

# Ethnographic Study on Marriage Practices of Selected Groups in Socorro Surigao Del Norte, Philippines

**Fel Janika D. Galanida-Canta**

Vice President for Research, Development and Extension of Bucas Grande Foundation College, Brgy. Taruc, Socorro, Surigao del Norte

## **ABSTRACT:**

This study aimed to determine and explore the marriage practices of the selected groups in Socorro, Surigao del Norte. The researcher believed that incorporating these ethnographic marriage practices on values education and ethics would help to understand the sociological, anthropological, and cultural concept of marriage and thus improve the family and society. This study used the Descriptive Phenomenological Research Approach using the Husserl method, as illustrated by Groenewald (2004), with transcribed semi-structured in-depth one-on-one interviews to explore the marriage practices of the selected group in Socorro, Surigao del Norte. A purposive sampling technique was used to find the eight (8) selected identified participants who are leaders, elders, and core members of the tribal group of Iglesia sa Socorro. Thematic analysis was used to determine the themes of the study. Based on the emerging themes, tribal migration and fanatic ideology were the primary historical background of the group's marriage practices. Findings revealed that the marriage practices of the selected groups of Socorro are based upon six emerging themes: customs, beliefs, bylaws, prohibitions, abuses, and trends. Marriage practices and customs are the ceremonial observance and procedures of the group. Beliefs are the faith and convictions of the tribes. Marriage practices, according to bylaws, are the rules and regulations. Prohibitions on marriage practices are the forbidden actions and rules on marriage practices. Abuses of marriage practices are the misuse, exploitation, and perversion of the customs. At the same time, the trending practices on marriage pertain to the new craze or mania observed or confirmed from outside the tribal norms in these current times. Marriage practices based on customs, beliefs, bylaws, and prohibitions are indigenous in traditions. In contrast, abuses of marriage practices and trending marriage practices are products of extremist viewpoints and conformation to outside traditions. They may result in dire consequences, including the destruction of marriage and, thus, the family.

**Keywords:** Marriage Practices, Ethnic Groups, Cultural And Values, Education, Surigao Del Norte, Philippines

## **I. INTRODUCTION**

The essence of family as the cornerstone of society is highlighted, echoing Winston S. Churchill's belief in its pivotal role in shaping virtues. According to Martin Luther, marriage, as the foundation of family, holds immense cultural and historical significance worldwide. However, education on marriage needs to

be improved in formal curricula, emphasizing biological aspects rather than broader cultural and ethical dimensions. This educational gap is particularly pronounced in the Philippines, where discussions on family and marriage occur mainly at later stages of education.

Despite the importance of marriage, cases of extra-marital affairs among teaching professionals and academics are increasingly prevalent, raising concerns about moral conduct within educational institutions. Philippine laws and codes underscore the sanctity of marriage and family unity, yet societal shifts in values have led to a rise in broken families, evidenced by declining marriage rates and the prevalence of cohabitation and premarital sex.

The study delves into indigenous Filipino philosophy, exploring three approaches: traditional/philosophical, cultural, and nationality/constitutional. Indigenous philosophy encompasses concepts such as the law of reversion, the balance of nature, and the value of non-violence, reflecting indigenous perceptions of reality. However, Western philosophical categories sometimes inadequately capture indigenous worldviews, necessitating a critical indigenous philosophy that respects and preserves indigenous ways of understanding.

In Socorro, Surigao del Norte, diverse indigenous marriage practices underscore the rich cultural heritage and its potential contribution to sociological, anthropological, and values education. The study advocates for integrating indigenous philosophy into education to foster a deeper understanding of marriage and its societal implications, emphasizing the importance of educating youth about marriage for personal and social development.

### **1.1 Research Exploratory Questions**

This study explores the marriage practices of selected groups in Socorro, Surigao del Norte. Specifically, this research answers the following questions: 1. How did the group affiliations in Socorro begin? 2. What are the marriage practices of the selected groups in Socorro? 3. Based on the findings, what intervention plan may be proposed?

### **1.2 REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE**

As Jocano (1998) discussed, the Philippines has a diverse cultural landscape shaped by Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous beliefs. Modern Filipinos navigate dating and marriage influenced by Western norms, but traditional practices like arranged marriages persist among Indigenous and Islamic communities. Courtship, once prominent, is waning due to Westernization and technology. Despite modernization, parental involvement in marriage remains significant, with parents often influencing partner choices and blessings that are highly valued in Filipino culture.

#### **Foreign Marriage Practices**

Walsh (2021) points out that the Western cultural shift in the late 18th century transformed marriage into a union based on love, a trend affecting Millennials' views on marriage. This transformation is discussed in light of the impact of technology on societal structures like marriage and family, as highlighted by research from Spar (2020). Shalaby (2018) explores tribal marriage customs in Egypt, noting practices such as enforced marriage at puberty and marriage by exchange or capture. Building upon this, Zaidi (2016) further examines variations in arranged marriage customs across different countries, influenced by beliefs, religion, and family orientation.

Transitioning to contemporary dynamics, David & Stafford (2013) emphasize the importance of love, commitment, forgiveness, and sacrifice in marriage dynamics, supported by research on religious values' role in marital satisfaction (Ellison et al., 2010). This discussion leads into Apostolou's (2017) exploration of the historical regulation of mate choice and the continuing practice of arranged marriages

in various cultures, with Samad (2010) highlighting the significance of arranged marriages in South Asian societies. Finally, Sanchez (2016) delves into royal marriage traditions, focusing on endogamy and the geopolitical, prestige, and religious factors influencing dynastic marriages. These discussions comprehensively understand the diverse practices and beliefs surrounding marriage across different cultures and historical periods.

### **Philippine Indigenous and Islamic Marriages**

Tan (2012) discusses how marriage reflects societal needs, with laws evolving to accommodate changing norms. Early marriages, joint under Spanish civil law, aimed at consolidating power, while American influence raised the minimum age. The Filipinas Heritage Library highlights the struggles of indigenous cultural communities (ICC) against discrimination and isolation, with limited access to resources. Tribal marriage practices, as described by Kasal.com, involve arranged unions influenced by superstition and parental consent. Dowry systems are prevalent, with conservative values dictating sexual conduct and elders playing significant roles. Tan (2022) notes that indigenous communities often follow Custom Law, allowing marriages at puberty or adulthood. Meanwhile, Marquez (2021) reports on early marriages in the BARMM region due to cultural beliefs and societal pressure against premarital sex.

### **Trends on Marriage in the Philippine**

Tan (2012) discusses the evolution of marriage laws in the Philippines, highlighting how societal changes influence legal regulations. Initially following 19th-century Spanish civil law, which allowed marriages as young as twelve, the Philippines later adopted a minimum age requirement under American influence, with parental consent necessary for minors (Tan et al., 2022).

Meanwhile, indigenous cultural communities (ICC) in the Philippines face challenges due to isolation, lack of resources, and discrimination (The Lumad of Mindanao: On Philippine History and Culture, 2022). Despite this, tribal marriage practices persist, often involving arranged marriages supervised by elders and influenced by superstitions and traditions (Marriage and Wedding Customs of Different Ethnic Groups and Regions in the Philippines, 2015).

Arranged marriages, dowry systems, and child betrothals are common among indigenous groups and Filipino Islamic communities, sometimes practiced from childhood (Marriage and Wedding Customs of Different Ethnic Groups and Regions in the Philippines, 2015; Cudis, 2022; Tan, 2022). This cultural adherence often leads to early marriages, with societal pressure enforcing marital unions, particularly among females (Marquez, 2021).

### **Philippine Education on Marriage**

The Philippine Commission on Population and several government departments introduced a pre-marriage orientation and counseling program in 2018 aimed at couples applying for marriage licenses. This program covers various aspects of marriage, including roles, relationships, legalities, and services for nurturing marriage. While discussions about marriage are limited in the school curriculum, there is a growing concern about the lack of emphasis on ethical values, leading to issues like premarital sex, infidelity, and single parenthood. Acosta (2017) emphasizes the importance of teachers upholding moral standards in their professional and personal lives, as their behavior can influence students' perceptions and values. Ethical conduct and integrity are crucial for teachers, ensuring they serve as positive role models for the youth.

## II. METHOD

This study employed a mixed Ethnographic method alongside the descriptive phenomenological research approach pioneered by Husserl and illustrated by Groenewald (2004). Ethnography involves observing people's cultural contexts to create a narrative account against a theoretical backdrop. At the same time, Husserl's phenomenology focuses on understanding consciousness and the meaning of individual experiences, mainly through intentionality. The primary data gathering tool was semi-structured in-depth one-on-one interviews, allowing for open-ended exploration of participants' experiences, opinions, and feelings. This method requires various skills, including establishing rapport, conducting interviews, and ensuring ethical considerations. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from specific groups in Socorro, focusing on the Iglesias sa Socorro due to their claim as an indigenous group with unique marriage practices. The study aimed to understand these practices through the participants' experiences and knowledge. Thematic analysis was employed to interpret the collected data, incorporating inductive and deductive approaches to identify patterns and themes relevant to the research questions. This method offers flexibility in framing the analysis and connecting themes to the data. The study ensured rigor and trustworthiness based on Guba's (1981) criteria, including truth value, applicability, consistency, and neutrality. Steps were taken to establish confidence in the findings, ensure their relevance to other contexts, maintain consistency in data collection, and mitigate bias in the research process and results. Overall, these efforts aimed to produce valid and reliable insights into marriage practices among selected groups in Socorro.

## III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

This chapter presents the data analysis and interpretation of the data gathered. This explains the detailed phenomenological analysis of interviews with eight (8) leaders, elders, or core members of Iglesia sa Socorro. The participants or informants completed the face-to-face interviews as they narrated and explored the marriage practices of this tribal community. The qualitative data is analyzed through thematic analysis. It is usually applied to texts, such as interviews or transcripts. The researcher closely examines the data to identify common themes – topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning that come up repeatedly (Caulfield, 2022). This chapter follows the six (6) steps of thematic analysis in identifying the themes of the data gathered.

### 1) Familiarization

This step involves meticulously reviewing all collected data, including transcribed interviews. Participants, aged sixty-five to eighty, passionately shared their experiences and cultural heritage, emphasizing their indigenous origin and strong convictions in their faith and beliefs. Despite migrating from various regions of the Visayas, they maintained their cultural identity and traditions. Religious and moralistic influences shaped their decisions, with mentions of deities and ancestors holding divine authority. The practice of arranged marriage, known as 'buy,' was highlighted, underscoring the leader's role in decision-making. Courtship was absent in their customs, and their traditional wedding ceremony involved marriage counseling by leaders. Various aspects of faith, customs, rules, and laws surrounding marriage were discussed, reflecting both the advantages and disadvantages of their practices.

### 2) Coding the Data

In this step, initial codes represent the meanings and patterns in the collected data, with phrases highlighted and categorized accordingly. The participants discuss their tribal origins from various Visayan regions and their migration in search of a promised land guided by their leaders. They express

strong faith in their doctrines, influenced by both indigenous beliefs and Roman Catholicism. Arranged marriage, termed 'buy,' is a significant practice overseen by leaders, with detailed customs and rules governing it. Obedience to these practices is emphasized, driven by faith and fear of divine authority. However, discussions also highlight challenges such as youth disregarding traditional practices, leading to issues like increased cohabitation and high divorce rates. The consequences of these challenges include marrying strangers and the immaturity of teenagers in handling marriage, posing significant problems for the community.

### **3) Generating Initial Themes**

In this step, themes are developed by reviewing the initial codes and identifying patterns in the data. The group's distinct tribal origin and their practice of ancestor worship are highlighted, along with their adherence to transcendent divine laws. Their origins vary across different regions of the Visayas, and they identify as a distinct maharlikan tribe. The influence of their generations of leaders, depicted as deities, is significant, tracing back to Dr. Jose Rizal. While influenced by the Roman Catholic Church, they maintain a unique interpretation of their beliefs.

Additionally, the theme of communal support through the institution of 'Hinabangay' is noted.

Regarding marriage practices, themes include unique rituals, decision-making processes on matchmaking and arranged marriage, faith and belief systems, rules and regulations, prohibitions, abuses, and trends. The prominent customs of 'buy' and 'may' signify arranged marriage and traditional wedding ceremonies, respectively, with leaders having the final say. Obedience is emphasized, with consequences for disobedience, including potential misfortunes. However, strong faith may lead to abuses by delegated matchmakers and leaders, with dire consequences for rule violations. Changes in current marriage practices may indicate challenges to cultural beliefs and potential solutions.

### **4) Reviewing the Themes**

This section is focused on the review and revision of the themes. It ensures that each theme has enough data to support them and that they are distinct. It is to ensure that the themes are valuable and accurate data representations. Here, the researcher must return to the data set and compare the themes against it. See if some themes or concepts need to be added and if they are present in the data. Lastly, and if required, change the themes to make it work better.

The table above compared the themes with the original data and looked for missing points or irrelevant results. The themes were modified depending on how they satisfied and justified the data after tracing them back to it. The final themes for the origin of the ethnicity of the tribe, as indicated above, are the concept of tribal migration and fanatic ideology. Marriage practices are manifested into six (6) key features: 1) custom practices, 2) practices on beliefs, 3) bylaws practices, 4) prohibition practices, 5) practices of abuse, and 6) trending practices.

### **5) Naming and Defining the Themes**

After establishing the initial themes, reviewing and revising them is essential to ensure accuracy and coherence. The researcher names the themes based on their implications and data interpretations. Each theme must be supported by sufficient data and remain distinct, with consideration given to merging similar themes and removing those lacking supporting data. This process aids in formulating a cohesive narrative from the themes identified in the interview transcripts. Two overarching themes emerge in the study: tribal migration and fanatic ideology. Tribal migration refers to the movement of indigenous groups seeking a promised utopia. At the same time, fanatic ideology denotes excessive devotion to religious beliefs, including ancestor worship, animism, and polytheism, guided by divine command

theory. Ancestor worship involves venerating deceased ancestors believed to influence fate, while polytheism acknowledges multiple gods with distinct roles. Divine command theory posits that moral actions are determined by divine commands, emphasizing obedience to religious authority.

Similarly, the interviews on marriage practices yield six themes: customs, beliefs, bylaws, prohibitions, abuses, and trends. Customs encompass ceremonial rituals and sacraments observed during marriage, while beliefs signify absolute trust in marriage processes. Bylaws govern marriage procedures, prohibitions enforce rules, and abuses denote misuse or exploitation of marital authority. Trends reflect evolving customs and ideas surrounding marriage, often influenced by external factors. This comprehensive analysis illuminates the complex dynamics of tribal culture and marriage practices within the research context.

### 6) Writing up the Report

The text discusses marriage practices among selected groups in Socorro, Surigao del Norte, highlighting their significance within the broader context of family and society. It delves into the ethnographic study of marriage among these groups, focusing on two main research questions: the origins of group affiliations in Socorro and their marriage practices.

The research approach employed is descriptive phenomenology, aiming to understand marriage practices through the lens of indigenous people. The study identifies two main themes regarding the origin of group affiliations: tribal migration and fanatic ideology. Tribal migration refers to the movement of indigenous people from various places, while fanatic ideology involves intense devotion to religious beliefs, including ancestor worship and polytheism.

Interviews with tribal members reveal six themes regarding marriage practices: customs, beliefs, bylaws, prohibitions, abuses, and trends. Customary practices include arranged marriages facilitated by leaders, while beliefs emphasize obedience to divine laws and the authority of leaders. Bylaws regulate marriage within the group, emphasizing monogamy and parental involvement. Prohibitions include restrictions on courtship outside the group and the prohibition of marrying non-group members.

Abuses of marriage practices include instances of sexual abuse and exploitation, particularly of women, stemming from extremist beliefs. Child marriage and early pregnancies are also highlighted as consequences of these practices. Trending practices indicate shifts towards premarital relationships, premarital sex, and increased separation among young married couples.

The study concludes that marriage practices in Socorro are influenced by indigenous traditions and fanatic ideologies, with a mix of advantages and disadvantages. Despite abuses, these practices hold cultural value and social significance, emphasizing the sanctity of marriage and family as essential elements of society.



**Figure 2. Explicit Framework Marriage Practices in Selected Groups of Socorro Surigao del Norte**

#### IV. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATION

In this chapter, the researchers present the findings, conclusions, and corresponding recommendations. This study explores the marriage practices of the selected Socorro Surigao del Norte groups.

The Ethnography Method and Descriptive Phenomenological Research Approach were employed to investigate the marriage practices of a selected group in Socorro, Surigao del Norte, using semi-structured one-on-one interviews with eight identified participants. The chapter aims to present study findings, analyze data, and identify primary core themes rooted in tribal migration and fanatic ideology influencing group affiliations in Socorro. These themes, including customs, beliefs, bylaws, prohibitions, abuses, and trends, delineate the unique marriage practices of the group. Recommendations based on these findings are provided to educators, parents, social workers, and local government officers, emphasizing the ethical, cultural, anthropological, and sociological values of marriage and family. Additionally, the research aims to inspire future studies exploring similar concepts, contributing to understanding marriage practices within various cultural contexts.

The ethnographic study on marriage practices among selected groups in Socorro, Surigao del Norte, identified six core themes shaped by tribal migration and fanatic ideology. These themes encompassed customs, beliefs, bylaws, prohibitions, abuses, and trends, revealing a blend of indigenous traditions and extremist influences. While customs, beliefs, bylaws, and prohibitions reflect indigenous practices, abuses, and trending practices stem from extremist viewpoints and external influences, potentially leading to negative consequences for marriages and families. The study's conclusions suggest educational implications, including course enrichment programs, values education, cultural education, and contributions to sociology and anthropology courses. Additionally, the findings highlight the need for social interventions to support teachers, professors, school administrators, and other academic community members in addressing these complex issues.

The recommendations derived from the study findings and conclusions aim to address various aspects of marriage education and support within the community. Firstly, advocating for the early introduction of marriage concepts in junior high school, facilitated by collaborative efforts between the Department of Education and the Department of Social Welfare and Development, is proposed. Secondly, the development of course enrichment programs, particularly in Ethics courses at the tertiary level, is suggested to enhance understanding of diverse Philippine indigenous marriage practices and their significance. Thirdly, support for tribal communities in Socorro through establishing educational institutions and exposure to laws and regulations concerning abuses is recommended. Additionally, providing counseling and support services, organizing community engagement activities, and utilizing media platforms to promote positive marital values are emphasized. Finally, integrating the study's findings into Socorro's cultural education curriculum on marriage is proposed further to enrich understanding and appreciation of marital customs and traditions.

#### REFERENCES

1. Abad, M. (2022). Child Marriage: At long last, the Philippines bans child marriage. <https://www.rappler.com/nation/philippines-bans-child-marriage/>
2. Acosta, P. (2017). Dismissing teachers over immorality. The Manila Times. <https://www.manilatimes.net/2017/07/02/legal-advice/dearpao/dismissing-teachers-immorality/336060>

3. Apostolou, M. (2017). Individual Mate Choice in an arranged marriage context: Evidence from the standard cross-cultural sample. *Evolutionary Psychological Science*. Springer International Publishing. DOI: 10.1007/s40806-017-0085-9
4. Caulfield, J. (2022). How to do thematic analysis | a step-by-step guide & example. <https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/>
5. Cudis, C. (2022). DSWD drafting intervention programs for child marriage victims. Philippine News Agency. <https://www.pna.gov.ph/articles/1165466>
6. David, P. & Stafford, L. (2013). A rational approach to religion and spirituality in marriage: The role of couples' religious communication in marital satisfaction. *Journal of Family Issues*, pp. 1–18. DOI: 10.1177/0192513X13485922
7. Ellison C. G., Burdette A. M., Wilcox W. B. (2010). The couple that prays together: Race, ethnicity, religion, and relationship quality among working-age adults. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, pp. 72, 963–975.
8. Groenewald T. (2004). A Phenomenological Research Design Illustrated. Rand Afrikaans University, *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/160940690400300104>
9. Guba, E. G. (1981). Criteria for assessing the trustworthiness of naturalistic inquiries. *ECTJ*, 29(2), 75.
10. Jocano F. L. (1998). Filipino social organization: Traditional kinship and family organization. Punlad Research House; Quezon City.
11. Koval, N. (1997). Spirituality in the system of professional development of a specialist: Dis. for Ph.D. of a doctor of Psychology: 19.00.13. Moscow. 1997. p.11. (e-resource) URL:<http://www.lib.ua-ru.net/diss/cont/122189.html> (date of access 02.02.2013).
12. Lincoln, Y. S. & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. SAGE.
13. Marriage and wedding customs of different ethnic groups and regions in the Philippines (2015). Facts and Details. [https://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Philippines/sub5\\_6c/entry-3872.html](https://factsanddetails.com/southeast-asia/Philippines/sub5_6c/entry-3872.html)
14. Marquez, C. (2021). Child bride tragedies. GMA News Online. <https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/specials/content/197/child-brides-lifelong-tragedies/>
15. Palos, J. L. & Sanchez, M. S. (2016). *Early Modern Dynastic Marriages and Cultural Transfer*. Ashgate.
16. Rodell, P. A. (2002). *Culture and customs of the Philippines*. Greenwood Press.
17. Samad, Y. (2010). Forced Marriage Among Men: An Unrecognized Problem. *Critical Social Policy*, 30(2), 189–207.
18. Shalaby, A. (2018). Tribal Marriages: A tradition more powerful than law, voiceless victims deprived of life. *Egypt Today*. <https://www.egypttoday.com/Article/1/62668/Tribal-Marriages-A-tradition-more-powerful-than-law-voiceless-victims>
19. Spar, D. L. (2020). *WorkMate Marry Love: How Machines Shape Our Human Destiny*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
20. Tan, M. L. (2022). Marriage and culture. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://opinion.inquirer.net/148838/marriage-and-culture#ixzz7IOVqDNZh>
21. The lumad of Mindanao: On Philippine history and culture. Filipinas Heritage Library. <https://www.filipinaslibrary.org.ph/articles/the-lumad-of-mindanao/>



22. Walsh, K. (2021). NowUKnow: Why Millennials Refuse to Get Married. Bentley University Newsroom. <https://www.bentley.edu/news/nowuknow-why-millennials-refuse-get-married>
23. Zaidi, A. U. & Shuraydi, M. (2002). Perceptions of Arranged Marriages by Young Pakistani Muslim Women Living in a Western Society. *Journal of Comparative Family Studies*, 33(4), 495-514. DOI:10.3138/jcfs.33.4.495