

“PRE-ARRANGED MARRIAGE AMONG B’LAAN SECONDARY STUDENTS: TA- LES OF JOY AND SORROW”

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to describe the lives’ experiences among B’laan secondary students who are involved in pre-arranged marriage. Phenomenological approach was employed with 14 students. In-depth interview and focus group discussion were conducted which revealed that pre-arranged marriage in B’laan tribes is prevalent and contracted by both bride’s and the groom’s parents. There were eight major themes emerged as experienced by pre-arranged marriage students such as agony and torment, confined and held captive, contempt, absence of courtship, violence, suffering and deprivation, harmonization, and freedom regained. The participants of the study had different approaches in coping with the experience, through support system, diversion of focus, toleration and acceptance and faith in the Divine. Despite of being married pre-arranged by their parents, they have their aspirations in life like: literacy, lesson and personal resolve, cultural awakening, exhortations to B’laan girl’s/women and personal liberation. Based on the results of the study, it came out that pre-arranged marriage of B’laan secondary female students were found to have particular aspirations pertaining to their marriage, education and career, but lacked confidence in their abilities to create the desired future, which made me conclude that marrying early through pre-arranged marriage is detrimental to their educational attainment.

Keywords :

B’laan. The Bilaan or B`laan are a tribal community of Southern Mindanao, the name of this indigenous group comes from the words *Bla* and *An*, meaning *Opponent People*. They are still upholding their traditional ways of living, their values and distinctive culture, it is impressive to see how this community can adjust and find meaning in life in a modern Philippine society (Website design and maintenance). Most marriages are limited to close relatives, within this community cousins are allowed to marry each other to protect and secure themselves from intrusions.

Joy and Sorrow of Pre-arranged Marriage Students. The live’s experiences

of student who is involved in pre-arranged marriage. It is joy when they experienced happiness, contentment, commitment, harmony and go hand and hand with partners to uplift life's situation and rear their children, educate them and guide them to the right path and teach them good values. And most of all when the husband permits his wife to finish her studies and enjoy while having school activities in spite they are married. It is sorrow when she experienced anguish in life due to lack of understanding, financial constrains, partner's jealousy, early pregnancy, battered wife, social isolation, lack of patience, incurred absences due to child's illnesses and a life full of stress and tension because of no love with each other. Typically, it is in the interest of wives to work hard to make their marriage work rather than to look for a way out (Pothen, 1989, Sing, 2010). Sacrifice was the third most referenced theme after family involvement. The wives are required to work, adjust, and sacrifice more than husbands in order to make their marriages work.

Pre-arranged Marriage.It is a marriage pre-arranged by both parents of the bride and the groom. They are proposed and contracted through the negotiation and decision between their parents or someone of the couple's family rather by each other. Both parents decide the dowry which includes: the necklace, gong, carabao, horse, brass container with betel nut mixed with line and a certain amount of money as agreed added Tinio (1993).

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INTRODUCTION

The Philippine educational system is currently faced by several issues that need to be taken into account in order to uplift the delivery of education to the most number of the people. One of these is the quality and accessibility of education to its individual. Apparently, the Philippine government, in spite of its inadequacy of providing some basic services to its people, is doing its best to provide the basis of basic schooling to its people for free. Similarly, the 1987 Philippine Constitution provides that public secondary education must be free. This legal mandates resulted to the increase in enrollment of public elementary and secondary schools. Hence, access to public education is now a right of every Filipino child and a responsibility of the parents.

In reality, formal education has not achieved what it was supposed to achieve. Our schools right now are in a delicate situation on how to keep children in school, with the increasing rate of "school leavers" or students at risk to dropouts, (DepEd. 2010) recognizing that most students who discontinue schooling were pushed out of the system due to factors beyond their and their parents' control. The functional literacy of the Filipinos as at its minimum reflecting the sad state of education, there are prevalent problems of our school-aged children, where children who are supposed to be in the classrooms, are working to help augment family income and attending the needs of the family. This suggests that children nowadays experienced the irony of what really they should experience in lives, supposedly the commitment of being in school. It is sad truth about the present condition among indigenous children in upland areas, who experienced this pragmatic marriage as one of the two types of pre-arranged marriage, where the bride and groom have no choice in the selection of a prospective partner, (Shuraydi & Zaidi, 2002). In contrary to our common belief, pre-arranged marriages are not necessarily forced. But in actuality, child marriage is a violation of human rights, compromising the development of young girls and often resulting in early pregnancy and social isolation, while little education and poor vocational training reinforcing the gendered nature of poverty (UNICEF 2005).

Pre-arranged marriage among indigenous school-aged children is widespread phenomenon across numerous culture and subculture worldwide (Futurescope.com). In fact, countries with a closer tie to their tribal history tend to have arranged marriages as the custom in their country. In this case, parents encourage the marriage of their daughters while they are still young in hopes that the marriage will benefit them both financially and socially relieving financial burdens on the family. Markedly, legal bride price can reach high amounts and require a legal religion intermediary to make sure all families are served. Though, marrying early is detrimental to the educational attainments of young girl (American Journal of Sociology copyright 1981).

To better comprehend pre-arranged marriage among indigenous secondary students, it is necessary to identify the gaps in the existing research. One of the identified gaps is in the research on culture and tradition of indigenous people in rural areas specifically pre-arranged marriage. More research is needed on pre-arranged marriage among B'laan secondary students to better understand if and how much this kind of marriage impacts their pursuit in education. The existing research also reveals a lack of qualitative studies on pre-arranged marriage as a whole. This interest is reflected in a renewed concern with the effects of this marital practice of school aged children on school progression.

So far, no qualitative research is conducted particularly pre-arranged marriage among B'laan secondary students. The fact that school personnel, teachers, and students do not recognize pre-arranged marriage students. This suggests that more research is necessary in order to better inform the concern citizens about the issue on "school leavers" or students at risk to "dropouts" as well as issues which the sufferer are experiencing. It is hoped to focus on their particular issue that will shed light on appropriate responses to other forms.

It is in this context that the researcher hopes to set out an inquiry about the present condition and the experiences of our school-aged children who are involved in pre-arranged marriage in upland areas. Likewise their coping mechanisms adopted to lead in their pursuits to education together with their aspirations to attain quality lives. This became the pivotal point of this research

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to describe the lives experiences of secondary students who are involved in marriage pre-arranged by their parents or by their relatives. This study involves public school in Kiblawan, Davao del Sur, with the intent of achieving clearer understanding of this pre-arranged marriage phenomenon in our secondary students in upland areas.

This research study envisions to account and to document the traumatic experiences of students who experienced this kind of marriage pre-arranged by their parents while they are schooling in public school. This phenomenological study presents evidences about the informant's personal characteristics, married life activities, school activities, school achievements, plans and ambitions in life and how they able to surmount challenges in life being pre-arranged marriage students.

In this study, the intention is to observe, listen and grasp the untold stories of the students as they divulge their experiences. The experiences and reactions of the students which are documented in detail are the absolute testimonies of the emotional feeling of anxiety or even the joy they have experienced in their married lives and how they were able to manage themselves to live life and sustain to continue their studies despite of their situations, the insights or realizations they can share with, out of their experiences and the advise they can give to their friends and classmates.

Research Questions

This study will be sought to answer the following questions:

- What are the experiences of students involved in pre-arranged marriage?
- What coping mechanisms are adopted by the pre-arranged marriage students to lead in their pursuits of education?
- What are the aspirations of pre-arranged marriage students?

METHODOLOGY

This chapter presented the nature of the study, the research design used with regard to presentation, analysis, and interpretation, the philosophical assumptions, role of the researcher, research participants, data collection process, data analysis, trustworthiness which includes the following: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability of the study and all individuals who were involved and the ethical considerations in the process.

Research Design

In this study, descriptive qualitative method was applied particularly phenomenology. Phenomenology is concerned with the study of human perception of events or phenomena from the actual happenings in the real world, (Campbell, 2011; Carpenter & Speziale, 2007; Creswell, 2007; Willis, 2007). It is reliving the experiences of the participants involved in the study and going deeper into their thoughts, identifying the essence of the experience as described by them, through lengthy discussions.

Role of the Researcher

It has been heard from the news, seen from the television and read from newspapers and through internet the disgusting outcomes brought about by the pre-arranged marriage among children not only here in our country but with the other countries. Here in the Philippines, a child protection program was enacted. It is a body of change which monitors the implementation of Republic Act No. 7610, the special protection for child against abuse, exploitation and discrimination act anchored with the child protection policy of the Department of Education. However, issues on child abuse are prevalent specifically child neglect, sexual abuse, and employment of the persuasion, inducement, enticement or coercion of a child to engage sexual conduct and any other forms related to abuse like pre-arranging their marriages. It is for this reason that I undertook this research endeavor to find out pre-arranged marriage among children does exist. If it still in existence, I investigate, explore and discover the underlying factors of the said phenomenon. In this way I can contribute in alleviating their way of life by giving insights and encouragement to pursue their education and help improve quality of education.

Research Participants

Before the conduct of the study, I already identified some of my informants. The identified informants were my students who enrolled in Open High School Program, whom I have chosen through purposive sampling as my participants based on a pre-selected criteria relevant to the research study (Carpenter & Speziale, 2007; Morse & Richard, 2006; Saunders, 2012) -in this case, they were all pre-arranged marriage students who experienced this kind of tribal marriage among B'laan. They were referred here in this study as "targets" and "victims" of pre-arranged marriage since they all suffered torment in the hands of their partners.

Collection of Data

In collecting the data of the study, I followed the following processes: in-depth interview with the informants, conducting focus group discussion with the participants, note taking and audio recording. Prior to this process, I made sure that ethical considerations were properly observed. I applied the key principles of ethical issues (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006; Bricki and Green, 2007; Mack et al, 2005) that should be considered in any research studies which are consent and confidentiality. A consent form was explained thoroughly to help them understand the focal reasons of having it by letting them signed the consent form. (Ancker, 2004) stipulated that informed consent is one of the most important things to

consider when conducting a research project. Basically, informed consent is something that was created to protect the participants. This means that no researcher can include a person in a research project without getting an approval from them first. This also protects the individual from harm and protects the researcher from being sued or having their project deemed invalid or unethical. During the meeting with the participants, I explained to them the details of the study and see to it that everyone understands that everything was done with confidentiality. After gaining their trust, I asked them to sign a written consent. It is important to provide them safe and comfortable environment in sharing their personal experiences (Bloom and Crabtree, 2006). I made sure the venue, where the interview conducted is free from distractions it's either in the computer laboratory fully air conditioned and well lighted or in the Guidance Counselor's office which is also conducive for conducting interviews.

Analysis of Data

Analysis of data in this study included the summary of group or mass data collected and the presentation of the results was based on the necessary features (Hancock et al, 2007).

The recorded in-depth interviews were manually transcribed, checked and evaluated for content analysis through peer debriefing and member checking. Janesick (2004) emphasized that peer debriefing allows a peer to review and assess transcripts, emerging categories from those transcripts, and final report. In addition, a peer acts as a sort of critical detective or auditor. This peer may detect whether or not a researcher has over-emphasized a point, or missed a rival legitimate hypothesis, under-emphasized a point, and in general does a careful reading of the data and the final report. Data were analyzed using specific methods like data reduction, data display, drawing of conclusion and verification and adding qualitative content analysis it attempts to identify its core consistencies and meaning (Wildemuth & Zhang, 2007). Data reduction is the abstraction of data from the transcription considering only the important details of the data and transforms it into a comprehensible material (Namey et al, 2007; Paul, 2006; Suter, 2012). This sorting and categorizing data is referred to thematic analysis of which there is pairing and sieving of data. In this study, I applied data reduction and hired an expert professional data analyst who assisted me in sorting and organizing groups of qualitative data and served as my word critic. Thus, consolidation of the data made the result of this study commendable.

Trustworthiness

To establish the trustworthiness of the study, I followed its four components namely: credibility, confirmability, transferability, and dependability. Trustworthiness is the basic thing in order to produce an effective and reliable research output. It added a strong impact to both researcher and its research works (Guba and Lincoln ,1998).

Ethical Consideration

Considering that my research study involves students specifically IPs, they are hesitant to divulge information because of shyness, fear and withheld some data. But as

part of research exactness, several protections were applied to eliminate their fears and trust will be developed. I ensured that my study is guided by ethical principles such as: respect for persons, beneficence, justice, consent and confidentiality (Mack et al, 2005) as described.

RESULTS

In this chapter, presents the participants' experiences with regard to their insights and perceptions which include generalizations which arise from the information gathered through in-depth interviews and focus group discussion. The following research questions contributed to the realization of data output from the informants.

What are the experiences of students involved in pre-arranged marriage?

What coping mechanisms are adopted by the pre-arranged marriage students to lead in their pursuits of education?

What are the aspirations of pre-arranged marriage students?

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Table 2. Themes and Core Ideas on experiences of B'laan students involved in pre-arranged marriage.

| Major Themes | Frequency of Responses | Core Ideas |
|-------------------|------------------------|---|
| Agony and torment | General | I was so sad; so unhappy even until now; never experienced happiness. |
| | Typical | I was afraid for I do not know the man, afraid for my future. |
| | | I was ashamed. |
| | Variant | I cried so much; I kept crying. |
| | | We keep on quarrelling. |
| | | I wanted to run away. |
| | | I cannot sleep; lost appetite to eat. |
| | | I was discouraged; wanted to die. |
| | | I was bullied by my classmates. |
| | Variant | Was afraid they will take revenge on family since dowry had been paid. |
| | | I want to get away from him but cannot; I struggled. |
| | | My Father chased me when I tried to run away; guarded me so I will not leave. |
| | | Loss of my freedom; no more freedom |
| | | I ran away; husband chased me and brought me back home. |

| Major Themes | Frequency Responses | Core Ideas |
|---------------------------|---------------------|---|
| | | Cannot go outing with friends anymore. |
| Contempt | Typical | I really did not like him; I do not love him; we did not love each other. |
| | Variant | I felt hatred, disdain, I hated him. |
| | | He was unattractive; ugly; old; untidy. |
| | | He was troublesome. |
| | | I always find fault with him. |
| | | I never learned to like him. |
| Absence of courtship | Typical | We met for the first time during the wedding ceremony; in spread mat. |
| | | My parents pointed at him on the street as the one I am going to marry. |
| | Variant | He just introduced to me as husband to be at home. |
| | | The day we were married, we did not know what to do. |
| Violence | Variant | He forced himself on me on the first night. |
| | | He was always jealous; follows me to school. |
| | | He battered when he was drunk; was possessive and ferocious. |
| | | I was force to do what he wanted because of fear. |
| | | I cannot leave abusive husband because we cannot return the dowry. |
| | | Sleeping with a man you do not love is the hardest experience. |
| | | Got pregnant at the age of 13; not menstruating yet. |
| | | I was always angry. |
| Suffering and deprivation | Typical | I experienced hardship because we were young. |
| | Variant | I did not know how to take good care of our sick baby; family. |
| | | We experienced poverty; financial constraints. |
| Harmonization | Variant | I gradually pity on him. |
| | | Now that we have kids, we learned to understand each other. |
| | | I eventually learned to live in harmony with him; to love him. |
| Freedom regained | Variant | I returned the dowry double with the help of my family, now I am free. |

Table 3. Themes and Core Ideas on coping mechanisms of B’laan students involved in pre-arranged marriage.

| Major Themes | Frequency of Responses | Core Ideas |
|---------------------------|------------------------|--|
| Support systems | General | Asked help from teachers to finish studies; asked for advice. |
| | Typical | Shared my concerns with my parents. |
| | Variant | Requested consideration from my teachers. |
| | | Sought help from family. |
| Diversion of focus | Typical | Divided time for studies and family. |
| | | Paid attention to my studies. |
| | Variant | Asked/convinced parents and husband to let me continue my studies. |
| | | Focused on tending my child. |
| | | Sometimes I sacrifice time even if it is difficult. |
| Toleration and acceptance | | I tried to enjoy life even if it is difficult. |
| | | I had no choice. |
| Faith in the Divine | | I prayed to God. |

Table 4. Themes and Core Ideas on aspirations of B'laan students involved in pre-arranged marriage.

| Major Themes | Frequency of Responses | Core Ideas |
|------------------------------------|------------------------|---|
| Literacy | General | Continue to study and be educated. |
| | Typical | Finish studies. |
| | Variant | Not to be called ignorant. |
| | | Be able to teach and guide my children. |
| | | Become a teacher. |
| Lesson and personal resolve | General | Find a good job. |
| | Variant | Give my children a good future; a good life. |
| | | Not to let my children experience my hardship in marriage. |
| | | I will not do the same to my children. |
| | | Educate and share to the parents about parenting. |
| Live life to the fullest. | | |
| Cultural Awakening | General | B'laan must gradually change and leave the culture of pre-arranged marriage; practice should be discontinued. |
| | Variant | Pre-arranged marriage is not good. |
| | | It is unfair for the women/girls |
| Exhortations to B'laan girls/women | Variant | Refuse the pre-arranged marriage. |
| | | Tell parents the possible consequences that will happen. |
| | | Girls should not be brought into this kind of marriage. |
| Personal Liberation | Variant | Freedom from someone you do not love. |
| | | Get out from the bondage of poverty. |
| | | I do not want to live in the highlands permanently. |

Chapter Summary.

The results of the study were based from the responses of both the in-depth interview informants and the FGD participants, among the experiences of the pre-arranged marriage students which came out as major themes, agony and torment with 31 percent incidence such as I was so sad; so unhappy even until now; never experienced happiness has the highest incidence, making it the general core idea and here are some of typical core ideas responses by the informants and participants in the FGD on agony and torment they have experience such as: I was afraid for I do not know the man, afraid of my future, and I was ashamed. Less than 25 percent responses on the other major themes on the experiences of pre-arranged marriage students such as; confined and held captive, contempt, absence of courtship, and violence and a low incidence below 10 percent experienced suffering and deprivation, harmonization and freedom regained.

Most of the participants and informants in the FGD coped from the experiences based on personal struggle. Among the four major themes, support system with 45 percent came out the highest level of coping mechanism among the pre-arranged marriage students with: asked help from teachers to finish studies; asked for advice as general core ideas. It followed by the diversion focus of 42 percent with the typical core ideas: divided time for studies and family and paid attention to my studies. Some just tried to enjoy live even if it is difficult, had no choice and have faith in the Divine.

Most of the participants and informants aspired to continue their studies and be educated as the general core ideas of the major theme literacy with 31 percent responses. Some aspired to finish studies, not to be called an ignorant, be able and guide their children and become a teacher. More than 25 percent on lesson and personal resolve as major theme which includes the general core idea: find a good job and others chose to give their children a good future, a good life, not to let their children experience their hardship in marriage, educate and share to the parents about parenting and live life to the fullest.

Only 24 percent of the major theme cultural awakening with the general core ideas such as: B'laan must gradually change and leave the culture of pre-arranged marriage; practice should be discontinued. For the others, pre-arranged marriage is not good and it is unfair for the women/girls. Only 11 percent and 5 percent on major themes exhortation to B'laan girls/women and personal liberation respectively, variant core ideas responses of the participants and informants are: refuse to the pre-arranged marriage, tell parents the possible consequences that will happen, girls should not be brought into this kind of marriage; and freedom from someone you do not love, get out of the bondage of poverty and I do not want to live in the highlands permanently.

Implications for Practice

On the experiences of B'laan students involved in pre-arranged marriage, there are eight major themes generated which were agony and torment, confined and held captive, contempt, absence of courtship, violence, suffering and deprivation, harmonization, and freedom regained. The results of these pre-arranged marriage experienced by B'laan students imply that Philippine Government needs to address these complex issues of our female students who are victims of this kind of tribal marriage, pre-arranging the marriage of young children as part of their culture and tradition. The child protection policy of the Department of Education ("Toward a Child-Friendly Education Environment") PWU-CWU-UNICEF or Plan Philippines of 2009) Mandate: Art. XV. Sec. 3 (b). 1987 Philippine Constitution: "the State

shall defend the right of children to assistance, including proper care and nutrition, and special protection from all forms of neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation and other conditions prejudicial to their development.”

Implications for Future Research

In as much as this study is limited to the public secondary school of Davao del Sur, the following future research are recommended: Since the findings of this study are not generalizable beyond the fourteen (14) participants, future research may be conducted on the pre-arranged marriage among the B'laan secondary students with another group of participants in order to strengthen and validate the findings of this study.

Second, future research may be conducted on pre-arranged marriage in other parts of Region XI and other regions to add to the research base and gather more information and insights from the other victims of pre-arranged marriage.

Third, future research may be done by conducting a re-interview with some of the participants to find out if their views and insights on the experiences have not changed over time.

Fourth, further research may be conducted to identify preferred and effective intervention strategies to address pre-arranged marriage among secondary students.

Fifth, a different research may be conducted documenting how school officials respond to needs of pre-arranged marriage students.

The findings of this study were viewed from the lens of the pre-arranged marriage B'laan secondary students. Further research may be conducted to determine the school heads' and teachers' views and insights on pre-arranged marriage of B'laan secondary students to confirm the findings of this study

Concluding Remarks

From the results of the study, I can say that pre-arranged marriage among school aged children is still prevalent most especially in highland areas. This traditional practice of pre-arranging marriage of young children by their both parents among the B'aan tribal group was handed down by their forefathers (Tinio, 1993).It plays a critical role in the preservation of culture and tradition. Cooperman (2004) cited, across the cultures and societies in the world have existed various models and approaches to the institution of marriage. Due to modernization formal education and marriage practices such as parent involvement in choosing marriage partner for their children and strong families are exemplified by rare divorce are made threat (Tumtwine, 2007).

From the findings of the study, we have observed how the pre-arranged marriage affected the participants of the study. This is parallel with the findings that traditional marriage practices like early marriage and commercialization of bride price (Tumtwine, 2007) should be discouraged to faster better health for women and reduction of poverty.

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