

Perceptions of Marriage and Future Marital Intentions among Filipino Senior University Students

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Abstract

Entering marriage is a significant life decision that includes major transitions in one's life. The study investigated the perceptions of marriage among Filipino senior university students majoring in Human and Family Development at a university in the Philippines. It aimed to understand their definition and views of marriage, and the factors that influence their decision to get married. The study employed a two-step descriptive qualitative design, combining initial surveys to identify themes, followed by in-depth interviews for deeper exploration, and purposive sampling to select eight senior students aged 20-22 years old from the University of the Philippines Los Baños in 2019, whose responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. Findings revealed that participants define marriage as a lifelong commitment to another person that is legally recognized and strengthened by intimacy. While they viewed marriage as a personal choice, they acknowledged its legal benefits, such as legitimate recognition of their children. Five key factors emerged in their decision to marry: influence of media, family pressure, financial capability, achievement of personal goals, and desire to build their own family. These findings reflect the negotiation between traditional family values and the modern aspirations of the younger generation in the Philippines. The study offers valuable insights for developing culturally-responsive relationship education programs for Filipino students and informing family-oriented policies that address the evolving perspectives of early adults toward marriage.

Keywords: early adults, family formation, marriage, marital intention, perception

Abstrak

Pernikahan merupakan keputusan hidup yang signifikan yang melibatkan berbagai transisi penting dalam kehidupan individu. Penelitian ini bertujuan untuk mengkaji persepsi mengenai pernikahan di kalangan mahasiswa tingkat akhir asal Filipina yang menempuh studi pada program Pengembangan Manusia dan Keluarga di salah satu universitas di Filipina. Secara khusus, penelitian ini berupaya memahami bagaimana mereka mendefinisikan dan memaknai pernikahan, serta mengidentifikasi faktor-faktor yang memengaruhi keputusan mereka untuk menikah. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif deskriptif dua tahap dengan teknik purposive sampling. Sebanyak delapan mahasiswa tingkat akhir berusia 20–22 tahun dari University of the Philippines Los Baños dipilih sebagai partisipan pada tahun 2019. Data yang terkumpul dianalisis menggunakan metode analisis tematik. Hasil penelitian menunjukkan bahwa partisipan mendefinisikan pernikahan sebagai komitmen seumur hidup kepada pasangan yang diakui secara hukum dan diperkuat oleh keintiman emosional. Meskipun pernikahan dipandang sebagai pilihan pribadi, para partisipan juga menyadari manfaat hukum yang melekat, seperti pengakuan sah terhadap anak-anak. Terdapat lima faktor utama yang memengaruhi keputusan mereka untuk menikah, yaitu pengaruh media, tekanan keluarga,

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kemampuan finansial, pencapaian tujuan pribadi, dan keinginan untuk membangun keluarga sendiri. Temuan ini memberikan kontribusi bagi pengembangan program pendidikan remaja dan konseling hubungan, menjadi bahan pertimbangan dalam perumusan kebijakan berorientasi keluarga, serta dapat menjadi dasar bagi penelitian selanjutnya mengenai sikap dan niat generasi dewasa muda terhadap pernikahan.

Kata kunci: dewasa awal, pembentukan keluarga, pernikahan, niat menikah, persepsi

Introduction

Marriage plays a vital role in shaping both individual lives and the broader fabric of society. It is a social institution rooted in cultural norms, traditions, and legal systems that govern interpersonal relationships and family formation. Across cultures, marriage serves multiple purposes such as emotional, social, spiritual, and economic, reflecting the diversity of human experience (Dhuli & Dhuli, 2024). It provides individuals with companionship, emotional support, and stability, while also fulfilling collective functions such as social order, kinship formation, and child-rearing. In many religious traditions, marriage is seen not only as a legal or social contract but also as a sacred covenant blessed by God, through which partners fulfill divine and moral obligations (Khatun et al., 2022).

From a sociological perspective, marriage is regarded as one of the fundamental institutions of human society. Eriksen (2015) emphasized that it is central to the perpetuation of the human race and the establishment of social alliances. In the Philippine context, marriage occupies a particularly significant role. The 1987 Philippine Constitution, under Article XV, Section 2, explicitly recognizes marriage as “an inviolable social institution” that serves as the foundation of the family. The Family Code of the Philippines further defines it as a “special contract of permanent union between a man and a woman” intended to establish conjugal and family life (Aguiling-Pangalangan, 2021). This legal framing underscores that marriage in the country is not merely a private relationship but a social institution that the State has an interest in protecting and regulating.

Yet, as societies evolve, so do their perceptions of marriage. Over the past decades, shifting gender roles, rising educational attainment, and increasing labor force participation among women have contributed to changing ideas about marriage and family formation. Sonkaya and Ocal (2024) observed that higher education leads to broader awareness and empowerment, reshaping priorities and expectations surrounding marriage. Individuals, especially women, who gain access to higher education tend to delay marriage and reconsider its timing and purpose. While some young people continue to hold traditional views, valuing marriage as an essential life milestone, others regard it as an optional or flexible life choice. These differences reflect a dynamic interplay between traditional beliefs and modern aspirations.

Similar shifts can be observed in the Philippine setting. Data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2022) show a notable decline in registered marriages, which fell by more than 40 percent between 2011 and 2021. Although this decline was partly

influenced by the pandemic, the broader trend reveals that Filipinos are marrying later in life. The median age at first marriage increased to 27.7 years for women and 29.5 years for men in 2020. Such changes point to evolving attitudes toward marriage, family, and adulthood. According to Reyes (2020), Filipino youth increasingly prioritize financial preparedness and personal growth before committing to marriage. Carandang et al. (2021) further note that despite these modern tendencies, family expectations and religious beliefs still influence young Filipino's marital aspirations.

The relationship between education, marital perception, and marital intention is central to understanding these patterns. Higher education exposes students to diverse worldviews and evolving gender norms, encouraging them to critically reflect on cultural traditions and societal expectations. Consequently, many young adults no longer see marriage as a prescribed step toward adulthood but as a personal decision based on emotional readiness, compatibility, and shared values. This shift aligns with global trends where emerging adults increasingly view marriage as one of many possible life paths rather than a universal goal.

These transformations are also shaped by broader societal forces. Globalization, digital media, and economic uncertainty have expanded access to diverse models of relationships, allowing young people to compare traditional marital roles with contemporary alternatives such as cohabitation or singlehood. At the same time, prolonged schooling and unstable employment have delayed other adult transitions, making marriage less immediate. Individual achievement, personal growth, and financial independence often take precedence, illustrating how modern life trajectories influence perceptions of long-term commitment.

However, while delayed or declining marriage rates are commonly associated with modernity and education, early or arranged marriages persist in some cultures and contexts. Nur et al. (2018) found that economic insecurity and limited education remain strong predictors of early marriage among adolescents in Indonesia. Though this finding focuses on younger populations, similar pressures may still influence early adults in low-income communities. Those with limited access to education are often more likely to marry early, as opportunities for personal and economic growth are constrained. These variations emphasize that perceptions of marriage are not uniform but shaped by intersecting cultural, economic, and educational factors.

Understanding how these multiple influences converge is essential in the Philippine context, where the tension between tradition and modernity remains strong. Most local studies have concentrated on early marriage in marginalized communities, marital satisfaction among adults, or demographic trends (Medina, 2021; Jocano, 2020; PSA, 2022). Few have explored how university students, who are entering adulthood and forming their own views about life and family, understand marriage in today's changing social landscape. University students represent a critical population because they stand at the threshold of major life transitions. Their views on marriage, family, and relationships may serve as indicators of future social and demographic trends.

To frame this exploration, the study adopts a dual theoretical lens. Arnett's (2000) theory of emerging adulthood provides a developmental perspective, positing that individuals aged 18 to 25 experience a distinct life stage characterized by identity exploration, self-focus, and the pursuit of long-term goals. Within this stage, marriage is

often re-evaluated as individuals weigh personal aspirations against social and familial expectations. Complementing this, the theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1991) explains how attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived control shape behavioral intentions, including the decision to marry. Together, these frameworks help explain both the internal motivations and external influences that shape young adults' marital perceptions and intentions.

Given these realities, examining how early adults perceive marriage is both timely and significant. The interplay of education, social norms, and emerging adulthood experiences may redefine what marriage means for the next generation of Filipinos. While previous research has often focused on early marriage, marital satisfaction, or demographic patterns, this study contributes by offering a nuanced understanding of how senior college students conceptualize marriage within a rapidly modernizing Philippine society. It highlights the intersection of education, culture, and emerging adulthood as key influences shaping marital perceptions, which is an area that remains underexplored in local scholarship.

This study aims to explore how senior university students conceptualize marriage within the context of modernization and changing cultural norms, and to examine how their educational experiences, social influences, and emerging adulthood experiences shape their perceptions and intentions toward marriage. By integrating developmental and behavioral theories, this research provides a multidimensional framework that links personal, cultural, and societal factors in the formation of marital intentions. Insights from this study may guide programs in family education, youth development, and counseling, and inform policy initiatives that address the evolving meaning of marriage in contemporary Philippine life.

Methods

Participants

This research followed a two-step descriptive qualitative approach and was conducted at the University of the Philippines Los Baños in 2019. It involved eight senior students, aged 20–22 years, classified as early adults according to standard developmental age groupings. Participants were selected because they had sufficient exposure to topics related to marriage through courses on family development, human interaction, and sociology.

Senior students from the same academic program were purposively included and differentiated based on their romantic experience. Those who had been in a romantic relationship were included to provide first-hand reflections on how experiences with intimacy, commitment, or conflict shape perceptions of marriage. Conversely, those who had never been in a romantic relationship were included to offer perspectives shaped primarily by observation, family upbringing, cultural norms, or media representations. This contrast enriched the data by allowing comparisons between experiential and non-experiential viewpoints, broadening the interpretation of how marriage is perceived within the same developmental and academic context. Students

outside the program or unwilling to participate were excluded, ensuring a relatively homogenous academic group while capturing diverse relationship experiences.

A total of 48 students completed the questionnaire, but only eight met the criteria and were invited for interviews. Despite the small number of interviewees, this sample was sufficient to generate meaningful insights within the scope of the study. In qualitative research, the emphasis is on depth of understanding and richness of data rather than statistical generalization. According to Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006), data saturation in focused qualitative studies is often achieved within 6–12 interviews, as key themes begin to recur and no substantially new information emerges. In this study, recurring patterns such as commitment, legal recognition, union, and family-building consistently appeared across participants, indicating that thematic saturation had been reached. Moreover, the inclusion of students both with and without romantic relationship experience provided contrasting perspectives, enhancing the diversity of insights captured. While the findings are not generalizable to all students, this sample provides a credible, context-specific understanding of perceptions of marriage within this academic group. This study does not use formal approval, but participation is voluntary, personal data is kept confidential, and participants can withdraw at any stage. This study aims to adhere to the principles of voluntary participation, privacy, and confidentiality.

Measurement

After screening, the 8 participants who met the criteria went through a one-on-one interview. The study adapted selected items from the General Attitudes Towards Marriage Scale (Fam et al., 2017), originally a 12-item Likert-type instrument. In the survey phase, the items were retained in a Likert format (1 = strongly disagree to 6 = strongly agree) to capture the respondents' level of agreement with positive and negative statements about marriage (e.g., "Marriage makes people happy," "I have doubts about marriage"). In the interview phase, these same items were used as a guide to elicit more open-ended responses. Instead of asking respondents to rate each statement numerically, the researcher rephrased them as prompts (e.g., "Do you think marriage makes people happy? Why or why not?") to encourage participants to expand on their reasoning and personal experiences. This approach allowed consistency across both stages of data collection while generating both structured (survey) and exploratory (interview) data for thematic analysis. The instrument underwent content validation through a consultation process with three academic supervisors who specialize in human development and family studies. This involved a round of expert review and guided discussion rather than formal pilot testing. Minor revisions were made for contextual clarity, particularly in the phrasing of the interview questions to better suit the cultural and educational background of Filipino university students.

Since the participants were proficient in English and the university's medium of instruction is English, the instrument was not translated into a local language. Thus, no back-translation process was conducted. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 45 minutes. Interviews were conducted in a quiet, private consultation room within the university campus to ensure participant confidentiality and minimize distractions. Through this, the researcher was able to gather information on the perception of the

senior students about marriage, factors that affected their views, and current issues that revolve around it.

Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the participants' responses. The process began with the deliberate transcription of interview recordings by the researcher. Relevant statements were then identified from the transcripts, and keywords were extracted to represent these statements. These keywords were systematically coded, and similar codes were grouped into sub-themes. The sub-themes were then organized into broader main themes, which captured the overarching patterns in the data. This structured approach to thematic coding allowed the researchers to meaningfully categorize and analyze participants' perceptions and insights.

To enhance the trustworthiness of the findings, several strategies were employed. Member checking was conducted by sharing selected interview summaries with participants to confirm the accuracy of interpretations and ensure their perspectives were faithfully represented. Triangulation was applied by comparing results across the two stages of data collection (survey and interviews), thereby strengthening the validity of the emerging themes. In addition, the researcher engaged in peer debriefing with faculty members and colleagues in the field of family development studies to critically review the coding process and thematic categories. An audit trail of decisions made during coding and theme development was also maintained to provide transparency and consistency in the analysis. These measures collectively ensured that the interpretations were credible, dependable, and reflective of the participants' lived experiences.

Findings

This section provides the findings of the study. It is organized into themes that were derived from the participants' responses. These themes were identified by analyzing the connections between their answers and recognizing the common patterns. Each theme provides a deeper understanding of the perceptions of marriage among the selected senior-level university students.

Theme 1. Definition of Marriage

The lay definition of participants about marriage revolves around notions of love and commitment to a partner. They further emphasized that marriage should involve intimacy and a strong bond between couples, cultivated through companionship and mutual affection. Overall, this theme indicates that participants define marriage primarily in terms of its emotional and relational dimensions.

Subtheme 1.1. Commitment to a Partner

The collective statements of the participants primarily linked marriage to the concept of commitment. They recognize that marriage involves maintaining the

relationship and honoring the vows that were recited during the marriage ceremony, as one participant stated, “After you get married, you made a promise not to leave each other, in sickness and in health” (Participant F). Participant F added that married couples become each other’s responsibility. Another participant expressed that “both partners should really be committed so that the marriage lasts” (Participant A).

Subtheme 1.2. Bond and Intimacy Between Partners

The participants emphasized that intimacy between partners is an important aspect of marriage. They described this union as a special connection that develops and deepens over time. This reveals each other’s true selves and connects their emotions. Participant G explained that marriage “is one of the most intimate relationships a person could have with another person. When it comes to marriage, two people become one. There are no holds barred and no filters. You show who you truly are” (Participant G). Moreover, the bond between partners in marriage is built upon and strengthened by their love for each other. The following statements further illustrate how participants perceived this special bond: “For me, marriage is built with love, and that is what I recognize as a special bond” (Participant B). “We know that marriage is about emotions as well. You would not marry someone you do not like. So, marriage is also about emotions, the union of emotions between two people” (Participant C).

Theme 2. Perceptions of the Institution of Marriage

After describing marriage in personal and relational terms, participants also discussed it as an institution shaped by law, religion, and culture. The participants perceived marriage as an individual choice. They highlighted the importance of considering their personal readiness and stability before entering marriage. Moreover, marriage was seen to be formally recognized through obtaining a marriage certificate from a legal authority. This theme consolidates their views on legality, contracts, state recognition, and sacramentality, reflecting how these institutional structures influence their understanding of marriage.

Subtheme 2.1. Marriage as an Individual Choice

The participants viewed marriage as both a personal choice and a societal function. They indicated that some individuals may prefer pursuing personal or professional goals rather than engaging in married life. As one participant shared, “Some people choose to remain single for life to prioritize their careers instead of getting married and starting a family” (Participant A). Another participant indicated:

“Marriage is a choice, not a necessity. It is also not mandated by law to get married at a certain age or even before we die. Sometimes, it’s more of a privilege, especially when viewed from the perspective of the LGBT community. I think it is not a necessity, to say the least” (Participant C).

Subtheme 2.2. Legal Recognition and Advantages through Marriage

Participants perceived marriage as one that attains legitimacy through formal recognition by an institution, such as the government, the state, or a religious authority.

This recognition formalizes the bond between partners as they adhere to policies that acknowledge them as a single entity. Participant H added, “In the case of my parents, they were both married through a civil ceremony before a judge and in the church. Thus, they have a marriage certificate” (Participant H). Similarly, the narratives of Participant C noted that the certificate not only serves as proof of a union but also functions as a contract between individuals that brings together both their families, including their economic status. Furthermore, this kinship ensures the continuation of their lineage, which is a goal for many families.

The participants also expressed that marriage offers legal advantages. These advantages are obtained when a legal authority, such as a magistrate or local judge, officiates the marriage ceremony and formalizes the union of two individuals. Once recognized by the government or state, the marriage brings benefits such as reduced taxes, easier processing of government papers, and the official recognition of children as citizens. Participant D described that these legal considerations are essential factors in couples’ decisions to formalize their relationship:

“If you are in a long-term relationship and want to have kids, there are legal benefits to being married. You can file shared taxes. When it comes to having children, it will be easier to process their documents in government-related procedures” (Participant D).

Theme 3. Factors Influencing the Decision to Marry

The participants have shared that there are several underlying factors influencing their decision to marry. They recognized that marriage is not an easy decision since it involves a lifelong commitment to another individual. Therefore, prior to making a decision, they give it careful thought and consideration.

One factor identified was the influence of media, which shapes perceptions by portraying idealized relationship dynamics. Family pressure was also noted as one factor. Filipino culture often expects individuals to marry and have children at a certain age. Another factor that emerged as an influencing factor was their financial capacity to afford a marriage ceremony and future expenses such as building a family, raising children, and buying a house. Moreover, it was also highlighted that fulfilling their personal goals before entering marital commitments was important for them. Despite these concerns, there remains a desire to have children in the future, which motivates them to pursue marriage.

Subtheme 3.1. Media Influence

The media exposes diverse information and perspectives from around the world. Both traditional and modern media depict situations that reflect reality. These channels showcase how Filipino couples interact and how their families work together. Even in the absence of direct experience, individuals are presented with representations of relationship dynamics through media. Given its widespread accessibility, people are exposed to a wide range of opinions and facts that can significantly influence their perspectives. The following statements illustrate how different media platforms inform

the participants' understanding of relationships and help them reflect on the kind of partner and family dynamics they aspire to:

"Even if it's fiction, it bears some resemblance to reality. It is possible for a couple to be like that or for someone to be like that (as portrayed in the media). Even without experiencing a relationship, you can see and sort out what kind of partner you want to be and the relationship dynamics you want to have" (Participant A).

"With social media, the internet, Facebook, and Twitter, you can see different worldwide views. There are many opinions, and you can also do your own research. You will learn a lot, especially if you read about it. There are lots of studies and facts that affect your perspective" (Participant D).

Subtheme 3.2. Family Pressure

According to the participants, traditional Filipino culture puts pressure on individuals, specifically those in their twenties, to marry. Each family has their own cultural norms that are shaped by their upbringing. This influences an individual's decision regarding marriage. It was also noted that there is an expectation for married couples to have children, as it is viewed as the next step in the marriage journey. Moreover, there is this notion that having children ensures that someone will be there to take care of them in the future. Participant A discussed that "in traditional Filipino culture, reaching a certain age comes with this expectation of getting married. There is this pressure, particularly on those in their twenties, to get married. This has been the culture for the longest time" (Participant A). Another participant shared a personal opinion about conventional perceptions about having children:

"It is foul and troubling that there is a common belief among Filipinos that you have to have children to ensure that someone will take care of you in the future. It is sad that children are seen as investments. In the Philippines, there's this expectation that once you get married, you must have a child. It's part of Filipino culture" (Participant C).

Subtheme 3.3. Financial Capability

The participants noted that finances are a crucial consideration before getting married, as various aspects of marriage require resources such as money and assets in pursuing marriage and holding a wedding ceremony. In the Filipino context, marriages are celebrated as part of the seven sacraments of Catholicism. Such ceremonies are expensive as there are things to be paid for. Moreover, the financial aspect extends beyond the wedding itself as it includes future considerations such as the costs of building a family, housing, and raising children. This perspective leads to the importance of financial independence in marriage, as reflected in the following statements:

"First, when you desire a memorable wedding, you should have savings dedicated for the ceremony. Second, when you get married, where will you live? It's

somehow difficult to still live with our parents. So to avoid conflict with them, we want to build our separate place” (Participant D).

“I don’t want to be someone who merely relies on my partner, as my mother taught me to stand on my own. I should also be stable with my work and income— and I should not depend on a man” (Participant F).

“My education would be wasted if I did not work and use my skills. (I believe that I) may still be a mother, as well as a wife, while pursuing a career. After all, this career can be our source of income” (Participant E).

“Having a stable source of income is important to provide for the whole family. It would be difficult if I only start figuring things out once I actually get married, such as how to provide for my wife and children” (Participant G).

Subtheme 3.4. Achievement of Personal Goals

Participants also emphasized the importance of achieving their personal goals, particularly attaining professional stability, prior to getting married. Moreover, unmet personal goals were identified as potential hindrances to marriage. For instance, Participant B desired to first achieve personal goals before getting married and expressed, “If I have not yet satisfied my goals, I will postpone my marriage” (Participant B). The participants also prefer to accomplish their individual goals before making a marital commitment, as described in the statements of Participant A and Participant H: “Like what I said, professional stability is also a factor (to consider in marriage). Once you are doing well in your job, you are able to take off.” “It is because I really want to achieve all those (goals) before I get married. They are my main priority” (Participant H)

Subtheme 3.5. Desire to Build a Family

The participants also mentioned that one of the key factors in getting married is their desire to build a family. They expressed that they want to have and raise a family. Participant B conveyed, “We want to achieve the same things in our lives. We both want kids. We want two kids” (Participant B). Participant H also expressed a desire to have children in the future, perceiving them as a source of happiness. Furthermore, there is a religious or spiritual belief that having a family is part of God’s plan for them. Participant G shared:

“Building my own family and being independent. I have that in mind and I’m looking forward to it. At the same time, I think that is what God and my family wants. To stand on my own and raise a family of mine” (Participant G)

Exploratory subgroup contrasts suggest nuanced emphases across participants. Women more often foregrounded financial readiness and household sustainability (e.g., budgeting for ceremonies, child-rearing, and shared economic security), whereas men more frequently referenced personal readiness and autonomy (e.g., timing vis-à-vis career goals). Participants with stronger religious identification emphasized marriage as

a sacrament and covenant, linking permanence to faith duties, while those reporting weaker religious ties framed marriage primarily as a legal or social contract with optionality. Students from comparatively lower economic backgrounds more often cited the costs of marriage and family formation (annulment, ceremonies, everyday expenses) as deterrents, whereas those from higher economic backgrounds discussed career timing and compatibility as the main gatekeepers. Finally, respondents with prior romantic experience grounded their views in relational dynamics (commitment, conflict management, compatibility), while those with no prior relationships relied more on family models, cultural norms, and media portrayals. These contrasts are indicative rather than inferential given the small qualitative subsample. They refine the thematic interpretation by showing how definitions and institutional perceptions of marriage vary across gender, religiosity, socioeconomic context, and relationship history.

Discussion

Marriage, as defined by the early adults in this study, is a commitment to a partner and a bond of intimacy. This understanding of marriage aligns with Lioe et al. (2023), in which they describe marital commitment as a mutual desire to stay together, encompassing personal commitment (the desire to remain), moral commitment (the sense of duty), and structural commitment (feeling constrained or unable to leave). Furthermore, Nemati et al. (2022) emphasize that commitment in marriage involves maintaining the relationship, fostering stability, expressing love, and navigating challenges. The participants' emphasis on marriage as a lifelong commitment reflects the concept of personal and moral commitment described in marital theory, and aligns with Arnett's (2000) Emerging Adulthood Theory, where young people begin to consolidate values about long-term roles such as partnership and family. Their internalization of both traditional views and modern self-determined principles suggests that marriage remains a psychologically significant future role, even in the context of increasing individualism. Despite the various roles of marriage in an individual's life, many early adults today believe that remaining single offers more advantages than getting married.

The Philippines has long been recognized as a family-oriented society. The people are expected to marry and bear children after marriage. However, recent demographic data revealed that the average age of Filipinos at their marriage increased. According to Abalos (2021), it rose from 25 to 27 years among Filipino men and from 22 to 24 years among Filipino women between 1960 and 2015. Keldal and Şeker (2022) indicated that the changing society and shifting youth priorities explain this idea. Other factors affecting their preferences to engage in a married life include financial concerns, career development, and pursuing higher education. Faradilla and Sunarti (2024) found that the family readiness of their undergraduate student respondents (aged 19-24 years) falls within a moderate range. They assessed family readiness by looking at the mental-intellectual maturity, social maturity, emotional maturity, moral-spiritual maturity, and family life skills of these undergraduate students. On the other hand, Compennolle and

Axinn (2019) reported that increased educational attainment has been linked to delayed marital timing.

Amid the changes in individual choices and preferences, the participants recognized that marriage comes with legal protection and formal recognition of partnership, as they perceived it as a union recognized by institutions such as the government, state, or religious bodies. This view is also consistent with the Family Code of the Philippines, which defines marriage as a special contract of permanent union between a man and a woman for the establishment of family life (Aguiling-Pangalangan, 2021). Additionally, Khatun et al. (2022) highlight that in Christianity, marriage is considered a sacrament symbolizing the union between Christ and the Church, while in Islam, it is a contract grounded in mutual respect and love.

On the other hand, the legal advantages through marriage ensure certainty in managing rights from inherited property, shared parenthood responsibilities for the best interest of the child, and social security benefits for married individuals (Gaol, 2024; Quan & Guerra-Termulo, 2021). Hence, despite the changing preferences of the youth regarding marriage, they still consider the legal importance of marriage and its implications in family building. This duality resonates with the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1991), wherein perceived behavioral control (e.g., financial readiness) and subjective norms (e.g., family and societal expectations) coexist with personal attitudes (e.g., desire or reluctance to marry). The interplay of these factors demonstrates how internal perceptions and external structures influence students' intentions toward marriage.

The findings from this study described that social media influences the decision of senior university students to marry in the future. The Philippines ranks first globally in terms of average daily time spent on social media. It was identified that Filipinos spend 3 hours and 53 minutes a day. It is higher than the global average of 2 hours and 24 minutes (Gagalang, 2022). The high level of engagement with social media affects the attitudes and behaviors of individuals toward consuming products and information. The results also align with the research by Hermanda et al. (2019), which emphasized that social media influencers contribute to the development of the self-concept of their audience. Although their study concentrated on the consumption of material goods, contemporary marriage is also shaped by this influence knowing that many young people acquire information about marriage through various social media platforms (Afolaranmi, 2020). Furthermore, Rahman et al. (2024) conducted a study in Indonesia that examined how social media shapes individuals' attitudes and behaviors toward marriage. They have found that online platforms expose individuals to both traditional and modern views on relationships and marriage. This constant exposure not only broadens their understanding of marriage and relationships but also influences how they prioritize their goals and define what marriage means to them. Thus, the media does not only inform individuals about marriage but also shapes their perceptions of what married life should be like and what constitutes a successful partnership. The content they see either reinforces or challenges their existing beliefs about being married and forming a family. Moreover, the media serves as an avenue through which they measure their readiness for marriage. These media channels may encourage individuals by showing the benefits and advantages of marriage. Moreover, social media

often portrays idealized images of romantic relationships within Filipino culture. These images become associated with the standards of dating and marriage today. The exposure of individuals to such content shapes their expectations and decisions regarding marriage. However, information from these platforms can also affect their decision-making process negatively. The current study's findings confirm Afolaranmi's (2020) observation that digital exposure has reshaped how marriage is understood by youth. Through the lens of the Theory of Planned Behavior, the exposure to diverse portrayals of relationships on social media informs both perceived norms and behavioral intentions, acting as a digital referent group. Participants' aspirational yet cautious tone toward marriage mirrors Hermanda et al.'s (2019) findings on the internalization of curated online images.

The participants experienced receiving pressuring remarks from their family members, leading to confusion and hostility toward marriage and bearing children. Due to the strong sense of family bonds and deep respect to older family members in the Filipino culture, family members hold significant influence on their attitudes toward marriage. This result was similar to a study by Zhu et al. (2022,) which indicated that parents and other family members serve as influential sources of marriage pressures for some. While this study focused on a different population and context, the findings remain relevant in illustrating the persistent influence of parental authority and expectations that extend into early adulthood. Another research by Zulfa et al. (2024) reported that some early marriages happen due to parental arrangements. Parent informants shared that they have arranged these early marriages to prevent potential slander directed toward their children. While this finding pertains to adolescents, it offers cultural context for understanding why family pressures around marriage persist for Filipino senior university students.

Many Asian countries, including Indonesia, firmly believe that an individual is required to be immersed in married life. Failure to do so can lead to social disapproval and stigmatization. These cultural patterns help explain why Filipino early adults still perceive strong familial and societal pressures surrounding marriage.

This study reaffirms the persistence of family influence as a normative force in collectivist societies like the Philippines. The prominence of family pressure reflects the role of "subjective norms" in Ajzen's framework, where perceived expectations from significant others affect one's intention to perform a behavior—here, the act of marrying. These results are consistent with Himawan (2019), who found that Indonesian youth experienced strong cultural imperatives to conform to traditional timelines.

The financial capability of an individual is another factor that affects the decision to marry. Economic hardships further aggravate the negative preferences toward marriage, given that many families living below the poverty line are facing unemployment and excessive debt. Fuadah et al. (2024) remarked that low income leads to an increasing subscription to debt services, which makes families vulnerable to financial burdens. Furthermore, individuals who married during adolescence experienced financial challenges, inconsistent parenting styles, and poor communication between them and their spouses (Noviani et al., 2024). With these economic and parenting concerns, the participants of this study desired to be financially independent first before getting into married life. This supports Compennolle and

Axinn's (2019) assertion that rising educational attainment and economic expectations delay marital transitions. Financial capability here functions as a gatekeeper of behavioral control—as conceptualized in the theory of planned behavior—restricting or enabling the decision to marry. The findings also expand on Ranta et al.'s (2014) view that career and financial security are now prerequisites to marriage, not its byproducts. Moreover, Kuang (2025) found that Filipino couples choose to live together instead of getting married because of financial reasons. This arrangement allows them to allocate their resources to other priorities, such as the needs of their children if they have any. Thus, marriage was not regarded as a financial priority.

Many young people also aspire to achieve their personal and career goals. Drawn from the UP Center for Integrative and Development Studies (2024) report "*Enabling Young Filipinos to Dream Big and Achieve Bigger*," many young Filipinos expressed the desire to delay marriage in order to pursue their personal goals such as achieving higher education and having stable careers. However, this trend is associated with their level of education, socioeconomic status, and place of residence. As Abalos (2014) noted, there is a stiffer competition in the labor market that pushes young adults to pursue advanced levels of education. This is often at the expense of delaying their marriage. In this context, Filipinos emphasize the importance of achieving personal goals and financial stability as prerequisites for getting married. It highlights their prioritization of career development and financial security. Moreover, it involves having the capacity to contribute and sustain the lives of their family members. This is consistent with the findings of Ranta et al. (2014), wherein they determined that education and work goals are the leading goals of emerging adults. Another goal is financial literacy. According to Putri and Simanjuntak (2020), there are five dimensions of financial literacy, namely, basic personal, money management, credit and debt management, saving and investment, and risk management. Having sufficient knowledge about this can help them prepare for their future lives. Moreover, Istikhamah and Yuliati (2016) highlighted that obtaining life insurance is a means of ensuring family security.

The focus on achieving personal goals before marriage reflects the 'identity exploration' dimension of Emerging Adulthood Theory. It also suggests that Filipino students, like their counterparts globally, view personal development as foundational to healthy partnerships. This developmental sequencing echoes Keldal and Şeker's (2022) findings that modern youth often prioritize autonomy and career before entering relational commitments.

Nevertheless, for individuals who decide to marry in the future, the motivating factors include the desire to have their own family and children, as they relate this wish to the pursuit of personal fulfillment and purpose. Being married is further regarded as a sign of maturity and readiness to take on greater responsibilities in their lives. This perspective is rooted in the family-centered culture of the Filipino people. Kuang (2025) noted that marriage tends to align more deeply with family-centered cultures like the Philippines. More than that, marriage, along with building a family, is viewed to uphold family traditions and preserve their family's shared sense of identity. This study supports previous findings (Khatun et al., 2022; Sonkaya & Ocal, 2024) that, despite structural delays and individualistic priorities, the family remains a core aspiration for many youth. The intention to build a family represents a deeply ingrained value that coexists with

changing life paths. This affirms that in the Filipino context, marriage continues to be understood as both a personal goal and a social expectation.

While this study provides valuable insights into the perceptions and marital intentions of Filipino senior university students, several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the small sample size of eight participants limits the generalizability of the findings, as the views expressed may not fully represent the diversity of experiences and cultural backgrounds among Filipino youth. Second, participants were all drawn from a single university and a specific academic program, which may have influenced their perspectives due to shared educational and disciplinary frameworks. Third, self-reported data from in-depth interviews may be subject to social desirability bias, with participants potentially framing responses in a manner aligned with perceived academic or cultural expectations. Fourth, the study's cultural context is limited to Filipino university students in a family-oriented society, which may not reflect the experiences of youth in more secular, urbanized, or culturally diverse settings within the Philippines or in other Southeast Asian countries. Future research could benefit from a larger, more diverse sample, inclusion of comparative regional or institutional contexts, and integration of mixed methods to validate qualitative findings.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Conclusion

Marriage is a union of individuals who choose to commit and spend their lives together. It is often viewed as a significant milestone in a person's life, yet perceptions of marriage vary among individuals. This study explored the perceptions of early adults toward marriage through interviews with eight participants aged 20-22 years to gain a deeper understanding of their views and attitudes. The findings revealed that participants commonly defined marriage as a formal and lifelong partnership characterized by commitment, legal recognition, and intimacy. They emphasized that marriage involves upholding mutual vows and being connected to their partner, and was associated with legal recognition and practical benefits such as tax reductions and legitimate recognition of children. Marriage was also seen as a personal choice, with participants highlighting the importance of personal readiness and stability before entering into marriage. Furthermore, it was perceived as the foundation for building a family, in which participants expressed that they work hard and prepare for married life and the responsibilities that come with it.

Five key factors that influenced their decision to marry were identified in this study. Two of these are external factors: media and family pressure. The media has shaped their expectations of marriage, while familial expectations caused pressure on them to marry and have children in the future. The other three can be considered as internal factors: financial capability, achievement of personal goals, and desire to build their own family. They considered their financial readiness in determining whether they could afford marriage and the life that comes after it. Achieving their personal goals was also seen as their priority before committing to marriage. Lastly, they have also expressed their interest in having children and forming a family of their own in the future. This study has shown that while early adults have already formed their own

perceptions and definitions of marriage, they remain cautious in committing and deciding to get married in the future. Participants recognized marriage as a major life transition requiring careful consideration of various influencing factors, both external and internal, before making their decision.

Recommendation

This study opens up opportunities for future research and practical applications regarding early adults' perceptions of marriage. Future researchers may consider conducting comparative studies to explore varying perceptions of marriage across different age groups. Additionally, studies with larger sample sizes are recommended to obtain more comprehensive data. A mixed-method approach combining quantitative surveys with qualitative interviews could provide both breadth and depth in understanding marriage perceptions. Furthermore, longitudinal studies are recommended to capture the dynamics and changes in marriage intentions as emerging adults transition through different life stages. They could also examine the interconnectedness of the different influencing factors and explore additional variables that shape perceptions of marriage.

In light of the findings of this study, it is important to equip early adults with accurate and relevant information about relationships and marriage. Integrating these topics into educational materials is recommended to help them better understand and prepare for future life decisions. For instance, universities could implement premarital education modules as part of their student development programs or integrate relationship skills training into existing curricula. Additionally, organizations working with the youth may design and implement relatable and inclusive programs that would deepen early adults' knowledge of marriage. At a broader level, policymakers may also develop initiatives and policies that are responsive to the current societal contexts that would make early adults more informed and supported with regard to thinking about their future family life. Examples include financial support policies for young couples, such as housing subsidies or tax incentives, and workplace policies that promote work-life balance to facilitate family formation. Together, these can foster an environment that empowers young people to navigate their future with greater awareness.

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