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Understanding the Marriage Practices of the Sama Bangingi Tribe: Cultural Significance and Social Implications

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the characteristics and cultural practices of marriage among the Sama Bangingi community in Barangay Bolong, Zamboanga City, Philippines. The study emphasizes the significance of promoting modest dowries and straightforward marriage procedures, aiming to make marriage more accessible and financially feasible. By advocating for simplified marriage customs, this research highlights the importance of parents avoiding demanding excessive dowries, which can reduce issues such as elopement and financial strain. The findings reveal that the majority of participants prefer simple, low-cost weddings, mainly due to financial limitations, and that dowries, though minimal, remain a customary aspect of marriage among the Sama Bangingi. This research provides valuable insights for prospective couples, parents, Muslim communities, other cultural groups, and future researchers.

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Introduction

Marriage practices and their implications vary significantly across cultures, shaped by socio-demographic factors, cultural traditions, and contemporary challenges. For instance,

religious-only marriages often create a liminal state for participants, as analyzed in English Muslim narratives, highlighting the complex interplay between tradition and legal frameworks [1]. Similarly, the consequences of early marriage reveal nuanced impacts, with cultural familiarity playing a pivotal role in shaping individual experiences [2]. Additionally, the influence of work on marriage dynamics differs across cultures, reflecting unique societal expectations and stressors [3]. These studies underscore the multifaceted nature of marriage, where communication, cultural expectations, and traditional practices intersect, shaping individual and communal experiences [4]-[6].

This study explores the unique characteristics and traditions of marriage among the Sama Bangingi community in Barangay Bolong, Zamboanga City. The Sama people, one of the three primary ethnic groups inhabiting the Sulu Archipelago alongside the Yakan and Tausug, maintain a rich cultural heritage that is particularly evident in their marriage customs. The etymology of the term "Sama" is somewhat ambiguous; however, it is suggested that the word may stem from "sama-sama," a term that embodies the essence of "togetherness" within their communal life [7].

Marriage traditions among the Sama are deeply intertwined with lunar phases, specifically during the full moon, which marks a significant period for conducting the pagkawin (marriage) ceremony. Celebrating under the full moon infuses the wedding festivities with vibrant colors and sounds, as the celebration often extends late into the night. For a Sama man intending to marry, the process involves seeking permission from his family, who then approach the woman's family to initiate the courtship. Upon the acceptance of a marriage proposal, a formal engagement, also known as "pagkawin," is conducted. This engagement is celebrated with a fluvial parade adorned with colorful banners, traditional music, and dancing, creating a festive atmosphere that brings together family and community members [8].

A notable feature of Sama marriage ceremonies is the maligay, a ceremonial area decorated with local delicacies, which becomes the focal point of the celebration. Marriage arrangements are typically within kinship lines, facilitated by parental consent. However, marriages may also result from elopement or abduction, both of which follow certain cultural protocols. In cases of elopement, for example, the couple may seek the protection of a village headman or local authority to formalize their union. The Sama people themselves are distinguished between land-oriented Sama and the sea-dwelling Sama Dilaut, also referred to as "sea gypsies" due to their nomadic maritime lifestyle [9].

The actual wedding day begins at the bride's residence, where family and guests gather for a day of music, dancing, and storytelling. By noon, the groom arrives with his relatives, and a ceremonial bath is conducted for the bride, symbolizing purification. Following this ritual, the groom pledges to care for his bride, and the couple engages in a solemn marriage ceremony

led by an imam. It is customary for the newlyweds to stay with the bride's family for three to four days before moving to the groom's family home. However, by the second or third year of marriage, couples are typically expected to establish an independent household, preferably near the wife's family, reflecting Sama Bangingi's matrilocal tendencies [7].

This study will contribute valuable insights into the distinct customs surrounding marriage among the Sama Bangingi, shedding light on the values of kinship, tradition, and community that shape marital practices within this community. The findings will provide a comprehensive understanding of how these practices maintain cultural continuity and adapt to contemporary influences, benefitting future couples, parents, researchers, and the broader Muslim and indigenous communities in the Philippines.

Literature Review

This section provides a comprehensive analysis of marriage customs across various Filipino indigenous communities, with an emphasis on dowry negotiations, wedding rituals, parental involvement, and post-wedding residence patterns. It examines the theories that underpin these cultural practices and reviews related studies thematically. This analysis synthesizes existing literature, highlighting commonalities, unique practices, and gaps the study aims to address.

Marriage practices are culturally significant events within Filipino indigenous communities, each following unique customs that reflect deep-rooted traditions, social structures, and family values. This chapter will examine various marriage customs within different cultural groups in the Philippines, including the Sama, Badjao, Tausug, Maranao, Jama Mapun, Yakan, Subanon, Maguindanao, and Tagalog communities. Each group's marriage traditions, from courtship and dowries to the ceremony and post-wedding practices, offer insight into the social frameworks and values upheld by these groups.

A. Related Study

The Badjao marriage process involves formal visits and negotiations by the groom's family, leading to the bride's seclusion and a concluding ceremony where the groom pledges to care for his wife. These steps reflect the community's emphasis on familial involvement and formal agreements to uphold the marriage bond [10]. Marriage among the Tausug people involve six distinct stages, from expressing interest to public celebration. This multi-step process underscores the importance of family approval and communal support, reflecting the significance of marriage as a public and family-centered institution [11].

The Maranao wedding, known as kakewing, includes a public recital of family lineages, challenges for the groom, and a formal ceremony officiated by an imam. These elaborate customs highlight the importance of lineage, negotiation, and the integration of Islamic

traditions with cultural practices [12]. The wedding ceremony of the Jama Mapun involves preliminary negotiations, festivities, and religious prayers, emphasizing the community's values of family support and religious observance. Symbolic gestures, such as unveiling the bride, reinforce the sacredness of marriage within this group [13].

Yakan marriages are diverse, encompassing various forms such as parental consent, elopement, and polygamy. The wedding ceremony typically lasts three days, with rituals symbolizing marital harmony. These traditions underscore flexibility in marriage forms while highlighting the roles of family support and symbolic practices in Yakan culture [14]. Subanon marriages are often pre-arranged and involve extensive dowry negotiations. Post-wedding, couples reside with the wife's family, reflecting matrilocal residence patterns, which signify the community's prioritization of maternal kinship ties and cooperative family support [15]. Maguindanao marriages are both cultural and religious, involving elaborate celebrations that integrate traditional customs with Islamic rites. This blend reflects the adaptive nature of Maguindanao practices in balancing traditional and religious expectations [16].

The Tagalog wedding process begins with 'pamamanhikan', a formal introduction and negotiation between families. Subsequent wedding preparations are communal, embodying the bayanihan spirit, where the community contributes to the celebration. These traditions emphasize family unity and community involvement [9].

B. Theoretical Framework

Marriage in many indigenous cultures can be explored through structural functionalism, which views social institutions, like marriage, as integral components that contribute to societal stability and continuity [14]. This theory helps to explain how marriage functions to reinforce alliances, social hierarchies, and economic ties within these communities. Additionally, symbolic interactionism, which focuses on shared meanings and symbols, is relevant in examining the symbolic gestures, dowries, and ceremonial practices unique to each culture, as these represent social values and kinship bonds.

The reviewed studies reveal a range of marriage customs, where themes of family involvement, dowry negotiations, and community celebrations are central. For many groups, marriage practices are deeply symbolic, reinforcing kinship ties and social cohesion. However, practices such as bride price and the roles of community in marriage processes vary widely, reflecting each group's unique social structure. Additionally, integration with Islamic rites, as seen in the Maranao and Maguindanao traditions, showcases an adaptive approach to preserving cultural heritage while observing religious practices.

Despite these rich traditions, the literature lacks information on how these practices are adapting to contemporary influences, such as economic changes and legal reforms affecting

Indigenous customs. This study will address these gaps by examining how marriage practices within the Sama Bangingi community navigate the balance between tradition and modernity.

Material and Methods

The research employs a qualitative approach to investigate a social issue. A narrative design will be utilized to effectively plan and implement the study, increasing the likelihood of obtaining relevant information. Interviews will be conducted with Sama Bangingi couples and elders in Barangay Bolong, Zamboanga City to gather valuable insights. The study will focus on thirteen respondents currently residing in the coastal residential area, predominantly inhabited by Sama Bangingi families.

Results and Discussion

After conducting thorough research, it is evident that the Sama Bangingi community highly values the tradition of dowry during marriage. In this tradition, the groom is expected to present a dowry to the bride, and the specific amount is determined through negotiations between the bride's parents and the groom. The presence of an imam is crucial during this process, as they offer guidance and provide religious support.

However, financial constraints can sometimes pose challenges for families who are unable to afford the full dowry requested by the bride's parents. In such cases, families may choose to initially provide a partial dowry, with the intention of fulfilling the remaining amount in the future. This highlights the significance of flexibility and understanding within the community when it comes to the financial aspects of marriage.

The involvement of the "wali," typically the bride's father, holds significant importance in Sama Bangingi marriages. The wali's permission is a prerequisite for the groom to marry his bride. This agreement underscores the significance of parental authority and approval in the community.

In the case of elopement, the couple must present a "tampan maru" to the girl's parents. However, this tampan maru is initially given to the imam, who serves as a mediator between the couple and the girl's parents. The imam then forwards the tampan maru to the girl's parents, usually accompanied by a letter from the imam explaining the situation. This ritual and communication process ensures proper respect and reconciliation in cases of elopement.

These agreements and customs are a reflection of the cultural values and traditions of Sama Bangingi, emphasizing the importance of family involvement, financial commitments, parental consent, and the role of the imam in facilitating the marriage process. The practice of "pagturul tayma" is not widely observed or performed within the Sama Bangingi community. This can be attributed to various factors, including a high prevalence of elopement among

couples and the acknowledgment of the financial expenses involved in carrying out the "pagturul tayma" ceremony.

The decision to forego "pagturul tayma" is influenced by a strong inclination to prioritize prompt marriage, placing greater emphasis on the union itself rather than an elaborate ceremony. This perspective mirrors the cultural values and priorities of the Sama Bangingi community, where the significance of marriage and commitment takes precedence over extravagant celebrations. By opting out of "pagturul tayma," couples in Sama Bangingi can concentrate on the essence of their union and the fulfillment of their desire to be married, without being encumbered by the financial constraints associated with elaborate ceremonies. This underscores their practical approach and underscores the significance they place on the act of marriage itself, valuing the commitment and union more than the formalities and costs associated with extravagant celebrations.

According to the information provided, it is clear that "pagpassal" is not part of the marriage customs of the Sama Bangingi community, as confirmed by all the informants. Instead, a different ritual occurs where the bride's makeup is applied before the groom and imam enter the room to perform the "bahtal." The absence of "pagpassal" indicates that the Sama Bangingi community has distinctive traditions and customs related to their wedding ceremonies. In this context, the emphasis is on preparing the bride's appearance through the application of makeup, symbolizing the importance of her presence and readiness for the upcoming ceremony.

The subsequent entry of the groom and imam into the room to perform the "bahtal" signifies the start of a sacred and formal aspect of the marriage ceremony. This practice underscores the role of the imam in guiding and officiating the marriage, highlighting the significance of religious blessings and spiritual guidance in the union. By foregoing the practice of "pagpassal" and incorporating the ritual of makeup application and the "bahtal," the Sama Bangingi community showcases their unique cultural practices and adaptations in their wedding ceremonies, shedding light on their specific traditions and values surrounding marriage.

The Sama Bangingi community does not incorporate the "paglugo" ritual into their marriage ceremonies. The informants unanimously confirmed the absence of the "paglugo" practice, citing it as an exclusive custom of the Tausug tribe. This omission of "paglugo" in Sama Bangingi weddings underscores the diverse cultural practices among different Muslim communities. While "paglugo" may be customary in other regions or among specific ethnic groups, the informants emphasized that it is not part of their marriage traditions. The informants' acknowledgment of the exclusive nature of "paglugo" to the Tausug tribe reflects a respect for cultural boundaries and diversity within their broader cultural and religious

context. By forgoing "paglugo," the Sama Bangingi community preserves its distinct customs and traditions, showcasing the cultural richness and diversity across Muslim communities in the region.

In the village of Sama Bangingi, as the wedding day approaches, meticulous preparations are underway to ensure a memorable celebration. The entire community, comprising family, friends, and neighbors, comes together to offer unwavering support and assistance. Collaboratively, they gather essential supplies and equipment for the upcoming wedding festivities. For example, preparations involve procuring wood for cooking and ensuring an ample water supply for various needs during the wedding festivities. In cases where specific utensils or items are lacking, families may seek to borrow them from their neighbors. This borrowing extends to plates, glasses, pots, pans, and other essential kitchenware required for the wedding preparations and feast.

Moreover, concerted efforts are dedicated to adorning the house where the couple will exchange vows. The entire community partakes in embellishing the venue with decorative elements, creating an ambiance of joy and celebration. The shared efforts in these preparations exemplify the communal spirit and robust social bonds within the Sama Bangingi community. Through collective endeavor and mutual assistance, they ensure that the couple's wedding day is well-equipped and the venue is aesthetically pleasing, fostering an atmosphere of unity and jubilation.

Sama Bangingi follows specific rituals before their weddings. The first ritual, known as "pagsaat," involves determining the most auspicious months for getting married. The couple seeks the guidance of the imam, who then announces the suitable wedding date based on the examination of the best month. This ritual ensures that the marriage takes place at an opportune time. The second ritual, "pagligu," refers to the bath ritual. During this practice, the imam typically performs the bath ritual for the couple. In the absence of an imam, the father may carry out the ritual if he possesses the required knowledge. Generally, it is the imam who bathes the couple, following a specific procedure. After the bath, the imam pours three pitchers of water over the couple while reciting certain words or prayers.

These rituals carry significant cultural and traditional value in Sama Bangingi weddings. They symbolize purification, blessings, and the sanctity of the marriage ceremony. By adhering to these rituals, the couple seeks spiritual guidance and invokes divine blessings for a harmonious and prosperous marital union. In the traditional wedding ceremony of Sama Bangingi, both the groom and the bride partake in specific rituals and preparations. On the wedding day, after completing her makeup, the bride awaits the arrival of her groom and the imam. They then enter the room to perform the "pagbatal" ceremony. Following this, the imam

proceeds with the "khutba nika," delivering a sermon to the couple while witnessing the wedding ceremony.

All sources agree that the imam delivers a sermon or "khutba nika" during the wedding ceremony. Typically, the imam recites a chapter or verses from the Quran and offers a brief sermon. This sermon may address the significance of marriage, the rights and responsibilities of the husband and wife, and other relevant aspects related to the marital union. These rituals, including the "pagbatal" and the "khutba nika," hold great importance in the Sama Bangingi wedding ceremony. They serve as a means of spiritual guidance, emphasizing the sacredness of marriage and providing the couple with insights into their roles and obligations as spouses according to Islamic teachings.

The Sama Bangingi tribe typically serves certain favorite foods during weddings or special occasions. These include dishes such as bang bang hantak, bawlu, tota, suman pitis, jah, and panyam. Additionally, they offer "tamparung," a rice dish wrapped in leaves. The menu also includes other food items like chicken, fish, pansit (noodles), vegetables, and more. However, it's important to note that due to financial limitations, some families may face difficulties in affording elaborate meals. Consequently, they may offer simpler refreshments such as drinks and biscuits to their guests instead. These food practices reflect the cultural traditions and available resources within the Sama Bangingi community. While they may not always have the means to provide extravagant feasts, they make every effort to offer hospitality and share their favorite dishes during significant celebrations.

Cultural traditions and practices significantly shape the lives and identities of various ethnic groups in the Philippines. For example, the Isinay people have preserved their linguistic heritage through documented texts and translations, providing insights into their unique cultural expressions [16]. Similarly, the Maguindanaoan community's rich traditions are highlighted in field reports that explore their societal structures and customs [17]. The Badjaos, a seafaring community, offer a compelling case study in how education and cultural practices intersect to sustain their way of life despite external pressures [18]. These studies emphasize the diversity and resilience of Filipino cultural identities.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the study, it is evident that the marriage practices within the Sama Bangingi tribe are characterized by simplicity and minimal expenditures. The expeditious solemnization of marriage is deemed paramount, representing the pinnacle of their union. Key tenets of their marital agreements encompass the bestowal of a dowry to the bride, the requisite permission from the bride's parents ("wali"), and the presentation of a "tampan maru" in cases of elopement. Contrary to other tribes, the Sama Bangingi eschew the customary practices of "pagturul tayma," "pagpassal," and "paglugu," instead prioritizing the

ritual of "pagsaat," which determines the propitious month for nuptials. Couples and their families prepare for the matrimonial ceremony through venue adornment and modest culinary arrangements, cognizant of their financial constraints.

Elopement's prevalence contributes to most community couples possessing nominal dowries. The celebration of their nuptials involves the observance of "pagtugtug kamanyan," wherein prayers or Du'as are recited. Owing to limited resources, the couple frequently extends wedding invitations solely to immediate family members. In summary, the researchers posit that the marriage practices of the Sama Bangingi tribe are emblematic of simplicity and austerity. Their nuptial ceremonies rank among the most unadorned in the Philippines, attesting to their values and financial circumstances.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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