom performance. These include accreditation training, technology

integration, court room credibility and ethical consideration. The legal basis for this study is anchored on Section 49, Rule 130 of the Revised Rules on Evidence, which recognizes the necessity of expert opinions in matters involving specialized skill. Furthermore, the study is supported by Republic Act 11131, which mandates the professional standards for practitioners in the field of forensic document examination. The systematic approach undertaken is assessment of the Forensic Document Examiner by the PNP Forensic Group in terms of lived experiences, measurable effect of their testimonies on the legal outcomes.

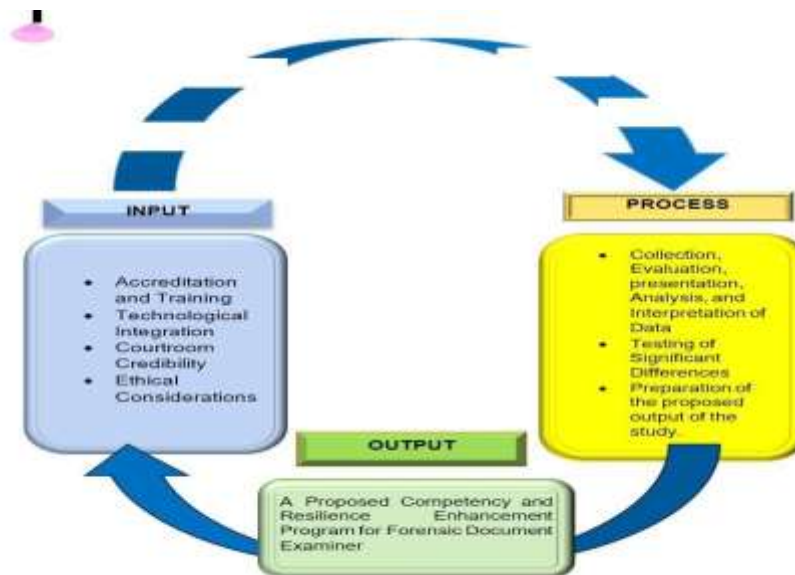


Figure 1. Schematic Diagram of Exploring the Testimonial Experiences, Influence on Goal Outcomes and Professional Goals of Forensic Document Examiner.

Conversely, the process incorporates the Collection, Tabulation, Presentation, Analysis and Interpretation of Data, Testing of Significant Difference and Preparation of the proposed output of the study.

The Output phase, represents the culmination of the research. It results in the identification of key themes regarding the challenges and triumphs of Forensic Document Examiner in the legal system. Ultimately, these findings are synthesized to create a Proposed Framework for enhancing the testimonial aptitude and professional resilience of forensic document examiners when presenting scientific findings in a court of law. Under Section 49, Rule 130 of the Revised Rules on Evidence states that the opinion of a witness on a matter requiring special knowledge, skill, experience, or training may be received in evidence.

Overall, this framework conceptualizes the mechanism functions as a formative evaluation tool, designed to identify and bridge systemic gaps across the input, process, and output stages. The conceptual paradigm is integrated with a feedback loop, represented by the return arrow originating from the Output and leading back to the Input. This loop signifies the cyclical and

transformative nature of the research. It suggests that the findings of this study, specifically the identified themes and the proposed training framework are intended to circulate back into the professional field of Forensic Document Examination.

Statement of the Problem

This study will explore the experiences and impacts associated with the court hearing of Document Examiners, particularly their experiences while testifying in court, the influence of their testimonies on case outcomes, and their aspirations for achieving favorable resolutions in the cases they handle.

Specifically, it will seek to answer the following:

1. What are the informants' lived experiences of being involved in the court proceedings?
2. What is the measurable effect of their testimonies on the legal outcomes?
3. What is the impact of their expert testimonies on judicial decisions?
4. What professional goals drive the informants' efforts to achieve positive case resolutions?



5. What challenges do the informants encounter during their participation in legal proceedings?
6. What strategies or interventions can be proposed to overcome challenges and enhance courtroom appearance?

II. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Design. This study used Descriptive Phenomenology, rooted in Husserl's (1931) philosophy, to capture the lived experiences of Forensic Document Examiners (FDEs) during court hearings. This approach allows the researcher to set aside biases and focus on the essential nature of examiners' testimonial experiences, revealing the realities behind their professional roles.

2.2 Research Method. A qualitative research design was employed to explore the complex experiences of FDEs in their field. As defined by Creswell & Poth (2018), this approach is ideal for understanding how individuals interpret their roles and challenges. Using open-ended inquiry, the study provides a rich, in-depth description of examiners' experiences as expert witnesses in court.

2.3 Population of the Study. The study used purposive sampling to select twelve active PNP Forensic Group members with at least three years' experience and a history of expert testimony in court. Participants were drawn from National, Regional, and Provincial Forensic Units and included both uniformed and non-uniformed personnel. Inclusion and exclusion criteria ensured only qualified, experienced FDEs participated.

2.4 Locale of the Study. Research was conducted at the PNP Forensic Group Headquarters in Camp Crame, Quezon City, and its regional and provincial satellite laboratories—central hubs for forensic document examination in the Philippines.

2.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study. The study focused on the testimonial experiences of FDEs within the PNP, covering both uniformed and non-uniformed personnel from NHQ, RFUs, and PFUs. It relied on qualitative interviews, excluding operational performance data and classified case details. Findings are based on self-reported experiences and may not represent all forensic practitioners in the Philippines.

2.6 Data Gathering Tools. Data were collected using a validated semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussions. The instruments, reviewed by senior examiners, featured open-ended questions aimed at eliciting detailed accounts of courtroom challenges, causes, and potential solutions to enhance examiner competency.

2.7 Data Gathering Procedure. Institutional approval was obtained before identifying and inviting eligible participants. Semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions were held at convenient locations, with informed consent and confidentiality strictly maintained throughout the process.

2.8 Treatment of the Data. Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological analysis was used: transcripts were reviewed, significant statements extracted, and themes identified. Findings were validated through member checking, ensuring accuracy and authenticity of the described experiences.

2.9 Ethical Considerations. Participants received full disclosure about the study, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Informed consent was mandatory. Data were securely handled, and the research process adhered to ethical standards, with voluntary and respectful participation throughout.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This concise discussion synthesizes the qualitative themes derived from in-depth semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions with twelve (12) Forensic Document Examiners (FDEs) of the PNP Forensic Group. Each theme presents verbatim informant statements (with English translations) and direct in-text scholarly citations supporting the empirical findings.

3.1 Informants' Lived Experiences of Court Proceedings

3.1.1 Mentally Tuning the Mind Like a Laboratory Instrument Before Testifying

Forensic document examiners undergo intentional psychological calibration prior to testifying, treating their cognitive state as an optical extension of forensic hardware to eliminate emotional bias, manage pre-court anxiety, and endure fatigue from long operational shifts. This psychological tuning is conceptualized under Professional Vulnerability theory (Biedermann & Joannidès, 2023), which outlines the anticipatory strain and cognitive load experienced when moving from the laboratory to the courtroom crucible. Global studies confirm that pre-testimony mental calibration is essential to prevent decision fatigue and preserve objectivity (Almazrouei, 2022). In the Philippine policing context, examiners rely heavily on personal rituals, logbook reviews, and spiritual anchoring to maintain focus (Maristela & Dalugdog, 2021; Maningo et al., 2025).

[IDI1:SS1]

"Bago ako sumalang sa witness stand, ginagawa kong parang calibration ng microscope ang isip ko dapat walang dumi, walang distraction, at naka-focus lang sa detalye."

Translation: "Before I take the witness stand, I treat my mind like a microscope calibration there must be no dirt, no distraction, and complete focus on the details."

[IDI2:SS2]

"Grabe ang kaba kapag papasok ka na sa courtroom, kaya ugali ko talagang magdasal muna sa lounge at dahan-dahang basahin ulit ang aking laboratory logbook para solid ang memorya ko."

Translation: "The anxiety is intense when entering the courtroom, so it is really my habit to pray first in the lounge and slowly re-read my laboratory logbook to make sure my memory is solid."



3.1.2 Surviving Aggressive Attacks on Forensic Skills and Credentials

During cross-examination, opposing counsel routinely attack the age, local training background, and specialized methodologies of examiners to break their poise and undermine their scientific authority. This adversarial strain reflects the 'psychological burden' documented in international literature, where expert witnesses face targeted strategies designed to induce

public professional self-doubt (Biedermann & Joannidès, 2023). In the Philippines, a legal 'clash of cultures' frequently leads to rigorous scrutiny of scientific findings over traditional legal assertions (Heirs of Danton v. Stier, 2021). As a result, local examiners report feeling personally 'on trial,' requiring cultivated resilience and assertive communication under the Judicial Educator Model (ForensisGroup, 2025).

[IDI3:SS4]

"Talagang gigisahin ka ng defense lawyer pagka-upo mo pa lang; may pagkakataon na harap-harapan nilang minaliit ang kredibilidad ko dahil lang sa tingin nila ay bata pa ako sa serbisyo."

Translation: "The defense lawyer will really grill you the moment you sit down; there was an occasion where they openly belittled my credibility simply because they felt I was too young in the service."

[IDI4:SS5]

"Sinubukan nilang i-disqualify ang aking pagiging expert witness sa pagsasabing wala akong sapat na trainings sa labas ng bansa para sa advanced ink analysis."

Translation: "They tried to disqualify me as an expert witness by claiming that I lacked sufficient overseas training for advanced ink analysis."

3.1.3 Hiding Safely Behind the Official Police Manual and Raw Science

When faced with hostile questioning, examiners regain emotional composure by anchoring their testimony strictly in Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and physical evidence. Relying on standardized protocols and peer-reviewed methods acts as an institutional shield against aggressive legal tactics

(Morgan, 2023). Within the PNP, adherence to the PNP FG Operations Manual and ISO 9001:2015 standards provides both legal standing and psychological protection on the stand (PNP Forensic Group, 2025). Local jurisprudence demonstrates that Philippine courts consistently uphold expert testimony when it is explicitly anchored in established laboratory manuals and objective physical facts (PIFSAI, 2023).

[IDI5:SS7]

"Kahit gaano pa kasungit o ka-agresibo ang nagtatanong, nakakaramdam ako ng kapanatagan ng loob kapag binabasa ko na ang mga factual data mula sa aming standard operating procedures."

Translation: "No matter how harsh or aggressive the cross-examiner is, I feel inner peace the moment I read the factual data from our standard operating procedures."

[IDI1:SS8]

"Hindi ako nakikipagtalo sa kanila; kapag ginitgit ako ng abogado, itinuturo ko lang kung ano ang nakasulat sa PNP Forensic Group manual at kung ano ang lumabas sa microscopy examination."

Translation: "I do not argue with them; when the lawyer presses me, I simply point to what is written in the PNP Forensic Group manual and what came out of the microscopy examination."

3.2 Measurable Effect of Testimonies on Legal Outcomes

3.2.1 Forcing the Other Side to Change Their Strategy

Clear demonstrations of forensic evidence instantly disrupt adversarial positioning, forcing opposing attorneys to request recesses, pivot away from authenticity challenges, or drop cross-examinations. This operational dynamic aligns with the

Judicial Educator Model, where active scientific demonstrations shift legal proceedings from theoretical arguments to empirical facts (Morgan, 2023). In the Philippines, given the high volume of document litigation, objective forensic findings serve as critical game-changers that compel strategic retreats by opposing counsel (NEDA, 2023; Maningo et al., 2025).

[IDI1:SS10]

"Noong ipinaliwanag ko na sa korte kung paano nabuo ang traced forgery gamit ang light box, biglang humingi ng suspension of hearing ang kabilang panig para raw pag-aralan muli ang depensa nila."

Translation: "When I explained to the court how the traced forgery was formed using a light box, the opposing side suddenly asked for a suspension of the hearing to re-evaluate their defense."



[IDI2:SS11]

"Makikita mo talaga ang epekto ng testimonya mo kapag ang abogado ng depensa ay biglang nagbago ng tono at hindi na kinukuwestiyon ang pekeng pirma, kundi nag-focus na lang sa ibang isyu."

Translation: "You can really see the impact of your testimony when the defense lawyer suddenly changes tone and stops questioning the forged signature, shifting their focus to other issues instead."

3.2.2 Seeing is Believing: Speeding Up Cases with Visual Tools

Utilizing visual enlargements, juxtaposition charts, macro-photography, and digital projections bridges the comprehension gap for lay judges and expedites trial proceedings. Global studies emphasize that visual evidence tools eliminate

'digital disconnects' and dramatically accelerate judicial comprehension (ResearchGate, 2025). This practice directly supports the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028 objective of enhancing judicial efficiency, as visual evidence reduces trial delays and resolves technical disputes in fewer hearings (Maristela & Dalugdog, 2021).

[IDI3:SS13]

"Tba pa rin kapag nakikita ng Hukom ang juxtaposition chart; mas mabilis niyang naintindihan ang microscopic pen lifts kaysa noong binabasa ko lang ang report."

Translation: "It is different when the Judge sees the juxtaposition chart; he understood the microscopic pen lifts much faster compared to when I was just reading the report."

[IDI4:SS14]

"Noong nag-project kami ng macro-photography ng altered land title sa screen, kitang-kita ng buong korte ang pagkabura ng hibla ng papel kaya natapos ang case validation sa loob lang ng isang upuan."

Translation: "When we projected the macro-photography of the altered land title on the screen, the entire court clearly saw the erasure of the paper fibers, which concluded the case validation in just one sitting."

3.2.3 Smashing Scams and Fake Defenses

Combining specialized analytical techniques—such as ink age verification, paper fiber inspection, and stroke synchronization—neutralizes complex white-collar fraud, digital tracing, and land-grabbing syndicates. Multidisciplinary forensic analysis is globally recognized as essential for uncovering

sophisticated criminal operations (Biedermann & Joannidès, 2023). In the domestic sphere, official PNP FG operational logs confirm that integrated document examinations routinely dismantle organized syndicate schemes and protect public and private property (PNP Forensic Group, 2024; RSIS International, 2025).

[IDI5:SS16]

"Ang resulta ng aming document analysis ang tuluyang bumasag sa organized land syndicate dito sa rehiyon dahil napatunayan nating peke ang lahat ng ginamit nilang selyo ng gobyerno."

Translation: "The result of our document analysis completely shattered the organized land syndicates in the region because we proved that all the government seals they used were fake."

[FGD7:SS18]

"Nawalan ng bisa ang mga pekeng loan agreements na ginamit para makuha ang pera ng mga biktima noong lumabas sa aming signature examination at paper examination na gawa-gawa lang ang mga ito."

Translation: "The fraudulent loan agreements used to siphon money from the victims were invalidated when our signature examination and paper examination revealed they were completely fabricated."

3.3 Impact of Expert Testimonies on Judicial Decisions

3.3.1 The Judge's Final Basis: Writing Science into the Verdict

Judges routinely incorporate the exact technical terminology, probability scales, and scientific findings of FDE reports directly into written court decisions. The direct integration

of expert terminology into judicial rulings is an international hallmark of effective expert communication (Morgan, 2023). Philippine Supreme Court jurisprudence demonstrates that forensic reports frequently serve as the 'sole solid foundation' for establishing falsification and fraud in court verdicts (G.R. No. 216491, 2021; RSIS International, 2025).

[IDI4:SS19]

"Napakasarap basahin sa promulgated decision ng korte noong makita ko na ang mga ginamit kong teknikal na termino tulad ng 'hesitation marks' ay kinopya mismo ng judge bilang batayan ng hatol."

Translation: "It was very rewarding to read the court's promulgated decision when I saw that the technical terms I used, like 'hesitation marks,' were copied verbatim by the judge as the basis for the verdict."



[IDI5:SS20]

"Hayagang sinabi ng Hukom sa kaniyang desisyon na ang siyentipikong ulat ng PNP Document Examiner ang nag-iisang matibay na pundasyon kaya napatunayan ang falsification."

Translation: "The Judge explicitly stated in his decision that the scientific report of the PNP Document Examiner was the sole solid foundation that proved the falsification."

3.3.2 Breaking Hard Deadlocks in Complex Cases

In cases involving contradictory eyewitness claims, bitter family estate disputes, or high-stakes corporate litigation, objective forensic testing serves as the definitive tie-breaker. International studies affirm that forensic experts are increasingly

relied upon as neutral arbiters to resolve deep evidentiary gridlocks (Vastrick et al., 2024). In the local justice system, scientific document analysis provides the objective baseline required to break prolonged legal stalemates (NEDA, 2023; Hilario & Pido, 2023).

[IDI1:SS22]

"Nag-aaway na ang mga magkakapatid sa loob ng limang taon dahil sa huling habilin ng magulang, pero nung nag-testify ako tungkol sa simulated forgery ng pirma, doon natapos ang deadlock sa mana."

Translation: "The siblings had been fighting for five years over their parent's last will, but when I testified about the simulated forgery of the signature, the deadlock over the inheritance finally ended."

[FGD9:SS24]

"Walang ibang mapagpipilian ang judge kundi ang maniwala sa aming ulat dahil nagkaroon ng gridlock sa mga testimonya ng mga testigo; kami lang ang nagdala ng purong siyentipikong katibayan."

Translation: "The judge had no choice but to rely on our report because there was a gridlock among eyewitness testimonies; we were the only ones who brought pure scientific evidence."

3.3.3 The Court's Protection: Trusting the PNP's Reputation

Judges actively protect expert witnesses from disrespectful, repetitive, or abusive cross-examination due to the institutional credibility and established integrity of the PNP Forensic Group. Courts frequently grant procedural protections to experts

affiliated with trustworthy, accredited scientific bodies (Lim & Choi, 2022). In the Philippines, trial judges enforce procedural rules to shield FDEs from badgering, citing official manual protocols and institutional standing (Supreme Court of the Philippines, 2023; University of Baguio, 2023).

[IDI3:SS25]

"Noong medyo bastos na ang pagtatanong ng defense counsel, ang mismong judge na ang nagsabi sa kaniya na igalang ang institusyon ng PNP Forensic Group dahil subok na ang aming kredibilidad."

Translation: "When the defense counsel's questioning became quite disrespectful, the judge himself told him to respect the institution of the PNP Forensic Group because our credibility is already proven."

[FGD11:SS27]

"Dahil kilala ang aming opisina sa pagiging tapat, hindi pinapayagan ng mga Hukom na sirain lang ng mga abogado ang aming moralidad sa pamamagitan ng mga walang basehang akusasyon."

Translation: "Because our office is known for being honest, Judges do not allow lawyers to just destroy our morale through groundless accusations."

3.4 Professional Goals Driving Case Resolutions

3.4.1 Staying 100% Neutral, No Matter What

Examiners maintain absolute scientific neutrality, evaluating physical features objectively regardless of command pressure, financial incentives, or legal alignment. Ethical vigilance and conscious bias mitigation are critical to preserving

independence under external pressure (Osborne et al., 2020). Under NAPOLCOM Resolution No. 2020-0382, absolute neutrality is codified as both a legal requirement and an ethical mandate for PNP examiners, enabling them to counter the 'Emotional Witness Effect' in court (Emerald Publishing, 2025).

[FGD11:SS29]

"May mga pagkakataon na may pressure mula sa labas o kaya mataas na opisyal, pero ang etikal na standard ko ay hindi pwedeng tapatan ng pera o pabor; katotohanan lang dapat."

Translation: "There are times when there is pressure from the outside or high-ranking officials, but my ethical standard cannot be matched by money or favors; it must strictly be the truth."

[FGD12:SS30]

"Hindi ko iniisip kung pabor sa prosekusyon o depensa ang report ko. Ang goal ko bilang FDE ay maging patas"



at maging boses ng dokumento nang walang kinikilingan."

Translation: "I do not consider whether my report favors the prosecution or the defense. My goal as an FDE is to be fair and to be the voice of the document without showing bias."

3.4.2 Lifting PNP Work to International Standards

FDEs are driven by a professional desire to align PNP laboratory processes with global benchmarks, such as ASTM and INTERPOL standards, through rigorous peer review. Global standardization and technical peer-review systems enhance overall evidentiary reliability in judicial settings (Biedermann &

Joannidès, 2023; NIST, 2025). Achieving ISO 9001:2015 accreditation elevates the institutional standing of Philippine forensic laboratories, reflecting ongoing modernization within the PNP Forensic Group (PNP Forensic Group, 2025; Alvarez, 2024).

[IDI5:SS31]

"Gusto kong patunayan sa bawat pagharap ko sa korte na ang PNP Document Examiners ay sumusunod sa mga international guidelines tulad ng sa ASTM at INTERPOL manuals."

Translation: "I want to prove every time I face the court that PNP Document Examiners adhere to international guidelines such as those in the ASTM and INTERPOL manuals."

[FGD1:SS32]

"Ang layunin ko sa aking karera ay ang makatutulong na itaas ang kalidad ng ating laboratory testing para hindi tayo mapag-iwanan ng ibang bansa pagdating sa forensic science."

Translation: "My goal in my career is to help elevate the quality of our laboratory testing so that we do not lag behind other countries when it comes to forensic science."

3.4.3 Protecting Real Lives and Properties from Ruin

FDEs derive deep fulfillment from the humanitarian outcomes of their technical analyses, such as exonerating innocent individuals and restoring stolen land to vulnerable families. Forensic science functions globally as a form of 'applied justice' that directly safeguards civil rights and livelihoods (Gal &

Lazar, 2023; Almazrouei, 2022). This aligns with UN Sustainable Development Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions) and local empirical findings highlighting the profound humanitarian motivation of Filipino examiners (United Nations, 2015; Maningo et al., 2025).

[IDI1:SS34]

"Nasisiyahan ako sa trabaho ko kapag alam kong ang aking ulat ay nakasalba sa isang inosenteng tao na gustong ipakulong gamit ang mga huwad na pirma."

Translation: "I find fulfillment in my work when I know that my report saved an innocent person whom others wanted to imprison using fraudulent signatures."

[IDI2:SS35]

"Ang tunay na drive para sa interim ay ang makitang nabawi ng mga mahihirap na pamilya ang kanilang lupang ninakaw sa pamamagitan ng mga falsified deed of sale."

Translation: "The true drive for me is seeing poor families recover their land that was stolen through falsified deeds of sale."

3.5 Challenges Encountered During Legal Proceedings

3.5.1 Explaining Deep Science in Everyday Words

Translating complex forensic concepts (e.g., pen lifts, line quality, spectral wavelengths) into lay terms without losing scientific rigor demands intense mental effort and causes communication fatigue. Simplifying technical jargon into

accessible analogies is globally recognized as a prerequisite for effective expert testimony (Widodo, 2024; Koch, 2025). In Philippine courtrooms, examiners frequently use practical metaphors (e.g., comparing handwriting habits to a person's gait) to make scientific data understandable to judges (Madrurnio & Martin, 2023; Maristela & Dalugdog, 2021).

[IDI3:SS37]

"Napakalaking hamon ang mag-translate ng mga technical concepts tulad ng line characteristics o pen lifts para maintindihan ng isang Hukom na walang background sa siyensya."

Translation: "It is a massive challenge to translate technical concepts like line characteristics or pen lifts so they can be understood by a Judge who lacks a background in science."



[IDI4:SS38]

"Kailangan kong gumamit ng mga simpleng analohiya, halimbawa ay itinutulad ko ang ugali sa pagsusulat sa paraan ng paglakad ng tao para lang ma-visualize nila ang stroke characteristics."

Translation: "I have to use simple analogies, for example, comparing writing habits to a person's manner of walking just so they can visualize the stroke characteristics."

3.5.2 Fighting the Myth That Signatures Must Look Identical

Examiners continually struggle against the widespread judicial misconception that authentic signatures must be perfectly uniform, educating the court on natural variation and tracing indicators. Overcoming fallacies regarding signature uniformity

is a persistent global hurdle in forensic document examination (Osborne et al., 2020; Dror & Scurich, 2022). Philippine Supreme Court jurisprudence places the burden on examiners to explain natural variation to prevent misinterpretations of authenticity (G.R. No. 216491, 2021; PIFSAI, 2023; University of Baguio, 2023).

[IDI5:SS40]

"Palaging akala ng mga abogado at ng publiko na kapag hindi magkapareho ang dalawang pirma, peke na agad ang isa hindi nila alam ang tungkol sa natural variations ng tao."

Translation: "Lawyers and the public always assume that if two signatures are not identical, one is automatically fake they are unaware of a human's natural variations."

[FGD6:SS41]

"Kailangan mong paulit-ulit na ituro sa witness stand na ang tao ay hindi makina; ang sulat natin ay nagbabago dahil sa stress, posisyon sa pag-upo, o kaya ay karamdaman."

Translation: "You have to repeatedly teach from the witness stand that humans are not machines; our writing changes due to stress, sitting position, or illness."

3.5.3 Keeping a Poker Face Under Heavy Pressure

Maintaining an unreadable 'poker face' under hostile, circular, or insulting cross-examination imposes severe physical and emotional strain on examiners, especially following long laboratory shifts. This emotional suppression exemplifies the physical and psychological toll of sustained courtroom testimony (Biedermann & Joannides, 2023; Sarwar & Akram, 2025). Local

research highlights chronic courtroom stress and fatigue as significant occupational hazards for Philippine forensic personnel, requiring deliberate emotional regulation to safeguard credibility (Maristela & Dalugdog, 2021; Noble, 2024; RSIS International, 2025).

[IDI1:SS43]

"Kahit galing ka sa magdamag na laboratory work at masakit ang katawan mo, kailangan mong magpakita ng poker face sa korte para hindi ka masiraang-loob kapag binuweltahan ka ng abogado."

Translation: "Even if you just came from overnight laboratory work and your body aches, you need to maintain a poker face in court so you won't lose heart when the lawyer turns on you."

[FGD1:SS44]

"Sobrang nakaka-drain ang emosyon kapag sinasadyang magsalita ng pabalang o mapang-insulto ang defense counsel para lang mapikon ka at mawala sa pokus."

Translation: "It is incredibly draining emotionally when the defense counsel deliberately speaks rudely or insultingly just to provoke you and throw you off focus."

IV. CONCLUSION

The lived experiences of PNP Forensic Document Examiners demonstrate that effective court testimony is achieved through meticulous mental, emotional, and procedural preparation. Despite the adversarial and often hostile environment of the courtroom, FDEs are able to maintain composure and authority by grounding their actions in structured routines, official protocols, and the objective reliability of scientific evidence. This resilience is fundamental to sustaining the credibility of forensic testimony in the Philippine justice system.

The testimonies of FDEs have a transformative impact on the trajectory of legal cases. Their robust, science-

based findings not only compel legal parties to adjust their strategies but also expedite case resolution through the use of compelling visual evidence. The technical rigor and clarity of FDE reports are indispensable in exposing fraud, supporting prosecutions, and ensuring that justice is served efficiently and effectively.

Expert testimony from FDEs is a cornerstone of judicial decision-making, frequently forming the factual and technical basis for court verdicts. The objectivity and institutional reputation of the PNP Forensic Group grant examiners significant influence in resolving even the most complex and deadlocked cases. This high level of judicial trust underscores the vital role of



forensic science in upholding the integrity and fairness of the Philippine legal process.

The guiding motivation for FDEs centers on unwavering scientific neutrality, a commitment to global best practices, and a strong sense of humanitarian responsibility. Their dedication to objective reporting, continuous professional development, and ethical conduct ensures that forensic document examination in the Philippines meets both national and international standards, ultimately protecting the innocent and supporting social justice.

FDEs face significant operational and psychological barriers, most notably in translating technical science into accessible language and combating persistent myths in court. Their ongoing success depends on their ability to communicate complex findings clearly, dispel misconceptions, and maintain emotional resilience under pressure. Addressing these challenges is essential to safeguarding both the effectiveness of forensic testimony and the well-being of examiners.

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