



## ***Kaksay na Pagpangugnan* and Its Implication in the Lives of Young Tagakaolo Couples**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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This study explored *kaksay na pagpangugnan* and its implication in the lives of young Tagakaolo couples. This study used phenomenological inquiry and purposive sampling. Data was gathered through In-depth Interviews and Focus Group Discussions. The data analysis identified four themes in the Tagakaolo couples' experiences with *kaksay na pagpangugnan*: financial problems will really dominate; socio-emotional challenges are also present; couples feel mixed regrets, happiness, and confusion; and parents are their support system. Twelve themes emerged as the challenges coping mechanisms of Tagakaolo couples' who undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan*: lack of money due to joblessness; difficulty of finding jobs due to lack of education; difficulty with household chores; support from parents still needed; frequent quarrels and misunderstanding, physical limitations of the body because of youth; limited freedom; had to find jobs as laborers; work hard for the future and ask help from mother; work every day and try to give child a good education; find ways to make a living; and engage in farming work not for self but for family. Another four themes emerged from the Tagakaolo couples' insights: do not marry early; survival is difficult with early marriage; not much happiness is experienced; and multi-tasking has to be done. The study suggests that teachers and academic institutions could help create an intervention or remediation program for their students to mitigate early marriage.

### **KEYWORDS:**

Early Marriage, Problems, Support System, Farming, Survival

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

The phenomenon of early marriage still occurs in different places in the world [XIII]. Early marriage in cultural societies allows for practicing the most controversial issues among young adolescents. It is rooted in different factors that contribute to young couples' problems [XIX]. According to UNICEF, the early marriage rate on 400 million children worldwide especially men and women aged 18 and under was 41% (2020).

Unfortunately, these young married couples face significant mental, emotional, and health problems [XII]. Additionally, it is prone to physical abuse and even sexual violence. They are also facing many challenges including limited opportunities in education, health risk, poor economic living, and even diseases [VIII].

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Early marriage is defined as marriage before the age of 18 years and is widely accepted and practiced by the cultural communities in the rural areas of the Philippines [IV]. The legal marriage age is 18, although many people get married before that age especially in rural and secluded places where social norms, access to education, and poverty are major factors [VI]. It is adopted and practiced as the *kaksay na pagpangugnan* by the Tagakaolo community. According to Hirai (2015), most women get married while they're 17 or under and some of them got married as young as 13 years old. He further discussed that low educational attainment is linked to poverty and early marriage because early marriage and lack of parental interest in education denied women the chance to pursue an education. Women eventually expressed profound remorse for their missed opportunities to further their education as a result. Some parents will arrange a marriage for financial considerations, primarily the bride price.

Child marriage was a common practice among Muslim Filipinos, according to the Code of Muslim Personal Laws [I]. However, it is now illegal. The Philippines' ban on child marriage imbedded in RA 11596 also known as

"Prohibition of Child Marriage Law" was enacted into law on December 10, 2021. It protects and promotes the welfare of Filipino children by forbidding any type of child marriage that would be damaging to their full development as a contributing member of society [XIV]. The UNICEF Philippines commemorated the enactment of this law as a significant victory for children's rights [V]. However, this does not imply that the practice will immediately end due to the socioeconomic and cultural circumstances that exist [II].

While the Philippine culture has been impacted by a variety of international cultures, notably Spanish and American cultures, indigenous communities can be found in the interiors of Luzon, Mindanao, and a few Visayas islands. The term "Indigenous Peoples of the Philippines" refers to a group of people or a homogeneous society that is acknowledged by others based on self-ascription and ascription [XVII]. According to the World Health Organization (2019), Indigenous populations, are communities that live within or are connected to geographically distinct traditional habitats or ancestral territories, and who identify as members of a distinct cultural group, descended from groups present in the area before modern states were formed and current borders defined. They generally keep their cultural and social identities, as well as their social, economic, cultural, and political institutions, independent from the dominant society or culture.

The vast majority of the Philippines' 12 million Indigenous peoples live in the uplands, which they claim as part of their traditional territory [XV]. The traditional areas comprise abundant natural resources found in our country about 350 million Indigenous peoples live in over 70 nations on six continents, representing more than 5000 languages and cultures. Also, there are ethnolinguistic groups that comprise 15% of the population in the Philippines.

Meanwhile, the Moro people's identity is primarily founded on their professed Islam, their institutional history with ties to the sultanates, their history of resistance to foreign colonial rule—whether it be European or Philippine—and the defense of their land rights against expropriation [III]. Moreover, there are at least 13 distinct ethnolinguistic groups that make up the Moro people, namely: Maranao, Maguindanao, Tausug, Kalagan, Sangil, Ilanun/Iranun, Palibugan, Yakan, Sama, Badjao, Jumamapun, Palawanon, and Molbog [XI]. Each of which has its own identity and institutional past. The Sulu Archipelago's tribes and those on the island of Mindanao, on the other hand, exhibit the most striking contrasts [IX].

On the other hand, Bangsamoro and the remainder of Mindanao are home to several indigenous, non-Muslim peoples known as Lumad. Nadal et al. (2022) discussed that since 1986, a vast number of the indigenous peoples of the Mindanao island group in the Southern Philippines have been referred to collectively as "Lumad." About half of the indigenous communities in the Philippines are Lumad, who are concentrated in Mindanao. The Bagobo, Banwaon, Blaan,

Bukidnon, Dibabawon, Higaonon, Mamanwa, Mandaya, Mangguwangan, Manobo, Mansaka, Matigsalug, Subanen, Tagakaolo, Talaandig, Tboli, Teduray, and Ubo are the 18 major Lumad ethnolinguistic groupings. These Lumad can be found throughout Mindanao, in isolated mountain valleys, low-lying plains, and coastal regions.

Nadal et al. (2022) further discussed that the Cebuano term "Lumad" means "indigenous." Although using a Cebuano word may seem paradoxical given that Cebuano is the language of the residents of Cebu in the Visayas, they thought it was the most acceptable choice given that none of the different tribes speak any other common language besides Cebuano.

Being one of the Lumad, Tagakaolo populations are often found in places with abundant biodiversity reservoirs. This is largely owing to their environmentally friendly actions in the use of natural resources, which have helped to preserve the land's natural wealth. Indigenous people become more significant; it has become increasingly sensitive over a long period in the International Decade of the World's Indigenous People (Balestra & Fleischer, 2018).

The Tagakaolo youth, discovering and learning the process of their traditional way of getting married is beyond significant. The process gave them the space to understand that "sablág" or bridewealth is an essential part of the Tagakaolo marriage. It binds not only the two individuals involved but also the families of these individuals. It symbolizes their commitment to each other.

This is further manifested through the "pag-mesmes", part of the ritual in the wedding ceremony where the parents of both parties will mold the rice into a ball. The rice must stick together as one, as this foretells the kind of marriage the couple will have. The "mesmes" or the rice is eaten together with a dish that the bride and groom will serve each other. This entire ritual signifies their vow of love that would harmonize them as a couple.

There is common literature discussing marriage and its implication in the lives of Tagakaolo couples, but limited studies were found to have investigated early marriage in terms of the implications in the lives of young Tagakaolo couples. This study is unique since this will involve the young Tagakaolo couples being part of the Indigenous People (IP) of the Philippines while utilizing a phenomenological approach that will unveil the impact of early marriages through under-participation in this study. This study would also suggest limited interventions due to a limited reference, especially when it comes to the implications of young Tagakaolo couples participating. This study is therefore necessary to ascertain the consequences of early marriage on young Tagakaolo couples. In order to establish various initiatives that will address the issues of early marriage for young Tagakaolo IP couples who are engaging in early marriage, the agencies may use the study's findings as a guide.

## II. METHOD

This study utilized a qualitative method which will take a phenomenological approach. This approach focused on the young Tagakaolo couples' experiences who marry at a young age. Also, it focused on experiences of human life. The qualitative method of research utilizing Phenomenological design highlights to identify and to be able to provide particular situation and plays an important role (Creswell, 2013). Performing certain steps was required in collecting data of this study as suggested by Creswell (2007). The first step was searching for the Datu (tribal leader) of the community who was a suitable informant taking into consideration the given inclusion and exclusion criteria. I submitted all essential papers such as letters of approval that must be prepared. Also, I submitted a letter of permission to the barangay containing the necessary information asking for assistance in having the young Tagakaolo couples become participants. In analyzing the data, I used the thematic analysis method in qualitative data. I used interviews and focus group discussions. There were various approaches to conducting thematic analysis and it was the flexible method (Caulfield, 2019).

Moreover, phenomenological design was used in this study, which is guided by the philosophical assumptions of qualitative inquiry in all of its complex designs and methods of data analysis: To understand a complex phenomenon, one must consider the multiple "realities" experienced by the participants themselves - the "insider" perspectives. The majority of qualitative researchers would agree with Snider's (2010) statement that numbers are impressive, but they conceal considerably more than they disclose. Furthermore, I felt that using a qualitative design to explore more nuanced of the *kaksay na pagpangugnan* of young Tagakaolo couples was more appropriate. This was in line with what said that qualitative investigations are frequently done to investigate the difficulties of an understudied population, particularly when there are few conceptual studies in the field (Ponce, 2017).

Hence, Phenomenology is known as educational qualitative research design. The intellectual foundations of qualitative research can be found in phenomenology (a philosophy), hermeneutics, and existentialism. As a result, qualitative research is situated within several philosophical frameworks that center on various views of reality. Phenomenological approaches, as defined by Padilla-Diaz (2018), aim to investigate people's experiences to gain a perspective on their lives concerning specific occurrences, and to learn what pertains to people in their daily lives. Phenomenologists focus on a person's emotions, sentiments, and beliefs, to enter the participants' inner living situations to examine the numerous opinions that people invariably hold (Stark, 2018).

In addition, this study used phenomenology and cultural competence frameworks to inform the research methodologies and analytical approach, and the researcher

used in-depth interviewing methods. Phenomenology was considered to be a good fit for this research since it was focused on the study of human existence and how people comprehend and interpret their actions. Phenomenology enabled the researcher to find hidden parts of people's lives that would not otherwise be revealed in 'regular' talks or to those outside their social or cultural groups. Also, in-depth interviews were conducted as the primary data collection method as structured nature allows the interviewee to tell their story most deeply and richly possible during the interview process. Lastly, the researcher explored the implications of *kaksay na pagpangugnan* for young Tagakaolo couples.

In data gathering, the researcher protected the respondents from damage and suffering, and the researcher observed acceptable behavior. The researcher first applied to the Graduate School where he was enrolled for permission to conduct the study. Following the receipt of authorization to conduct the study, the researcher drafted a study proposal titled "*Kaksay na Pagpangugnan* and Its Implications in the Lives of Young Tagakaolo Couples," which was submitted to the research panel for suitable critiques and changes. The researcher created the interview sheet, which was used to collect data for this study, after modifying the proposal presented by the research panel. This interview sheet was reviewed by specialists in the field, including the Graduate School research validator. After following the validation of the interview sheet, the researcher selected study participants using purposive sampling technique. Before the interview, a letter was sent to the study participants requesting permission to participate in the study. To have an organized approach of getting data from the participants, the researcher set up an interview schedule with the study participants. The researcher also obtained an approved and recommendation letter from the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples (NCIP) office, the tribal chieftain of the Tagakaolo tribe in Malita, and the LGUs in the locale to seek opinion, permission to conduct interviews with the participants, and to include IP specifically young Tagakaolo couples in this study before the interview. The respondents were given explanations on their data privacy, topic, content, and survey to ensure comprehension and asked for their agreement. They were provided with an interview consent form. Data collection that included documentation such as video and audio recordings was also explained to them. Each participant in the interview process was given a minimum of 60 minutes and a maximum of 2 hours. Before beginning the interview, the researcher read a written consent statement that included permission to conduct an interview and observation.

The researcher used the interview sheet as a guide when asking questions. The researcher invited the participants to choose their pseudonyms after the interview. The researcher then sent the data that were needed in this study to a data analyst for adequate data analysis using thematic analysis. Maguire and Delahunt (2017) laid out the

step-by-step guide in doing a thematic analysis that this study followed. When the researcher became familiar with the gathered data, codes were generated, and themes were searched. The themes were then reviewed and defined. The write-up followed that were developed and discussed in light of the study's objectives. The findings served as the foundation for a conclusion and recommendations that would address the issues raised in this study.

Hence, the researcher adopted the model of phenomenology data analysis of Colaizzi (1978) as well as the current Saldaña (2013) data analytical procedures, which highlight conceptual trends and identify the processes. First, the researcher read and re-read the transcribed interviews extensively to identify with the data, and to gain a sense of each person and their history and experiences. The investigator could recognize relevant statements from the transcripts that contributed directly to the proposed phenomenon. From that, the researcher developed interpretive meanings of the significant statements. The researcher reread the research protocols to ensure the original description was evident in the interpretive meanings. The interpretive meanings were arranged into clusters, which allowed themes to emerge. The data analysis tool consists of transcription of responses of the participants of the study, and these were coded which themes were assigned for proper narratives coherent to the data that will be gathered. The data analysis tool comprised of transcription of study participants' responses, which were classified and assigned to themes for proper narratives consistent with the data collected.

The researchers used tools to analyze the data collected from the study participants after they have analyzed the data collected. As a result, the data acquired through the use of a semi-structured interview were analyzed by transcribing responses. During the interview, the researcher used the participants' responses verbatim. The data analyst transcribed the responses, and the results were interpreted by the researcher for discussion.

During this process, the researcher sought validation, avoided repetitive themes, and noted any discrepancies. The themes were then integrated into an exhaustive description. The researcher also referred the theme clusters back to the protocols to substantiate them. It was imperative that the research be immersed in the data by repetitiously reading over the material as preparation for analysis (Marshall & Rossman, 2010). The data collection, note-taking, coding and memoing should transpire simultaneously from the onset of the research and a sorting process was facilitated to achieve categorical saturation (Locke, 2001).

As previously mentioned, this study was guided by a phenomenological framework. Firmly based in qualitative research, phenomenology would provide an avenue for discovering traditional marriage rituals of the Tagakaolo from these stories, the researcher searched for comparisons as to how the participants experienced the phenomenon; as meaning ultimately evolved from relationships in the data

(Colaizzi, et al, 2015). Data collected through the interview protocol provided a rich description of the experiences of the participants as well as how they coped with their roles.

In addition, as Gonzalez' (2016) data analysis process recommended, the researcher first chronologically bracketed the commentary and began phenomenological reduction. The data reduction process began with open coding and interpretive memoing where the researcher identified words that best represented emerging topics that served to form categories of meaning. This helped to determine direction for further analysis. Next, the researcher identified the salient points that developed within the data to further shape the evolution of core topics. The following phase again required coding and memoing but was more focused with evolving analysis through connecting directly to the data to confirm and revise emerging topics and redirecting those ideas to meaning units.

The final stage dealt with the evolving categories and search for alternative understanding before converting the emergent categories into thematic units and using the themes to compose my descriptive report. Creswell (2013) suggested researchers search for patterns by pulling the data apart and putting them back together in more meaningful ways. Through this strategic puzzling. Reaching the final stage of confirmed themes involved summarizing, validating, when necessary, modifying ideas before settling on the general and unique themes to make the composite summary.

The researcher ensured credibility of this study. Every study conducted must be, of all means, credible. This is to establish and demonstrate the truth of the study findings. Credibility is seen as the most important criterion in establishing trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The questions for the interview protocol for the Key Informant Interview were reviewed by credible persons who were experts in qualitative studies. I made use of the member checking method to make sure of the accuracy of the information and encouraged them to evaluate the integrity of the results.

**III. RESULTS**

**Table 1. Themes and Core Ideas on the Experiences of the Tagakaolo Couples who have Undergone with *Kaksay na Pagpangugnan***

| <i>Major themes</i>                            | <i>Core Ideas</i>   |
|--|---|
| <i>Financial problems will really dominate</i> | Really difficult without money for food and daily expenses.<br>Had to work as a farmer.<br>Couldn't even buy own clothes.<br>Didn't have money for hospital bills.<br>Had financial problems when pregnant.<br>Always argued over money and food.<br>Different agencies gave assistance.<br>Entered into all sorts of work. |



|   |   |  |   |
|---|---|--|---|
|   | Hard to find permanent work with no education.<br>All money was spent on the family.  |  | As a husband I must find milk for my son and food for my family.<br>Not enough money to buy clothes for my daughter or even myself.   |
| <b>Socio-emotional challenges are also present</b>          | Fought with my wife everyday.<br>Fought with my wife when we had big problems.<br>Fought with my wife over small problems.<br>Fought over things like milk for my child and rice.<br>Difficult to be married if you are not ready physically, emotionally and spiritually.<br>Second childbirth nearly killed me.<br>Got married early because of many wrong stories heard from neighbors and relatives.<br>When you get married, you will realize how life is cursed.  | <b>Difficulty of finding jobs due to lack of education</b> | Finding a job at a young age.<br>I do apply at government offices but they won't accept me because of my education.<br>I don't have a diploma to show them; they rejected me.<br>I cannot work for a big establishment.<br>I don't have a diploma to attach to my work application.<br>Hard to get married early without education.<br>You cannot find a job without a diploma.                         |
| <b>Couples feel mixed regrets, happiness, and confusion</b> | I'm thankful to my husband that he will support me in going to school even though we have children.<br>I feel happy, but sometimes there is pain.<br>It's really hard; it's not easy to find money at a young age.<br>I have a lot of regrets for committing at an early age.<br>It was very difficult.<br>You will experience happiness.<br>Time comes that you will regret early marriage.<br>Confused because I am too young for this.<br>Finding out better about marriage so I can weigh what's right or wrong in it.<br>Unfortunate; we did this at the wrong time.<br>Now we are regretting what we did.<br>I feel regret every time we face difficulties/<br>Early marriage is a big problem. | <b>Difficulty with household chores</b>                    | Being a parent is not easy, you have to do the household chores.<br>You need to do all the things like finding a job, taking care of your child and doing the household chores every day.<br>Life is becoming miserable because we don't know how to cook and even wash our own dishes.<br>Being a parent is not easy, you have to do the household chores.<br>It is hard, but you have to stay strong. |
| <b>Parents are their support system</b>                     | This would not be possible without our parents' guidance.<br>Thankful to parents for love and support despite early marriage.<br>Parents support me financially and want me to finish school.   | <b>Support from parents still needed</b>                   | You call on your parents and ask for their assistance.<br>You ask the assistance of your parents for rice and milk for your child.<br>Can't live without my parents,<br>Hard for us as a young Tagakaolo couple to get help from parents.   |
|   |   | <b>Frequent quarrels and misunderstanding</b>              | Always arguing with each other; our life is becoming miserable.<br>I thought that this would be easy for me and my husband.<br>I always pray for guidance, especially on dealing with difficult situations.<br>We misunderstand each other.   |
|   |   | <b>Physical limitations of the body because of youth</b>   | Hard to give birth when you marry young.<br>Nearly died with my second childbirth.<br>I was still young and needed to continue learning at school.  |
|   |   | <b>Limited freedom</b>                                     | No more friends at all when you get married early.<br>You can't be with your friends and relatives anywhere.<br>It's too late; getting married is one of the bad memories in life.  |
|   |   | <b>Had to find jobs as laborers</b>                        | When we got married, sir, we knew how to work for ourselves.  |

**Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on the Challenges Coping Mechanisms of Tagakaolo Couples Who Have Undergone with *Kaksay na Pagpangugnan***

| Major Themes                            | Core Ideas   |
|---|--|
| <b>Lack of money due to joblessness</b> | No money for food, expenses, and your husband's clothes.<br>It's not easy to get married early, especially when you're new to finding a job.<br>You just have to find a way to make money, like being a carwash boy. |

I am trying to take care of my family, sir, but we are not doing well, sir.

It was hard for me, sir, especially when we got married when we were still young. Sir, I make a living driving a motorbike and carrying rice and coffee.

We managed it, sir, by supporting my family but it is difficult if you are the only one to take care of your family.

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**Work hard for the future** Work hard, sir, to get rid of my family's problems.

**Ask help from mother** It's really difficult, sir, that you are the only one who can support your child and wife. I was able to do everything, sir , with the help of my family.

I'm looking for a way, sir, to get out of trouble, even though in our current situation, there are still times when we live comfortably, I can eat and drink, and I can buy milk.

When I got married, sir, it was my mother who helped me. You really need to work hard every day for your future

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**Work every day** Work every day, sir, so that we can live comfortably, but the difficulties experienced are very serious.

**Try to give child a good education** I work every day, sir, because you will take care of it, and I can't do anything because this is the truth.

As a young parent, sir, I cannot deny that I am really trying hard to give my child a good education.

Sir, I need to help my family so that they can live well, sir, and eat properly.

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**Find ways to make a living** When I got married early, sir, I said that I would work so that I could provide for my wife's needs.

If you want to think about it, sir, I shouldn't have gotten married yet, but it's already broken and I need to act so that I can give them a good tomorrow, sir.

As a young person who got married early, I have nothing else to think about but just making a living, sir.

As a father, I don't think it's difficult. As long as I can help my family, sir, I don't wish for anything else.

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**Engage in farming Work not for self but for family** I farm, grow coffee and bananas, sir, and I am trying, sir, so that I have medicine and food to give to my child.

I tried, sir, to try really hard despite the heat and rain.

It's good, sir, that I finished elementary school because I know how to write,

count and list, so I've been using it to survive.

You must keep in mind that you are going to work not for yourself but for your family.

**Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on the Insights of Tagakaolo Couples Who Have Undergone with *Kaksay na Pagpangugnan***

| <i>Major themes</i>                                     | <i>Core Ideas</i>   |
|---|---|
| <b><i>Do not marry early</i></b>                        | If you don't get married early, you won't be like us suffering everything in life.<br>Don't rush to get married because it's very difficult.<br>It is not safe to get married early when still young.<br>To my fellow Tagakaolo, do not follow our path.<br>Follow the advice of your parents, elders and authorities.          |
| <b><i>Survival is difficult with early marriage</i></b> | It is really hard to be committed at an early age.<br>You experience all sorts of hardships.<br>We experienced eating just once a day.<br>We have to fight for our children's welfare.<br>You can't find a job without a diploma.<br>You cannot buy your own clothes, even underwear.<br>It's not easy to find work when young. |
| <b><i>Not much happiness is experienced</i></b>         | If you are married you cannot have much happiness in life.<br>Cried and questioned why such things happened to me.<br>Felt sad every time I don't have money in my pocket.<br>Felt regret due to tiredness and exhaustion.<br>Cried every day because I had no food to offer my family.   |
| <b><i>Multi-tasking has to be done</i></b>              | Went to the farm every day to get camote and corn for our food.<br>Tried to do multi-task, like doing household chores and studies.<br>I sold many products like banana chips and camote cue to find money and for us to survive.   |

**IV. DISCUSSION**

Experiences of the Tagakaolo Couples who have Undergone with *Kaksay na Pagpangugnan*

From the data gathered on the participants' experiences, four (4) main themes emerged, which are shown

in Table 1. I was able to choose the fundamental ideas to present in my report using these themes. These themes are: financial problems will really dominate; socio-emotional challenges are also present; couples feel mixed regrets, happiness, and confusion; and parents are their support system.

How they pictured out marriage before was totally different from what they are experiencing upon engaging at a young age. Their marriage experiences were dominated by challenges that were almost unbearable for them as they struggle socio-emotionally, with mixed emotions. *Kaksay na pagpangugnan* was eventually a remorseful decision made by them. These had left them no choice but to cling to their parents' support even if they already have started their own families.

a. Financial Problems Will Really Dominate

One of the problems encountered by Tagakaolo couples who have undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan* was that financial problems really dominate. This was shared by all of the participants. Being committed to a relationship, more importantly in marriage, requires a great deal of patience and endurance. The participants encountered financial problems frequently, even the basic needs such as food seemed to be so hard to purchase for these young couples, let alone the hospital bills in times of emergency. The pressure to provide for the family is heavy and if couples can't handle it well, will always lead to argument and fights. However, they must do whatever it takes to selflessly provide for their family's needs even if it requires them to do the job they were not prepared for or ask for assistance from anyone in the community.

b. Socio-emotional Challenges are also Present

Socio-emotional challenges were also present in a marriage of Tagakaolo couples who have undergone with *kaksay na pagpangugnan*. They have shared the emotional difficulties of being married towards their partner or even with their own self, as they engage in a big responsibility of marriage at a young age. Having no idea nor means of solving daily life ordeals in an early marriage set-up, solutions seemed to be impossible, leading to arguments. The Tagakaolo couples who have undergone with *kaksay na pagpangugnan* were not ready physically, emotionally, and even spiritually. Jumping onto marriage with just fleeting emotions and relying on hearsays are far different to what one will experience firsthand in a married life.

c. Couples Feel Mixed Regrets, Happiness, and Confusion

It is difficult to distinguish between infatuation and love. Yet, having the feeling of admiration towards someone or other reasons has urged the Tagakaolo couples to undergo *kaksay na pagpangugnan*. Love may seem a beautiful thing, however marriage is a different story. Lucky enough are those who have supportive husband, wife, or parent with constant provisions even after being married. On the other hand, most engaged in early marriage expressed difficulties unlike what

they had expected. Finding money is difficult for the young ones, when the market prefers those with high educational attainment and at an able and competitive age. Hence, despite the happiness they felt in marrying, they still can't deny the fact of being regretful of their decision to marry at a young age. All of the participants shared the same sentiments in feeling mixed regrets, happiness, and confusion in entering the married life at a young age. They shared the myriad of feelings they experienced through the ups and downs of the relationship.

d. Parents are Their Support System

Young Tagakaolo couples who have undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan* were still dependent on their parents' guidance and support. Their culture allows them to rely on their parents even after getting married. Tagakaolo parents believe that their young married children can still pursue education. They give assistance for their daily needs such as food and even for their continued schooling, for those that have enough funds. However, there are parents who wanted but can't support their young married children due to limited financial resources.

Challenges and Coping Mechanisms of Tagakaolo Couples Who Have Undergone with *Kaksay na Pagpangugnan*

There were twelve (12) major themes which emerged as the Tagakaolo participants were asked of the challenges and their coping mechanisms undergoing *kaksay na pagpangugnan*, as shown in Table 2. These themes are: lack of money due to joblessness; difficulty of finding jobs due to lack of education; difficulty with household chores; support from parents still needed; frequent quarrels and misunderstanding, physical limitations of the body because of youth; limited freedom; had to find job as laborers; work hard for the future and ask help from mother; work every day to give child a good education; find ways to make a living; and engage in farming work not for self but for family.

The results of the interview and focus group discussion highlighted the unanimous challenges these young Tagakaolo couples faced in their married life. Starting a family of their own meant accepting the responsibility of fatherhood and motherhood but they seemed oblivious of these duties until they experienced it firsthand. Their age may have played a huge factor of limitations from getting a stable job, keeping with household chores, depending on parents still, immaturity that leads to frequent conflicts, physical limitations, and gloomy perspective.

a. Lack of Money Due to Joblessness

Lack of income is a big problem especially when being employed is the only source of income for a family. Lack of money results in problems that are hard to deal in a family such as being not able to support the needs and wants when the parents are unemployed. This was experienced by the young Tagakaolo Couples who have undergone with *kaksay na pagpangugnan*. The job market requires competitive employees having met the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and

the fact can't be denied that those with higher educational attainment applicants are highly preferred by employers. Finding a stable job is not easy, not to mention at a young age. Moreover, having a family at a young age means a great responsibility let alone those that are still studying or even stopped their education for early marriage. However, being a parent also means putting the welfare of your children first before yours. Doing everything for them and providing their needs are coping mechanisms of parents to fill their shortcomings towards their own selves.

b. Difficulty of Finding Jobs Due to Lack of Education

Schools help students prepare by giving them the employable skills necessary to meet societal demands. Therefore, obtaining a degree is crucial to landing stable employment. Tagakaolo couples who have undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan* struggle in this area, particularly those who weren't able to attain higher education background. Most jobs with descent pay require a diploma from applicants, however, graduating from college is already close to impossibility in the life of a young Tagakaolo couple, they even struggle completing elementary or secondary education due to early marriage. Yet rejections did not stop them, the couples were committed to finding a job no matter how difficult it is to secure one.

c. Difficulty with Household Chores

Along with financial issues, they struggled with managing the chores around the house. After getting married, some people might be able to support their own housing, while others can't, so they continue to live with their parents. In either case, getting used to new setup and surroundings takes a long time for adjustment. Young parents were bombarded with tasks at home, taking care of their children while also finding daily sources of income. Others even fight over washing the dishes, cooking, and other household chores for they did not practice these before marriage. Yet they have learned to be strong and resilient since no one will stand up for their children but them. Challenges are opportunities for development of strength and wisdom.

d. Support from Parents Still Needed

The expectation is that in order to get married, a couple must be able to support themselves financially and rear their own children on their own. But with the Tagakaolo couples who participated in *kaksay na pagpangugnan*, the situation is different. The young couples acknowledged that even though they are already married, they continue to need support from their parents. However, as forward as they seem but even asking for support from parents is hard. They admit that asking for parental assistance for the daily needs of one's own family should not be the case in the first place when they are already married.

e. Frequent Quarrels and Misunderstanding

Young Tagakaolo couples are prone to fighting because they feel the pressure and stress of their burdens when life seems to be so complicated appearing to be full of only troubles. As a result of lacking a fully comprehensive

perspective of bigger responsibilities in life, including marriage, they frequently argue and misunderstand one another. Marrying of thinking only about happiness but the reality is a slap, hurting each other with words out of anger due to misunderstanding that could still be resolved through proper communication and adjustments. However, they were able to cope through holding onto their faith to God in these difficult situations.

f. Physical Limitations of the Body Because of Youth

Males and females both experience natural physical changes throughout puberty, which require time to completely develop these new features. When the body is not yet fully developed or improved to support another life, it has limitations. This is manifested by the young Tagakaolo couples who have undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan*. Giving birth is a life and death scenario, even more for teens whose bodies have just undergone puberty. They haven't grasped the idea of giving birth yet given their young age, their youthful appearance is still subject for maturity as being thought from school. But their decision to get married at a young age acquainted them with their physical limitations.

g. Limited Freedom

A husband and a wife's responsibility and devotion are marriage. While one is already married, especially while the pair is still young, life is very different from that of a single person. The Tagakaolo couples who have undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan* attested to this. These young couples may have believed that marriage is all about love and being together, but after they started living together, they discovered that it severely restricted their independence. Their former way of life and their formative experiences have changed. The luxury of getting together with friends or even relatives for a bond is not afforded by parents anymore, as the priority is always the children. This plays a causal experience of the young Tagakaolo couples to regret marrying early.

h. Had to Find Job as Laborers

Having children requires the parents to provide for their partner and children. However, *committing kaksay na pagpangugnan* meant even more responsibility for young Tagakaolo couples looking for employment. Because of their young age, they lack higher education due to their early marriages and incomplete basic schooling. This great responsibility was somehow overcome by the young Tagakaolo couples by persisting to continue living and giving their all to provide for their own family. This is a characteristic worth emulating. Not to give up on the consequences of your decisions, but to carry the lessons you gained from it and move forward and do your best since their current situation is not yet their final destination. No matter how hard life is, they continue to strive and survive.

i. Work Hard for the Future and Ask Help from Mother

In most instances, a mother is always there whenever her child needs help. In any way, a parent unconditionally supports their children for their deemed welfare. Tagakaolo



young couples who have undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan* who participated in this study lived under this coping mechanism. They ask help from their parents, particularly their mothers, whom they trust most, while still working hard for their future.

j. Work Everyday and Try to Give Child a Good Education

Children are the source of parents' strength to work even harder, consequently providing them with the quality education that they deserve. It is the right of a child to access education, and the responsibility of the parents to raise them well through being educated. However, when things don't go the way parents wanted it to be, children become their weakness. Seeing their children being uncomfortable with what they could provide pains them. Hence, as young as they are, these Tagakaolo couples have accepted the challenge for there is no way out from committing *kaksay na pagpangugnan* but to work unceasingly for the sake of children.

k. Find Ways to Make a Living

Tagakaolo young couples had embraced the consequences of their decision to get married at an early stage of their lives. They may have been caught off guard of the weight of their responsibilities, but they were now fully aware of how life can get even difficult for them and were trying to do their best to provide for their family by finding ways to make a living. They are now living a life not solely for themselves but for their own family. Selfless hairwork has been their coping mechanism towards life challenges concerning their family.

l. Engaging in Farming Work Not for Self but for Family

Young Tagakaolo couples were exposed to farm life as their homes are found in the mountain province of Davao Occidental. Mostly came from a family of farmers. Having the basic skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic obtained in their elementary years are for some already enough to live day by day. Consequently, farming was the source of living for this young Tagakaolo couples. However, as they now have their own family to raise, farming was mainly not for themselves but for their family.

*Insights of Tagakaolo Couples Who Have Undergone with Kaksay na Pagpangugnan*

There were four (4) major themes which emerged as the Tagakaolo participants were asked of their insights that can be shared with others, as shown in Table 3. These themes are: do not marry early; survival is difficult with early marriage; not much happiness is experienced; and multi-tasking has to be done.

Having experienced challenges that were completely lacking from their considerations before getting married early have made them learn the lessons in a hard way. Marrying young is not advisable for it requires great sacrifices that takes a youthful life as a collateral as

experienced by the young Tagakaolo couples who undergone *kaksay na pagpangugnan*. Happiness may have been found but that is questionable in the long run. It is not for indolent people; it favors those with managing skills without any time spared for a pause from multi-tasking.

a. Do Not Marry Early

The participants expressed their unhappiness with the situation they have found themselves in after having problems getting married at an early age. They strongly advise against getting married young after all they have gone through. They concluded, to marry early is to suffer in life. There is no age standard to be married but certainly not when one is not yet prepared. There is so much more in life than getting involved in a great responsibility, that is marriage. One must prepare himself by availing oneself of quality education while enjoying youth, to get a successful life in adulthood.

b. Survival is Difficult with Early Marriage

Being married gives you the freedom to start and run your own family on your own terms. The obligation is substantial, though. It also meant that you are already responsible for supporting and raising your family on your own, with no guarantees from anyone other than your partner and you. The participants talked about how hard it was to make it after getting married young. A lot of first times of the couple that are crucial in their married life. Life sure does not guarantee constant happiness yet it is not friendly to young Tagakaolo couples who are still starting to know their big responsibilities which seemed to be not yet suitable for their age, based on their testimonies. Surviving is prioritizing the welfare of the children that requires patience and sacrifices to find sources of income and provide for their needs. The dilemma is their young age, with not enough acquired employability skills and educational attainment. Life is difficult for them.

c. Not much Happiness is Experienced

Young Tagakaolo couples who had *kaksay na pagpangugnan* experiences expressed their dissatisfaction with what they had anticipated would be a happy marriage. They felt confident in expressing their ideas and feelings that their early marriage had not been filled with much happiness. A husband or wife is not a guarantee of a constant support system during the course of a marriage. They experienced frequent arguments, not being able to pursue education, no money at all, leading to deep regret of marrying early in life. The hard work to provide for the family is satisfying yet, the extent sometimes wished them to go back from where marriage has not yet decided. Sometimes, the only option is to ask for assistance from others who are concerned for them.

d. Multi-tasking Has to be Done

The days of receiving parental assistance are long gone because becoming married involves taking on the duty of managing your own family's multiple responsibilities, particularly those who have settled separately from their parents' house. young Tagakaolo couples who have dealt

with *kaksay na pagpangugnan* have shared their insights on multitasking in marriage. The pressure of serving your partner and children while pursuing a career and working hard for a living is heavy. But a parent must provide for the family regardless of the circumstances for the sake of the children. This was all realized by the Tagakaolo couples at a young age. They were not prepared for this, yet the decision was made and so are the consequences.

## V. CONCLUSION

*Kaksay na pagpangugnan* has become a tradition to the Tagakaolo people over the years. However, early marriage is frequently debated notably all over the world. Alarmingly, most couples expressed regret in committing to marriage at a young age.

I used in-depth interviews and focus group discussions on generating selected participants' experiences, coping mechanisms, and insights on *kaksay na pagpangugnan*. Transcribing the participants' responses to the questions is the main source of data. My task during the interview was to get the participants to share their experiences; fortunately, they were eager to do so.

Through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, it was found that Tagakaolo couples had several challenges and struggles with their experiences. Financial problems dominate in their marriage life due to lack of income, socio-emotional challenges are also present, they feel mixed regrets, happiness, and confusion, and they admit that their parents are still their support system even if they are living separately having their own family.

Moreover, they coped up through the challenges of lack of money due to joblessness, difficulty of finding jobs due to lack of education, difficulty with household chores, support from parents still needed, frequent quarrels and misunderstanding, physical limitations of the body because of youth, limited freedom, by finding jobs as laborers, working hard for the future and asking help from mother, working every day and try to give child a good education, finding ways to make a living, and engaging in farming work not for self but for family.

I had the opportunity to experience what it's like to be a researcher while carrying out this study. With the help of my mentor, I did all the essential steps to ensure the success of this research. It is challenging since gathering relevant and high-quality data to support my work takes time, patience, and persistence.

Furthermore, Tagakaolo couples expressed considerations concerning not marrying early, surviving is difficult with early marriage, not much happiness is experienced, and multi-tasking has to be done.

To conclude, there may always be advices from the community on how one's life should be directed, yet others are misleading. In this study, it appears that most of the couples exerted efforts in surviving the overwhelming challenges of *kaksay na pagpangugnan*. Throughout their

married life, *kaksay na pagpangugnan* may have gave them happiness yet this was a decision they deeply regret and advised the youth not to get married at a young age.

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## VII. DISCLOSURE

Conflict of Interest was another concern. The study was conducted not because the researcher was personally interested in it, but because it was relevant to specific institutions and individuals. In the context of my study, there were no evidence of a conflict of interest, such as any disclosure of COI, which is a set of conditions under which professional judgment concerning primary interests, such as participants' welfare or the validity of the research trends, nor was influenced by a secondary interest, such as academic or financial gains and expectations.

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