

BOUNDLESS LOVE IN BOUNDED TIMES: THE BEHAVIOR OF MARRIED COUPLES IN LONG-LASTING RELATIONSHIPS

*Mostoles, Margarita Dale E. and Oida, Mary Dabryl B.
BS in Psychology*

Abstract

The evolution of culture caused by modernization has brought challenges to married couples on how to maintain long lasting relationships. This study aims to determine the significant difference in the enduring vulnerabilities and the adaptive processes of the husband and the wife, and their stressful life events when grouped by demographic profile. A total of 24 married couples who have been married for 25 years and above from Barangay Real, Calamba City, Laguna were chosen as the respondents. Through comparative study, data were gathered using a survey-questionnaire. Results show that there is a significant difference in the enduring vulnerabilities of the husband in the length of time that the couple have been married while in terms of the wife, there is a significant difference in the family structure where she came from. Moreover, there is no significant difference in the adaptive processes of the husband and the wife when grouped by demographic profile while in terms of the stressful life events, there is significant difference in religion and number of children. Also, it was found out that there is no significant difference between the enduring vulnerabilities and the adaptive processes of the husband and the wife.

Keywords: *married couples, long lasting relationships, enduring vulnerabilities, adaptive processes*

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary marriages are on the verge of being cut by the evolution of culture caused by modernization. The probability of a lasting marriage decreases as people embrace the future of modernity. These seem to be the phenomenon that is happening around the globe. Eurostat (2016) stated that since 1965, the crude marriage rate of countries in European Union has declined in 2011 while the crude divorce rate increased to 2.0. Also, in the United States, Wilcox and Marquardt (2011) stated that from 2.45 million in 1990, the total number of marriages fell in 2010 to 2.08 million. The divorce rate has almost doubled that of 1960, but, since reaching its apex point in history in the early 1980s, has declined.

Moreover, the Asia/Pacific region is not into joining the bandwagon. In Maldives, Tajikistan, Bangladesh, and the Kyrgyz Republic, crude marriage rates are highest at over ten marriages per 1,000 adults. Less than half of this is the marriage rate in New Zealand, Samoa and Mongolia. Maldives has a crude divorce rate which is higher by three times than the average of the Asia/Pacific economies. Divorce rates in Indonesia, Vietnam, and Tajikistan are low relative to high marriage. Marriage rates had a constant decline over 1970-2010 and divorce rates got doubled in Japan, Australia, and New Zealand and more than five times in Korea (OECD, 2014).

In the Philippines, marriage is crucial for Filipinos are family-oriented. This makes them vulnerable to everything that is happening inside their homes. Filipino families are not exempted from the phenomenon of increase in separation rates in married couples. For one out of five married couples in the Philippines are in splitsville based on the data gathered from the Philippine Statistics Authority (Takumi, 2014). For a lot of factors contribute to failing a marriage while building a solid and an unbreakable marriage needs a lot of work, time and knowledge. That is why this study aims to help married and to-be-married couples in maintaining their marriage intact and happy. This involves the factors that contribute to a happy married life, how to properly solve conflicts, what to do to always make each other happy and feel appreciated, and other reasons on how to make a marriage last which are very needed in this time where “instant” is so available and the definition of love is becoming superficial.

After all, people aim for a stable and lasting relationship; many of them may just do not know how. Communication may from the very start is the key, for two souls to be free and united as can be.

Conceptual framework

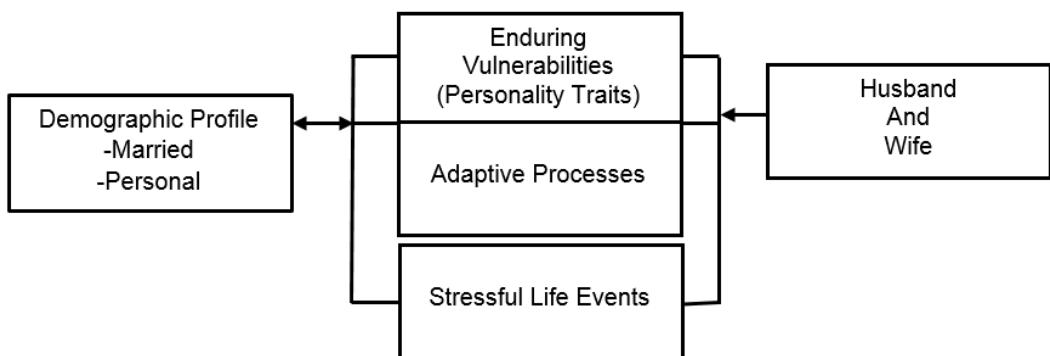


Figure 1. Conceptual framework of the study

Figure 1 shows the conceptual framework of the study. The demographic profile which consists of married and personal profile of the respondents are factors that affect the *Enduring Vulnerabilities* which include the personality traits that the husband and wife contribute to their marriage, *Adaptive Processes* which refer to ways on how the husband and the wife solve their conflicts, and *Stressful Life Events* of married couples which refer to events that they considered stressful. Then, the *Enduring Vulnerabilities* and *Adaptive Processes* of the husband and the wife were compared.

The framework was based on Karney and Bradbury's Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation Model which has three variables: Enduring Vulnerabilities, Adaptive Processes and Stressful Life Events.

Objectives of the study

The study aims to know the demographic profile of the respondents: (a) married profile which consists of: years married, age that they got married, timespan that they knew each other before getting married, similarity in religion, and number of children; and (b) personal profile which consists of: family structure and environment where they grew up. It aims to know the husband and the wife's *Enduring Vulnerabilities* and *Adaptive Processes*, and their *Stressful Life Events*. It also aims to determine if there is a significant difference in the *Enduring Vulnerabilities*, *Adaptive Processes*, and *Stressful Life Events* when respondents are grouped by profile. Lastly, it aims to determine if there is a significant difference between the *Enduring Vulnerabilities* and *Adaptive Processes* of the husband and wife.

METHOD

This research study was conducted through descriptive design and quantitative approach, with the use of researcher-made Filipino-translated survey-questionnaire in data gathering based on Karney and Bradbury's Vulnerability-Stress-Adaptation model. The study's respondents were 24 couples who have been married for 25 years and above from Barangay Real, Calamba City, Laguna. The researchers got the number of respondents by having the effect size of 0.4; α of 0.05; power of 0.90 and a sample size of 48. The survey-questionnaire had undergone pre-testing and got a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.885. In data analysis, frequency and percentage were acquired from demographic profile, and weighted mean from enduring vulnerabilities, adaptive processes and stressful life events. ANOVA was used in determining the significant difference in the: (a) enduring vulnerabilities, (b) adaptive processes, and (c) stressful life events when respondents are grouped by profile. T-test, on the other hand, was used in determining the

significant difference between enduring vulnerabilities and adaptive processes of the husband and the wife.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Below are the results of the gathered data:

Profile of the husband and wife as couple

Most of respondents are 30-34 years married which is equivalent to 38%. They got married in a time in the Philippines (1980s) when marriage and love are so important and sacred. During this time, religion is the utmost center of Filipino families and separation is sin. This supports Raso (2011)—for most of the respondents were born in the 1960s and 1970s which made them considered as Generation X'ers—for he stated that the statistics reveal that Generation Y'ers are more likely to have shorter marriages and to get divorced than Generation X'ers.

There are only 2 couples who have been in their 45-49 years and 50 and above years married. This is linked with the life expectancy of Filipinos, for according to the statistical report published by the Philippine Commission on Women (2014), the current female life expectancy is still at 73.14 years compared with men at 67.61 years. Meaning, few couples made it until 45 years of marriage and above.

Most of the husbands got married at the ages of 21-25 years old with 46%; while the ages 31-35 and 36-40 got the same frequency of 1. Meanwhile, most of the wives got married at the ages of 21-25 which is equivalent to 50% and none got married at the ages of 36-40.

The reason why the respondents got married at those age is that it takes a lot of time for the couple to be emotionally, psychologically, and mentally ready. Also, Filipino couples tend to make sure that both of their families are in good terms first. In support, one study proves that the closer a couple's age is, the greater the chances of avoiding divorce (Garber, 2014). However, the results somehow contradict Wolfinger (2015), for he said that as a person ages from teenage years to being an adult through late twenties/thirties, the odds of divorce decline and as he/she moves to his/her late thirties and early forties, the divorce risk increases again. Meaning, it is better to get married when a person is at his or her late 20s or 30s for the divorce rate is lower.

Most of the couples have known each other for 1 to 11 months before getting married (63%); while, 6-10 years and 11 years and above have the same frequency of 1.

A span of 1-11 months being a short or long period of time for dating before getting married varies on different contexts of time. But as long as the

couple already knew each other and see themselves with each other for the rest of their lives, then those are enough reasons to confirm that they are ready to get married. This neither contradicts nor confirms Pokluda (2014) who said that “short dating” may cause problems in marriage. The reasons is that neither of them knows the real personality of one another and people gets married quickly for they only base the decision on feelings. Basing it on feelings may be quite dangerous as feelings can change.

Most (23) of the couples have the same religion which got 96%. This is because Filipinos tend to choose a mate from the same religion, so that both of them share the same beliefs and tradition and for them to also not have any conflict on what to teach and how to raise their kids. In support, American Psychological Association (2014) stated that religious beliefs can strengthen happy marriages. Moreover, Burkepile (2013) said that marrying someone who came from the same religion is beneficial because it does not make a spouse pressured in converting into another faith, keeps the children out of confusion and etc.

Most (7) of the couples have 4 children with a total of 29%; while 1 child got the frequency of 1.

Majority of the couples have been married for 31-35 years, this means that they plan to have kids during the 1980s. Philippines experienced an economic crisis during the early 1980s but the economy recovered and became stable in the late 1980s (Solon and Floro, 1993). People always keep in mind the essence of practicality so there was a big possibility that they began to have kids during the late 1980s for that was when they can afford the expenses of raising 4 children.

The number of children that the couple wants to have may be mostly based on the economy of a certain time. But for Johnson (2016), researchers discovered that the decline rate in relationship satisfaction is nearly twice as steep for married couples who have children than for childless married couples when compared. Surprisingly, the marital satisfaction of new parents and also the likelihood of separation declines.

Profile of the husband and the wife (personal)

Most husbands came from a nuclear family with a total of 79% while most wives came from a nuclear family (87.5%).

During the 1940s up to 1950s, separated parents were not rampant and a typical Filipino family was a nuclear family, for Filipinos are family-oriented and were strict followers of the Church. That is why the children that the parents from this time produced were also molded to make a lasting marriage that is centered to God. Unlike now where Filipinos became more liberated, separated parents are rampant which resulted in their children doing the same act too. This confirms Albert Bandura's (1961) Social Learning

Theory which states that through the process of observation learning—watching the behavior of another person just like their parents—children learn social behavior (McLeod, 2014).

Most of the husbands and wives came from rural environment with a total of 75% while 25% came for urban environment. This is because families from the province are more conservative and this is the place where Filipino values and traditions are enforced effectively. This confirms the study of Leonhardt and Quealy (2015) for they said that children who grew up in urban areas of a country are less likely by 10 percentage points of getting married while children who grew up in rural areas or conservative areas of a country has a higher possibility of getting married by 26.

Enduring vulnerabilities of the husband

The enduring vulnerabilities that got the highest mean of 3.50 are “*I let her handle our household money*” and “*I make sure that my parents and her get along well*”, interpreted as *strongly agree*; while “*I get deeply involved with other women*” got the lowest mean of 1.21, interpreted as *strongly disagree*.

Most of the husbands were traditional for they believe that their wives should handle the household money. In line with this, a respondent said that after he got his salary, he will not get anything from it, and he will just give his whole salary to his wife for she is the one responsible in handling money.

They also believe that their parents and their wives should get along well for they want their parents to accept their wives as a new part of the family which makes them emotionally attentive. They also stay committed by not getting deeply involved with other women. A study from The National Marriage Project suggested that husbands who belong in a lasting marriage are satisfied, emotionally attentive, and they spend quality time with their wives (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2011).

Adaptive processes of the husband

The adaptive process that got the highest mean of 3.25 is “*I accept my mistakes*” with an interpretation of *agree*; followed by the mean of 3.21 which is “*I criticize her when she makes a mistake*” with an interpretation of *agree*; while the statement “*I hurt her physically when we’re in conflict*” got the lowest mean of 1.58 and an interpretation of *disagree*.

Most of the husbands accept their mistakes which means that in order to solve their marital conflicts; husbands are willing to swallow their pride. The results also show that husbands communicate well with their wives. In line with this, a respondent said that when his wife is angry, he will just stay quiet and calm, so when his wife already said what she has to say and that her anger had subsided, then that is the time when he will speak his side. After that, they

will reconcile.

The results also showed that husbands do not hurt their wives physically. Meaning, they have self-control.

The results mostly confirm the study of Vaden (2012) which states that there are rules in communicating to solve a conflict and these are by not yelling, telling the spouse that the love is not gone even if they are in conflict, being open-minded which can also mean accepting ones mistakes, and others.

Enduring vulnerabilities of the wife

The enduring vulnerabilities that got the highest mean of 3.50 and interpretation of *strongly agree* are “*I consider his advice/s*”, “*I help him in doing the household chores and handling the kid/s*”, “*I make sure that my parents and he get along well*”, and “*I support him in his dreams/goals*”; while “*I get deeply involved with other men*” got the lowest mean of 1.17 and an interpretation of *strongly disagree*.

The wives were traditional for they acknowledge that their husbands are the ones who are in charge in making decisions, while their role are more on doing the household chores, handling the kids, and supporting their husbands’ careers. In support to this, a respondent said that she stayed at home to take care of the kids while her husband was the one who is working.

The wives also make sure that their husbands and their parents get along well. They are also committed by not getting involved deeply with other men.

This mostly confirms a study from The National Marriage Project which states that wives in lasting marriages are satisfied, committed to their husbands, love their husbands generously, nurture a family mentality, make time for their families and, enjoy and pursue social support (Wilcox & Marquardt, 2011).

Adaptive processes of the wife

Among the wives, the adaptive process that got the highest mean of 3.38 is “*I make sure that we solve our marital problems immediately*” with an interpretation of *agree*; while “*I hurt him physically when we’re in conflict*” got a mean of 1.42 and interpretation of *strongly disagree*.

Most of the wives want immediate marital conflict resolution so they stay open-minded by accepting their mistakes and resolve conflicts through communication. In this regard, a respondent said that even though her husband and she have conflicts, they solve them when one of them instigates reconciliation by humbling ones’ self and saying sorry.

In support, Bloch, Haase, and Levenson (2014) stated that a study found that during marital conflicts, a couple is more likely to be happy when the

wife is the first one to calm down before the husband. Also, the wife's use of constructive communication helps a mediating pathway for resolving marital conflict immediately.

The results also showed that wives have self-control for they will not physically hurt their husbands while in conflict.

Stressful life events of the couple

The stressful life event that got the highest mean of 2.83 is "*Finding own house and/or lot*" with an interpretation of *agree*; while "*Imprisonment of a spouse or both spouses*" got the lowest mean of 1.58 and an interpretation of *disagree*.

It is typical for first time parents to struggle in finding their own house and/or lot and raising children just like other newlyweds. Also, a respondent said that when her husband and she were newly married, finding their own house and lot were really hard, especially when they were trying to be independent for them to raise their own family. She also mentioned that after they got their own house, a typhoon struck it, so they have to fix it. She said that house-related problems were the most stressful event that had happened to them.

This confirms what Press Association (2016) stated that buying a new house is one of the stressful events to couples.

Comparative analysis of the enduring vulnerabilities and profile

Majority of the variables have no significant difference in the husband's enduring vulnerabilities when grouped by profile except in the number of years married (*p*-value= 0.011). This means that husbands from different number of years married have different enduring vulnerabilities. Most of the respondents came from 30-34 years followed by 25-29 years. Meaning, behavior and attitude of the husband become better based on the duration that he has been married since he needs to compromise for him to fit in the role of a father.

In support, Anwar (2014) said that couples who get through the first 15 years of marriage learn to value one another, do not have any contempt for each other and accept each other's differences, take pride in one another's accomplishments, have genuine respect for one another and are no longer engaged in futile attempts to change one another. This also supports a study which states that the duration of marriage does not have an effect on conflict resolution strategies of spouses but gender and personality traits do. Also, there is a significant interactive relationship among the length of marriage, personality traits, gender and conflict resolution strategies of spouses (Igbo et al., 2015).

Comparative analysis of enduring vulnerabilities of the wife when grouped by demographic profile

Majority of the variables have no significant difference in the wife's enduring vulnerabilities when grouped by profile except in family structure (p-value= 0.005). This means that wives who came from a different family structure have different enduring vulnerabilities and that family structure has an effect on how the wife behaves inside the marriage. The majority came from a nuclear family in which parents are the ones fully responsible for their child's growth. Wives who came from this type of family are great to be a spouse for they grew up seeing their parents make a relationship work, meaning they know how to make their relationship/marriage last for they learned from their role models—their parents. For some of the respondents who came from an extended type of family, this also means that wives from extended families know how to make marriage work for they have also seen how their family is so close-knitted. That is why when they grew up and have their own family, they will also apply what they have learned as a child. Albert Bandura's (1961) Social Learning Theory supports these for his theory states that through the process of observation learning—watching the behavior of another person just like their parents—children learn social behavior (McLeod, 2014).

There were no wives who came from grandparent type of family. This is because wives that came from grandparent type of family did not know how to make their marriage work for they were not raised by their parents, maybe they felt neglected because of this. In support, Knapp, Norton and Sandberg (2015) stated that negative experiences from the family where a person came from were positively associated with relationship self-regulation and secure attachment behaviors. Also, the relationship between negative experiences from family-of-origin and relationship self-regulation was mediated by attachment behaviors.

Comparative analysis of the adaptive processes and profile

There is no significant difference in the husband's adaptive processes when grouped by demographic profile. Meaning, there is no difference in the adaptive processes of the husbands who came from different demographic profile and that the husband's adaptive processes is not influenced by these set of variables.

This supports humanistic psychology which begins with the existential assumptions that phenomenology is central and that people have free will. Meaning, a person has control over his choices, and all distinctively human qualities. Carl Rogers (1959)—a humanistic psychologist stated that how individuals perceive and interpret situations is most important, that is why he redirected psychology to “the self” (McLeod, 2007, updated 2015).

Comparative analysis of adaptive processes of the wife when grouped by demographic profile

There is no significant difference in the wife's adaptive processes when grouped by demographic profile. Meaning, there is no difference in the adaptive processes of wives who came from different demographic profile and that the wife's adaptive processes are not influenced by these set of variables.

Comparative Analysis of Stressful Life Events and Profile

Only religion ($p= 0.021$) and number of children ($p=0.38$) have a significant difference in the stressful life events when grouped by demographic profile. Meaning, couples who share the same faith experience different stressful life events than those couples who do not. Religion plays a role in a married couple's emotional stability, for faith is necessary for them to endure all the hardships. However, couples who do not share the same religion may encounter more stressful life events for they will encounter conflicts on beliefs and what faith to apply in raising their kids. According to American Psychological Association (2014), religious beliefs can strengthen happy marriages.

In the number of children, there are different stressful life events that were encountered by couples with different number of children. Most respondents have 4 children which means that this balances the stress in the family. According to Dube (2013), mothers of three are experiencing more stress than mothers of four or two children. This is "Duggar Effect", when a person gets to a critical mass of children, and their life becomes easier.

Enduring vulnerabilities of the husband and the wife

There is no significant difference between the enduring vulnerabilities of the husband and the wife. This is because they have been together for so long that their personalities were already mixed. According to Wilcox and Marquardt (2011), husbands and wives who are happily married share the same qualities like being committed.

Their behavior is of a traditional couple. For the husband strongly agreed that the wife is the one who is responsible when it comes to handling the household money, while the wife strongly agreed that the household chores and handling the kids are her duty. Noticeably, the husband and the wife are also dynamic and modern for the husband agreed that he lets his wife have her own job and not just him. Also, even though it is the wife's responsibility to do the household chores and handling the kids, the husband responded that he helps in doing these things, too. In support, Klein et al. (2013) stated that

women still perform the majority of the household tasks, but men also participate in doing the housework and childcare. Meaning, sharing household chores is vital to marital success.

Filipinos being so family-oriented, it is only natural that both spouses make sure that their spouse gets along well with their parents. Bernstein (2012) said that marriages in which the husband reports feeling close to his in-laws are more likely to last, while the opposite effect can be seen when the wife reported being close to her in-laws. But in the case of Filipinos, it seems that marriage lasts when both the husband and the wife are close to their in-laws.

Infidelity has no place in their marriage, for they do not get deeply/romantically involved with other people. In support, Channel News Asia's (2016) Josephine Teo cited successful marriages have "steadfast loyalty, commitment and devotion."

Adaptive Processes of the Husband and the Wife

There is no significant difference between the adaptive processes of husband and wife. Meaning, they have the same way of solving conflicts. For they have been married for so long that they have encountered many conflicts so they already know how to handle them effectively.

Communication is present in the couple's way of solving conflict for they agreed that they should tell each other what they like and do not like about each other's behavior. Meanwhile, they disagreed that they would not go home or talk to each other when they have a fight. In support, Betts (2015) stated that communication has been consistently identified by many researchers as an integral part of a maintaining a healthy relationship.

The couple uses collaborative conflict management style, for they cooperate with each other to understand and express their own concerns to find a win-win solution. According to De Bruyne and Greeff (2011), collaborative conflict management style got the highest correlation with both marital satisfaction and spousal satisfaction.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The couple's duration of marriage is the factor that has a significant difference in the enduring vulnerabilities of the husband when grouped by profile. Family structure that the wife came from is the only factor that has a significant difference in the enduring vulnerabilities of the wife when grouped by profile. There is no factor that has a significant difference in the adaptive processes of the husband and the wife when grouped by profile. The factors that have a significant difference in the stressful life events when grouped by profile are religion and the number of children. Lastly, there is no significant

difference found between the enduring vulnerabilities and adaptive processes of the husband and the wife.

Based on the results of this study, the researchers recommend the following:

For the “to be” married and already married couples who wish for lasting marriage, results of this study may help and guide them in nurturing their relationship. It is highly recommended that (a) the husband may be the one in charge of working and providing family needs—but it is also recommended for the wife to have the freedom to work if she wants; (b) the wives are the ones to be in charge in handling the household money and in handling the children/household chores—it is better if the husband helps in doing the chores and raising kids, too; (c) the husband should make sure that his wife and his parents get along well and this also applies to the wife; (d) a spouse may show affection through appreciation, giving attention, celebrating every important occasion together, dating once in a while, making each other happy, and also by affirming one’s love by saying “I Love you”; (e) couples need connection—they need to tell their needs, wants, advice, problems and even secrets to each other, so that they can accept each other’s differences, can overcome each other’s weaknesses, and can support each other’s dreams; and (f) having God at the center of matrimony is highly recommended because spiritual strength helps maintain relationships despite challenges.

In solving and handling conflicts, it is recommended that couples use collaborative conflict management in which both parties make an effort to solve the conflict. The heart of this type of conflict management is communication and acceptance. Couples should be open for helpful/healthy criticisms and of what they like and feel. Each should learn how to compromise to solve their problems immediately. Couples should learn how to accept their mistakes and not to repeat them after being forgiven.

Lastly, it is also highly recommended that couples learn to view each stressful life events like raising children not as a drawback to their marriage but as a challenge for it will mold them to be better versions of themselves and their marriage to survive challenges.

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