

Configuring Common Toxic Filipino Family Culture: A Literature Review

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ABSTRACT

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Toxic family culture is one of the taboo topics in most Filipino households. Thus, studies have shown that toxic cultures are often passed on after each generation due to families undergoing behaviors and belief systems that have been normalized for the longest time. This study aims to recognize the existence of toxic family cultures and realize their impact on every family member's well-being. In this literature review, the main sources of data are empirical studies that have been published throughout the years. Results show that toxic Filipino family cultures exist and that they contribute to the intergenerational cycles of dysfunction and pertinent issues among the younger family members such as academic pressure and burnout, anxieties, stress, depression, delinquency, child aggression and other external behavioral issues. It is recommended that ways of identifying and acknowledging toxic family cultures and their long-term behavioral impacts that currently exist among Filipino households are essential. Further studies need to explore special cases of Filipino families to achieve in-depth and qualitative understanding of micro-situations and occurrence of toxic culture impacts among family members.

Keywords: Toxic Family Culture, Filipino Culture, Systematic Literature Review

INTRODUCTION

Family plays a fundamental role in shaping individuals' lives and the broader society. It is a unit holds a sacred and pivotal place in every nation. ¹In the Filipino context, familial bonds are profoundly significant, influencing one's identity, values, and aspirations (De Guia, 2019). While many Filipino families embody harmonious and nurturing environments, it is critical to recognize the existence of toxic family cultures that can have a negative impact on every family member's well-being. ²As an institution, family is often celebrated as the cornerstone of Filipino culture, where values of love, respect, and unity are deeply entrenched (Medina, 2017).

Toxic family culture has been considered controversial as it raises various opinions and elicits diverse viewpoints from various sectors of society, contingent upon their interpretations of what constitutes a toxic family culture. However, there is still a need to deconstruct the lesser-explored parts of Filipino family relations, focusing on toxic factors that can pervade this revered institution. ³Baylosis (2019) explained that toxic family culture may be developed through preconceptions about simple matters therein inside a family or group. Thus, it also describes the family dynamics in several aspects of Filipinos, such as work settings, politics, and social interactions.

The continuation of intergenerational attitudes and expectations is one of the core aspects contributing to toxic family culture in the Philippines. These beliefs include concepts such as unquestioning devotion to parents and elders due to *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude). ⁴Gavino, Donato and Panotan (2023) explained that *utang na loob* among millennials represents developing values and adaption to modern situations. This particular value lies beyond gratitude emphasizing meaningful experiences and positive life changes. ⁵Additionally, ⁵Rungduin et al. (2016) have also highlighted that *utang na loob* as part of strong Filipino values is perceived as *pagkilala* (acknowledgement); *pagtutumbas* (reciprocity) and *panlipunang gampanin* (social responsibility). ⁶Although *utang na loob* brings positive repression in some contexts, ⁶Dizon et al. (n.d.) argued that *utang na loob* is significantly correlated to

parental academic pressure and anxiety among Filipino college students. ⁷Wibowo and Syamsudin (2023) enumerates the characteristics of a dysfunctional family and toxic parents or family members namely; parents who cannot support the family, over-controlling to children and verbally and abusive.

⁸Moreover, in most cases of Filipino families, the first born or second born children, regardless of gender and sexuality are usually associated to elder's responsibility, which is commonly known as "*tagasalo*" syndrome (Perez, 2022). Even though "*tagasalo*" syndrome is a common behavior, positively taken in Filipino perspectives it also leads to the person's confusion in life roles, becoming too sensitive of other's feelings and needs and sacrificing their own welfare (being *panganay* assuming the parent's responsibilities in the household). ⁹Further, it can also lead to internalizing behaviors that may cause internal anxiety and stress and externalizing behaviors in order to cope with anxieties (Tian-Ng & Umandap, 2023).

The parent's role in the family dynamics is also seen as a contributing factor to development of toxic family culture. ¹⁰ The corporal punishments and coercive disciplines as part of authoritarian parenting style significantly leads to child aggression, delinquency, withdrawals and depression, behavioral and emotional problems (Garcia & Alampay (2012). ¹¹Thus, authoritarian mothers is positively associated to daughter's depressive symptoms (Hock, Mendelson & Hindin, 2018). ¹²Although it may lead to higher academic achievement in some cases, majority of the implication highlights rebellious attitudes and problematic behaviors in the latter part of their adolescent life (Fabella, 2022).

¹³Having these notions, it has been observed that most of the studies have focused on individualized aspects of Filipino unique concepts and behaviors an such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *tagasalo* (catcher) syndrome (Rungduin et al., 2016; Perez, 2022 ; Gavino, Donato and Panotan, 2023; Tian-Ng & Umandap, 2023). Additionally, the findings have been highlighting the positive implications making the negative ones being unexplored and unrecognized. ¹⁴Moreover, parental academic pressure and corporal punishments as part of authoritarian parenting style is less explored as an individual aspect of the family dynamic issues and puts highlight on the positive implications significantly (Jocson, Alampay and Lansford, 2012; Hock, Mendelson & Hindin, 2018). Therefore, this paper is an attempt to discuss and highlight the pertinent issues focusing on the possible negative implications of existing family dynamics and cultures in order to acknowledge "toxic" behaviors that may have been affecting the present generation.

METHODS AND METHODOLOGY:

The study utilized a Systematic Literature Review research design, which aims to gather qualitative data from existing studies and relevant findings focusing on the phenomenon understudy. ¹⁵In order to synthesize scientific evidence in a transparent and reproducible manner to address a specific research issue, systematic literature reviews (SRs) aim to include all published evidence related to the topic and evaluate the quality of that evidence (Lame, 2019). This study had mainly focused on examining relevant findings on toxic family culture in the Philippine context. The study employed purposive sampling method in order to determine the appropriate materials to be reviewed relevant to the research problem. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling design often used in qualitative studies. ¹⁶It is commonly preferred when random selection is not applicable to the research goal (Bekele & Ago, 2022). The study reviewed 10 empirical studies related to toxic family culture or family dynamics. This involves selecting empirical studies as primary sources of data based on specific characteristics relevant to the study, such as experiences or behaviors associated with toxic family culture in the Filipino context. The criteria in the material selection include the following:

- a) empirical studies in the Philippine context (studies that have primary data source such as interviews or surveys),
- b) studies that have Filipino participants or respondents, and
- c) either qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

This targeted approach ensures that the data gathered can provide valuable insights into the phenomenon being investigated, contributing to the depth and relevance of the empirical data collected. In terms of ethical considerations, the studies reviewed were cited and acknowledged accordingly. Thus, empirical studies used should have encompassed the criteria set (sampling design) prior to selection and review. ¹⁷The researcher ensured to follow the standard process of systematic review in educational research according to Zawacki-Ritcher et al. (2020) to avoid methodological issues that may arise such as bias on voice and representation of ideas.

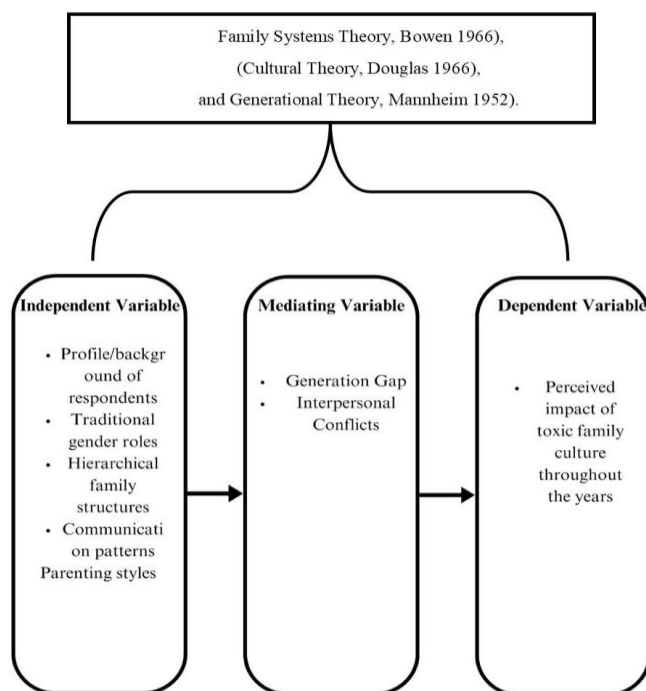


Figure 1. Theoretical Paradigm

Figure 1 shows the interaction of the IV- MV- DV model (independent, dependent, and mediating variable). It also explains how the study is supported by the theories.

¹⁸Rather than focusing solely on individual family members, the Family Systems Theory (Bowen 1966), is a psychological framework that examines family dynamics and interactions as a whole. Therapists like Murray Bowen and Salvador Minuchin developed it. This theory suggests that family members are interconnected and influence each other's behavior. Changes in one family member can lead to changes in the entire family system. The family unit, comprising of the father and the mother, serves as the fundamental cornerstone for the wholesome growth and progress of the children. ¹⁹This is primarily because, within the familial environment, the child experiences a sense of safety, affection, and care (Ribeiro, 2007). A healthy and secure environment is necessary for a child to develop, acquire knowledge, and discover. However, an unfavorable home situation can hinder a child's social, intellectual, and emotional progress. Studies have shown that a disadvantaged family environment in a child's infant years is associated with developmental setbacks. Same with toxic Filipino culture, if common toxic family culture is always applied in the household children's development will outgrow and can lead to serious problems that may affect their beliefs, values, and behaviors, which they can pass from generation to generation if not supervised.

²⁰Cultural Theory Douglas (1966) developed by Mary Douglas, focuses on the ways in which people classify and understand their world. One of her notable contributions is the "Grid-Group Cultural Theory". The classification of cultures is based on two dimensions: grid, which pertains to the level of social regulation, and group, which indicates the level of social integration. This theory helps analyze how cultures shape people's beliefs, values, and behaviors. Moreover, this theory will also work on how common toxic Filipino family culture shapes people's beliefs, values, and behaviors in opposite ways.

²¹Generational Theory Mannhei (1952) "generation gap" explains the differences in beliefs, values, and lifestyles exist between different generations. It suggests that the experiences and influences unique to each generation can lead to a disconnection or gap between them and other age groups. This theory is often used to explain conflicts or misunderstandings between parents and children, as well as broader societal changes over time. It is important to note that while generational gaps can be real, not all individuals within a generation will conform to the same beliefs

or values. The bridge between the two generations can be created through acceptance and understanding. Parents need to establish communication and foster a friendly relationship with their children. Additionally, they should recognize their child's endeavors to discover their own identity.

The independent variables in the study consist of the profile/background of the family members, traditional gender roles, hierarchical family structures, communication patterns and parenting styles. As for the mediating variables, the researchers identified that these include generation gap and interpersonal conflicts among family members, which influence the impact of toxic family culture in Filipino households. Finally, the dependent variables are the perceived impact of toxic family culture throughout the years.

RESULTS

On Profile

The literature review findings identify that common family characteristics who exhibit toxic culture or dynamics include those who practice the *tagasalo* (catcher) theory among the firstborn or second born children regardless of gender and sexuality, parents declaring family obligations to *panganay* (first born or middle born) due to dysfunctional marriage, low literacy or low educational attainment and poor socioeconomic status. Familial obligation among *panganay* (first born or middle born) is also associated to *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude), which means they should be the one to take over their parent's financial and even emotional duties when they are already capable of doing so – completed tertiary education and have stable source of income or job.

On Common Toxic Family Culture Exhibited in Filipino Households

Throughout the years, the studies reviewed have highlighted the common toxic family culture exhibited in Filipino households, which include; (a) the *tagasalo* (catcher) syndrome or also known as "parentification"; (b) parental pressure on academic achievement (regardless of birth order); (c) *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude); and (d) corporal punishments /authoritarian parenting.

On Perceived Impacts of Common Toxic Family Culture Exhibited in Filipino Households

The *tagasalo* (catcher) syndrome is seen to have positive implications such as sensitivity to other's feelings, developing sense of responsibility, learning to respond and take actions to immediate concerns and resolving conflicts within the family. Meanwhile, negative implications is also evident such as experiencing confusion on identity and roles, becoming too sensitive and concerned, sacrificing own welfare, internalizing behaviors that causes stress and anxiety and external behaviors to cope with the anxieties. The parental pressure on academic achievement is also evident as toxic family culture that leads to children's academic anxiety, stress and burnout. Subsequently, coercive parenting or authoritarian parenting is commonly perceived negatively as studies shown that it leads to child aggression, delinquency, withdrawals and depression as well as behavioral and emotional problems. Thus, *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) as an adverse effect of familial obligation to *panganay* (first born or middle born) also leads to academic anxiety and stress especially to children who are still in school.

CONCLUSIONS

The study argues that toxic family culture or negative family dynamics has been going on for a long time in most Filipino households. Thus, the parent's roles in maintaining a good and healthy family dynamics is crucial on this matter. The parent's educational attainment, socioeconomic status and marriage status are the specific demographic factors that lead the first born or second born children to assume familial obligations in absence of the parent's role. Subsequently, it is deemed that old family behaviors such as *tagasalo* (catcher) syndrome and *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) has negative and long term implications to the younger members of the family- the children. It is recommended that ways of identifying and acknowledging toxic family cultures and dynamics and their long-term behavioral impacts that currently exist among Filipino households are essential. Further studies need to explore special cases of Filipino families to achieve in-depth and qualitative understanding of micro-situations and occurrence of toxic culture impacts among family members.

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Annexes:

Tables of Data Gathered from Empirical Studies Reviewed

Table 1: Profile of the Families who Exhibit Toxic Family Culture

Studies	Relevant Findings
Perez (2022); Tian-Ng & Umandap (2023)	Slight <i>Tagasalo</i> syndrome- No significant difference on gender and birth order. Absolute <i>Tagasalo</i> – first born female and middle born children
Jocson, Alampay and Lansford (2012)	<i>Educational attainment of parents</i> (both mothers and fathers) has indirect association to parenting style; <i>authoritarian parenting (mothers)</i> and <i>corporal punishment (fathers)</i> .
Barlitangco et al. (2019)	Children raised by <i>parents with lower literacy</i> experience neglect.
Retuya et al. (2017)	<i>High performing students</i> in school mostly have family obligations.
Barlitangco et al. (2019); Garcia, A. S. & Alampay, L. P, (2012)	Children <i>with separated parents and reside with extended family</i> experience neglect. Parents experiencing stress, anxiety; difficult marital relationships; poor economic situation and neighborhood condition.

Table 2: Common Toxic Filipino Family Culture

Studies	Relevant Findings
Perez (2022); Tian-Ng & Umandap (2023)	<i>Tagasalo syndrome</i> – being the mediator, listener, care taker of the family when parents are absent (financially and emotionally), harmonizer of the family
Jocson, Alampay and Lansford (2012); Hock, Mendelson & Hindin (2018)	physical or corporal punishments or coercive disciplines to children
Garcia & Alampay (2012);	parental hostility and aggression
Retuya et al. (2017)	parental academic pressure; familial obligation

Barlitangco et al. (2019)	emotional invalidation; over involvement of parents
Dizon (n.d); Rungudin et al. (2016); Lim	<i>utang na loob (debt of gratitude)</i>

Table 3: Perceived Impacts of Toxic Filipino Family Culture

Studies	Relevant Findings
Perez (2022); Tian-Ng & Umandap (2023)	sensitivity to other's feelings; developing sense of responsibility; responds and take actions to immediate concerns about family, resolves conflicts among family members; experiences confusion and become too sensitive and concerned; sacrificing own welfare; internalizing behaviors that causes stress and anxiety; external behaviors to cope with the anxieties
Jocson, Alampay and Lansford (2012); Barlitangco et al. (2019)	constant need of validation, lack effective communication, mental health issues, generational trauma
Retuya et al. (2017)	mental health issues due to parent's expectations and familial obligation
Garcia & Alampay (2012) Hock, Mendelson & Hindin (2018)	child aggression; delinquency; withdrawals and depression; behavioral and emotional problems Authoritarian mothers (parenting) is positively associated to daughter's depressive symptoms.
Rungudin et al. (2016) Lim & Rañola (2022) Dizon (n.d.)	perceived as <i>pagkilala</i> (acknowledgement); <i>pagtutumbas</i> (reciprocity) and <i>panlipunang gampanin</i> (social responsibility) extending gratitude and reciprocity; allow meaningful connections if moderately instilled in routines; evolving trait connected to familial relationships correlated to parental academic pressure and anxiety among college students