

Exploring the Levels of Readiness in Assuming Filial Responsibility among Filipino Adults



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ABSTRACT

Introduction: The study examines the readiness of Filipino adults to fulfill their filial duties within the cultural context of the Philippines, where filial piety is regarded as crucial for upholding the family's collective reputation and mitigating potential social stigma.

Methods: The researchers utilized a quantitative research methodology with a descriptive and normative approach. They collected data via an online survey administered to 403 participants. The respondents' preparedness to fulfill filial obligations was assessed using a standardized scale measuring readiness for filial responsibility.

Results: The results suggest that most Filipino adults are not fully prepared to meet their filial obligations towards their aging parents. While they exhibit moderate level of readiness to provide physical, emotional, spiritual, and psychological support, the data indicates they are ill-equipped to assume the financial responsibilities associated with caring for their aging parents. The study also found that the adult child's physical distance from the aging parent significantly affects their capacity to provide physical support, with those living away from their parents exhibiting greater readiness to offer financial assistance compared to those who are co-residing with their parents. Additionally, individuals with independent sources of income demonstrated higher levels of preparedness to fulfill the financial responsibilities associated with their filial obligations.

Conclusion: The intricate and multifaceted nature of the obligations which adult children have towards their aging parents underscores the need for a customized and personalized approach in supporting the older persons, rather than a universal expectation.

KEYWORDS: Filial Responsibility, Adults, Readiness for Filial Responsibility, Filial Piety, Older persons

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

In the Filipino culture, the family serves as the fundamental unit of social organization (Ballon & Tamoria, 2023). While the nuclear family is central, extended family ties are frequently deeply interwoven (Abalos & Yeung, 2024; Becina & Carpio, 2019). Filipinos are encouraged to maintain robust relationships not only with their parents but also with aunts, uncles, and other relatives (Gutierrez, 2017). As such, familial connections may extend beyond biological kinship, encompassing distant relatives, close neighbors, and even friends (Fatalla, 2023). The common practice of addressing non-blood relatives and associates using kinship terms like "Tita," "Tito," "Lola," and "Lolo" exemplifies the expansive nature of Filipino family structures. It is not uncommon for a grandchild to refer to their Filipino grandparents' friends and cousins using these familial titles.

Filipinos are renowned for their strong and close-knit family bonds (Goyal, 2019). A salient aspect of Filipino family life is the concept of filial piety, which emphasizes the reverence and respect that children are expected to show towards their parents (Uy, 2023). Filipino adults anticipate their offspring to provide care and support for their parents, driven by a sense of duty and obligation rooted in the Filipino value of "utang na loob" or debt of gratitude (Medina & Medina, 2023; Yiu, 2016). As children mature, they are socialized to prioritize the well-being and needs of their parents, offering emotional, practical, and financial assistance as required (Fu et al., 2018; Wakui & Cheng, 2023). This normative trait of maintaining a debt of gratitude aligns well with the concept of filial piety, which entails the dutiful act of care and respect for one's elders and parents (O'Neil, 2021).

In the Filipino cultural context, filial piety is believed to be essential for preserving the family's collective reputation and avoiding social embarrassment (hiya) (Awi, 2023; Dominguez, 2017). Many Filipinos hold the perspective that each family member

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has multiple responsibilities and obligations that they must fulfill (Guzman & Teh, 2016). The prevalent belief among most Filipinos is that each family member has specific duties and responsibilities that they must uphold, as this is crucial for sustaining respect and ensuring harmony within the family (Lumbay, 2021). For instance, family members are expected to consistently show respect towards their elders (Choi et al., 2017). Moreover, the opinions and views of younger family members and children are often considered secondary to those of their seniors (Toyokawa & Igarashi, 2016). Additionally, the responsibility of providing care for aging family members typically falls upon their offspring or grandchildren (Abalos et al., 2018).

The practice of filial piety in the Philippines is a complex and nuanced phenomenon. While Filipino individuals generally revere their elders and prioritize family values, instances of tension and resentment can arise, particularly among younger generations who may feel overburdened by the familial obligations imposed upon them (Gregorio et al., 2023; Pan et al., 2022). Filipino young adults may occasionally face challenges in balancing their personal aspirations and needs with the demands and expectations of their families. As such, it is crucial to assess the preparedness of adult offsprings in upholding their filial responsibilities. This study was aimed to explore the varying levels of readiness among Filipino adults in assuming the role of providing physical, financial, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support to their aging parents and other older family members.

Theoretical Framework

Bowen's Family Systems Theory offers a significant framework for evaluating an adult child's preparedness to assume filial responsibilities. This theory conceptualizes human behavior and relationships, positing that highly influential individuals within the nuclear family have a significant impact on the ways in which other family members interact and function (Harrison, 2019; Muniandy & Muniandy, 2022). The family systems perspective views the family as a framework where a change in one member leads to compensatory adjustments and reciprocal interactions among other relatives (Chavkin, 2020; Gavazzi & Lim, 2023). This perspective elucidates why individuals tend to seek their family's attention, approval, and support, and respond to the needs, expectations, and disappointments of others (Cavaiola, 2020). Such interdependence is believed to promote cohesiveness and collaboration among family members in providing security, shelter, and guidance to one another. The degree to which an adult child is prepared to assume filial responsibilities can be understood through the lens of Bowen's Family Systems Theory, which highlights the reciprocal relationship between individual development and family dynamics (Montayre et al., 2019). This explains why when adult children perceive the changing needs of their aging parents, would immediately assume the implied responsibilities of providing practical, emotional, and financial support.

Nevertheless, prolonged strain can lead to anxiety and other issues. If this tension remains unresolved, the emotional bonds among relatives may exacerbate stress, thus causing at least one family member to feel overwhelmed, detached, and unstable (Cohen, 2023). These individuals often bear the burden of pressure and systemic strain, which can consequently make them more susceptible to experiencing depression, substance abuse issues, illnesses, and physical health problems (Coy, 2019).

The social exchange theory (1964) provides another possible explanation for the strong support of filial obligations. According to this theory, individuals are motivated by a sense of personal responsibility and aim to maximize their rewards while minimizing the costs they incur in a relationship (Makhubele & Kekwaletswe, 2017; Stafford & Kuiper, 2021). The social exchange theory posits that relationships are governed by a norm of reciprocity, whereby individuals are expected to respond in kind to benefits or favors received from others (Kim, 2021; Ko et al., 2023). According to the social exchange theory, parents provide various necessities to their children, such as food, shelter, care, and socialization. As a result, children are expected to ensure their parents' emotional and material well-being, especially when the parents are ill or disabled. This relationship creates an implicit agreement where each family member will receive the inherent support within the relationship (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2017).

Lastly, the Filial Care Theory (2020) provides a comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved in filial responsibilities. It considers factors such as family dynamics, relationships between generations, cultural influences, and socioeconomic conditions. This theory posits that filial care is the fulfillment of the children's implied duty to safeguard their parents' survival, well-being, and dignity (Uy & Palompon, 2020). This assumed obligation stems from a sense of moral duty, gratitude, and reciprocity towards one's parents, and is further reinforced by cultural norms and societal expectations and may be fulfilled in the form of physical, psychological, financial, emotional and spiritual support (Uy, 2020). As individuals age and their functional capacities diminish, societal expectations dictate that younger family members provide care for their older relatives as part of an implicit familial agreement (Uy & Palompon, 2020). Moreover, the Filial Care Theory posits that this filial care is driven by the vulnerability and dependency of the older family member, as they become increasingly reliant on their younger relatives for physical, emotional, and financial support as their own capacities diminish with age (Uy & Palompon, 2020).

The Filial Care Theory acknowledges that the ways in which filial care is provided evolve in response to sociocultural changes, shifting family structures, and evolving societal expectations (Uy & Palompon, 2020). As societies progress and family dynamics transform, the specific manifestations of filial care adapt to reflect these broader cultural and relational shifts (Uy & Palompon, 2020). For example, adult children may become less available for direct caregiving responsibilities due to factors such as geographic distance, competing professional and personal obligations, or changing attitudes towards traditional caregiving roles. In such cases, the fulfillment of filial care may involve alternative arrangements, such as coordination of care between family members, utilization of formal caregiving services, or delegating certain caregiving duties to younger generations like grandchildren

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(Uy & Palompon, 2020). The theory recognizes that the practice of filial care is not static, but rather a dynamic process that evolves alongside the sociocultural and familial landscape.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a cross-sectional design, where the researchers aimed to gather data to identify the respondents' readiness in assuming filial responsibility. A cross-sectional study is a type of observational research that analyzes data of variables collected at a single point in time across a sample population or a pre-defined subset. This approach provides a snapshot of the target population's characteristics, attitudes, and behaviors at a specific moment, allowing researchers to explore the relationships between different variables (Fleetwood, 2021).

The researchers employed a quantitative research design that utilized a descriptive normative approach. This approach leverages statistics and values considered typical or standard for the surveyed population to gather data and gain insights on a particular subject matter. The researchers opted for the descriptive method as it is a widely used technique to obtain information, often using questionnaires. This methodological choice was deemed appropriate for the present study, which aimed to assess the readiness of adult children in assuming filial responsibility.

The study was conducted in the Philippines, which had a total population of 109,035,343 as of May 1, 2020 (Census of Population and Housing, 2020). The researchers employed a simple random sampling, a type of probability sampling where participants were randomly selected from the population (Depersio, 2021). This method is the simplest of all probability sampling techniques, requiring a single random selection and little prior knowledge of the population (Bhardwaj, 2019). Research conducted on this sample should have excellent internal and external validity due to the randomization (Fisher & Fethney, 2016). This sampling approach is used to extract a smaller sample from a larger population and then use it to gather sufficient data and draw conclusions about the broader group (Depersio, 2021). The researchers employed a set of criteria to guide the selection of study participants. Specifically, they sought individuals who were: a) Filipino adults aged 18 or above; b) had prior experience in caregiving for an aging parent or is anticipating caring for an aging parent c) Living in the Philippines, d) had access to the internet; and e) were willing to participate in the study without any monetary incentive.

When a sample is taken from a population, a formula must be used to consider confidence levels and margins of error (Ellen, 2021). Several research studies have used Slovin's formula to determine the sample size (denoted as n). This formula considers the total population size (N), as well as the desired margin of error (e) (Ellen, 2021). Using the formula, with the margin of error set at 0.05, the minimum sample size was computed to be 399.99 (approximately 400 respondents). A total of 403 valid responses were analyzed in this study.

After receiving institutional approval from the Capitol University College of Health Sciences (then College of Nursing), the researchers utilized Google Forms to distribute online questionnaires and gather the necessary data. To maximize participation, the researchers reached out to potential participants through various online channels, including social media platforms, community forums, and personal networks. The online survey collected demographic data and included questions that assess the respondent's current situation and responsibilities. For instance, the first two questions in the online survey served as qualifiers to ensure that the respondents either 1.) currently provide any form of support to an aging parent or 2.) anticipate having an aging parent becoming dependent on them. At least one of these criteria must be met for the respondent to qualify for this tool. If both questions #1 and #2 were answered with "NO", the respondent is considered unqualified for this study, thus his/her responses to the online survey were not included in the analysis.

In the online survey, the researchers utilized a standardized instrument called the Readiness for Filial Responsibility (RFR) Scale to gather the necessary data. This scale was designed to assess the participants' preparedness to assume filial care responsibilities for their aging parents or relatives. The scale evaluated various dimensions of filial care, including physical, financial, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support (see figure 1) (Uy, 2020). With robust psychometric properties, the RFR scale has an average scale-level content validity index of 0.952, a scale-level content validity index for universal agreement of 0.88, and an internal consistency of 0.973 (Cayetano et al., 2024, Uy, 2020). The RFR Scale consists of 22 items (grouped into 5 clusters), each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" (Uy, 2020). The first cluster includes five items that evaluate an individual's readiness for providing physical support. The second cluster, with five elements, assesses the readiness for financial support. The third cluster, with four items, measures the readiness for psychological support. The fourth cluster encompasses four items that gauge the readiness for emotional support. Finally, the fifth cluster consists of four items that assess the readiness for spiritual support. Each of the five cluster scores and the RFR total score had a minimum of 1.0 and a maximum of 5.0 (Uy, 2020). The cluster and RFR scores were interpreted using three categories: Poorly Prepared, Moderately Prepared, and Highly Prepared. This helped to determine the participant's level of readiness in each category. The score ranges and their interpretations are displayed in table 1 (Uy, 2020).

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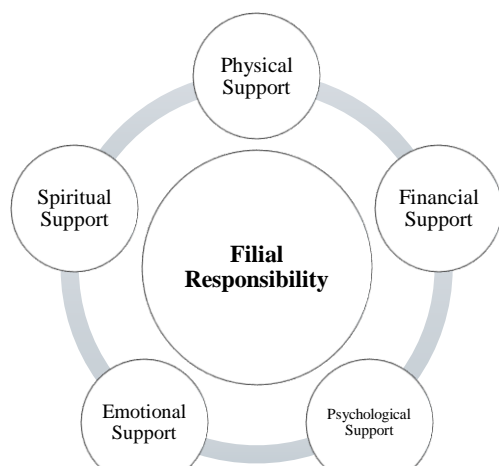


Figure 1. The five themes that are equally important in the assumption of filial responsibility (Uy, 2020).

Table 1. The score ranges and the assigned interpretation of the RFR scale (Uy, 2020).

Score Range	Interpretation
1.00 - 2.33	Poorly Prepared
2.34 - 3.67	Moderately Prepared
3.68 - 5.00	Highly Prepared

The researchers analyzed the data by calculating the mean values to describe the levels of readiness for filial responsibility among the respondents, including physical, financial, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support. They also investigated differences in readiness levels using Welch's t-test, comparing those who live with aging parents, have dependent children, have income sources, and have commitments requiring regular physical presence. Additionally, they examined the relationships among the different types of support using Pearson correlation analysis. All comparative and correlative analyses performed were set at 0.05 significance level and were conducted using SPSS version 21.0.

RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The study assessed the readiness of Filipino adult children in fulfilling their filial obligations, which encompass physical, financial, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support. The survey data from 403 respondents showed that, on average, they were moderately prepared to assume these responsibilities, with a mean score of 3.25. However, individual differences were noted based on their personal circumstances and family dynamics. Respondents exhibited moderate preparedness in terms of physical, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support, with respective mean levels of 3.40, 3.52, 3.65, and 3.59. Nonetheless, the findings revealed that the adult Filipino respondents were poorly prepared in terms of financial capability, which emerged as a critical factor in fulfilling their filial duties. The study results align with previous research (Cayetano et al., 2024), which found that a sizable proportion (32.5%) of Filipino adults are not fully prepared to financially support their aging parents' basic needs. This is largely attributed to their limited personal incomes and other financial commitments that hinder their ability to fulfill this filial obligation.

Table 2 indicates no statistically significant variations in the mean levels of preparedness for providing physical assistance among adults based on their living arrangements with aging parents, the presence or absence of dependent children, or the availability of income sources. However, a significant difference (T-Value: 2.4443; P Value: 0.0159) emerged when comparing respondents with commitments necessitating their physical presence and those without such obligations. These findings suggest that the physical availability of the adult child assuming filial responsibility is a crucial factor in their ability to deliver physical support. Adult children whose personal and professional commitments necessitate prolonged physical separation from their aging parents are less capable of providing timely physical assistance and emotional support in response to their parents' emergencies or needs.

In terms of financial preparedness, the Welch's T-Test analysis revealed significant disparities in the mean levels of financial readiness for filial responsibilities. Specifically, adults residing with their aging parents exhibited lower levels ($\bar{x}=1.99$; $SD=1.17$) of financial preparedness compared to those not living with their older relatives ($\bar{x}=2.29$; $SD=1.05$). This difference in financial preparedness may be attributed to the financial burdens associated with living with aging parents, as the adult children are more directly responsible for covering the daily living expenses and healthcare costs of their older relatives. In contrast, those who live away from their parents are more likely to have independent sources of income, which enhances their financial capacity to fulfill filial duties through monetary support. Furthermore, individuals with a source of income demonstrated greater financial readiness ($\bar{x}=2.44$; $SD=1.07$) than those without ($\bar{x}=1.95$; $SD=1.10$). Moreover, adults with commitments necessitating regular physical presence also showed significantly higher financial readiness ($\bar{x}=2.33$; $SD=1.22$ vs $\bar{x}=2.03$; $SD=1.06$). This could be attributed to the notion that individuals with such obligations tend to have more stable careers and financial resources, thus better positioning them to provide monetary support to their aging parents. These findings suggest that adults not living with their aging parents, who may lack direct experience in supporting their older relatives, perceive themselves as more financially equipped to fulfill their filial obligations.

Conversely, the capacity of adult children to provide psychological, emotional, and spiritual support to their aging parents

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appears unaffected by factors like living arrangements, having dependent children, having personal income, or personal/professional commitments. The Welch's t-test found no significant differences in the level of readiness for these types of support among the participants. This suggests a general consistency and resilience in the preparedness for delivering intangible support as part of filial duty, regardless of individual circumstances. The adult children exhibited a similar ability to offer mental and emotional well-being support to their aging parents, highlighting the importance they place on this aspect of filial piety.

Table 2. Welch T- test results comparing levels of physical, psychological, financial, emotional and spiritual support when grouped according to living arrangements, responsibilities for dependent children, income sources, or competing personal and professional commitments.

		Mean	SD	T value	P - value	Decision
Living with ageing parent						
Readiness for Physical Support	Yes	3.38	0.95	0.2946	0.7685	Accepted
	No	3.41	0.96			
Readiness for Psychological Support	Yes	3.59	0.99	-1.0248	0.3063	Accepted
	No	3.49	1.03			
Readiness for Financial Support	Yes	1.99	1.17	-2.6095	0.0095	Rejected
	No	2.29	1.05			
Readiness for Emotional Support	Yes	3.71	1.01	-0.933	0.3515	Accepted
	No	3.61	1.05			
Readiness for Spiritual Support	Yes	3.67	1.03	-1.3099	0.1912	Accepted
	No	3.53	1.09			
Have dependent children						
Readiness for Physical Support	Yes	3.23	1.03	0.8152	0.4228	Accepted
	No	3.40	0.95			
Readiness for Psychological Support	Yes	3.65	1.02	-0.6758	0.5054	Accepted
	No	3.51	0.98			
Readiness for Financial Support	Yes	2.53	1.34	-1.6562	0.1108	Accepted
	No	2.07	1.08			
Readiness for Emotional Support	Yes	3.57	1.07	0.2867	0.7767	Accepted
	No	3.64	1.03			
Readiness for Spiritual Support	Yes	3.64	1.10	-0.2755	0.7852	Accepted
	No	3.57	1.07			
Have source of income						
Readiness for Physical Support	Yes	3.41	0.99	-0.1826	0.8553	Accepted
	No	3.39	0.94			
Readiness for Psychological Support	Yes	3.54	0.97	-0.3159	0.7523	Accepted
	No	3.51	1.03			
Readiness for Financial Support	Yes	2.44	1.07	-4.0529	<0.0001	Rejected
	No	1.95	1.10			
Readiness for Emotional Support	Yes	3.60	0.93	0.4408	0.6597	Accepted
	No	3.65	1.08			
Readiness for Spiritual Support	Yes	3.58	1.01	0.0045	0.9964	Accepted
	No	3.57	1.09			
Has any commitments that demand physical presence						
Readiness for Physical Support	Yes	3.16	1.01	2.4443	0.0159	Rejected
	No	3.46	0.93			
Readiness for Psychological Support	Yes	3.44	1.14	0.7654	0.4456	Accepted
	No	3.54	0.97			
Readiness for Financial Support	Yes	2.33	1.22	-2.0895	0.0387	Rejected
	No	2.03	1.06			
	Yes	3.53	1.08	1.0519	0.2948	Accepted

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Readiness for Emotional Support	No	3.67	1.02			
Readiness for Spiritual Support	Yes	3.53	1.10	0.4159	0.6781	Accepted
	No	3.59	1.06			

The Interrelationships Among Respondents' Levels of Readiness

The study utilized the Pearson correlation coefficient to explore the underlying relationships between the different dimensions of readiness for filial support. The linear trends in the data points representing the paired dimensions of filial responsibility are visually depicted in Figure 2, along with an estimated regression line.

Table 3. Strength of correlations among readiness for support variables.

	Readiness for physical support	Readiness for financial support	Readiness for psychological support	Readiness for emotional support	Readiness for spiritual support
Readiness for physical support	***	r= 0.3521 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.7392 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.7307 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.5945 P-value: <0.01
Readiness for financial support	r= 0.3521 P-value: <0.01	***	r= 0.3034 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.2211 P-value: <0.001	r= 0.2360 P-value: <0.01
Readiness for psychological support	r= 0.7392 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.3034 P-value: <0.01	***	r= 0.8417 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.7411 P-value: <0.01
Readiness for emotional support	r= 0.7307 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.2211 P-value: <0.001	r= 0.8417 P-value: <0.01	***	r= 0.8046 P-value: <0.01
Readiness for spiritual support	r= 0.5945 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.2360 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.7411 P-value: <0.01	r= 0.8046 P-value: <0.01	***

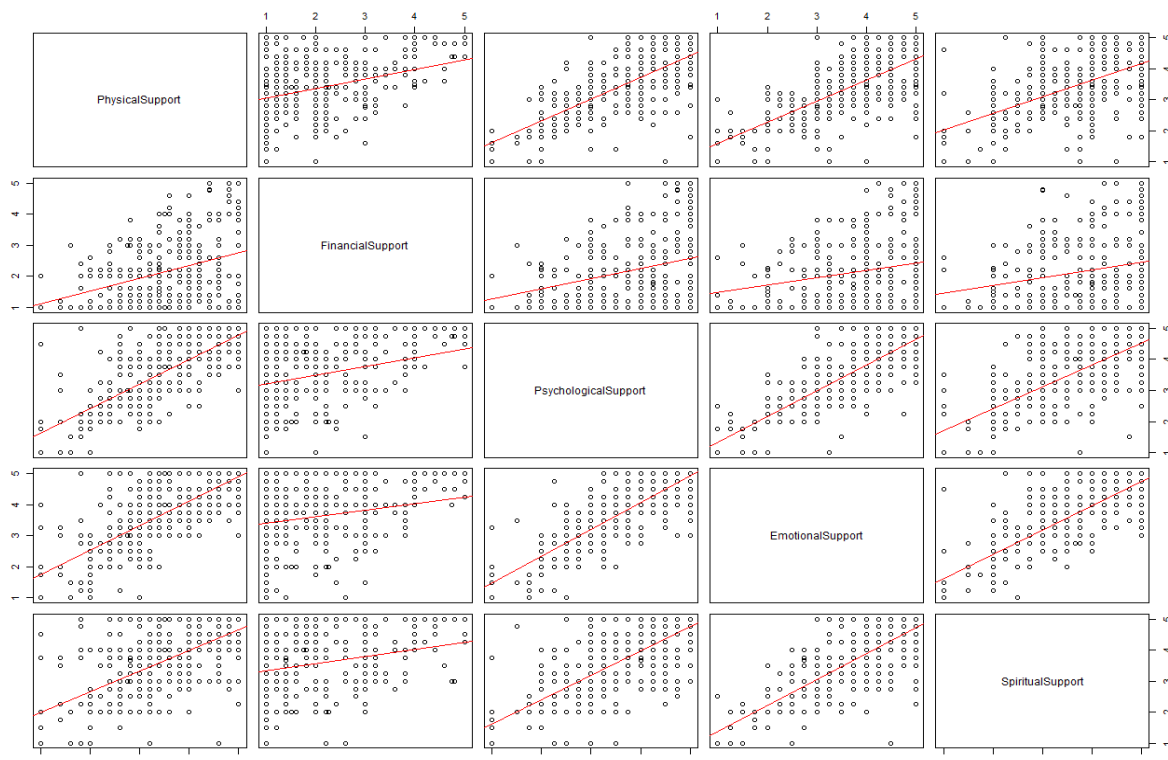


Figure 2. Pairwise correlations of levels of readiness in assuming filial responsibility.

The correlation analysis revealed that the five dimensions of filial responsibility - physical, financial, psychological, emotional, and spiritual support - were significantly interrelated. Specifically, the findings showed low positive correlations between financial support and emotional support, as well as that between financial support and spiritual support. Moderate positive correlations were observed between physical support and financial support, and between financial support and psychological

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support. Moreover, strong positive correlations were found among physical support and psychological support, physical support and emotional support, physical support and spiritual support, psychological support and emotional support, psychological support and spiritual support, and emotional support and spiritual support. These correlation patterns validate the conceptual assumption of Uy (2020) that these five aspects of filial responsibility are interconnected in the way individuals fulfill their filial obligations.

SYNTHESIS

The study found that readiness for physical support for aging parents was primarily influenced by the adult children's personal and professional commitments, rather than factors like living arrangements, having dependent children, or maintaining personal income sources. However, the readiness for providing financial support to one's aging parents differed, with adults living with their aging parents and those living without personal income sources exhibiting remarkably lower financial preparedness than their counterparts. In contrast, the levels of readiness for psychological, emotional, and spiritual support were consistent across different living and employment circumstances. These findings suggest that filial responsibility is a multidimensional concept, with the physical, financial, and intangible aspects being shaped by distinct personal and contextual factors.

CONCLUSION

Personal circumstances of adult children influence their readiness to fulfill different components of filial responsibility. While the capacity for physical and financial support is affected by factors such as living arrangements and income, the ability to provide emotional, psychological, and spiritual care appears more consistent across diverse situations. Their living conditions and professional commitments may limit the adult children's direct involvement in certain aspects of filial piety, but they remain committed to upholding their overall filial obligations. This suggests a nuanced understanding of filial piety, where adult children adapt their support based on their circumstances yet maintain a holistic commitment to caring for their aging parents. The complex and multidimensional nature of filial obligations underscores the need for a tailored and personalized approach in supporting the aging population, rather than a universal expectation.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors listed certify that they have no affiliations or involvement with any organization or entity that has a financial or non-financial interest in the subject matter, or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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ETHICAL STATEMENT

This study involving human participants was reviewed and approved by the research committee of the College of Health Sciences (formerly College of Nursing) of Capitol University. At the time of conducting this study, the university had no established institutional research ethics board to review the protocol and grant the approval. The respondents provided their informed consent to participate in this study. Full disclosure with the respondents and data privacy were also maintained throughout the completion and publication of this research.

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