



## Understanding the lived experiences of families with Extended Family Members: a phenomenological study

Compreendendo as experiências vividas por famílias com membros da família estendida: um estudo fenomenológico

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### ABSTRACT

Having extended family members is a common problem some people in the present generation face. An extended family consists of more than two generations of relatives living together or in proximity, including grandparents, aunts, and in-laws. However, this phenomenon received little interest in the context of the Philippines. This study aimed to describe the struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights of having extended family members in this modern society, particularly in the Philippines. We engaged in a descriptive phenomenological research design. Twelve participants had extended family members, and the data were analyzed using Colazzi's method. The results revealed the following themes: Financial problems and Family conflict for their struggles, Faith and Resilience for coping mechanisms, and Intensive family support for their insights. Despite having an extended family member who experienced challenges in their lives, The participants discovered how to meet their daily needs while helping one another in order to get through life and accept that they have extended family members, especially when it comes to being responsible and devoted to one another as an extended family.

**Keywords:** Extended Family, Qualitative Research, Phenomenology, Philippines.

### RESUMO

Ter membros da família extensa é um problema comum que algumas pessoas da geração atual enfrentam. Uma família extensa consiste em mais de duas gerações de parentes que vivem juntos ou próximos, incluindo avós, tias e sogros. No entanto, esse fenômeno recebeu pouco interesse no contexto das Filipinas. Este estudo teve como objetivo descrever as dificuldades, os mecanismos de enfrentamento e as percepções de ter membros da família extensa nesta sociedade moderna, especialmente nas Filipinas. Utilizamos um projeto de pesquisa fenomenológica descritiva. Doze participantes tinham familiares extensos, e os dados foram analisados usando o método de Colazzi. Os resultados revelaram os seguintes temas: Problemas financeiros e conflito familiar para suas lutas, Fé e Resiliência para mecanismos de enfrentamento e Apoio familiar intensivo para suas percepções. Apesar de terem um membro da família estendida que enfrentou desafios em suas vidas, os participantes descobriram como atender às suas necessidades diárias e ajudar uns aos outros para superar a vida e aceitar o fato de terem membros da família estendida, especialmente quando se trata de serem responsáveis e dedicados uns aos outros como uma família estendida.

**Palavras-chave:** Família estendida, pesquisa qualitativa, fenomenologia, Filipinas.

### INTRODUCTION

In the present generation, many problems have emerged, and one of the most common problems that some people face is having an extended family. An extended family is a group of more than two generations of relatives living within the same household or very close to one another. Grandparents, aunts, and in-laws are examples of extended families (Waites, 2015). Early researchers defined this family structure as a constellation of nuclear families across two or more generations. (Williams, 2011). The complexity of relationships in an extended family is due to the need to negotiate the expectations and needs of each family member. A complex extended family relationship can also detract from the parent-child relationship (Strong, 2015).

Most young people in Asia live with their parents, even if they are married and have their own family that relies on them. In recent years, the number of young people who have their own families and live with their parents has remained consistent, and most of their circumstances have not changed. The number of young people living in extended families has

increased, including their families. This complicates an extended family based on demands and preferences caused by the actions of family members who only live in another family's home. (Hamoudi et al., 2017). Furthermore, numerous research groups are focusing on intergenerational transition. Adults continue to rely on their parents (grandparents) to provide for their own families, particularly for young people (children, grandchildren) who start their own families and live in the same house (Lafave et al., 2017).

In the Philippines, though the children are urged to live apart after marriage, they reside in the same house as their parents or relatives. Typically, members of an extended family share a home where they pool resources and take on family duties. Extended family's resiliency and ability to provide for the children's needs, yet several risk factors associated with extended families can decrease their well-being. Risk factors include complex relationships, conflicting loyalties, and generational conflict (Engstrom, 2015). Extended families consist of several generations, including biological parents and their children, in-laws, grandparents, aunts, uncles, and cousins. Extended families are typical of collective cultures where all family members are interdependent and share family responsibilities, including childrearing roles. (Waites, 2015).

We, as student researchers, became interested in digging deeper into the phenomenon because some of our members experienced having extended family members in the family. We want to learn about other families' experiences and how narrative analysis might provide new insights. Some of our members experience struggles and challenges after several years of having extended family members in the family. This study is an area of interest for those who experience the same thing as our members today. Moreover, the phenomenon of families having extended family members in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, needs to be studied more.

The primary purpose of this study is to describe the struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights of families with extended family members in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur.

The significance of this research is that it greatly benefits a family. Through this research, families could formulate solutions for handling extended family members. It helps the family be more aware of the possible outcomes and responsibilities. This study also benefits couples by allowing them to be responsible and raising awareness of how familial relationships impact them. It also encourages them to strengthen their relationships. Lastly, this study encourages future researchers to conduct similar studies on extended families and use them as a reference.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

In this study, the researchers used phenomenology with a qualitative approach. Specifically, the researchers utilized a phenomenological description to learn about families' experiences with extended family members. A phenomenological approach is a form of qualitative research that focuses on studying an individual's lived experiences and describes the phenomenon within the world. (Neubauer et al., 2019). Using this phenomenological method, the researcher can understand different struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights about families with extended family members.

### **Research Participants**

Eight families participated in this study and underwent an interview. These participants fill out an informed consent form. The researchers will use labels instead of using the participants' real names. We used purposive sampling from a larger population participating in Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur. The purposive sampling method is applied when studying one or more particular cases that fit specific requirements or possess particular qualities (Campbell et al., 2020). In selecting participants for this study, the researchers established the following criteria: (1) A resident of the Municipality of Santa Cruz, Davao del Sur, Philippines; and (2) some relatives or family members have lived with them for at least five years, such as grandparents, siblings, cousins, uncles, aunts, and other relatives.

### **Instrument and Analysis**

In this study, the researchers utilized an interview guide questionnaire, which the experts validated. The respondents to this interview were analyzed using thematic analysis by Colaizzi's methods (Praveena, 2022). Colaizzi's method is a step-in data analysis and descriptive phenomenology in the qualitative method. This technique was used to extract, organize, and analyze the data.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

Based on the study's purpose, we presented the results in three themes: a discussion of the struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights experienced by families with extended family members at home.

## Struggles of Families with extended family members

Potential power struggles and conflict, complicated financial management, lack of privacy, and the need for additional safety measures are among the struggles of having an extended family member (Farland, 2023). In this study, the participants have the following themes: Financial and Family Conflict as their struggles.

**Financial Problem.** The participants faced financial challenges for their daily needs due to family conflicts because of financial aspects, just like one of our participants said, *"financial matters, especially things to buy like rice and viands."* (Norma, 64 Page 1, Line 2). Another participant needed help with financial aspects, mainly regarding food and daily necessities. Based on the statement of Annalyn, 39 years old, with eight extended family members and over five years of having an extended family member who said, *"The problem is with the food because of the cost we have to provide for them every time they are here at home. It is consumed daily, where to find money to provide our needs."* (Page 12, Line 2). Moreover, other respondents claimed that there are times when they struggle to manage their money, and as a result, they cannot save any money owing to their needs, especially since so many of them are in their homes. As based on the statement of Rebecca, 51 years old with five extended family members and over six years of having extended family members, said, *"Sometimes, I think that if it was just us, our expenses would be less or we would have fewer expenses if it were just me, my three children, and my father. However, we have additional (people), so our expenses increase. So, the problem is, I cannot save. I cannot save because my money and my monthly income have disappeared. I really cannot save anything. My monthly income goes to food."* (Page 8, Line 6). These studies have shown that worries and insecurities about the family's financial situation often generate psychological distress, possibly contributing to marital conflict and problems in parenting, in addition to exacerbating emotional and behavioural problems in children (Ponnet et al., 2013). Extended families can be complex because of various financial needs, responsibilities, dynamics, and sociopolitics (Bayiga, 2023). It is possible for both situations to be incredibly tense, nervous, and depressing. Giving in to family pressures can lead to resentment, fearfulness, and constant money worries, while resisting them can make someone feel guilty and often not good enough (Wellness, 2018).

**Family Conflict.** The participants experienced misunderstandings but would settle in the end to overcome the challenges and solve their situation. As our participant mentioned during our interview, *"Sometimes, disagreements cannot be avoided within a family because of different personalities"* (Annalyn, 39 Page 1, Line 6). Moreover, one of our participants said that they believe in praying when it comes to conflicts stated by Norma, 64 years old with seven extended family members and 14 years of having an extended family member, said, *"Sometimes, within a family, there are conflicts, but they can be resolved through forgiveness and prayer."* (Page 1, Line 6). Furthermore, based on the statement of Behing, 60 years old, with six extended family members and over 16 years of having extended family members, they said, *"I cannot avoid arguing from time to time, but it does not last long because we are family"*. These conflicts may occur due to clashes in personalities, values, and beliefs. While input from extended family members can be welcomed, unsolicited advice or opinions may create tension within the family dynamic. Conflict exists in all families. It is inevitable that family members may occasionally argue or disagree with one another. Families argue about a variety of topics, the majority of which are settled internally (Nguyen, 2021).

## Coping mechanisms of Families with extended family members

Family coping strategies or behaviours are strategies or behaviours families use to strengthen family relationships, maintain the family's well-being, emphasize family and community as coping resources, and find resolutions to stressors and family hardships (Santiago, 2022). In this study, the participants have another theme represented in coping mechanisms: faith and resilience.

**Faith.** The participants develop their faith through prayers and hope this will help them solve their challenges. As one of our respondents said, *"Prayer is indeed one way; through it, we can find solutions to our problems, and they can be resolved."* (Norma 64 Page 1, Line 12). Moreover, the same previous informants were pointed out by another participant who expressed her statement, *"When we pray to the Lord when big problems arise, it is still us, the family, who will understand each other"* (Rebecca 51, Page 15, Line 12). Furthermore, another participant expressed that praying is the key to all their problems. Based on her statement, Daniella is 20-years-old, with 12 extended family members and over 20 years of having extended family members. *"My way is just to stay positive and always pray to God that everything will be okay with all the problems."* (Page 2, Line 12) Belief in God and adherence to godly principles are vital in shaping the foundation of a robust and influential family (Sloan, 2023). Extended families can cover loved ones in prayer through both joyful and challenging seasons (Dawson, 2023).

**Resilience.** The participants access income from their numerous jobs (majority business) to sustain their everyday needs. Just like one of our participants said, *"What we rely on now is their welding shop and this small store of ours."* (Norma, 64 Page 1, Line 10). Moreover, other participants stated that they are satisfied with their current financial situation and rely on their small stores to meet their daily needs. Expressed by Daniella, 20 years old, with 12 extended family members and over 20 years of having extended family members confidently said, *"We are content with what we have each day. We also have a small store that helps sustain our daily needs."* (Page 6, Line 10). Furthermore, Another participant stated that she still

managed her current income from her apartment and a small store to help with their daily necessities in their house stated by Rebecca, 51 years old with five extended family members and six years of extended family member, said, "Currently, I have rented out my apartments as boarding houses and stores, so that is my source of income." (Page 2, Line 10). The family is aware of the proper times and methods for taking care of their own requirements as well as the demands of the business (Dickinson, 2022). The family business is an entity on its own and needs to be managed with a different focus than the family itself. Although there was some overlap, it's best to see this apart from the social family structure in order to take a more calculated and professional approach (Janzen, 2016).

### Insights of Families with extended family members

The essential characteristic of the extended family is that multiple adults are not parents of the children. However, they may also have parent-like family roles and share the responsibilities of providing for the whole family by contributing financially or in other ways. These extended family members could include aunts, uncles, cousins, and other relatives (Meleen et al., 2019). In this study, the participants' one theme as a source of their insights into having extended family members was Intensive Family Support.

**Intensive Family Support.** The participants experience being family-oriented by understanding each other, being respectful to each other, and doing things that show kindness to their families. Just like the statement revealed by our participant: "My family can watch over me when I have a problem; for that, I also realize that I am not alone and there are those who care about me. Moreover, it is not just about me; they also share their problems with me, which allows me to provide solutions or advice that helps them stay positive despite our problems." (Daniella Page 6, Line 16). Moreover, the following participants talk about how respecting one another is the most important thing to do if someone has extended family members. Based on his statement, Remegio, 44 years old with four extended family members and over 14 years having an extended family member, said: "You should not harm each other, just respect each other, you are family after all." (Page 7, Line 16). In addition, the participants dealt with many issues, but they talked about working through them and supporting one another since they believed that families could handle these kinds of problems. To express this statement, Norma, 64 years old, saying that, "Discussing the sharing of problems, no one else will help each other, we are just like a family." (Norma Page 2, Line 14). Furthermore, the participants expressed their statements about helping in financial ways. Rebecca, 51 years old with five extended family members and six years having extended family members, said, "We still help each other because his mother still buys, still spends here, his mother buys food, rice and that also includes his salary, we still share, we still share expenses." (Page 15, Line 14). Being part of a family can be beneficial as it brings love, security, and support. Family members who understand and appreciate help someone overcome life's many challenges. However, sometimes, conflict can also occur (Calmerly, 2022). Respect is also essential for resolving disputes in the family. When disagreements arise, it is easy to fall into patterns of disrespect, leading to further tension and division. However, when we respectfully approach conflicts, we open the door to effective communication and compromise (Sipho, 2023). Helping close or extended family with money is common for many parents or financially successful individuals. Experience happiness to help out, or may see it as a burden (Boudreaux, 2021).

## CONCLUSIONS

This study focus on families with extended family members' struggles, coping mechanisms, and insights. The findings describe their financial and family conflict struggles, faith and resilience as coping mechanisms, and intensive family support that forms their insights. Despite these challenges, they continue to provide for their family's needs regardless of financial, health, and wellness concerns. They consider having an extended family an advantage in family bonding and problem-solving. The results of this study could provide valuable insights and inspiration for other families with extended family members. Therefore, extended family members should not be viewed as a burden but rather as an enriching aspect of family life. The result of this research will benefit not only the participants but also the families with extended family members, whether they are part of the community or not. We encouraged other families with extended family members to acknowledge their circumstances and accept what they have.

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