



## Balancing Ambitions: The Lived Experiences of Filipino Couples Delaying Parenthood for Career Advancement

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### Article Info

**ISSN (online):** 2583-8261

**Impact Factor (RSIF):** 8.41

**Volume:** 05

**Issue:** 01

**Received:** 26-11-2025

**Accepted:** 28-12-2025

**Published:** 30-01-2026

**Page No:** 122-128

### Abstract

This study focused on exploring the narratives of four (4) Filipino couples residing in selected cities in Laguna who have chosen to delay parenthood for career advancement. The study utilized a questionnaire constructed for semi-structured interviews which was designed to explore the themes and experiences they encounter while prioritizing professional growth and deprioritizing parenthood. The interview consisted of nine (9) questions. Results showed that several key themes emerged from the study. Filipino couples often delay parenthood to achieve financial stability, career progression, and personal growth before embracing parenthood. Financial stability is prominent, with couples citing financial preparedness and security as critical considerations before starting a family. Additionally, health concerns, particularly age-related risks for women, play a significant role, emphasizing the need for fertility education and accessible public health resources. The study also found that in delaying parenthood societal and familial expectations present mixed influences, with support from peers and younger generations but pressure from older ones. Finally, lifestyle and career demand heavily impact decisions, reflecting a shift towards intentional family planning focused on economic security, health readiness, and personal ambitions. The results provide valuable insights into the motivations and experiences of Filipino couples delaying parenthood for career advancement.

**DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54660/IJSSER.2026.5.1.122-128>

**Keywords:** Career Advancement, Delayed Parenthood, Filipino Couples

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### Introduction

Entering marriage is a major life milestone. Among the older generation, there is a lasting belief that marriage is not just about two people coming together but also a natural expectation for parenthood. The shift into parenthood can be one of the most significant and transformative changes a couple undergoes in their lifetime (Estlein *et al.*, 2024)<sup>[7]</sup>. However, in an increasingly globalized and modernized society, are reevaluating these norms and deprioritizing parenthood to advance their careers.

Career advancement is the course of action that a person takes to further their occupational level, decide on a career path, and improve their skills (Devindi & Rajapaksha, 2022)<sup>[5]</sup>. This results in personal development, job satisfaction, and financial stability. The term “career” refers to the progression, rank, and accumulation of work experience an individual acquires over time, whether within an organization, company, or as a freelancer. It encompasses the responsibilities and skills developed in a professional context. Career advancement typically involves changes to an employee’s current role or position and often includes the potential for promotion.

Parenthood brings significant changes, affecting work capacity, housing needs, mental and physical health, relationship stability, and more (Eichmeyer & Kent, 2023) <sup>[6]</sup>. For married couples, the preparedness for the responsibilities of raising children contributes to more stable and nurturing family environments in the long term. In contrast, unpreparedness could lead to difficulties with the demands and conflicts within the parenting role, wherein parents' poor well-being significantly affects their children's development. However, couples choosing not to have children can be perceived as deviating from the norm, leading to skepticism, criticism, and potential ostracism. Many societies still consider that bearing a child is highly significant for social coherence and social organization, which in turn puts a stigma against couples without children. Cultures like the Philippines strongly believe that having children is a status symbol, signifying fulfillment, blessing, and success. However, these expectations can cause negative outcomes in one's relationship with one's spouse, marriage life, and social image (Gouni *et al.*, 2022) <sup>[9]</sup>. Having no children as a married couple in the Philippines is viewed as an unfortunate and pitiful predicament (Tudy & Tudy, 2020) <sup>[16]</sup>. This cultural expectation is evident, wherein questions on childbearing, such as "Do you have a baby already?" are constantly asked. Despite the cultural norm, there are married couples who voluntarily choose to delay parenthood due to various reasons, one of which is career advancement. According to the Commission on Population and Development in 2023, civil registration indicates that Filipinos are delaying marriage and childbearing, increasing the average age from 25 to 28. This decision is often motivated by a desire to prioritize family planning and career advancement or to explore life more extensively before fully embracing the responsibilities of parenthood. This decision is portrayed as a personal choice influenced by lifestyle preferences, environmental concerns, and a critical examination of societal expectations. Moreover, the rise in women's higher education and workforce participation has shifted personal goals, with many prioritizing career advancement and financial stability before starting a family. This delay helps individuals gather resources to provide comfort for their families while avoiding conflicts between child-rearing and career growth. The desire for security, combined with personal accomplishments, strongly motivates the delayment of parenthood (Zabak *et al.*, 2023) <sup>[17]</sup>. Parenthood at a young age compromises career opportunities, possibly leading to the loss of future earnings, skills, and experience. Financial stability emerges as a universally crucial factor in determining the timing of parenthood. It provides the foundation for parents to build a stable and nurturing environment for their children, ensuring their well-being and future success. Parents' financial resources are crucial, as children raised in poverty tend to face more developmental challenges and perform worse academically than those whose parents are financially stable (Bussemakers *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[1]</sup>. This preparedness enables parents to access quality healthcare, education, and other essential resources that contribute to a child's overall development. However, the delay in parenthood may pose a problem in reproductive health, especially with women. Age has been linked to an increased risk of health complications for both the mother and the child, including higher chances of certain

diseases in offspring. Pregnancies conceived later in life are often associated with poorer reproductive outcomes (Federica Zacchini *et al.*, 2021) <sup>[8]</sup>. For women pursuing career advancement, prioritizing reproductive health is essential to ensure that delaying parenthood supports both their personal and professional goals while minimizing potential health risks.

Hence, this study aims to understand the lived experiences of Filipino couples who choose to delay having children for career advancement. It explores how they balance their career goals and desire for family planning. By examining their personal stories, the study provides valuable insights into the changing dynamics and goals of families in Filipino culture. It unveils the reasons, experiences, and motivations they encounter in their journeys, offering a nuanced understanding of how these couples navigate career and family aspirations in the Philippines. Furthermore, it seeks to create interventions that will aid Filipino couples in making informed decisions about family planning and career advancement, ensuring they can achieve both their personal and career goals harmoniously.

## Methodology

### Research Design

To explore the lived experiences of Filipino couples delaying parenthood for career advancement, the researchers employed a qualitative methodology utilizing a phenomenological approach. A phenomenological study seeks to examine a phenomenon from the perspective of individuals who have personally experienced it, aiming to capture its essence (Neubauer, 2019) <sup>[12]</sup>. Applying this approach to married couples provided insights into their narratives and the complexities of their decision to delay parenthood in pursuit of career advancement.

### Research Locale

The study was conducted in selected cities of Laguna namely Cabuyao, Calamba, and Santa Rosa. These places are suitable for the study because they are among the major cities in the province. Furthermore, according to the Department of Trade and Industry Philippines (2023) <sup>[4]</sup>, the abovementioned cities placed the top three rankings on the annual competitiveness index among the cities and municipalities in Laguna.

### Population and Sampling

The population selected for this study are Filipino married couples residing in Cabuyao, Calamba, or Santa Rosa from the province of Laguna who had decided to delay parenthood to prioritize career advancement. Delayed parenthood is defined as the outcome of a broader behavioral process involving personal decisions and choices (Boom, 1984, as cited by Szcześniak *et al.*, 2024) <sup>[15]</sup>. Furthermore, the population for this study consisted of Filipino couples, ages 27 to 40 years old, residing in selected cities in Laguna province.

According to the Philippine Statistics Authority, in 2021, the median age for marriage is 27 for women and 29 for men, indicating that family planning typically begins around these ages. Furthermore, the age is limited to 40 due to Erik Erikson's Intimacy vs. Isolation stage under psychosocial development, which spans from approximately 18 to 40 years and focuses on forming intimate relationships and establishing long-term commitments (Samsanovich, 2021)

[14].

The study utilized a purposive sampling technique to reach the target of eight (8) participants. This method involved intentionally selecting participants based on specific experiences, characteristics, knowledge, or criteria, thereby excluding samples that do not possess these predetermined characteristics (National Center for State Courts, 2022) [11].

### Participants of the Study

The participants selected for this study are Filipino married couples residing in Cabuyao, Calamba, or Santa Rosa, Laguna. The study involved four (4) couples, comprising a total of eight (8) participants, who had decided to delay parenthood to prioritize career advancement. The participants were required to have been in a legally married or cohabiting relationship for at least four (4) years to qualify as couples delaying parenthood. Participants from any professional field or occupation were eligible, provided that one or both partners were employed or had stable careers and were actively pursuing career advancement.

### Research Instrument

The study utilized a questionnaire constructed for semi-structured interviews which delved into the experiences of Filipino couples who delay parenthood for career advancement. The questionnaire was designed to explore the themes and experiences they encounter while prioritizing career growth and deprioritizing parenthood.

### Validation of the Instrument

To check and validate the questionnaire for the semi-structured interview, the researchers sought help from experts in the fields of psychology and research.

### Data Gathering Procedure

A formal request was sent to the Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences at the University of Cabuyao to conduct the semi-structured interview. The participants, who were Filipino couples who had delayed parenthood for career advancement, were interviewed virtually using Zoom Workplace. Once the participants had finished the interview, the collected data was tallied for thematic analysis and interpretation by a qualitative data analyst.

### Ethical Considerations

The researchers adhered to ethical standards by securing informed consent from both the University of Cabuyao and individual participants, conducting pre- and post-interview orientations. Confidentiality was maintained by limiting data access to researchers and ensuring compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012. Participation was voluntary, with individuals free to withdraw at any time without repercussions. The researchers minimized potential harm by addressing physical and psychological risks and offering support when needed. The study upheld beneficence by maximizing participant benefits and maintaining a meaningful experience. Finally, professional integrity was observed through honest, unbiased, and transparent research practices, reinforcing the study's validity and reliability.

### Treatment of Qualitative Data

The researchers treated and analyzed the data gathered from the interviews using Thematic Analysis. The first step involved familiarizing themselves with the data by transcribing audio recordings, reading transcripts, and noting initial patterns. Next, the qualitative data analyst generated initial codes based on these patterns and grouped similar codes together. Then, they organized these codes into potential themes, identified trends and patterns in the data, and revised the themes as needed. Finally, the researchers crafted a narrative that told the story of the data, ensuring coherence and supporting their claims using thematic analysis (King, 2004; Dawadi, 2020) [10, 3].

### Results and Discussion

The results of this study show how Filipino couples carefully consider the decision to delay having children. Many shared that waiting allows them to focus on important goals such as building a stable career, saving money, growing emotionally, and strengthening their relationship. These steps are seen as necessary before starting a family. However, the study also highlights the challenges that come with delaying parenthood, including health and fertility concerns, pressure from older family members, and possible gaps between generations. Overall, the findings suggest that while delaying parenthood has both benefits and difficulties, most Filipino Couples value careful planning, open communication, and achieving personal milestones before becoming parents.

**Table 1:** Descriptions for Strengthening Foundations Through Delayed Parenthood

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Strengthening Foundations Through Delayed Parenthood	Financial and Career Advantages	<p><b>Participant 1:</b> "Sa financials, kumbaga kami pa lang dalawa, parang sa amin pa lang yung budget namin."</p> <p><b>Participant 4:</b> "Mas nakapag-concentrate ako or kami sa career namin at na-achieve namin yung tinatawag na 'financial stability.'"</p>
	Focusing on Personal Growth and Relationship Building	<p><b>Participant 5:</b> "Mas nakabuwelo pa kaming mag-asawa kung anong gusto naming gawin."</p> <p><b>Participant 8:</b> "Sa ngayon mas may time kami sa isa't isa."</p>

**Table 2:** Descriptions for Challenges Associated with Delayed Parenthood

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Challenges Associated with Delayed Parenthood	Health and Fertility Concerns	<b>Participant 3:</b> “Nakita kong risk bilang babae is ‘yung potential impact na sa health ko and ‘yung fertility.’” <b>Participant 7:</b> “Mas mataas na ‘yung risk sa pagbubuntis kapag tumatanda na.”
	Emotional and Generational Gaps	<b>Participant 4:</b> “May chance na mahirapan kami na mag-connect sa future anak namin.”

The second superordinate theme, “Challenges Associated with Delayed Parenthood,” addresses the complexities and potential drawbacks of postponing family life in pursuit of career or personal goals. While this decision can offer certain advantages, it also brings forward significant concerns.

The subordinate theme Health and Fertility Concerns highlights the biological risks of delaying childbirth, especially for women, drawing attention to potential fertility issues and pregnancy complications that come with age.

Conversely, the subordinate theme Emotional and Generational Gaps explores the emotional distance or disconnect that may arise due to wider age differences between parents and children, potentially influencing parenting styles and communication. When combined, these subordinate themes illustrate the delicate balance couples must navigate when deciding the optimal time to begin parenthood.

**Table 3:** Descriptions for Balancing Stability and Age-Related Concerns

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Mixed Reactions to Parenthood Decisions	Positive Support and Understanding	<b>Participant 3:</b> “Yung sa ka-age namin na may mga anak na ngayon, sa amin. Nag-gets nila ‘yung status namin ngayon.’” <b>Participant 5:</b> “Supportive naman ‘yung pamilya ko pati ‘yung pamilya ng asawa ko sa desisyon naming huwag munang mag-anak.’”
	Pressure from Older Generations	<b>Participant 7:</b> “Pine-pressure kami ganun sa family lalo sa side ng asawa ko kasi pang-siyam siya sa side nila.”

Next, the third superordinate theme, “Balancing Stability and Age-Related Concerns,” focuses on how individuals weigh their emotional and financial preparedness against the realities of delaying parenthood. It reflects the effort to become ready while remaining aware of the implications of aging.

The subordinate theme Financial and Emotional Preparedness underscores the desire to enter parenthood from

a place of security and emotional stability. In contrast, the subordinate theme Concerns About Age and Parental Dynamics raises practical worries about parenting at an older age, such as reduced energy and wider generational gaps. Together, these themes offer a balanced perspective that values both thoughtful planning and recognition of time-sensitive challenges.

**Table 4:** Descriptions for Mixed Reactions to Parenthood Decisions

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Balancing Practicality and Cultural Expectations	Financial Independence as a Priority	<b>Participant 3:</b> “Sobrang importante ng pag-prioritize ng career advancement para ma-secure yung financial.” <b>Participant 8:</b> “Sa family hindi namin iniisip masyado. Ang gusto lang namin financially stable na at komportable na kami sa career.”
	Navigating Societal Pressures	<b>Participant 6:</b> “Minsan may pressure rin ako... lalo na sa mga disadvantages habang tumatanda tayo.”

Following that, the fourth superordinate theme, “Mixed Reactions to Parenthood Decisions,” examines the range of social responses individuals encounter when choosing to delay parenthood.

The subordinate theme Positive Support and Understanding describes how encouragement from peers, partners, and family members can validate the choice to prioritize personal and professional goals. This support, especially from those

who have experienced parenthood themselves, can reduce anxiety about breaking from traditional timelines. On the other hand, the subordinate theme Pressure from Older Generations reveals the challenges of meeting family expectations, particularly from elders who may expect earlier family formation. These differing responses reflect how social influences can simultaneously affirm and challenge an individual’s decision to delay starting a family.

**Table 5:** Descriptions for Balancing Practicality and Cultural Expectations

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Confidence Through Partner Support and Planning	Shared Goals and Understanding	<b>Participant 5:</b> “Confident naman ako. Ang pinakamahalaga kasi para sa’kin ay ‘yung parehas ‘yung desisyon namin ng asawa ko.’” <b>Participant 6:</b> “Confident ako kasi malinaw sa akin kung ano ‘yung mga career goals ko.’”
	Importance of Communication	<b>Participant 8:</b> “Binibigyan namin ng oras ‘yung kaming dalawa na nag-uusap para nagkakaintindihan kami.”

Then, the fifth superordinate theme, “Balancing Practicality and Cultural Expectations,” explores how individuals manage the tension between financial priorities and cultural norms regarding parenthood. It highlights the intentional nature of decision-making in Filipino families.

The subordinate theme Financial Independence as a Priority captures participants’ focus on achieving financial security as a prerequisite for starting a family, helping to minimize stress

and ensure a stable home life. In contrast, the subordinate theme Navigating Societal Pressures describes the difficulty of managing cultural or familial expectations that may not align with personal timelines. Despite these pressures, participants remained determined to focus on their financial and professional goals. These subordinate themes together reflect how individuals strive to reconcile practical aspirations with cultural traditions.

**Table 6 :** Descriptions for Confidence Through Partner Support and Planning

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Balancing Stability and Age-Related Concerns	Financial Independence as a Priority	<b>Participant 4:</b> “Yung decision namin na yon is nakaka-long term. Hindi lang para maging financially stable, kundi emotionally ready para sa future children namin.” <b>Participant 8:</b> “Mas stable na kami financially at emotionally, mas magiging ready kami para sa mga responsibilidad ng pagiging magulang.”
	Concerns About Age and Parental Dynamics	<b>Participant 5:</b> “Medyo nakakaramdam din ako ng kaba kapag iniisip ‘yung future... lalo na kapag nagka-edad ka.”

Moreover, the sixth superordinate theme, “Confidence Through Partner Support and Planning,” emphasizes how mutual understanding and collaborative decision-making foster confidence in delaying parenthood. It showcases the power of strong partnerships in navigating life goals.

The subordinate theme Shared Goals and Understanding reveals how alignment in values and long-term plans between

partners strengthens trust in their decision-making. Simultaneously, the subordinate theme Importance of Communication highlights the role of open, honest conversations in managing expectations and maintaining relationship harmony. These insights demonstrate that shared planning and communication are key to balancing present ambitions with future responsibilities.

**Table 7:** Descriptions for The Influence of Lifestyle on Parenthood Decisions

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Preparing for Parenthood While Managing Careers	Financial and Health Preparations	<b>Participant 6:</b> “Naglalaan kami ng oras para mag-ipon at magplano para magkaroon ng maayos na financial foundation.” <b>Participant 5:</b> “Nag-iipon kami ng savings para kung ready na kami sa parenthood, hindi na masyado magiging burden financially.”
	Setting Clear Timelines	<b>Participant 8:</b> “Communication with your wife kasi kailangan kayong dalawa yung mag plano.”

In addition, the seventh superordinate theme, “The Influence of Lifestyle on Parenthood Decisions,” explores how daily routines and personal fulfillment shape individuals’ choices about when to start a family.

The subordinate theme Financial Security as a Deciding Factor underlines how career success and economic readiness are considered essential before entering parenthood.

Meanwhile, the subordinate theme Lifestyle and Career Demands focuses on how professional obligations and personal priorities influence the timing of family life. These subordinate themes together emphasize that lifestyle satisfaction and career achievements are closely linked to long-term parenting plans.

**Table 8:** Descriptions for Preparing for Parenthood While Managing Careers

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
Key Milestones Before Parenthood	Financial and Career Achievements	<b>Participant 4:</b> “Isa rin yung pag i-invest ng home or other assets, syempre gusto namin mabigyan ng komportableng buhay anak namin.” <b>Participant 7:</b> “Career advancement, promotion ganyan saka financial freedom.”

Furthermore, the eighth superordinate theme, “Preparing for Parenthood While Managing Careers,” focuses on the efforts individuals make to balance professional goals with family planning. It reflects the proactive steps taken to ensure stability despite demanding careers.

The subordinate theme Financial and Health Preparations discusses strategies like saving money, achieving career

milestones, and maintaining health as essential to responsible parenting. In addition, the subordinate theme Setting Clear Timelines illustrates how structured planning and partner communication help couples coordinate career growth with future family goals. These approaches reduce uncertainty and help manage expectations effectively.

**Table 9:** Descriptions for Key Milestones Before Parenthood

Superordinate	Subordinate	Responses
The Influence of Lifestyle on Parenthood Decisions	Financial Security as a Deciding Factor	<b>Participant 7:</b> “Unaq-una talaga dyan ang financial stability... kaya career advancement muna talaga dapat.”
	Lifestyle and Career Demands	<b>Participant 5:</b> “Sobrang focus ako sa trabaho kasi gusto ko munang maabot ‘yung mga career goals ko.”

Finally, the ninth superordinate theme, “Key Milestones Before Parenthood,” captures the goal-oriented mindset individuals adopt in preparing for family life. It underscores the belief that parenthood should be grounded in personal, financial, and professional accomplishments.

The subordinate theme Financial and Career Achievements emphasizes the importance of achieving job stability and financial independence before embracing parenthood. Similarly, the subordinate theme Securing Assets and Stability reflects the significance of acquiring tangible resources, such as a home, as part of the preparation process. Collectively, these milestones instill a sense of readiness and

confidence, allowing individuals to align their family aspirations with a strong foundation.

## Discussion

After analyzing the results of this study, the following emerging concepts have been identified to illustrate how Filipino couples navigate the decision to delay parenthood in pursuit of career advancement. The findings highlight the ways in which their aspirations, relationship dynamics, and socio-cultural influences shape their preparedness, motivations, and challenges in balancing personal and professional goals.



**Fig 1:** Thematic Map of Superordinate and Sub-themes

The discussion of this research illustrates the emerging themes resulting from the participants’ narratives and lived experiences. Through a thorough review of their responses, the researchers identified key themes that reflect how Filipino couples navigate the decision to delay parenthood in favor of career advancement. The following major themes along with the subordinate themes emerged from the participants’ narratives: for Strengthening Foundations Through Delayed Parenthood – (a) Financial and Career Advantages, (b) Focusing on Personal Growth and Relationship Building; for Challenges Associated with Delayed Parenthood – (a) Health and Fertility Concerns, (b) Emotional and Generational Gaps; for Balancing Stability and Age-Related Concerns – (a) Financial and Emotional Preparedness, (b) Concerns About Age and Parental Dynamics; for Mixed Reactions to Parenthood Decisions – (a) Positive Support and Understanding, (b) Pressure from Older Generations; for Balancing Practicality and Cultural Expectations – (a) Financial

Independence as a Priority, (b) Navigating Societal Pressures; for Confidence Through Partner Support and

Planning – (a) Shared Goals and Understanding, (b) Importance of Communication; for The Influence of Lifestyle on Parenthood Decisions – (a) Financial Security as a Deciding Factor, (b) Lifestyle and Career Demands; for Preparing for Parenthood While Managing Careers – (a) Financial and Health Preparations, (b) Setting Clear Timelines; and for Key Milestones Before Parenthood – (a) Financial and Career Achievements.

In today’s Filipino society, marriage no longer automatically means starting a family right away. Many couples are now choosing to delay parenthood so they can focus on building their careers, achieving financial security, and investing in personal growth. While having children is still widely seen as a symbol of success and fulfillment, especially in the eyes of older generations, more people are beginning to challenge that expectation.

For many, delaying parenthood is a practical choice that allows them to prepare a more stable and supportive environment before taking on the responsibilities of raising children. This shift is influenced by increased access to education and career opportunities, particularly for women,

who now have more control over their personal and professional lives. However, delaying parenthood is not without complications, as biological realities, particularly for women, mean that fertility and health risks increase with age. As the average age of childbearing in the Philippines rises, couples must carefully weigh these risks alongside their desire for career progress and personal fulfillment.

This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of Filipino couples who have chosen to delay parenthood in favor of career advancement and personal development. The findings revealed that while couples face pressures from societal norms and generational expectations, they also gain confidence and clarity through open communication, shared goals, and mutual support. Participants emphasized the importance of emotional readiness, financial security, and strong relationships in their decision-making process. Their experiences reflect a shifting mindset that values thoughtful preparation over strictly following traditional timelines. Moreover, the growing trend of delayed parenthood in the Philippines highlights the need for more supportive systems. Access to financial planning resources, fertility education, and open discussions about modern family choices can help couples make well-informed decisions. By acknowledging these shifting priorities, society can better support families in creating a future that fits their goals and values.

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## How to Cite This Article

Gracilla AN, Ilagan RL, Macaraeg RA, Sadueste IM, Lazaro RK. Balancing Ambitions: The Lived Experiences of Filipino Couples Delaying Parenthood for Career Advancement. *Int J Soc Sci Except Res.* 2026;5(1):122-128. doi:10.54660/IJSSER.2026.5.1.122-128

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