

Research Article

Upland Women's *Dakop* Experiences: A Culture of Community Shaming and Social Pressure

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Abstract

This narrative analysis study was conducted to describe the experiences of upland women in the culture of *dakop*, highlighting the community shaming and social pressure. *Dakop* is a cultural belief when the young couple intimately together is seen or caught by a witness who will then inform the family of the girl, thereby causing public shame. This study was conducted at Libacao, Aklan, Philippines. There were eight (8) participants purposively selected based on the criteria to share their experiences. The interview guide and observations were utilized for qualitative data. Thematic analysis was used for data analysis. Secondary data such as school records supplemented the findings and results of the study. As revealed by the study on the narratives and experiences of the participants, the upland women exposed to *dakop* culture face unique challenges and adjustments in their married lives, but they continue to persevere and adapt to their circumstances. Despite the challenges and misjudgments, they encountered, these women remain resilient, driven by their commitment to their families and their determination to overcome societal obstacles. In response, the school management offered support through Safe and Confidential Space, Individual/Group Counseling, Connection with Mental Health Professionals, and Workshops or Training for Life Skills Development. Drawing from the narratives and stories of the participants, hence a policy recommendation for young women who experienced *dakop* culture was developed.

Keywords

Dakop Culture, Community Shaming, Social Pressure, Upland Women, Policy Enhancement

1. Introduction

Culture dictates as society follows.

The culture is a system of knowledge whereby a relative group of people share. By the sharing of values, behavior, attitudes, beliefs, and language it becomes accumulative to the younger generation. No matter how the outside world views a certain culture, the one within the group embraces the peculiar identity and this becomes a process of protecting and thriving the culture that the group built into [3].

The upland people of Libacao, Aklan have a distinct culture of *dakop*. *Dakop* is a cultural belief when the young couple intimately together is seen or caught by a witness who will then inform the family of the girl, thereby causing public shame. To preserve the woman's dignity, the parents advise their daughter to be married to her lover or forced to be in a relationship with a man whom they were less likely to know well.

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Younger women subjected to the culture of dakop were obliged to get into forced relationships sacrificing their chance of finishing their education due to some reasons and situations that the only solution is to accept the relationship between two families.

Arrange Marriage

On the context of arranged marriage, according to Tahir [21], originating from a culture of arranged marriages but educated in the context of free-choice marriage, contends that the existing literature on arranged marriages often fails to offer a thorough exploration of this traditional marital practice. Instead, many analyses approach arranged marriages through the lens of the modern free-choice marriage system, inherently favoring the latter as the ideal. This analysis critically examines the social principles intrinsic to arranged marriages, often misunderstood, such as hierarchy, patriarchy, collectivism, group loyalty, and the roles of parental and individual marital consent. Contrary to previous assumptions associating arranged marriages with underdeveloped societies, low educational levels, and lower social classes, the research of Alfrian [1] on arranged marriages among young educated Muslim women in South Sulawesi, Indonesia, the motivations behind the choices made by young, educated Muslim women revealed that Indonesian women opt for arrange marriages for reasons of the impact of family systems, religious teachings, economic considerations, and personal preferences, all of which contribute to a conscious choice.

Early Marriage

In the study of Lebni et al. [10], early marriage presents a compelling social issue for young women, and this study investigates its consequences among Kurdish women in western Iran who married before 18 years old. Utilizing a qualitative approach, 30 participants were interviewed, revealing 389 codes, 12 sub-categories, 4 sub-themes, and 2 main categories. Negative outcomes include physical and psychological problems, family issues, and social challenges, while positive consequences involve intra-family support and opportunities for progress. Mitigating post-early marriage challenges requires raising awareness about contraceptives, providing comprehensive social and health services during pregnancy, and offering training and psychological counseling to empower women and their husbands in navigating personal and marital issues effectively.

The research underscores the essential support required for individuals affected by early marriage, emphasizing the critical need for safe accommodation when leaving an abusive union to prevent young girls from being forced back to their spouses or parents. Despite this urgency, the Housing Act currently fails to recognize early (forced) marriage as a priority factor in determining homelessness, and providing evidence of domestic violence as grounds for priority housing poses significant challenges for young women exiting such marriages. Moreover, childless young women over 18 leaving early marriages are often overlooked for high-priority rehousing, leaving them with the difficult choice of returning

to potentially hostile parental environments or seeking survival elsewhere, exposing them to increased vulnerability, particularly to sexual exploitation in the absence of a support network. This complexity is exacerbated for young women on spousal visas deemed ineligible for public funds, a concern raised by organizations like Southall Black Sisters [6].

Culture of Community Shame

Shame is a social mechanism employed in our interactions with others, and thus the externalized expression of shame has an important role to play in how an individual relates to society. Shame is the body's physiological reaction to dealing with social pressure, though culture and society play a central role in fostering this emotion. Shame is a painful emotion that arises when people feel criticized by others following an act that goes against the accepted norms, or as a response to a sense of failure. Shame appears in early childhood, often with a sense of helplessness [13].

Emotion is the combination of a mental evaluative process, simple or complex, with systemic responses to that process, which molds the subject's relationship with his or her surroundings. The immediate personal and social realm is fraught with uncertainty and is related to our fate. Therefore, we must be able to choose the most successful response essential to our existence. How we experience emotions differs from culture to culture, and our emotional patterns are significantly influenced by the culture around us. It is the significance attributed to an event that evokes emotion, not the event itself.

In the study of Mayer [15], the experiences of shame in the context of racial and cultural belonging were explored. Participants were a multiracial purposive sample of 11 South Africans (five females and six males, four white, two colored, two Indians, and three black Africans; in the age range between 40 to 61 years). The participants completed a semi-structured interview on their perceptions of shame in the context of family and community. The interview data were analyzed utilizing interpretative phenomenological analysis. Participants from all racial groups considered shameful experiences primarily about the violation of family and community norms and values. Findings show that male white Afrikaans-speaking participants narrated shameful experiences mainly about the violation of religious (Calvinist) norms and values. Furthermore, the violation of racially constructed boundaries was also likely with females with an Indian and white Afrikaans cultural background. Overall, the findings suggest white Afrikaans culture is less shaming of individuals in comparison to black, colored, or Indian cultures. Shame beliefs appear to be culturally nuanced in their salience to members or racial-ethnic groupings.

Poverty is one of the factors that affects culture shaming. Shame is similarly construed in each culture as an unpleasant emotion appertaining to the inner self, leading to concealment, retreat, avoidance, and ultimately personal disintegration. Not surprisingly, given the different degrees of economic development, poverty is more variably constructed but

is universally related to deprivation and hardship. Poverty, in urban areas especially, is also considered degrading, with people forced into disreputable behavior by limited opportunities for subsistence. Almost everywhere, immediate post-revolutionary China possibly accepted, poverty is presented not just as a lack of income but as the inability to fulfill personal goals and social expectations, as a lack of social recognition, and as the shame resulting from both. The arenas, vectors, and targets of poverty-related shame vary by culture [23].

In the Philippines, some communities often face exclusion, loss of ancestral lands, displacement, pressures to and destruction of traditional ways of life and practices, and loss of identity and culture. In extreme situations, social and political discontent has erupted into armed conflict, the 40-year-old armed conflict in Mindanao, involving secessionists and communist insurgents is a prime example. Conflicts such as these not only threaten the stability and development potential of affected areas, but they exacerbate the plight of indigenous peoples. From economic development to environmental protection to justice, human rights, and good governance, the protections and participation need to be mainstreamed through all relevant decision-making bodies and stakeholder organizations.

Furthermore, Leitch [11] highlighted the phenomena of shame and shaming from both psychological and sociocultural perspectives. Shame is generally viewed as a private, self-conscious experience in which individuals feel that a weakness or vulnerability has been exposed not only to others but also to themselves, leaving them feeling deficient and humiliated. Shaming is the social process by which shame is induced intentionally or unintentionally in others. Although not all shame experiences are induced by others nor indeed are public, it is argued that social institutions such as schools play a role in perpetuating and condoning shaming rituals justified as encouraging self-conscious moral attributes in individuals. What remains unexplored are the unconscious dynamics of shaming experiences both at an individual and collective level and how these interrelate. This paper explores some preliminary case study data on teachers' experiences of shame and shaming in educational practice. Results indicate that there are some pieces of evidence that teachers may use shaming rituals systematically as pedagogical or regulatory mechanisms, given clinical evidence that shame and shame-induced experiences do not necessarily produce the intended adaptive outcomes and are more often associated with negative psychological symptoms, careful self-examination both at individual and system levels within education is needed.

The Rights of Women

The rights of women seek to achieve gender equality as a fundamental value that should be reflected in development choices and contends that women are active agents of development, not just passive recipients of development. The Magna Carta of Women [19] defines the Gender and Devel-

opment Program as the development perspective and process that is participatory and empowering, equitable, sustainable, free from violence, respectful of human rights, supportive of self-determination, and actualization of human potentials. GAD focuses on gender mainstreaming or a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies, programs, and projects in all social, political, civil, and economic spheres so that women and men benefit equally. Assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, or programs in all areas and at all levels. Executive Order 273 [8], issued on September 9, 1995, and signed by President Fidel V. Ramos, adopted the Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development (PPGD) 1995-2025 [17]. The PPGD 1995-2025 is a 30-year perspective plan that outlines the policies, strategies, programs, and projects that the government must adopt to enable women to participate in and benefit from national development while EO 273 directs all government agencies, departments, bureaus, offices and instrumentalities, including government owned and controlled corporations, at the national level, sub-national and local levels to: (1) To take appropriate steps to ensure the full implementation of the policies/strategies and programs/projects outlined in the Plan; (2) To institutionalize Gender and Development (GAD) efforts in government by incorporating GAD concerns, as spelled out in the Plan, in their planning, programming and budgeting processes, and (3) To include/incorporate GAD concerns in the formulation, assessment, and updating of their annual agency plans; formulation, assessment and updating of their inputs to the medium/long-term development plans, and preparation of their inputs to sectoral performance assessment reports, public investment plans, and other similar documents.

In the Philippines, the pursuit of gender equality and women's empowerment has achieved major inroads in the past decades. The gender-responsive laws, policies, and programs in place and the institutional and enabling mechanisms in national government agencies and local government units are a result of the continuing advocacy of government and its partners among lawmakers, people's organizations, civil society groups, and the academe [24].

The Philippine Commission on Women [16], through its Local GAD Resource Program (LGRP), developed the Gender and Development (GAD) Local Learning Hub as a certification program for local government units. It aims to institutionalize the sharing and replication of local experiences and showcase GAD-related innovations to enable the LGUs to initiate and strengthen their gender mainstreaming efforts. This program is in line with the Magna Carta of Women which mandates government agencies, including LGUs, to adopt gender mainstreaming to promote women's human rights and eliminate gender discrimination in their systems structures, policies, programs, processes, and procedures.

The Philippines has been consistent in making it to the top

10 global ranking in the Global Gender Gap Index of the World Economic Forum since 2006 [25]. The index is comprised of 14 indicators measuring educational attainment, health and survival, economic participation and opportunity, and political empowerment. It measures the difference between men's and women's access to resources and opportunities rather than the total level of attainment. The Philippines' stellar position among countries with viable track records in gender equality is partly because the country has an extensive and impressive institutional framework to promote gender equality [14]. More so, the highest law of the land sees to it that women are protected. The 1987 Philippine Constitution states [22] two prominent provisions relative to the protection of women. The first in the Declaration of Principles, Article II Section 14, asserts that, "The State recognizes the role of women in nation-building and shall ensure the fundamental equality before the law of women and men." Additionally, Article XIII, Section 14 provides that, "The state shall protect working women by providing safe and healthful working conditions taking into account their maternal functions, and such facilities and opportunities that will enhance their welfare and enable them to realize their full potential in the service of the nation."

Ironically, Anonuevo [2] observed that the gender situation in the Philippines is characterized by sharp contradictions. It graphically shows samples of women's advancement in politics, academic, and professional excellence, and even legislation. But this is contrasted by images of prostituted women, battered wives, economically disadvantaged women, and exploited migrant workers. As such, there is still a need to propagate gender equality and women's empowerment to the widest audience possible.

As cited by Losaria [12], even if there has been an effort to correct cultural biases and role-stereotyping of women, misconceptions and gender biases have not been corrected despite GAD training. Women are still seen as weak and often relegated to domestic roles and reproductive providers. The same idea is elucidated in Executive Order No. 77 [7] on Gender-Responsive Local Development Planning (2002). According to this book, women need to have an equal share in power and decision-making in economic affairs to be able to enjoy a fair share of the economic resources and benefits, including equal pay for work of equal value. Moreover, there has not been a corresponding change in the sharing of home responsibilities. Even when both spouses are employed, the wife is still expected to continue being responsible for the house, resulting in multiple burdens for women.

According to International Labor Organization [9], the evident need to change both women's and men's attitudes toward gender equality and the role of gender stereotypes in shaping these attitudes is a key topic that is at the heart of women's empowerment and gender equality endeavors. To change attitudes implies changing perceptions, understanding, expectations, beliefs, and language, all of which are deeply rooted in one's experience, inherited socio-cultural value

systems, prevalent modes of thinking, peer pressure, personal hopes and fears, and so much more, which is often difficult if not impossible to express.

Global Gender Map

The Global Gender Gap Index serves as an annual benchmark, systematically evaluating the present status and progression of gender equality across four crucial dimensions: Economic Participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment.

As per the 2023 Global Gender Gap Index Report [25] by the World Economic Forum, the Philippines continues to lead as the most gender-equal country in Asia with a 79.1 percent gender parity with higher economic participation and educational attainment of females. Reported as of May 2024, the Philippines even ranked 16th among 146 countries, in the 2023 World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index report. As of 2023, no country has yet achieved full gender parity. East Asia and the Pacific exhibit a parity score of 68.8%, ranking as the fifth highest among the eight regions. However, progress toward gender parity has plateaued for over a decade, experiencing a 0.2 percentage-point decline since the last edition. Notably, New Zealand, the Philippines, and Australia lead the regional level in terms of parity [20].

At Aklan State University, there is an Annual Gender and Development Planned activities intended yearly. For this year 2024, different activities like tree planting, research related to responsive Disaster Risk Reduction management, pieces of training for Solid Waste Management, and community/extension activity on the value of gender-responsive health and services research and extension activities to promote healthy and well-balanced lifestyles among stakeholders.

The culture of dakop has implications to education. Younger women though yearn to finish their schooling, yet marital obligation and motherhood seize the women's opportunity.

There are problems encountered by people who live in the upland areas of Libacao Aklan, including but not limited to a denial of their rights, discrimination, land dispossession, violence, and oppression. They are also often faced with merging culture and integration and forced into the mainstream dominant culture of loyalty to the family.

Moreover, the Philippine Statistics Authority's Annual Poverty Indicators Survey [18] showed that school dropouts have reached more than 2.97 million, 61.9 percent of whom are girls aged 16 to 24 who are forced into "marriage" or "family matters." As the problems vary depending on the situation and specific circumstances, so do the responses and coping mechanisms. Upland people are often stigmatized and described in derogatory terms. This is even worse for the upland women who are generally the visible expressions of their cultures.

Domenico and Jones [5] made a correlation between the lack of education and opportunities to early pregnancy through research which reveals that teenage mothers may

become pregnant intentionally because they don't recognize other life goals within their reach. It is estimated that having a child as a teenager reduces the chances of post-compulsory education by 12%-24%. Additionally, compromised education and career opportunities contribute to the lack of qualifications and an increased risk of social exclusion. Teens who become pregnant are also more likely to have experienced poverty, academic difficulties, and sexual abuse, risks that increase the likelihood of emotional distress (Coley & Chase-Lansdale, as cited in Canayong [4]).

This study divulges the upland women's culture to education since these women were trapped in the culture of dakop. The main purpose of the researcher in conducting this study is to provide knowledge for upland people and for women to share their rights, to be heard, to stand firm on what they believe in, and to be directed to the goal that they set. They need to understand how this culture of shaming and social pressure affects their life and their whole being as a woman. Thereby insisting their rights through adequate knowledge, information, and equality are fundamental to their value as functional individuals in society. Moreover, they will also have the chance to uplift the awareness and understanding of the equal rights, protection, and actualizations of the role of women and to receive the same opportunities in terms of future programs that could create big change in the society where they live.

Hence, it is in this light that the researcher inquired to know the story behind dakop, the experiences of upland women in culture shaming, and social pressure.

2. Methodology

The study utilized qualitative method design utilizing the phenomenological approach. It was conducted at Libacao, Aklan, Philippines. Eight (8) upland women who experienced dakop culture were taken as participants of the study. In-depth Interview using audio recording and observation were the instrument used to gather the data. The researchers adopted the Colaizzi for data analysis.

3. Finding

The life stories of the upland women/students on Dakop: The upland women exposed to dakop culture face unique challenges and adjustments in their married lives, but they continue to persevere and adapt to their circumstances. They often reflect on the differences between their lives before and after marriage, sometimes with a sense of melancholy and hidden emotions, as they contemplate how their lives might have been different if they had not entered into these early marriages or partnerships.

Dakop women share the common experience of being judged and misunderstood by their community, yet they continue to persevere and fight their silent battles for the

well-being of their children and families. These women caught in the dakop culture endure harsh judgment and discrimination, facing negative comments and stereotypes that bring shame and guilt. They conceal their silent struggles from the public, battling the stigma and bias that persistently haunt them. Despite the challenges and misjudgments, they encounter, these women remain resilient, driven by their commitment to their families and their determination to overcome societal obstacles. However, upland women who have experienced the dakop culture hold aspirations for a brighter future, including dreams of finishing their education and pursuing professions like teaching or nursing to uplift their families. Despite facing challenging circumstances, they exhibit determination and resilience in working towards their goals. However, some regret not being able to fulfill their dreams and carry the weight of unfulfilled aspirations.

2. The school management for students experiencing dakop, namely: Safe and Confidential Space where the school offered a safe space for young women to openly discuss their experiences and concerns can aid in processing emotions and seeking support without fear of judgment or repercussions; Individual/Group Counseling where the school offers counseling sessions to process their feelings and emotions and how to cope with the difficulties and judgment of the society; Connection with Mental Health Professionals, collaborating with the mental health professionals to help dakop women on how they can manage the impact of early cohabitations; Workshops or Training for Life Skills Development where the school identifies a potential lack of essential life skills, such as financial literacy, among young women who have experienced early cohabitation and suggests that programs like TESDA can empower them with the necessary skills for independence and self-sufficiency. TESDA offers various training programs like STEP, YTP, BSTP, and TWSP, targeting out-of-school youths and equipping them with technical skills and training for employment or entrepreneurship; Encouragement to Pursue Studies where the school encourages women to finish their studies by encouraging them to enroll in Alternative Learning System to help them return to school and finish their grade levels. These provide various support services, including safe spaces for sharing experiences, counseling, connections with mental health professionals, life skills workshops, and encouragement to pursue education, aiming to help these young women recover, develop resilience, and lead fulfilling and independent lives.

3. Based on the results from the narratives and stories of the participants, a policy recommendation for young women who experienced dakop culture was developed. This policy recommendation aims to provide appropriate guidance and support that will empower young women to make informed choices and continue their education. The policy highlights the following; Comprehensive Sexuality Education where it suggest to implement a comprehensive sexuality education curriculum is crucial to provide age-appropriate information on relationships, reproductive health, contraception, and

family planning while emphasizing responsible decision-making, self and others' respect, and the consequences of early cohabitation; Accessible Counseling Service where it establish counseling services within schools to provide confidential and non-judgmental support to young women who have experienced early cohabitation; Alternative Educational Pathways where it creates a flexible educational pathways, such as evening classes or distance learning programs, to accommodate the unique needs of young women who have experienced early cohabitation; Empowerment through Life Skills Training where it integrates life skills training to make informed choices, resist peer pressure, and navigate challenges related to relationships and early cohabitation; Parental and Community Involvement where it involves parents, guardians, and the broader community is crucial for raising awareness about its consequences and risks, promoting open dialogue, offering educational opportunities, and fostering supportive environments through community organizations, religious institutions, and local leaders to promote positive decision-making among young women; and Collaboration with Local Government Agencies and Organizations where it implements the policy recommendations outlined will provide a structured framework to support young women who have experienced dakop culture with the strong collaboration with the LGU and other organizations.

4. Conclusions

Based on the findings, the study explored the life stories of upland women affected by the dakop culture and examined how schools are managing the situations faced by students experiencing these challenges.

The life stories of these women were complex and profound, shaped by early marriage and motherhood, which significantly influenced their transition into adulthood. Their narratives illustrate the intricate interplay between societal expectations, personal dreams, and the harsh realities they confront. Moving from their teenage years into married life presents a stark contrast, filled with regrets and silent battles.

Despite facing discrimination and societal biases, these resilient upland women silently endure personal challenges, bearing the weight of misconceptions. They deserve empathy and fairness, as their strength in adversity speaks to their resilience. These women hold onto dreams, aspiring to become educators, nurses, or complete their education, showcasing their determination. With proper support, they can achieve these aspirations and overcome the constraints of the dakop culture, emphasizing the importance of understanding and support for those who have faced such trials.

The policy aims to enhance their well-being, empower them to make informed choices and acknowledge their resilience and potential, promising a brighter future for these young women in Aklan.

5. Recommendations

In light of the challenges faced by upland teenage women who have experienced dakop culture, it is imperative to consider a series of recommendations aimed at empowering them and creating a more supportive environment.

Some key recommendations include:

For women who have experienced dakop culture, taking steps to improve their lives and pursue their aspirations can be challenging but achievable. These steps may include pursuing higher education and skill enhancement, developing financial literacy for independence and stability, building a support network, considering vocational training or small businesses, prioritizing mental health, seeking legal support, engaging in community involvement, advocating for women's rights, and set clear goals to pursue a brighter future despite past challenges.

School cultural coordinators should actively promote inclusivity and awareness within their schools. They can organize cultural sensitivity training for teachers and students to foster empathy and understanding. Encouraging open dialogue about the dakop culture can help reduce stigma and create a more supportive school environment.

Guidance counselors should be trained to provide specialized support to students experiencing dakop-culture-related challenges. They should offer confidential counseling services, emotional support, and referrals to external resources when necessary. Additionally, counselors can organize awareness campaigns within the school to reduce discrimination and judgment.

The Gender and Development Municipal Coordinator should collaborate with schools and community organizations to develop and implement programs that address the unique needs of upland teenage women affected by dakop. This includes organizing workshops on gender equality, reproductive health, and life skills training. They can also facilitate partnerships with local healthcare providers for accessible services.

The Department of Social Welfare and Development should work closely with local NGOs and community organizations to provide financial and social assistance to upland teenage women and their families. This support can include scholarships, livelihood training, and access to healthcare services. DSWD can also conduct regular assessments to identify and address the specific needs of these families.

The Local Government Units should allocate resources to establish community centers or hubs that offer educational and vocational programs tailored to the needs of upland teenage women. These centers can also serve as safe spaces for support group meetings and workshops. Furthermore, the LGUs should actively engage with the community to raise awareness and reduce discrimination.

Policymakers should prioritize the inclusion of comprehensive sex education and support for upland teenage women

in the educational system. This includes allocating funding for training programs for teachers and counselors and developing policies that protect the rights and well-being of these young women. Collaboration with relevant government agencies and stakeholders is essential to ensure the effective implementation of these policies.

Abbreviations

ALS	Alternative Learning System
DSWD	Department of Social Welfare and Development
GAD	Gender and Development
LGRP	Local GAD Resource Program
LGUS	Local Government Units
NGOs	Non-Government Organizations
PPGRD	Philippine Plan for Gender Responsive Development
TESDA	Technical Education & Skills Development Authority
STEP	Special Training for Employment Program
YTP	Youth Profiling for Starring Careers
BSTP	Barangay Skilled Training Program
TWSP	Training for Work Scholarship Program

Conflicts of Interest

No conflict of interest.

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