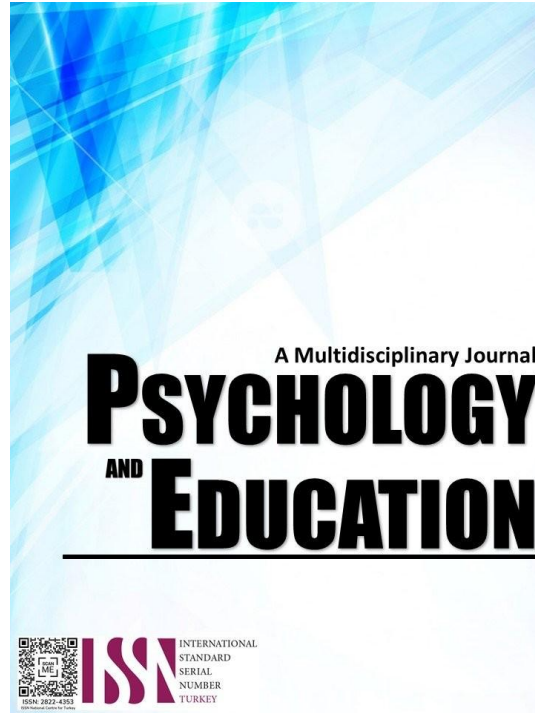


LIVED EXPERIENCES OF ADOLESCENTS LIVING WITH THEIR GRANDPARENTS



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Lived Experiences of Adolescents Living with their Grandparents

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Abstract

This study explored the lived experiences of adolescents raised by their grandparents, aiming to understand the emotional, psychological, and social implications of grandparental care. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), six junior high school students who had been under grandparental care since childhood were purposively selected as co-researchers. Through in-depth interviews, the study identified six key themes: Aspired by the Presence of Grandparents, Living Indulgent with Favor, Living with Gladness but Still Longing for Completeness, Choosing Silence, Finding Peace, Feeling the Weight of Challenges, and Surviving through Striving. These themes reflected both the supportive and restrictive aspects of being raised by grandparents—revealing experiences of love, stability, and security alongside emotional longing, pressure, and limited independence. Findings indicated that grandparental upbringing significantly shapes adolescents' emotional resilience, self-esteem, and self-efficacy. Positive caregiving fosters a sense of belonging and confidence, while overly permissive or traditional parenting styles can lead to self-doubt and internal conflict. The study's implications highlight the need for schools to provide targeted counseling and psychoeducational programs to support students in nontraditional family structures. Moreover, seminars promoting intergenerational understanding are recommended to strengthen communication between grandparents and adolescents. By bridging generational gaps and addressing emotional needs, institutions can promote healthier psychosocial development. Future research should include participants from varied socioeconomic backgrounds and compare adolescents raised by grandparents with those raised by biological parents to deepen insights into the diverse impacts of family structure on adolescent well-being.

Keywords: *grandparenting, lived experiences, adolescents, emotional well-being*

Introduction

Parenting plays a crucial role in Philippine society, where the family serves as the cornerstone of social life (Bartolome et al., 2017). The Child and Youth Welfare Code underscores that a child's well-being and holistic development depend on the moral guidance, care, and support provided by parents or guardians. According to the Global Parenting (2021) survey, many Filipino parents live within extended family structures that preserve traditions, uphold respect for elders, and assist in childcare. However, this arrangement can also bring challenges—42% of parents reported feeling pressured or influenced by relatives' opinions and advice. Moreover, due to persistent economic constraints, many parents continue working after childbirth to sustain their families, often experiencing guilt and anxiety over balancing work and parenting responsibilities (Nestle Parenting Initiative, n.d.).

In the Philippines, grandparents often play a vital role in child-rearing, stepping in as primary or secondary caregivers (Jumawan-Dadang, 2019). This practice reflects traditional family systems in which childcare responsibilities are shared across generations. While grandparenting can provide valuable emotional, practical, and cultural support, it can also become burdensome. Studies have shown that when caregiving demands intensify, grandparents may experience stress and fatigue, transforming a potentially rewarding experience into a source of strain (Jumawan-Dadang, 2019). This phenomenon is not unique to the Philippines; similar trends exist in the United States and Europe, where grandparenting serves as both a form of family support and a means for the elderly to maintain cognitive and social engagement.

Grandparenting has long been recognized as a significant cultural and social phenomenon in the Philippines (Smith, 2019). Across Asian countries, grandparents often assume caregiving roles due to circumstances such as parental separation, migration for work, or other family disruptions (Jun et al., 2013, as cited in Yuli et al., 2019). Adolescents in these situations frequently experience emotional and developmental challenges resulting from disrupted family structures. The University of the Philippines Population Institute (2022) reported that one in three Filipino children grows up without parental presence, with 7% primarily cared for by grandparents. This trend is most pronounced in Central Luzon, NCR, and CALABARZON, and is primarily attributed to parents working away from home (45%), marital separation (38%), and parental death (17%).

The absence of parents due to employment or migration has significant psychological and emotional consequences for children (Alcantara, 2019). While grandparents fill the caregiving void, their roles often extend beyond traditional expectations, taking on full parental responsibilities. Children raised in grandparent-headed households may face emotional, behavioral, and developmental challenges (Yunus, 2017). Nevertheless, grandparents also serve as important emotional anchors, offering love, security, and stability in the absence of parents (Xu & Harrison, 2023). They contribute significantly to their grandchildren's upbringing by providing financial, practical, and emotional support, thereby maintaining family cohesion across generations (Glaser et al., 2018).

Globally, grandparent caregiving is a growing phenomenon. In China, the rise of "left-behind children" has led many grandparents to assume full-time caregiving roles as parents migrate for work in urban areas (Liang, 2022). Similarly, in the United States, over 7

million grandparents lived with at least one grandchild under 18 in 2020, accounting for one in ten American children (Helpguide.org, n.d.; U.S. Census Bureau, 2020; Maguire, 2022). This global rise in grandparent-headed households highlights a shifting dynamic in family caregiving structures, underscoring the need to understand the implications for children's emotional and psychological well-being (Backhouse & Graham, 2013; Glaser et al., 2018).

Although living with grandparents provides emotional and financial benefits, it also presents challenges. Green (2020) noted that having grandparents at home enhances emotional support and financial stability, while also improving household cooperation and security. However, she also emphasized that multigenerational living can lead to tension, lack of privacy, and disciplinary inconsistencies, as grandparents tend to be more lenient with children. These complexities reveal that while intergenerational households offer stability, they also demand adaptability, mutual understanding, and clear boundaries among family members.

Despite the challenges faced by adolescents raised by grandparents, many still experience a sense of safety, unconditional love, and belonging. Grandparents foster emotional development by providing a nurturing, nonjudgmental environment where adolescents can express themselves freely, promoting resilience and self-worth (Motherhood Center, n.d.; Li et al., 2019). However, research on adolescents' lived experiences within grandparent-headed households remains limited and fragmented. The present study seeks to deepen the understanding of how adolescents construct their sense of self, cope with adversity, and build resilience within these unique family contexts. By expanding upon existing findings, this research aims to provide insights that can inform psychological support programs, family interventions, and community-based guidance for adolescents raised by grandparents.

Research Questions

The study aimed to explore the lived experiences of adolescents who are living with their grandparents. Specifically, it answered the following questions:

1. What is the profile of the participant?
2. What are the experiences of adolescents living with grandparents on how they were raised?
3. What are the impacts of grandparental upbringing on the emotional well-being of the participants in terms of:
 - 3.1. resilience;
 - 3.2. self-esteem; and
 - 3.3. self-efficacy?

Methodology

Research Design

This study employed a phenomenological approach, a qualitative research method designed to explore and understand participants' lived experiences. Phenomenology focuses on gathering personal narratives, stories, and descriptions to identify common themes and patterns within these experiences (McLeod, 2015). Specifically, this study utilized a phenomenological method to gain a deep understanding of adolescents' lived experiences while being raised by their grandparents, identifying shared meanings across their individual accounts. According to Edmonds and Kennedy (2013), phenomenology involves describing an individual's direct experience. Rooted in Edmund Husserl's philosophical stance, phenomenology asserts that the foundation of knowledge lies in the self's conscious experience—its perceptions and sensations derived from life events. The philosophical traditions of Husserl and Martin Heidegger underpin the foundations of phenomenological research, emphasizing the suspension of assumptions to uncover the essence of human experiences (Heotis, 2020). As Luna (2009, as cited in Casiño, 2018) explained, phenomenology emerged as a new way of philosophical inquiry, involving logical investigations that explore the "experience of thinking and knowing."

In qualitative research, the goal is to understand rather than generalize. Hence, non-probability sampling was deemed appropriate, as it allows for the selection of participants who can provide rich, relevant data (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000). The study employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique in which participants were intentionally chosen based on specific characteristics relevant to the study. The co-researchers were junior high school students (Grades 8–10) who had been raised by their grandparents during middle childhood, providing firsthand insight into the phenomenon under investigation.

Participants

The co-researchers in this study were adolescents who began living with their grandparents during middle childhood (ages 6–12), typically due to parental separation or parents working abroad. This developmental period is crucial, as it is marked by significant cognitive, social, and emotional growth, shaping the child's identity and interpersonal relationships. The participants were selected through purposive sampling, guided by clear inclusion criteria: (1) a junior high school student currently enrolled at CSTC, Inc. for the academic year 2024–2025, (2) living with grandparents since middle childhood, and (3) having a record of frequent counseling-related concerns, as observed by advisers and the guidance office. The study was conducted within the researcher's institution for confidentiality and accessibility. Six (6) co-researchers, from Grades 8 to 10, participated in the study, representing the target population of adolescents raised by grandparents within the selected locale.

Instrument

The primary data collection tool was the individual semi-structured interview, designed to capture in-depth and personal accounts of the co-researchers' experiences. The interview guide included open-ended questions and sub-questions that encouraged participants to express their thoughts freely, allowing flexibility for follow-up inquiries that emerged naturally during the conversation. This unstructured flow enabled participants to reflect on and describe their experiences in their own words, fostering a conversational and introspective atmosphere.

To ensure the validity and reliability of the interview guide, the instrument underwent expert validation by a panel comprising a psychologist, a registered guidance counselor, and a grammar specialist. The experts evaluated the clarity, relevance, and appropriateness of each question, providing feedback to refine the instrument for accuracy and content validity.

Each interview lasted approximately 30 minutes to 1 hour, during which the researcher encouraged participants to narrate their experiences openly. With the co-researchers' full consent, interviews were audio-recorded and supplemented with field notes to capture both verbal and non-verbal expressions. Following the sessions, participants were informed about a follow-up meeting to review and validate the researcher's interpretation of their experiences, ensuring that the findings accurately reflected their perspectives. As suggested by Streubert and Carpenter (2012), spot-checking and transcript verification were employed to ensure data accuracy and completeness.

Procedure

The data collection process followed several structured steps to ensure ethical and methodological rigor. First, the researcher sought permission from the school principal to profile students from Grades 7 to 10 who were living with their grandparents during the academic year 2024–2025. From this profile, the researcher identified students exhibiting patterns of behavioral or emotional concerns recorded by the guidance office. The selected students were then invited to participate in Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) interviews, which encouraged them to share their lived experiences in their own terms.

Second, the researcher prepared informed assent forms for the co-researchers and informed consent forms for their grandparents, explaining the study's purpose, scope, procedures, and confidentiality measures. Given that participants were minors, their guardians determined the appropriate time and place for the interviews. Third, upon securing consent, face-to-face semi-structured interviews were conducted in a comfortable and private setting, lasting 30 to 60 minutes. The researcher introduced the study's objectives, obtained verbal permission to record, and facilitated open-ended discussions. Finally, the researcher ensured that all collected data were stored securely and used solely for research purposes, maintaining strict confidentiality and anonymity throughout the process.

Data Analysis

The study employed Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as its data analysis method. This approach enabled a detailed exploration of participants' narratives to identify shared meanings and themes related to their lived experiences. Following the steps outlined by Smith et al. (2012), the researcher first transcribed the interviews verbatim and engaged in repeated reading to achieve familiarity with the data. A manual color-coding process was then used to organize and categorize meaningful statements, allowing descriptive themes to emerge from participants' accounts (Sullivan & Forrester, 2019). The process was iterative and inductive, involving constant comparison between transcripts and emerging themes to uncover underlying patterns and interpretations. In line with Nowell et al. (2017), thematic analysis supported this process by identifying recurring concepts and relationships that reflected the essence of adolescents' experiences with grandparental upbringing.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical integrity was maintained throughout all stages of the research process. The researcher adhered to the ethical principles of respect, beneficence, and confidentiality as outlined by Creswell et al. (2018). Informed consent from grandparents and assent from adolescents were obtained after a comprehensive briefing that explained the study's objectives, procedures, benefits, risks, and the voluntary nature of participation, including the right to withdraw at any time. The information was presented in age-appropriate language to ensure comprehension. Regular check-ins were conducted during the study to reaffirm participants' comfort and understanding. All data—recordings, transcripts, and notes—were treated with utmost confidentiality and were used solely for academic purposes. The researcher also ensured that the research process fostered sensitivity, respect, and trust between the participants and the investigator, upholding the highest ethical standards in qualitative inquiry.

Results and Discussion

This section presents the themes aligned with the phenomenon deduced from the research, which are: 1) the profile of the co-researchers; 2) the experiences of adolescents living with grandparents on how they were raised; 3) the impact of the challenges on the well-being of the adolescents, and 4) the psychoeducational programs. This part also tackles the subordinate themes, which were drawn based on stories of the co-researchers guided by the prepared prompt questions. In addition, the researcher chose to pursue this study because, like these adolescents, she also lived with her grandparents when she was her age. Now that she understands the challenges they are facing, the researcher believes she can better relate to their experiences, which motivated her to push forward with this research.

My Own Story – My Path to Becoming a School Counselor

Becoming a school counselor has been a journey shaped by my experiences and a deep desire to support students in their times of need. My path wasn't always clear, but each step I took led me closer to this fulfilling profession. One of the most important influences on my journey was my own experience as a teenager when my mother left for abroad to work, leaving me and my siblings in the care of our grandparents. This situation created challenges that shaped my understanding of resilience, and it ignited a passion within me to help others who may be facing similar struggles. Through various encounters and challenges, I discovered the importance of listening and guiding young minds as they navigate the difficulties of school life and personal issues.

I vividly remember in my high school days, that living with my grandparents was not easy. I faced many adjustments and struggles, and my relationship with them was challenging at times. During my high school years, I dreamed of becoming a teacher. I plan myself inspire young minds, share knowledge, and make a positive impact in the classroom. However, as life often goes, situations take a different turn.

Then, I built my own family, and having three kids with different personalities proved to me that being a mother was hard I couldn't imagine. For a long time, I embraced my role as a simple housewife, pouring my energy into raising my children and creating a loving home. I cherished the moments spent with them, watching them grow and develop their personalities. However, as I observed their growth, a sense of desire began to stir within me. I realized that while I was dedicated to nurturing my family, I also needed to dream for myself.

Seeing my children flourish inspired me to reflect on my own goals. I had always sheltered a passion for learning, but life had taken me on a different path. I wanted to set an example for my kids, showing them that it's never too late to pursue your dreams. It was this realization that reignited my desire to continue my education.

Moreover, as I determined to shape a new path for myself, I enrolled in a psychology program. Diving into my studies opened up a world of knowledge and understanding that I had yearned for. I found myself fascinated by the difficulties of the human mind and the factors that influence behavior. The more I learned, the more I recognized the value of mental health and emotional well-being, not only for myself but also for my family.

Furthermore, balancing my studies with motherhood was challenging, but my newfound passion fueled me. I set aside time for my assignments, often studying late into the night while my children slept. There were moments of doubt and fatigue, but the thought of achieving my goals and inspiring my kids kept me motivated.

As I progressed in my studies, I began to see the connections between psychology and my own life experiences. My past struggles and the challenges I faced living with my grandparents started to make sense. I realized that these experiences had equipped me with the empathy and resilience needed to understand others' struggles, particularly children and adolescents.

After I graduated, I was privileged to get a position here at the institution. Even though I was a newly graduated, the owner of the school trusted me to be the guidance counselor for junior high school. I remember when he gave me this position because I am a mother and I have a lot of experience raising a child. Even though I am a newbie in the field, I can use that to help other children who are experiencing struggles.

In my first year in the academe, I must say I struggled with understanding my job description. Students with problems, including young ones who would fight, came to the guidance office. At that time, I didn't know how the students would perceive me—whether they would be scared of me or they would realize that I was ready to listen to them. However, I also had to impose sanctions for the offenses they committed.

Along the way, as I encountered these challenges, I began to realize that my knowledge was not enough to address all the issues the children faced. This realization encouraged me to decide to pursue a master's degree in guidance and counseling. I recognized that promoting my education would equip me with the skills and understanding necessary to support my students better, as there was still so much more to learn.

Throughout my time as a guidance counselor and at the same time as a master's student, I have encountered numerous students facing various challenges. When our principal assigned us an action research project, the behavior of children immediately came to mind as a significant area of study. Over my three years in this role, I observed that some students repeatedly returned to my office, and I noticed a common thread among them—mostly, they all lived with their grandparents. This observation sparked my interest in pursuing a study to explore the impact of growing up in a grandparent-led household. I wanted to ensure they felt heard and understood, just as I had longed for during my childhood.

Table 1 summarizes the relevant facts about the co-researchers of this study. All of them are adolescents aged 13 to 18 years and are currently enrolled as junior high school students. As seen in the table, among the six co-researchers, three have been staying with their grandparents since birth. One began staying with them at the age of three, the other one stayed when she was two years old, and another one started living when he was nine years old. This indicates that most of the co-researchers have experienced long-term grandparental care. The adolescent stage, marked by their transition from childhood to adulthood, brings about significant changes in how they relate

to the world.

Co-Researcher's Profile

Table 1. *Adolescent's Profile*

Co-Researchers	Description			
	Age	Gender	Grade Level	Years of Living With Grandparents
Co-Researcher 1	14	Female	Grade 8	Since birth
Co-Researcher 2	14	Female	Grade 8	11 years
Co-Researcher 3	15	Female	Grade 9	13 years
Co-Researcher 4	16	Male	Grade 9	Since birth
Co-Researcher 5	16	Female	Grade 10	Since birth
Co-Researcher 6	16	Male	Grade 10	7 years

According to the University of the Philippines Population Institute (2022), childhood and adolescence are critical stages of development that involve close parental support and guidance. As presented, a third of today's Filipino youth, however, have had to navigate the challenges of growing up without the existence of both biological parents. The result of the study (Results of the 2021 Young Adult Fertility and Sexuality Study (YAFSS) other people, mainly their grandparents, raised 7% of the youth. In connection, as stated by James Windell at the Michigan Psychological Association (MPA), 2024, children being brought up by grandmother and granddad are much more likely to have experienced traumatic events that will influence their development, according to the report published online in the journal *Pediatrics*. On the other hand, Adesman, in the same article, said that grandparents who step in and care for their grandchildren are doing fantastic work. They assume these responsibilities when the need arises, and they should all be commended, given the challenges they have.

Thematic Reflection

The diagram illustrates the lived experiences of six co-researchers raised by their grandparents, each with a distinct life theme. The themes presented in Figure 1 were derived from the interview conducted. The themes identified in this study were derived from clustered codes, which emerged through the process of deductive interpretation of data collected from unstructured interviews. Due to the unstructured nature of the interview, slight variations in interpretation may occur as the conversation progresses. Follow-up questions were incorporated naturally to delve deeper into participants' responses, allowing for a more comprehensive understanding of their perspectives. Each co-researcher represents their life themes as follows: Co-Researcher 1 finds emotional support and care from grandparents, which eases the fear of judgment. Co-Researcher 2 feels secure and nurtured through grandparental care and support. Co-Researcher 3 experiences joy and stability but longs for parental presence. Co-Researcher 4 seeks peace through silence, coping with misunderstandings and isolation despite grandparents' support. Co-Researcher 5 feels the weight of challenges, with grandparents sometimes being a source of distress, compounded by peer issues. Lastly, Co-Researcher 6 strives for independence, using grandparental guidance and challenges as motivation to succeed.

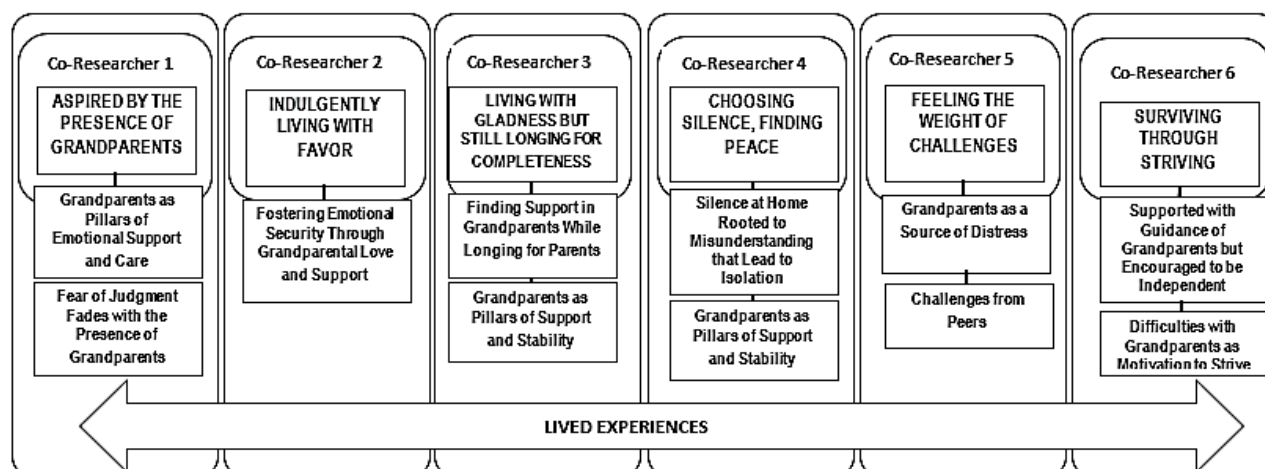


Figure 1. *Co-researcher Themes*

However, in order to further understand the phenomenon under study, constant communication with the parents or guardians was conducted before the actual interview was conducted. The face-to-face interview was done through the approval and permission of the co-researchers' guardians, and the researcher made sure to allot time on the given schedule during their free time. It is the most convenient way to note verbal and nonverbal cues that may add or alter the full understanding of the co-researcher's answers.

To follow the IPA research design employed in the study, the researcher individually presented questions to the co-researcher. The

answers were translated into the English language and placed in brackets for easy understanding. Additionally, modifications to the answers and follow-up questions were made based on the interview flow, such as connecting previous answers with new ones and jumping between questions, to link and identify patterns of themes from the co-researchers' responses. Furthermore, the emphasis on the deduced themes for the research phenomena was also visible in each presentation. This was done to fully extract the theme of the Lived Experiences of Adolescents Living with their Grandparents.

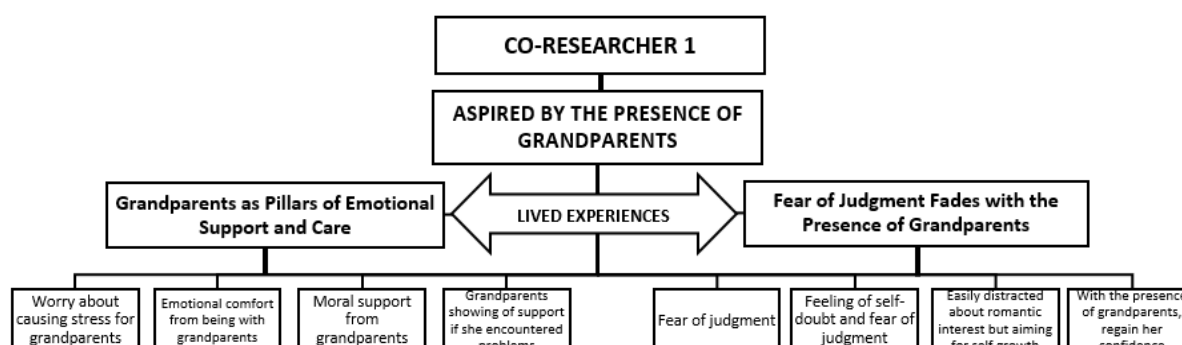


Figure 2. Co-Researcher 1 Lived Experiences – “Aspired by the Presence of Grandparents”

Figure 2 illustrates co-researcher 1's lived experiences, highlighting the theme "Aspired by the Presence of Grandparents," reflecting the support and guidance she received from her grandparents despite her struggles with self-trust and confidence. This theme was derived from the co-researcher's consistent emphasis on the vital role her grandparents played in her life. Maguire (2022) emphasized in her study that children raised in a grandparenting family structure developed some sense of resiliency, which encouraged them to succeed in their lives even after knowing that they are living in a different family structure. In addition, by understanding such family dynamics, co-researchers can break unhealthy cycles and develop better relationships for themselves and future generations (Quirk, 2023). However, the following emergent themes, based on the clustering of codes, illustrate how the researcher arrived at these overarching themes.

Emergent Theme 1: Grandparents as Pillars of Emotional Support and Care

Emergent theme 1 highlights how the grandparents of co-researcher one serve as a constant source of emotional support and care. The theme was inferred based on how the co-researcher reiterated the support and guidance of her grandparents despite the absence of trust and confidence in herself.

Demographically speaking, co-researcher 1 is a 13-year-old female, a grade 8 student living with her grandparents since birth. During the face-to-face interview, the co-researcher was led to a separate room to ensure the confidentiality of the interview since the researcher assured the parents or guardians that the gathered data from the interview were taken on its utmost confidentiality.

During the conversation, the researcher told the co-researcher a brief introduction “*Ok anak, tulad noong ipinagpaalam ko sa iyong parents, lolo at lola, isa ka sa napili kong participants base sa kraytirya na ikaw ay nakatira sa iyong lolo at lola at may na-raised na concerns sa guidance office at POD.*” Then, the conduct of the interview preceded. Mogeni (2024) Once said that one of the challenges you may face is finding and recruiting enough participants who meet your criteria and are willing to share their opinions and experiences. In connection, the researcher started with a clear introduction and purpose to make it more comfortable for the co-researchers when sharing their experiences.

Upon securing the environment and willingness of the co-researcher, the researcher started asking questions referring to the purpose of the present research. It was started by asking something about the co-researcher and her family.

“Okay lang naman po ako. Ang pinagkakaabalahan ko po ay dito po sa school, tsaka.. dito lang po sa school gawa ng gusto ko po makasali sa with honor. Ahh..Apat po kami magkakapatid. Okay naman po yung pamilya namin.”

[“I'm doing fine. I've been busy with school, mainly because I want to be part of the honors list. There are four of us siblings, and our family is doing well.”]

After that, we proceeded to the interview, wherein the co-researcher happily shared her experiences living with her grandparents.

“Napakasaya po..parang..parang kasama ko lang po yung mommy ko at tsaka yung daddy ko tsaka po nagpapa..naano po.. parang..ang ganda po sa pakiramdam na kasama ko ung lolo at lola ko po na may gumagabay pa po sa amin.”

[I feel so happy... it's like I'm with my mom and dad. And it feels... it feels so good knowing that my grandparents are with us, guiding us along the way]

With her response, it shows that she is emotionally connected with her grandparents despite the absence of her parents. However, aside from good experiences living with them, she then stated how she struggles at school and also faces difficulty in establishing good

relationships with peers, which resulted in misunderstandings between her and her grandparents.

“Halimbawa po gawa ng dito s school may nakakaaway po ako minsan ayun po..parang ang nagagawa ko na lang po ay maibaling sa bahay.. tapos bigla po ako sesermonan yun po..ayun nasasagot ko po siya.”

[Sometimes, I have fights at school, and I bring that stress home. Then my grandparents talk to me about it, and I try to answer them back.]

Because of that, her grandparents are imposing discipline, especially during the time that her behavior went negatively. But despite this, she also mentioned that the love and guidance from them remain.

“Siya po ‘ung laging ano..laging andyan para sa akin para ‘pag may problema ako, kahit ano po,kahit.. ‘pag ako mali..tinatama niya po ako..at tsaka ‘ung pagmamahal ng aking nanay (lola) ay naibibigay naman po...”

[They are always there for me when I have problems, and even if I make mistakes, they help me fix them. I also feel my grandmother's love for me]

To support how adolescents deal with peers, Quanman and Zhen (2024) stated that positive grandparenting is strongly linked to the positive behavior of adolescents. They easily adapt and adjust to the challenges they encounter. Additionally, supportive grandparents have a positive effect on how adolescents form good peer relationships.

In the situation of co-researcher 1, the absence of her parents due to their work can cause her to feel alone; it is important that the grandparents are present to provide support and guidance. Additionally, despite struggling to overcome these difficulties, her grandmother insisted on helping her manage feelings of doubt and fear. Consistently, her grandmother reminds her that doing her best is enough. Whenever she struggles with her confidence, she finds strength in recalling her grandmother's reassuring words.

“Sinasabi po sa akin lagi ng lola ko basta ginawa mo lagi ang best po..okay na po ‘yun..okay na daw po ‘yun. Na kaya ko pong gawin ‘to, kung kaya ng iba dapat..kung kaya ng iba ay kaya ko rin kasi.. kasi parehas lang kaming tao. sadyang..wala lang daw po akong tiwala sa sarili ko kaya ‘di ko makita ‘ung talent ko.”

[“My grandmother always says that doing my best is enough. She tells me that if others can do it, I can too. She says I just don’t believe in myself, so I can’t see my own talent.”]

This affirmation from her grandmother gives her strength and motivation to believe in herself. According to Suharli and Sriati (2023), making positive affirmations can shape an individual's self-understanding and ability to interact with the social environment, fostering self-love, increasing self-confidence, and helping one view oneself more positively. In accordance with research conducted by Zebua et al. (2022), which explains that positive affirmation can help someone appreciate themselves more, perceive the world as a protected and satisfying place, reduce fear, and view themselves as better or more positive, it is important to consider its impact. Moreover, in the latter part, co-researcher 1 describes that during moments of emotional pain, such as when she feels lonely or overwhelmed, she finds relief in the company of her grandparents. Their role is not only being a guardian; instead they serve as pillars of emotional support, especially during challenging times. She mentioned,

“Sobra pong nakakatulong sila kasi...napapagaan po ung loob ko...ung nacocomfort po nila ako sa mga problema ko.” kaya tuwing andon po ung lola ko ayun po parang gumagaan po ung pakiramdam ko...”

[“They really help me a lot because it lightens my heart, and they comfort me with my problems.”]

As stated by Clark (2020) in the American International Journal of Social Science Research, family factors can be effective in the development of self-confidence among students. In connection, he found that students who live away from their parents, whether for a short or long period, or whose parents do not show much interest in them, often lack self-confidence.

That is why, due to the current situation and some responsibilities as a student, her doubt about herself exists. However, as she always said, the good thing is that, with the presence and support of her “Lola,” her resiliency and self-efficacy got boosted. Along with this, her grandparent gives her comfort and the opportunity to regain her self-esteem.

Overall, the experiences of Co-researcher 1 clearly show how her grandparents serve as pillars of emotional support and care in her life. They provide not only the physical care necessary for her well-being but also the emotional support that helps her surpass those mentioned difficulties.

However, their support strengthens her ways of coping and courage to believe in what she can do and allows her to cope with the challenges that come with living away from her parents. Through their constant presence, love, and encouragement, her grandparents serve as her strength to gain her emotional growth and self-confidence.

Emergent Theme 2: Fear of Judgment Fades with the Presence of Grandparents

This theme highlights how the supportive presence of the grandparents of co-researcher 1 helps lessen the fear of judgment, allowing regain confidence and trust in herself. Through the involvement of her grandparents, she feels that she is worthy of what she is doing.

As she mentioned, if she has to perform at school, she can't manage herself.

“yung pagspeech po sa unahan na maraming tao, yun po.. ngsishake po ung voice ko, Tas..nanginginig po ako..yun po..tas makikita ko na lang po sila(lolo at lola) na sinasabi na..na kaya mo yan..wag mong isipin ung sasabihin nila, ang mahalaga ay nakapagperform ka at naibahagi mo sa kanila ang gusto mong sabihin.”

With what she mentioned, that is her common problem that she notices about herself, she always thinks of what will other might say, also she was easily distracted when it comes to romantic interest. She stated, *“ung nadidistract po s pag aaral tpos pag ngkaron po ng boypren ay papabaya na ung pag aaral..kaya gusto ko pong magbago ng sarili ko un gung sa pag aaral ko na po ibubunton ung time ko”, but she was aiming to change and instill self-growth.”*

However, co-researcher 1 admitted that she always feels she cannot trust herself; instead, she wants her grandparents to be with her.

She added,

“Minsan po..hindi po ako naniniwala na may talent ako..kasi parang feeling ko po lahat ng ginagawa ko ay di..lahat ng ginagawa ng iba ay diko kaya..tapos tuwing gagawin ko na ung ginagawa ng iba ay kinakabahan na ako..kung ano-ano pumapasok sa isip ko..kaya tuwing andon po ung lola ko ayun po parang gumagaan po ung pakiramdam ko..parang..iniisip ko po ung sinabi nia saken un po..”

“Lahat ng tao may talent..sadyang..sadyang..wala lang daw po akong tiwala sa sarili ko kya diko makita ung talent ko...”

Because of doubt and fear of expressing her abilities, she continually shared that having a grandparent around her is a blessing. From the times that she did not believe that she could make something that her relatives were proud of up to the time that she was dreaming of making something different, her source of strength is the support and love of her grandparents. The study of Adcox (2024) confirms that grandparents who build strong emotional bonds early on in their grandchildren's lives will find that those bonds last for quite a period of time as the grandchild matures. She added, “Strong emotional bonds usually survive the passage of time and the many changes that both generations go through.”

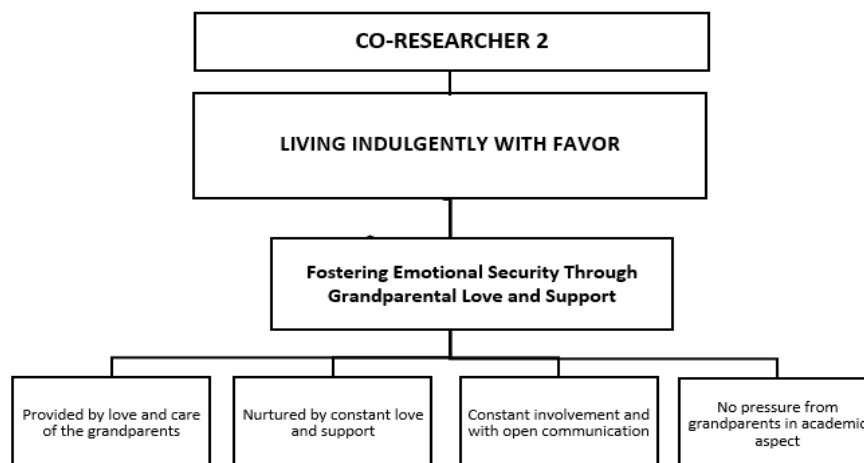


Figure 3. Co-researcher 2 Lived Experiences: “Living Indulgently with Favor”

Figure 3 illustrates co-researcher 2's lived experiences, labeled the theme "Living Indulgently with Favor," emphasizing how she has been lucky to receive continuous support and guidance from her grandparents. In every aspect of her life, from her education to personal growth, her grandparents have provided a nurturing and encouraging environment. This theme arises based on the clustering of codes from the gathered data on the interview.

Emerging Theme- “Fostering Emotional Security Through Grandparental Love and Support”

The term “security” was used by the researcher to show how Co-researcher 2 perceived her life living with their grandparents. As she started sharing about her situation and experiences, it seemed that she was excited to talk about it. Meanwhile, the emerging theme is evident in how she embraces a life of ease. To give more details about this theme, the following textual information describes her challenges and experiences.

Demographically, Co-researcher 2 is a female who is currently in her 8th grade. She was fourteen years old and declared living with her grandparents since she was three years old. Co-researcher 2 seems to be the only participant who has a favorable situation living with their grandparents, among others. At the beginning of the interview, she reveals how she feels about her family, especially living with her grandparents.

“Opo masaya naman po..masaya naman po kami magkakasama, lagi po ako nageenjoy kasama sila...inaalagaan po nila ako.”

[Yes, it's happy... we're happy together, and I always enjoy being with them... they take care of me].

She added:

“Kada umaga po ginigising po nila ako ni lolo ay ni lola po tapos pagkapunta ko po sa lamesa ay may pagkain na po nakahanda doon sabihin na lang po na kakain na ako tapos pinag iinit po ako ng tubig ganon tapos yun na po pagtapos ko po magbihis ano po mapaalala po sakin yung mga gamit ko tulad po ng id ganun po tapos ano po yun binibigyan po akong pamasahé tapos aalis na po ako papuntang school”.

It describes how her grandparents show their love and care through their daily actions. For some grandchildren, grandparents consistently serve as a source of emotional support when they have not received this support from their parents since birth (Xu & Harrison, 2023). With Co-researcher 2, it seems that she is very dependent on her grandparents.

In addition, she also shared the supportive environment created by her grandparents. No pressure with academics and also cared in times of sickness. *“Ahh masaya po yung environment na pinalaki po nila kung lagi po nilang tinatanong ako kamusta ako ganun po.. kamusta yung school inaalala po lagi ako tsaka yung mga ano po kaya pag may sakit po ako ganyan inaalala po ako lagi...sabi lang po nila ay kung sa kung ano okay lang po na hindi maging honors basta pasado daw po tsaka natututo ang mahalaga daw po ay okay po ako”*

The study by Chen et al. (2022) said that if children live in a responsive environment where they feel accepted and encouraged, they will feel emotionally safe and free to express themselves because they are confident that their emotional needs will be met.

To connect with the present study, it is clear that Co-researcher 2's life with her grandparents was filled with constant support, care, and understanding. She felt valued and loved in the presence of her grandparents, especially her grandmother. As a result, she grew up with a sense of happiness and contentment, shaped by the firm foundation of love and guidance that her grandparents provided for her.

Figure 4 shows Co-researcher 3's life theme as “Living with Gladness but Still Longing for Completeness.” This reflects her heartfelt story of joy and gratitude while living with her grandparents, yet she carries a deep longing for the presence of her parents to feel truly complete. Despite this, the support and care provided by the grandparents have become a strong foundation in her life. Emergent themes such as finding support in grandparents while longing for parents and grandparents as pillars of support and stability highlight her journey of balancing love and longing, showcasing the vital role grandparents play in providing both emotional and financial support. These are based on the clustered codes arising from the statements of the co-researcher 3.

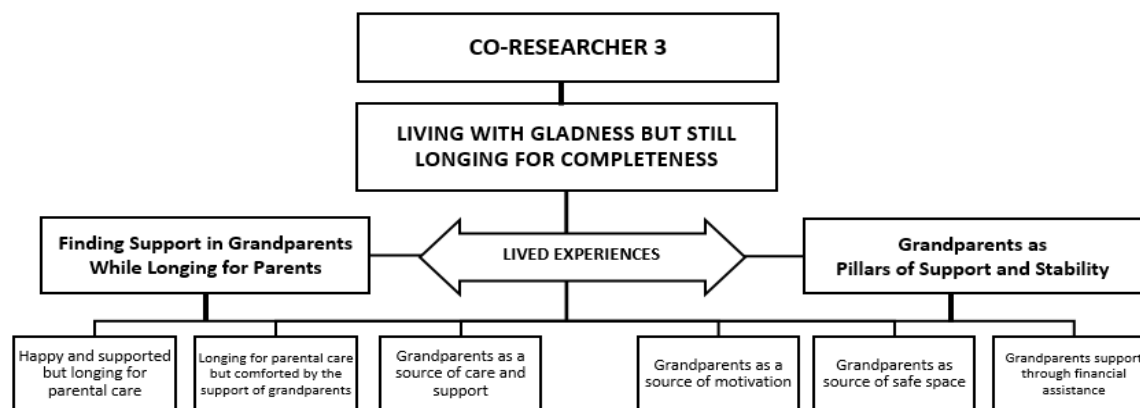


Figure 4. Co-Researcher 3 Lived Experiences: “Living with Gladness but Still Longing for Completeness”

Emergent Theme 1: “Finding Support in Grandparents While Longing for Parents”

Emergent theme 1, labeled as “finding support in grandparents while longing for parents,” captures the mixed emotions of being lovingly raised by grandparents while longing for the presence of parents. Co-researcher 3 illustrates these feelings, expressing gratitude for her grandparents' care and guidance. She is a 15-year-old female and has been living with her grandparents since she was two years old. I am currently enrolled in grade nine junior high school. As a granddaughter, she described feeling happy living with her grandparents but still longing to be with her parents.

During the conversation, I asked her first how her life living with her grandparents, and she answered,

“Maayos naman po pagpapalaki nila sakín, ano, nalungkot lang po talaga ako dahil sa parents ko. Wala pong issue sa lola at lolo ko. Mag-aral lang daw po ng mabuti para mapabuti po ako.”

[They raised me well... I'm just really sad about my parents... there are no issues with my grandparents. They always tell me to study well so that I can have a better future.]

This shows that while she receives a good upbringing with her grandparents, she still feels the absence of her parents. In the study of

Hogene and Daling (2023), when parental absence is recurring and frequent, it can operate as a chronic stressor in adolescents. In connection, she also describes feeling sad every time she recalls how she ended up being away from her parents.

Despite her longing for her parents, she gave a glimpse of a smile when she talked about her grandparents. It is because of the guidance and support she received from them.

She stated:

[“nung nag try po akong ano tumira sa lolo at lola ko mas na feel ko po dun na ano.. mas maayos po dun yung ano.. yung life ko po dun.”]

[When I tried living with my grandparents, I felt that life there was better and more stable.]

As stated by Dinero et al. (2018), establishing close interpersonal relationships is an important task in adolescence, and maintaining stable close relationships during this stage of life has been found to influence psychological health in later life stages. In the situation of co-researcher 3, it is important that during the parental absence due to their work, the grandparents were present to support, guide, and provide.

As we continued our conversation, I asked her how her grandparents help in terms of overcoming challenges, especially at school, and she confidently answered, *“Dahil sila din naman po ang nag motivate sa akin na ganito... ganun... ang gawin mo, dapat ganito ka”*.

In relation to this, she even discussed how she managed her emotional well-being while living with her grandparents.

“Halos don po ako nag aano..nagpapakita kay lolo'lola.. halimbawa tampo ako halos ilang days hindi na po ako naimik sa kanila.. ganun po pero naayos naman po namin...”

[I mostly show that to my grandparents... for example, when I'm upset, I barely talk to them for a few days... but we eventually work things out.]

This shows that her grandparents' parenting style is adequate to provide her with the care and support she needs. Moreover, she also emphasized the difficulties she encountered as a teenager while her parents were not with her. Emotionally, she is longing with them, but sadly, as she mentioned, both of her parents have their own families, too, and they are the ones that contributed to her problems. So, she had no choice but to stay with her grandparents.

And she stated:

“Mostly po puro kay mama at kay papa po ang dahilan ng problema ko...”

[Most of my problems are mainly because of my mom and dad]

Another similar challenge was mentioned by the co-researcher 3, but having her grandparents by her side makes her feel existed,

“syempre po si lola po ang nagbibigay kapag walang baon ..tapos siya na rin po bumili ng gamit ko nun” as she explained.

[Of course, my grandmother was the one who gave me money when I had none, and she also bought my school supplies back then]

Afterward, as we went back to the prompt question, I requested her to describe herself and share with me if she was satisfied with who she was right now. Unexpectedly, she mentioned again,

“Hmm.... nararamdaman ko po is may pagka ano po... may pagkainggit na masaya rin po kasama sila lolo at lola”

[She feels a sense of jealousy when she sees other kids with their moms and dads.] Although she longs to be with her parents, as long as her grandparents are there, she'll be fine. To support this, Attar-Schwartz & Khoury-Kassabri (2016) stated the higher the involvement of grandparents, the fewer emotional problems and the more pro-social behavior of the children, which seems to suggest that grandparents, as an alternative resource to parents, can play a supportive role to some extent. In connection to the present study, despite the absence of co-researcher 3's parents, the involvement of grandparents provides comfort and assurance.

Emergent Theme 2: “Grandparents as Pillars of Support and Stability”

Emergent theme 2 highlights how the grandparents of co-researcher 3 act as her primary source of emotional support and stability in the absence of her parents. This theme emerged during the interview when the co-researcher expressed that her grandparents not only provided a safe and nurturing environment but also served as her main source of guidance and encouragement. She described them as individuals who consistently motivated her and instilled values that shaped her actions and decisions. She stated:

“Opo, nakakatulong po dahil sila din naman po ang nag-motivate sa akin na ganito, ganyan, ang gawin mo dapat, ganito ka.”

According to the study by Armstrong (2022), it conforms that safe environments and nurturing relationships are protective factors that promote resiliency and positive child outcomes even following adversity. Moreover, in the present study, co-researcher 3 describes that her grandparents' guidance has not only motivated her to make positive choices but also created a sense of security and purpose.

As we continued, she described how she deals with challenges involving her parents, but despite that, she finds relief and support in her grandparents, who serve as her confidants and sources of guidance.

“Opo nakakausap ko po sila.. lalo na si lola dahil po pag yun po talaga paminsan halimbawa po na may problema po kami ni papa.. siya.. siya po ang natulong sa akin”

[Yes, I talk to them... especially to my grandmother because, for example, when my dad and I have problems, she is the one who helps me].

At the end of the conversation, she added that her grandparents' role extends beyond emotional support. They also provide financial assistance when needed.

“Um.. nung ano nga po nung dati pong super ano pa kami (financially drain) syempre po walang baon di yun po nag tinulungan niya(lola) po ako dun na ano umambag po siya kay papa dun sa tuition ko tapos siya na rin po bumili ng gamit ko nun”.

[Um... back when we were really struggling financially, of course, I had no allowance. My grandma helped by contributing to my dad for my tuition, and she also bought my school supplies back then.]

In connection, Michalski and Shackelford (2015) stated that grandparental resources are multidimensional, including practical help, food production, finances, time in the form of childcare, or the emotional support provided by a listening ear, all of which are grandparent investments. Grandparents can play a variety of active roles, such as storytellers, family historians, mediators or counselors, and people who encourage children, teach them knowledge and skills, and even some life wisdom.

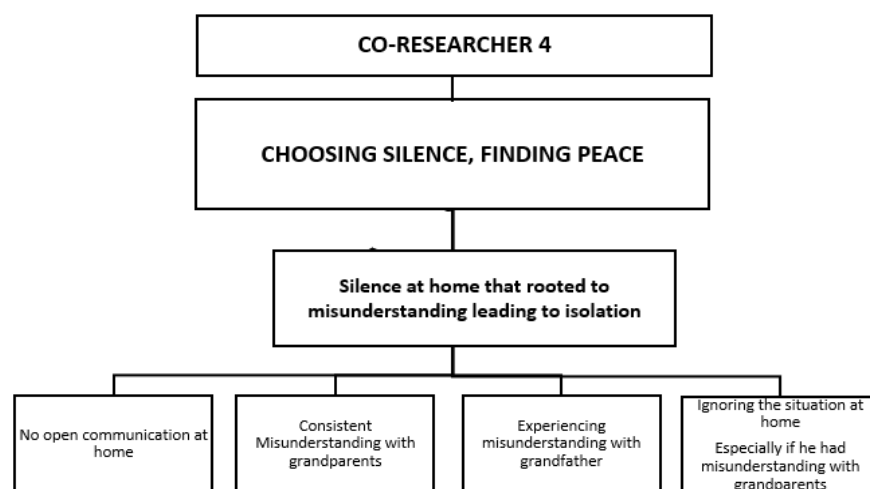


Figure 5. Co-Researcher 4: “Choosing Silence, Finding Peace”

Figure 5 illustrates co-researcher 4's lived experiences, which highlight the theme "Choosing Silence, Finding Peace," reflecting the life of co-researcher 4, who experienced a significant turning point when his parents left him. The emerging theme was based on the clustering of codes from the data gathered during the interview. This event led him to live with his grandparents, starting his life full of challenges and adjustments. In his silence, he found a way to cope with the emotional pain of being separated from his parents. Over time, he learned to adapt to his new environment and discovered moments of peace despite his struggles. His story sheds light on the resilience and quiet strength of adolescents adjusting to life with their grandparents, finding ways to move forward despite the absence of their parents.

Emerging Theme 1: “Silence at Home Rooted to Misunderstanding that Leads to Isolation”

This emergent theme of co-researcher 4 highlights the situation at home. He described feeling a lack of warmth and understanding from his grandparents, who were strict and focused more on discipline than emotional support. Demographically, co-researcher 4 is a 16-year-old male, a grade 9 student, and has been living with his grandparents since birth. Before we started the interview and built a rapport with him, the researcher thanked him for being one of the participants, explained the purpose of conducting the interview, and discussed the confidentiality of whatever information he would give.

He shared that their way of showing concern often came across as harsh treatment, which made him feel distant.

“Pagminsang ay okay po tapos po minsan po hindi.. Eh lagi pong galit sa kinang yung lola ko e.. Di ko nga po alam dun lagi po akong napapansin nun”

[Sometimes things are okay, but other times they're not. My grandpa is always angry with me, and I don't even know why...he always seems to pick on me]

That is why, to avoid further conflict, co-researcher 4 admitted that he preferred to stay quiet and isolate himself. He mentioned spending most of his time in his room, where he felt safer and free from judgment, “eh ano lang po ako samin, wala pong masyadong ginagawa nasa kwarto lang po”

[At home, I don’t really do much—I just stay in my room]

According to attachment theory stated in the study of Xu and Harrison (2023), the secure attachment further develops into expectations of trustworthiness, which children internalize and take with them throughout their lives. On the other hand, negative attachment experiences in close relationships between caregivers and children can lead to mistrust and hurt future relationships.

As we continued the interview, co-researcher 4 shared that one of the common reasons for misunderstanding with his grandparents was his habit of frequently going out. He mentioned that his grandparents often questioned his whereabouts and the people he spent time with, which sometimes led to arguments.

“Pagka po ako’y ano pag ako’y aalis lagi pong nagagalit sakin po wag na daw po akong umalis eh tapos pag dating ko po tutulog.. natutulog na lang po ako tapos kinabukasan okay na po.”

[When I go out, my grandmother always gets mad and tells me not to leave. But when I get back, I just sleep, and by the next day, everything’s fine.]

For that reason, he decided it was easier to ignore the situation rather than explain himself; his silence is his way to avoid escalating the anger of his grandfather. According to the care theory cited in the study of Delphina (2024), that response is very important to show that the caring has been received and recognized; without this response, there is no caring relation, no matter how hard the carer has worked at it.

Similarly, his silence became a barrier to understanding and connection. Instead of confiding to his grandparents, co-researcher 4 chose to keep his feelings to himself, further isolating him from the only caregivers he had. He stated,

“Hindi po kami nagaano (nag-uusap) parang pagka may problema po ako hindi po kami ganun”. “Araw araw lang po akong pinagsasabihan. Pero wala naman.. po parang sanay na po..”

[We don’t really talk, especially when I have problems—we’re not like that. Every day, she just scolds me, but it doesn’t really affect me anymore... I guess I’m used to it]

If caregivers are not capable of fostering open communication, it can result in emotional disconnection and misunderstanding within the relationship. Adolescents may feel unsupported, believing their thoughts and emotions are not important. Additionally, this lack of communication can lead an adolescent to distance themselves from themselves and also to others emotionally and rely only on their coping mechanisms. In the study of Xu and Harrison (2023), it is indicated that the grandparent-grandchild relationship predicted grandchildren’s social competence. More specifically, closeness between grandparents and grandchildren was positively associated with grandchildren’s social competence, whereas conflict between grandparents and grandchildren was negatively associated with grandchildren’s social competence.

In the present study, co-researcher 4 shows failure in the caring relationship between him and his grandparents. While his grandparents may express care through their strictness and concern about what he is doing, the lack of open communication and understanding prevents this care from being fully received or acknowledged by the co-researcher 4. Instead, their approach is perceived as controlling and dismissive, leading him to withdraw and choose silence as his way of standing up for himself.

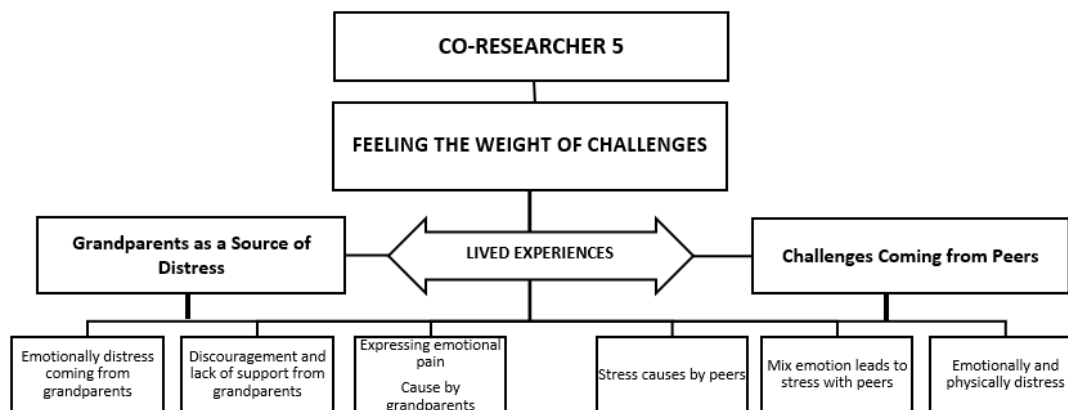


Figure 6. Co-Researcher 5: “Feeling the Weight of Challenges”

Figure 6 showed co-researcher 5, who labeled her experiences living with their grandparents as “feeling the weight of challenges.” It emphasizes how she deals with different challenges and difficulties caused by her grandparents and peers. This theme will explain what

she went through living with her grandparents, how that situation affects her daily life, especially at school, and how she deals with peers. Additionally, this shows the feeling of being overwhelmed, having too much to handle, or feeling stressed when dealing with difficult problems or situations.

Emergent Theme 1: “Grandparents as a Source of Distress”

This theme highlights the emotional and psychological challenges faced by co-researcher five as she was growing up with her grandparents. As she described her family, it carries the idea that the challenges she was dealing with were weighty enough to cause emotional discomfort or strain, often requiring extra effort and courage to overcome. Co-researcher 5 is a 16-year-old female, a grade 10 student, and has been living with her grandparents since birth. I chose her to be one of my participants because of her previous concerns about her experiences since then.

Before we went to the room that I prepared, I asked her for permission to record our conversation. I also discussed the goal and confidentiality of the said interview. Moreover, we agreed that whenever she's uncomfortable, she has all the right not to answer and stop the interview.

At the beginning of the interview, co-researcher 5 started sharing her relationship with her grandparents.

“since grade eight ganun pa din po sila sakin never sila nag change... um... pero nag change pala po as in konti lang naman po na pag che change.. ng hindi na po ako katulad ng ah... sinasaktan physically pero mentally sinasaktan po talaga ako... pero hindi po nila napapansin talaga yun kasi sabi nga po normal lang po yun sa kanila dahil ganun nga po sila... sa kapatid ko naman po ay minsan ay magkasundo madalas away din”

[It's been the same since Grade 8; they never really changed. Well, they did change a bit—like, they don't hurt me physically anymore, but mentally, they still hurt me a lot. But they do not notice it because they think it's normal for them to act that way. With my sibling, sometimes we get along, but most of the time, we fight.]

Her response shows that there is a misunderstanding between her and her grandparents that still flashes back in her mind. However, as we continued the conversation, she consistently told me the way how she was treated at home.

“Um medyo nasasaktan po ako then masaya naman din po kasi dun po sa part na nasasaktan the way they treated me talaga po is masakit talaga po tsaka gusto ko rin pong maranasan yung pag aalaga din po sakin ng mommy ko dahil nga po since bata talaga po is wala po siya sa tabi ko then yun nga po”

[I'm a bit hurt, but also happy at the same time. The part that hurts is how they treated me, and it was really painful. I also want to experience my mom taking care of me because she hasn't been there for me since I was a child.]

The absence of her parents has resulted in co-researcher 5 carrying the weight of emotional pain that she was experiencing as a teenager. According to Annor et al. (2024), parental absence in childhood has been associated with an increased risk of poor mental health outcomes such as depression and anxiety. Also, she added,

“sinasaktan po nila ako mentally not physically yun po yung kinakaharap ko po”.

[They hurt me mentally, not physically—that's what I'm dealing with]

In connection, if co-researcher 5 continues battling her emotions and unresolved challenges at home with her grandparents, it will affect her way of expressing her true feelings and may cause more conflicts or misunderstandings.

As we go further with the interview, she reiterated the conflicts and disagreements that they are facing every single day, and she mentioned feeling helpless sometimes especially if her grandparents mistreat her due to some expectation that she forgets to attend to. Hurtful words and some degrading manners shows by them, *“maging responsible na ate daw po ako..wag daw po patamad tamad..kaso kahit naman po natulong naman po talaga pagkauwi ko, hindi pa rin po napapansin” she stated.”*

[They tell me to be a responsible older sister and not be lazy. But even when I do help after coming home, they still don't seem to notice]

In addition, she mentioned that most of the time, she encountered disagreements with her grandparents, especially her grandmother. She can't resist but feel upset, and because of that, she ended up harming herself, *“wala akong masabihan po nun so ang ginagawa po ako po ay self-harming then suicidal thoughts po.”* [I'm unable to talk to anyone about it, so what I end up doing is hurting myself and having suicidal thoughts.] Her statement about hurting herself reveals that she carries deep emotional pain due to the way her grandmother treated her. In the study of Smith and Seagal (2023), they stated that if the children have suffered from emotional neglect, trauma, or abuse, those wounds will not disappear just because they are now in a safe place. They will need time to heal. That is why co-researcher 5 prefers to stay silent every time her grandmother gets angry with her, and she no longer feels anything then, she added.

“ah dinadamdam ko po siya then actually po nung umulit ulit po nila na pinapakita mo sakin yung ganun ganyan ganyan wala na po akong nararamdaman as in pong naging manhid na po ako yung nararamdaman ko”.

[I take it to heart, and actually, when they kept repeating things like that, I stopped feeling anything. It's like I became numb to it, that's how I feel now]

Consistently, as we go further with the interview, co-researcher 5 keeps on saying that the source of her burdens and distraction was her grandparents. She mentioned that they keep discouraging and ignoring her even the times she's trying to communicate with them.

"kasi one time po nag open po ako ng ganyan ay wala po silang paki ang ginawa mo ay tumawa lang and sabi po ay kung magpakamatay ako if ever na magpakamatay ay iiyak ka lang po ng isang araw then di ba po burol then after po ng burol diba libing po then kakalimutan daw po ako after ng libing ganun po"

[One time, I opened up about how I felt, but they didn't care. All they did was laugh and said that if I ever committed suicide, they'd just cry for a day. Then, after the wake, there would be the burial, and after that, they'd forget about me.]

However, despite repeated circumstances like this, as a teenager, she can't easily handle herself, but with the help of her mother, who is working away, she can even call or message her to confide. Moreover, as she goes through that situation, she'll make sure that the respect for her grandparents is still there.

Emergent Theme 2: "Challenges coming from Peers"

This theme emerged from the interview, highlighting how co-researcher 5 experiences with friends and classmates influenced her emotional well-being and sense of belonging. Peer relationships often bring both support and difficulties and for this stage of adolescent life, that is a big part that makes them valued.

As indicated by Santor et al. (2000), cited in the study of Ding et al. (2018), peer pressure that accompanies peer group participation refers to a subjective feeling of being pushed, urged, or dared by others to accomplish something only because of the expectations of other people.

As co-researcher 5 described her relationship with her classmates as one of her struggles. She then mentioned that one of the challenges is the issues coming from her new friends. She started to have difficulty establishing good relationships with them.

"Nung una ma'am masaya dahil yun nga nagkaroon po ako ng mga bagong kaibigan pero at the moment nga ngayon nagbago po siya dahil may issue nga na hindi naman po totoo yun po"

[At first, ma'am, I was happy because I made new friends, but at the moment, things have changed because of an issue that isn't true].

This shows that adolescents are also in a stage where they are still developing their sense of identity, and insecurities or self-esteem issues may influence how they interact with peers. To support this, according to Jugueta (2010), in the study of Mendoza (2017) the positive and negative consequences of peer pressure were portrayed. Most teenagers are attempting to fit in and be acknowledged by peers. The positive effect of peer pressure can give an individual inspiration, comfort, and achievement. Its negative effect is hindered judgment, risky behaviors and hostility.

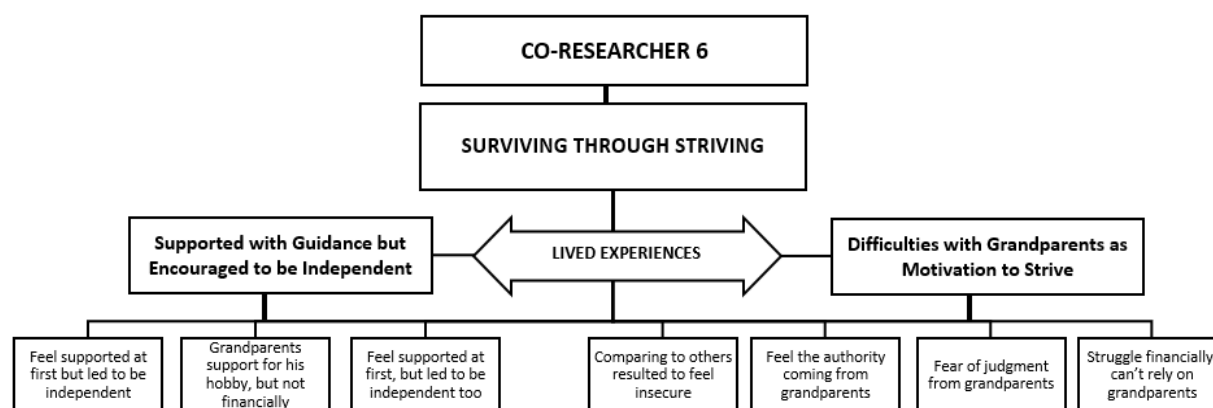


Figure 7. Co-Researcher 6: "Surviving through Striving"

Figure 7 illustrates co-researcher 6's lived experiences tagged with the theme "surviving through striving," symbolizing the idea of resilience and perseverance. It highlights how co-researcher 6 pushes himself for improvement. It's not only about survival, but also about putting in effort, overcoming difficulties, and continuously striving for something better, even in the most challenging times.

Emergent Theme 1: "Supported with Guidance of Grandparents but Encouraged to be Independent"

Emerging theme 1 highlights the strategies of grandparents in raising co-researchers 6. The theme was based on how the researcher reiterated the support given by the grandparents, but at the same time, they encouraged him to stand on his own. Co-researcher 6 emphasized how his grandparents provided guidance, showing emotional support and care while allowing him the freedom to make

decisions, take responsibility, and develop independence. Demographically, co-researcher 6 is a 16-year-old male, a grade 10 student living with his grandparents since he was seven years old. The interview was conducted in a face-to-face setup at the time allowed by the co-researcher.

In the first part of the interview, to build the connection that we needed for him to be able to feel at ease answering my queries, I started to ask how he is, and then we proceeded. At first glance, he was shy but very willing to share his story about himself and his current situation living with his grandparents.

He mentioned, *“Hindi naman po nila ako pinapabayaan sinusuportahan naman po nila bata pa ako tapos po nung nag high school na po ako simula nung grade nine po hindi na po nila natututukan sa ano sa pag aaral ako lang po mag isa ako nagawa.”* [They don’t neglect me; they support me. I was still young before, but when I reached high school, starting from grade nine, they couldn’t focus on my studies anymore. I had to manage on my own] However, he stated that his grandparents want him to learn many things on his own, that is why they don’t give much help to him.

This parenting style reflects a balanced where the grandparents’ involvement nurtures a sense of security, yet their encouragement fosters self-reliance and growth. Cherry (2020) expressed in her article that authoritarian parenting is a nurturing style described by high requests and low responsiveness. Guardians with an authoritarian style have exclusive standards of their children yet give almost no method of feedback and nurturing.

Moreover, in the present study, co-researcher 6 described the support he received from his grandparents was limited. He mentioned, *“Mas gusto po nila na masanay po ako na walang walang katulong po sana sa gawain gusto po nila.”* [They prefer that I get used to doing things on my own, without any help. That’s what they want]

This statement from co-researcher 6 shows that the treatment he received could have been the way his grandparents taught him to be tough and to learn things at an early age. However, it allows him to misunderstand the situation he is facing. Similarly, this will leave a mark that his grandparents, especially his grandmother, are not that concern about him. *“Ah kay lolo naman po pwede po pero kay lola maliit po ang tiyansa..Iba po kasing ugali nun ni lola.”* [With my grandfather, it’s possible, but with my grandmother, there’s little chance. She has a different attitude]

The strategies employed by the grandparents of co-researcher 6 aim to instill resilience and self-reliance, which sometimes lead to misunderstanding about the grandparents’ intentions as stated in Pillar Theory that was developed by Diana Baumrind (updated on November 21, 2023, by Hartin and Cummins) who theorized that children’s behavior can be attributed to the specific parenting style they experienced in their homes. Furthermore, this theory was developed to describe the important aspects of parenting that shape the way they interact with their children.

Emergent Theme 2: “Difficulties with Grandparents as Motivation to Strive”

This theme explores co-researcher 6 challenges faced while living with grandparents serve as a driving force for personal growth and resilience. Despite conflicts or strict expectations, these difficulties become motivators for co-researcher 6 to work harder, prove his capabilities, and achieve his goals. According to the study of Serrano (2011), as children experience life and view the actions of others and their accompanying responses, they will begin to learn how to act in society.

The theme explains how the co-researcher strives despite he is experiencing problems with his grandparents, specifically his grandmother. Co-researcher 6 has a thought that his grandmother doesn’t like him. It’s all because of the way he treated him at home and, at the same time, all the mean words coming from his grandmother.

Despite his feelings of being worthless in the eyes of his grandmother, he indeed says that he feels the support and guidance of what he likes to do, especially if it is about his hobby motorcycle.

“Ung suporta po... tsaka yung suporta po yung sinusuportahan po nila dun sa gusto ko and then hindi po nila ako ano.. hindi po nila pinipigilan.. Um... sa motor po um... saka po yung syempre po hilig ko yung kumakarera sa motor. Lagi po nila akong pinapalalahanan na maingat daw po ako at huwag gagawa ng masama sa lahat”

In relation to this, he added that the full support of his grandparents on his hobby shows that they are proud of him. They haven’t had a conflict when it comes to this matter. However, he mentioned that he experienced a problem paying for his tuition and his grandparents or even his parents cannot provide for him. So, he has to make a way and provide for it on his own.

“Oh.. mahirap po na pagsubok.. uh.. yung mawalan po ng pangtuition sa ano sa exam ko.. pahirapan po nun nung lumapit po dun sa ano sa kuya kuyahan ko sa ibaba, sa ibaba namin yun po nakapag nakapag tuition naman po ako binigyan po muna ako ng pang tuition para lang maka exam.”

[Oh... it was a difficult challenge... uh... losing my tuition for my exam. It was hard when I approached my older brother [friend] downstairs. He was the one who gave me money for tuition so that I could take the exam.]

The implication of his experience in terms of money gave him the courage to provide for himself. Though he got the feeling of happiness in what he was doing, he added that he could also count on his grandparents. They can provide for him but there are instances that they

also can't.

As we continued the interview, I asked him how living with their grandparents affected his emotional well-being as a teenager. The question seems to be a big help for the co-researcher to express his thoughts about it. He didn't directly answer that, but giving his example will do.

"Kahit po may ginagawa ako na tungkol dito sa school gusto po nila ng mauna yung kanilang inuutos po..Kapag masaya nakaka panibago po sa ganun...kaya kung may problema po sinasarili ko lang po kasi minsan hindi po ako nagkekwento."

[Even when I'm busy with schoolwork, they want their instructions to take priority. Their happiness feels refreshing, so when I have problems, I tend to keep them to myself because I don't always share what's going on.]

These statements emphasized that they literally don't have a good relationship with his grandparents most of the time. This is also evident that despite he is okay living with them, there are more instances that they have unresolved issues within. Moreover, as indicated by Morin (2019), authoritarian parents don't explain the intuition behind these standards. At whatever point mentioned to explain, the parent may basically reply, "Since I said so." They additionally don't permit children to engage in critical thinking difficulties or impediments. All things considered, they make the guidelines and uphold the outcomes with little respect for a child's opinion.

Furthermore, given these statements, I still asked if he could lean on his grandparents if he were facing a problem or challenge. Surprisingly, he stated that he needs to be brave on his own to avoid being blamed.

"Hindi po, pag nagka problema po parang ano lang parang ako po yung nagiging masama dun, eh pag nagka problema ako na tungkol dun sa ginagawa ko sa halimbawa nagsaside line po Pag nagkakaproblema po na ano.. kumbaga parang maisip nila na ako yung magiging masama sa ano sa sitwasyon na yun."

[No, when a problem comes up, it feels like I'm the one being blamed. For example, when I encounter issues with something I'm working on, like doing a side job, they tend to see me as the bad one in that situation.]

Given all these challenges, the co-researcher still pushes himself to be more independent. Distance between his parents was the very reason to be more independent in his life. Kotaman (2016) said that strict parenting attitudes and conflicts directly and negatively affect children's emotional control. He added that it will happen during the time that we prevent children from showing communication and any expression of anger or fear and treat them with cruelty, criticism, or punishment until they stop displaying fear or anger.

He shared in the last part that he prefers to keep what is in his mind; it is not because he didn't respect his grandparents but for him to understand that life is not easy without his parents.

Eidetic Reduction

In the process of conducting this phenomenological study on the lived experiences of adolescents living with their grandparents, the researcher initially encountered an apparent ease in identifying potential participants. However, what seemed like a straightforward task soon revealed deeper challenges. Despite the participants' initial willingness, some of them expressed hesitation and uncertainty about their involvement, which required additional effort to reassure and guide them through the process. Furthermore, some grandparents, protective of their grandchildren, refused participation, adding another layer of difficulty. Nevertheless, the researcher remains committed to ensuring that these voices are heard, employing all necessary strategies to gain their trust and cooperation, as this study holds critical importance in understanding the dynamics of grandparental caregiving and its impact on adolescent well-being.

Co-Researcher 1 was a 13-year-old female Grade 8 student who had lived with her grandparents since birth due to her mother working abroad. Tagged with the theme "aspired by the presence of grandparents," this shows how she receives guidance and support from her grandparents yet struggles with self-doubt and a lack of confidence in her abilities. During the interview, she shared that while she feels happiness and security living with her grandparents, she also experiences periods of loneliness due to her mother's absence.

At school, co-researcher 1 was motivated to excel and make her family proud, but she faces emotional challenges, especially when dealing with conflicts and pressure from academics and peers. Her grandparents play a vital role in disciplining her, offering her comfort and guidance when she encounters difficulties. She values their advice and feels their love, which helps her overcome difficulties, particularly when she doubts herself or feels unsure about her talents.

Despite her challenges, such as distractions from personal interests like crushes, she strives to focus on her studies and improve herself. The support from her grandmother strengthens her self-efficacy and resilience. Although she struggles with low self-esteem, her grandmother's constant encouragement helps her believe in her potential, making her feel comforted and supported in her journey toward personal growth and academic success.

With the co-researcher 2, she was a 14-year-old female in 8th grade, who described her experience living with her grandparents since the age of three. She expressed contentment and happiness in her living situation, stating, *"Opo masaya naman po..masaya naman po kami magkakasama."* [Yes, we're happy. We're happy being together]. Unlike other participants in the study, her narrative is characterized by a positive outlook on her life with her grandparents, whom she perceives as caring and supportive. She emphasized that her grandparents provide for her needs, preparing meals, helping her get ready for school, and giving her fare money.

Throughout the interview, she detailed her daily experiences, highlighting her responsibilities, such as caring for her sibling and keeping things organized for school. Her grandparents encourage her to focus on learning rather than academic awards, saying, “wala naman po.. sabi lang po nila ay kung sa kung ano okay lang po na hindi maging honors basta pasado daw po.” [They didn’t say much. They just told me that it’s okay not to be an honor student, as long as I pass. This support allows her to feel secure and valued in her environment.

In addition, co-researcher 2 experiences reveal a nurturing environment characterized by love and understanding. While she recognized occasional disagreements with her grandparents, mainly regarding preferences for TV shows, she described these instances as mild and rare. Despite some unwillingness to share personal teenage experiences, she stated that her grandparents have always been there for her, especially during challenging times at school. She expressed gratitude for the support she receives, indicating that they have helped her since childhood.

As I engaged with co-researcher 3, she shared her experiences of living with her grandparents for over 12 to 13 years. She explained that the decision to stay with them was because of the separation of her parents. Initially, she found it challenging to decide where to live, feeling undecided between both sides of her family. However, after some happenings, she chose to live with her grandparents, feeling a sense of comfort and stability in that environment. She described her life with her grandparents as “spoiled” but also acknowledged the financial challenges that come with her grandparents’ limited income.

When I asked about her responsibilities at home, co-researcher 3 indicated that she adapts to the tasks assigned by her grandparents. She expressed that her daily life is a mix of happiness and sadness. While she enjoys the nurturing environment her grandparents provide, she also feels a sense of longing for her parents. This longing sometimes manifests as envy when she sees classmates living with their parents, highlighting the emotional difficulty of her situation.

Despite her positive relationship with their grandparents, co-researcher 3 admitted that conflicts occasionally arise, particularly when she acts lazily or responds in frustration. She recognized these moments as opportunities for growth, noting that her grandparents corrected her with the intent to guide and teach. Although there are moments of hurt and frustration, co-researcher 3 understands that these conflicts are part of her grandparents’ efforts to raise her well.

Throughout our conversation, it became clear that co-researcher 3 values the support and guidance her grandparents provide. She occasionally expressed feelings of envy, but overall, they found comfort in her grandparents’ presence and support. While they sometimes struggles with feelings of isolation or misunderstanding, she has learned to figure out these emotions and continues to rely on her grandparents for both emotional and practical help, especially in her educational and personal growth.

Like the deduced theme of her experiences, co-researcher 3 described her life as one filled with gladness due to the nurturing environment her grandparents created. However, she also experiences a persistent longing for completeness. Although she finds happiness in the love and guidance provided by her grandparents, this sense of fulfillment is strengthened by the absence of her parents, which leaves a lack of emotional connection. For instance, she expressed feelings of envy when observing peers who have both parents actively involved in their lives. This contrast highlights the two aspects of her situation, as she enjoys living with her grandparents while simultaneously feeling incomplete without her parents. Ultimately, this explains how her living situation can be both a source of comfort and a reminder of what is missing in her life, emphasizing the complexity of her emotional state.

During the interview with co-researcher 4, I began by inviting him to share a bit about himself and his family. He opened up about his background, revealing that his mother had gone abroad to ensure a better education for him and his siblings, while his father had left when they were still young. This foundational experience seemed to shape his current feelings of abandonment and isolation.

As he spoke, I noticed that he often described his daily life as quiet and uneventful, primarily spent alone in his room. When I asked about how long he had been living with his grandparents, he reflected on the years he had spent with them since childhood. I inquired further, asking whether he knew why he was living with them, and he shared that he had been entrusted to their care because of the lack of options available.

In discussing his responsibilities at home, he mentioned that his grandmother didn’t assign him much to do, and he felt okay about it, but this led to a sense of detachment from his family life. I asked him about his emotional experiences living with his grandparents, to which he admitted that sometimes things were fine, but other times he felt strained, especially due to his grandfather’s frequent reprimands. His comments about his grandmother were more positive, and he appreciated her kind treatment.

As the conversation continued, I asked deeper into how he was raised and what expectations his grandparents had for him. He acknowledged their guidance on the importance of doing well in school, and he also noted that they provided support when needed. However, he expressed a remarkable struggle when it came to communication. He shared that he often kept his problems to himself, feeling that he could not talk openly with his grandparents about personal issues, even though he felt more comfortable discussing school matters with them.

Towards the end of our discussion, I asked him how living with his grandparents affected his self-perception and confidence. He expressed that he felt okay about who he was but also expressed a sense of longing for a deeper connection and understanding. As he reflected on his life, it became evident that he lived in a “reserved space” where he balanced gratitude for his grandparents’ care with

a desire for emotional fulfillment and a stronger familial bond.

This conversation revealed the difficulties of his experiences, capturing his feelings of both contentment and isolation as he surpasses his teenage years, living in a household where love was present but often overshadowed by a sense of disconnect.

As I began the interview with co-researcher 5, I approached her with a warm smile, inviting her to share about herself and her family. Initially hesitant, she expressed that she didn't have much to share. However, with gentle encouragement, she opened up about her family situation. She described her home life as typical but filled with conflict, saying, "*parang katulad din po ng ibang pamilya pero mas... yung mas araw-araw yung sigawan at away.*" [It's kind of like other families, but it's more... there's more shouting and fighting every day]

When I asked how long she had been living with her grandparents, she reflected, "*fifteen years po... simula birth na po ako doon,*" [Fifteen years... I've been there since I was born] revealing that they had always been her guardians due to her parents' separation. She shared, "*yung father ko po ay pumunta ng iba... yung mother ko po is nagtatrabaho sa malayo,*" [My father went to another place, and my mother works far away] showing her feelings of abandonment.

As we continued, I inquired if her schoolmates were aware of her living situation. She confirmed, "Yes, po," and when I asked about her friends, she reiterated that they knew as well. I prompted her to describe a typical day with her grandparents, leading her to discuss their treatment of her and her responsibilities.

She noted, "*never sila nag-change*" [They never changed] about her grandparents' treatment, implying at her emotional distress: "*hindi po nila napapansin talaga yun kasi sabi nga po normal lang po yun sa kanila.*" [They really don't notice it because, as they said, it's just normal for them.] While she felt her grandfather was nurturing, her grandmother's reprimands weighed heavily on her.

In discussing her challenges, she revealed feelings of hurt and happiness: "*masaya naman din po kasi dun po sa part na nasasaktan,*" [I'm also happy in a way because even though I'm hurt, there's a part of me that feels okay] capturing the duality of her experiences. She expressed isolation in her struggles, stating, "*I think di po kasi one time po nag-open po ako ng ganyan ay wala po silang paki,*" [I think that's because, one time, I opened up about how I felt, but they didn't care.] indicating a lack of empathy from them.

As the interview progressed, she spoke about the pressure to be responsible and not lazy, saying, "*Sabi daw po'y wag nga daw pong maging tamad.*" [They told me not to be lazy] Despite this, she acknowledged the support they provided for her hobbies but felt emotionally disconnected from them, noting that they often laughed off her struggles.

Indications of her resilience emerged as she discussed bullying and peer pressure at school, revealing her raw moments of desperation: "*ang ginagawa ko po ay self-harming then suicidal thoughts po.*" [I'm hurting myself and having suicidal thoughts] She reflected on how her grandparents' emotional neglect affected her self-worth, saying, "*I think fifty-fifty po na nakakabuti at hindi po.*" [I think it's fifty-fifty, both good and bad]

As we wrapped up, she shared a mix of anger, sadness, and a desire for connection. She articulated dreams of becoming a doctor but felt weighed down by her grandparents' doubt, "*Sabi daw po'y wag nga daw pong maging tamad.*" [They said not to be lazy.] However, she also highlighted her mother's encouragement, which fostered her self-esteem.

The interview concluded with a sense of emotional release for her, showing the difficulties of growing up in a home filled with both love and conflict and the indirect balance between family expectations and personal ambitions.

Moreover, co-researcher 6 has been living with his grandparents for seven years, ever since his parents separated when he was in third grade. Both of his parents moved to Manila, and his mother remarried, leaving him in the care of his grandparents. Despite this significant change in his family structure, he manages to balance school with working on motorcycles and doing side jobs. While he faces the usual challenges of a teenager, such as being scolded for coming home late or not immediately following instructions, he still feels that his grandparents are supportive.

In terms of responsibilities, co-researcher 6 helps with household chores and assists in the store. However, his grandparents stopped helping him with schoolwork when he reached high school, expecting him to become more independent. This shift in their approach led him to rely on himself for many things, including managing his finances. When he lacked money for tuition during exams, he sought help from a friend in his motor group rather than his grandparents because they were not always able to provide for his school expenses.

Emotionally, co-researcher six tends to keep his feelings to himself. Although he feels he could approach his grandfather, if necessary, he finds it difficult to talk to his grandmother, who he says has a different personality. He shared a memory from ninth grade when he got into a fight at school. His grandfather defended him when the other student's parents confronted them, showing that his grandparents supported him even in difficult situations.

Overall, co-researcher 6 feels proud of his accomplishments, especially when his grandparents acknowledge his hard work, such as his success in motorcycle competitions. Despite facing challenges, he remains content with who he is, valuing his independence and finding ways to handle problems on his own.

Conclusions

This study explored the lived experiences of adolescents raised by their grandparents, drawing from the themes that emerged through Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The findings illuminated the psychological, emotional, and social dimensions of grandparent-led upbringing, revealing both the nurturing and challenging aspects of this family structure. The narratives of the six co-researchers reflected diverse realities—ranging from feelings of love, support, and gratitude to struggles with independence, emotional longing, and self-doubt. These shared experiences provide a meaningful understanding of how grandparental care influences adolescent development, resilience, and self-concept formation.

The themes identified—such as “Aspired by the Presence of Grandparents,” “Living Indulgent with Favor,” “Living with Gladness but Still Longing for Completeness,” “Choosing Silence, Finding Peace,” “Feeling the Weight of Challenges,” and “Surviving through Striving”—represent distinct pathways of emotional adaptation. Each theme aligns with established psychological theories, including Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, Baumrind’s parenting styles, Bowlby’s attachment theory, Viktor Frankl’s concept of meaning-making, Duckworth’s notion of grit, and Bandura’s self-efficacy theory. Collectively, these perspectives highlight that being raised by grandparents can serve as both a source of emotional stability and a site of internal conflict, depending on the nature of the caregiving environment and the adolescent’s coping mechanisms.

The implications of these findings extend beyond the individual level to educational and institutional contexts. Schools, as key developmental environments, play a crucial role in supporting adolescents navigating complex family structures. The study underscores the need for tailored guidance programs that recognize the unique emotional needs of students raised by grandparents. By fostering emotional literacy, resilience, and open communication, schools can help these students process feelings of separation, develop a stronger sense of identity, and enhance their psychological well-being.

Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of intergenerational understanding. Many adolescents experience a cultural and generational gap that can lead to miscommunication and emotional distance from their grandparents. This finding implies that family education programs and school-based interventions should address not only the adolescents’ needs but also the perspectives of the grandparents, equipping them with modern parenting insights while valuing their traditional wisdom. Bridging this gap can strengthen family bonds and promote healthier emotional development among adolescents.

The study presents several recommendations aimed at addressing the emotional and developmental needs of adolescents raised by their grandparents, emphasizing the shared responsibility of schools, families, and researchers in supporting their growth. It is recommended that school counselors conduct seminars or workshops specifically designed for students under grandparental care, focusing on emotional awareness, coping strategies, and the development of a positive self-concept. These initiatives should help adolescents understand their family dynamics, reduce feelings of abandonment, and appreciate grandparental care as a source of love and stability. In addition, the school administration and guidance office should integrate a comprehensive support program into the school’s action plan in collaboration with the principal and teachers. This program may include counseling services, peer support groups, and structured activities that enhance emotional resilience, promote social adaptation, and foster a sense of belonging among students from nontraditional family structures.

Parents and grandparents are likewise encouraged to engage in family-oriented seminars that promote intergenerational understanding and effective communication. These sessions should offer insights into adolescent psychology and provide practical strategies for nurturing emotional connection, managing behavioral concerns, and balancing authority with empathy. By fostering this mutual understanding, grandparents can maintain their traditional values of care while adapting to the developmental needs of modern adolescents. Lastly, future research should expand the scope of the study by including participants from various socioeconomic backgrounds or by comparing adolescents raised by grandparents with those raised by biological parents. Such studies would deepen understanding of how different family structures influence emotional well-being, self-concept, and resilience, contributing valuable insights into the broader field of developmental and family psychology.

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