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A Phenomenological Study of the Experiences
of Parentified Filipino Young Adults

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Abstract

Family culture in the Philippines is considered one of the significant factors in an individual's identity. This study aimed to understand parentification as it appears in the Philippine context and to explore the lived experiences of parentified Filipino young adults. This qualitative phenomenological study utilized purposive sampling. Five single Filipino young adults who reported carrying out family obligations were interviewed. Validated semi-structured interview guides were used to explore the experiences of the participants. Informed consent was distributed through MS Forms. Thematic Analysis was used to analyze interview transcripts. Significant themes which appeared were the Family's internal affairs which lead to dysfunctionality and changing of family roles (dependencies, bonds and financial concerns), various individual perspectives brought upon by experiences (feelings, hardships, and uncontrolled situations), and outside factors (social circles, and overall environment). The respondents identified themselves as family provider, or *tagatustos*, due to their experiences. The aftereffects of parentification can lead to mental health problems. Thus the availability of interventions needs to be assessed. The tagatustos role has a broad scope to tackle, encouraging future researchers to look into the field of Filipino Psychology and Psychotherapy.

Keywords: Parentification, Family Psychology, Filipino Family

Introduction

The term *parentification* refers to the phenomenon of children taking on caregiving roles that exceed their capacity and developmental stage (Borchet et al., 2020b), often this leads to the child providing extreme care even to their parents instead of receiving it from them (Borchet et al., 2020a). Parentification implies the emotional distortion of a familial relationship between parents and children. The distortions may manifest in a wishful desire or dependent behaviour (Boszormenyi-Nagy & Spark, 1973). Dependency of behaviour is evident when a child is presented to be emotionally available to the parent while the parent lacks emotive availability. These distortions may threaten a state of emotional distress in parentified children (Hooper, 2008). Gregory J. Jurkovic (1997) wrote a construct of the parentification phenomenon, who stated that there are two significant facets of parentification: instrumental and emotional. Instrumental parentification refers to a child aiding in managing the Family's daily living, such as shopping or chores. In contrast, emotional parentification relates to the acts of comforting, dispute resolution, social support, and encouragement (Jurkovic, 1997). Authors such as Hooper *et al.* (2011b) and Bying-Hall (2008) suggest that instrumental parentification is less harmful to the child than emotional parentification, on the basis that children are more able to process and adopt instrumental roles while emotional roles can grow to be more stressful and challenging to perform.

Studies have shown that childhood parentification is significantly linked with the emergence of psycho-

pathologies in adulthood (Arellano et al., 2018; Hooper et al., 2011a; Hooper et al., 2012; Schier et al., 2011). This, however, is complicated by the nature of family systems as a whole, with some studies, such as one by Hooper *et al.* (2012), implying that parentification is often only one underlying facet in the prediction of psychopathologies in adulthood.

Some studies also imply that there are some benefits to parentification. Hooper *et al.* (2007) found that parentification may develop essential skills needed in adulthood. Van der Mijl and Vingerhoets (2017) found that parentification is associated with mental growth, with parentified individuals having higher resilience and higher cognitive empathy. In light of these findings, it is best to approach parentification as a multifaceted phenomenon that may have long-standing risks and benefits. Furthermore, parentification can become a crucial finding throughout marriage and family counselling. As parentification has its roots in childhood neglect (Hooper, 2007), it becomes essential for family therapists to remove children from roles that force them to take on overburdening parental positions (Valleau, Bergner, & Horton, 1995).

Hooper (2007) provides a framework for how attachment theory may apply to parentification. Attachment theory was heralded by John Bowlby, which states that humans inherently seek out relationships, that dependency is part of being human, and that rejection and emotional isolation are traumatizing events for the human mind (Lebow, Chambers, and Breunlin, 2019).

Hooper (2007) relates this to parentification through the notion that infant-parent relations tend to be the foundation and blueprint for subsequent relationships later on in the child's life and that attachment theory may serve as a basis for the impact left by parental neglect and the sort of positive and negative outcomes it might lead to. Hooper (2007) further explains the implications of attachments styles on parentification as the effect of a child being unable to develop an attachment to one's parent; that this inhibition and lack of security from a parental figure

leads to the child losing trust in others, subsequently leading to the child developing a defensive strategy which forces them to take on a more proactive role in the Family.

Young adulthood is typically associated with a transition towards independence. However, young adults tend to navigate the adult world with substantial support from their families to accomplish developmental tasks that eventually lead to their individuation from the Family (Booth et al., 2012). Parentification exacerbates this process, wherein relationship building, personality formation, and other developmentally critical operations are significantly impeded (Hooper, 2008). These young adults are more likely to feel overwhelmed and must be given careful attention by mental health professionals (Boumans & Dorant, 2018).

Parentification tends to have different implications across different cultures, but Hooper *et al.* (2014b) outline an exciting trend among immigrant families, wherein children in these immigrant families become what they call *cultural brokers*; a role which has the child help their parents assimilate into a new culture— whether it be linguistically, or through more active management means such as handling finances.

A study by Żarczyńska-Hyla *et al.* (2019) on Polish adolescents expressed a prevalent relationship between parentification and feelings of unfairness. This is in stark contrast to a study by Wei *et al.* (2020) on Taiwanese adolescents, which suggests that parentification has a positive relationship with family relationships and a negative relationship with the perception of unfairness. Perhaps this results from most Asian countries having a more collectivist, family-oriented mindset than their western contemporaries.

According to a study by Atenas *et al.* (2016), Filipino culture tends to place the Family as the core of its social structures, wherein the Family is the centre of the Filipinos' universe (Alampay, 2014): The cohesiveness strongly characterizes the Filipino Family among immediate members and extended kin, respect for elders and deference to parental authority, and fulfilment of mutual obligations. (p.108)

Alampay (2014) stated that parent-child interactions, their meanings, and the complex roles within the Family are affected by broader social contexts, including socioeconomic status, neighbourhoods, extended Family and kin, and overall culture. Collectivism is the dominant social culture in the Philippines, which is described as *"the value placed on traits such as conformity, cooperation, interdependence, and striving towards group goals"* (p.50) (Cohen, 2018).

Pakikisama (being along with or adjusting to others) is a central part of Filipino social dynamics, wherein there is persistent avoidance of conflict and confrontation in favour of conformity. In Filipino families, parent-child relationships are marked by the *kapwa* (kinship) dynamic (Alampay & Jocson, 2011). Children in Filipino culture often expect to prioritize familial obligations, sacrificing their interests to obey parental authority.

A study among Chinese immigrants by Chen (2015) demonstrated that the impact of parentification on the child depends upon the degree of obligation the child has to their Family, where a greater sense of commitment equates to higher rates of stress and parentification. Filipino culture highly values family bonds; in a traditional Filipino family, the fathers serve as the Family's breadwinners while the mother takes care of the Family's domestic needs (Alampay, 2014). It is typical for Filipino children to be expected to fulfil their responsibilities as their parents' younger counterparts.

Assigning particular responsibilities to every child in the Family is a common aspect of Filipino familial culture. A study by Hooper *et al.* (2011b) states that demographic profiles appear to influence the course and outcomes of parentification. An adolescent who assumes to take adult roles before being emotionally ready to manage functions successfully suggests negative results (Hooper et al., 2011b). The long-term consequences are often destructive, crippling, traumatic, and damaging. Parallels can also be drawn between parentification and a phenomenon in Filipino psychology known as the *tagasalo personality*. This can be traced back to Arellano-

Carandang's *Filipino Children Under Stress* (1987), wherein she refers to individuals who take on caretaker roles as *tagasalo*. The term tagasalo means "the one who catches", and according to Arellano-Carandang, there is a tagasalo in every Filipino family. Udarbe (2001) briefly summarizes Arellano-Carandang's theory into three facets that the tagasalo must face: (1) There has to be a compulsion to take on a caretaker role as though it is one's duty and obligation, (2) this need is unconscious, and the individual does not understand the source of the drive or compulsion, and (3) there is a tendency for the individual to overextend oneself to become the "catch-all"; the tagasalo. Udarbe further expounds on Arellano-Carandang's original theory, stating that tagasalo are individuals who willingly take on responsibilities in the Family to relieve stress and tension that becomes present in family alliances. Markedly, Udarbe describes the emergence of the tagasalo in the Family as the result of a child wishing to separate themselves from an unruly, problematic sibling. A cursory glance at tagasalo personality and parentification can have them appear similar, but the key difference is how the latter phenomenon focuses on making adjustments *for the sake of* one's parents and Family; effectively being the parent to one's parents, while being tagasalo is the result of willingly resolving tense family *alliances*.

A study by Teng *et al.* (2021) brings to light how the Filipino value of *utang na loob* (indebtedness) plays a crucial role in parentification, as it is common practice in the Philippines to give high regard and respect to one's parents regardless of their age; such feelings of indebtedness thus lead to compulsions to contribute and assist one's parents in everyday tasks and responsibilities. But diving further into published research, such as the EBSCOhost database (EBSCO, 2022), yields little in parentification as it appears in Filipino culture. Additionally, parentification is often associated with pathological childhood neglect (Rana & Das, 2021). Developing countries such as the Philippines have higher instances of child maltreatment, including negligence, due to complex

factors such as poverty and a lack of political will to properly enforce the legal framework which protects against it (Roche, 2017; Madrid et al., 2013). Studies also show that childhood parentification is highly associated with psychopathologies that the individual carries into adulthood (Hooper et al., 2011a; Nuttall et al., 2021; Jankowski et al., 2011). With this in mind, this study wishes to fulfil the following objectives: (1) To understand parentification as it appears in the Philippine Context, and (2) to explore the lived experiences of parentified Filipino young adults

The family systems theory was created by Bowen and states that patterns in the Family develop as a way of diffusing anxiety (Brown, 1999). The theory is concerned with family dynamics, such as structures, roles, the hierarchy of power, patterns of communication, and boundaries, as well as the action which occurs between groups in the Family (Rothbaum et al., 2002). One key concept of the theory is the familial triangle, which represents how alliances and power dynamics work within a three-person family. Families are often a complex network of different triangles, and triangles are often the result of a third individual being included in the interaction of two other people or coalitions where two individuals take stock against one another (Falicov & Brudner-White, 1983). Hooper *et al.* (2014a) describe the triangulation found in families with parentified children as that of the *Deadly Drama Triangle,* wherein a *victim*, the parentified child, is under the demands of the *persecutor*, a parent or caregiver, and a *rescuer*, perhaps a sibling, will offer the victim some form of support. Hooper *et al.* imply that family members involved in the parentification process can take up any of the three roles associated with the deadly drama triangle at different times for some covert purpose, such as angling for a perceived benefit or payoff.

Hooper (2007) relates parentification to family systems theory through the notion that parentification occurs in the context of neglect, when the parents are not able to maintain stability in the familial triad, and a child begins to take on more proactive roles to help manage the anxiety generated by this neglect.

However, it's possible that these behaviours are less a product of neglect but more a result of enduring familial bonds. One may posit that a child-making child only that their parents cannot is less a result of negligence but more of a response of a child's goodwill to aid parents facing adversity. Of course, one cannot deny that there may be negative repercussions regarding the child's development (Hooper, 2008; Boumans & Dorant, 2018), but this sort of behaviour is a perfect example of Filipino volunteerism, or what is colloquially known as *kusang loob*.

Methods

Research Design and Participants

This study used a qualitative phenomenological approach. The purpose of phenomenology is to study the human experience from the actor's particular perspective to understand the structure and meaning of an incident (Keen, 1975). This study, in particular, made use of interpretative phenomenological analysis.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis is an approach that concedes to the impossibility of having access to a participant's internal worlds and that any attempt at translating a participant's experiences will always remain a mere interpretation, integrated into meaningful clusters within and across different cases (Willig, 2008).

Participants were selected through online invitation using purposive sampling. A flier was posted on websites such as Facebook and Reddit to garner online interest. Individuals who responded to the flier were subjected to the following inclusion criteria: (1) They must be single, (2) they must be between the ages of 18 to 25 years old, (3) they must have at least one parent and one sibling, and (4) they must carry out domestic work, family responsibilities, or financial obligations for their Family.

These criteria are based on similar studies conducted by Teng *et al.* (2021) in their research on the daughters of Filipino professionals during the pandemic, COVID-19. Criteria for the age range of young adults was defined by Simpson (2018) as ages 18-25. Young adults were chosen for this study as

young adult carers were found to have high scores on parentification (Bouman & Dorant, 2018).

Implementing the community quarantine limits the researcher's access to the participants. The researchers maximized online platforms for gathering data through interviews and online surveys. Participants were identified using MS Forms to help ensure that all criteria were met and that consent could be obtained to record the interview. These forms were also used to get their schedule of availability.

Instrumentation and Data Analysis

A list of guide questions was used to help moderate the interview flow. These guide questions were validated by experts on parentification and family therapy, as well as a Filipino grammarian for the Tagalog version. The interview focused on parentification experiences, and in the instances where the interviewee experienced intense emotions, psychological first aid was administered.

Data were analyzed using thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a qualitative research method that seeks to discern themes from a data set; coding is used to help determine the common underpinnings of participants' thoughts and emotions through their speech throu2017). Braun and Clarke's (2006) 6-phase framework for thematic analysis was used, as outlined by Maguire and Delahunt (2017). This framework for thematic analysis makes use of six specific steps, which are: (1) Becoming familiar with the data, (2) generating initial codes, (3) searching for themes, (4) reviewing themes, (5) defining themes, and (6) creating the write-up (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017). Aside from manual coding, NVivo was also used to accomplish this endeavour. NVivo is a qualitative research software by QSR International designed to organize and manage qualitative data (QSR International, 2016).

Ethical Considerations

Participants were given an informed consent form which stated the purpose of the study, risks, benefits, and an overview of the research methods. Participants were allowed to ask as many questions regarding the purpose of the study and its overall research design as they pleased. Should they have chosen to consent to the study, they were also allowed to withdraw if ever they found that they felt any sort of discomfort. The interview only took place once the participant felt that they understood the details in the informed consent form and had no further questions.

The researchers protect participants' identities, and transcripts and recordings generated through the study are only accessible to the researchers and relevant participants. Participants may also request the results of their thematic analysis or a copy of the study should they wish. Participants who want to be removed from the study in light of their transcripts or recordings will be granted their request.

Results and Discussion

Six participants were interviewed, one of which was excluded due to not meeting the inclusion criteria after an analysis of their came from the Reddit community. Of the five participants, four were female, and one was male. All presented quotations in this section would be English translations of the original text if it were initially spoken in Filipino. Table 1 shows the main themes and subthemes of this study.

Table 1 Main themes and subthemes

Main themes	Subthemes
A- The state of a family's internal affairs which lead to the parentification of children	1- Complex bonds among the members of families with parentified children
	2- Financial concerns experienced in the Family
	3- Parents' dependencies and problems that lead to a troubled family
B- Individual perspectives as a parentified child	1- Feelings towards one's obligations or role
	2- Looking forward to one's hardships

Table 1 Main themes and subthemes

Main themes	Subthemes
	3- Things that the parentified individual couldn't control
	4- Reactions in response to the difficulties associated with parentification
C- Outside factors which influence the Family and the self	1- The role of social circles in lightening the load of hardships
	2- The role of the environment in forcing children to take up adult roles

Main Theme A: The state of a family's internal affairs which lead to the parentification of children

Participants tended to look towards the Family's internal affairs as the focus of their lives.

Ranging from the Family's web of relationships to overall survival, the Family and its overall functioning *is* the primary concern for the participants.

Subtheme A1: Complex bonds among the members of families with parentified children

Table 2. Codes that are under the subtheme A1

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
1- Complex bonds among the members of families with parentified children	Broken Family	Families with complex relationships, usually the result of a parent having another family on the side
	Distant and complicated parent-child relationships	When a child wishes to become more uninvolved with their parent(s), usually as a result of anger or resentment over their neglect or dysfunctionality, it may also manifest as the parent not being more present and not making an effort to connect emotionally with their children.
	Tight sibling bonds	Usually, the result of absent or distant parents, where sibling bonds become the centre of the familial relationship. This can take the form of the "adult" of the siblings prioritizing the others' welfare, or there is a more robust, closer bond among siblings to care for one another. Ironically, due to the nature of taking on a parental role, the relationship can also be quite strict or hurt the younger siblings due to the parentified child's insistence on the structure.

A common trend among participants is the prevalence of "complicated" bonds among the members of the Family. The most common is a distant parent-child relationship, where all participants reported feeling distant from their parents. This emotional distance between participants and their parents tended to come from a place of broken trust, whether it be parents having a second family or the parents having an overall dysfunctional lifestyle. Ms C (20 y.o.) said, "It's like they don't know what to do with their lives. It's like they're unaware that they have many children. They aren't ready. They never finished schooling; they don't have work."

Some participants implied that this feeling of distance results from needing to take on adult responsibilities early on in the household. There may be a framework for this phenomenon, as one study by Engelhardt (2012) implies that, due to the child missing out on developmentally essential activities such as forming healthy interpersonal relationships, the parentified child may find it challenging to develop a secure attachment to their caregivers.

Additionally, participants tended to give much attention to their sibling bonds. Many reported a sort of closeness with their siblings in a parental and protective kind of fashion. Still, some would say being strict with their siblings, with Ms P (23 y.o.) mentioning that she reached the point of inciting physical punishment: "Because at that time, I spanked my sibling a lot. My sibling was young, too, four years old. Of course, they got spanked for every little thing they did wrong. It turns out that, what I was doing was wrong. I was overdoing it."

Subtheme A2: Financial concerns experienced in the Family

Table 3. Codes that are under the subtheme A2

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
2- Financial problems encountered in the Family	Bleak socioeconomic situation	When the Family's income isn't able to keep up with the Family's needs, this results in children needing to step up.
	Monetary responsibility inflicted on children	It is being concerned with Family or personal finances and being charged with making that money alone despite being a child.

Of the different themes and subthemes, financial concerns would be the most prominent across all participants and themes. All participants reported financial concerns as one of their primary responsibilities throughout childhood, with most participants still providing for their families financially well into their young adult lives. Many would equate financial responsibilities with taking on adult roles in the Family. They attribute economic struggle as the critical factor in determining the likelihood of being a parentified child. Ms Mk (20 y.o.) said: "I think as I've said, social status plays a role, and we can see adult roles being given to children when it comes to like, let's say, low-income families. Let's compare it with the upper class. Even if it was a situation where the child doesn't have their mom or dad, but they come from an upper-class family, it's technically like. They don't seek even that missing role because it is replaced by money or a value that is provided by another figure."

Subtheme A3: Parents' dependencies and problems that lead to a troubled family

Table 4. Codes that are under the subtheme A3

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
3- Parents' dependencies and issues which lead to a troubled family	Irresponsible parent(s)	When one or more parents don't necessarily have a dysfunctional lifestyle but act irresponsibly about child care. Typically by being detached from the Family or not concerning themselves with household responsibilities.
	Overseas Filipino Worker parent(s)	When one or more parents work overseas, leaving the children to take charge of their siblings.
	Parent(s) with chaotic lifestyles	Where one or more parents have a dysfunctional or unhelpful lifestyle, examples are "tambay" parents or parents with addiction problems.
	Parent(s) struggling with career	Where one or more parents are actively trying to give the Family a more comfortable life, but circumstances still lead to the children taking on adult roles to compensate for that struggle usually.
	Unplanned parenthood	When the children are unexpected and not planned for.

The lifestyles of the participants' parents tended to vary quite widely. Still, a common denominator was some form of struggle that incapaciparent's ability to parent their children effectively. Many of the participants reported having parents who worked overseas, others would say having parents who were working long hours at demanding jobs that left them exhausted at home, and others would cite their parents as having dysfunctional, unhelpful lifestyles. Regardless, these struggles would manifest in the participant needing to take up responsibilities in managing the Family.

Theme B: Individual perspectives as a parentified child

Aside from their observations about their Family and external forces, the participants demonstrated a keen sense of introspection, which afforded them several more personal perspectives from the eyes of a parentified individual.

Subtheme B1: Feelings towards one's obligations or role
Table 5. Codes that are under the subtheme B1

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
1- Feelings towards one's commitments or role	Exhaustion associated with an adult role	Mental, emotional, and physical. When an individual feels that they are stretched far too thin.
	Frustration over one's circumstances	One feels some frustration over needing to prioritize familial obligations. Often due to missed opportunities or not having any free time, but can also be sourced from a sense of blaming the parents.
	Pressure to perform one's role	Expectations from one's Family and peers create a lot of pressure for the individual to meet a very high standard. These standards may be self-imposed via one's perception or imposed by others. It can manifest as impostor syndrome. Individuals may feel they aren't allowed to be anything else but their role.

All participants would report frustration, exhaustion, and pressure to perform their expected roles. Frustration often manifests as missing out on things, anger towards one's parents, or overall feelings of unfairness. This typically is correlated with the participant's sense of pressure to continue with their roles, where when presented with an option to do what they want or to sacrifice those wants for the sake of the Family, they would almost always choose the latter. Mr N (23 y.o.) said, "Somehow, it's expected that you are dependable. From my experience, it's difficult if you have a stepsister or stepbrother on the bad side. Especially if you appear successful."

Participants would also report frequently feeling tired and repeatedly writing a breakdown overall. One would report having suications, and another would express a sense of hopelessness. Ms Mi (21 y.o.) said, "They become workaholics, to the point that it burns them out, and still keep on going because they think that their only purpose is to serve and to serve. And that's just sad to think about."

Subtheme B2: Looking forward from one's hardships

Table 6. Codes that are under the subtheme B2

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
2- Looking forward from one's hardships (Inaasahang/Dadalhing pagbabago sa hinaharap)	Becoming equipped for the future	One's adult roles taken up in childhood often becomes good preparation for one's future adult roles and responsibilities
	Emotional growth from hardships	Gaining a sense of emotional growth or maturity from one's experiences in adult roles during childhood
	Sense of pride over one's self	There may be a sense of pride over one's self, may it be through being self-reliant and responsible or being able to weather the difficulties of life.

Despite their feelings, many participants could see some positives in their life experiences. One such positive thing is the sense of emotional growth; *being mature for one's age* has lent them the emotional maturity to deal with difficult situations. In line with this is how these experiences have equipped them for their lives as young adults, whether through an enhanced sense of independence or an overall readiness for life's challenges. Ms Mk (20 y.o.) said, "I know for myself that being exposed to this kind of thing. Helped me become stronger because I can manage things on my own."

For many of the participants, there is also a sense of pride. Others feel that their experiences have made them stronger, appreciate the things they have learned, and see their negative experiences as a badge of honour. Mr N (23 y.o.) said:

> "I think all the negative things I've experienced were things I had to go through to achieve what I have now. If I didn't go through those things, I don't think I would be as excellent as I am now; how I feel, and my views on life, so whatever errors I might have made, I believe that I still have regrets about them."

Subtheme B3: Things that the parentified individual couldn't control

Table 7. Codes that are under the subtheme B3

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
3- Things that the parentified individual couldn't control	Adapting is not a choice	To survive, one has no choice but to take on responsibilities well beyond what is expected of their age.
	Adults taking authority	When adults such as parents still hold a lot of sway and authority over children, even if the child has demonstrated the capability of making decisions on their own, there will usually be a feeling of not having any credibility.
	Becoming another parent	Where one takes on the full responsibility of a parental figure as a child, described by one respondent as "being a third parent".
	Imposition of gender roles on children early on	When traditional gender roles are imposed on a child, such as a daughter being told to take on housework or a son needing to be the "man of the family",.
	Lost childhood	It is growing up too fast and taking on responsibilities at a

Table 7. Codes that are under the subtheme B3

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
		young age that aren't typical for a child.
	Lost sense of self	When one starts losing a sense of identity, it is usually described as the personal feeling that they are nothing more than the role given to them.
	Obligations being the priority over wants or needs	One's obligations to one's Family precede personal wants and feelings. This will usually be associated with heavy time costs, leaving the individual with little time for themselves.
	Regularization of adult responsibilities in one's upbringing	The distinct pattern of adult roles is slowly indoctrinated into a child's way of living.

A common throughline among the participant's experiences is the notion that *adapting is not a choice.* Participant experiences were rife with many factors and situations that they perceived were out of their control.

The significant of these factors is childhood. All participants reported feeling that they never really enjoyed their youth like others within their social circle. They were forced to grow up too fast to fit into the expected roles. Ms Mi (21 y.o.) said:

> "I'm still trying to cope with growing up. I still have resentment for trying to grow up so fast that up until this point, I'm still trying to understand myself. I'm still trying to separate my adult self from my child self. But, [I] still want to experience that thing I didn't have."

These feelings of having a lost childhood are often accompanied by a misplaced sense of self, where the participant felt like they didn't have a sense of identity outside the role given to them. Engelhardt (2012) describes this as a familiar role where the child will miss out on self-differentiation.

These feelings of loss usually find root in the perception that the participants' obligations always take priority, regardless of their wants or needs. When asked how it came to this, many participants would describe the process as the regularization of responsibilities and duties as some form of pattern. This will initially manifest as the imposition of traditional gender roles on a child, such as a girl taking on household chores and gradually transitioning into becoming another parental figure in the household.

Subtheme B4: Reactions in response to the hardships associated with parentification

Table 8. Codes that are under the subtheme B4

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
4- Reactions in response to the difficulties related to parentification	Being kind to others	Despite one's difficulties and struggles, the individual is still capable of being kind and supportive of others. Be it through becoming another person's social support or through philanthropy.
	Building emotional walls	They are creating distance between themselves and others to protect their innermost emotions. This will sometimes manifest as an inability to accept help or not being able to have close friendships.

Table 8. Codes that are under the subtheme B4

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
	Coping through distractions	The act of not giving one's struggles and difficulties too much thought, often using a distraction such as taking walks. Some may take on hobbies if they can afford them.
	Healthy optimism	Despite the difficulties of one's overbearing responsibilities, there remains a sense of optimism in the individual for the future and the fruits of their labour.
	Not repeating a problematic past	A conscious effort to avoid the same consequences as those in the past. An example is not following the parents' footsteps to avoid their same mistakes or attempting to secure a better future for another sibling.
	Toxic positivity	Wherein healthy optimism becomes completely unrealistic, usually using turning a blind eye to pressing issues.

Participants would also detail their reactions and responses to their experiences, the most common being a concerted effort not to repeat the past. Participants would be acutely aware of their parent's mistakes, typically becoming a primary motivator. One participant described how, in response to their parents' lack of family planning, she and her siblings no longer had any plans to have children. Another told how she wanted to raise her siblings differently from the way her own parents raised her.

Some participants also displayed a sense of optimism means coping with their challenges and using their experiences as motivators to drive themselves forward and improve. However, one participant cautioned against allowing this healthy optimism to become a toxic positivity. Many participants choose to have their experiences inspire and instill a sense of kindness into them and to have the drive to infuse that they aren't just their Families.

Other reactions are not as constructive, however. Some participants would sooner choose to create emotional walls to protect themselves from harm, and some would prefer to cope with their struggles by keeping themselves busy with distractions.

Central Theme C: Outside factors which influence the Family and the self

Aside from the Family and the individual, several outside factors help paint a more cohesive picture of the participant's experiences and how these affect their social lives.

Subtheme C1: The role of social circles in lightening the load of hardships

Table 9. Codes that are under the subtheme C1

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
1- The role of social circles in lightening the load of hardships	Exporting familial parts of partner's social circles	One's role in the Family also becomes one's role in a different social process. i.e. Becoming the "mom of the group"
	Outside social support	The source of one's social support will come from outside of the immediate Famifamily, friends or extended Family.

Many participants would mention that the difficulties of their experiences were helped mainly by the presence of social support from individuals who were not necessarily part of their immediate FamiFamiliesltiple participants would say that they would often receive support from extended Family, such as aunts or grandparents, who would give them opportunities to make ends meet.

Friends were also important sources of support, with some feeling that they could trust their friends more than their parents. Additionally, many participants would also say that they would bring their roles with

their FamFamiliesto their social circles, implying that their roles with the Family strongly influenced their mode of socialization. Ms Mk (20 y.o.) said:

"Aside from my realizations, I could adapt my mother nature to my younger sibling in other situations. I don't just practice it in a family environment; even with my friends, I automatically have a maternal instinct towards them. Even though sometimes it's a little funny because, in my friend groups, the youngest person ends up being the mature one among the peers."

Subtheme C2: The role of the environment in forcing children to take up adult roles

Table 10. Codes that are under the subtheme C2

Subtheme	Codes	Code Description
2- The role of the environment in forcing children to take up adult roles	Culture's effects on the emergence of parentified children	The impact of culture on one's lot in life. Filipino culture is often cited as defining roles in the Family. Sometimes the individual will actively question the part of such culture.
	Personalized experiences dictating the likelihood of parentification	There is an assertion that the experience of having an adult role in childhood is not necessarily bad. Still, personal motivations and being able to control if one is taking on too much responsibility will determine if it's terrible for you.

Filipino culture and its accompanying stereo-types have created a lens through which participants can measure their experiences. All participants mention how Filipino notions of Family have defined many familial roles and functions for them. Some examples mentioned were how the mother is always the "law ng tahanan" (literally, the light of the household) or how being the eldest immediately means that you are the next in line to take up responsibilities. Many of the participants' appraisals tend toward refuting many of these traditional family stereotypes. One of the participants, for example, is a middle child who was saddled with many of the responsibilities typically expected of the eldest. Others simply question the notion of Family in general due to their atypical set-up, thanks in part to circumstances that may leave them separate from their parents.

Regardless, many participants feel that being given an adult role as a child is not a bad thing. For them, their experiences are a product of circumstance and the specific environment that they were put in, and that other individuals who have been given adult roles will not always necessarily feel the same things that they have. Ms Mk (20 y.o.) said:

I can't think because I feel like it depends on the reason why you do it. It's because anyone can do it. I think there's an action that will not suddenly appear; there must be a driving force, and that driving force of that reason; I think that's what dictates whether it's a good thing or a bad thing.

A common element among most participants' experiences was the presence of tenuous or complicated family ties. These complex relationships among family members tended to become a foundation for what would become the Family's

overall dysfunction, and this dysfunction would be one of the reasons for a child to take on adult roles in the Family. These relationships are marked by parents being vastly distant from their children, whether due to an overbearing workload, being physically unable to be present due to working overseas, or the parents themselves having individual dysfunctionalities which leave them incapable of effectively parenting their children.

Parentification often occurs in family systems where boundaries are inconsistent with well-functioning procedures (Hooper et al., 2014a). Al Ubaidi (2017) describes several different types of dysfunctional family dynamics, but the most relevant to this research is that of *the chaotic household*. Al Ubaidi describes this family dynamic as a place where children are poorly looked after due to parents being largely non-present, forcing older siblings to develop as early parental figures in the Family and creating dangerous family attachments. This makes for a suitable substrate upon which the parentification phenomenon can occur, as a requirement for parentification is a family structure that allows the crossing of generational boundaries, permitting family members to exist in subsystems typically reserved for specific generational levels (Hooper et al., 2014a).

But what does taking on "adult roles" mean to the average Filipino? Based on participants' experiences, essential tasks include managing the household and taking care of siblings in place of their parents. But alongside these tasks, the most prominent and arguably most important aspect of their roles revolved around the Family's financial needs. A common underpinning among all the participants' experiences was the responsibility of making money from an early age. Many participants would argue that the presence of and access to cash is essential in determining if children need to take an adult role. Indeed, higher rates of parentification have been associated with low socioeconomic status, and how this creates an environment in which a parent becomes more non-present in the Family (Rana & Das, 2021; Żarczyńska-Hyla et al., 2019). These family dynamics are also

backed by the fact that, in the Philippines, poverty and overall vulnerability to poverty rise as the family size rises, further exacerbated by factors such as lower accessibility to education and resources (Orbeta, 2006). One may then surmise that, to Filipino parentified individuals in challenging economic situations, the instrumental aspect of their role may take precedence due to its underlying urgency in terms of the Family's survival, and this is backed up by how participants were more likely to call themselves *providers* of their households more than any other title. Because of this wording, it may be pertinent to colloquially describe Filipino parentified individuals in these types of economic circumstances as *tagatustos*. This word means supplier, quartermaster, or support.

In contrast, the participants have expressed not having a desire to fulfil their parents' emotional needs, with some even completely shirking that responsibility and choosing to distance themselves from their parents altogether. Many also mention not being able to fully provide emotional support for their siblings, making do with providing their physical presence as a source of comfort instead. This is at odds with more contemporary definitions of what Filipino families find most important. Tarroja (2010) outlines that Filipino families tend to value physical togetherness and emotional connections among their family members, where a sense of closeness, warmth, and intimacy can endure even the long distances that separate transnational families.

This aversion towards emotional closeness may be due to the underlying processes associated with the indoctrination of a child into an adult role. Parentification tends to be characterized by children being unable to create secure attachments towards the parentifying adult due to the child being forced to provide emotional support for the parent from an early age without reciprocation, disrupting the formation of secure emotional attachments, which internalizes attachment issues that may be brought into the child's adult life (Engelhardt, 2012).

What parentification looks like to the typical tagatustos may then be summarized as such:

1. The Family's economic struggles impair a parent's ability to be a parent to their children, manifesting as either a fervsincereication to their work or as dysfunctional and unhelpful lifestyles.

2. With non-present parents, the children are forced to take up caretaking roles in the Family. As they grow older, this role stretches out toward monetary responsibilities to those families' survival.

3. Due to a failure to develop a secure attachment to their parents, the parentified child begins to express emotional distance from their Family and devotes themselves to the instrumental aspect of their role.

Additionally, it was found that birth order. However, an essential factor in deciding who among the siblings would eventually end up taking the role of the tagatustos was not necessarily the final deciding factor. Many participants felt they still needed to take on parental roles despite being middle children.

Parentification has mainly been associated with adverse outcomes for the parentified individual (Boumans & Dorant, 2018; Valleau, Bergner, & Horton, 1995). However, there has been some speculation that parentification can benefit the individual, especially in terms of individuation, autonomy, self-esteem, and levels of maturity (Saha, 2016; Engelhardt, 2012).

The experiences of the tagatustos in this study somewhat align with these speculations, as many of these individuals express a sense of pride or achievement from their triumph over their experiences. Saha (2016) would also note how parentification exists on a continuum, with the family system being the most vital influencing factor, and this coincides with many of the insights given by the study participants; where the overall impact of being granted an adult role is going to be dependent on several factors, such as the child's degree of control over the situation and their economic status.

Among the five interviewed individuals, however, there is no denying that it has left them with many adverse outcomes. Most of the tagatustos interviewed would express a feeling of exhaustion or overbearing pressure, alongside feelings of regret and frustrations over missed childhoods and lost identities, thanks to their embroilment into parental roles. Perhaps this is the consequence of the interplay between their circumstances and personal experiences, as poverty and overall economic strife have long been associated with higher rates of mental health problems (Murali & Oyobode, 2004; Burns, 2015).

Although not consistently negative, the aftereffects of parentification can be severe and last across multiple generations (Hooper et al., 2014a). Parentification creates long-term problems when the child permanently crosses the adult/child boundary and thus is treated like an adult from a young age (Bying-Hall, 2008). DiCaccavo (2006) describes the primary goal of therapy for the parentified individual to be the process of *deparentification*, which involves the facilitation of the client's visibility by acknowledging the parentified child's burdens and internalized senses of shame or guilt. In the context of family therapy, Bying-Hall (2008) recommends working with the parents to help promote a sense of accountability and self-efficacy in their ability to take care of their children.

These strategies, however, may not be wholly applicable to the tagatustos. The availability of therapeutic interventions is restricted by the general cost of therapy, which may discourage tagatustos as they may choose to use that money for their Family instead. There are also many inherent factors to the tagatustos experience that counselling and psychotherapy cannot account for, such as the inaccessibility of education or inefficient government initiatives that can address poverty, making treatment a complex and nuanced endeavour.
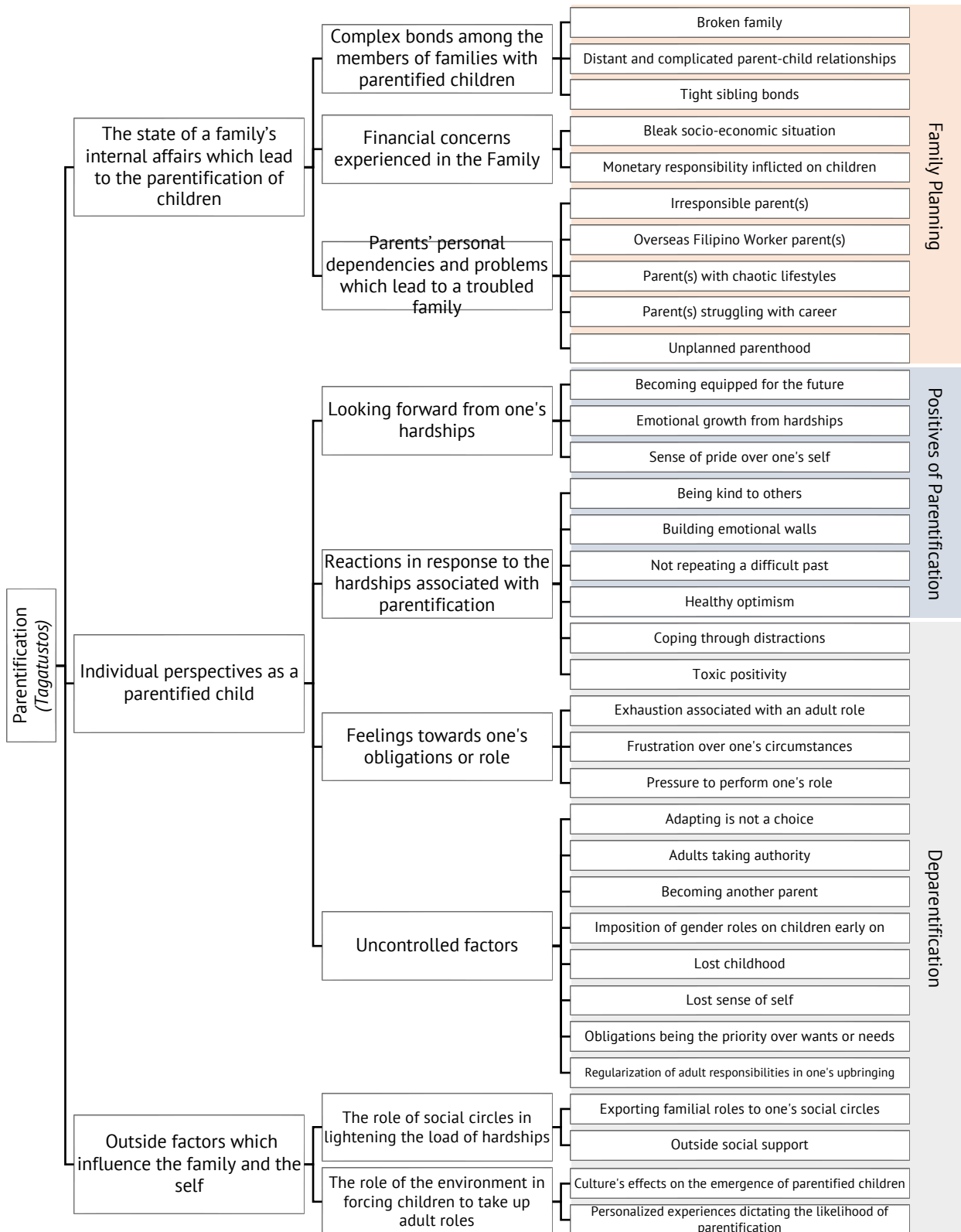
Parentification *(Tagatustos)*

The state of a family's internal affairs which lead to the parentification of children
- Complex bonds among the members of families with parentified children
  - Broken family
  - Distant and complicated parent-child relationships
  - Tight sibling bonds
- Financial concerns experienced in the Family
  - Bleak socio-economic situation
  - Monetary responsibility inflicted on children
- Parents' personal dependencies and problems which lead to a troubled family
  - Irresponsible parent(s)
  - Overseas Filipino Worker parent(s)
  - Parent(s) with chaotic lifestyles
  - Parent(s) struggling with career
  - Unplanned parenthood

(Family Planning)

Individual perspectives as a parentified child
- Looking forward from one's hardships
  - Becoming equipped for the future
  - Emotional growth from hardships
  - Sense of pride over one's self
- Reactions in response to the hardships associated with parentification
  - Being kind to others
  - Building emotional walls
  - Not repeating a difficult past
  - Healthy optimism
  - Coping through distractions
  - Toxic positivity
- Feelings towards one's obligations or role
  - Exhaustion associated with an adult role
  - Frustration over one's circumstances
  - Pressure to perform one's role
- Uncontrolled factors
  - Adapting is not a choice
  - Adults taking authority
  - Becoming another parent
  - Imposition of gender roles on children early on
  - Lost childhood
  - Lost sense of self
  - Obligations being the priority over wants or needs
  - Regularization of adult responsibilities in one's upbringing

(Positives of Parentification / Deparentification)

Outside factors which influence the family and the self
- The role of social circles in lightening the load of hardships
  - Exporting familial roles to one's social circles
  - Outside social support
- The role of the environment in forcing children to take up adult roles
  - Culture's effects on the emergence of parentified children
  - Personalized experiences dictating the likelihood of parentification

Figure 1. Psychological dynamics of results

Conclusion

The parentification phenomenon in the Philippines can broadly be understood from the country's culture of closeness and indebtedness interplaying with the poverty commonly associated with more prominent families. In terms of counselling and psychotherapy, much attention will need to be placed on the individual. Still, a family counselling setting is pertinent to manage the parents' ineffective parenting and to discuss the long-standing effects this parenting style has left on the children. Future research into Filipino Psychology and Family Psychotherapy should focus on different family roles in the family system, significantly how the Philippines' culture around collectivism modifies familial bonds in the face of economic and sociological changes in the country. This may establish a clearer picture of how different dysfunctionalities emerge among families, as well as how this manifests in the individual psychopathologies of the children.

Further research on parentification and the emergence of tagatustos roles will need to emphasize interviewing families with more diverse economic situations to understand how more open availability of resources may modify this type of role and further look into the effect of gender and traditional gender roles. It may also help to look for individuals who take up moving parts in the Family and how parentification has taken place for them.

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