

Research Article

The Filipino family in transition: DINKS and the family paradigm shift in Northern Mindanao, Philippines

Andrew James V. Infiesto^{1*}, Marph Daryl O. Porras²

¹ Department of Sociology/College of Arts and Social Sciences/ Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology/ Philippines, andrenjames.infiesto@g.msuiit.edu.ph

² Department of Sociology/College of Arts and Social Sciences/ Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology/ Philippines

Correspondence should be addressed to the *Corresponding Author; andrewjames.infiesto@g.msuiit.edu.ph

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ABSTRACT

This study examined the lives of Filipino Double Income No Kids (DINK) couples in Northern Mindanao who challenge dominant cultural expectations in a society where familism and childbearing are strongly linked to moral worth, legacy, and social identity. Utilizing a mixed methods approach, comprising a regional online survey and in-depth interviews for cross-case analysis with select DINK couples, the research investigates public awareness, motivations, social pressures, and envisioned futures of those who consciously choose a child-free marital life. Quantitative findings reveal that 58.5% of the 215 respondents express a willingness to embrace the DINK lifestyle, suggesting a potential shift in reproductive intentions among younger Filipino cohorts. However, this emerging openness coexists with a prevailing cultural stigma. Qualitative data further uncover three major themes: (1) the negotiation of identity and autonomy under social and familial pressure; (2) strategies of disengagement or confrontation toward unsolicited comments on childlessness; and (3) long-term planning for aging, including the formation of alternative support systems outside traditional family structures. Anchored in Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration, the study frames these couples' decisions as forms of reflexive agency, challenging and reshaping normative family scripts. This study foregrounds how kinship, reproduction, and social belonging are reimagined within the Philippine context. It situates DINK couples in the broader cultural negotiations of familial expectations, intergenerational obligations, and the moral economy of family life.

Keywords: DINK, Child-free, Couples, Reproductive Choice, Filipino Family

1. INTRODUCTION

In the heart of every Filipino household lies an expectation, an unspoken but powerful rhythm of life that associates marriage with childbearing, of homes echoing with children's laughter, and of dreams anchored in future generations. For decades, this rhythm has been the foundation of Filipino family identity, sustained by tradition, religion, and the deeply rooted belief that children are not only blessings but also bearers of legacy. But what happens when couples choose to move to a different beat?

Across bustling cities and quiet provinces alike, an emerging group of Filipino couples are rewriting what it means to be a family. These are the Double Income No Kids (DINK) couples, couples who, despite societal pressures, opt to prioritize career growth, financial stability, personal freedom, and at times, the weight of practical realities over the traditional path of parenthood. Their stories and experiences are powerful acts of resistance in a society where familial expectations run deep. The Filipino family, anchored in collectivist values and shaped by a strong sense of intergenerational responsibility, has always been resilient in the face of change. Yet as urbanization intensifies, the cost-of-living surges, and individual aspirations become more pronounced, new family patterns are surfacing, patterns that no longer revolve around children, but around choice.

Globally, the DINK (dual-income, no kids) lifestyle has gained traction in Western societies such as Germany, the U.S., and Japan, where individual autonomy and self-realization are more culturally embedded (Lamanna et al., 2018). In the Asia-Pacific region, however, similar trends are emerging, albeit with distinct socio-cultural contours. For example, in Singapore, married couples without children are becoming increasingly visible: one recent study reported that 15% of resident ever-married women aged 40-49 have no children, and many cited lifestyle preferences and work-life balance as key influences (Tan, 2025). Meanwhile,

in South Korea, roughly one in three workers in their 20s and 30s stated they had no intention of having children, attributing this decision to economic burdens and desires for personal autonomy (Kim, 2020). Turning to the Philippines, where Catholicism and communal identity remain central (Medina, 2015), the decision by couples to remain child-free may still feel like a radical departure. Such couples are not simply economic units; they are actively challenging the notion that family is incomplete without offspring. While financial considerations often play a role, the decision to embrace the DINK lifestyle also signals how modern Filipino couples negotiate the tension between respect for tradition and the pursuit of self-determination. Here, DINK couples are more than just economic units; they are challenging the long-held belief that family is incomplete without offspring. Their decision is not simply a matter of economics, though financial considerations often play a role. This lifestyle is a reflection of how modern Filipino couples are negotiating the space between honoring tradition and honoring themselves.

This study centers the voices of these couples, their motivations, their struggles, their aspirations. It is about the intimate decisions made behind closed doors and the social negotiations that follow. Why do some Filipino couples choose to live without children? How do they navigate the persistent tug of cultural and familial expectations? And how does their lifestyle challenge or coexist with the values deeply entrenched in Filipino society? By exploring these questions, this research does not seek to prescribe a new ideal. Instead, it aims to humanize a choice that, for many, in the Philippine context, remains misunderstood or quietly judged. In giving space to the narratives of DINK couples, we make room for a broader conversation, one that embraces the complexity of love, partnership, and the ever-evolving idea of what it means to build a life together.

While the Double Income No Kids (DINK) lifestyle is widely accepted in Western societies, where autonomy is a celebrated value, its emergence in the Philippines carries a different weight. In the Philippines, to remain child-free is not simply to resist societal norms, but to redefine them. There remains a deep gap in the understanding of this lifestyle within collectivist cultures. Despite the growing visibility of child-free couples in urban spaces, public discourse continues to frame marriage as a journey toward procreation, and children as the natural fulfillment of that journey.

When Filipino couples decide otherwise, the questions they face aren't merely logistical —they are existential. "Why don't you want children?" "Don't you worry about who will take care of you when you grow old?" "What will your family think?" These questions reflect more than curiosity; they mirror the cultural weight that defines parenthood as both a duty and a form of belonging. In choosing the DINK lifestyle, Filipino couples often confront these expectations, navigating complex terrains of guilt, defiance, and self-determination. This study asks: What lies beneath this choice? What values, pressures, aspirations, and fears animate it? And more importantly, how does this lifestyle unfold in a society still defined by its deep reverence for family continuity?

This study aims to explore the socio-cultural, economic, and personal motivations behind the adoption of the Double Income No Kids (DINK) lifestyle among Filipino couples. By examining this phenomenon, the study seeks to provide insights into the evolving definitions of family and individual aspirations within a predominantly collectivist and religious society. Specifically, this study aims to: (1) Examine public awareness, perceptions, attitudes, and the future trends of the Double Income No Kids lifestyle. (2) Identify the factors driving Filipino couples to embrace the DINK lifestyle. (3) Describe the challenges and experiences of Filipino DINK couples as they pursue a child-free lifestyle within a predominantly collectivist society. (4) Examine how Filipino DINK couples navigate social expectations, family pressures, and cultural norms that traditionally emphasize parenthood and familial continuity. And lastly, (5) Explore the long-term aspirations of Filipino DINK couples, particularly their perspectives on aging and envisioned future life chances.

To understand the choice to live without children in a society where children are considered indispensable, this study draws on Anthony Giddens' Theory of Structuration, a framework that acknowledges the tension between social structures and personal agency. Giddens' theory proposes that individuals are not merely passive products of their culture. Rather, they are capable of interpreting, negotiating, and even reshaping the very norms that once shaped them. For Filipino DINK couples, this means that while traditional expectations may guide their lives, they are also capable of pushing against these boundaries, asserting new family ideals that prioritize well-being, autonomy, and mutual growth.

The duality of structure, the idea that structures both constrain and enable action, is evident in how these couples live. Social norms may whisper that a family must have children, but modernity whispers back with different possibilities. Couples are not only listening, they are choosing. This framework also introduces the concept of reflexivity, where individuals constantly examine and adjust their lives in response to societal shifts. Filipino DINK couples, exposed to global ideas and modern pressures, engage in ongoing self-evaluation. They consider their choices in light of religious teachings, familial expectations, financial realities, and their own aspirations, often reinterpreting these frameworks in the process.

2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This chapter presents the methodological framework for exploring the experiences of Double Income No Kids (DINK) couples residing in Northern Mindanao. It outlines the proposed research design, sampling procedure, data collection methods, and ethical considerations that will be observed during the study. Each section in this chapter provides a detailed description of the methods used to ensure a rigorous and ethically sound approach to gathering and analyzing the data for inquiry.

Exploring the lifestyle experiences of double-income couples without kids (DINKs) necessitates a descriptive research design and a qualitative approach. This study employed a qualitative research design, specifically utilizing a cross-case analysis approach, while incorporating triangulation to ensure the robustness and validity of the findings.

Triangulation is achieved through the integration of multiple data sources and methods, including survey questionnaires administered via Google Forms and in-depth interviews. The survey served as a foundational step, collecting demographic profiles,

lifestyle motivations, and challenges, which guides the subsequent qualitative phases. Cross-case analysis was systematically compared and contrast the experiences of multiple participants to identify patterns, variations, and recurring themes, offering deeper insights into the complexities of the DINK lifestyle. By having this research design, this study provides a comprehensive understanding of the DINK phenomenon, particularly in the Philippine context, making it a significant contribution to this emerging area of research.

Specifically, in drawing a comprehensive picture of the experiences of DINK couples in the Philippines, the researcher conducted a profiling activity using Google Form. This form was opened for responses from DINK couples across the Mindanao. The profiling aimed to gather preliminary information such as demographic details, years of cohabitation, professional backgrounds, and the motivations, benefits, and challenges associated with adopting the DINK lifestyle. This step is crucial for refining the research data and ensuring diverse social representation and narratives, given that this study is exploratory and among the first of its kind in the Philippine context.

Following the profiling, in-depth interviews were conducted to uncover participants' motivations, lifestyle choices, benefits, and the challenges or adjustments they face as DINK couples. This method provides rich and detailed accounts of their lived experiences. The qualitative design emphasizes open-ended, conversational communication, allowing for thorough probing and follow-up questioning based on participants' responses. The cross-case analysis enabled the researcher to examine similarities and differences among participants' experiences, offering a comprehensive understanding of the DINK lifestyle. By analyzing the data across multiple cases, the study aimed to discover broader themes and insights that highlight how DINK couples navigate and rationalize their lifestyle choices.

Research Locale and Participants

The study was conducted in select cities in Northern Mindanao, namely: Cagayan de Oro City, Iligan City, Malaybalay City, and Valencia City. Northern Mindanao, located in the southern Philippines, is a vibrant and diverse region ideal for conducting sociological research on the lifestyles of double-income couples without children (DINKs). Comprising five provinces—Bukidnon, Camiguin, Lanao del Norte, Misamis Occidental, and Misamis Oriental—Northern Mindanao also includes nine cities, each offering unique cultural and socio-economic landscapes. These cities are Cagayan de Oro, Iligan, Malaybalay, Valencia, Gingoog, El Salvador, Ozamiz, Tangub, and Oroquieta.

Northern Mindanao is strategically located, with easy access to both Mindanao's central areas and coastal regions, making it a hub of cultural, economic, and social activity. The region is known for its blend of urban growth and natural beauty. Cities like Cagayan de Oro and Iligan are bustling centers of commerce and industry, while cities like Malaybalay and Valencia provide a more serene, mountainous backdrop (Department of Tourism, 2018). This mix of urban and rural settings offers a well-rounded view of how DINK couples in various environments experience and adapt to this lifestyle.

With that, the nature of Northern Mindanao is a blend of modernity and tradition. Cities like Cagayan de Oro, the regional center, are known for their progressive infrastructure and vibrant nightlife, making them comparable to more urbanized areas in the Philippines. On the other hand, cities like Valencia and Malaybalay are surrounded by scenic landscapes, with agricultural and eco-tourism industries playing vital roles in their economies. The diversity of these locales makes Northern Mindanao an ideal area to study how the DINK lifestyle is shaped by varying socio-economic and environmental contexts.

Northern Mindanao's unique combination of bustling cities and natural landscapes offers an enriching perspective on modern Filipino life. The region's cities represent a cross-section of both modernized and traditional Filipino values, potentially influencing how DINK couples approach their lifestyle, values, and personal goals. With its urban centers and close-knit communities, Northern Mindanao provides a compelling backdrop for understanding how the DINK lifestyle fits within Philippine society today.

To address the first research objective, the study employed an online survey distributed through widely used social media platforms such as Facebook, X (formerly Twitter), and Instagram. The questionnaire remained accessible to individuals aged 18 and above residing across Mindanao. A total of 215 respondents participated in the survey, providing insights relevant to the study's initial objective. For the subsequent objectives (2 to 5), 10 couples, as shown in table 1, were selected using a referral-based sampling method, where early respondents suggested others who fit the criteria. This strategy, often called snowball sampling (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981), is particularly useful in engaging individuals from specific or less-visible groups.

Key informant interviews were conducted with ten DINK (Double Income No Kids) couples, identified through recommendations by the initial participants. Both partners in each couple were interviewed—sometimes together, and other times separately, depending on their availability. These interviews offered deeper insights into their shared lifestyle choices and personal perspectives.

Key informants were selected based on the following criteria:

1. They identify themselves as DINK (Double Income, No Kids) couples.
2. They have been living together as a couple for at least five (5) years.
3. They are residents of Northern Mindanao.

Table 1
Summary of Informants' Demographic Profile

Informants	Professions	Years of	Income Range	Address
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Marriage				
Couple 1	Government Employees	6 years	70,000 – 100,000	Valencia City, Bukidnon
Couple 2	Government Employees	15 years	80,000 – 120,000	Malaybalay City, Bukidnon
Couple 3	University Professors	6 years	100,000 – 160,000	Valencia City, Bukidnon
Couple 4	Government Employee; Entrepreneur	18 years	80,000 – 120,000	Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental
Couple 5	Administrative Officer; Chef	12 years	80,000 – 150,000	Iligan City, Lanao del Norte and Valencia City, Bukidnon
Couple 6	University Instructors	5 years	60,000 – 80,000	Malaybalay City, Bukidnon
Couple 7	Government Employee; Anglican Priest	8 years	70,000 – 100,000	Iligan City, Lanao del Norte
Couple 8	Entrepreneurs	7 years	150,000 – 200,000	Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental
Couple 9	University Professors	9 years	150,000 – 200,000	Malaybalay City, Bukidnon
Couple 10	IT Specialist; Virtual Assistant	5 years	150,000 – 200,000	Cagayan de Oro City, Misamis Oriental

Through this method, the study aimed to gain in-depth insights into the DINK lifestyle in Northern Mindanao, with the referrals enabling the researcher to identify more individuals who shared the specific characteristics under investigation.

Instruments

An interview guide, a profiling questionnaire, and a google form survey questionnaire for the public's perception of the DINK lifestyle were employed in this study, with all these instruments structured to align closely with the research objectives. The interview guide is a carefully designed list of high-level topics and specific questions aimed at exploring the experiences and perspectives of DINK (Double Income No Kids) couples in Northern Mindanao. Each question within the guide is formulated to elicit detailed responses that address the study's key themes, such as lifestyle choices, challenges, and motivations of DINK couples. This structured yet flexible approach allows the interviewer to maintain consistency across interviews while enabling informants to freely share their insights and experiences in depth.

Data Collection

A profiling questionnaire was utilized as an initial step to gather key demographic and background information from potential participants, the profiling questionnaire seeks to capture data on age, gender, location, years of cohabitation, professional backgrounds, and reasons for choosing the DINK lifestyle. The questionnaire also ensures diverse representation and will serve as a tool to refine the participant selection process, ensuring the research achieves saturation and represents various perspectives. Together, these instruments enabled the study to capture both broad demographic trends and qualitative insights into the lives of DINK couples.

Additionally, a Google Form survey questionnaire was utilized to assess the public's perception of the Double Income No Kids (DINK) lifestyle. The survey aimed to capture a diverse range of perspectives by reaching respondents across various demographics and geographical regions. The questionnaire consists of closed-ended questions, primarily in a "Yes" or "No" format, focusing on areas such as awareness, family and social dynamics, and societal impact of the DINK lifestyle. Questions are structured to elicit responses that reflect the general public's level of understanding, attitudes, and beliefs regarding DINK couples and their lifestyle choices.

The use of Google Forms ensures accessibility and efficiency in data collection, allowing respondents to participate at their convenience. Data were analyzed statistically to identify trends and common perceptions. These insights were triangulated with the qualitative data gathered from in-depth interviews with DINK couples, ensuring a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

By integrating the results of the Google Form survey with the qualitative findings, this study contributed meaningful insights into the evolving family structures in the Philippines and their implications on societal norms and public policies.

Data Analysis

In analyzing the data collected, a thematic analysis through Axial coding was conducted using computer-aided qualitative data analysis software (CAQDAS). The researcher first transcribed the recorded audio captures from the interviews to ensure all responses were accurately documented. These transcriptions provided a rich dataset for analysis.

Thematic analysis, a method widely used in qualitative research, was applied to identify patterns within the interview data (Braun, V., & Clarke, V., 2006). This approach allowed the researcher to delve into the experiences and perspectives of DINK (Double Income No Kids) couples in Northern Mindanao. Through careful examination, common themes—topics, ideas, and patterns of meaning—that emerged from the responses, offers insight into the unique lifestyle choices, motivations, challenges, and societal perceptions of DINK couples.

For this study, the researcher closely reviewed the data to identify recurring themes. Each theme was analyzed to uncover how Filipino DINK couples perceive and navigate their lifestyle in the context of Northern Mindanao, providing a comprehensive understanding of their experiences and aspirations. To ensure that the data collected reached a point of saturation, the researcher carefully monitored the recurrence and consistency of themes emerging from the interviews. Although the study initially identified ten (10) couples as respondents for the qualitative phase, an additional five (5) couples were interviewed to confirm that no new significant insights, themes, or variations were surfacing in the narratives. These additional interviews served as data saturation subjects, validating that the information gathered from the initial respondents was already comprehensive and representative of the experiences being explored. This methodological step strengthened the reliability and trustworthiness of the findings, as it confirmed that the data had reached thematic sufficiency before finalizing the analysis.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In recent years, the DINK (Double Income No Kids) lifestyle has moved from the peripheries of public discourse into the mainstream consciousness, especially among younger, urban-dwelling Filipinos. This study, drawing from the responses of 212 individuals—predominantly young, single, female, and based in Mindanao—uncovers how Filipino society understands, accepts, and reacts to this emerging family configuration. The overwhelming majority of respondents were between 18 and 24 years old (76.4%), female (72.6%), single (89.2%), and child-free (92.5%), providing a generational lens through which the DINK lifestyle is viewed. Their economic standing largely placed them in lower income brackets, consistent with early-career or student populations. Geographically, 97.2% were from Northern Mindanao.

To establish a contextual foundation for the study, a regional survey was first conducted to generate a baseline of public awareness, perceptions, and attitudes toward the Double Income No Kids (DINK) lifestyle, as well as to gauge possible future trends in its acceptance within the region. The survey data provided a broad picture of how this emerging lifestyle is understood and socially positioned among different sectors, directly addressing the study's first objective. Building on these findings, the subsequent objectives focused on exploring the lived narratives of DINK couples themselves. Through in-depth qualitative interviews, the study sought to capture how personal experiences, values, and social contexts shape and are shaped by this lifestyle choice. At times, the discussion cross-references the survey data to emphasize points of convergence or contrast, thereby grounding the qualitative insights within the broader social patterns revealed in the regional survey. This integrated approach not only validates the findings but also highlights that the transitions and transformations in the Filipino family structure are already perceptible within the regional context where the study was conducted.

Public awareness, perceptions, attitudes, and the future trends of the Double Income No Kids Lifestyle

Public awareness of the DINK lifestyle appears to be high. As shown in table 2, More than 84% of respondents recognized the term, and an even greater number understood that childlessness can be an intentional, values-based choice. Many associated this decision with economic pragmatism, career aspirations, and personal freedom. Respondents also widely acknowledged that child-rearing is not a universal life goal, an idea once considered unconventional in Filipino society. Yet, awareness alone does not equate to acceptance.

Table 2
Public Awareness on the DINK Lifestyle (N = 215)

Survey Item	Yes	No	Unsure
Awareness of what the DINK lifestyle entails	84.4%	7.5%	8.0%
Awareness that some couples intentionally choose to remain child-free	85.8%	6.6%	7.5%
Belief that DINK couples enjoy economic benefits	80.2%	10.8%	8.9%
Awareness that DINK couples often prioritize career advancement	83.0%	9.0%	8.0%
Recognition that financial concerns influence the decision not to have children	83.0%	9.0%	8.0%
Awareness that medical conditions (e.g., infertility) can cause childlessness	68.4%	17.5%	14.2%
Belief that DINK reflects a shift from traditional family structures	80.7%	11.3%	8.0%
Awareness that DINK couples have more personal freedom and lifestyle autonomy	89.6%	4.7%	5.7%
Belief that DINK trend may contribute to declining population growth	83.0%	8.5%	8.5%
Perception that the DINK lifestyle affects work-life balance	84.9%	7.1%	8.0%

Personal familiarity with child-free couples	59.4%	33.0%	7.5%
Familiarity with reasons behind the decision to remain child-free	82.5%	7.5%	9.9%

Shown in table 3, 90% believed DINK couples enjoy more freedom and less financial strain, only around half felt that Filipino society is truly accepting of the lifestyle. Social pressure remains a defining factor: 93% of respondents believed DINK couples face familial expectations to have children, while over 76% noted that these couples often face criticism and judgment.

Table 3
Public Knowledge on the Family and Social Dynamics of the DINK Lifestyle (N = 215)

Survey Item	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
DINK couples are more likely to prioritize their careers	81.7%	10.8%	7.5%
DINK couples have fewer responsibilities compared to those with children	64.3%	28.3%	7.5%
DINK couples face pressure from family to have children	93.0%	3.0%	4%
DINK couples experience less family-related stress	54.0%	30.0%	6.0%
Filipino society is generally accepting of the DINK lifestyle	23.5%	51.2%	25.4%
DINK couples are more likely to provide financial support to extended family	64.8%	11.7%	23.5%
DINK couples face more criticism from family members than couples with children	76.1%	10.9%	13.0%
Remaining child-free can strengthen a couple's relationship	44.5%	21.1%	34.3%
DINK couples should take greater responsibility for aging family members	28.6%	53.1%	18.3%

The responses shown in table 4 illuminates a growing tension between emerging values and long-standing norms. A strong majority of respondents affirmed that DINK couples challenge traditional Filipino family structures. Public opinion also reveals an understanding of how DINK couples contribute to society. Many respondents believed that child-free couples offer unique societal inputs, whether through economic activity, professional excellence, or community engagement. However, only a slight majority believed their contributions are recognized as equal or legitimate within traditional frameworks of Filipino values.

As shown in table 4, the study also found that 60.1% of respondents supported government recognition of DINK families through inclusive programs or policies. Most notably, 79.3% recognized the long-term societal implications of growing DINK trends—such as declining birth rates and changing demands on infrastructure and economic planning. The survey findings narrate a cultural shift. Respondents reflected mixed emotions about remaining child-free: 58.5% said they would consider it, while a sizeable minority (25%) remained reluctant. Their views represent a balancing act between societal belonging and personal authenticity.

Table 4
Public Attitudes on the DINK Lifestyle (N = 215)

Survey Item	Yes	No	Undecided/Unsure
Willingness to personally consider the DINK lifestyle	58.5%	25.0%	16.5%
Support for government policies or programs for child-free couples	60.1%	18.3%	21.6%
Belief that the DINK lifestyle has long-term societal and economic implications	79.3%	8.9%	11.7%

Table 5 shows that despite lingering cultural resistance, attitudes are clearly shifting. Nearly 82% of participants believed that the number of DINK couples in the Philippines would increase in the future, and a strong 87.3% linked this rise to improved gender equality and career opportunities. There was also overwhelming consensus (85%) that society should adapt to evolving family configurations. As DINK couples redefine partnership and legacy, they also face emotional complexities. While 44.5% believed childlessness could strengthen a relationship, many were unsure—suggesting that love without children still struggles for cultural affirmation. Similarly, while DINK couples may support aging family members financially, they are often judged more harshly for their lifestyle choices.

Table 5
Public Perceptions on the Future Trends of the DINK Lifestyle (N = 215).

Survey Item	Agree	Disagree	Unsure
Belief that the number of DINK couples in the Philippines will increase in the future	81.7%	5.2%	13.1%
Agreement that gender equality and career opportunities contribute to the rise of DINK lifestyle	87.3%	4.7%	8.0%
Belief that society should adapt to accommodate changing family structures	85.0%	4.2%	10.8%

Factors Driving the Filipino Double Income No Kids Lifestyle

In a culture where children are often seen as the heart of the home, a quiet evolution is unfolding. Across Northern Mindanao, more Filipino couples are choosing to live as Double Income, No Kids (DINK) households. Not as an escape from responsibility, but as a way to live with intention. Their stories tell us that this choice is less about avoiding parenthood and more about navigating the pressures and priorities of adult life today.

For many couples, raising a child in today's economy is overwhelming with reports that inflation in the Philippines has been continuously rising (Asian Development Bank, 2022)—essential needs such as food, childcare, education, and housing continue to stretch the average household budget. Among the couples interviewed, most shared one common fear: bringing a child into the world without the means to support them fully. Couple 4, from Cagayan de Oro reflected on their childhood experiences growing up in poverty:

"When I was young, I lived in a squatter area. Every morning, I saw many children with nothing to eat or wear. I told myself I would never raise a child in that kind of life. I really believe that becoming parents would feel more like a risk than a gift."

For them, having a child without financial security would feel like repeating a cycle they worked hard to escape. The couple shared how even basic items like diapers and milk formula, along with the cost of hiring a help, would make a huge dent in their budget. For some couples, the DINK lifestyle is not a deliberate choice but one shaped by health complications or personal family histories. In a few cases, infertility brought them face-to-face with grief and disappointment. Others decided not to pursue parenthood because of concerns over hereditary conditions or the long-term effects of past vices. Couple 5, who had experienced two miscarriages spoke candidly about the pain of losing a pregnancy—once before she even realized she was expecting.

"It became too much, to the point that we lose hope." They shared. "We prayed to God that if this is not meant for us, we will accept it."

Couple 2, once eager to conceive, found peace in being child-free and focused their attention on caring for rescue animals. They shared:

"Although we do not have any children, we find joy in taking care of our rescued pets. Maybe this is our purpose. Since then, it has been a fulfilling thing to do."

Couple 6, still wrestling with guilt over past substance abuse, shared:

"We were drug addicts before marrying each other. Because of that, we really fear the possibility of having a special child. What if our child is born with a defect because of the life we used to live? We do not want to bring someone into this world if we cannot guarantee their well-being."

These stories show that for some, choosing not to have children is not about freedom, it is about facing limitations with honesty. Oftentimes, in the Philippines, being part of a family often means continuing to care for one's parents and siblings, even after marriage (Medina, 2015). For many DINK couples, choosing to delay or not have children comes from their strong responsibility to their own families. The emotional and financial weight of these obligations leaves little room for raising children of their own. Couple 1 shared how they still send money home every month to help their parents, who have no stable income.

"Our family of origin was used to receiving money from us the end of the month. Before we got married, we talked about how we could build a family while still supporting our own, but when you see your parents aging and struggling, how can you say no?"

Couple 3 became unexpected guardians when a sister and her husband died in an accident. Overnight, they were caring for two children.

"It was never part of our plan, but we could not turn our backs. These children needed someone, and we were there. We do not want them to be orphaned by someone else."

For these couples, family remains the highest priority even if it means setting aside dreams of raising children themselves. The decision to live as a DINK couple in the Philippines is shaped by more than just personal choice. It is informed by deep-rooted values, harsh economic realities, health concerns, and family obligations.

Negotiating Childlessness

Filipino couples who choose not to have children often find themselves on the receiving end of doubt, pressure, and even quiet exclusion. Double Income No Kids (DINK) couples in the Philippines navigate a social terrain where their decisions are not only questioned but sometimes punished emotionally and materially. Their stories tell us much about how family, faith, and tradition shape what it means to belong. Filipino DINK couples often feel pressured by others' expectations in the form of repeated questions, backhanded remarks, and unsolicited prayers. What may begin as a casual inquiry, "When are you having children?" can turn into a heavy judgment about their character, values, or future. Couple 6 remembered how a seemingly light conversation took a sharp turn. The husband was told:

"You should have a child already. You are getting older. It would be unfair if you end up relying on others when you are old."

Though still in their early thirties, they were made to feel like burdens, no longer independent, simply because they chose not to have children. Couple 7 recounted how family gatherings became spaces of emotional discomfort.

"Sometimes, our relatives tell us we are lacking in faith, that maybe we have no children because we do not go to church.

Even when we explain that we are not ready, they would not listen. They say we are already married, so we should just go ahead and have a child."

Even well-meaning neighbors cross boundaries can sometimes cross the line of giving unwanted advice. Couple 8 was urged to join fertility massages with no invitation:

"I did not want to go, but I said yes because for them, they were just trying to help. They made me think of my mother—she has no grandchildren, and I am her only child. That thought makes me feel guilty. So, I was compelled to join."

For many, it is not just about resisting the expectation to have a child, it is about withstanding the emotional toll of disappointing loved ones. Choosing to stay child-free becomes both an act of love for their partner and an act of resistance in the face of cultural obligation. For DINK couples, not having children often becomes an excuse for unfair treatment—whether in family decisions, inheritance, or caregiving roles. Couple 1 shared a particularly painful experience:

"During a family meeting, I was told I would receive a smaller share of the inheritance. They said, 'You do not have children anyway, better to give it to those who do.' That moment stung. It felt like I was being punished for my choice."

Couple 4 was asked to look after their aunt's grandchildren, at first as a favor, then gradually as a long-term arrangement. "She texted us and asked if we could enroll them in school. We have a business to run. We felt abused. Just because we do not have children does not mean we have more financially. Even if we do, it is not our responsibility. However, we did enroll them as we are being pressured by our relatives."

Some couples even experience moral judgment from close friends. Couple 2 recalled how a priest friend questioned their lack of a child by asking,

"What sin have you committed that you are not blessed? That question lingered. It made us question our faith. What if he was right?" the couple shared.

These stories reveal a pattern: DINK couples are often expected to give more, sacrifice more, and expect less. Their worth, in the eyes of family, seems to shrink with every year they remain childless. Their contributions are overlooked, and their needs dismissed, all because they chose a path that diverges from the norm. Perhaps the most subtle and damaging challenge DINK couples face is the assumption that they live easy, selfish lives. Many are perceived as having no problems—stable with money, relaxed, and always ready to help others. Couple 3 spoke openly about this:

"They say we are lucky because we have money and no stress. But they do not see the pressure at work, the mental load, the responsibilities we carry. They ask us to babysit or help with expenses because they think we have no one else to care for."

Couple 4 expressed frustration at being labeled "selfish" shared:

"They told us that we are selfish as we are not sharing our life with anyone because we have no children. But they do not know what we have been through. We chose peace over pressure. It was not an easy decision."

The belief that they have extra time, money, and energy, becomes a license for others to assign them roles they never agreed to. Couple 10 described how they were always asked for help, yet excluded when it came to family decisions:

"We were expected to contribute, but when the family's land was being divided, they told us we would receive less, because we have no children. That broke me. I felt like I did not belong, even in my own family."

In a society where value is often measured by how much you give to the next generation, DINK couples struggle to prove that their lives are equally meaningful. Their pain does not lie in regret, but in the effort of always having to justify their existence outside the traditional mold.

Navigating Social and Cultural Judgment

In the Philippines family is both structure and symbol, choosing not to have children can feel like walking against the current. Filipino DINK couples do more than defy a cultural script; they must continuously explain, defend, and affirm a choice that challenges deep-seated norms of marriage, adulthood, and social duty. The choice to remain child-free is often viewed as unnatural or even immoral within a context that sees reproduction not merely as a private matter, but as a collective obligation. As scholars like Medina (2015) and Perttierra (2005) assert, the Filipino family is grounded in collectivist ideals and intergenerational expectations. Parenthood is seen as both legacy and virtue. In this environment, DINK couples are not simply opting out of parenthood, they are quietly resisting a dominant narrative that equates children with purpose, sacrifice, and belonging.

One of the most common strategies among the informants was disengagement—choosing silence over conflict, and distance over constant explanation. For many, ignoring unsolicited opinions became an emotional necessity. Couple 9 explained:

"It is really hard to make people understand that we do not want children. No matter how much we explain, they still think we are wrong. So, we stay quiet. If we give in just to please others, we will still be the ones who suffer in the end."

Their silence is not passive. It is an act of resistance grounded in self-awareness. Couple 10 shared:

"Even our own family says we are making a mistake. But we are the ones who must live with this choice, not them. We just do not respond anymore. It is exhausting."

Couple 7 also recalled a painful moment during a family reunion:

"Our parents approached us in front of our relatives and asked, 'When will you have children? You are getting older. Who would take care of you when you get old? Are you not afraid of growing old alone?' We just looked at each other and chuckled, trying to dismiss it. But deep inside, it really hurts."

Humor becomes a temporary shield, but it does not erase the sting of being constantly questioned. In the words of couple

“Sometimes we respond through humor, but it is not easy living in a world that sees your decision as wrong. Every night, we remind each other—it is better not to have a child than to raise one we might regret, or fail to give a good life. We just let them talk. It is our life to live.”

These narratives show that silence is not avoidance, it is a form of survival. Their refusal to conform is grounded not in defiance but in deep reflection and personal integrity. While some couples retreat, others choose to confront. Many of the informants described moments when they directly responded to unsolicited remarks, sometimes with humor, at other times with emotional honesty. Couple 2 playfully remarked:

“It is okay that we do not have kids yet—better than those who have many, but all of them are unattractive and ugly.”

Though said in jest, the statement exposes the absurdity of the belief that all parenthood is noble by default. More often, however, confrontations stem from quiet frustration. Couple 3 shared:

“Every time we go home, someone asks, ‘When will you have a child?’ It builds up. Sometimes I just say, ‘If we do, it will be when we are emotionally and financially ready. Not just to prove something to you.’”

Another narrative from Couple 4 highlights, a painful comment from an aunt who said,

“What a waste of your womanhood, you do not have a child.” The response was clear and brave: “Maybe it would be a greater waste if I had a child and could not give them a decent life, like what you did to your children.”

Even the fear of aging alone is weaponized against them. As Couple 5 recalled:

“They say, ‘Are you not afraid of having no one to care for you when you grow old?’ And I say, ‘I am more afraid of raising a child without love, just to satisfy other people’s standards.’”

These confrontations are not acts of aggression but of emotional truth-telling. They mark the boundaries of self-respect and responsibility. These couples do not owe anyone an explanation, yet they offer one, out of hope that they might be seen, heard, and understood on their own terms.

Aging and Autonomy

In the Philippines, family remains a central pillar of identity and belonging, choosing not to have children is often regarded with unease, if not outright concern. For Filipino couples who identify with the Double Income, No Kids (DINK) lifestyle, this choice is rarely about ease or selfishness—it is, instead, a quiet and deliberate act of living life on one’s own terms. National trends reveal that more Filipinos are rethinking the traditional path of marriage and parenthood. The country’s fertility rate has dropped below replacement level, and half of married women report no desire for additional children (PSA, 2023; Santos, 2020). Supporting this, a survey conducted for this study found that 58.5 percent of 215 survey respondents are considering a DINK lifestyle. Yet despite this growing shift, many DINK couples still find themselves the subject of pity or criticism, particularly when conversations turn to aging.

In a culture where elders often rely on children for physical, emotional, and financial support, the absence of offspring in later life raises complicated questions. Who will care for them? Who will sit at their bedside in sickness or old age? Who will remember them?

What does it mean to age without children in a society that expects them? For many Filipino DINK couples, the answer lies in reimagining aging not as a descent into loneliness, but as a journey shaped by mutual care, financial foresight, and emotional resilience. Rather than fear the absence of children, they focus on nurturing the presence of each other. Couple 10 reflected on this quiet understanding:

“We do not have children to accompany us to the hospital or join us at check-ups. But as long as we are both alive, we will be there for each other. We are not afraid of growing old—only the thought of losing one another. We are getting ready for old age spending so much for our life insurances.”

Her partner continued,

“I do not think of aging in terms of who will take care of us. I think about how we can continue living with dignity, even as the world starts to slow down for us. And I hope that people who once we made connection with, will still remain in communication with us.”

Couple 9 brought to light the social invisibility that can come with childlessness in old age. They shared:

“Most of the time, when you grow old without children, it feels like you no longer have an identity in society’s eyes. During family gatherings, we are the ones asked, ‘Still no children?’ as though we have contributed nothing. But we know that our love, our teamwork, and our efforts still matter, even if we grow old with just each other. So long as we love each other in our lifetime, we can survive.”

Couple 8 expressed a reflection that felt like a whisper of hope:

“If the time comes when we begin to forget things, I hope what we will remember is the love we shared. That alone would make everything worth it.”

Their stories reveal not fear of being alone, but a powerful desire to grow old with meaning. To age, for them, is not to decline but to continue choosing one another, every day, with tenderness, love, and care. Without the built-in assurance of filial care, Filipino DINK couples often look ahead with both realism and resolve. Their imagined futures are not passive outcomes, rather they are deliberate constructions shaped by planning, saving, and dreaming differently. Couple 7 shared with pride,

“We do not have children to look after us, but that does not mean we do not have a plan. We are building our retirement fund, investing wisely, and securing healthcare. Others might think we are pitiful, but we are just trying not to become a

burden to anyone."

Their pragmatism is encapsulated by a deep sense of accountability, not only to each other but to their future selves. Other reflections carried heavier emotional undertones, as Couple 6 admitted,

"Sometimes I cry, not because I regret not having children, but because I fear we will have no one with us when we grow old. But we take care of each other. That is what it means to be true partners, to stay until the very end."

This sense of permanence, of mutual promise, offers an emotional foundation in the absence of traditional family structures. For many, future planning also involves advocating for systems that include people like them. As Couple 1 spoke candidly:

"Most elderly services in the Philippines are built around the idea that older adults have families. But we do not. That is why we are preparing everything—insurance, emergency funds. Still, we hope that someday there will be policies that include people like us."

This yearning goes beyond personal survival, it reflects a call for structural change. Couple 2 envisioned new possibilities:

"If we grow old and get sick, where do we go? You cannot always depend on relatives. That is why we are thinking of moving to a private assisted-living community, or maybe build one with our friends who are also DINKs. We will help each other. Like a cooperative for child-free aging."

One of the most moving testimonies came from a couple, who shared a quiet fear and an even louder hope:

"Whenever I see an elderly person in a poorly managed care home, I cannot help but wonder, what if that becomes us? That is why we dream of helping build something better. A place where childless elders are respected and cared for. Aging should not be a punishment for not reproducing."

These stories reveal something powerful: Filipino DINK couples are not living lightly or thoughtlessly. They are preparing for futures that may look different from the norm, but are no less full of meaning. These narratives make it clear that Filipino DINK couples are not living recklessly or selfishly, as they are often perceived. On the contrary, they are engaging in a form of anticipatory care—investing time, resources, and emotion into preparing for a future where they can grow old with agency, not abandonment. In Giddens' terms, their choices reflect *structured agency*: the capacity to act intentionally within the bounds of societal norms, while also subtly reshaping them. Through reflexive planning, such as securing health insurance, building support networks, or imagining aging, they stretch their decisions across time and space, embodying Giddens' concept of *time-space distanciation*. Their futures are not confined to the here and now, but actively woven across imagined tomorrows. In doing so, they call not only for personal readiness, but for a cultural and institutional reimagining of what it truly means to age with dignity in the Philippines.

4. CONCLUSION

The Filipino family, long held as the bedrock of moral, economic, and emotional life, is undergoing a subtle but profound transformation. This study has foregrounded the voices of Double Income, No Kids (DINK) couples, individuals whose life choices challenge prevailing cultural scripts, but do so not with the goal of dismantling tradition, but with the intention of constructing an alternative form of kinship that is comfortable within the prevailing social realities. Their stories reveal that the decision not to have children, far from being an act of selfishness or individualism, can be an informed, responsible, and affective response to contemporary social, economic, and relational realities.

In many ways, DINK couples embody what Anthony Giddens (1984) conceptualized as "structured agency." They live within the boundaries of cultural expectations—those that define parenthood as a moral duty and marriage as a means to reproduction—while simultaneously reshaping these structures through their lived practices. They demonstrate the "duality of structure," where social systems both constrain and are reconstituted through human action. In their conscious decision to forgo childbearing, they are not merely passive recipients of social change; they are agents of transformation whose micro-level decisions ripple across the broader terrain of Filipino kinship. Survey data from this study, corroborated by national trends, paints a compelling picture of the changing family landscape. The Philippine Statistics Authority (2023) reported a decline in the national fertility rate to 1.9, the lowest in the country's history falling below the replacement level of 2.1. Likewise, 58.5% of the 215 respondents in this study expressed an openness or preference toward a child-free lifestyle in the future. These figures are not anomalies, they are social facts indicative of evolving preferences around intimacy, responsibility, and life planning.

The implications of these findings reach far beyond the boundaries of private choice—they speak to the shifting architecture of family and citizenship in the Philippines. At the policy level, the study underscores the urgency of rethinking state frameworks that still hinge on reproduction as a prerequisite for social worth. There is a clear need to decouple state benefits and protections from reproductive status so that aging Filipinos without children are not left on the margins of healthcare planning, pension systems, and social welfare programs. Recognizing childfree couples as legitimate family units invites policymakers to design support systems grounded in inclusion rather than conformity.

At the cultural level, the research opens space for dialogue within institutions that shape Filipino values—schools, churches, and communities—to broaden their definitions of family. When the idea of family expands to include couples who live purposefully without children, it becomes possible to embrace the diversity of modern Filipino life without moral judgment or stigma. Doing so enriches collective understanding of care, companionship, and fulfillment beyond traditional kinship roles.

From an academic standpoint, this study fills a long-standing gap in Philippine sociology. The DINK lifestyle, while visible in global sociological debates, has remained largely absent from local research. By documenting how Filipino couples navigate economic, social, and emotional landscapes outside parenthood, this work contributes to an evolving portrait of the

Filipino family—one that reflects mobility, choice, and changing gender roles. Its findings can inform CHED's sociology curricula by encouraging the integration of emerging family forms into modules on gender, social institutions, and population studies. Including discussions on DINK households can help students critically examine how power, culture, and agency intersect in the making of modern families. In the context of regional development planning, insights from this research can guide local governments in designing programs that reflect real household structures—supporting inclusive housing, livelihood, and eldercare systems that accommodate both childfree and childrearing populations.

In conclusion, the experiences of Filipino DINK couples illustrate a society in flux. Their lives are emblematic of a broader negotiation between tradition and modernity, structure and agency, norm and deviation. They remind us that family is not a static institution, but a living system, one that must evolve if it is to remain relevant and just. These couples may not raise children, but they raise important questions about autonomy, meaning, and kinship in the twenty-first century. And in those questions lies the possibility of a more expansive, empathic, and plural or diverse understanding of what it means to be family in the Philippines. This research contributes to a richer, more grounded discourse on what it means to build a family and a nation. By giving visibility to couples who choose a different path, it calls attention to the evolving realities of love, responsibility, and social belonging in the Philippines. In doing so, it not only expands the vocabulary of Philippine sociology but also strengthens the moral and intellectual groundwork for a more inclusive and empathetic society.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The researcher observed strict ethical standards in conducting this study. Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Dean of the College of Arts and Social Sciences at Mindanao State University - Iligan Institute of Technology (MSU-IIT). Before any data collection took place, ethics clearance was secured from the Research Integrity and Compliance Office (RICO) of Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology (Ethics Clearance Code UERB-2025-00034).

The nature and purpose of the study were clearly explained to all informants, ensuring that they fully understood its scope. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to protect the identity and personal information of each participant. Informants were invited to participate through an informed consent process, where they acknowledged their rights and the voluntary nature of their involvement. Participants were informed of their right to refuse to answer any questions they found intrusive or uncomfortable and were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any point without any negative consequences.

For the online survey component, informed consent was presented in a separate section of the Google Form before the questionnaire itself. Respondents were given the option to proceed with the survey only after indicating their consent. If a respondent chose not to participate, the form would terminate without recording any information. This ensured that participation was entirely voluntary and that no data was collected without explicit consent.

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