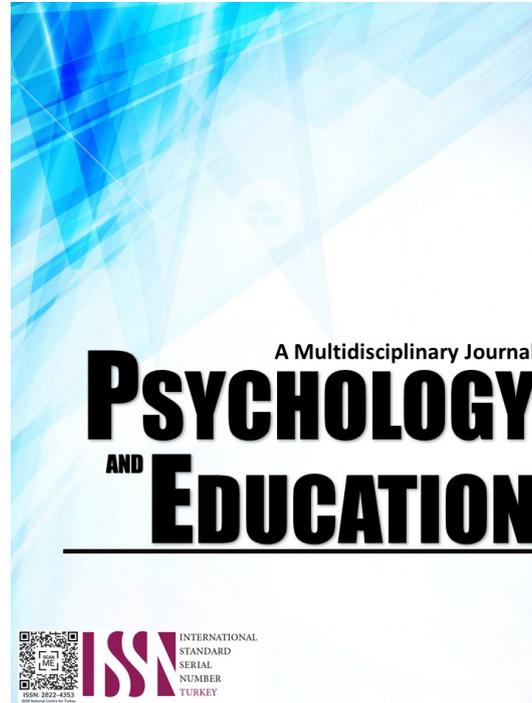


# UNSTOPPABLE: THE DREAM THAT NEVER CLOSES DOORS BEYOND EARLY MARRIAGE



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## Unstoppable: the Dream That Never Closes Doors Beyond Early Marriage

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### Abstract

This study aimed to explore and discover the lived experiences of married students as well as the challenges they face and insights about being married at such a young age. The researcher adopted the qualitative phenomenography design to interview the fifteen conversational partners using the Interview Guide. The researcher had an in-depth interview with the married students about their lived experiences and the conversations were audio-recorded. Then the data were analyzed using phenomenological explications and thematic analysis. The conversational partners affirmed that they are looking at the positive side of being married at an early age. They are driven by goals and aspirations despite the situations they are in. As a teacher and as a researcher of the study, I had the belief that for students who married early their dreams of finishing their studies will die on the day they get married. The account shared by my conversational partners changed my perception and views about the situation they are in and now I finally understand. Family and loved ones are indeed their number one supporters in life. Therefore, despite the circumstances, they still believe that they have to continue their studies in order for them to achieve their dreams in life.

**Keywords:** Cultural Practices, Coping Mechanisms, Insights, Married Students, Adjustment Period

### Introduction

*“I said I did not want it to happen, but I had no choice”*. It is the common line of Fatima and other young people who are arranged by their parents or *wali* to marriage (Cepeda, 2019). Today, there are 1.3 billion adolescents in the world, more than ever before, accounting for 16% of the global population (UNICEF, 2022). Adolescence is often thought of as a period during which young people concentrate on their education, develop skills that will be useful in maturity, and possibly enter the workforce and begin love relationships. On the other hand, arranged, early marriages signify the end of childhood for a substantial number of girls—especially those living in the poorest countries—and any chance of further personal growth and development (Erulkar, 2013).

Over the last decade, extensive research has been conducted on early marriage. According to the studies, social and cultural conventions, particularly religious ones, impact the age at which a girl expected to marry (UNICEF, 2014). However, in Thailand, there were no prohibitions on stopping teenagers from marrying. Instead, the country developed projects designed to improve rural conditions. As a result, high birth rates, maternal and newborn mortality, poor health, and low attendance continued to recover (Rivera, 2011).

In the Philippines, young people are only allowed to marry after they reach 18 under the Family Code. Minors who are Muslim are exempt. Philippine Muslim males can marry at 15 under Presidential

Decree (PD) No. 1083, or the Code of Muslim Personal Laws. Muslim females can marry as young as 12 if they have started menstruation and their male guardian, or *wali*, permits them (Cepeda, 2019).

According to the Philippine Family Code, the minimum age of marriage in the Philippines is 18 years old. However, child marriage is common in many religions and societies. Women in certain cultures can marry when they reach puberty, usually around fifteen. Other indigenous peoples permit early marriages but are not acknowledged because indigenous women are granted fundamental human rights and freedoms under Republic Act No. 8371, or the “Indigenous Peoples Rights Act,” which includes the constitution and relevant international conventions. Women in the ARMM, MIMAROPA, and SOCCSKSARGEN also marry sooner than in other regions (Philippine Commission on Women, 2020).

Nevertheless, girls at such an age should study at school, enjoy adolescence, and not worry about their husbands or children (UNFPA, 2019). While some boys are affected by child marriage, the issue has a considerably more significant impact on girls’ life. Lower health and education, lower employability, and increased dangers to abuse and violence are unacceptable. The Commission’s Population and Development (POPCOM) Region XII analysis stated that child marriage is both a consequence and a cause of poverty (UNFPA, 2020).

Locally, it is a great challenge and concern for teachers to motivate married students to focus on their studies



since they also have home or family responsibilities. Furthermore, married students are also prone to dropping out. The phenomenon caught the researcher's attention to pursue and explore married students' lived experiences, challenges, feedback, and insights.

### Research Questions

This study explored the stories and lived experiences of married students. Specifically, the study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of students who are married?
2. What feedback or comments do the students receive from their families, teachers, classmates, and schoolmates when married?
3. What challenges do the students experience, and how do they cope with these challenges?
4. What are the insights of the students who got married at an early age?

### Literature Review

#### Early Marriage

Early marriage is any marriage entered into before one reaches the legal age of 18 (Bayisenge, 2010). An arranged marriage is one in which parents will lead in choosing a marriage partner for their son or daughter. The children still have the final decision (Abdul-Wahid, 2018). In contrast, in the study of Jones (2010), traditional arranged marriages posited that the parents, particularly the father, have control over the arrangement of the marriage. This means that in traditional Muslim culture, arranged marriage exists since children value obedience to their parents. Traditionally, in the arrangement of marriage, the father is the one who has the foremost authority to decide since he is responsible for looking for a suitable husband or daughter-in-law to be. Furthermore, Tahir (2021) emphasized in his study that though the marriage could be arranged, the child's consent on whether he/she agrees or not matters in the decision-making.

Child marriage continues to be highly prevalent in Africa, where almost 40% of girls are married before the age 18 (UNICEF, 2014). In an article by Ruffert (2018), the highest percentage of child marriages occurs in Niger, a country in West Africa, where 28 percent of females get married before age 15, and 76 percent of people under the age of 18 are already married. One of the factors contributing to the high

number of underage marriages in Niger is poverty. One in five of the nation's 20 million citizens subsist on less than one euro daily. The United Nations Human Development Index ranks the nation second to last. Many low-income families believe that by marrying off their young girls, they can safeguard their future. Often, families also fear that if their daughters become pregnant while unmarried, it will dishonor the family. Additionally, child marriages are performed to end disputes, pay off debts, or make money from the bride price.

The females end up bearing the brunt of this practice's adverse effects on their health. Birth problems are not uncommon at this stage. The girls' bodies are not mature enough for pregnancy and childbirth because they are still youngsters. They may experience protracted labor and frequently deliver their babies with severe damage. Maternal mortality in Niger is among the worst in the world, and childbirth is one of the leading causes of this. In 2015, the UN reported that for every 100,000 births, more than 550 mothers died.

Additionally, the report of Cummins and Fonseca (2017) entitled "Teenage pregnancy and early marriage in Timor-Leste" specified that one of the foremost causes of child marriages is childbearing. Given the conservative attitudes towards teenage relationships, there are pressures for young people and their families to hide the shame of teenage pregnancy by quietly 'fixing' it through marriage. Most adolescent personal experiences rely on the difficulties of making offensive decisions in an environment that does not enable them to discuss it openly, does not provide them with critical information on how to improve and develop moral judgments, and does not equip them to handle situations.

Early marriage has health-related consequences and reduces girls' educational opportunities. In Niger, only 15 percent of girls attend secondary school. However, education is the only channel that enables young people to learn a trade and find a job (Ruffert, 2018).

In Iran, there is no minimum age for marriage. With the consent of the legal guardian and the sanction by a court, the girl child could be married off at any age. There is no limitation on the age difference between the girl child bride and the groom. The same situation exists for boys. The marriage of girls above 13 and boys above 15 does not need court permission, as revealed in All Human Rights for All in Iran (2016).

One out of every six females in the Philippines married before the age of 18 (UNFPA, 2014). As

reported by the Bangsamoro Women Commission, there are around 88,600 child brides in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (BARMM) as of 2021. BARMM, generally called Bangsamoro, is a Muslim-majority independent province of the Philippines with a demographic of 3.8 million people. As shown in a UNICEF report titled “Children in the Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao,” considering the absence of data on child marriages in the area, the occurrence is widespread in the BARMM, notably among Moro and Indigenous tribes (Nortajuddin, 2020).

### Causes of Early Marriage

Over the last decade, extensive research has been conducted on some variables contributing to child marriage and some of its repercussions (Vogelstein, 2013). According to the studies, social and cultural conventions, particularly religious ones, impact the age at which a girl is expected to marry. In addition, a girl’s socioeconomic situation, educational level, and community environment influence her likelihood of marrying young. Even though the effect on child grooms has not been highly studied, marriage may also put boys in an adult role for which they are unready, put them under financial pressure, and decrease their chances for education and career development (UNICEF, 2014).

Poverty, lack of education, cultural norms, and security are some key factors that drive and support the practice of child marriage. When a young girl is forced to marry, she experiences short- and long-term consequences. According to the United Nations Children’s Fund (2020), her chances of graduating high school diminish while her chances of encountering domestic violence increase. There is also a more significant likelihood of perpetuating intergenerational poverty cycles.

Moreover, according to the analysis, one of the root causes of the practice is that families may have multiple children, and their earnings are insufficient to support and educate all of them. Some tribes in the community have already been criticized for marrying off adolescents as early as 12 years old or when they enter puberty, as revealed by Nortajuddin (2020).

However, Graham, Kohen, and Montoya (2020) discovered that household income in early adolescence predicts school dropout, early marriage, and early childbearing in a journal article titled, “School Dropout, Child Marriage, and Early Pregnancy among Adolescent Girls in Rural Honduras.” The study

revealed that, most girls dropped out of school owing to a lack of financial resources or a desire no longer to be a student rather than marriage or motherhood. Only a small number of these students return to school. This research can help determine when and how measures can be made to protect girls and boost their chances of finishing secondary education, postponing marriage, and avoiding early pregnancy.

However, it is widely accepted among young British Muslims and their families, communities, and social circles that dating should not be discussed, observed, or acknowledged at home or in public. This taboo has both cultural and religious justifications. Culture-specific bans on dating and discussing dating are tied to tradition and honor (Werbner, 2007; Ali et al., 2020). Their religious foundations are presumptions and convictions regarding what is permitted (halal) or forbidden (haram) in Islam (as cited by Ali et al., (2020).

Since dating elicits an undesirable image for many Muslims, particularly older ones, physical contact in extramarital interactions is discouraged, such as occasional hugs or kisses (Rashid, 2017).

Moreover, an article by the Muslims Women League cited in (Ghaffari, 2016) stated that unmarried couples are warned against spending time alone in remote locations where they could be more likely to act on their desires and thus be less restrained. Muslims believe that God forbids having sex outside of marriage. Hence, this is prohibited in their religious regulations.

The findings of Lai et al. (2018) revealed that to avoid discrimination and shame of having a daughter who was impregnated out of wedlock, parents tend to marry the boyfriend of the unborn to legalize the relationship and safeguard the future of their daughter. However, youths are negotiating cultural and religious norms against dating and being open about it by breaking silences on the subject and pushing the idea that dating can be halal in certain circumstances (Ali et al., 2020). They are finding ways to make choices, mediating between, on the one hand, widespread family expectations that they will marry (Ahmad, 2012).

On the other hand, in research conducted by Abdallah (2017) in Bubukwanga Sub-county, Uganda, it was disclosed that early marriage is related to girls quitting school in the locality as determined by the education welfare officers and students. According to the studies, 83.5 percent of teachers have agreed that child marriages are connected to various factors, the most common of which was a lack of education and family

tension. This concludes that child marriages are a significant concern in Bubukwanga Sub-County.

Handayani's (2014) research showed that the rate of early marriage is very high as a result of several factors, including the fact that young women with lower levels of knowledge are 2.3 times more likely to marry young than those with higher levels of knowledge and that the economy is one of the factors that put them most at risk.

In one study, Raj et al. (2019) discovered that early marriage societal norms, the financial load of school fees, and limited opportunities for girls beyond marriage impact girls' schooling. Nonetheless, some girls show psychological toughness in these situations and can continue in school and delay marriage with the help of their parents and instructors. Unfortunately, girls who are less academically inclined and those who marry young receive less support from their families and existing programs to stay in school. Programmatic efforts should be expanded to include educational support for married and childbearing girls and options for women and girls beyond marriage. There was much discussion on the necessity of the girl's motivation to continue her studies after she married in India. Girls said that continuing their education necessitates a broad spectrum of support from their biological and in-law families, their spouses, and schools. Parents and daughters frequently choose grooms based on their commitment to supporting their education.

### **The Lived Experiences of Married Students**

The initial theory proposed was that marriage causes students to enter a different stage of life than their single peers. Some students indicated that they only had so much time on campus, which limited their capacity to engage with current events and their peers. Married students regularly stated that marriage had made them more adult and independent. Others recognized that much of their time spent with them before marriage had been unexpected because they frequently interacted with their friends and classmates in resident halls and the student center. Students also reported that while they spent less time with friends after marriage, the time they did spend together was more intentional. To put it another way, married students said their friendships strengthened (Clark, 2014).

It was also revealed that married students experienced detachment from social

life off-campus and from social life on campus. Peers

typically look at married students differently. Furthermore, the different stages of life experienced by married and single students can make it difficult for the two groups of students to relate to one another. This is because their unmarried peers have different perspectives on married students. Because students' interpersonal relationships with classmates, staff, teachers, family, and mentors impact their contentment, perseverance, success, and development on and off campus, such changes in social interactions should be evaluated. Several students claim that marriage has caused them to be more responsible with their time, take their homework more seriously, and even obtain higher scores (Taviano, 2006; Clark, 2014).

Moreover, the study's findings also stated that marriage brings additional duties outside academic pursuits, limited time, changing priorities, and altered interactions with friends, family, and the campus environment. Students linked all of the criteria to their student participation. The most common mentions were a lack of available time and energy and a shift of interest in their academics and social connections.

In addition, married students had personality traits that indicated higher academic and motivation levels. They also place a higher value on academic performance than single students. Due to their additional responsibilities, married students spend more resources on academic accomplishment and personal welfare and less on social activity and institutional commitment.

Furthermore, Clark (2014) mentioned that married students could also experience strain from conflict between spouses, feelings of exhaustion from balancing roles, and bitterness toward unequally shared household work. Married students and their families are likelier to endure stress and conflict at home without spousal support and shared duties. These added responsibilities and roles cause married students to reprioritize the effort they put toward academic, social, personal, and family responsibilities and activities.

The study by Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) entitled "The Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in the Philippine Secondary Public Schools" revealed that due to a large number of activities, diversions, and lack of attention, the students' biggest obstacles have been self-studying, poor internet connection, lack of sleep, and time to answer all of the modules.

Khattab (2015) revealed that students with either high aspirations or high expectations have higher school achievement than those with low and low expectations.



Furthermore, the essential predictor of future educational behavior among adolescents is total alignment between high aspirations, high expectations, and high achievement.

However, Lasode and Awotedu (2014) stated in their research that the present student life of marriage-related duties and roles increases the limits on students' extra time and energy, causing them to change the prioritization of goals and involvement. For all students, adjusting to the demands of higher education can be challenging. Students are subject to stressors—such as time management, social activities, sleep deprivation, and financial concerns—which can affect academic performance (Womble, 2010).

Mullings (2018), in her journal entitled “Marriage and Academia: Finding the Balance between Marriage, School, and Life,” revealed that, although marriage can be one of life's most personally satisfying events, students who get married during their college years are more prone to stress, mental health difficulties, and reduced educational performance. Marriage duties can put a burden on time management and increase stress levels.

According to Baras (2016), children, work, house chores, and a huge “to do,” list leave too little time for intimacy. Besides this pile of things they must do, couples also need to find time for themselves, and often, they cannot do that when things are a bit stressed, whether due to bad health, workload, money shortage, children's demands, family obligations, or just the usual daily things, romantic time for the couple is pushed to the side and becomes less and less critical.

Arumugam et al., (2021) stated that interpersonal communication skills are crucial for forming a strong link between spouses. There are significant points out the importance of interpersonal communication skills for an intense couple marital relationship; it is valuable to provide communication and counseling to the couple before they get wedded, which can support the couple's relationship satisfaction and life quality, and it is one of the primary preventative measures in the early levels. Effective pair communication is an essential tool for marital strategy planning. People spend much time communicating verbally with their partners because it helps them absorb the message better.

Conflicts spark among couples when they cannot communicate well with their spouse or how the husband interprets the communication that the wife made and vice versa (Tavakolizadeh, Nejatian & Soori, 2016). Therefore, communication skills are an

essential determinant of marital satisfaction. Couples can enjoy being together more as long as their interpersonal communication exists, preventing misunderstandings and conflicts (Baghipour, 2010).

On the other hand, early marriage is associated with early pregnancy. Adolescent pregnancy is both a cause and a result of child marriage. In many cases, child marriage is the cause of early pregnancy. Other data shows that sex outside of marriage is forbidden, and unintended pregnancy is the cause of child marriage (UNFPA, 2015).

In worst cases, teen mothers are more likely than later-married girls to have earlier conceptions and have much more offspring. This increases the possibilities of maternal morbidity, mortality, and delivery, which can have lengthy health implications or even lead to death. The lower the chance a girl can withstand when pregnant at a young age. They are also more prone to be killed due to the difficulties during labor and birth than women in their 20s. If they can withstand childbearing and delivery, their babies are more expected to be stillborn or die in the first month of life (UNICEF, 2022).

The study by Birchall (2018) discovered that girls who become pregnant or marry young may have struggled academically, possibly taken studies late, and have had academic problems, all of which raise the chances of early marriage or pregnancy.

Teenage pregnancy and early motherhood are linked to poor scholastic success, poor physical and mental health, social isolation, poverty, and other variables (Maemeko et al., 2018). Moreover, teenagers with children have lower scholastic achievement than teenagers who do not have children. The study's findings suggest that the various responsibilities that affected students encountered are one of the causes of their low academic performance as pregnant and mothering teenagers (Duncan, 2011).

Motherhood exacerbates domestic responsibilities as a barrier to girls' continued education. Even when there was spousal support for post-marriage schooling, parental duties sometimes made it hard for married ladies to continue their studies. To summarize, few participants identified enablers and facilitators for married girls' school retention, corresponding to higher hurdles to education after marriage than before marriage. Those that did highlight essential advantages and resources for school retention prior to marriage: the girl's self-efficacy and motivation, as well as family support. In-laws and husbands, as well as the natal family, were obligated to provide support for

married ladies. Another major factor was the decision-makers opinion that continuing education after marriage is possible; these attitudes may be especially crucial for married girls, given the more significant social norms against continuing education after marriage (Raj et al., 2019).

In addition, an article written by Garcia (2022), in which she interviews two young girls, Erlyn and Daisy, who live close to one another in an urban community in Quezon City, near Manila, stated that raising their firstborn during the pandemic, trying to recover from childbirth, dealing with breastfeeding and learning lullabies are all weighing up whether they should or can return to their studies or find work. They also mentioned how uncomfortable breastfeeding is.

Additionally, the transition to motherhood, particularly for first-time mothers, is stressful and disruptive to regular daily routines. The differences in maternal-infant body clock patterns and the demands of nighttime infant caregiving responsibilities, mainly infant feeding, were destructive to standard sleep patterns (Carrega, 2018).

Watts et al. (2015) discovered that young women have more duties, social recognition, and a sense of purpose as they become mothers. Despite the benefits of parenthood, individuals face problems that harm their life. The most common difficulties were coping with increasing obligations following the infant's birth and balancing the competing demands of schooling, a job, and caring for a baby in a settlement site. Furthermore, young moms claimed that their mothers, siblings, and close friends were supportive, but the father of their child and the larger community were unusual. Despite the personal perceived benefits of becoming a mother, participants believed that their wider ethnic communities frowned upon adolescent mothers, leaving them with feelings of shame and embarrassment.

### Consequences of Early Marriage

According to Ijeoma et al. (2013), young marriage results in instability, poorer health, diminished problem-solving skills, less school involvement, and adverse effects on the welfare of children.

Teenage pregnancies and early marriage in Timor-Leste have evident effects on many elements of adolescent life, including their wellness, education, career opportunity, and overall well-being. Along with its intricacy, many agencies and characters are concerned with reducing it, including the public health and education sector, families and the wider

population, gender defenders and lawmakers, and teenagers (Cummins & Fonseca, 2017).

It stands to reason that child marriage should be banned. Rivera (2011) proved how child marriage affects young girls' physiological, emotional, and psychological development and their capacity to progress in school. While only the girls who engage in this detrimental behavior may suffer, the entire community suffers. Countries like Niger, Yemen, and Thailand that indulge in this practice are trapped in a never-ending poverty cycle. Child marriage adds to society's concerns such as population explosion, medical costs, and lost opportunities for human development.

In the past, adolescent marriage and quitting high school correlated to a wide range of adverse effects, including higher lifetime poverty rates. According to results, a woman who marries young is 31 percentage points more likely to be impoverished later in life. A woman who drops out of school has an 11 percent advantage, according to Dahl (2010).

Moreover, young dads and mothers also affirmed that they did not intend to become "early" parents; the majority said the situation had thrust the position upon them. Even though the vast majority loved their kids dearly, many felt overburdened by the immense duties of raising them. Young parents described feeling worried and unsure about their lives and their children's futures. However, despite these difficulties, young parents generally relished their roles as moms and fathers (Crivello & Mann, 2020).

Although early marriage and motherhood are frequently connected to school dropout, data establishing a direct and causal link is sparse, according to Birchall (2018). This is because early marriage and pregnancy can cause and result in dropping out of school. Girls drop out of school or are removed because they are pregnant or married, but girls who have previously dropped out are more likely to marry and become pregnant. In Sub-Saharan Africa, a large body of data links early pregnancy (often outside marriage) and school dropout. In South Asia, some studies examine the relationship between early marriage (and resultant early pregnancies) and school dropout.

Though it is self-evident that teenage pregnancy and marriage play a significant role in girl child dropout rates, the distinctive scopes of published data, the lack of quality, nearly comparable national data, and the reality that early marriage and pregnancy, like dropout rates, are so deeply entwined with socioeconomic

disparities and imbalanced gender norms, make simple causal assertions about how early marriage and pregnancy impacts school dropout challenge.

According to Orge and de Guzman (2019), a child's comprehension of the various elements/aspects that can aid them in achieving educational goals and being respected and treated equally is critical, as is taking advantage of being safeguarded in terms of health and wellness. They studied the causes and impacts of child marriages from the viewpoint of secondary school students participating in the ten national and integrated high schools in Botolan, Zambales, Philippines. The study took place throughout the school year 2018-2019.

Child marriage among high school students is complex but tied to individual and group conditions, perspectives, and ideas. Gender inequality, cultural norms, and poverty all have a role in the practice of early marriage. Young brides and grooms are more likely to suffer from disease and hardship, have fewer educational opportunities, and experience individual and interpersonal impacts such as vulnerability. In addition, numerous support indicators for young students were provided and investigated in this study to assist them in completing the Basic Education cycle.

Additionally, Wodon et al. (2017) wrote an article about the economic implications and effects of child marriage and how it impairs girls' educational achievement. Moreover, child marriage makes it less likely for girls to finish secondary education. This is revealed by questions asked of parents in household surveys on why their daughters dropped out of school. Adolescent females frequently drop out of school for various reasons, including marriage. A similar conclusion is achieved by analyzing the association between child marriage and educational attainment. The ramifications are profound. Depending on the country or region, every year that a girl married young (before age 18) is associated with a four to 10 percentage point decline in the likelihood of finishing secondary education.

An article entitled "Arrange Marriage: Advantage and Disadvantage" by Shuani (n.d). The entire responsibility of the marriage is undertaken by both parents. In the case of arranged marriage, the children are well looked after by the in-laws. They are taken proper care of and receive a lot of love and affection from their grandparents even when their parents are away. It is easier to get financial assistance from parents in times of need. Moreover, Danziner and Ratner (2010) posited that young people are taking

longer to achieve financial independence since their parents

are there to support them with their financial needs.

### Adjustment Period

One of the significant adjustment problems in marriage, especially for married students, is financial. Money, or lack of it, profoundly influences their adjustments to marriage. Their financial situation can threaten their marital adjustment in two crucial areas. First, friction may develop if the wife expects her husband to share the workload. Second is the desire for material possessions (Kelly, LeBaron & Hill, 2018).

Choosing the role of a student by studying for an examination or working on an assignment rather than attending to the needs of a child can sometimes be challenging. Academic activities and pursuits by married students are stressful periods in their schooling. They experience a substantial stress level contributing to poor academic performance and academic dishonesty (Famiriyo & Abifor, 2019).

Akpotor (2018) recommended that married students imbibe the prioritization principle. They should do first thing first and in the order of importance. Compartmentalization of roles should be considered. If a married student has an assignment to do and breakfast for her husband, she should wake up early enough to complete the school assignment before preparing breakfast. Moreover, she also stressed that the need for a corresponding adjustment to increasing and conflicting roles should be done so that marital roles should not be an excuse for poor academic performance.

Time management skills are linked to better academic performance and less stress in married students. The importance of effective time management is compounded for those who take on the challenges of marriage and the demands of attending school. Despite the rigorous demands of attending school, married students need intricately balance their individual, relationship, and academic demands and needs so that he/she is available to support the family in his/her pursuits while still facilitating academic success. To be a successful married student, it is essential to be successful at self-care. Spend time figuring out what self-care means, whether it involves spending time in nature, exercising, or simply spending time with the family. It may be beneficial to schedule for family, school, and personal concerns (Mullings, 2018).

Similarly, the responsibilities of being married and a



student are difficult to balance. While marriage can pose additional challenges to the daily routine of a college student, including placing additional time constraints and detracting from self-care, it is possible to overcome these challenges by developing time management skills like using a planner to schedule personal, marriage, and school time (Noori & Orfan, 2021).

Sicam et al, (2021) discovered that time management and financial difficulties are among the challenges of married students.

### **Coping Mechanism**

To benefit those affected, assessing the numerous factors contributing to academic stress is crucial to develop the best corrective actions. Additionally, it was noted that they lacked their previously acquired support system, such as leaning on their relatives and childhood friends through trying times (Kumar & Nancy, 2013). Excessive homework, peer pressure, test anxiety, and time management challenges have all been linked to increased academic stress (Kumaraswamy, 2013).

Something that most people want most is to get married. Nowadays, getting married early may not be a popular decision for some students, but it is seen as a potential solution to the problem at hand for others. The causes of student marriages include cultural and religious ones. Student marriages face distinct issues than traditional marriages do. The division of roles is the issue. Married students shall handle domestic duties according to their status as a husband or a wife. However, they must also play the part of a student by attending classes, completing assignments, and taking exams (Rositoh & Sarjuningsih, 2017).

According to the study's findings, the dual role that the participants—married students—had to play was what caused stress for them as a student and a housewife. They consequently felt worn out and left specific jobs unfinished. Interpersonal and economic issues exacerbated stress. Additionally, the participants' lack of assertiveness in expressing their thoughts or seeking assistance from other family members to complete their duties contributed to their stress. The participants had to fulfill their obligations as students, which included showing up for a class on time, turning in assignments on time, and developing their skills. According to the study's findings, the dual role that the participants—married students—had to play caused stress for them as a student and a housewife. They consequently felt worn out and left specific jobs

unfinished. Interpersonal and economic issues exacerbated stress.

Additionally, the participants' lack of assertiveness in expressing their thoughts or seeking assistance from other family members to complete their duties contributed to their stress. The participants had to fulfill their obligations as students, which included showing up for a class on time, turning in assignments on time, and developing their skills (Sumakul et al., 2019).

The stress and trauma that student mothers experience, according to Egenti and Omoruyi (2011), make them feel psychologically, emotionally, and physically averse to their schooling. Some have left the school as a result of this. Some students also struggle with pregnancy, while others continue to study while caring for their newborns. This adds to their burden and has caused some of them to fail their exams while forcing others to give up on them. Some people miss lectures altogether due to pressure from their marriages or may skip classes for a decent amount of time. All of these have an impact on their academic performance.

The process of learning and comprehending does not end when a couple starts a family. Because there are frequently things that have never been envisioned before, the early stages of marriage can occasionally be a time of adjustment that is challenging for a newly married couple (Janiwarty & Pieter, 2013). Young, unstable couples must try to understand one another before getting married since, if the issues in their marriage are not resolved, it will likely result in divorce. This is the primary consideration before a young marriage. Participants also mentioned how crucial and necessary family support is for them because it assists them in adjusting to their early marriage. Parental support is necessary since it is the first type of assistance participants need.

Moreover, the findings show that the most significant support sources are interpersonal relationships, marriage quality, and family bonds. Because of the close ties that bind the family, one family member's concern will impact all the others. Even though there was initial rejection in this study, all participants received support from their families, who eventually accepted and encouraged the marriages of young-age couples.

### **Methodology**

This section presents the research design, sampling



design, role of the researcher, conversational partners, data sources, data gathering procedure, instrumentation, face-to-face interview, data analysis, the trustworthiness of the study, and ethical considerations.

### Research Design

This study used a qualitative method to study people's beliefs, experiences, attitudes, behavior, and interactions (Pathak et al., 2013). Qualitative research requires inquiries from respondents about their experiences of things that happen in their lives. Moreover, it is a method that asserts illustrating the action of attaining essence and describes how an individual explicates their story rather than generating logical and mathematical outcomes (Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Looking closer at the research questions, the researcher employed a phenomenological ethnography type of qualitative method to discover different ways people understand and experience a specific phenomenon. Phenomenography research design emphasizes discovering qualitatively different ways people experience, conceptualize, realize, and understand various phenomena around them. (Martin et al., 1992). Thus, this study explored married students' lived experiences, feedback received, challenges encountered, and insights.

### Sampling Design

Purposive sampling was used in this study. It is a non-probability sampling that helped the researcher choose the conversational partners based on the characteristics and objectives of the study (Crossman, 2020). It only focuses on a specific population element relevant to the study and can answer the research questions. Therefore, the study purposively included 15 married students.

### Conversational Partners

The conversational partners are 3 junior high school and 12 senior high school students who are married. They were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (a) either male or female student, (b) ages 13-18 years old, (c) legally married, (d) with or without a child, (e) had been married for six months and beyond. Those who did not meet the criteria are excluded as conversational partners.

### Role of the Researcher

The researcher served as a keen observer of the

conversational partners during the interview in assessing their non-verbal clues and was able to get along with them. The researcher also actively listened and showed empathy as her conversational partners disclosed their experiences, ensuring they were comfortable sharing their stories as married students.

The researcher also served as a translator. Most conversational partners were Muslim but could respond to the questions in Tagalog, so the researcher did not have any problem regarding the dialect used during the interview. Since the interview is audio recorded, the researcher carefully did the transcription of the conversation made. The researcher itself transcribed the actual conversations following the flow of the interview. Lastly, the researcher also served as the analyzer for the responses of the conversational partner. Each answer was analyzed well because it served as the basis for the study's success.

### Data Sources

The study was based on analyzed and interpreted data to get the correct information. In this descriptive phenomenological research, the primary data source was the in-depth interview responses.

The secondary data were derived from different journals, articles, and books and collected from electronic databases and information systems (Murrawat & Naserhariati, 2011).

### Instrumentation

The researcher used a semi-structured interview guide as the instrument in this study. The interview guide reflects the questions to be asked. Based on the objectives of the study, the interview guide is composed of three parts. Two preliminary questions comprise the first part being asked to the CPs to start the interview. The second part is the main questions comprising 13 sub-questions. The third part is one wrap-up question that allows the conversational partners to add or share something not yet asked.

### Data Gathering Procedure

The study was conducted in the following steps: The researcher sent an approval letter to the Dean of the Graduate School of Notre Dame of Midsayap College requesting to conduct this study. Then, the researcher also asked for the permission of the Schools Division Superintendent by sending a letter to his office. When the letter was approved, it was attached to the letter, which was sent to the administrators of the Alameda North District's secondary schools for the researcher



to administer the study. When the letter was approved, the researcher approached the advisers with married students and asked for their addresses, contact numbers, and Facebook accounts. After asking for the details of the prospective conversational partners, the researcher forwarded a consent letter to their parents. While at the same time, the conversational partners were informed through an assent letter to explain the study's objectives and purpose and to seek their permission to participate formally.

After this, the researcher and the conversational partners met at the agreed time and location. The researcher transcribed the conversations and organized the data. Then, the researcher met the conversational partners to verify the transcriptions of the conversations again. The conversational partners affixed their signatures at the conforme section of Participant Verification Form.

This research required the conversational partners to disclose their own lived experiences through verbal conversation regarding their emotions and points of view. Hence, ethical consideration is needed.

In securing the ethical appropriateness of the study, the researcher informed the conversational partners through the assent form. The conversational partners were informed about the purpose of the study and the process to guarantee their identification and the confidentiality of their statements.

The following are the ethical principles that this study adheres to according to Belmont Report (1979).

### **Respect for Person**

Conversational partners are autonomous beings treated courteously and with

respect by protecting their autonomy. They were allowed to choose whether to join or not in the study. Therefore, informed consent and assent form are essential in this study. The researcher ensured the voluntariness of the conversational partners and did not force them to do so if they were unwilling to participate.

### **Beneficence**

The researcher served as the confidante of the conversational partners. Therefore, the researcher was not allowed to expose the identity of the conversational partners by disclosing their responses without their permission. The researcher bears in mind the risk in conducting the study due to the exploration

of the personal and sensitive experiences of the conversational partners. The researcher needs permission from the DepEd-Cotabato Division office, the Graduate School dean, the school's principals, the adviser, and the parents. The decisions of the conversational partners to participate are respected, and efforts were made to keep the conversational partners' identities confidential.

### **Justice**

This principle promotes fairness and equal distribution of risk and benefits of the research. The researcher did not manipulate the conversational partners and ensured they met the study's criteria.

### **Confidentiality**

The researcher treated the identity and conversational partners' responses confidentially as stated by the law and were only used for this study's purposes alone. Any known information drawn from this study remained confidential to protect the rights and welfare of the CPs. In addition, the researcher did not reveal any information without the consent of the conversational partner regarding the publication or discussion of the research findings.

### **Anonymity Clause**

As this study discussed the participants' personal experiences, the confidentiality and privacy of the CPs are required. After the identified conversational partners agree to be interviewed, the CPs give their available time, date, and venue for the interview. Each of them is assigned a pseudonym. The names in transcripts, as were their grade and sections, are changed or deleted. The researcher only kept a secured list of names of the conversational partners and their separate pseudonyms.

### **Result**

This section presents the qualitative analysis outcome from the research questions' answers. The results are based on emergent themes, sub-themes, core ideas, and categorization.

### **Profile of the Conversational Partners**

Presented in Matrix 1 are the findings of the study generated from the thematic analysis.

Matrix 1 shows the conversational partners' profiles

during the in-depth interview. Three male and 12 female married students were involved in the study. Their marriage years vary from six months to two years. Five conversational partners already had children, three were pregnant, and the rest had no children.

The ideas shared by the conversational partners were used to sort out the insights related to the salient results of their lived experiences as married students. To uphold confidentiality, code numbers were given to the conversational partners.

Matrix 1. Profile of the Conversational Partners

Code Number	Age	Gender	Grade Level	Married at the age	Tribe/Ethnicity	Year/months of being married
TLEMS1	18	Female	Grade 12	17	Maguindanaoan	1 year
TLEMS2	16	Female	Grade 11	16	Iranun	7 months
TLEMS3	15	Female	Grade 9	14	Iranun	7 months
TLEMS4	16	Female	Grade 9	15	Iranun	6 months
TLEMS5	18	Male	Grade 12	16	Iranun	2 years
TLEMS6	17	Female	Grade 11	15	Ilonggo	2 years
TLEMS7	18	Female	Grade 9	16	Iranun	2 years
TLEMS8	17	Female	Grade 11	16	Ilonggo	1 year
TLEMS9	18	Male	Grade 11	17	Maguindanaoan	1 year
TLEMS10	17	Female	Grade 11	16	Iranun	1 year
TLEMS11	18	Female	Grade 12	18	Iranun	6 months
TLEMS12	17	Male	Grade 12	17	Iranun	7 months
TLEMS13	18	Female	Grade 12	18	Ilonggo	6 months
TLEMS14	18	Female	Grade 12	17	Iranun	6 months
TLEMS15	18	Female	Grade 11	14	Iranun	4 years

Figure 1.

The audio-recorded dialogues were transcribed, translated, and analyzed after the in-depth interviews. The material was presented using a cross-analysis to compare the primary themes. This was used when Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997) published *A Guide to Conducting Consensual Qualitative Research*, which used the three response classifications: general, typical, and variant.

The first category is General, which signifies that the central concept applies to all situations (15 cases). Next is typical, meaning the idea applies to 50% or more examples (8-14 cases). Finally, variant denotes that it applies to fewer than half of at least two samples (2-7).

The primary themes were presented according to the order of the research question and were used to categorize the information. The core ideas from the CPs' responses are listed under the primary themes. The table also included a column that showed the frequency of the responses, which served as the

foundation for categorization.

**Themes**

There were 76 significant statements, ten core ideas, and three major themes framed in the thematic analysis. Matrix 2 shows three major themes and ten core ideas that emerged from the subjective experiences of the conversational partners, specifically their lived experiences as married students.

Matrix 2. Themes, Core Ideas, and Categorization of the Lived Experiences of Married Students

Major Themes	Core Ideas	Categorization
Cultural Practices	Arranged Marriage	Typical
	Teenage Pregnancy	Variant
	Addressing Moral issues	Variant
Adjustment Period	Financial Difficulties	Typical
	Parental Responsibilities	Variant
	Complying with Academic Requirements	Typical
	Time Management	Variant
Coping Mechanism	Support from Parents and Loved Ones	Variant
	Proper Communication and Coordination	Variant
	Driven by Goals and Aspirations	General

Figure 2.

The following themes are extracted from the in-depth interviews: cultural practices, adjustment period, and coping mechanisms.

**Cultural Practices**

The theme cultural practices is taken from the CP's responses to their lived experiences on why they got married early. These core ideas developed: arranged marriage, teenage pregnancy, and addressing moral issues.

**Arranged Marriage**

The core idea was developed from the significant

statement shared by the conversational partners. Arranged marriage is described as a marriage involving the parents in selecting marriage partners for their children. Parents or guardians choose their children's life partner, whether their children like the chosen partner or not. The following are the CP's significant statements:

"Because my father's family side and his mother liked us to be together. I do not know the boy, but his mother visited our house and told me I would marry his son. So, my father and his mother talked about the arrangement of our wedding." (TLEMS1)

"It was arranged marriage, our parents both talked about the arrangement. I was afraid and sad knowing that I would get married at a young age. Eventually, I accepted it since I could not do anything anymore." (TLEMS2)

"My parents wanted me to marry early. I hesitated if I would agree or not because I was too young. At first, I did not want to agree, but my mother made me agree to get married because she said they were doing it because it was for my own good." (TLEMS3)

"I married early because it was my father's decision. The boy that I married is just from here. It is normal that I was surprised, and I cannot explain how I feel. So, I thought to make them happy I would do what my parents wanted me to do. I accepted it because I had to obey my parents. I do not want them to feel bad and I want them to be happy with what they want." (TLEMS4)

"As you know in our culture, parental, parents are the one who decides and no matter what we do, we cannot go against them once they have decided. I did not like their decisions but I had to accept their decision." (TLEMS7)

"I do not want to get married early, it was my parent's decision. We were arranged since birth, so they just fulfilled their agreement. If I was to decide, I do not want to marry early because it is tiresome." (TLEMS12)

"My parents build a friendship with my husband's parents and so they have decided that we will be arranged parentally." (TLEMS13)

"The reason why I got married is parental, it was lockdown when they introduced me to the boy and we liked each other. The family of my husband promised me that they would support my study." (TLEMS14)

"My parents decided to marry me off because the school is far from here and we have no budget during that time." (TLEMS15)

The core idea Arranged marriage is classified as

Typical since 9 out of 15 conversational partners expressed this answer.

### Teenage Pregnancy

Exploring the reasons why the CPs got married early is because they got pregnant or they got their girlfriends pregnant, which is immoral in Muslim culture. They have to marry early to avoid conflict with each family. The following are the CP's responses:

"I got pregnant early, so my parents decided to let me marry. I do not know if I will agree or if I will raise my child alone." (TLEMS8)

"I told my father that I want to get married because my girlfriend is pregnant." (TLEMS9)

"It was the decision of my husband's parents to marry us since I was already pregnant at that time." (TLEMS11)

The core idea Teenage Pregnancy is classified as Variant since 3 out of 15 conversational partners mentioned this answer.

### Addressing Moral Issues

Holding hands, cuddling and kissing are prohibited in the practice of culture

in Muslims. Once the couple is caught dating by their relatives, they are set for an arranged marriage to address the immoral act they committed. The following are the statements shared by CPs.

"Because of rumors that someone caught us holding hands and in our culture that is not allowed." (TLEMS5)

"I was married early because of issues that there is something happened between me and my Muslim boyfriend which is against their tradition." (TLEMS6)

"I had this Christian boyfriend and we were caught dating in the middle of the night which is against our Muslim culture. We ended up getting married." (TLEMS10)

The core idea Addressing Moral Issues is classified as Variant since 3 out of 15 conversational partners mentioned this answer.

### Adjustment Period

Being married at a young age, a lot of things will change. They have to adjust

to each other differences, such as attitudes and values, and know how each other deals with real-life

situations. Adjustment Period is the second major theme with core ideas: Financial difficulties, Parental Responsibilities, Complying with Academic Requirements, and Time Management.

### Financial Difficulties

The core idea Financial Difficulty was extracted from the significant statement of the conversational partner. It is one of the challenges married students face in their adjustment period. The following are the CP's accounts:

"Married life is really tough, especially when you are still studying and you need to sustain both your educational and your family needs." (TLEMS5)

"Number 1 problem of being a couple is financial. I am always the one who is looking for ways so that we can save up." (TLEMS6)

"Sometimes, I borrowed money from our neighbors and paid it after my husband got money from his harvest." (TLEMS7)

"Then, thinking about household expenses, even pampers and foods we cannot afford to buy because we have no money." (TLEMS8)

"I borrowed money from my friends since I feel ashamed to ask for money from my parents even though I know that they have money." (TLEMS9)

"As a husband, if I earned some money, all those earnings will be taken by my wife. I cannot save some money for myself." (TLEMS12)

"As a married one, I have struggled in finding money... and food." (TLEMS13)

"Money is our biggest problem as a married couple since we don't have any investment." (TLEMS15)

The core idea Financial Difficulties is classified as a Typical since 8 out of 15 conversational partners articulated this answer.

### Parental Responsibilities

The Parental Responsibilities is formulated from the significant statement shared by the CPs. In the adjustment period, raising a child is one of the challenges married students face, especially since they are too young and have never had any parenting skills.

The following are the responses of CPs:

"I got pregnant quickly and gave birth at a young age, it was challenging for me to take care of my baby, especially when she got sick for 7 days. I cried because I do not know what to do." (TLEMS1)

"I have difficulty caring for my children the food to eat, and expenses at home. It is difficult when your children are sick." (TLEMS7)

"It is difficult to take care of a baby, especially when I do not have milk to feed her since I have nothing to eat. Because she was the first baby and I was too young, it was difficult." (TLEMS8)

"Almost every night we were awake because of our baby, and I am not used to it and I was too young." (TLEMS9)

"It was difficult to take care of because there were four of them. I was crying when they felt ill because I did not know what to do." (TLEMS15)

The core idea Parental Responsibilities is categorized as Variant since 5 out of 15 conversational partners have children.

### Complying with Academic Requirements

As married at the same time, a student has to accomplish their module so that they will not be at risk of dropping out, their outputs are the bases of teachers if they are still active or not, and grades will be derived from the number of outcomes submitted by the students. These are the following significant statements derived from the CP's responses:

"I am having a hard time answering my module because I was pregnant at that time and after doing a household chore I fell asleep." (TLEMS1)

"I was late in submitting my output since I was too lazy to answer my module because of a lot of housework." (TLEMS4)

"I am struggling in answering my module since we do not have a signal here, no internet, and I am just self-reliant in answering my module." (TLEMS7)

"I am struggling in doing my module and creating projects." (TLEMS8)

"One of the challenges that I encountered as a student in answering my module is having no signal so that I can research, especially on Google since I am a Grade 11 student. It is difficult since there is no teacher I can ask since there is no internet, and I do not have someone here to help me answer my module." (TLEMS9)

"I have a hard time answering my module, and sometimes I am late in submitting my output because of housework." (TLEMS10)

"If I have a hard time accomplishing my module, I will research it on Google. I am very dependent on Google." (TLEMS11)

"I was not able to join the face-to-face classes since I

am afraid to get vaccinated.” (TLEMS12)

“I was one of the ranking students before, but now my grades are dropping since I no longer have time to answer my module.” (TLEMS6)

The core idea Complying with Academic Requirements is categorized as Typical since 9 out of 15 conversational partners have articulated this answer.

### Time Management

Married students have their duty and responsibilities: being a student, a wife/husband, and a parent. Therefore, time management is derived from the responses of the CPs as they have to adjust to their married life and their student life. These are the responses of the CPs:

“Sometimes I sacrificed my time for my child just to answer my module, especially when the deadline is about to come.” (TLEMS1)

“I answered my module at night. Then I cook and do housework after putting my baby to sleep.” (TLEMS7)

“Being a wife and a student at the same time is difficult to handle because I have to divide my time between my study and my family, especially now I am one of the students who are attending face-to-face classes.” (TLEMS11)

“I have divided my time between my husband, doing household, and accomplishing my module. At six in the evening, I am doing my module and every morning I do my housework such as sweeping, doing the laundry, and cooking.” (TLEMS13)

“I balanced my time between my husband and my studies, when it comes to my study my husband is there to help me.” (TLEMS14)

“I have to balance my time between my study, my husband, and at the same time my children. After I bathe my children in the morning, I will do the housework and cook for my husband. Then I do my module at night.” (TLEMS15)

The core idea Time management is categorized as a variant since 6 out of 15 conversational partners have articulated this answer.

### Coping Mechanism

Married students have to deal with different challenges. It is also essential to

know how they cope with these challenges and what motivates them to continue their studies. These are the core ideas developed from the responses of CPs, such

as support from parents and loved ones, proper communication and coordination, and driven by goals and aspirations.

### Support from Parents and Loved Ones

The core idea of Support from Parents and Loved Ones is formulated from the significant statements expressed by the conversational partners. For the students to cope with the challenges of being married at a young age is made possible with the support of their parents and loved ones. These are the responses of CPs:

“If I have problems with money, my parents will give me if I ask them.” (TLEMS2)

“Being married early is not too difficult for me because my parents are there to guide my husband and me.” (TLEMS3)

“My parents helped me in answering my module since they are both teachers and also in doing my housework my mother is there to help me.” (TLEMS4)

“My parents provided us with money so that we can have the capital for our sari-sari store.” (TLEMS5)

“In terms of money, my husband gives me his earnings as a banana worker, and sometimes my parents give me money.” (TLEMS10)

“We do not have any problems with money since my mother-in-law is there to give us money. Sometimes my parents also give us money.” (TLEMS11)

“I am not having a hard time because my parents are supportive. I also do not work because my parents are the one who is working for us, I just focus on my study.” (TLEMS12)

“If we do not have money, we will ask for money from our parents.” (TLEMS13)

“If there are expenses, and we are short of money, my husband's parents are ready to provide for us.” (TLEMS14)

The core idea support from parents and loved ones is categorized as Typical since 9 out of 15 conversational partners have articulated this answer.

### Proper Communication and Coordination

The core idea was formulated from the significant statements expressed by the conversational partners. This means that proper communication and coordination is the coping mechanism of CPs whenever quarrels and small fights between the couple happen.

“Even if it is my fault, he is the one who makes the

first move to talk to me.” (TLEMS1)

“Whenever we fight about who will be the one to use the cellphone, he is always the one to give way and he let me use it first.” (TLEMS2)

“Between the two of us, when we fought, as a husband, I am being humble to her so that our fight will not escalate.” (TLEMS5)

“We get along once I am the one who is acting childish and sometimes I said that I will leave him but then he will stop me from leaving.” (TLEMS6)

“We talked to each other if we had a problem.” (TLEMS10)

“I am saying “sorry” if I am the one who is at fault, and I will show him my affection so that his temper will disappear.” (TLEMS11)

“To avoid conflict, we talked properly about the problem.” (TLEMS13)

“Before we go into a fight, I will ask him first what is the reason, because I believed that not knowing the reason will lead to big fights.” (TLEMS14)

The core idea Proper communication and coordination is classified as Typical since 8 out of 15 conversational partners have articulated this answer.

### Driven by Goals and Aspirations

As shared by the CPs that being married early does not mean their schooling will stop. Education must continue for them to achieve their goals in life. For them, it does not mean that being married early, their dreams will die. The CP’s account is as follows:

“My goal in life is to finish my study so that my children will be proud of me someday. And I want to build our own house since we are still living with my in-laws. Although it is fine for them, being on our own is a bit different so we can decide on our own.” (TLEMS1)

“I want to have a safe delivery and have a healthy baby and I would like to finish my study so that when my child is big he has something he can be proud of me. That even if I am married early still I continue my study.” (TLEMS2)

“I would like to finish my study and have our own house. And if I will be given a chance I will proceed in college.” (TLEMS3)

“My dream is to finish my study, if I will be able to finish Grade 9, I would like to continue studying even if I will get pregnant and have a child. I would like also to graduate in my Arabic study.” (TLEMS4)

“I aim to finish my study with her and get out of poverty.” (TLEMS5)

“My goal is to graduate and be stable in life, and then I want to show people who bring me down that I was more stable than them.” (TLEMS6)

“I’d like to... finish grade 12 then be able to build our own house since we are still living with my parents. And I want to become a teacher.” (TLEMS7)

“I want to finish my study; that is why I need to do well for me to reach my dream to become a nurse. I wanted to build a house, but my husband said that I should finish first my study.” (TLEMS8)

“My dream in life is to... even if I have a child already, I will not stop studying because my wife and I wanted to graduate together. And I wanted to have a separate house from my parents since there were many of us. It is challenging because I have to buy viand for all of us. I cannot budget and save money.” (TLEMS9)

“My goal in life is to graduate, find a job, and have children.” (TLEMS10)

“Even if I’m pregnant, I hope that I can still finish my study so my child can be proud of us and that we can graduate until college.” (TLEMS11)

“I would like to finish my study and build my own house.” (TLEMS12)

“My goal is to graduate even though it is difficult; I will give my best so that I can get out of poverty and be able to build a house.” (TLEMS13)

“As a married student, I want to finish my study so that my husband would not have much difficulty in farming and I will be able to help with our expenses.” (TLEMS14)

“Even if I cannot graduate, I wanted to find a job to help them.” (TLEMS15)

The core idea driven by goals and aspirations is classified as General since 15 of 15 conversational partners have articulated this answer.

### Discussion

This section provides a discussion of the themes from the analyzed data. This phenomenological study aimed to explore the phenomenon of married students. It examined the themes, core ideas, and categorization of the lived experiences of married students.

At this point, qualitative research aims to describe a lived experience of the phenomenon, as defined by Kulkarni (2013). The evaluation of qualitative data and the methodologies used to analyze it must be distinct from more standard or quantitative research methods. The participants have described and narrated their

lived unique experiences, which will serve as the study's primary data. The study participants were 15 students from the secondary school of Alamada North District. The experiences they openly shared were organized into themes, with the core ideas derived from their responses to the questions they addressed.

### Cultural Practices

The first theme is *cultural practices* which refer to common perceptions of how people in a culture routinely behave. It is often viewed as the usual way of life. Thus, it affects the everyday life of a person. *Cultural practices* are one of the themes extracted as most conversational partners agreed that being married early is part of their culture.

*Arranged marriage* is a common practice of Muslims in which the parents or guardians are the ones that choose the life partner of their children whether their children like or know the chosen partner or not. Some of the CPs tried to run away from home and seek advice from their relatives, yet they ended up deciding to obey their parent's wishes. Moreover, though most of them felt uncertain about what will happen after their obedience, they followed their parents' decisions about whomever they would be married to. They did not have the chance to choose their life partner as their father was the one looking for a suitable future in-law. They were given time to decide whether they agreed or not and, ultimately, to follow their parents' decision. This means it is clear to them that they were not forced into the arrangement. However, in choosing their partner, they needed to have that kind of freedom.

The response of the CPs implies that they are somehow deprived of their rights to choose whom to marry or to live with as their married spouses. Based on their traditional cultural practices, arranged marriage is adamant wherein their parents are the ones to decide whom they would be marrying which may start at a very young age. This culture barely affects their decision-making as a student and, at the same time, their life when they are tied up at a certain young age, which leaves them with no choice.

The findings of this study supported the study of Jones (2010), where he posited that the parents, particularly the father, have control over the arrangement of marriage.

This means that in traditional Muslim culture, arranged marriage is existence since children value obedience to their parents. Traditionally, in the arrangement of marriage, the father is the one who has the foremost

authority to decide since he is responsible for looking for a suitable husband or daughter-in-law to be. Furthermore, Tahir (2021) emphasized in his study that though the marriage could be arranged, the consent of the child on whether she/he agrees or not matters in the decision-making.

*Teenage pregnancy* is why students got married because they got pregnant or they have impregnated their girlfriends. In this scenario, it was not known to the parents that they were having a relationship while studying and they ended up being pregnant. This resulted in both parents deciding on early marriage for them to ease the situation.

This means that CPs had to marry early to avoid conflict with each family and to avoid the scandalous situation their sons or daughters have committed. Though their children are not yet ready to build a family, getting married is the only solution most parents could do which pacifies the consequence of being pregnant early.

Based on the gathered data from the CPs, teenage pregnancy results from them dating without their parents' consent and running away from the responsibilities at home. CPs hide their relationship from their parents so that they can be free to choose who they will be dating, which has gone intimately and led to early pregnancy. Thus, the only resort of the parents to avoid humiliation is to let their son or daughter marry early.

The result is similar to the findings of Lai et al. (2018), which revealed that in order to avoid discrimination and shame of having a daughter who was impregnated out of wedlock, parents tend to marry the boyfriend of the unborn to legalize the relationship and safeguard the future of their daughter.

Additionally, the findings of this study strengthen the report of Cummins and Fonseca (2017) entitled "Teenage pregnancy and early marriage in Timor-Leste," which specified that one of the foremost causes of child marriages is childbearing. Given the conservative attitudes towards teenage relationships, there are pressures for young people and their families to hide the shame of teenage pregnancy by quietly 'fixing' it through marriage.

Dating secretly in Muslim is not allowed. Even talking to a certain boy who is not a relative is forbidden. One of the CPs revealed that her relatives caught her in the middle of the night dating and, as a result, early in the morning, her boyfriend was summoned to negotiate

about their actions. Thus, *addressing the moral issue* is one of the core ideas that leads to early marriage. As experienced by some CPs, they married to avoid unpleasant actions such as holding hands, having premarital sex, and being caught dating at unusual times. If a girl or a boy is seen talking to a nonrelative or touching each other, there is a tendency that they will be married to as long as it is desired by the parents to address the immoral issues committed by their son or daughter.

This implies that morality is a significant factor that has to be nurtured by every young individual, especially women in Muslims, given the fact that their traditions are likely concerned with gestures that may look entirely unpleasant in the eyes of many. Holding hands, cuddling, or kissing is said to be an action that is not supposed to be done out of wedlock; thus, it would be subjected to an arranged marriage by elders if young couples are seen doing so.

Since dating elicits an undesirable image for many Muslims, particularly older ones, physical contact in extramarital interactions is discouraged such as occasional hugs or kisses (Rashid, 2017).

Moreover, an article by the Muslims Women League (1999 as cited by Ghaffari, 2016) stated that unmarried couples are warned against spending time alone in remote locations where they could be more likely to act on their desires and thus be less restrained. Hence, this is prohibited in their religious regulations.

### Adjustment Period

The second theme of this study is the *Adjustment Period* that happens after a young couple has wedded. Adjusting to married life could be overwhelming for many newly married couples since marriage takes two individuals with different habits and values and puts all those differences under one roof to form a new life together.

Based on the interview, the CPs' combined experiences as a student, a parent, and a wife/husband made them adjust to things as newly married students, specifically regarding *financial difficulties*, *parental responsibilities*, *complying with academic requirements*, and *time management*. Thus, this result coincides with the findings of Sicam et al. (2021), where it was found that time management and financial difficulties are among the challenges faced by married students.

*Financial difficulty*, one of the significant adjustment

problems in marriage, is seen as the number one problem faced by CPs – as determined by them. They revealed that money is the number one need of married students so that they can provide for the needs of their own families. Most of the CPs confirmed that they had experienced financial difficulties in their marriage especially in providing the basic needs of the family and their school projects. Some CPs shared that they had lent money from their parents or friends and promised to pay it the soonest possible they could obtain money through work. Male CPs admitted that they are pressured to provide for their financial needs. One CPs acknowledged that he cried a lot when they had nothing to eat. If they could earn money, they have to budget it for their necessities and other priorities.

Consequently, it was revealed based on the interview that working and studying at the same time is hard for these young couples. Thus, marrying at the right age and at the right time is an important factor that needs to be considered by young ones since marrying at a very young age would undoubtedly lead to financial struggle due to a lack of knowledge and experience in budgeting. Looking into the situation of my CPs, they have to provide financially on matters and priorities that need attention such as their continued learning which they need sustainability which added to their other financial obligations at home. As a positive result, this gives them a realization of manifesting financial management early.

The claim was also confirmed by UNICEF (2014), which states that marriage may also put boys in an adult role for which they are unready and may put them under financial pressure. Accordingly, it is affirmed that husbands are more pressured to provide for their family's needs.

Additionally, financial problem or situation profoundly influences their adjustments to marriage. Their financial situation can threaten their marital adjustment in two crucial areas. First, conflict may develop if the wife expects her husband to share the workload. Second is the desire for material possessions (Kelly, LeBaron & Hill, 2018). This means that money matters significantly in married students' relationships since they need to sustain their education, family, and household needs.

In addition to financial difficulty, parenting is one of the challenges mentioned by CPs. *Parental responsibilities* are involved in the adjustment period among married students. Married students experience difficulty rearing their children especially when they have a health problem. They also experience hunger

when there is no food to eat. According to a female CP, the responsibility is more demanding because they are the ones to provide for their needs, and she finds it difficult to watch her children suffer from illness. Aside from being a lactating mother which eating nutritious food is necessary to provide milk and make the baby healthy, female CPs also experienced sleep deprivation just to attend to their babies' needs.

Thus, this finding supports Carrega's (2018) study that the differences in maternal-infant body clock patterns and the demands of nighttime infant caregiving responsibilities, mainly infant feeding, were destructive to normal sleep patterns.

As an additional finding, some CPs who have children rely on the support of their parents when they have something to do so they ask for assistance when their children are ill. They become parents who need to learn many things at a very young age, especially in terms of handling their own families. They become restless when their little ones get sick and do not know what to do that is when they will ask for their parents' help and presence. Another study that had the same result was the study of Watts, et al (2015), that the support of parents and guardians is present and contributes to feelings of acceptance and optimism. Therefore, in the young married couple's lives, the parents' presence in the adjustment period of these young couples matters most during their times of difficulty.

Moreover, another finding pointed out that married students faced an ultimate challenge in building their own life, significantly raising their children. It is quite a challenge for them to raise and take good care of their kids whenever they are sick. These resulted in poor parenting where parents of early age cannot provide the necessities for their children. This resulted in a lack of knowledge and experience in house chores which led to a more challenging situation for both young married couples.

Even though the vast majority loved their kids dearly, many felt overburdened by the immense duties of raising them. Young parents described feeling worried and unsure about their lives and their children's futures. However, despite these difficulties, young parents generally relished their roles as moms and fathers (Crivello & Mann, 2020).

Since married students are already building their own families, there are instances when *complying with school requirements* is a big deal. *Complying with academic requirements* is challenging for married

students since they also have families to prioritize and modular is the only learning platform the school provided during this pandemic. As a young couple, they have difficulty answering their module despite the presence of the internet which is oftentimes slow in connection in their area, so they mostly go to town just to do their research. Aside from answering their modules, they are also preoccupied with running the house and as well as taking care of their children. Due to slow internet connectivity and household obligations, they are late in submitting their output.

In this pandemic, where learning transpires at home, it can be said that this served as an advantage and a privilege, especially for married students, because they can now have the chance to continue their learning and at the same time take good care of their children. Yet, as they have experienced, it can be more difficult since they have to balance their priorities. At times, they failed to submit requirements because of the inability of the resources needed such as books and internet connection for research purposes. Additionally, they found it challenging to study while taking care of their kids and providing for their day to day living.

This was asserted in the study of Lasode and Awotedu (2014) that the present student life of marriage-related duties and roles increases the limits on students' extra time and energy, causing them to change the prioritization of goals and involvement.

Similarly, the study of Dangle and Sumaoang (2020) entitled "The Implementation of Modular Distance Learning in the Philippine Secondary Public Schools" has also highlighted that one of the biggest obstacles for students is a large number of activities, diversions, self-studying, poor internet connection, and time to answer all of the modules. This only reveals that as young newly wedded couples with loaded responsibilities, studying while building a family is indeed one of their greatest trying times.

Another significant adjustment for young couples is *time management*. Time management can be challenging for young married people, especially balancing studies and home responsibilities. Time is an element that must be adequately managed among married individuals, especially married students. Married students must divide their time between academics, children, household chores, and partners. Their time with these elements must not be neglected since it encompasses the real-time story of a family.

Difficulty in managing time is quite notable as being experienced by one of the CPs where difficulty in time

management has been experienced. Being married early would mean a more comprehensive view of obligations and responsibilities. You often have to multi-task to patch things up, such as doing house chores and answering modules.

Other CPs affirmed that they are having difficulty managing their time for their family and school. CPs revealed that sometimes they sacrificed their time for their studies just to attend to their children's needs and sometimes choose to take care of their family first over their studies. Difficulty in handling time was experienced by TLEMS 15, where the CPs emphasized that it is difficult to have children, especially if one of the children is studying too.

This result supports Mullings (2018) in her journal entitled "Marriage and Academia: Finding the Balance between Marriage, School and Life," which states that although marriage can be one of life's most personally satisfying events, students who get married tend to reduce educational performance, marriage duties can put a burden on time management and increase stress levels.

Therefore, in the adjustment period of young married couples, students are subject to stressors such as time management, social activities, sleep deprivation, and financial concerns, which can affect academic performance (Womble, 2010).

### Coping Mechanism

*Coping mechanisms* are approaches to which outside or inner pressure is managed, adapted to, or acted upon. CPs tried to cope with the different challenges they experienced. Some CPs admitted that they married at a young age and it was difficult for them to adjust to things that were new to them but they were able to cope with it with the help of their loved ones. Although they were already married, they were still assisted by their parents and stayed at their parents' house. As married students, they have many things to deal with, such as their role as a parent, as wives/husbands, and at the same time as a student. Out of the responses of the CPs *Support from loved ones*, *proper communication and coordination*, and *being driven by goals and aspirations* are the three core ideas shaped under the theme of *coping mechanisms*.

Since CPs revealed that they were still staying at their parents and/or in-laws' house, they have also affirmed that they were still assisted in terms of financial problems, taking care of their children, and decision-making. Therefore, unceasing *support from loved ones*

is felt by most CPs. This means that parents are still there to provide for the needs of their married children since they are still living with them, so some of the expenses are being shouldered by their parents, and the husband only gives money if it is harvest time or earns money from his living.

Though marrying early poses many challenges, it may be easy if everything is provided, especially in financial matters. Financial management is most likely be the problem of a young married couple who have the least experience in financial management, added to the fact that they could not earn and could not even seek any job vacancy because they are busy at home taking care of their kids and at the same time coping with their studies. Thus, their parents are the one who provides for and helps them in terms of running the house. They were assisted or guided by their parents in building their own families.

This core idea supports the article entitled "Arrange Marriage: Advantage and Disadvantage" by Shuani (n.d), where both parents undertake the entire responsibility of the marriage. In the case of arranged marriage, the in-laws look after the children well. They are appropriately cared for and receive much love and affection from their grandparents even when their parents are away. Furthermore, it is easier to get financial assistance at the time in need.

However, the assistance received from parents by young couples may negatively impact their financial independence. This result affirmed the study of Danziger and Ratner (2010), who posited that young people are taking longer to achieve financial independence since their parents are there to support them with their financial needs. Thus, as a young couple, financial independence may take much time for them to practice and live with it since they are too comfortable with their parents' assistance.

*Proper communication and coordination* are also seen as one of the solutions of the CPs whenever misunderstanding occurs. Misunderstanding can always be an issue for a married couple, especially when both are young in age and heart. So, this calls for an adjustment on both sides so they can be at peace; therefore, communication is one way to keep a healthy relationship.

It is indeed significant that communication must be a two-way process and vice versa: one should talk while listening. Through this, misunderstandings can be patched up and sustain a sound and healthy relationship. When misunderstanding occurs in their

relationship, the couple chooses to talk about the causes so that things will be okay, and avoid physical abuse, as claimed by CPs. One must understand if he or she is at the peak of anger. CPs have stayed silent whenever their husband or wife is angry at them and wait for them to calm down. One of them has to walk out and after that they are fine. This means CPs choose to talk whenever problems or quarrel occurs.

Marriage is not perfect, especially for a young couple who has to go through a lot of patience and understanding to maintain their relationship intact. It is not only the love that has to be nurtured but also embracing the negativities of each one and positively working for a healthier life together.

The findings of the study supported the study conducted by Arumugam et al. (2021), stating that interpersonal communication skills are crucial for forming a strong link between spouses. Interpersonal communication skills are effective, especially pair communication which serves as a tool for marital strategy planning for an intense couple-marital relationship. People spend much time communicating verbally with their partners because it helps them absorb the message better.

Since conflict is inevitable among couples when both cannot communicate their feelings and intentions well (Tavakolizadeh, Nejatian & Soori, 2016), having good communication skills would give marital satisfaction. Couples can enjoy being together more as long as their interpersonal communication exists, which prevents any possible misunderstanding the conflicts (Baghipour, 2010).

Based on the findings, most married students are *driven by goals and aspirations*. CPs tried hard to continue their schooling even though they were already married. A CP agreed with his husband that she will continue her study after their marriage. Her husband had supported her all the way. A CP had asserted that even if she had another child or she would get pregnant during her schooling, she would always choose to continue her study. She became more determined knowing that she had support and continued to be one of the rankings. This denotes that they wanted to continue their schooling even though they were married. Moreover, they still have goals and aspirations that they need to achieve for the betterment of their future so that their children will be proud of them.

This implies that marrying at an early age does not stop them from reaching their dreams and aspirations

in life. They may have experienced setbacks in life, yet they are still positive and look for possibilities, chances, and opportunities in which they think they can still be at their best. They are eager to continue what they have started by simply learning the basics of life at school. This and all are a manifestation that though instances challenged them, they embraced it and made it their stepping stone to do more, to prepare and work for more of life's challenging battles.

The citation by Clark (2014) claimed that married students had personality traits indicating higher academic and motivation levels. Due to their additional responsibilities, they spend more resources on academic accomplishment and personal welfare and less on social activity and institutional commitment.

The research finding is also supported by the results of Khattab (2015), who revealed that students with either high aspirations or high expectations have higher school achievement than those with both low aspirations and low expectations. Furthermore, adolescents' essential predictor of future educational behavior is total alignment between high ambitions, high expectations, and high achievement.

## Conclusion

The result of this study embodies the different aspects of married students as it affects the whole self of being married at an early age. Based on the results and generated themes from this study, the following are the functional implications:

Firstly, married students were married due to their parents' will because they thought they did it for the betterment of the future of their daughter and son. Though they said that they are happy in their married life, they can say that they are happy but at the same, challenges are inevitable. Secondly, the support and guidance of parents are still there even though they are building their own families. As expressed by CPs, they experience difficulty adjusting, particularly in the finances of their family's needs, taking care of their children, and doing their duties as students but the parent's support made them outlive the burdens of finances. This may negatively imply that it only creates another problem since they become an additional burden for their parents. Thirdly, in education, there is a likelihood for married students to neglect their studies since they have many responsibilities as wives/husbands/parent and a student at the same time which may result in low academic performance.

Most CPs have yet to hear or receive any comment or feedback from their friends, teachers, and relatives. They have revealed that it has become natural to them since it is part of their culture. Although they never heard any comments or feedback, married students who continued their schooling expressed decreased interest and social activities on campus. This implied that married students are less focused on socialization activities since they do not have time for any activities irrelevant to their lives as students and as married ones.

Married students realized that they must go with the flow and face whatever struggles they have to conquer in their everyday life as they are motivated to finish their studies. Despite the uncertainties, one thing they made sure of is that they will continue their education although it is manifested with continued absences from classes, they will still cope with it.

As a whole, the implication of early marriage to education contributes to the reason students are absent for a number of days which could end up in students dropping out or no longer continuing their studies. Some of them are pregnant, and some of them have to earn money for their living which may result in their low performance at school.

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