Kiyatindugan (Rising Up) of Mother and Child… The Experiences of Young Muslim Adults and their Single Mothers in Zamboanga City, Philippines

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This qualitative study investigated the experiences of young Muslim adults and their mothers from Zamboanga City, Mindanao, Philippines in surviving the difficulties of single parent families. Perspectives from the experts on Muslim culture regarding the dynamics of Muslim families were also gathered. Ten young adults, who experienced their parents' separation during their adolescent years, and their mothers from single-parent Muslim families served as participants. The participants were visited and interviewed based on the scheduled appointments given by their community and religious leaders. Five themes emerged from the study using the Creswell's Spiral Analysis. The first theme found was the gender differences in family obligations. The males in the study had a higher educational attainment than most of the females in the family. The young adults with higher educational attainment redefined their situations in a positive way. The other young adults, on the other hand, accepted their family challenges with resignation. The second theme was the special roles of the extended family, including relatives and stepfathers. Thus, remarriage as a solution to financial crises came out as the third theme of the study. Obtaining better opportunities abroad was another theme that surfaced showing how the single parents and their children cope with financial challenges. The last theme was the parent's influence on their children's outlook in life. It was prevalent in the study that the attitudes of the parents, particularly the mothers, influenced the young adults' perspectives on life.

Keywords: young Muslim adults, single mothers, Zamboanga city, separation, Muslim families

If Filipinos were asked what they value most in life, a majority would answer "the family." The family remains the most important and basic unit of society in the Philippines. Parke (2003) noted that most researches are consistent in supporting the notion that, on average, children do best when raised by their two married biological parents who have a low conflict relationship with each other. Four significant terms emerge such as *two*, *married, biological parents* and a *low-conflict relationship*. Undeniably, these are "dream" terms that all families hope to possess. When unmanageable conflicts arise within a family, some parents decide to distance themselves. Or when children find out that their parents are not one's biological parents, they may wish to live apart from their parents.

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Solo parenting is a growing phenomenon and such transitions have also been seen among Filipino Muslims. Muslims compose of about five percent of the total Philippine population and are confined almost entirely to the southern and western parts of Mindanao such as Cotabato, Lanao, Jolo, Sulu and Zamboanga. Muslim families practice unique cultural traditions especially those pertaining to marriage and family relationships such as divorce and subsequent marriages. As Buat (2002) explained, one has to consider the fact that Muslim men are allowed to have four wives, unlike Christian Filipinos who are allowed to have only one wife. Polygamy is a pre-Islamic practice which Islamic law has sought to regulate. A man is only allowed a maximum of four wives at a time according to Article 27 of the Muslim Code. It also stipulates that the man has to make sure that he can divide his time equally between his four wives. With regard to divorce, the Muslim code adopted forms of dissolution of marriage while the family code allows annulment by judicial process. However, rather than allowing their husbands to take on additional wives, more and more women are opting for de facto separation or divorce.

Further, Saha (2000) stressed that polygamous marriages are found to be divorce-prone. The odds of divorce were found to be 2.5 times higher for polygamous unions than monogamous unions. Among Muslims, infertility or the inability to give birth to a male child and chronic illness of the wife are the two main reasons which enhance the risk of divorce. They can lead either to a marriage of the husband to a second wife (thus leading to a polygamous marriage) or to a divorce of the previous wife followed by another wife. Other valid grounds for divorce in Islam include physical, mental or emotional abuse, failure to fulfill the objectives and purposes, in which marriage was initiated, marital infidelity and failure of the husband to provide for the family. Separation, increasing divorce rates and the percentage of families headed by a single parent are social and personal problems faced by Muslim families as well (Kassaimah, 2008).

Despite these realities, there is little available research on divorce among Muslim families in the Philippines. Some studies presented data in relation to the effect of divorce or marital separation on the children. It has been noted that Muslim children of divorce suffer long term effects and end up struggling with alcohol, drugs and sex (Kassaimah, 2008). On the other hand, among children, an array of adverse effects has been found related to emotional, psychological, social and academic problems (Batacan, 2000, Cabato & Dapug, 2004; Parke, 2003; Que, Bandillo & Sardea, 2004; Santrock, 2005) In this light, positive points also emerged among children of solo parents, such as becoming stronger and being open-minded about the situation (Aban, Mobo, Montallana & Velasco, 1996; Baldoz, 2002).

Several studies about single-parent families have been explored in the areas of Luzon and Visayas, two of the major islands in the Philippines (Aguilar, Dela Cruz, Garcia & Velasquez, 1999; Astorga, 2001; Gilapay, 2006; Kissman, 1993;); however, there are few studies about single parent families in Mindanao Muslim communities.

For a Muslim, young adulthood is the period when a man and woman are expected to settle down. In Mahmud's (2005) survey of Indian Muslims, 25 years old is identified as the age of marriage.

Among Muslims, early adulthood is a period of adjustment to new patterns of life and new social expectations. This is the stage when people enter into a marital relationship and a stable job. In addition, early adulthood is considered a "settling down age". Settling down involves finding economic stability and a stable marriage partner. It is usually during the early adults'

years that the individual takes his/her first serious full-time job. Nevertheless, men and women are expected to make an occupational commitment, or educational choices (Mahmud, 2005).

The researcher became interested in exploring the experiences of young adults considering that fewer researches were conducted on the perspective of young adults and chose to interview young Muslim adults who are unmarried and their mothers to share their experiences as part of single parent families.

Literature Review

Marital dissolution in family would resort to different challenges both to the parent and child. Recent studies have found common challenges of single parents. They face three kinds of overload. One is responsibility-overload which may result from having too many financial resources. Task overload, on the other hand, arises from the fact that one parent must do the work of two parents. The third is emotional overload which can occur when the single parent neglects his or her own needs (Benokraitis, 2012).

Several negative effects, on the other hand about single parenting have been investigated internationally. Parke (2003) noted that with regard to divorced families, research showed that the educational achievements of children with married parents were better than children with divorced parents. Children of divorced parents were more than twice as likely to have serious social, emotional or psychological problems as children of intact families.

Another interesting concept to look into is whether the parents' separation has an effect on how the child perceives future relationships and views the concept of marriage. Watskins (2005) reported that in single-parent families, self-esteem issues play a major role in a child's behavior. The finding stated that the mother-daughter relationships suffer the most, as girls formulate their world-view and confidence from the example of their mother. In this regard, the educational level of parents also contributes to the behavioral maturity of the children. Related to this is the study of Diaz (2011) that discussed that kids growing up in single-parent homes may experience stronger emotions such as anger, anxiety or sadness.

To determine the family experiences of the children from single parent families, the researcher found it significant to gather responses from children in the young adult stage particularly the unmarried ones to determine how their experiences affected their view of relationship and marriage. Young adulthood is the stage after adolescence. One of the most important features of emerging adulthood is that this age period allows for exploration in love, work, and world views more than any other age period (Arnett, 2011). The process of identity formation emerges in adolescence but mostly takes place in emerging adulthood. The conceptual framework of the study is presented in figure 1.
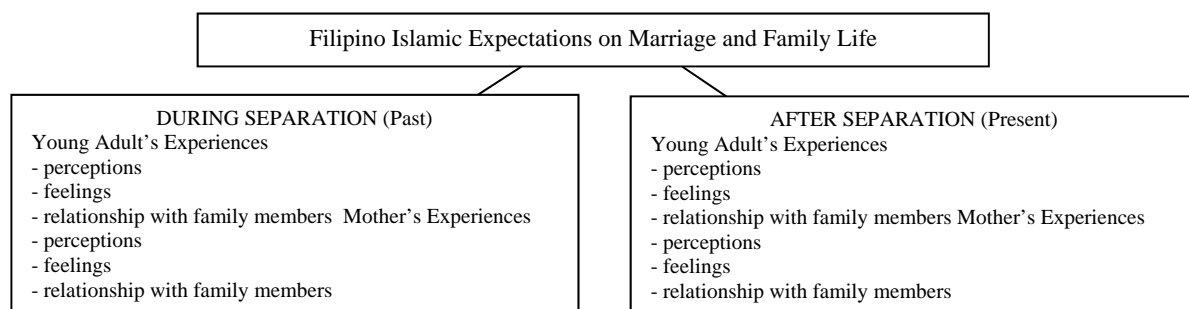

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework.

Method

A narrative research is employed to seek perspectives and meanings from participants. The individual stories of the participants were transcribed and every detail shared by the participants are considered significant. The in depth description of their lives were studied, and every individual story was respected (Boglan & Biklen, 2004; Parker, 2005).

Participants

The study was conducted in Zamboanga City where 35 per cent of the population is Muslims and 65 percent is composed of other religions like Catholic, Christian, Protestant, et al. Ten (10) single parent Muslim families were the participants. The young adults' ages ranged from 20 to 30 years old and they are those whose parents separated during their teenage years. The single mothers were divorced from their husbands and raised their children independently for five or more years also served as participants.

Table 1

Profile of Young Adults Interviewed in the Study

Name	Gender	Age	Educational Attainment	Job
1. Abdullah	Male	26	2nd Year College	Unemployed
2. Barrack	Male	27	1st year College	Tricycle driver
3. Calim	Male	30	2nd year College	Security guard
4. Dashir	Male	27	Grade 3	Unemployed
5. Fatima	Female	21	3rd year High school	Unemployed
6. Glenda	Female	23	2nd year High school	Unemployed
7. Hamid	Male	23	High school graduate	Seaweeds worker
8. Janna	Female	21	College level	Saleslady
9. Kamal	Male	30	College undergraduate	Construction worker
10. Luna	Female	21	High school graduate	Unemployed

Table 2

Profile of the Single Mothers

Name	Age	Educational Attainment	Job
1. Amina	49	Elementary graduate	Housewife
2. Bashiba	41	Grade 6	Housewife
3. Chalis	45	Elementary Graduate	Housewife
4. Dona	49	Elementary	Housewife
5. Fransha	55	Elementary	Housewife
6. Gloria	58	AB Economics	Housewife
7. Helena	44	High school graduate	Housewife
8. Juliana	48	Elementary	Housewife
9. Karina	50	High school graduate	Housewife
10. Lolita	48	Elementary	Housewife

Instruments

Two types of interview guides for the single mother and young adult were developed by the researcher based on the concepts indicated in the conceptual framework. The concepts included the child and mother's perceptions and feelings during the separation process, relationship with family members, post separation process, and dynamics and expectations of Muslim Families. The panel who are professors from a private institution with Ph. D degrees checked the interview guides.

Procedure

Face-to-face interviews were conducted by the researcher with the aid of a researcher-constructed interview guide and tape recorder. The length of the interview sessions conducted for every participant was around thirty minutes to one hour. The key points discussed during the interview included, (1) the child's perceptions and feelings during the separation process; (2) relationship with family members; (3) post-separation process, and (4) dynamics and expectations of Muslim families. The concepts probed for the single mothers during the interview included (1) the reasons for divorce; (2) the life after the separation; and (3) the present family situation. Filipino and Chavacano were the languages used in the interview guide because these are the two most used languages in Zamboanga City.

Data Analysis

The data analysis of this research adapted Creswell's (2007) idea about qualitative research. According to Cresswell qualitative research begins with the preparing and organizing of data (text data/ transcripts) for analysis. Then, data was reduced into themes through a process of coding or condensing of the codes. Afterwards, the data is represented in figures. The researcher followed the Cresswell's data analysis spiral. In the spiral analysis of data, the researcher presented the data which is the packaging of what was found in text, tabular or figure form. Then, a diagram is developed after several analytic, reflective and interpretative processes. The diagram is the visual presentations of relationships between concepts and the object or a product of analysis.
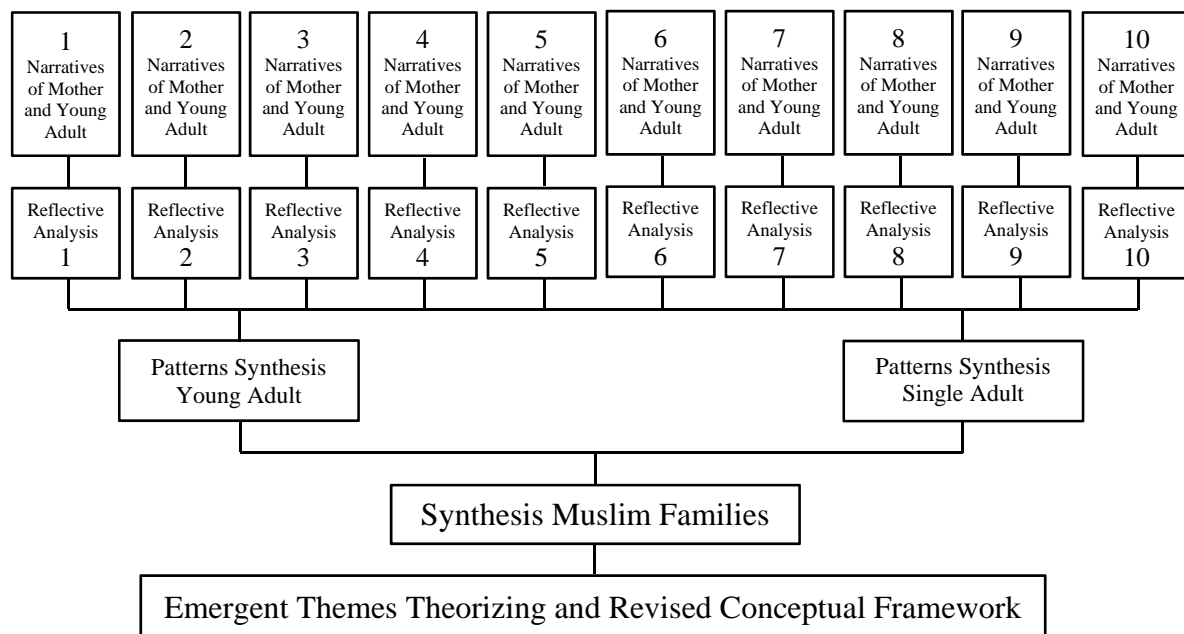

Figure 2. Flowchart of data analysis.

Results and Discussion

The following are the general themes found in the study.

Male Privilege in Muslim Society

It can be gleaned from the profiles that most of the males in the study are able to have some college education, most of the females reached high school. This may be an indication that Muslim families value the males in their culture. Because they are expected to hold a special role in the family, they should attain the highest educational level possible. It can be noted that males are prioritized in terms of getting an education because they are expected to provide for the family.

Gender Differences in Family Obligations

With regard to their employment status, most of the males are presently working or looking for a job. Most of the females, on the other hand, are unemployed and in their sharing, they do not mention any efforts to presently find a job. The weight of responsibilities

held by Muslim men as providers in the family may be underscored. Being a part of a single-parent family, where the father does not give financial support, the male child is aware of his responsibility to help his mother in meeting the family's needs.

Special Roles of the Extended Family

Mostly, the young adults share the significance of their grandparents, uncles and aunts in assisting their mothers in financially and emotionally supporting them. There are instances when these young adults disclose how they have become closer to their relatives than to their own families. They enjoy the company of their relatives, and can even share secrets with them. These relatives provide financial assistance and they are also sources of good counsel and strength aiding the young adults to accept their present situation.

The single mothers likewise are very open about the help extended by their parents and siblings in meeting the needs of their children. Truly, the term "extended" justifies their roles to the single-parent families, because they sincerely "extended" help to them without expecting anything in return.

Remarriage as a Solution to Financial Crisis

Three out of four mothers reveal that they have better lives when they remarried because aside from the financial support that they received, their second husbands are kind. The husband's is one factor that enhances the harmonious atmosphere of the family. Only one mother confesses that she failed in her second relationship, and once again filed for divorce.

Even the young adults of the mothers who remarried also express that they are happier when their mothers remarry. They describe their stepfathers as kind and supportive, and they also have a good relationship with their younger half siblings.

Visualizing Better Opportunities Abroad

As noticed in the stories shared by the single mothers, most of them opt to go abroad to support their children. Instead of working in Zamboanga, they want to have better salaries by going to places like Saudi Arabia, Malaysia, Brunei and Manila. A connection in the dreams of the young adults is also noticed, because they also dream of going abroad someday. This is one way they can foresee how their present situations can be alleviated. There is an increasing percentage of Filipinos going abroad and the Muslims behave in accordance with this trend.

Mothers' Influences on Children's Outlook in Life

Going through the mothers' and young adults' responses, the mother's influence on her children's reactions is obvious regard to their challenging situations in life. If a mother faces a situation lightly, the child may face it similarly. Personality wise, when the mother projects an attitude, the child reflects same attitude as well.

Symbolic Model: Weave of Muslim Culture of Single-Parent Families' Experiences

When the meanings of the findings were examined, a woven mat *(banig)* image was thought to symbolize the interconnection of the themes. This is a symbol of the humble lives of the Filipino Muslims for the mat is commonly the place where they can lay on and rest when they are tired. The symbol is formulated based on the interviews gathered from the Muslim experts and from young adults and single mothers, themes emerged from the young adults, single mothers, perspectives and relationships between the themes generated from the young adults and their mothers. These themes interact with and are interwoven with the several cultural expectations among Muslims when it comes to their gender roles, beliefs and practices.
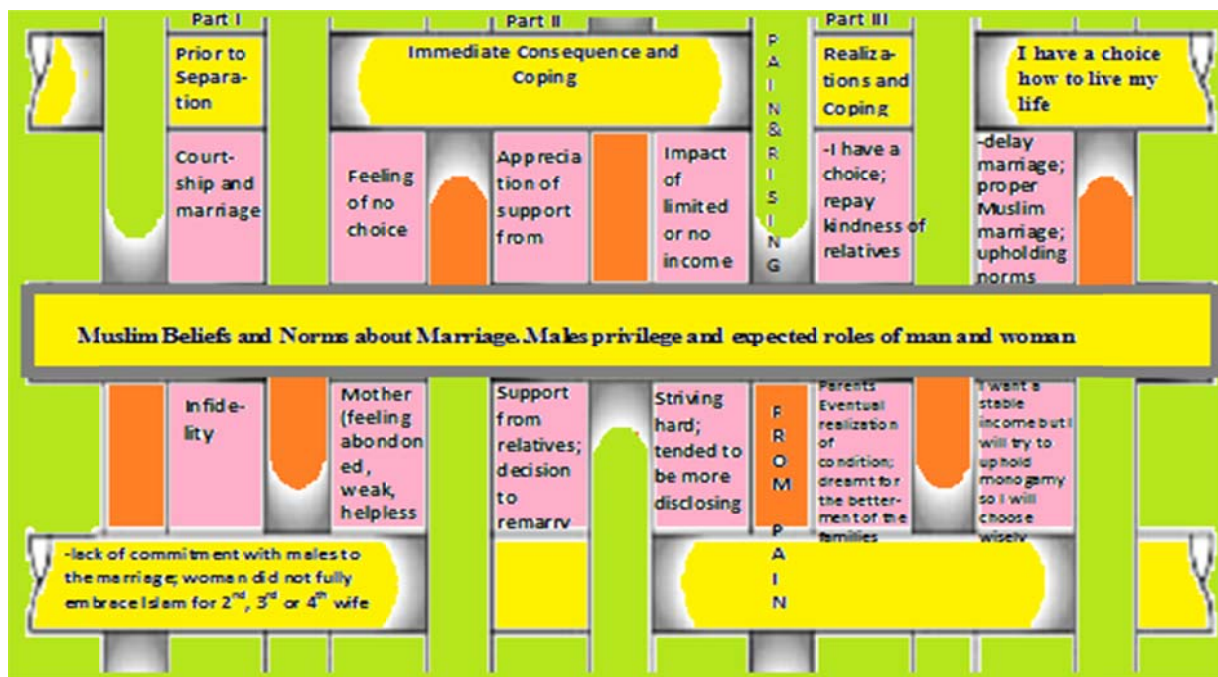

Figure 3. Symbolic Model of the Woven Mat (*Banig*).

Conclusion

Considering the study's statement of the problem, the research findings revealed the following conclusions:

Based from the Muslim experts, the "proper" Muslim marriage means following the required marriage procedures like the giving of dowry and acceptance of parents' consent. The couple, after marriage is expected to perform the responsibility of a husband and wife, whereby husbands are expected to be breadwinners and wives are to serve their husbands. Muslim men are also expected to support the family even in cases of divorce, and Muslim women should take care of the family. Two factors served to weaken the marriage. The study has shown that the lack of the initial requirements may result in a lower commitment of the husband to the wife and his family. On the other hand, the lack of acceptance of the woman of the possibility of a polygamous marriage served as a deterrent to the harmonious marital and family life, thus leading to divorce. This projects the Feminist Perspective cited by Benokraitis (2012) viewing that family as a group whose members learn socially-constructed expectations based on gender roles, social class, race, age, sexual orientation, and marital status.

These two sources of weakness may have led to the divorce. Children from single parent families, because of divorce, have various reactions regarding the separation of their parents especially when this happens in a crucial stage of their lives, the adolescence phase. During the separation, the children (teenage years) have negative perceptions, insights and feelings. Being a part of an "incomplete" family pains them as they become jealous of other families. Feelings of confusions, anger, loneliness, and sadness were apparent on these children. Yet, several years after the separation, despite the different challenges faced, most children will learn to gradually accept the family situation as they mature. There are several factors that influence them for this acceptance, like being open-minded about the situation or cognitive restructuring, understanding the Muslim culture, love of mother and support from the extended family, caring step-father, faith, and positive hopes and dreams for the future. This is relevant with the family life course development perspective viewing the family as a group whose members accomplish specific developmental tasks in a series of stages (Benokraitis, 2012).

Children left by their fathers would form a closer relationship with their mothers and siblings because they depend on each other and they value togetherness in meeting all the family stresses they experience. However, feelings of distance with their fathers will develop considering the event that they did not experience support from their fathers as years passed. Yet, in a Muslim culture, this will not hinder the young adults in moving on with their lives, because the male young adults serve as a father in the family by trying their best to be the breadwinner in the family, while the female young adults help their mothers so that their mothers will not be that overburdened in holding the dual responsibilities as both father and mother. Mahmud (2005) stressed two points exercised by young adults like the humanization of values and expansion of caring. The young adults begin to increase their awareness on the meaning of human values and they have increasing empathy towards others.

Single mothers undergo several challenges performing the task as single parents. Aside from the pains experienced because of the separation, the pain is exacerbated because of the responsibilities the mothers undergo to solely support and take care for the children. Thus, this can direct their children to go on with their lives despite the pains in the past. Faith, help extended by the relatives, along with the second husbands, and the dreams for their children contribute to the single Muslim woman's strong attitude despite all adversities. Lamaras and Reedman (2009) in the theory of Family Crisis explained that vulnerable families have difficulty in meeting their stressors or demands while those families who are capable of doing well in the face of adversity are called resilient.

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