

Mga Bulaklak ng Panahon: Exploring the Lived Experiences of Old-maiden and their Chosen Path to Singleness

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Abstract

This study explores the lived experiences of Generation X old maidens in Laguna, Philippines, focusing on how they construct meaning, identity, and well-being through their chosen path of singlehood. Grounded in Martin Seligman's PERMA Theory of Well-Being, the research employed a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological design using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with four purposively selected participants who met the criteria of being unmarried, childless, and belonging to Generation X. The findings revealed seven central themes: autonomy and emotional satisfaction, choosing singleness with purpose, navigating social expectations, emotional resilience, coping through social bonds and meaningful activities, intersection of relationships and achievements, and redefining success beyond marriage. Participants demonstrated that singlehood is a conscious and fulfilling life choice characterized by independence, strong family ties, faith, and personal growth. Despite experiencing societal pressures and emotional challenges, they exhibited resilience through adaptive coping strategies such as humor, spirituality, and supportive relationships. The study also found that success and fulfillment are redefined through caregiving, personal development, and self-defined goals rather than marital status. Overall, the research concludes that singlehood is not a deficiency but a meaningful and empowered life path. It recommends promoting inclusive support systems, strengthening family understanding, and encouraging further research on singlehood. The study aligns with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) and SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by highlighting the importance of autonomy, mental health, and inclusive societal perspectives. It contributes to socio-cultural and psychological sustainability by promoting acceptance of diverse life choices and enhancing understanding of well-being beyond traditional norms.

Keywords: Autonomy, Emotional resilience, Interpretative phenomenological analysis, PERMA theory, Singlehood, Social expectations, Well-being

1. Introduction

This study examines the lived experiences of Generation X old maidens in Laguna, Philippines, focusing on how they construct meaning, identity, and well-being through singlehood. It situates singlehood within socio-cultural expectations, psychological frameworks, and evolving global perspectives, highlighting how women redefine fulfillment beyond traditional marital norms. By synthesizing related literature and grounding the study in the PERMA Theory of Well-Being, the research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of singlehood as a valid and meaningful life choice.

1.1 Background of the Study on Singlehood and Lived Experiences of Generation X Old Maidens

Old maidens' lived experiences reflect diverse pathways toward personal fulfillment, autonomy, and self-development, often challenging traditional expectations that prioritize marriage and family. In Filipino society, where marriage is strongly valued, women who remain single redefine success through caregiving, career pursuits, and personal growth. Despite these shifts, their motivations and experiences remain underexplored. Existing studies show that single Filipino women actively construct self-worth through family, spirituality, and personal development (Canesares et al., 2024), while global research highlights the marginalization and invisibility experienced by single women (Chan et al., 2023). These contrasting perspectives indicate that singlehood can both empower and marginalize women, depending on socio-cultural context. However, much of the literature in the Philippines continues to emphasize marriage, leaving the lived experiences of old maidens insufficiently examined. This study addresses this gap by exploring their personal, social, and emotional realities, as well as their coping strategies and identity formation.

1.2 Themes and Insights from Related Literature on Single Women's Identity, Fulfillment, and Social Roles

Literature reveals that cultural narratives significantly shape the experiences of single women. Studies in Pakistan and East Asia show that single women often face discrimination, yet simultaneously develop pragmatic and empowered approaches to autonomy (Bukhari & Riaz, 2023; Ang et al., 2020). In the Philippines, research indicates increasing acceptance of singlehood, with women negotiating identities that balance societal expectations and personal satisfaction (Manalo et al., 2021; Mendez & Ong, 2022). Traditional power structures also influence perceptions of marriage, as more egalitarian

societies tend to place less emphasis on marital centrality (Kolpashnikova et al., 2020). Filipino studies further show that single women construct meaning through self-advocacy, caregiving, and spirituality (Mendez & Ong, 2024), while older adults maintain social connections and well-being through digital engagement (Castillo et al., 2021). These findings highlight the dynamic interplay between societal expectations and individual agency. Global research challenges stereotypes that single women are less fulfilled, showing instead that they often report higher life satisfaction due to independence, strong social networks, and personal goal pursuit (Hoan, 2024; Stern et al., 2024). Similarly, Filipino studies demonstrate that singlehood can foster autonomy, resilience, and self-development (Manalo et al., 2021; Ong, 2022). However, stigma and marginalization persist, affecting women's sense of belonging and reinforcing societal biases (Fisher & Sakaluk, 2020). Despite this, women actively reframe singlehood as an opportunity for growth and meaningful engagement, emphasizing agency and empowerment across contexts.

1.3 Local, National, and Global Context of Singlehood Among Women

At the global level, singlehood is increasingly recognized as a legitimate life path shaped by socio-cultural transformation and individual choice. Studies across countries demonstrate that while stigma remains, shifting norms allow women to redefine identity and fulfillment beyond marriage (Bukhari & Riaz, 2023; Ang et al., 2020). Nationally, the Philippines reflects a transitional context where traditional marital expectations coexist with growing acceptance of alternative life choices. Research shows that Filipino women are gradually redefining singlehood through self-advocacy, spirituality, and caregiving (Manalo et al., 2021; Mendez & Ong, 2022; Mendez & Ong, 2024). Locally, in Laguna, these dynamics are situated within a culturally rich environment where family-oriented values remain influential. The study captures how Generation X old maidens navigate these intersecting pressures while constructing personal meaning and well-being. Across contexts, singlehood emerges as both a site of tension and empowerment, shaped by cultural expectations and evolving social norms.

1.4 Theoretical or Conceptual Basis Using PERMA Theory of Well-Being

The study is anchored in Martin Seligman's PERMA Theory of Well-Being, which emphasizes five core elements: positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (Hill, 2020; Positive Psychology Center, 2025). These components serve as key determinants of human flourishing and provide a framework for understanding how individuals achieve satisfaction and purpose. Applying this framework, the study examines how old maidens experience well-being beyond traditional marital expectations. It highlights that fulfillment can be derived from meaningful work, social relationships, and personal achievements, rather than solely from marriage. By using PERMA, the research challenges conventional narratives and demonstrates that well-being is multifaceted and attainable through diverse life paths, including singlehood.

1.5 Research Gaps and Rationale for Studying Generation X Old Maidens

Despite increasing attention to singlehood, significant gaps remain in understanding the lived experiences of older, never-married women, particularly within the Filipino context. Much of the existing research focuses on younger women or general gender roles, leaving Generation X old maidens underrepresented. Additionally, while global studies highlight empowerment and fulfillment, local research indicates persistent stigma and cultural pressure, suggesting a need for deeper exploration of how these women navigate conflicting expectations. The lack of qualitative, phenomenological studies further limits insight into their subjective experiences and meaning-making processes. This study addresses these gaps by employing an in-depth interpretative approach to examine how Generation X old maidens construct identity, cope with societal expectations, and redefine fulfillment. It provides a nuanced understanding of singlehood as both a personal choice and a socio-cultural phenomenon.

1.6 Alignment with Relevant Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)

This study aligns with SDG 5 (Gender Equality) by challenging traditional gender norms that equate women's value with marriage and promoting recognition of diverse life choices. It also supports SDG 3 (Good Health and Well-Being) by examining psychological well-being and resilience among women navigating singlehood. Furthermore, the study relates to SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by addressing social stigma and marginalization experienced by unmarried women, advocating for more inclusive societal perspectives. These alignments highlight the relevance of the research in promoting equitable and inclusive social structures that recognize individual autonomy and well-being.

1.7 Importance of the Study to Multidisciplinary Sustainability

The study contributes to socio-cultural sustainability by promoting acceptance of diverse life paths and reducing stigma associated with singlehood. It supports psychological sustainability by exploring well-being, resilience, and identity formation among women outside traditional marital roles. From a sociological perspective, the research enhances understanding of evolving gender roles and social norms, while contributing to gender studies by challenging entrenched narratives about marriage and success. It also informs policy and community development by encouraging inclusive perspectives that recognize the needs and contributions of unmarried women.

Overall, the study advances multidisciplinary sustainability by integrating psychological, social, and cultural dimensions, demonstrating that individual well-being and societal progress are interconnected and can be achieved through inclusive and diverse life choices.

2. Material and methods

2.1 Research Design

The study utilized a qualitative hermeneutic-phenomenological design to explore and interpret the lived experiences of Generation X old maidens in Laguna, Philippines. This approach combines phenomenology, which focuses on understanding the structure of lived experience, and hermeneutics, which emphasizes interpretation of meaning (McLeod, 2025; Fuster, 2019). Through this design, the study moved beyond mere description to interpret how participants construct meaning from their singlehood, particularly in relation to resilience, identity formation, and the legitimacy of singlehood as a life choice. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) guided the analysis, emphasizing reflexivity, self-examination, and bracketing in understanding participants' experiences (Tallodi, 2019). The method focused on how individuals interpret their world within their social and relational contexts. Data collection involved handwritten notes, voice recordings, and iterative questioning during interviews conducted in participants' chosen settings to ensure depth and authenticity of responses.

2.2 Locale of the Study

The study was conducted in Laguna, Philippines, selected for its relevance as a socio-cultural setting in examining singlehood among Generation X women. The locale provided a contextual backdrop that allowed meaningful exploration of participants' lived experiences. A research locale is defined as a specific setting chosen for its relevance to the research topic and its contribution to the credibility and focus of the study (PhilScholar, 2025).

2.3 Participants of the Study

The participants were four Filipino women classified as old maidens, defined as never married and without children, belonging to Generation X (born between 1965 and 1980) and residing in Laguna. Their lived experiences served as the primary data source, offering insights into psychological well-being, socio-cultural influences, and identity formation related to singlehood. Small sample sizes are appropriate in IPA studies to allow in-depth and idiographic understanding, prioritizing quality over quantity (Smith et al., 2021; Subedi, 2021). Participants were fully informed about the study's purpose and procedures prior to data collection. Written informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality, privacy, and dignity were maintained throughout the research process.

2.4 Sample and Sampling Procedure

Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who met specific criteria: unmarried women from Generation X residing in Laguna. This non-probability sampling method intentionally selects individuals capable of providing rich and relevant information aligned with the research objectives (Hassan, 2024; Nikolopoulou, 2022). A total of four participants were included, consistent with recommendations for IPA studies that favor small samples, typically ranging from three to six individuals, to maintain analytical depth and interpretative richness (Smith et al., 2009). This approach ensured that each participant contributed meaningful and information-rich perspectives on the phenomenon under investigation.

2.5 Research Instrument

The primary research instrument was a semi-structured interview guide designed to explore participants' lived experiences through the lens of the PERMA model. The guide included core questions addressing personal experiences of singlehood, emotional and social challenges, coping mechanisms, perceptions of achievement and relationships, and sources of meaning and purpose. These were supported by probing questions that encouraged deeper reflection on joy, engagement, societal expectations, personal fulfillment, and identity formation. The interview structure consisted of rapport-building questions, main thematic questions, and debriefing questions to allow reflection and closure. This format ensured flexibility while maintaining focus on key research objectives. The instrument aimed to generate rich, meaningful, and reliable qualitative data aligned with the study's phenomenological framework.

2.6 Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection began with the distribution of a formal invitation outlining the study's purpose. Participants were recruited through social media, and interviews were scheduled based on their availability and preferred format, either face-to-face or virtual. Informed consent was obtained prior to participation, ensuring ethical compliance and voluntary involvement. Rapport was established before each interview to encourage openness and authenticity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted using a prepared protocol aligned with the research questions and the PERMA model. Interviews included open-ended questions, probing techniques, and debriefing components to capture comprehensive narratives. Additional data sources included field notes documenting observations, relevant documents connected to participants' experiences, audiovisual materials such as photos and digital content, and creative ethnographic elements like narratives and digital

archives. All interviews were audio-recorded with permission and transcribed verbatim. Data were securely stored, and all recordings were deleted after transcription to maintain confidentiality and comply with data privacy standards.

2.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The study applied Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) following Creswell and Poth (as cited by Smith & Fieldsend, 2021). This method enabled systematic interpretation of participants' lived experiences through a double hermeneutic process, where participants interpret their experiences and the researcher interprets those interpretations. Analysis involved verbatim transcription of interviews to preserve nuances such as tone and emotion. Initial coding identified meaningful segments related to psychological well-being, socio-cultural pressures, coping strategies, and identity formation. These codes were grouped into emergent themes, which were then aligned with the PERMA model to provide theoretical grounding. Themes were refined and interpreted to uncover deeper meanings of singlehood, including resilience, fulfillment, and the redefinition of societal expectations. Credibility was ensured through reflexivity, thick description, and maintaining an audit trail. Reflexive notes documented researcher biases, detailed descriptions preserved participants' voices, and systematic tracking of coding and theme development enhanced transparency and rigor, ensuring trustworthy findings.

2.8 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly followed throughout the study. Participants were informed about the research purpose and procedures, and informed consent was obtained in compliance with the Data Privacy Act of 2012 (Republic Act No. 10173) and Chapter X of the PAP Code of Ethics. Participation was voluntary, and individuals could withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained by omitting identifying information from all records and transcriptions. The use of audio recording was clearly explained, and consent was reaffirmed before each session. All data were handled securely and used solely for research purposes, ensuring respect for participants' rights, privacy, and autonomy.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Autonomy, Purpose, and Emotional Well-Being in Singlehood

3.1.1 Autonomy and Emotional Satisfaction

The findings show that participants experience a strong sense of contentment, independence, and emotional fulfillment in their singlehood. They expressed happiness derived from living independently, maintaining harmonious relationships with family, and grounding their lives in strong faith. Their narratives reflect inner peace, gratitude, and satisfaction without reliance on romantic relationships. These results indicate that autonomy plays a crucial role in emotional stability and well-being. Participants redefine happiness through independence, spirituality, and family connections rather than societal expectations of marriage. This aligns with findings that unmarried Filipino women achieve fulfillment through self-determination and spiritual engagement, reinforcing that emotional well-being can exist outside traditional relationships (Manalo et al., 2021).

3.1.2 Choosing Singleness with Purpose

Participants demonstrated that singlehood is a conscious and purposeful decision. They rejected societal expectations of marriage, prioritized personal growth, and embraced their status with acceptance and clarity. Their responses show that they view singlehood not as a deficiency but as a deliberate life path aligned with their values. This suggests that singlehood is framed as an empowered choice rooted in self-awareness and autonomy. By prioritizing personal well-being over societal expectations, participants challenge traditional norms and redefine fulfillment on their own terms. Their experiences reflect emotional maturity and intentional living, emphasizing that happiness is self-defined rather than externally imposed.

3.2 Social and Emotional Struggles in Navigating Singlehood

3.2.1 Navigating Social Expectations and Pressures

The findings reveal that participants encounter social pressures such as family questioning, teasing, and matchmaking attempts. Despite these challenges, they respond with humor, assertiveness, and reframing, maintaining emotional boundaries and resisting societal expectations. These responses demonstrate resilience and agency in dealing with external pressures. Participants actively protect their identity and self-worth, rejecting the notion that marriage defines success. Their ability to reframe societal expectations reflects empowerment and aligns with broader observations that single individuals negotiate social norms while maintaining autonomy.

3.2.2 Emotional Resilience

Participants exhibited strong emotional resilience by managing societal pressures through detachment, positivity, and faith. They expressed contentment, avoided internalizing stigma, and relied on spiritual beliefs to maintain emotional balance. This highlights how emotional resilience is sustained through personal coping strategies such as humor, faith, and self-

acceptance. These findings support the idea that single individuals experience emotional challenges shaped by societal expectations but can maintain well-being through adaptive strategies (DePaulo, 2006; Kohut, 2018). Their experiences demonstrate that resilience allows them to transform potential stigma into strength and personal clarity.

3.3 Coping Mechanisms Through Social Bonds and Meaningful Engagement

3.3.1 Social Relationships and Family Support

The results show that participants cope with singlehood by strengthening relationships with family and friends. They derive happiness from shared experiences, celebrations, and daily interactions, which provide emotional support and a sense of belonging. These findings emphasize the importance of social connections in sustaining well-being. Participants replace the absence of romantic relationships with meaningful familial and social bonds, reinforcing that fulfillment can be achieved through supportive networks. This aligns with research highlighting the role of friendships and social support in coping with singlehood (Arnett, 2019; Cheng, 2021).

3.3.2 Caregiving and Meaningful Roles

Participants find purpose through caregiving roles, such as supporting family members and nurturing relatives. These responsibilities provide a sense of identity, contribution, and fulfillment. This indicates that caregiving serves as a meaningful alternative to traditional marital roles, allowing participants to construct purpose and self-worth. Their experiences demonstrate that fulfillment can be derived from service and relational contributions, reinforcing the value of non-traditional life paths.

3.3.3 Faith and Community Engagement

Participants engage in religious and community activities, which provide emotional relief, companionship, and a sense of purpose. Faith practices and social participation contribute to their overall well-being. This suggests that spirituality and community involvement are key coping mechanisms that enhance resilience and life satisfaction. Their experiences support findings that engagement in faith and social activities strengthens psychological well-being and provides meaning in singlehood (Arnett, 2019; Cheng, 2021).

3.3.4 Contentment in Simplicity

Some participants emphasized that simple interactions with family and friends are sufficient to sustain happiness. They rely on everyday routines and close social circles rather than structured activities. This reflects a minimalist approach to well-being, where contentment is rooted in simplicity and stable relationships. Such perspectives highlight that fulfillment does not require complex social structures but can be achieved through consistent and meaningful interactions.

3.4 Redefining Success and Fulfillment Beyond Marriage

3.4.1 Intersection of Relationships and Achievements

The findings show that participants define achievement through relational contributions, such as caregiving, personal growth, and acts of kindness. They take pride in supporting their families, developing confidence, and maintaining strong social ties. This demonstrates that success is not measured by conventional milestones like marriage but by meaningful relationships and personal development. Participants integrate relational and personal achievements, creating a holistic understanding of fulfillment that challenges traditional societal norms.

3.4.2 Redefining Success Beyond Marriage

Participants described success in terms of happiness, independence, contentment, and goal attainment. They emphasized personal aspirations, financial responsibility, and the ability to help others as key indicators of fulfillment. These findings show that success is self-defined and rooted in autonomy, service, and personal growth. Participants reject societal definitions of success tied to marriage, instead embracing alternative pathways that prioritize well-being and purpose. This aligns with studies highlighting that singlehood can be a legitimate and fulfilling life choice characterized by independence and social contribution (Cabalza, 2018; Bunolna, Grande, and Morales, 2024).

3.5 Synthesis of Emerging Themes

The results reveal seven interconnected themes that collectively describe the lived experiences of old maidens. Participants consistently demonstrated autonomy, resilience, and the ability to navigate societal expectations while maintaining personal fulfillment. They faced personal, social, and emotional challenges, including societal pressure and internal struggles, yet developed adaptive coping strategies grounded in relationships, faith, and meaningful activities. These findings highlight that singlehood is not a limitation but a dynamic and meaningful life path. Participants redefine identity, success, and fulfillment through independence, social contribution, and self-defined purpose. Their experiences illustrate that well-being can be achieved outside traditional marital frameworks, reinforcing the validity of diverse life choices.

4. Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings reveal that singlehood among Generation X old maidens is a conscious, meaningful, and fulfilling life choice grounded in autonomy, emotional stability, and spiritual strength. Participants demonstrated that happiness and well-being are not dependent on marriage but are achieved through inner peace, family relationships, faith, and personal values. Despite experiencing social pressures, emotional concerns, and societal expectations, they exhibited resilience, self-awareness, and strong coping mechanisms. Family support emerged as a central source of belonging and purpose, while caregiving roles, personal beliefs, and spiritual practices reinforced their identity and fulfillment. Overall, singlehood was constructed as a purposeful and empowered way of living, reflecting a holistic sense of well-being aligned with emotional, relational, and personal growth.

The study recommends that old maidens be supported through activities that promote psychological well-being, including community involvement, spiritual engagement, and personal hobbies that foster resilience and fulfillment. Mental health professionals are encouraged to develop culturally appropriate programs that enhance self-esteem, identity formation, and coping strategies for managing social stigma. Families are advised to create a supportive and accepting environment by reducing pressure related to marriage and respecting individual life choices. Communities and organizations are also encouraged to implement inclusive programs that recognize diverse life paths and reduce stigma toward unmarried women. Additionally, future researchers are urged to further explore the psychological and social dimensions of lifelong singlehood using broader samples and varied research approaches to deepen understanding of this phenomenon.

The study is limited by its small and specific sample of four Generation X old maidens residing in Laguna, Philippines, which may restrict the generalizability of the findings. The use of purposive sampling and a qualitative hermeneutic phenomenological approach focuses on in-depth understanding rather than broad representation, limiting applicability to other populations or contexts. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may reflect subjective interpretations shaped by personal experiences. Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insights into the lived experiences, coping mechanisms, and perspectives of single women within a specific socio-cultural setting.

Compliance with ethical standards

The authors declare no conflict of interest, and this study received no external funding. The researchers acknowledge the voluntary participation of the selected Generation X old maidens in Laguna, Philippines, whose informed consent was obtained prior to data collection using non-invasive, semi-structured interviews. All procedures were conducted with respect for participants' autonomy, ensuring that participation was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time. Confidentiality was strictly maintained, and no identifying information was disclosed in any part of the study.

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