

Delay Rather Than Rejection of Marriage: The Meaning of Cohabitation Outside Marriage Through the Eyes of Live-In Couples

Jemafe A. Gabutero

Graduate School Holy Cross of Davao College Philippines

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.47772/IJRISS.2026.100500742>

Received: 20 May 2026; Accepted: 25 May 2026; Published: 12 June 2026

ABSTRACT

Cohabitation outside marriage is a pressing social issue. Using qualitative descriptive study, I explored the meaning of cohabitation and marriage postponement as perceived by five unmarried couples. My in-depth interviews made me realized that cohabitation outside marriage is described as similar to marriage and a socially negotiated relationship, while marriage postponement is viewed as a delay rather than rejection of marriage. In this study, I highlighted the need for counseling and outreach programs to promote informed decisions among live-in couples. I believe that research across diverse contexts is needed to better understand the economic, social, and cultural factors influencing cohabitation and marriage decisions.

Keywords: Delay rather than rejection of marriage, cohabitation outside marriage, live-in couples

INTRODUCTION

The Problem and its Setting

In the global context, I have noticed that cohabitation and marriage postponement have become increasingly visible among long-term live-in couples worldwide. Many couples now remain in cohabiting relationships for extended periods without entering formal marriage, reflecting changes in how commitment and family life are understood in contemporary society (Caprinali et al., 2023). Researchers have also observed that the growing prevalence of non-marital unions and delayed marriages has raised concerns about the changing role and social value of marriage (Zahl-Olsen et al., 2023).

Across various countries, I learned that cohabitation and marriage postponement are becoming more common among long-term live-in couples. In Spain, many couples stay in cohabiting unions for years before deciding on marriage (Caprinali et al., 2023). In Norway, cohabitation has become a common form of partnership instead of immediate marriage (Zahl-Olsen et al., 2023). In Japan, increasing numbers of unmarried adults reflect changing views on marriage and family life (Kawata & Komura, 2023). These trends show that long-term cohabitation and delayed marriage are significant social issues in many societies.

In the Philippine context, I have found that cohabitation and marriage postponement have also become more noticeable among long-term live-in couples. Studies revealed a continuing rise in cohabiting unions while formal marriages continue to decline (Abalos, 2024). Long-term live-in arrangements are becoming more common, reflecting changing perspectives on marriage, commitment, and family formation in Philippine society where marriage has traditionally been highly valued (Abalos, 2024).

The persistence of cohabitation and marriage postponement may lead to several social and relational consequences. Studies suggest that prolonged cohabitation without marriage may contribute to relationship instability and higher risks of union dissolution compared to married couples (Zahl-Olsen et al., 2023). In the Philippines, the increase in non-marital unions has also been associated with changes in traditional family structures and the growing number of children born outside formal marriage (Abalos, 2024). These consequences highlight why cohabitation and marriage postponement continue to be viewed as important social concerns. Collectively, I understand that it is for this reason that this study was conducted.

Research Question

In this study, I aimed to answer the following questions:

1. What meanings of cohabitation do long-term live-in couples create through their interactions with themselves and others?
2. What behaviors of long-term live-in couples are influenced by their meanings of cohabitation?
3. What are the perceptions of long-term cohabiting couples on marriage postponement?

Significance of the Study

In this study, I aimed to highlight the perspectives of long-term cohabiting couples who postpone marriage. My findings may contribute to Sustainable Development Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) by showing how economic conditions and relationship stability influence couples' opportunities to formalize their unions. I also emphasized the importance of moral, spiritual, and social dimensions in addressing delayed marriage, aligning with the mission and vision of The Holy Cross of Davao College (HCDC).

For participants, this study may provide space to reflect on their experiences and challenges. For families, communities, and educators, it offers insights into shifting relationship patterns and their impact on social expectations and values. Policymakers and leaders may use the findings to design support systems for diverse family arrangements, while academics and future researchers can draw on this work to deepen understanding of changing marriage practices in the Philippine context.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

My study is anchored in Symbolic Interactionism (Blumer, 1969), which explains how individuals construct meaning through social interaction. Symbolic Interactionism Theory explains that human behavior is shaped by the meanings people assign to things, and these meanings are developed through social interaction. It emphasizes that individuals are not passive responders to their environment; instead, they actively interpret and give meaning to their experiences before demonstrating a particular behavior.

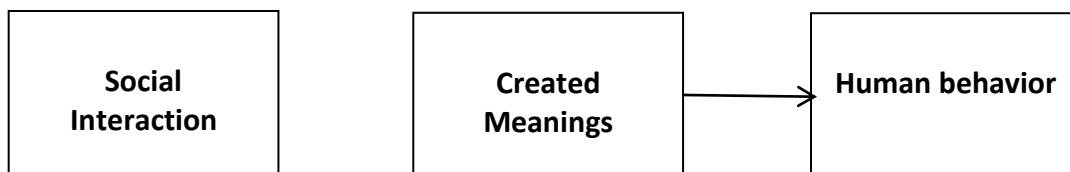


Figure 1. Conceptual Paradigm

Assumptions

In my study, I assumed that the responses of my study participants would align with what is presented in the theory, I also assumed that through their social interactions, the participants are able to shape their behavior according to the meanings they attached to cohabitation. Furthermore, I assumed that they might share insights or experiences that are not covered in the framework, which could possibly emerge as new themes in the study.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In my study, I employed qualitative-descriptive research design to provide a clear and straightforward description of a phenomenon based on participants experiences, staying close to their words and meanings (Villamin et al., 2024). Qualitative descriptive research design is applied when a study seeks to provide a clear, straightforward description of participants' experiences or perceptions in everyday language without developing

theory or extensive interpretation (Sandelowski, 2000; Kim et al., 2017). This design is advantageous because it is simple, flexible and produces practical findings that are easy to understand and grounded in participants perspectives (Villamin et al., 2024)

Research Locale

I conducted my study in Barangay Pasian, Monkayo, Davao de Oro. I chose this setting because it reflects both traditional Filipino values on marriage and the modern realities of couples opting for live-in arrangements.

Sample and Sampling Technique

My study involved 10 individuals (5 couples) who had been in long-term cohabiting relationships for at least five years without transitioning to marriage (Creswell, 2013). Couples with children were included if they met the cohabitation requirement under Article 34 on Marriage Exemption in the Philippines; while those who had undergone a civil wedding, were previously married and separated, or had no intention of marrying were excluded.

Participants were selected regardless of educational or professional background, provided they were of legal age (20 years and above), had lived together for at least five years, and both partners voluntarily agreed to participate. To ensure relevance and depth, I employed purposive sampling, a non-probability technique appropriate for qualitative descriptive research, as it prioritizes rich insights over generalization.

Research Instrument

I gathered data through in-depth interviews (Fontana & Frey, 2020), which allowed participants to openly share their experiences while giving me flexibility to explore emerging themes. Using an interview guide, I covered areas such as personal and relational background, reasons for cohabitation, perceptions of marriage, factors influencing its postponement, and future perspectives. With informed consent, all sessions were audio-recorded to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Data Gathering Technique

Participants were recruited through purposive sampling, targeting long-term cohabiting couples who met the inclusion criteria. Recruitment involved personal invitations and coordination through community networks or referrals. Once participants consented, I conducted in-depth interviews (IDIs) to gather rich qualitative data. Each IDI lasted approximately 30–45 minutes, conducted face-to-face depending on participants' preferences, and was audio-recorded with informed consent to ensure accurate transcription and analysis.

Data Analysis Technique

I employed thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2016) method. This process involved familiarizing myself with the transcripts, generating initial codes, organizing them into broader themes, reviewing for coherence, and defining each theme to capture its central meaning. The final report presented themes systematically, supported by participant statements.

Trustworthiness of the Study

To ensure trustworthiness, I applied several strategies. Credibility was established through member checking and triangulation. Transferability was supported by providing thick descriptions of participants' contexts. Dependability was ensured through an audit trail documenting research decisions and processes. Confirmability was achieved through reflexivity, maintaining a journal to minimize bias and ground findings in participants' narratives. I secured the necessary ethical clearances and institutional approvals, including a Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE) certificate and an endorsement from the Dean of the Graduate School. Participants were fully informed about the purpose, procedures, and their rights through an informed consent process. Their participation was voluntary, with the option to withdraw at any time without consequence. Confidentiality was maintained using pseudonyms and secure data storage.

RESULTS

In this chapter, I present the results of my study on marriage postponement among long-term cohabiting couples. I also provide the summary of findings and my modified paradigm.

Cohabitation of long-term live-in partners created through interactions

From the interviews, I observed that my study participants consistently emphasized financial readiness and the need to prioritize basic needs over formal marriage. One of the male participants explained:

“Mao rajud to akoo nga mahuman ang balay” (“My main goal is really to finish our house.”) (Participant 1M, Line 47, Page 1), while the female participant added, *“Imong budget nga kulang kulang pa, dili jud ka kadali dali sa plano nga pakasal dayon.”* (“If your budget is still insufficient, you cannot easily proceed with plans to marry.”) (Participant 1F, Line 42, Page 1)

Another participant shared:

“Wala naman mi laing tumong nga gusto makab-ot jud gawas nga makabalay sa mi bago kasal.” (“We no longer have any other goal to achieve except to build our own house first.”) (Participant 3M, Line 175, Page 4)

As I interviewed further, the participants explicitly articulated that their lived experiences mirror that of married couples. One female participant shared:

“Kung ikumpara sa ubang magtiayon nga gikasal karon wala may kalahian sa pagpuyo mao raman, wala lang juy papel gigunitan.” (“If compared to other couples who are married, there is no difference in how we live, it’s just that we don’t have a marriage certificate.”) (Participant 1F, Lines 15-16, Page 1)

Similarly, another female participant shared:

“O, para nako pareha raman ang gikasal ug wala. Magkuyog man gihapon mo sa kalipay ug kaguol. Kaapan lang kay wa jud kay gihawiran, sa yuta pa, wala titulo.” (For me, it feels like there’s no real difference between being married and not being married. You still go through happiness and struggle together. The only downside is that there’s nothing formal holding you together, no legal title, so to speak.) (Participant 5F, Lines 338-339, Page 6)

The participants described how their relationship evolved over time, particularly in handling conflicts and responsibilities. One participant reflected:

“Sa kadugayan... murag ni matured na maka adjust na.” (“Over time, I became more mature and learned how to adjust.”) (Participant 1F, Line 6-7, Page 1), while the male participant similarly noted, *“Sauna murag gawas-sulod pa kaayo ang hunahuna... karon kay trabaho-pamilya na lang jud”* (“Before, my thinking was immature... now it is focused on work and family.”) (Participant 1F, Line 67-68, Page 1)

One male participant treated the house as a prerequisite for marriage:

“Unahon sa namo among balay ayha mi pakasal.” (“We will prioritize building our house before getting married.”) (Participant 1M, Line 20, Page 1), which was echoed by the female participant, *“Kanang naanay balay!”* (“When we already have a house!”) (Participant 1F, Line 172 Page 4)

Another participant shared...

“Basta mahuman naning among balay wala namay laing prayoridad.” (“Once our house is finished, we will no longer have any other priorities.”) (Participant 1M, Line 46, Page 1)

As we went along with the interview, my participants emphasized that having children strengthened their bond and sense of responsibility. One participant expressed:

“Kung walay anak...hagbayay ra gilayasan” (“If there were no children, one could easily just leave.”) (Participant 1M, Lines 56, Page 1), suggesting that children act as a stabilizing force. The female participant

also described their relationship as “*Simbolo sa gugma, respeto... sinabtanay*” (“*A symbol of love, respect...and mutual understanding.*”) (Participant 1F, Lines 46, Page 1)

On the other hand, I saw how firm they were as they asserted their autonomy in making decisions, particularly regarding marriage. One participant emphasized:

“*Diko musugot nga atuang ginikanan mudesisyon... kita juy maghimo ug desisyon.*” (“I will not allow our parents to decide... we are the ones who should decide.”) (Participant 1M, Line 20-21, Page 1)

Similarly, one participant remarked:

“*Kadto akong ugangan, gusto siya magpakasal ming duha unya kadtung niagi naay kasalan ng bayan, unya kay siya diman musugot kay lain man pud daw ug wa siyay ipakaon, mao tuy ingun niya.*” (“My mother-in-law wanted us to get married during a mass wedding, but he refused because he said it would be embarrassing if he couldn’t provide food.”) (Participant 2F, Lines 83-52, Page 2)

I felt the genuine commitment of the couples as they continue to narrate various difficulties, including financial instability, conflicts, and life challenges, which they navigated together. One male participant shared:

“*Daghan kaayong mga kalisdanan naatubang.*” (“We have faced many hardships.”) (Participant 3M, Lines 183-184, Page 4), while the female participant stated, “*Laban lang... kaya ra gihapon tungod sa mga anak.*” (“Just keep fighting...we can endure it because of our children.”) (Participant 2F, Lines 122, Page 3)

While participants expressed a desire to marry, they consistently linked it to economic capability. The male participant stated:

“*Lisod uy! ug wa kay saktong tigom, di jud ka kapakasal.*” (“It’s difficult! if you don’t have enough savings, you really cannot get married.”) (Participant 5M, Lines 306, Page 6), and both participants repeatedly emphasized, “*Kung nay kwarta, pakasal uy!*” (“If there is money, then we will get married.”) (Participant 2F, Lines 94, Page 2)

As the participants shared, I realized that rather than being a simple alternative to marriage, cohabitation is experienced as a dynamic and meaningful partnership that reflects both practical necessity and emotional commitment. I felt a deep sense of understanding that the meanings of cohabitation are continuously constructed through everyday interactions, shaped by love, economic realities, shared responsibilities, aspirations for the future, and influence in their behavior.

Behaviors of long-term live-in couples shaped by meaning of cohabitation

As the participants continued to construct their personal meaning of cohabitation, they also demonstrated shared responsibility in handling finances. The male participant described:

“*Ang akoang income akoo jud ihatag niya.*” (“I really give my income to her.”) (Participant 1M, Lines 30, Page 1), while the female participant explained, “*Ginasabutan namo kung unsay amoang kuanon sa kwarta.*” (“We discuss and agree on how the money will be spent.”) (Participant 1F, Lines 29, Page 1)

As further emphasized, one participant showed that their behavior centers on responsibility rather than individual spending.

“*Gikuan sa kanang mga bills, mga bayrunon, budget sa pagkaon, gatas, diaper.*” (“It goes to bills, payments, food, milk, and diapers.”) (Participant 4F, Lines 57-58, Page 4)

Another participant stated:

“*Unahon sa jud ang panginahanglan sa pamilya... kasal makahuwat mana.*” (“We prioritize the needs of the family first... marriage can wait”), while also emphasizing, “*Tigum-tigum*” (“Saving money”) (Participant 4F, Line 311, Page 5)

One participant shared his experience stating:

“Ug mag away mi... mulakaw ko... inig uli wala na, bugnaw na.” (“When we argue, I leave... when I return, things have cooled down.”) (Participant 1M, Lines 56-57, Page 2), while the female participant noted, *“Wala man mi katulgan nga away... kinahanglan magkaistoryahanay jud.”* (“We do not sleep while still fighting... we make sure to talk it out.”) (Participant 4M, Line 253, Page 5)

On the other hand, one female participant described her role on division of tasks, saying:

“Ako sa buntag magluto... siya mutrabaho.” (“I cook in the morning... he works.”) (Participant 2F, Line 76, Page 2), while the male participant added, *“Inig kahapon, ako napuy hikay pulihanay ra sa trabahoon sa balay.”* (“In the afternoon, I take over; we take turns with household tasks.”). (Participant 2M, Line 81, Page 2)

One female participant expressed her view on long-term commitment. She said:

“Laban lang... kaya ra gihapon tungod sa mga anak.” (“Just keep fighting... we can endure it because of the children.”) (Participant 2F, Lines 122, Page 3), while the male participant stated, *“Daghan kaayong mga kalisdanan naatubang.”* (“We have faced many hardships.”) (Participant 2M, Line 132, Page 3)

Additionally, the couple demonstrated autonomy in decision-making and resistance to external pressure. One participant emphasized:

“Diko musugot nga atuang ginikanan mudesisyon.” (“I will not allow our parents to decide.”) (Participant 1M, Line 20-21, Page 1), while the female participant shared that they often ignore outside comments, *“Diman nako kaayo tagdon.”* (“I don’t really pay attention to them.”) (Participant 2M, Line 122, Page 2)

Participants also exhibited expressions of care, affection, and everyday commitment through simple but meaningful actions. One male participant expressed:

“Tarong man ko mutrabaho tarungon pud ko inig uli nako sa balay.” (“I work properly, and I also act properly when I get home.”), while the female participant described emotional closeness, *“Siya akong mapahimungtan... siya na akong bespren.”* (“He is the one I turn to... he has become my best friend.”) (Participant 2F, Line 123, Page 2)

Hearing the participants narratives, the finding revealed that the behaviors of long-term cohabiting couples are deeply rooted in the meanings they construct about their relationship. These behaviors showed that commitment is enacted through daily practices rather than formal status. Their actions, financial cooperation, delayed marriage, conflict management, shared responsibilities, resilience, autonomy, and everyday expressions of care reflect a lived experience of cohabitation that is both practical and emotionally grounded.

Perceptions of Marriage Postponement

Participants consistently emphasized that lack of financial resources is the main reason for delaying marriage. One participant directly stated:

“Lisod uy! ug wa kay saktong tigom, di jud ka kapakasal.” (“It’s difficult! if you don’t have enough savings, you really cannot get married.”), while both participants repeatedly affirmed, *“Kung nay kwarta, pakasal uy!”* (“If there is money, then we will get married.”) (Participant 5M, Lines 317-320, Page 6)

Even when low-cost or mass weddings were mentioned, they still perceived marriage as requiring expenses, as expressed in, *“Bisan pag muingon tag nay libre nga kasal, makagasto man jud ka.”* (“Even if they say the wedding is free, you still end up spending.”)

The participants also framed marriage as something that can wait. One participant explained:

“Unahon sa jud ang panginahanglan sa pamilya... kasal makahuwat mana.” (“We prioritize the needs of the family first... marriage can wait”), while both emphasized their shared goal, *“Unahon sa namo among balay ayha mi pakasal.”* (“We will prioritize building our house before getting married.”) (Participant 1F, Lines 54-55, Page 1)

One participant believed that cohabitation already fulfills the essence of marriage. One female participant shared:

“Wala may kalahian sa pagpuyo... wala lang juy papel gigunitan.” (“There is no difference in how we live... we just don’t have a marriage certificate.”), while later reinforcing, *“pareha raman ang gikasal ug wala”* (“Those who are married and those who are not are just the same.”) (Participant 1M, Line 81, Page 1)

One participant acknowledged the sense of aspiration despite postponement by stating:

“Mas maayo jud nag ma legal ang kaminyoon.” (“It is still better to make the marriage legal”), and expressed that marriage would bring pride, *“Ma proud ko sa akong kaugalingon, sa akong asawa ug mga anak.”* (“I would feel proud of myself, my wife, and my children.”) (Participant 4M, Lines 81-84, Page 1)

Similarly, the female participant described marriage as *“simbolo sa gugma, respeto”* (“a symbol of love and respect”). These statements showed that while postponed, marriage remains an important goal for the future. As I interviewed further, participants reported receiving reminders from parents, relatives, and community members. One participant recalled:

“Sige ganig ingon si mama... ‘pakasal namo.’” (“My mother keeps telling us to get married.”) (Participant 2F, Line 170, Page 3)

While one male participant shared:

“Maluoy pud ko nila... sige rakug ingnun nga ‘pakasal namo.’” (“I feel pity for them because they keep telling us to get married.”) (Participant 4M, Line 220, Page 4)

Participants consistently expressed that marriage is part of their long-term plan, not something they are abandoning. One participant stated, *“Naa gihapon tung plano nga magpakasal”* (“The plan to get married is still there.”), while both affirmed, *“Puhon, puhon”* (“Someday, in the future”). This indicates that postponement is seen as a delay rather than a rejection, anchored in hope and future aspirations.

Moreover, participants described their situation as shaped by economic limitations and changing priorities. One participant explained:

“Praktikalan na mga tao... kung unsa tuy pinakaimportante, mao juy unahon.” (“People are practical nowadays... whatever is most important is prioritized.”), (Participant 5M, Line 314, Page 6)

Based on the narratives of the participants, I realized that long-term cohabiting couples perceive marriage postponement as a necessary, practical, and temporary condition influenced by financial constraints, family responsibilities, and personal readiness. While they value marriage as a meaningful and symbolic institution, they prioritize stability and preparedness, demonstrating that postponement is not a rejection of marriage but a strategic decision shaped by their lived realities.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of the study revealed a clear interactional process in how long-term cohabiting couples construct, live, and interpret marriage postponement.

1. Meanings of Cohabitation through Social Interaction

Cohabitation is defined as functionally similar to marriage except for the absence of legal document. It is also considered as a socially negotiated relationship.

2. Behaviors Shaped by Meanings of Cohabitation

Couples demonstrate autonomy in decision-making, emotional strength, family commitment, and socio-economic behaviors to sustain the relationship despite financial difficulties and lack of legal union.

3. Perceptions of Marriage Postponement among Cohabiting Couples

Marriage postponement among long-term cohabiting couples is a temporary delay not a rejection of marriage which is influenced by financial readiness, changing life priorities, practical decision-making, and future hopes.

DISCUSSIONS

Discussed in this chapter are the findings of the study. Presented as well are the implications for practice and future directions.

Meanings of Cohabitation through Social Interaction

In my study, I found that cohabitation was constructed by long-term cohabiting couples as a relationship similar to marriage, differing mainly in the absence of legal recognition. My finding is aligned with the study of Hiekel and Fulda, (2023) and Kuperberg (2023), showing that couples increasingly define cohabitation through shared emotional commitment and everyday practices, reinforcing its legitimacy as a socially negotiated union. My findings affirm this study stating that meanings of cohabitation are actively created through social interaction. However, the present finding contrasts the idea of Rosenfeld and Roesler (2024), which suggested that cohabitation is not always viewed as equivalent to marriage, as it may still be perceived as less stable or as a preparatory stage rather than a permanent arrangement.

Behaviors Shaped by Meanings of Marriage Postponement

My finding showed that the behaviors of long-term cohabiting couples are shaped by social interactions. I observed that they show resilience, patience, mutual support, forgiveness, and financial coping like saving money. Even without being married, they work together in handling problems such as financial struggles and family responsibilities. My finding supports Perelli-Harris and Gassen (2023), who found that cohabiting couples rely on shared support and problem-solving to manage life challenges. Similarly, my finding also aligns with McErlean (2024), which explained that cohabiting couples often organize their relationships around economic survival, adjustment, and shared responsibilities to maintain relationship stability despite financial challenges. However, my finding contrasts Cantalini et al. (2024), who argued that marriage continues to remain an important institutional marker of long-term commitment and family formation despite increasing cohabitation trends. This means that even if some cohabiting couples show strong commitment, it may not always last compared to married couples.

Perceptions of Marriage Postponement among Long-Term Cohabiting Couples

My finding shows that the perceptions of marriage postponement among long-term cohabiting couples are shaped by financial readiness, changing life priorities, practical decision-making, and future hopes. I realized that my participants see marriage as something they want in the future, but not something that should happen immediately because they need to be financially stable first. My finding aligns with Abalos (2024), who found that many couples in the Philippines postpone marriage because of economic realities, changing priorities, and practical life considerations. Similarly, my finding supports Dover and Willoughby (2024), who explained that cohabiting couples often prioritize personal goals, financial readiness, and stability before entering marriage. However, my finding contrasts Mu and Yeung (2023), who argued that many couples still consider marriage as the ideal and socially recognized form of commitment even when they choose to cohabit before marriage. These findings support my claim that behavior is influenced by the meanings constructed within the relationship.

Furthermore, the findings support the perspective of Symbolic Interactionism, which explains that meanings about commitment and marriage are continuously shaped through social interaction and shared experiences. The participants constructed the meaning of marriage and cohabitation through daily responsibilities, emotional support, and practical decision-making within their relationships.

Implications for Practice

Social workers especially those involved in the government agencies may conduct awareness programs to address the need for supportive interventions such as financial literacy, accessible marriage services, counseling, and community awareness programs to help couples make informed and realistic decisions. This also suggests that educators may incorporate discussions on cohabitation as a social reality, evolving meanings of marriage and economic influences on family formation. Integrating these topics in social science or values education may help students develop a more realistic and non-judgmental understanding of modern family structures. Religious sectors, particularly the marriage officiating individuals, may exert more efforts to reach out cohabiting couples to provide the necessary guidance for decision-making.

Future Direction

Future research may expand this study by exploring marriage postponement in different cultural and geographic contexts and examining how economic conditions, family expectations, and social norms vary across settings. It may also include perspectives from children, parents, and extended family, as well as use of quantitative or mixed-method approaches to further examine the direct relationship between economic status and marriage timing. Additionally, future studies may further investigate the roles of financial stability, religion, emotional well-being, and policy effectiveness in shaping cohabitation and marriage decisions.

Modified paradigm

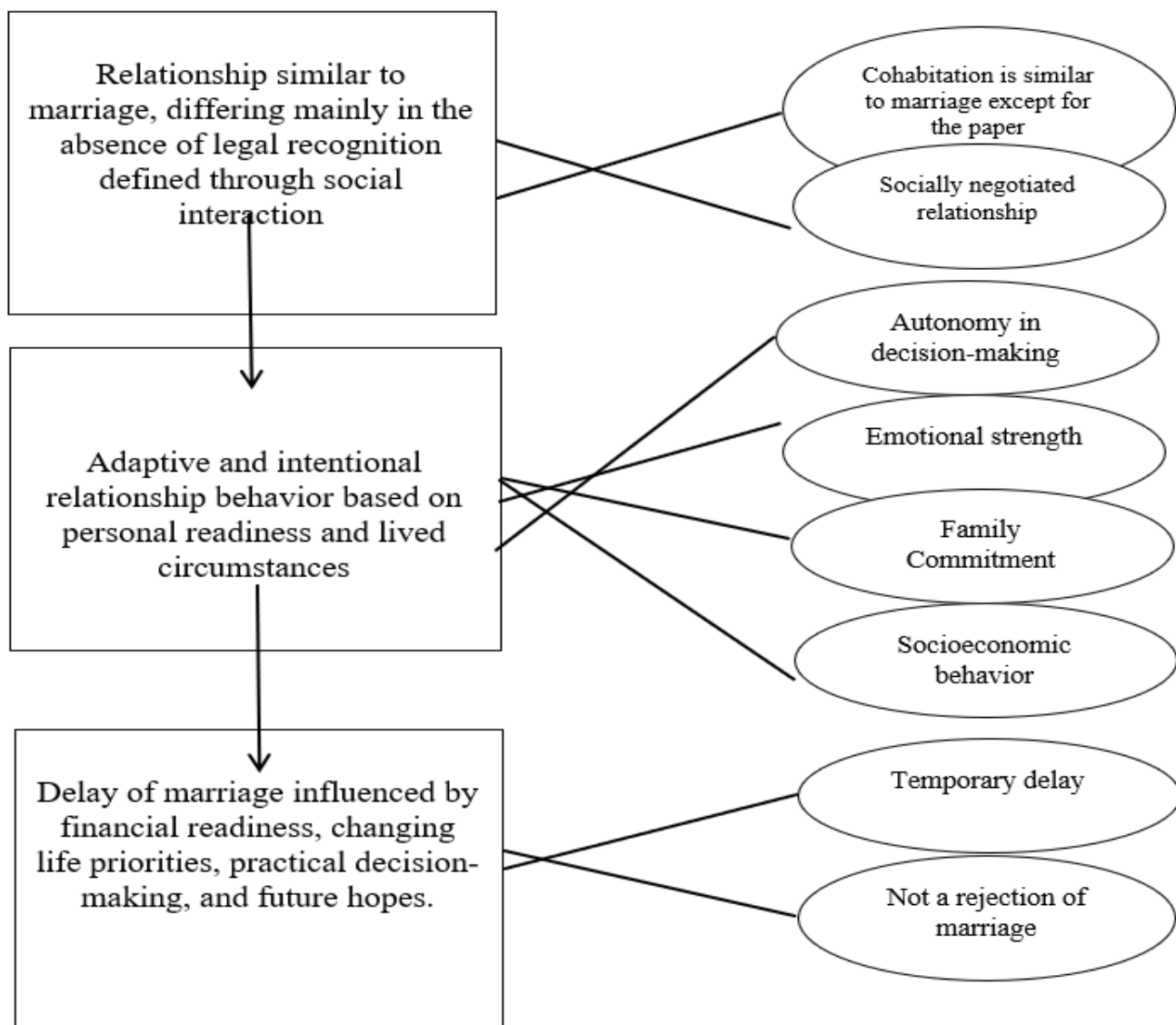


Figure 2. Modified

REFERENCES

1. Abalos, J. B. (2024). Do Filipinos still say “I do”? The continuing increase in non-marriage and cohabitation in the Philippines. *Journal of Family Issues*, 45(5), 1326–1349. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0192513X231182366>
2. Blumer, H. (1969). *Symbolic interactionism: Perspective and method*. University of California Press.
3. Caprinali, A., Vitali, A., & Cortina, C. (2023). The transition from cohabitation to marriage in Spain: Differences and determinants in same-sex and different-sex couples. *Genus*, 79(24). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s41118-023-00201-0>
4. Cantalini, S., Ohlsson-Wijk, S., & Andersson, G. (2024). Cohabitation and marriage formation in times of fertility decline: The case of Sweden in the twenty-first century. *European Journal of Population*, 40(1), Article 15. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-024-09703-9>
5. Dover, C. R., & Willoughby, B. J. (2024). Is getting hitched on the horizon? Examining predictors of cohabitation and early marriage in emerging adulthood. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships*, 41(10), 2889–2913. <https://doi.org/10.1177/02654075241258492>
6. Fontana, A., & Frey, J. H. (2020). The interview: From neutral stance to political involvement. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research* (6th ed.). SAGE Publications.
7. Hiekel, N., & Fulda, B. E. (2023a). Love, commitment, and the meaning of marriage among cohabiting couples in contemporary societies. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 85(4), 1023–1040. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12915>
8. Hiekel, N., & Fulda, B. E. (2023b). The social meaning of cohabitation across Europe. *European Journal of Population*, 39(1), 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10680-022-09635-4>
9. Kawata, K., & Komura, M. (2023). Only-child matching penalty in the marriage market. *arXiv*. <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2307.15336>
10. Kim, H., Sefcik, J. S., & Bradway, C. (2017). Characteristics of qualitative descriptive studies: A systematic review. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 40(1), 23–42. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.21768>
11. Kuperberg, A. (2023). Cohabitation and perceptions of marriage: A shifting boundary. *Sociological Perspectives*, 66(4), 789–807. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214221123456>
12. Manning, W. D., & Smock, P. J. (2023). Cohabitation and family formation in the United States. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49, 1–24. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-030420-123456>
13. Mazzeo, F., Hiekel, N., & Vitali, A. (2024). Joint pot or separate purses? Unpacking the cohabitation-marriage gap in income pooling across Europe (MPIDR Working Paper WP-2024-024). Max Planck Institute for Demographic Research. <https://doi.org/10.4054/MPIDR-WP-2024-024>
14. McErlean, K. (2024). Cohabiting couple’s economic organization and marriage patterns across social classes. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 86(3), 762–786. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12947>
15. Mu, Z., & Yeung, W.-J. J. (2023). Internal migration and cohabitation in China: A mixed-method study. *Sociological Perspectives*, 66(6), 1125–1145. <https://doi.org/10.1177/07311214231180559>
16. Perelli-Harris, B., Berrington, A., & Galezewska, P. (2023). Cohabitation as an alternative to marriage. *Population Studies*, 77(2), 145–162. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2022.2156789>
17. Perelli-Harris, B., Gassen, N. S., & Lappegård, T. (2023). Cohabitation and family complexity in comparative perspective. *Population Studies*, 77(2), 175–195. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00324728.2023.2176458>
18. Rosenfeld, M. J., & Roesler, K. (2024). Stability of cohabiting versus married unions. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 86(1), 45–60. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12910>
19. Sandelowski, M. (2010). What’s in a name? Qualitative description revisited. *Research in Nursing & Health*, 33(1), 77–84. <https://doi.org/10.1002/nur.20362>
20. Schwartz, C. R. (2023). Cohabitation and marriage in the United States: The shifting role of cohabitation. *Annual Review of Sociology*, 49, 129–148. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-soc-031021-024933>

-
21. Villamin, P., Lopez, V., Thapa, D. K., & Cleary, M. (2025). A worked example of qualitative descriptive design: A step-by-step guide for novice and early career researchers. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 81(8), 5181–5195. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jan.16481>
 22. Zahl-Olsen, R., Thuen, F., & Stea, T. H. (2023). Cohabitation, marriage, and union dissolution in Norway: A comparative prospective study. *Journal of Divorce & Remarriage*, 64(5–6), 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10502556.2023.2277648>