



Pakikisama in the Context of Wives' Lived Realities in Post-Marital Residence with In-Laws

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the lived experiences of seven Filipino wives residing with their in-laws in multigenerational households through in-depth, semi-structured interviews analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Analysis followed iterative IPA procedures (initial noting, emergent theme development, and cross-case synthesis) supported by QDA Miner Lite, with analytic rigor ensured through researcher reflexivity, memo writing, and sustained engagement with the data. Guided by Family Systems Theory, Family Conflict Theory, Transformative Learning Theory, and the Filipino cultural construct of *pakikisama*, the study examined how emotional, relational, and cultural conditions shaped wives' everyday realities. Eight interrelated themes emerged: (1) Relational Burnout, the depletion of personal resources from daily household life; (2) Emotional Exhaustion, fatigue from sustained relational demands; (3) Multidimensional Support, moral, emotional, and financial assistance from in-laws often experienced as obligatory; (4) Identity Tension, challenges in negotiating personal roles within the household; (5) Harmonious Restraint, deliberate emotional regulation and strategic silence to maintain peace; (6) Persistent Living Arrangement, long-term co-residence as a structural and emotional reality difficult to change; (7) Transformative Adaptation, increased self-awareness and personal growth through prolonged cohabitation; and (8) Mandated *Pakikisama*, the cultural imperative to uphold harmony and respect (*paggalang*). Findings portray Filipino wives as active negotiators of gendered emotional labor, sustaining family cohesion within extended households. By foregrounding *pakikisama* as both a cultural resource and constraint, the study extends qualitative literature on multigenerational households and gendered emotional labor beyond Western-centric frameworks, challenging assumptions that emotional labor is invisible or secondary and demonstrating how it is culturally mandated and relationally embedded in non-Western contexts, with implications for culturally responsive family support systems.

Keywords: *Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, Filipino Wives, Extended Family Households, Pakikisama (Getting Along), Emotional Labor, Family Systems, Intergenerational Dynamics, Women's Resilience*

INTRODUCTION

Multigenerational household arrangements remain common across Southeast Asia, including the Philippines, where newly married couples often reside with one or both sets of parents due to cultural norms, economic constraints, and caregiving expectations. As family structures shift amid urbanization, economic precarity, and changing gender roles, these arrangements warrant renewed scholarly attention, particularly given growing concerns about women's mental health, marital strain, and the adequacy of existing family support systems. Post-marital residence norms typically specify whether couples live with the husband's or wife's family (Khalil & Mookerjee, 2018, as cited in Sugianto et al., 2025), and in patriarchal societies, women are often expected to reside with their husband's family (LibreTexts, 2020). While such arrangements

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may provide material and social support, they also create relational vulnerabilities, especially for wives navigating power asymmetries, role ambiguity, and emotional expectations within extended households.

Existing studies document frequent conflicts between mothers-in-law and daughters-in-law, often arising from unclear family roles, competing authority, and the absence of a shared family identity, which may foster emotional disconnection and marital strain (Zahrakar et al., 2022). Research further indicates that the quality of these relationships significantly affects wives' physical health, emotional well-being, and social functioning (Gopalakrishnan et al., 2023). However, much of the literature (largely grounded in Western or quantitatively oriented frameworks) conceptualizes co-residence primarily in terms of burden or support. What remains conceptually underexplored is how wives *experience, interpret, and emotionally negotiate* daily life with in-laws, particularly in non-Western contexts where cultural values regulate emotional expression, obligation, and relational ethics. From a qualitative and phenomenological perspective, the lived meanings of emotional labor within multigenerational households remain insufficiently theorized.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framing

This study examines the lived realities of Filipino wives residing with in-laws through Family Systems Theory, Family Conflict Theory, Transformative Learning Theory, and the Filipino cultural value of *pakikisama* (getting along). Family Systems Theory conceptualizes the household as an interconnected unit, where stress, role changes, or emotional shifts in one relationship reverberate throughout the family system, shaping interactional patterns and power dynamics. Research has shown that ambiguous roles and communication breakdowns in extended households often generate tension and emotional strain (Famiglini, 2023). Family Conflict Theory further elucidates how unequal authority and competing expectations intensify interpersonal conflict in patriarchal family structures.

The cultural value of *pakikisama* provides a critical interpretive lens for understanding how wives regulate emotions, suppress dissent, and adapt behaviors to preserve harmony and relational continuity. Transformative Learning Theory complements this perspective by illuminating how prolonged exposure to relational strain can foster reflection, adaptation, and personal growth, enabling wives to reframe their identities and coping strategies over time (Dirkx, 2020; Johnson, 2021). Together, these frameworks allow for an integrated analysis of emotional labor as culturally mediated, relationally embedded, and developmentally consequential.

Research Gaps and Purpose of the Study

This study addresses three interrelated gaps in the literature. Empirically, there is limited contextualized research on Filipino wives' lived experiences within multigenerational households, particularly regarding emotional labor and relational negotiation. Theoretically, existing scholarship has yet to fully conceptualize *pakikisama* as a form of gendered emotional labor that sustains family cohesion under conditions of cultural obligation and unequal power. Methodologically, few studies employ phenomenological approaches capable of capturing the depth, nuance, and meaning-making processes embedded in everyday co-residence with in-laws.

Addressing these gaps, this study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) to generate qualitative insight into how Filipino wives experience, interpret, and negotiate emotional labor within multigenerational households. In doing so, it contributes to qualitative theory-building by extending understandings of *pakikisama* beyond interpersonal harmony to include its function as emotional labor, while also informing culturally sensitive family support and counseling practices.

Research Objectives and Research Questions

To guide the study, the researcher formulated clearly defined research objectives to ensure analytic focus and parsimony in examining the lived experiences of Filipino wives residing with their in-laws in multigenerational households. Specifically, the objectives were: (1) to describe the lived experiences of wives in post-marital residence with in-laws; (2) to identify the essential themes emerging from their narratives; and (3) to generate recommendations grounded in participants' accounts that may inform culturally responsive family support and practice. To further focus the inquiry, the study was guided by the central question: "*What is the essence of the lived experience of wives in post-marital residence with in-laws?*" Additionally, the following corollary questions were formulated to support the exploration of the central question, to wit:

1. How do Filipino wives describe their lived experiences of post-marital residence with in-laws in multigenerational households?
2. What essential themes emerge from Filipino wives' accounts regarding emotional labor, relational negotiation, and cultural expectations (e.g., *pakikisama* and *paggalang*)?
3. Based on the findings of the study, what culturally responsive recommendations may be drawn?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Navigating Emotional Strain in Extended Family Life

[Martinez et al. \(2020\)](#) investigated mental health help-seeking among Filipinos, revealing cultural silence, shame, and self-restraint that shape wives' negotiation of marital and familial hierarchies through quiet compliance and indirect opposition. Similarly, [Lee et al. \(2025\)](#) described intergenerational silence, emotional stoicism, and indirect communication as culturally rooted norms shaped by expectations of respect and self-control. Both studies highlight constraints on women's expression, yet they also reveal resilience, as participants leveraged therapy, peer support, and bicultural strategies to redefine emotional norms and foster relational healing. In contrast, [Daly and Perry \(2021\)](#) emphasized the tensions and reciprocal costs of women's emotional labor, showing how initial oppression may evolve into subtle retaliation or withdrawal, whereas [Putri and Kusumaningrum \(2024\)](#) underscore growth potential, linking positive emotional expression to enhanced marital satisfaction in Indonesian households. [Han et al. \(2023\)](#) further complicates this picture, showing that mother-in-law/daughter-in-law tensions suppress self-expression but also reveal adaptive resistance through quiet efforts to preserve harmony. Collectively, these studies converge on the role of culturally enforced silence and restraint in shaping wives' behavior but diverge in outcomes—some emphasizing constraint and emotional strain, others highlighting resilience, growth, and adaptive coping. Cross-cultural comparisons (Filipino vs. Indonesian contexts) illustrate both shared pressures of patriarchal family systems and divergent negotiation pathways, pointing to the need for qualitative approaches capable of capturing these lived meaning-making processes, which prior research has not fully addressed.

Intergenerational Surveillance and Control

Global and regional studies consistently show that living with mothers-in-law (MILs) shapes women's autonomy, behavior, and daily life. [Pradhan and Mondal \(2023\)](#) found that MILs influence daughters-in-law's (DILs) reproductive decisions, while [Anukriti et al. \(2020\)](#) demonstrated co-residence restricts mobility and social connections. [Dixit et al. \(2022\)](#) observed MILs asserting authority in childcare and household decision-making, highlighting direct surveillance, whereas [Abdullah et al. \(2025\)](#) extended this view, showing economic and caregiving expectations further constrain women's choices. These studies converge on the theme of constraint but diverge in emphasis across domains, illustrating that MIL authority is multidimensional and culturally reinforced. Prior research documents patterns of control but largely neglects women's lived interpretations and strategies for navigating these pressures—gaps that an IPA approach can illuminate.

Cultural Dissonance and Role Conflict

Households are dynamic sites where cultural expectations, intergenerational roles, and societal pressures converge, producing role conflict and dissonance. [Dagami et al. \(2022\)](#) documented marital tensions in Leyte arising from parental separation, while [Saviet and Greif \(2021\)](#) showed intercultural marriages in the U.S. face communication and expectation challenges. [Akanle and Ogunkan \(2021\)](#) highlighted Nigerian MILs' contested authority, described Syrian refugee families adapting patriarchal norms toward collaboration. These studies converge on households as sites of tension and negotiation but diverge in outcomes, from constraint and strain to resilience and adaptation. Existing work rarely engages with how wives actively interpret and negotiate these roles, leaving a conceptual and methodological gap addressed by IPA.

“Pakikisama” as Survival Strategy

In Filipino extended families, pakikisama (getting along) emphasizes harmony, conflict avoidance, and mutual accommodation. [Capuli et al. \(2025\)](#) highlighted DILs’ adaptive compliance to maintain family unity, while [Felipe-Dimog et al. \(2023\)](#) emphasized respect and elder caregiving. In contrast, [Pagente \(2023\)](#) emphasized reciprocity and situational discretion in applying pakikisama. These studies converge on its role in sustaining household cohesion but diverge in highlighting constraint versus agency. Prior research documents pakikisama descriptively, but its function as gendered emotional labor within power-laden hierarchies remains under-theorized—a gap addressed through IPA in the current study.

Emotional and Psychological Impacts of In-Law Relationships

Extended family living profoundly affects wives’ autonomy, well-being, and identity. [Walsh \(2021\)](#) and [Patel and Desai \(2022\)](#) emphasize resilience and personal growth via meaning-making, while [Adebayo et al. \(2025\)](#) and [Abdullah \(2025\)](#) highlight vulnerability and reduced autonomy under in-law interference. [Ang-Tan and Choo \(2024\)](#) demonstrate supportive in-law relationships can foster integration and emotional security. Across contexts, experiences reflect a tension between constraint and growth. Previous research largely remains descriptive, focusing on patterns of compliance or resistance without fully integrating theoretical frameworks. Family Systems Theory highlights relational interdependence, Gendered Emotional Labor frameworks reveal invisible work sustaining cohesion, and Cultural Harmony frameworks emphasize values like pakikisama and paggalang. Yet these approaches fall short in capturing how wives themselves interpret and transform these pressures. By employing IPA, the current study illuminates how Filipino wives negotiate, internalize, and reconfigure cultural imperatives into coping strategies, resilience, and identity work, advancing qualitative theory by framing pakikisama as emotional labor situated within systemic, gendered, and cultural contexts.

RESEARCH METHOD

Research Design and Participants

This research utilized a qualitative design, adopting an Interpretative Phenomenological Approach (IPA) as outlined by [Creswell and Creswell \(2018\)](#), to examine the lived experiences of seven (7) Filipino wives residing with their in-laws in multigenerational households. IPA studies typically use small, purposive samples ranging from six to 25 participants, prioritizing depth over breadth and an idiographic focus on individual meaning-making. Based on this guideline, seven respondents were selected, allowing for rich, detailed exploration of lived experiences while maintaining analytical rigor ([Smith & Nizza, 2021](#)). Participants were aged 18 to 40 and resided in Tanauan City, Batangas, representing the developmental period when individuals commonly establish intimate family relationships ([MSEd, 2025](#)). All participant identities were anonymized in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and Table 1 presents participants’ ages and duration of cohabitation using assigned code names. Purposive homogeneous sampling was employed to ensure participants shared key characteristics relevant to the study objectives.

Data Collection

A validated semi-structured interview guide was used to facilitate in-depth, open-ended interviews, allowing follow-up questions based on participants’ responses. Recruitment was conducted via a Facebook post outlining the study purpose, participant qualifications, and voluntary participation. Prior to each interview, participants were briefed on study objectives, procedures, and rights, including confidentiality, anonymity, and the right to withdraw, ensuring ethical informed consent. Interviews were conducted in a trauma-informed, respectful, and

nonjudgmental environment, audio-recorded with consent, and meticulously transcribed for analysis.

Trustworthiness

Credibility was reinforced through member-checking, consistent interview protocols, and a trauma-informed approach fostering authentic disclosure. Dependability was addressed by maintaining detailed documentation of procedures and analytic steps, creating an audit trail for replication. Confirmability was strengthened through reflexive journaling and peer debriefing, ensuring findings were grounded in participants' accounts rather than researcher bias. Transferability was supported by providing thick description of participants' household contexts and co-residence arrangements, allowing readers to assess applicability to other extended-family settings.

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed following systematic IPA procedures, which prioritize individual meaning-making within relational and cultural contexts. The steps included: (1) iterative reading of transcripts to ensure immersion in participants' narratives; (2) initial noting, capturing descriptive, linguistic, and conceptual observations; (3) emergent theme identification, condensing significant insights into concise thematic statements; (4) clustering themes into broader categories to reveal connections across experiences; and (5) cross-case analysis to examine convergences and divergences among participants, highlighting shared and unique aspects of wives' lived realities. IPA was particularly suitable for this study because it emphasizes the lived meaning-making process of individuals situated within complex relational and cultural contexts. By integrating participants' voices with researcher interpretation, IPA allows the study to illuminate how Filipino wives internalize, negotiate, and transform cultural imperatives such as pakikisama and paggalang (getting along and respect) into coping strategies, emotional labor, and identity work, providing both depth and nuance to qualitative theory building.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Researchers conducting phenomenological inquiries typically work with interview samples ranging from 5 to 25 participants (Arize, 2024); thus, this study involved seven (7) wives cohabiting with their in-laws after marriage. The participants, aged 18 to 40 and residing in Tanauan City, Batangas, were selected because this developmental period is when individuals commonly seek and establish intimate relationships (MSEd, 2025). In the Philippines, individuals may legally marry at 18, though those aged 18–21 require parental consent and those aged 21–25 must obtain parental advice (PCW Welcomes Law Prohibiting Child Marriage (Philippine Commission on Women, 2022)). All participant identities were anonymized in adherence to the Data Privacy Act of 2012, and Table 1 presents their ages and duration of cohabitation using assigned code names.

Table 1. Profile of Participants

Participant	Age	Years of Cohabitation with in-Laws
Wife AAA	34	5 years
Wife BBB	29	3 years
Wife CCC	30	4 years
Wife DDD	34	17 years
Wife EEE	27	3 years

Participant	Age	Years of Cohabitation with in-Laws
Wife FFF	25	8 years
Wife GGG	32	4 years

Table 1, profile of Respondents, presents the demographic and cohabitation data of seven participants, identified as Wife AAA through Wife GGG. The table outlines each respondent's age, which ranges from 25 to 34 years, and their duration of co-residence with in-laws, which varies considerably from 3 to 17 years. This summary provides essential background information on the participants, emphasizing both their relatively young age and the diverse lengths of time they have lived with their in-laws.

The data collected from the investigation of participants' personal lived experience, and the investigation of the provided similar experiences, were among the methods of inquiry. As a result, the research was guided by the central question, that is:

"What is the essence of the lived experience of wives living with their in-laws?" Meanwhile, the corollary question has been answered in the discussion below:

Corollary Questions 1. How do wives describe their experience living with their in-laws?

Interview Question 1: What emotions do you commonly experience while living with your in-laws?

The responses from Wife BBB (age 29, 3years of cohabiting with in-laws) and Wife GGG (age 32, 4years of cohabiting with in-laws), both of whom expressed feelings of irritation and stress in their daily interactions. These excerpts reveal the emotional toll of prolonged co-residence and relational strain within multigenerational households. Wife BBB's admission of her frequent annoyance, delivered with calm composure, reflects a quiet exhaustion that has become part of her routine. Similarly, Wife GGG's account of her persistent irritation and stress suggests an ongoing struggle to maintain emotional restraint amidst accumulated tension. Together, both of them illustrate a recurring pattern of their suppressed frustration and emotional fatigue, underscoring how constant negotiation of harmony may lead to "tense contentment" within the family dynamic.

"...I often feel irritated."—wife BBB

"...I often feel annoyed and stressed."—wife GGG

In relation to this, [Machette and Cionea \(2023\)](#) argued that in-law relationships and communication breakdowns contribute to daily frustrations, emotional exhaustion, and strained marital interactions in intercultural co-residence. Similarly, [Akinsanya & Oluwole \(2025\)](#) highlighted that role-related emotional strain and internalized stress among women living in demanding family or community roles are relevant for analyzing quiet exhaustion.

Interview Question 2: How does living with in-laws influence your mental and emotional well-being?

The responses from Wife BBB and Wife GGG reveal the emotional toll that cohabitation with in-laws can have on psychological well-being. Wife BBB described her experience as living with in-laws is stressful a statement that reflects emotional burnout caused by persistent interference in her personal matters. Signs of psychological fatigue and internal conflict were evident in both accounts, as the participants both them struggled to maintain composure amid ongoing tension. Together, these narratives illustrate how prolonged relational strain and blurred household boundaries can erode of their emotional resilience, foster stress, and weaken one's sense of self

within the family system. This was evident in their responses when they stated:

"...Living with in-laws is stressful..." – Wife BBB

"...Living with my in-laws has a significant negative impact on my mental health... I'm being dictated to..." – Wife GGG

Relative to this, [Soubia \(2025\)](#) stated that role overload, emotional exhaustion, social isolation, and economic dependence arising from concentrated household labor and caregiving responsibilities, and links these stressors to increased risks of anxiety and burnout. Similarly, [Sahrawat \(2024\)](#) highlighted the psychological toll of unpaid domestic labor, including chronic stress, fatigue, and feelings of being psychologically overextended when boundaries between caregiving and personal time are blurred.

Interview Question 3: How would you describe the support you and your husband have been getting from your in-laws?

The responses from Wife BBB and Wife DDD (age 34, 17years of cohabiting with in-laws) reveal the complex nature of in-law support within extended family households. Wife BBB shared that she receives small financial help, such as money to buy milk, an act that, while emotionally appreciated, highlights the couple's limited financial independence and subtle reliance on her in-law assistance. Similarly, Wife DDD described that she received help with housework, childcare, and emotional guidance during family challenges. This was evident in their responses when they stated:

"...Sometimes they give small financial help, like money to buy milk..."—wife BBB

"...They help me with housework and childcare, and they also give advice when problems arise in our family..."—wife DDD

Similarly, [Moneva & Jumag \(2020\)](#) noted that small, targeted financial assistance can influence perceived support, a concept that can be applied both methodologically and conceptually to everyday caregiving contributions, such as providing money for milk within extended households. Similarly, [Nabe & Chavez \(2025\)](#) emphasized that emotional presence, advice, and small gestures of help, including intermittent financial support, shape wives' perceptions of support and contribute to marital well-being.

Interview Question 4: Have you ever experienced any challenges while living with them? If yes, what are those?

The responses from Wife BBB and Wife AAA (age 34, 5years of cohabiting with in-laws) reveal their subtle yet persistent identity tensions within extended family living. Wife BBB described that they had misunderstandings in child-rearing explaining that differences in parenting approaches between her and her in-laws often lead to emotional strain and hurt feelings. In contrast, Wife AAA emphasized her financial burden of supporting both her children and her in-laws, noting the stress of managing her husband's budget and ensuring everyone's needs are met. These dynamic exposes the dual pressure of caregiving and financial obligation, where fulfilling multiple roles often requires suppressing personal preferences.

"...misunderstandings, especially when it comes to raising children, because of course they

have their own way of doing things, and I have mine—it's different, so we often end up hurting each other's feelings..."—wife BBB

"...what's really hardest for me is the food—I can't leave them out because my husband puts me in charge of the budget, so whatever I prepare for my children, I have to make sure they have it too..."—wife AAA

Thompson et al. (2020) noted that chronic interpersonal stressors and boundary ambiguity deplete personal resources, leading to emotional fatigue that undermines both role performance and identity consolidation. In the Philippine context, Bulloch (2021) observed that women frequently navigate the tension between personal aspirations and intergenerational expectations, experiencing stress as they balance autonomy with familial obligations.

Interview Question Number 5: What coping mechanisms or adjustment strategies do you develop as you live with them?

The responses from Wife BBB and Wife CCC (age 30, 4years of cohabiting with in-laws) reveal their quiet yet deliberate emotional strategies and employ to maintain harmony within extended family living. Wife BBB shared that she often chooses not to express her irritation, explaining that showing her frustration would only escalate conflict and disturb the household peace. In contrast, Wife CCC says she intentionally avoids sensitive conversations when her in-laws are present, opting to delay or relocate discussions to prevent interference and emotional strain. These accounts illustrate their strategy of emotional withholding and self-regulation, where preserving relational stability often requires suppressing personal expression. This was evident in their response when they stated:

"...I just don't show that I'm annoyed sometimes, because if I do, it'll only cause more trouble..."—wife BBB

"...when we need to talk about something, we just do it somewhere else or wait until the in-laws aren't around..."—wife CCC

Relatively, Hennink and Kaiser (2022) discuss how participants deliberately withhold or regulate emotions to maintain relational stability. Emotional withholding and disclosure are not random but intentional strategies used to navigate sensitive relationships. By choosing silence or restraint, they preserve harmony and avoid escalating conflict.

Interview Question Number 6: How do you envision your ideal living arrangement in the future?

The narrative of Wife BBB highlights the structural constraints of their situation, as she links her capacity to earn income with the possibility of living independently. She notes that without her job, they would be unable to save enough to move out, expressing a quiet anxiety about being permanently bound to her in-laws' household. In contrast, wife FFF (age 25, 8years of cohabiting with in-laws) reflects her sense of emotional resignation and the internalized belief that independence might not necessarily bring empowerment or improved well-being. Collectively, the exemplars illustrate that while independence is the ideal, they will remain entangled with financial barriers and a pervasive sense of helplessness. This was evident in their response when they stated:

"...for me, if I can't work, we won't be able to save up to live on our own because if it's just my

husband working, we might end up living in the same house forever...”—wife BBB

“...I feel like even if we move out, it’ll still be the same...”—wife FFF

In a similar vein, [Soubia \(2025\)](#) explained that a lack of personal income contributes to anxiety about permanent co-residence and restricted mobility. Similar to this, [Ballesteros et al. \(2024\)](#) highlighted how demographic and housing pressures create anxiety about co-residence, especially for low-income families.

Interview Question Number 7: What lessons and/or insights have you gained from living with their in-laws?

The narrative of Wife CCC reflects an evolving self-awareness, as she learned that not everything she does is right and moved from being disrespectful to elders to learning to follow in-laws and get along well. Likewise, Wife DDD emphasized core relational values, noting that she learned love, getting along with others, humility, patience, and respect, which she believes strengthen family bonds. This was evident in their response when they stated:

“...I’ve learned that not everything I do is right. Before, I wasn’t respectful toward elders, but through them I learned to follow my in-laws and get along well...”—wife CCC

“...I’ve learned that love, harmony, humility, patience, and mutual respect strengthen our relationship and help build a whole and happy family...”—wife DDD

Interview Question Number 8: What advice would you give to other wives who will live with their in-laws?

The advice of Wife GGG directly conveys her struggle, stating, even if it's hard, you need to endure it, even if you feel bad inside, you need to get along because no matter how annoyed you are, you can't move out. In contrast, Wife DDD's advice is more reflective and constructive, emphasizing that you need patience, respect, understanding, adaptability, and open communication. These insights frame cohabitation as an experience requiring maturity, composure, and compromise to maintain familial harmony. This was evident in their response when they stated:

“...even if it’s hard, you have to endure it—even if it hurts inside, you still have to get along, because no matter how annoyed you are, you can’t afford to move out, so you really have no choice but to force yourself to get along...”—wife GGG

“...the advice I can give is to have long patience, be respectful, be understanding, know how to adjust, and maintain open communication...”—wife DDD

Regarding this, [Hochschild and Machung \(2020\)](#) highlight how endurance, compromise, and emotional labor are central to domestic life, particularly in contexts where individuals must balance personal frustrations with the demands of relational harmony. Their work underscores that sustaining household peace often requires suppressing personal expression and exercising patience, aligning closely with the strategies described by Wife GGG and Wife DDD.

Corollary number 2: What themes emerged from the responses of wives living with their in-laws?

Based on the narratives shared by wives residing with their in-laws, the researchers

identified eight (8) themes. These include: (1) Emotional Depletion; (2) Emotional Exhaustion; (3) Moral and Financial Support; (4) Identity Tension; (5) Guarded Grace; (6) Enduring Setup; (7) Personal Growth Through Humility and Adaptation; and (8) Obligated Harmony.

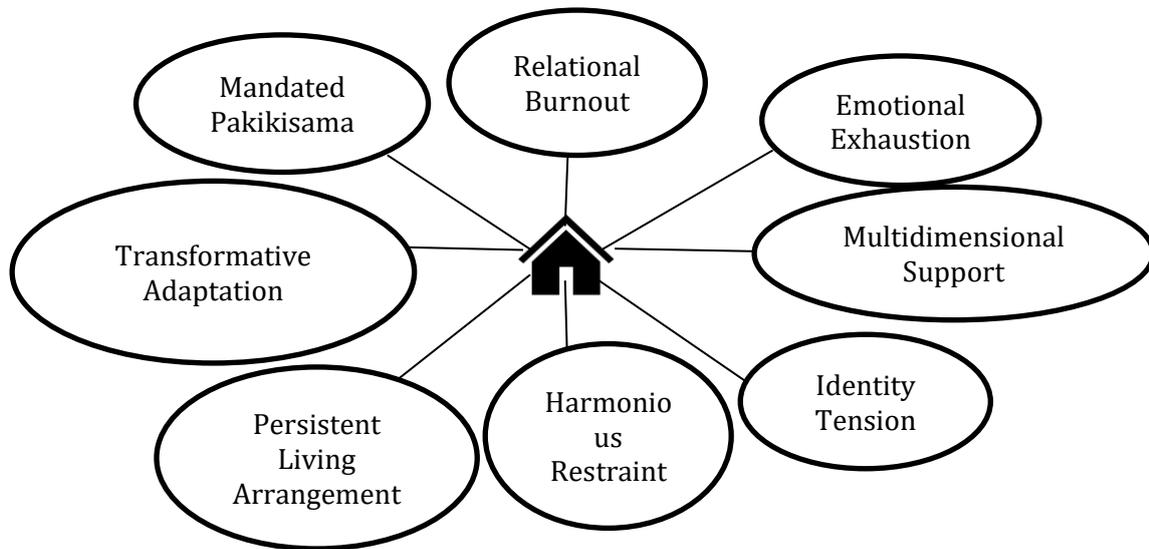


Figure 1. Diagram maps eight core emotional and practical themes

Figure 1 shows a diagram of eight core emotional and practical themes that shape what it feels like for wives living with in-laws. It centers the home as the shared space and shows how obligations, identity strain, emotional wear, support, and growth all radiate from that setting. The house icon at the center represents the shared domestic environment where relationships, roles, and daily routines intersect. Each oval is a theme that both affects and is affected by living arrangements, signaling that the experience is multi-dimensional, emotional, social, moral, and financial

Relational Burnout

In the first question, the theme Relational Burnout refers to participants' gradual draining of inner resources experienced while navigating their daily life within extended family households. This theme reflects a state of sustained emotional fatigue of wives. Relative to this, Wife BBB explained:

"I often experience feelings of annoyance, especially when my mother-in-law comments on how I raise my children. Even though I stay quiet, inside I feel drained because it happens almost every day. I try to keep the peace, but it leaves me exhausted." —Wife BBB

Emotional depletion refers to the gradual draining of a wife's inner resources as she navigates daily life within an extended-family household. In a similar vein, favored treatment, hierarchical expectations, and constant relational monitoring in such households amplify everyday demands on wives, producing sustained fatigue rather than occasional upset (Ramos et al, 2024).

Relative to this, the Family Systems Theory helps explain how this emotional depletion occurs within the interconnected family unit, where stress and tension in one relationship affect the dynamics and well-being of the entire household. Moreover, Family Conflict Theory highlights how unclear roles, conflicting expectations, and power imbalances contribute to this fatigue, as wives must constantly manage relational demands. Furthermore, the Filipino cultural value of pakikisama shapes how wives respond to these challenges, encouraging them to regulate their

emotions, maintain harmony, and avoid confrontation despite internal strain. Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory suggests that navigating these emotionally taxing experiences can foster personal growth, as wives develop coping strategies, reflect on their roles, and gain insight into themselves and their family relationships. Together, these theories and the lens of pakikisama provide a culturally and relationally grounded understanding of the emotional depletion experienced by wives in extended family living.

Emotional Exhaustion

In response to the second guide question, the theme Emotional Exhaustion this theme refers to the gradual depletion of emotional energy due to sustained demands, boundary tensions, and the pressure. Wives experience fatigue from constant monitoring, suppressed autonomy, or the need to perform emotional labor. This aligns with the statement of Wife BBB:

“Residing with in-laws often causes stress because I feel I have to watch everything I say and do. Even small things, like how I cook or discipline my children, are noticed and sometimes criticized. I stay quiet to avoid conflict, but inside I feel drained, like I’m carrying tension every day.” —Wife BBB

Emotional exhaustion among wives who co-reside with in-laws develops from the cumulative toll of constant self-regulation and constrained autonomy. [Chen et al. \(2024\)](#) further explained that habitual suppression and surface acting continually managing facial expressions, tone, and disclosure to avoid conflict erode emotional resources and predict burnout in applied settings. [Chaudhary \(2025\)](#) added that systematic reviews of recent literature show how prolonged affective performance across domains reliably produces long-term exhaustion and reduced coping capacity.

From the perspective of Family Systems Theory, emotional exhaustion arises because stress and tension in one relationship ripple throughout the family unit, affecting both marital interactions and household dynamics. Moreover, Family Conflict Theory explains that ambiguous roles, conflicting expectations, and power imbalances within extended households intensify these pressures, making it difficult for wives to assert autonomy without generating conflict. Furthermore, the Filipino cultural value of pakikisama (getting along) shapes how wives navigate these challenges, as they often suppress personal needs and regulate behavior to maintain harmony, avoid confrontation, and preserve relational cohesion. Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory suggests that, despite the strain, these challenging experiences can prompt critical reflection and personal growth, enabling wives to develop new coping strategies and reshape their understanding of family roles, boundaries, and self-identity. Taken together, these theories and the lens of pakikisama (getting along) provide a culturally and relationally grounded explanation for the cumulative toll of co-residing with in-laws on wives’ emotional resources.

Multidimensional Support

In response to guide question number 3, the theme **Multidimensional Support** captures the complex nature of assistance received from in-laws, which participants describe as a combination of moral encouragement and financial aid. While these forms of support are undeniably helpful, they are often experienced as obligatory or non-negotiable, something the couple must accept regardless of personal preference or emotional readiness. Building on this, Wife DDD explained:

“They help me with housework and taking care of my children, and they also give advice when problems arise in our family. Sometimes the advice feels supportive, but other times it feels like we have no choice but to follow it, even if we disagree. For example, when we wanted to manage our finances differently, they insisted on their way, and we had to comply to avoid conflict.” —Wife DDD

This resonates with recent scholarship: [Medina \(2021\)](#) emphasizes that Filipino families often frame financial and moral support as both a blessing and a binding duty. Moreover, ethnographic studies of multigenerational households in Southeast Asia document narrative accounts in which moral support is offered alongside prescriptive advice and monitoring, leaving couples describing help as both beneficial and coercive. Scoping review on intergenerational dynamics in South Asia.

In a similar vein, Family Systems Theory helps explain how such support reflects the interdependence within the family unit, where assistance from one member affects the well-being and functioning of the entire household. Moreover, Family Conflict Theory illustrates how obligations tied to this support can generate tension or strain when expectations are unclear or responsibilities are unevenly distributed. Furthermore, the Filipino cultural value of *pakikisama* (getting along) shapes how wives navigate these dynamics, as they often accept and reciprocate support to maintain harmony, avoid confrontation, and preserve relational cohesion. Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory suggests that negotiating these supportive yet demanding interactions can foster personal growth, prompting wives to develop new coping strategies, adapt to family roles, and refine their understanding of boundaries and relational responsibilities. Together, these theories and the lens of *pakikisama* (getting along) provide a comprehensive framework for understanding the relational, cultural, and developmental dimensions of moral and financial support from in-laws.

Identity Tension

In response to guide question number 4, the theme Identity Tension captures the emotional and relational complexities wives face as they navigate their roles within extended family households. This tension often arises when personal decisions, especially around caregiving and household management, are shaped or constrained by the expectations of in-laws. Building on this, Wife EEE explained:

“There are often misunderstandings, especially when it comes to raising children. My mother-in-law insists on her way of disciplining, while I believe in a different approach. Sometimes she corrects me in front of the children, and I feel hurt and undermined. I try to stay respectful, but inside I struggle because I want to assert my own parenting style. We’re different, so we often end up hurting each other’s feelings.” —Wife EEE

Filipino wives navigate caregiving and household roles under the scrutiny of in-laws, often experiencing emotional conflict when personal decisions such as child-rearing or budgeting are overridden by elder family members ([Bass Connections, Duke University, 2024–2025](#)). Similarly, cross-cultural studies show that emotional labor, particularly in family caregiving contexts, leads to identity tension when women are required to perform roles that conflict with their personal values or preferences ([Chaudhary, 2025](#)). Furthermore, caregiving and domestic decisions are frequently shaped by elder expectations, which limit wives’ ability to assert their preferences and contribute to ongoing emotional strain ([Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2024](#)).

In connection with this, the Family Systems Theory explains how these tensions emerge within the interconnected family unit, where one member's actions or expectations influence the entire household. Moreover, Family Conflict Theory highlights that unclear roles, conflicting expectations, and power dynamics contribute to strain and emotional friction in daily interactions. Furthermore, the Filipino cultural value of pakikisama (getting along) shapes how wives manage these tensions, as they often adjust their behavior, suppress personal preferences, and seek harmony to maintain relational cohesion. Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory suggests that negotiating these identity tensions can lead to personal growth, as wives reflect on their roles, develop new strategies for managing relationships, and refine their understanding of themselves within the family system. Together, these theories and the lens of pakikisama (getting along) provide a culturally and relationally grounded explanation for the complexities of identity negotiation within extended family households.

Harmonious Restraint

In response to guide question number 5, the theme **Harmonious Restraint** captures the emotional restraint and strategic silence wives employ to preserve harmony within extended family living. Rather than openly expressing frustration or asserting boundaries, participants describe deliberately withholding emotion and avoiding conflict to prevent further tension. This aligns with the statement of Wife CCC:

"I just don't show that I'm annoyed sometimes, because if I do, it'll only cause more trouble. For example, when my mother-in-law comments on how I manage the household, I stay quiet even if I disagree. I feel it's better to keep my feelings inside than to argue, because arguments only make the atmosphere heavier. It's tiring, but I choose silence to keep the peace." —Wife CCC

"Even when I feel upset, I hold back my words. If I speak up, it will be seen as disrespectful, so I just keep quiet. It's hard because I feel invisible sometimes, but I know silence keeps the family together." —Wife EEE

Roman et al. (2025) emphasize that family cohesion often depends on restraint, compromise, and interventions that reduce open conflict. Similar to this, Cheung (2021) highlights how emotional security in families is maintained through disintegration avoidance, essentially avoiding conflict to preserve harmony, which parallels your participants' accounts.

Relatively, Family Systems Theory helps explain how this restraint functions within the interconnected family unit, as the emotional regulation of one member impacts the well-being and stability of the entire household. Moreover, Family Conflict Theory highlights that these strategies often arise from navigating ambiguous roles, differing expectations, and power dynamics that could otherwise lead to tension or confrontation. Furthermore, the Filipino cultural value of pakikisama (getting along) shapes how wives manage these situations, encouraging them to prioritize harmony, avoid open conflict, and maintain relational cohesion. Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory suggests that practicing such emotional restraint can foster reflection and personal growth, enabling wives to develop coping strategies, negotiate boundaries more effectively, and cultivate a deeper understanding of themselves within the family system. Together, these theories and the lens of pakikisama provide a culturally and relationally grounded explanation for the emotional strategies wives employ to sustain harmony in extended family living.

Persistent Living Arrangement

In response to guide question number 6, the theme Persistent Living Arrangement reflects the participants' perception of long-term co-residence with in-laws as a structural and emotional reality that feels difficult to escape. Wife BBB explained:

"For me, if I can't work, we won't be able to save up to live independently. Because if it's only my husband working, we might end up living in the same house forever. Sometimes I feel trapped, like our future is already decided for us. I want to have our own space, but the financial situation makes it impossible. It's hard because I know my in-laws mean well, but I also feel like I can't breathe freely in this arrangement." —Wife BBB

Wife FFF also shared: *"We've been living with my in-laws for eight years now. At first it was temporary, but with the rising costs of housing, it feels permanent. I sometimes wonder if we'll ever have the chance to build our own household. It's like the longer we stay, the harder it becomes to imagine leaving." —Wife FFF*

Building on this, *PIDS (2025)* confirms that nearly 29% of Filipino families live in extended households, validating participants' sense of permanence. Furthermore, Market Research SEA shows that housing shortages and affordability crises make co-residence a long-term reality.

Likewise, Family Systems Theory helps explain how this prolonged co-residence influences the entire household, as financial dependence and shared responsibilities affect relational dynamics and emotional well-being. Moreover, Family Conflict Theory illustrates that long-term arrangements can exacerbate tensions, as unclear roles, power imbalances, and competing expectations persist over time. Furthermore, the Filipino cultural value of pakikisama (getting along) shapes how wives respond to these constraints, encouraging them to prioritize harmony, adapt to structural limitations, and manage relational obligations without overt confrontation. Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory suggests that navigating these enduring living arrangements can foster resilience and personal growth, as wives develop strategies to cope with structural and emotional pressures while redefining their understanding of autonomy and family roles. Together, these theories and the lens of pakikisama (getting along) provide a culturally and relationally grounded explanation for how wives experience and manage long-term co-residence with in-laws.

Transformative Adaptation

In response to guide question number 7, the theme Transformative Adaptation highlights the participant's self-awareness and emotional maturation while navigating life with in-laws. It reflects a shift from resistance or self-centeredness to a more relationally attuned stance marked by humility, respect for elders, and intentional pakikisama (getting along and respect). Wife CCC explained:

"I've learned that not everything I do is right. Before, I wasn't respectful toward elders, and I would often insist on my own way. But through living with my in-laws, I realized that following them and showing respect helps keep the family together. At first, it felt like giving up my independence, but now I see it as growth. I've become more patient, and I've learned that humility makes relationships smoother and less stressful." —Wife CCC

Learning humility and patience while co-residing with in-laws serves as an adaptive

strategy for wives, involving intentional *pakikisama* (getting along and respect) and respect for elders, which promotes both family harmony and personal growth. Humility functions as a transformative virtue that deepens self-awareness and strengthens relationships, highlighting its role in fostering adaptation and emotional growth within relationally complex environments.

In like manner, Family Systems Theory helps explain how these changes occur within the interconnected family unit, as personal growth and adaptation by one member influence the overall family dynamics and relational harmony. Moreover, Family Conflict Theory highlights that learning to navigate role expectations and relational tensions fosters coping strategies that reduce conflict and maintain balance in the household. Furthermore, the Filipino value of *pakikisama* (getting along) shapes this growth, guiding wives to prioritize harmonious relationships, respect elders, and align their behavior with family expectations. Lastly, Transformative Learning Theory illustrates how these experiences promote reflection, self-awareness, and emotional development, allowing wives to adapt effectively to the challenges of extended family living. Together, these theories and the lens of *pakikisama* (getting along) provide a culturally and relationally grounded understanding of how wives achieve personal growth through humility and adaptation.

Mandated Pakikisama

In response to the last guide question, the theme Mandated Pakikisama captures the emotional and cultural imperative to maintain *pakikisama at paggalang* (getting along and respect) when living with in-laws, especially when the wife has no alternative housing option. It reflects a form of adaptive compliance, where relational virtues are practiced not purely out of willingness, but out of necessity and survival within a shared space. Wife GGG explained:

“Even if it’s hard, you have to endure it. Sometimes I feel hurt inside when my in-laws criticize how I manage the household, but I still have to get along. No matter how upset I am, I can’t afford to move out, so I have no choice but to force myself to stay quiet and follow. It feels like survival, because if I resist, the whole family harmony will break.” —Wife GGG

Compliance with in-laws’ expectations is often viewed as necessary for maintaining stability in shared households, where *pakikisama* (getting along) and *paggalang* (respect) are practiced to avoid conflict, particularly when wives lack independent housing options. Additionally, *pakikisama* (getting along) prioritizes harmony and acceptance within Filipino families, often requiring the suppression of personal frustrations to preserve unity, especially in close living arrangements where leaving is not an option (Pineda, 2023).

A key interpretive contribution of this study lies in the paradoxes revealed across wives’ narratives. Extended family living is simultaneously experienced as a source of support and obligation: in-laws provide childcare, financial aid, and moral encouragement, yet these forms of help are often framed as non-negotiable duties that constrain autonomy. This duality underscores how “multidimensional support” functions as both a blessing and a burden, shaping wives’ emotional landscapes in contradictory ways. Similarly, wives’ accounts highlight the tension between growth and exhaustion. On one hand, prolonged co-residence produces emotional fatigue, suppressed autonomy, and relational burnout. On the other, it fosters humility, patience, and transformative adaptation, with wives reframing *pakikisama* as a pathway to resilience and self-awareness. This contradiction suggests that the same cultural value can be experienced as both a mechanism of constraint and a resource for empowerment, depending on context and interpretation. Another paradox emerges in the theme of harmonious restraint: silence and emotional regulation preserve household peace, yet they simultaneously erode wives’ sense of voice and agency. What sustains family cohesion also perpetuates invisibility, revealing the costs of

relational harmony. Likewise, persistent living arrangements are described as structural realities that feel permanent and restrictive, yet they also cultivate coping strategies and adaptive virtues that strengthen family bonds. Foregrounding these paradoxes moves beyond description to highlight the interpretive complexity of wives' lived experiences. Rather than treating contradictions as anomalies, this study positions them as central insights: extended family living is not simply oppressive or supportive, but a relational terrain where cultural values, structural constraints, and personal agency collide to produce outcomes that are at once burdensome and transformative.

CONCLUSION

This study identifies eight principal ways in which Filipino wives navigate life within extended family households, providing insight not only into lived experiences but also into broader theoretical and practical implications. First, the theme of Mandated Pakikisama demonstrates that emotional labor is frequently structurally compelled rather than voluntary. Compliance with in-laws' expectations is informed by both cultural norms of harmony and respect and by structural factors such as economic dependence and limited housing options. This reframes emotional labor as a necessary adaptation, transforming everyday relational obligations into mechanisms for sustaining household cohesion. Second, the theme of Guarded Grace illustrates that quiet endurance and strategic restraint may serve as protective strategies while concurrently producing emotional strain. This duality underscores the nuanced nature of resilience within family systems, wherein adaptive behaviors support household harmony but may constrain individual autonomy. Collectively, these findings advance Family Systems Theory, refine Family Conflict Theory, and extend Transformative Learning Theory by demonstrating that personal growth and relational adaptation frequently occur within conditions of structural and cultural constraint.

In light of these findings, the study offers theory-informed implications for practice, recommending culturally sensitive family counseling, community-based interventions for women in multigenerational households, marital education addressing in-law dynamics, and policy considerations regarding housing and social support systems. From a methodological perspective, this research illustrates how Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) provides idiographic depth and culturally grounded theorization, capturing fine-grained detail of participants' lived realities. By situating narratives within Filipino values of pakikisama and paggalang (getting along and respect), the study demonstrates the capacity of IPA to move beyond Western-centric applications, producing insights that are simultaneously locally embedded and globally relevant. In conclusion, the research contributes to the advancement of qualitative scholarship, offering both novel theoretical perspectives and practical guidance for supporting women navigating extended family living arrangements.

LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

This study is limited by its small, context-specific sample of seven wives co-residing with their in-laws in Tanauan City, Batangas. As a qualitative study using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), it prioritized depth and meaning over generalizability. Participants' accounts may have been influenced by cultural expectations such as pakikisama and paggalang (getting along and respect) which often encourage emotional restraint and conformity, possibly leading to underreporting of personal frustrations or conflicts. The findings, while rich in contextual insight, reflect subjective experiences that may not represent the broader population of Filipino wives living in extended family households.

Future studies must include quantitative approaches to statistically examine the relationships among key factors such as emotional regulation, marital satisfaction, and perceived

autonomy. Incorporating larger samples through correlational or comparative designs would help validate the patterns identified in this study and determine their prevalence across different contexts. Mixed-method and longitudinal research are also encouraged to provide a more comprehensive understanding of how wives' coping strategies and emotional adaptation evolve over time and under varying socio-economic and familial conditions.

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