

Pamakyabe: Acculturation and Basic Psychological Needs Through the Lens of Adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas of Floridablanca, Pampanga

Paulino B. Susim

Laguna College of Business and Arts, Calamba City, Laguna, Philippines

Author Email: paulinosusim4@gmail.com

Date received: June 25, 2024

Date revised: July 17, 2024

Date accepted: July 20, 2024

Originality: 97%

Grammarly Score: 99%

Similarity: 3%

Recommended citation:

Susim, P. (2024). *Pamakyabe: Acculturation and basic psychological needs through the lens of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas of Floridablanca, Pampanga*. *Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, 2(8), 618-629.
<https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0313>

Abstract. This study examined the neglect and discrimination faced by the Mag-Indi Aeta community in Florida Blanca, Pampanga, Philippines, and its impact on their mental health. It also explored the community's adaptive strategies and their implications for cultural preservation, resilience, and basic psychological needs. Using a qualitative research design and interpretative phenomenological analysis, the study investigated the lived experiences of five adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas concerning acculturation and psychological needs. The analysis revealed ten themes: Autonomy in Expression and Interaction, Autonomy in Empowerment Dynamics, Competence in Skill Utilization and Self-Esteem Enhancement, Competence in Modern and Practical Skills, Diverse Acculturation in Values, Diverse Acculturation in Behavior, Relatedness through Varied Engagement Levels, Relatedness through Diverse Emotional Interactions, Diverse Acculturation in Knowledge, and Diverse Acculturation in Cultural Identity. This research highlighted the discrimination, acculturation processes, and psychological needs of indigenous communities, advocating for inclusive and culturally sensitive programs such as self-awareness programs, Usap Tamo benches (buddy benches), IP day, and Kapatad week. These initiatives aim to improve the well-being of indigenous populations, promote cultural exchange, and eliminate discrimination and bullying.

Keywords: Acculturation; Basic psychological needs; Mag-Indi Aetas.

1.0 Introduction

Despite progress in society, Indigenous people still encounter discrimination in systemic, cultural, and interpersonal forms. Disparities in education, healthcare, and employment worsened, sustaining cycles of disadvantage. These challenges significantly contributed to mental health disparities among indigenous populations. Discrimination, whether explicit or subtle, deeply affects the mental well-being of indigenous individuals. Enduring experiences of prejudice, stereotypes, and marginalization elevated stress, anxiety, depression, and other mental health issues. The cumulative effect of daily microaggressions and institutional discrimination presented distinct challenges for Indigenous communities.

Indigenous people were the most neglected part of society and were discriminated against. As stated by Kaplan (2022), Native Americans were the neglected part of the group, stemming from the insufficient focus on the Indigenous community and the suppressed, unspoken horrors of history. As a result, the lack of access to public health services, particularly mental health services, has led to a rise in suicides among Indigenous people.

Nsoesie and Yang (2022) highlighted a disturbing increase in suicide rates among Indigenous individuals in the U.S., especially within the 10 to 34 age group, reaching its peak among all ethnic and racial groups in 2020. The concerning statistics, revealing 23.9 suicides per 100,000 Indigenous people, signified a 40% increase from 2010 to 2020. The underlying health disparities stemmed from a history of colonization, racism, and discrimination, exacerbated by unfavorable social and economic conditions.

Ren and Jiang's (2021) research on acculturative stress and basic psychological needs, which measured autonomy, relatedness, and competence among Chinese migrants, revealed that high acculturation stress was linked to low need satisfaction, high need frustration, increased depression, and decreased happiness. Acculturation stress was notably associated with depression. Need satisfaction and frustration acted as mediators, influencing happiness and depression by impairing or facilitating basic psychological needs.

The Aeta community is considered one of the earliest settlers in the Philippines. Despite a lack of comprehensive terminology to represent them, these diverse people had a significant presence throughout the Philippine archipelago, from the northern to the southern regions. Despite the enactment of the Indigenous People's Rights Act (IPRA) in 1997, according to Santos (2021), Indigenous people here still neglected their basic needs, such as healthcare and land-related deprivation, which remained the main problem of the IPs.

Due to the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo in 1991, which particularly affected the Mag-Indi Aetas, they were compelled to abandon their ancestral lands due to ashfall and lahar and sought refuge among the lowlanders. Consequently, the Mag-Indi Aetas faced discrimination from the lowlanders, attributed to their physical appearance and knowledge, as highlighted by David (2021). To address these challenges, the Mag-Indi Aetas adopted *pangangamuhan* as a strategy, serving as a coping mechanism distinct from slavery or peonage, characterized instead by a mutual agreement and resource sharing that benefited both parties. This approach was particularly advantageous for those seeking to enhance their children's lives and protect them from discrimination, even though Aeta children were not compensated for their services to the lowlanders. The Mag-Indi Aetas rejected the characterization of *pangangamuhan* as a form of slavery; instead, they perceived it as an adaptive strategy that had assisted them in navigating the difficulties posed by a swiftly changing world, marked by environmental degradation and persistent discrimination.

In Filipino culture, the coping mechanism known as *pakikisama*, or *pamakyabe* in Kapampangan, aligned with the concept of *pakikipagkapwa* towards outsiders, particularly those seeking acceptance within the dominant group. Boñon (2024) highlighted *pakikisama* or *pamakyabe* as a fundamental cultural tenet in the Filipino context, emphasizing the importance of social unity and fostering positive relationships with others. This involved displaying respect, empathy, and kindness towards individuals and groups alike, promoting adaptability and accommodation across various social contexts. However, *pakikisama/pamakyabe* could take on a negative aspect when individuals prioritize conformity to maintain smooth relations, disregarding moral principles. This negative manifestation involved submitting to peer pressure and adhering to the majority's wishes, as articulated by psychologist Virgilio Enriquez.

This research addressed the urgent need to tackle the persistent neglect and discrimination faced by indigenous communities, specifically the Mag-Indi Aeta people in Floridablanca, Pampanga, Philippines. Present-day challenges, resulting in notable disparities and bullying, led to adverse mental health outcomes among indigenous populations. Drawn on insights from studies on acculturative stress and psychological needs, the research underscored the influence of neglect and discrimination on mental well-being. The primary objective was to illuminate the adaptive strategy and its implications for the Mag-Indi Aetas. It offered valuable insights into the intricate dynamics of cultural preservation, resilience, and the influence of basic needs on Indigenous communities. Through an examination of the experiences of the Mag-Indi Aetas, the study sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of the relationships among indigenous communities, discrimination, acculturation, and basic psychological needs. Ultimately, the research aimed to advocate for more inclusive and culturally sensitive approaches to enhance the well-being of indigenous populations.

2.0 Methodology

2.1 Research Design

This qualitative study utilized a phenomenological design, specifically Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), to explore the cultural perspectives and lived experiences of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. According to Busetto et al. (2020), qualitative research involves examining phenomena's characteristics and contexts through non-numeric data, such as text, video, or audio, to understand concepts, opinions, or experiences. This approach was essential for investigating the acculturation process of the adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. Gill (2020) also highlighted that phenomenology aims to comprehend how individuals perceive phenomena within specific contexts, using interviews and participant observation to gather detailed information. This approach focuses on individual experiences and subjective perspectives, making it particularly effective for exploring motivations and challenging assumptions. This study employed phenomenology to delve into the life experiences, perceptions, and cultural complexities of the adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. The study used comprehensive methods such as in-depth interviews, participant observations, and discussions to uncover the unique experiences, values, and customs of the Mag-Indi Aetas. By avoiding preconceived notions, the researcher allowed the participants to narrate their stories, revealing the subtleties of their lives and traditions. Moreover, Smith and Nizza (2022) explained that IPA aims to interpret how individuals understand their experiences by analyzing participant responses in detail, focusing on themes, emotions, and meanings. This method provided a thorough understanding of the adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas' narratives and the significance they attach to their experiences.

2.2 Research Locale

The research was conducted among adolescents in the Mag-Indi Aetas communities in Floridablanca, Pampanga. As David (2021) mentioned, the eruption of Mt. Pinatubo compelled the Mag-Indi Aetas to relocate alongside the lowlanders due to the presence of ash and lahar. The Pinatubo Development Organization established Ayta resettlement sites where the Aetas were required to reside, farm, and work with the "*unat*", a type of living they were not accustomed to. Due to this, an acculturative adaptation of *pangangamuhan* has been developed by Aetas to aid them in adaptation to the challenges of a continuous change of the world, marked by the swift degradation of their natural surroundings and the presence of discrimination against them. Floridablanca, Pampanga, was selected for research on acculturation and basic psychological needs due to its substantial Mag-Indi Aeta population, known for its rich cultural heritage. The community's unique position at the intersection of traditional lifestyles and modernization pressures makes it an ideal setting to study acculturation. Floridablanca's diverse social and cultural environment provides a dynamic context to explore how the adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas navigate their identity, maintain their cultural practices, and meet their psychological needs amid continuous changes. This setting offers valuable insights into the resilience and adaptability of Indigenous groups facing external influences, making it a pertinent location for such research.

2.3 Research Participants

This study conducted five interviews with members of the Mag-Indi Aetas community in Floridablanca, Pampanga, particularly adolescents. As Subedi (2021) posits, qualitative research operates on the premise that reality is socially constructed and subjective, emphasizing collaborative knowledge formation between researchers and participants. Utilizing small, purposefully selected samples enables a deep exploration of individual experiences, yielding nuanced insights. Furthermore, it fosters close relationships between researchers and participants, enhancing data quality and supporting the creation of thorough, contextually rich descriptions.

This research targeted adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas aged 15 to 20, as they are significantly impacted by cultural shifts in their community. According to Gordon (2022), individuals at this stage begin to adopt global perspectives and contemplate their roles within broader societal dynamics. Adolescents were selected due to their active socialization, which plays a crucial role in their personal development. The data table includes participants' age, preferred aliases or nicknames, gender, civil status, and grade level. If participants do not provide a nickname, the researcher will assign "IP" followed by a number, by American Psychological Association (2015) guidelines for referring to Indigenous Peoples.

2.4 Research Instrument

The semi-structured questionnaire was designed to capture the real-life experiences of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas aged 15 to 20 years. It was rooted in Berry's Acculturation Theory, which encompasses four distinct acculturation

attitudes: Integration, Separation, Assimilation, and Marginalization, to understand the attitude of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas in the 21st century. The set of questions is based on Kim and Abreu's study results. The researcher patterned the questions into four dimensions as follows: (a) Behavior: Person's choice of friends, foods, etc. (b) Values: Attitudes and beliefs, cultural customs, social beliefs, etc. (c) Knowledge: Person's knowledge about the culture. (d) Cultural identity: Attitudes toward one's cultural identification.

This research also patterned the questions on Basic Psychological Needs Theory (BPNT), including Autonomy To check volition, initiative, and self-determination. Relatedness: To know if the adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas experience closeness and a feeling of connectedness to the current community. Competence: To determine if they are effective and capable of achieving goals despite different cultural views.

Five esteemed validators with expertise in cultural psychology, thesis writing, and Indigenous peoples were meticulously selected to validate the instrument. These validators, chosen for their significant expertise, ensured the instrument's reliability and effectiveness. The validation process entailed a comprehensive review of the questionnaire's questions, assessing clarity, conciseness, and relevance, and offering feedback to enhance the instrument for optimal data collection. Additionally, the researcher utilized Lawshe's content validity method to evaluate the instrument's accuracy, aiming for a high content validity score. Each item was classified as "essential," "useful but not essential," or "not necessary," resulting in a post-validation score of 0.99 per item. This rigorous validation process ensured the instrument's effectiveness in capturing the acculturation of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas and their basic psychological needs.

2.5 Data Gathering Procedure

This research involved collaboration with local authorities in Floridablanca, Pampanga, the National Commission on Indigenous People Region III (NCIP Region III), and the NCIP Pampanga Community Service Center to secure permits for interviewing adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. This collaboration ensured compliance with local regulations and official authorization. The permit application outlined the study's goals, methodology, participant criteria, and validated questions. Informed consent was obtained from the NCIP Region III representative and Indigenous People Mandatory Representative (IPMR) for participants under 18, ensuring ethical standards and protecting participants' rights. Data collection included documenting individual interviews with audio and video recordings, with procedures communicated to interviewees, NCIP Region III, and IPMR as part of the informed consent process. Initial data collection focused on demographic information to build rapport, followed by friendly introductions, outlining research objectives, and addressing potential discomfort. Information on hotlines was provided for any post-interview issues.

Moreover, the research aimed to ensure trustworthiness through rigorous qualitative methodologies, including thorough interviews and literature reviews. Two theories enhanced credibility and understanding of acculturation and basic psychological needs. Detailed descriptions of the Mag-Indi Aeta community's cultural, social, and historical background supported the transferability of findings to similar indigenous groups. Consistency in data collection and insights from internal qualitative data analysts ensured objectivity with a transparent audit trail of research decisions and processes. These strategies aimed to produce credible, transferable, dependable, and confirmable insights into Indigenous youth well-being and cultural adaptation. Recorded interviews allowed for meticulous review and analysis, enhancing the researcher's ability to extract deeper insights and comprehensively understand participants' perspectives.

2.6 Ethical Consideration

Involving adolescent participants, this study acknowledged the necessity of securing informed consent from parents or local authorities. Collaboration with local government entities was pivotal in obtaining official approval to interview young members of the Indigenous community, specifically adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. During one-on-one interviews, informed consent was conveyed through both written and verbal means to ensure participants and their guardians fully comprehended and agreed to the study's terms. This dual approach facilitated open communication and addressed any concerns or inquiries. The informed consent document detailed the study's objectives, confidentiality guarantees, and procedures for recording and transcribing interviews for data analysis. This method upheld ethical standards and demonstrated transparency, respect, and concern for the well-being of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas participants.

Additionally, to safeguard confidentiality, participants were encouraged to select an alias or pseudonym; alternatively, one was assigned to them as necessary. As Kang and Hwang (2023) noted, ensuring participant anonymity enhances data integrity by fostering a secure environment conducive to honest sharing and increased participation. Lastly, participation in this study was voluntary, with individuals retaining the right to withdraw at any data collection stage. Access to video recordings used for transcription was restricted to ensure secure data handling and protect participant identities throughout the research process. These practices underscored ethical principles, prioritizing autonomy and privacy for all participants.

3.0 Results and Discussion

Researchers identified ten (10) thematic categories.

Theme 1: Adapt Harmoniously and Communicate Assertively

The responses of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas reflect their adaptation to the challenges within their current community. For those prioritizing unity with lowlanders, resolving conflicts involves a delicate balance of diplomacy and reconciliation. As articulated by Rose,

"I want to ensure that I maintain good relations with them. I'm determined to integrate myself so fully I don't feel left behind. Just because I come from a different background doesn't mean I can't connect with them."

This demonstrates their cautious approach, potentially overlooking certain conflicts or addressing them diplomatically to preserve community harmony. Conversely, for those impacted by bullying and discrimination, like Lay 2, who stated,

"Baluga. They don't know that we also have feelings; it hurts to be called baluga. It's acceptable to us if they call us brother/sister. That's the appropriate term, not baluga. have a classmate who has been called 'oy baluga,' and he did not react to it."

Adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas assertively express their beliefs and needs, establishing boundaries that demand respect and independence. In navigating conflicts, they emerge as advocates for self-expression, crafting narratives of empowerment and self-worth. Ultimately, the responses of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas underscore their resilience as they adapt strategies to assert autonomy amidst the challenges in their community. Thompson (2023) emphasizes the personal and professional benefits of embracing adaptability, which enhances resilience and clarity during challenging transitions. Adaptability supports psychological well-being, facilitates smooth career changes, and strengthens resilience in overcoming obstacles. Similarly, assertiveness, discussed in "Being assertive: Reduce stress, communicate better" (2024), empowers individuals to effectively express ideas, advocate for beliefs, and manage stress through clear, respectful communication. Proficiency in assertiveness fosters self-assurance, enriches interpersonal relationships, and contributes to overall personal and professional fulfillment.

Theme 2: Empowerment Through Education and Traditions

It illuminates how adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas employ strategic approaches to assert autonomy within their community. They utilize their cultural heritage as a source of resilience to overcome challenges and pursue personal development and advancement. As articulated by Rose,

"I will study hard for Indigenous people like me to show them the importance of education. Some of them cannot afford it because they live too far from school, unlike here, where the school is nearby."

This underscores education's pivotal role as a catalyst for empowerment and progress within the community, with participants showing unwavering commitment to academic excellence. Their aspirations extend beyond personal achievement to serve as inspirations for others facing educational barriers in the Indigenous community. Furthermore, the theme underscores the significance of cultural heritage in shaping identity and strength among adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. Participants draw strength from their cultural traditions and community support, asserting their independence and reinforcing their unique identity within a diverse societal context. However, the theme also reveals some individuals' challenges when their cultural practices are disregarded, leading to isolation and frustration. As expressed by Lay 2,

"Sometimes it is helpful, sometimes not, because it feels like what we are doing is nonsense, as they do not believe in us, on our traditions."

When individuals encounter conflicting perspectives on their cultural heritage, this can result in disconnection and alienation. Assigning autonomy and preserving a strong identity becomes difficult without recognition or acceptance of their traditions and beliefs. These challenges often lead to frustration, isolation, or inadequacy as individuals strive to reconcile their cultural background with external pressures. Ultimately, achieving autonomy in cultural identity is hindered without the necessary validation and support to embrace and uphold one's heritage.

Moreover, Bohnsack (2021) underscores adolescents' strong pursuit of autonomy during critical life stages such as toddlerhood and adolescence. Autonomy involves independent thinking, acting, and feeling, enabling individuals to self-regulate and make decisions independently. During adolescence, young people seek to define their identities as distinct from parental influence, a process influenced by caregivers who can either nurture or hinder it. While autonomy fosters problem-solving skills, values formation, and responsibility-taking, excessive autonomy without proper guidance can impede developmental growth. Conversely, overly protective caregiver behaviors may inadvertently push adolescents to seek autonomy through harmful means.

Theme 3: Enhancing Self-Esteem and Reading Skills

This explores the impact of education and community support on adolescent Mag-indi Aetas in Floridablanca, Pampanga. Participants' stories highlight their dedication to improving reading skills with community assistance, recognizing reading proficiency's importance for learning and social interaction. As Kay-Kay articulated,

"Now that we are living with Kapampangan, our confidence is boosting. Before, the old Aetas did not have confidence in themselves. But since we are living with Kapampangan, our confidence is growing stronger. We are no longer shy about interacting with them. We are no longer shy when we report in front of the class."

Support from the Kapampangan community significantly boosts confidence among adolescents, empowering them to engage more confidently in various aspects of life. This encouragement fosters a belief in their abilities and equips them with the resilience to overcome challenges. Furthermore, the achievements of indigenous individuals who have pursued higher education serve as inspirations and role models, motivating adolescents to pursue their goals across different areas of life. Overall, the study underscores how education, community support, role models, and competency enhancement empower adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas to navigate challenges, seize opportunities, and achieve personal and professional growth.

According to Ashworth (2023), competencies encompass skills, knowledge, behaviors, attitudes, and attributes essential for success in diverse roles. Recognizing and demonstrating competencies is crucial for professional development, and they can be enhanced through career planning, self-assessment, goal setting, continuous learning, feedback-seeking, mentorship, collaboration, workshops, technological integration, experimentation, progress monitoring, perseverance, and highlighting achievements.

Theme 4: Effectiveness of Modernization and Practical Skills

Despite modern influences, it explores how traditional customs endure within Floridablanca's Mag-Indi Aeta community. Kay-Kay illustrates this resilience:

"For example, when we sow crops, and they bear fruits, we offer some fruits as a gesture of gratitude. This allows us to sell the remaining fruits."

This ritual underscores the community's adeptness at preserving essential traditions for livelihood and cohesion. However, modernization poses challenges, particularly among kulot individuals in lowland areas, as Ney suggests:

"I'm not sure, maybe not, because we are modern now. That's my parents' belief."

Some individuals question traditional relevance, leaning towards modern practices influenced by societal norms and parental guidance. This dynamic reflects their evolving competence in navigating tradition and modernity, adapting practices to meet contemporary needs while safeguarding cultural heritage. This response demonstrates a nuanced understanding of cultural identity and a commitment to preserving traditions amidst evolving societal norms. Windon (2023) further supports this theme, emphasizing the significance of adopting cross-cultural attitudes and approaches to enhance communication in diverse contexts. Situating cultural competence within a globalized and increasingly diverse world, Windon highlights the need for individuals and organizations to recognize, assess, and adjust their cultural behaviors. Cultivating cultural competence enhances productivity, customer service, and intercultural communication skills, fostering mutual understanding and respect across varied cultural landscapes.

Theme 5: Acculturation Through Integration and Separation of Values

This examines how cultural values are assimilated through education, fostering mutual understanding and enrichment within a diverse community. Lay 2 explains,

"I'm sharing our traditions with them so they can understand our cultural practices. We explain what we do in the mountains, highlighting our traditions. Even though our houses may not be impressive, we are wealthy in land ownership, and we cultivate various crops."

This integration highlights sharing indigenous traditions with Kapampangan culture, promoting a deeper appreciation and facilitating harmonious coexistence amid societal shifts. Conversely, distinct indigenous traditions persist, safeguarding cultural practices. Lay 1 exemplifies this separation:

"That's not the case for them. For them, playing with a gecko is just a joke, but for us, it can make you sick. I'll withdraw from the scene instead."

The kulot community maintains unique customs, choosing distance to preserve their values and well-being. This commitment underscores their dedication to tradition amidst diverse community perspectives. Moreover, Dixon (2019) notes that individuals integrating into a new culture often experience improved psychological health and reduced acculturative stress compared to those choosing alternative paths. Integration acts as a shield against mental health issues like depression, anxiety, and stress. Furthermore, integration mitigates the adverse effects of discrimination, providing resilience against acculturative stress and psychological challenges faced by immigrants in contexts of prejudice and discrimination. This underscores the importance of adaptive cultural integration in fostering well-being and resilience within diverse communities.

Theme 6: Assimilation Through Learning, Integration through Interacting, and Separation due to Bullying

This explores the complex process of blending cultural heritage with new environments, revealing significant implications for personal growth and community cohesion among adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. Integration of cultural heritage into new settings takes varied forms. While some adolescents choose educational institutions with diverse cultural backgrounds to boost confidence and broaden their horizons, others prefer interaction within their Indigenous community, as illustrated by statements from Kay-Kay and Lay 1. According to Kay-Kay,

"Mostly Aetas. However, most of our room is made up of Kapampangans. For instance, we have a school in our area for Aetas, but I prefer not to study there because everyone is kulot. Even though they are studying, they still appear shy. It's beneficial to interact with different people. It helps boost your confidence."

Consistent with acculturation theory, this assimilation process may lead to shifts in cultural identity and practices as knowledge and values from the dominant culture are assimilated. Conversely, some adolescents distance themselves from the dominant culture, potentially as a form of resistance or cultural preservation. As stated by Lay 1,

"None, with my kulot friends. Sometimes, the unat bully us."

They seek security and belonging within their cultural circle by associating with familiar peers and customs, shielding themselves from potential mistreatment or conflict. Moreover, Cuncic (2024) highlights the pivotal role

of friendships in adolescents' lives, offering support during difficult times and enriching their experiences in various ways. Emotionally, friends provide invaluable support and positively influence mood and self-esteem. Happiness and confidence spread easily among friends, and a supportive social circle significantly enhances one's sense of self-worth and resilience in challenging situations. Additionally, friendships are crucial in reducing stress and fostering a sense of belonging and community. Their presence mitigates the impact of stressful events, creating an environment where individuals feel valued and accepted. Ultimately, friendships shape values and character, motivating adolescents to strive for self-improvement and achieve their potential by surrounding themselves with positive influences and supportive peers.

Theme 7: Relatedness to Own Culture and Disconnection from Others Due to Bullying

It explores the intricate dynamics of cultural integration and preservation among adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas. Despite the availability of community-specific schools, some adolescents choose educational institutions with diverse cultural backgrounds to broaden their perspectives and enhance their self-esteem. As articulated by Rose,

"I prefer spending time with the unat because I learn new things from them."

This challenges the notion that educational success requires cultural uniformity, highlighting the benefits of exposure to diverse educational environments. However, tensions between preserving cultural identity and assimilating into dominant cultural norms are apparent. While some retreat into their Indigenous community, others resist or selectively adopt aspects of the dominant culture while preserving elements of their heritage. Negative experiences, particularly bullying, can significantly impact cultural identity, prompting some individuals to distance themselves from the dominant culture and seek refuge within their community. As expressed by Lay 1,

"Kulot, because I enjoy their companionship. We're different because she prefers to be with the unat [referring to the other kulot]. I prefer to be with my tribe because many of the unat bully us due to our physical features. So, no, I don't usually interact with the unat."

This reluctance to interact with the dominant group underscores the challenges faced by adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas in navigating cultural differences and maintaining their cultural integrity amidst adversity. These insights underscore the dynamic nature of cultural integration and preservation among adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas, emphasizing the importance of respecting and acknowledging diverse cultural experiences. Creating inclusive environments where individuals can freely express their cultural identities is crucial for fostering social cohesion amidst evolving societal landscapes.

Furthermore, Yusof et al. (2020) underscored the significance of relatedness as a fundamental aspect of the basic psychological needs theory within educational contexts. Grounded in the self-determination theory, this emphasizes the importance of feeling valued and forming connections with others to enhance self-confidence and motivation. Beyond academic achievement, university experiences contribute to developing values such as respect, collaboration, and community engagement. Peer interactions are pivotal in campus dynamics, empowering students to undertake meaningful initiatives that positively impact their surroundings, supported by faculty and student affairs professionals.

Theme 8: Emotional Connection to Own Culture and Disconnection with Others

It delves into the complex dynamics of cultural interactions among adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas within a diverse community. According to Ney,

"I'm happy too. They enjoy joking around and getting along. For example, when it comes to mountain foods like corn and tamarind, they love sharing them. However, some Kapampangans, for instance, can be picky and may not enjoy these foods."

This highlights that interactions within their cultural circle evoke feelings of happiness and belonging, while engagements with individuals from diverse backgrounds offer opportunities for personal growth and cultural understanding. Conversely, negative experiences with members of the dominant culture, such as bullying or

social exclusion, create discomfort and hinder the formation of genuine connections across cultural divides. Ney also mentioned,

"I'm also happy, but sometimes they bully me, teasing me. We can't avoid it. In Kapampangan, you think twice about what they might do to you. It feels like you're overthinking whether they'll do something to you. It feels like they're backstabbing you behind your back."

Moreover, some adolescents display emotional detachment when interacting with those from different cultural backgrounds, potentially hindering efforts to foster appreciation for diversity. These findings underscore the importance of cultivating inclusive environments, prioritizing mutual respect and cross-cultural understanding, and facilitating social cohesion amidst the evolving societal landscape.

Lawrenz (2021) highlighted the significance of social connections in shaping individual well-being, emphasizing their impact on mood and emotional health. Meaningful interactions foster closeness and belonging, enhancing one's sense of value, understanding, and appreciation. By emphasizing human connection, individuals can strengthen social ties, alleviate loneliness, and enhance emotional resilience. Ultimately, nurturing authentic relationships enriches life experiences and improves mental and emotional well-being.

Theme 9: Assimilation and Separation through Cultural Knowledge

This explores how acculturation influences the learning and knowledge transmission among diverse cultures, particularly within the adolescent Mag-Indi Aeta community. The research identifies various adaptations indicative of acculturation, notably the assimilation observed through the gradual integration of certain traditional practices into mainstream culture. Rose's statement reflects this trend:

"Some of it only. These are the practices that our tribe mostly engages in, but not consistently, as our parents do not regularly adhere to them. We participate only during special occasions."

The influence of Kapampangan culture has contributed to the decline of ancestral traditions, as some Aetas adopt Kapampangan customs. This illustrates a broader phenomenon of cultural erosion in which traditional practices yield to dominant cultural norms. Despite these adaptations, participants preserve their heritage, demonstrating remarkable cultural resilience. Lay 2 exemplified by their belief in spiritual causes of illness:

"For example, when they are ill, sometimes we attribute the sickness to spirits. They do not believe us if we inform them that spirits are causing their illness."

This dynamic between acculturation and cultural preservation underscores the ongoing negotiation of identity within diverse communities, highlighting the significance of embracing and celebrating cultural diversity. According to Wisner (2023), cultural awareness, or cultural sensitivity, involves recognizing and appreciating the commonalities and differences among diverse cultural groups. It requires curiosity, openness, and a willingness to explore the spectrum of cultural diversity while being mindful of one's cultural biases. Cultivating cultural awareness is critical for fostering better interpersonal connections, creating healthier organizational climates, and advancing the development of a more empathetic society. While recognizing the importance of cultural awareness is foundational, actively engaging in its development is essential. This involves acknowledging personal biases, seeking knowledge about diverse cultural traditions, and engaging in meaningful interactions with individuals from various backgrounds. It is an ongoing journey marked by openness, respect, and a willingness to learn from experiences and interactions.

Theme 10: Assimilation and Preservation of Cultural Identity

It underscores the critical importance of cultural identity for individuals and communities, encompassing aspects like heritage, customs, language, beliefs, and values. However, among indigenous groups such as the Mag-Indi Aetas, assimilation into a new cultural identity often leads to the neglect and erosion of their authentic cultural heritage. This transformation is evident in the experiences of three participants who have adopted practices from the dominant Kapampangan culture, resulting in a detachment from their cultural roots. Kay-Kay's statement reflects this shift:

"The tradition of most Aetas now mirrors that of the Kapampangan, so we are essentially similar to the Kapampangan. I can speak the Kapampangan language fluently, but when I'm with other kulots who speak the Mag-Indi language, I can understand them somewhat, but I struggle to communicate or respond in kind."

Their readiness to embrace new ideologies influenced by factors such as social acceptance poses challenges to the sustained preservation of traditional customs. In contrast, some adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas uphold their cultural identity by distancing themselves from the dominant group. Two participants express their disconnection from Kapampangan traditions and reluctance to interact with individuals outside their cultural circle, illustrating this separation. As stated by Lay 1,

"I don't like that either. As I mentioned earlier, I don't like to associate with unat."

Despite their deep attachment to their cultural origins, they exhibit limited engagement with other cultures, preferring the familiarity of their community. While they hold their cultural legacy in high esteem, they demonstrate hesitancy or disinterest in exploring alternative cultural perspectives beyond their immediate environment. According to Heyl (2023), cultural identity encompasses individuals' connection with their cultural group, incorporating elements beyond ethnicity such as religion, gender expression, and regional traditions. Strong personal identity significantly correlates with improved mental health outcomes, facilitating social connections crucial for overall well-being and fostering a sense of community and shared experiences that shape perspectives and enhance a sense of belonging.

4.0 Conclusions

This research sheds light on how adolescents navigate cultural adaptation and resilience amidst societal challenges, advancing the understanding of resilience theories in psychology, particularly concerning the influence of cultural identity on adaptive strategies and psychological well-being. The study aligns with identity development theories by exploring how adolescents negotiate their identities within diverse cultural contexts. It underscores the impact of cultural identity formation on self-esteem, autonomy, and emotional well-being, essential aspects of adolescent psychology.

The research suggests that adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas should engage in cultural immersion to adapt to ongoing modernization in their community. This involvement helps them gain insights into various perspectives, customs, and values, fostering the flexibility to navigate changing circumstances effectively. Through interactions with different cultures, they can deepen their understanding of societal changes and develop the resilience to preserve their cultural heritage amidst evolving trends. Cultural immersion offers numerous benefits, including enhancing cognitive flexibility, promoting empathy, and fostering a sense of belonging and identity formation, ultimately equipping adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas with the skills and resilience needed to navigate modernization while enhancing their psychological development and cultural identity.

Themes such as bullying, social exclusion, and peer relationships significantly contribute to understanding adolescents' social and emotional development, particularly Mag-Indi Aeta adolescents, emphasizing the importance of community support and interpersonal relationships in fostering psychological resilience and emotional health. Recognizing the psychological impact of the fear of missing out (FOMO) on adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas, Kapampangan individuals must cultivate empathy towards Indigenous communities, understanding the stress, anxiety, depression, and loneliness that may arise from feelings of marginalization. By acknowledging these challenges, Kapampangan individuals can create a more inclusive environment through active listening, advocacy for Indigenous rights, and initiatives promoting cultural understanding and unity, contributing to a fairer, more cohesive society where everyone feels valued and included.

The family of adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas should encourage their children to interact with lowlanders to enhance their psychological growth and social integration. These interactions fulfill fundamental psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. However, it is crucial for families to emphasize maintaining a connection with their cultural heritage while engaging with lowlanders. This ensures that adolescent Mag-Indi Aetas develop a robust sense of self while cherishing their cultural legacy and promoting cultural continuity within their community.

The research also highlights the transformative role of education in empowering adolescents, bridging cultural gaps, and enhancing self-esteem through academic achievement, supporting theories in educational psychology that stress the importance of supportive learning environments and cultural competence in educational outcomes. Teachers and school faculty are critical in fostering inclusivity and fair treatment for Mag-Indi Aeta students in educational settings. By advocating for inclusivity, educators can establish a nurturing environment where every student feels valued and respected regardless of their cultural background, addressing and eradicating instances of discrimination or bullying, thereby enhancing the academic performance and overall psychological health of Mag-Indi Aeta students and upholding essential principles of social justice and human rights.

Collaborative efforts involving local government units, the National Commission on Indigenous Peoples Region III (NCIP Region III), and the Indigenous Peoples Mandatory Representative (IPMR) are crucial for raising awareness about Indigenous communities among lowlanders. This initiative aims to promote cultural understanding and address psychological factors such as prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping through educational campaigns, workshops, and cultural events, challenging biases and negative perceptions directed at indigenous communities and fostering empathy and social unity.

Future researchers could conduct comparative studies involving participants from different indigenous groups, encompassing a wider age range and larger sample sizes. Investigating the influence of parental attitudes toward cultural heritage on adolescents' adaptation strategies and self-concept, as well as examining the impact of gender, socioeconomic status, and other intersecting identities on cultural adaptation and resilience, would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the diverse experiences within the Mag-Indi Aeta community. This intersectional approach can offer deeper insights into the multifaceted nature of cultural adaptation and resilience among adolescents.

5.0 Contributions of Author

The author conducted and funded the research, which underwent a thorough panel review and underwent editing for language and format.

6.0 Funding

This research is not funded by any private or local agency.

7.0 Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest about the publication of this paper.

8.0 Acknowledgement

The researcher deeply thanks his family for their unwavering support throughout this journey. Acknowledgments include his mother, Marissa, for encouragement to see tasks through and his father, Paulino III, whose guidance is felt despite his physical absence. Thanks also to sisters Lezie, Liezl, and Leila for their steadfast support and inspiration. Gratitude extends to Ima for unconditional love and continuous encouragement. Special thanks are given to Salome and Moises Angcon for generous lodging and assistance, ensuring the researcher's extended stay. Jay Mark is recognized as a significant source of inspiration and unwavering support. The research adviser, Sir. Ronel E. Tarcilo, is acknowledged for patience and knowledge sharing, particularly in qualitative aspects crucial to completing this research. Recognition goes to Uzziel G. De Loyola and Isiah Eugene G. Peji for validating the survey form. The qualitative data analyst, Sir Bernard Christopher A. Catam, is thanked for meticulous scrutiny enhancing study credibility. Dr. Ma. Lorena M. Tagala is acknowledged for her invaluable expertise and support. Heartfelt appreciation is extended to friends and colleagues Daryl, Margarette, Ate Karizza, Ate Queng, Madeleine, Ericka, Jen, Clars, Sir. Pol and Angelo, thank you for your unwavering support during challenging times. Esteemed panelists are recognized for valuable insights and trust in the research process. Classmates Doc Egaie, Ms. Geng, and Ms. Elaine are thanked for motivating words that kept the researcher on course. NCIP Region III, Sir. Ira, Ma'am Lydia, IPMR, Sir. Joey and the Mag-Indi Aetas are honored as champions and inspirations behind the study's realization, and their cooperation makes the research possible. Finally, Almighty God expresses profound gratitude for strength, guidance, knowledge, and ensuring health and safety throughout the journey.

9.0 References

- Ashworth, H. (2023, November 20). Competencies: A Definition Psychometric Success. Psychometric Success. <https://psychometric-success.com/interview-advice/competencies/competencies-definition>
- Bohnsack, K. (2021, May 5). Autonomy in Adolescents. Adolescent Counseling Services.
- Boñon, W. (2024). Pakikisama in Dialogue with Aquinas' Amicitia. *Philippiniana Sacra*, 59(178), 27–46. <https://doi.org/10.55997/1003pslix178a2>
- Busetto, L., Wick, W., & Gumbinger, C. (2020). How to use and assess qualitative research methods. *Neurological Research and Practice*, 2(1), 14. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s42466-020-00059-z>
- Cuncic, A. (2024, April 24). 6 Benefits of Friendship and Why It's So Important to Stay Close. Verywellmind. <https://www.verywellmind.com/the-importance-of-friendship-3024371>
- David, K. C. (2021). Ang Amo at Maamo: Pangangamuhan among the Ayta Mag-Indi of Pampanga, Philippines. *Journal of Critical Perspectives*, 57(2), 1–35.
- Dixon, T. (2019, January 27). Key Studies: Effects of acculturation on behaviour. IB Psychology.
- Gill, M. J. (2020, January). Phenomenology as qualitative methodology. Research Gate.
- Gordon, S. (2022, March 10). 16-Year-Old Child Development Milestones. VeryWellFamily. <https://www.verywellfamily.com/16-year-old-developmental-milestones-4171922>
- Heyl, J. (2023, May 24). How Embracing Your Cultural Identity Can Help Your Mental Health. VeryWellMind: <https://www.verywellmind.com/how-embracing-your-cultural-identity-can-help-your-mental-health-7487052>
- Kang, E., & Hwang, H.-J. (2023, March). The Importance of Anonymity and Confidentiality for Conducting Survey Research. ResearchGate.
- Kaplan, G. (2022, April 20). A Legacy of Negligence: The Historical Mistreatment of Indigenous Peoples in the United States. *Berkley Public Policy Journal*. <https://bppj.berkeley.edu/2022/04/20/a-legacy-of-negligence-the-historical-mistreatment-of-indigenous-peoples-in-the-united-states/>
- Lawrenz, L. (2021, November 15). The Importance of Connection. Psychcentral. <https://psychcentral.com/lib/the-importance-of-connection>
- Nsoesie, E. O., & Yang, Y. (2022, November 29). The High Suicide Rates Among Indigenous Populations. *Public Health Post*. <https://www.publichealthpost.org/databyte/suicide-rates-indigenous/>

- Ren, Q., & Jiang, S. (2021). Acculturation stress, satisfaction, and frustration of basic psychological needs and mental health of chinese migrant children: Perspective from basic psychological needs theory. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 18(9), 4751. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18094751>
- Santos, J. (2021, October 16). Indigenous peoples remain neglected despite law passed 24 years ago – CHR. *Manila Bulletin*. <https://mb.com.ph/2021/10/15/indigenous-peoples-remain-neglected-despite-law-passed-24-years-ago-chr/>
- Smith, J. A., & Nizza, I. A. (2022). What is interpretative phenomenological analysis. *APA Psychnet*. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0000259-001>
- Subedi, K. (2021, December). Determining the Sample in Qualitative Research. *ResearchGate*. <https://doi.org/10.3126/scholars.v4i1.42457>
- Thompson, J. (2023, February 21). How Well Do You Handle Change? The Benefits of Being Adaptable. *BDC*. <https://www.business.com/articles/how-well-do-you-handle-change-the-benefits-of-being-adaptable/>
- Winston, S. (2023, May 1). What is Cultural Competence and How to Develop It? *PennState Extension*. <https://extension.psu.edu/what-is-cultural-competence-and-how-to-develop-it>
- Wisner, W. (2023, May 26). Cultural Awareness – How to Be More Culturally Aware & Improve Your Relationships. *Verywellmind*. <https://www.verywellmind.com/cultural-awareness-importance-how-to-develop-it-7500316>
- Yusof, N., Awang-Hashim, R., Kaur, A., Abdul Malek, M., Suppiah Shanmugam, S. K., Abdul Manaf, N. A., Seow Voon Yee, A., & Zubairi, A. M. (2020). The role of relatedness in student learning experiences. *Asian Journal of University Education*, 16(2), 235. <https://doi.org/10.24191/ajue.v16i2.10308>