

Aging Well in a Collectivist Society: Filipino Grandmothers' Narratives of Successful Aging

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ABSTRACT

Successful aging is increasingly understood as a multidimensional construct shaped by health, well-being, and social engagement; however, dominant perspectives largely reflect Western individualistic values and offer limited insight into collectivist societies. This study explored the lived meanings of successful aging among Filipino grandmothers and the socio-cultural factors shaping their later-life experiences. Using a qualitative narrative inquiry design, ten (10) grandmothers aged 60–70 years from Bukidnon, Philippines, were purposively selected and interviewed through semi-structured, in-depth conversations. Participants were included based on self-identification as aging successfully and their demonstrated ability to maintain active involvement in family or community life, engage in caregiving roles, and participate meaningfully in daily social relationships. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved data familiarization, inductive coding, theme development, review, refinement, and interpretation. Findings showed that successful aging was perceived as a relational and culturally grounded process characterized by family achievement, maintained health, spirituality, resilience, and continued participation in family and community life. Rather than emphasizing independence alone, participants valued interdependence, meaningful intergenerational roles, emotional balance, and social connectedness as central to aging well. The study extends prevailing models of successful aging by demonstrating that, in the Filipino context, aging successfully is deeply embedded in collective values, family reciprocity, and enduring social purpose, highlighting the importance of culturally responsive policies and community-based support for older adults.

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INTRODUCTION

Successful aging is not merely reaching an advanced age. It involves achieving a sense of fulfillment in later life, overcoming obstacles, and finding meaning each day. It is the ability to adapt to physical and emotional changes while continuing to live meaningfully, characterized by growth and contribution despite challenges. Successful aging goes beyond merely staying healthy or looking young. It is not only about avoiding illness but also creating an environment where grandmothers could thrive emotionally, socially, and mentally.

The concept of successful aging has evolved beyond simply avoiding disease or physical decline. Recent studies have shown that successful aging is influenced by various factors, including cognitive engagement, perception, control, and life satisfaction (Estebesari et al., 2020). It is also highlighted by the importance of happiness and fulfillment in both the present and the past. The most important elements

of successful aging, as identified by 1,994 participants in a large-scale study by Burton et al. (2024), were being “active, independent, and engaged,” rather than the absence of disease or decline. These findings suggested a broader understanding of aging that included physical and cognitive health, as well as emotional and social well-being.

Cultural values and intergenerational support play a vital role in shaping aging experiences in the Philippines. Grandmothers are highly regarded in Filipino families, often taking on caregiving roles for grandchildren while participating in household decision-making (Uy & Sadang, 2021). Strong family ties, religious involvement, and community participation give meaning and fulfillment to Filipino grandmothers.

Although successful aging has been widely studied in Western contexts, dominant

models have traditionally emphasized individual autonomy, personal productivity, physical functioning, and the avoidance of disease as key indicators of aging well. These perspectives reflect cultural values that prioritize independence and self-sufficiency in later life. In contrast, studies conducted in Asian societies have shown that successful aging is often understood through relational and collective dimensions, including family connectedness, filial support, social harmony, spirituality, and the fulfillment of intergenerational responsibilities (Chen et al., 2022). Rather than viewing dependence solely as a marker of decline, many Asian perspectives recognize reciprocal family support and meaningful social roles as important components of well-being in old age. This contrast suggests that the meaning of successful aging is culturally situated and may not be fully captured by frameworks developed primarily in Western settings.

Within the Philippine context, these collectivist orientations are reflected in strong family networks, religious engagement, and community participation; all of which shape older adults' experiences of aging. Filipino grandmothers, in particular, occupy significant caregiving, advisory, and kinship roles that extend beyond the household and contribute to family continuity and social cohesion. Despite these contributions, their perspectives remain underrepresented in gerontological scholarship. Furthermore, limited research has examined how Filipino grandmothers themselves define and experience successful aging within the context of their everyday social relationships and cultural obligations.

Therefore, this study explored the lived narratives of self-identified successfully aging Filipino grandmothers in Barangay Kalasungay, Malaybalay City, Bukidnon, Philippines. It sought to understand how they define successful aging based on their lived experiences. Specifically, the study aimed to (1) explore how self-identified grandmothers define successful aging; (2) identify the personal, sociocultural, and environmental factors that shape their experiences of successful aging; (3) describe the rewarding and challenging experiences they encounter throughout the aging process; and (4)

examine the strategies and support systems they rely on to sustain their well-being in later life.

Theoretical Framework

Grounded in two complementary theoretical perspectives, this study integrates successful aging theory by John W. Rowe and Robert L. Kahn with symbolic interactionism as developed by George Herbert Mead and later expanded by Herbert Blumer. The study employs them as a unified analytical lens to capture both the structural and interpretive dimensions of successful aging. The successful aging theory, as articulated by Rowe and Kahn (1997), as cited by Baciú (2021), provides the objective foundation by identifying three interrelated components: avoidance of disease and disability, maintenance of high physical and cognitive functioning, and sustained engagement in social and productive activities. These dimensions, often illustrated as overlapping domains, define the structural conditions under which aging may be considered "successful," emphasizing that well-being extends beyond mere physical health to include active participation and mental vitality. Supporting this, Baciú (2021) noted that despite age-related cognitive changes, older adults may still achieve positive aging outcomes through continued engagement and adaptability, while Bhattacharyya et al. (2025) highlighted the role of psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and optimism in sustaining these outcomes.

Although Rowe and Kahn's framework has significantly influenced gerontological research, its emphasis on individual autonomy, productivity, and functional independence reflects assumptions that emerged largely from Western cultural contexts. In contrast, Filipino cultural values emphasize family interdependence, reciprocity, collective responsibility, and social connectedness. Within this context, successful aging may be understood not solely in terms of maintaining independence or avoiding physical decline, but also through fulfilling meaningful family roles, sustaining intergenerational relationships, and contributing to the well-being of others. Consequently, the concept of successful aging is not rejected but rather transformed through

local cultural interpretations that place greater value on relational engagement and collective well-being.

Complementing this structural perspective, symbolic interactionism explains how the meaning of “successful aging” is subjectively constructed through everyday social interactions. As cited by Frödin (2025), this perspective posits that individuals interpret and assign meaning to their experiences based on social exchanges, shaping their identities and self-perceptions. In the context of this study, as noted by Little (2016), grandmothers’ understanding of successful aging emerges from how they are perceived and treated within their families and communities, as well as how they interpret their roles as caregivers, elders, and sources of wisdom. Integrating these perspectives, the study views successful aging not only as the presence of favorable health, functioning, and engagement (objective conditions), but also as a socially negotiated and meaning-laden experience (subjective interpretation).

Thus, the structural indicators identified by Rowe and Kahn correspond with and are given depth by the lived experiences of grandmothers, including their sense of independence, resilience, and continued involvement in family and community life. By examining the stories and personal narratives of grandmothers, the study is able to capture how meanings of successful aging are constructed, negotiated, and reinforced through everyday interactions with family members, relatives, neighbors, and community networks. Narrative accounts provide insight into how older adults interpret their experiences, evaluate their life circumstances, and assign meaning to their roles and relationships, thereby revealing the subjective dimensions of successful aging that cannot be fully understood through objective indicators alone.

As discussed previously, the study focused on grandmothers residing in Barangay Kalasungay, where strong family ties, caregiving responsibilities, religious involvement, and community participation remain central features of later life. This combined framework allows for a more comprehensive analysis of

successful aging by examining how personal, social, and environmental factors interact with socially constructed meanings. It recognizes that identity and self-worth in later life are continuously shaped through interaction; for instance, when grandmothers are acknowledged as capable or wise, such recognition reinforces their sense of purpose, value, and emotional well-being, key elements that both reflect and sustain successful aging. Through this integrated lens, the study provides a deeper understanding of how grandmothers in Kalasungay not only meet the conditions of successful aging but also actively construct and live out its meaning in their everyday lives.

Moreover, the methodological procedures described in this research provide an ethically sound context that upholds voluntary informed consent, ensures trustworthiness, protects participants’ confidentiality and anonymity, respects their right to withdraw at any time, minimizes potential risks, maintains secure data management, practices researchers reflexivity, and reports findings honestly and responsibly.

METHODOLOGY

This study employed a qualitative approach and narrative inquiry design to explore how grandmothers define and experience successful aging through their lived stories. The research was conducted among 10 self-identified successfully aging grandmothers aged 60–70 years in Barangay Kalasungay. The focus on grandmothers was intentional, as they play a central role in Filipino families, particularly in caregiving, emotional support, and cultural transmission. While older men may offer different perspectives, they were not included in order to maintain a focused and in-depth understanding of women’s lived experiences. Only participants who were cognitively and physically capable of engaging in the interview process were included.

A narrative inquiry design was selected as it focuses on experience as expressed through stories and is particularly suited for

understanding how individuals construct meaning from significant life events (Clandinin, 2006). This design was further grounded in a hermeneutic orientation, which emphasizes the interpretation of meanings embedded in lived experiences and personal narratives. As noted by Lindseth and Norberg (2004) and Neubauer et al. (2019), hermeneutic interpretation enables researchers to uncover how individuals make sense of their identities, relationships, and life transitions through narrative meaning-making. By integrating narrative inquiry with a hermeneutic lens, the study captured both the unique perspectives of each grandmother and the shared meanings that emerged across their accounts, allowing for a deeper and more nuanced understanding of successful aging. This combined approach effectively addressed the research questions by centering on participants' own definitions and interpretations rather than relying on predetermined or generalized constructs of aging.

The sample size of 10 participants was deemed appropriate for narrative inquiry, which prioritizes rich, in-depth exploration of individual experiences rather than broad generalization. Narrative inquiry commonly relies on relatively small samples to allow detailed examination of participants' life stories and meaning-making processes (Clandinin, 2005). Participant recruitment continued until thematic saturation was achieved, defined as the point at which additional interviews no longer generated substantially new themes, insights, or interpretations relevant to the research questions. By the tenth interview, recurring patterns and narratives had become sufficiently consistent across participants, indicating adequate depth and informational redundancy to support a comprehensive understanding of the phenomenon under study. This approach aligns with recommendations that qualitative sample adequacy should be determined by information richness and conceptual depth rather than numerical targets alone (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Purposive sampling was employed to select information-rich participants who could provide relevant and meaningful insights into the phenomenon under study. Participants were

required to meet the following criteria: (1) must be both a grandmother and a senior citizen aged 60–70 years old; (2) must have grandchildren and experience in caring for them; (3) must be actively involved in family or community life; and (4) must be willing and able to share personal experiences. The age range of 60–70 years was applied as a strict inclusion criterion to ensure that all participants were within the senior citizen stage of later adulthood while simultaneously occupying the familial role of grandmother. These criteria ensured that participants possessed firsthand knowledge of intergenerational relationships and the aging process within their social contexts. As emphasized by Palinkas et al. (2015), purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research for identifying participants who can contribute rich and in-depth information.

Data were collected through in-depth, semi-structured interviews using open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed narratives of successful aging. The interview guide was developed by the researchers and validated by experts to ensure clarity, cultural appropriateness, and alignment with the study's objectives. The guide was initially prepared in English and subsequently translated into Cebuano, the primary language spoken by the participants. To enhance linguistic accuracy and preserve conceptual equivalence, the translated version was reviewed by bilingual individuals proficient in both English and Cebuano. Interviews were conducted primarily in Cebuano, allowing participants to express their experiences in the language with which they were most comfortable and familiar.

Prior to data collection, ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Research Ethics Committee of Bukidnon State University. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their rights, and the voluntary nature of their participation. Informed consent was secured, and interviews were audio-recorded with permission, lasted approximately 40 to 60 minutes per session. Interviews were conducted in participant-selected settings to promote comfort and openness. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained, and participants were informed of their right to

withdraw at any point without consequence. Measures were also taken to safeguard participants' well-being, particularly when discussing personal and potentially sensitive experiences related to aging and family life.

Data analysis was conducted using thematic analysis following Braun and Clarke's (2022) six-phase framework. Although the study was grounded in a hermeneutic narrative inquiry design, the analysis focused on identifying and interpreting shared patterns of meaning across participants' narratives rather than constructing individual narrative profiles or case trajectories. First, the researchers familiarized themselves with the data through repeated reading of the transcripts and careful review of the audio recordings. Second, initial inductive codes were generated by identifying meaningful segments of text related to participants' experiences, perceptions, and interpretations of successful aging. Third, related codes were grouped into preliminary categories and examined for recurring patterns across narratives. Fourth, potential themes were developed by clustering conceptually related categories and exploring their relationships. Fifth, the emerging themes were reviewed, refined, and clearly defined to ensure internal coherence and distinction from one another. Finally, the themes were interpreted and presented through narrative descriptions supported by verbatim participant quotations. Throughout the analytic process, coding decisions, theme development, and interpretive insights were documented through analytic memos and regular discussions among the researchers to enhance transparency, consistency, and credibility.

To ensure the rigor and trustworthiness of the study, the criteria proposed by Lincoln and Guba were applied, including credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability (Alexander, 2019). Credibility was established through prolonged engagement with participants, member checking, and the use of verbatim transcripts to accurately reflect participants' narratives. Dependability was ensured through systematic documentation of the research process, including detailed records of data collection and analysis procedures. Confirmability was strengthened by maintaining a reflexive stance

and audit trail, allowing the findings to be grounded in the data rather than researcher bias. Transferability was addressed by providing thick descriptions of the research context, participants, and findings, enabling readers to determine the applicability of the results to similar settings. Through these strategies, the study ensured a rigorous, transparent, and ethically sound process, resulting in a comprehensive and credible understanding of how grandmothers define and experience successful aging.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

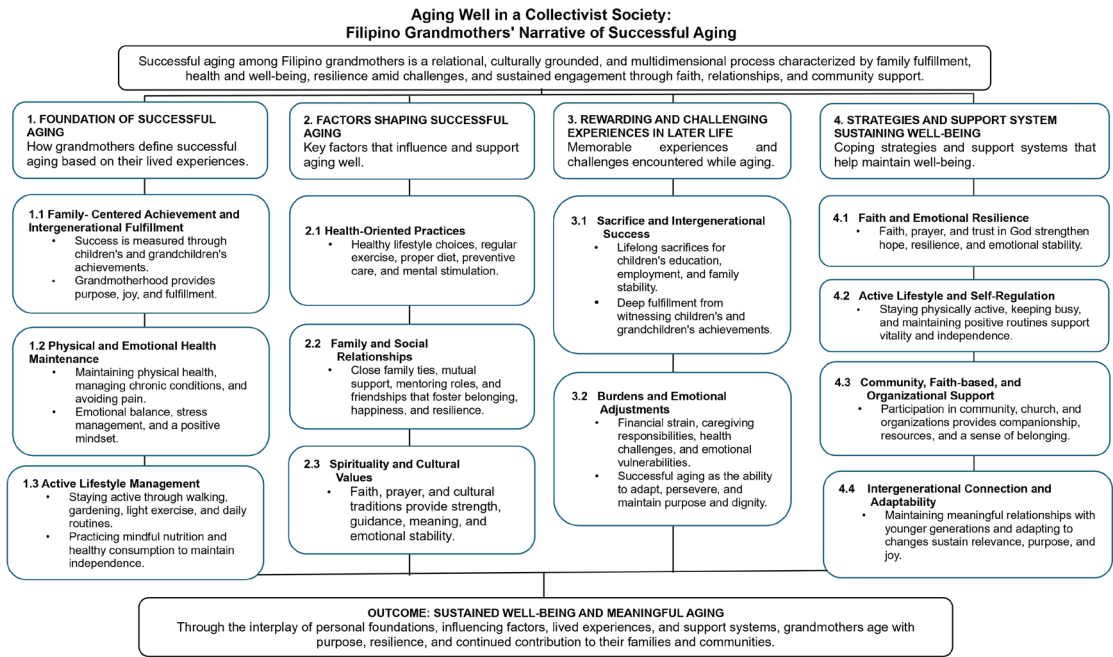
Through thematic analysis of participants narratives within a hermeneutic narrative inquiry framework, successful aging among Filipino grandmothers emerged as a relational, culturally grounded, and multidimensional process. Rather than equating aging successfully with the absence of illness, participants framed it as a life stage characterized by family fulfillment, physical and emotional balance, resilience amid challenges, and sustained engagement through faith and social support. These findings demonstrate that aging well in the Philippine context is shaped by collective well-being, interdependence, and culturally embedded values.

To provide an overview of the findings, Figure 1 presents the thematic diagram that emerged from the narratives of Filipino grandmothers. The diagram illustrates four interrelated domains of successful aging, demonstrating how aging well is understood as a multidimensional, relational, and culturally grounded process within the Filipino collectivist context.

Foundations of Successful Aging

This subsection explores how self-identified grandmothers define successful aging based on their lived experiences. The findings indicate that successful aging is understood as a multidimensional and culturally grounded process shaped by family-centered achievement, health practices, self-sufficiency, and active lifestyle in daily life. Rather than focusing solely on individual achievement, participants

Figure 1
Thematic Diagram of Successful Aging among Filipino Grandmothers



emphasized collective well-being, personal discipline, and sustained functionality as key indicators of aging well.

Family-Centered Achievement and Intergenerational Fulfillment

Participants consistently defined successful aging through their children’s and grandchildren’s achievements, positioning family success as the primary source of fulfillment in later life. Aging well was not measured by personal gain but by the ability to support and witness intergenerational progress.

Marian linked successful aging to her children’s educational attainment, reflecting intergenerational success as a source of fulfillment: *“For me, success means being able to let my two children finish their studies so they will not experience the same hardships I went through. My goal is for my children not to inherit the struggles that I had in life”*. Similarly, Hydie associated successful aging with her children’s professional achievement: *“I consider myself successful because I was able to help my children finish their education*

and become professionals”. The intergenerational dimension of successful aging becomes more evident in Edith’s narrative: *“For me, success means seeing all my children graduate and even more so if my grandchildren will also finish their studies”*. These narratives demonstrate that grandmotherhood remains a central identity in later life, where personal sacrifices are reinterpreted as meaningful through children’s achievements. Beyond their roles as mothers, participants also described fulfillment in witnessing the growth and achievements of their grandchildren. As grandmothers, they continued to provide guidance, encouragement, and emotional support, allowing them to remain actively involved in shaping the lives of younger generations.

The results support previous research indicating that Filipino older adults interpret aging through family solidarity and shared well-being (Badana & Andel, 2018). However, unlike Western models of successful aging that emphasize autonomy and individual productivity, participants prioritized relational fulfillment and collective success. Furthermore, this supports intergenerational solidarity

theory, which emphasizes the role of family reciprocity in sustaining well-being. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, successful aging emerges as a socially constructed meaning shaped by lifelong family roles and interactions. The participants interpret their children's and grandchildren's achievements as symbolic confirmation of their worth and contribution across the life course.

Physical and Emotional Health Maintenance

Participants highlighted the importance of maintaining their physical health and emotional stability as key indicators of successful aging. This theme reflects the outcomes of well-being that participants sought to achieve, including managing chronic conditions, preserving mobility, avoiding pain, and maintaining a positive and stress-free mindset.

Normz emphasized personal responsibility for maintaining health through lifestyle choices: *"I eat meat only in moderation and make sure to eat vegetables and fruits because health is truly the main capital in everyday life. I avoid staying up late, and I do not have any vices"*. Sergia reinforced this perspective by emphasizing medical awareness and self-discipline: *"Regular check-ups, consulting the right doctor when sick, and practicing self-discipline are important. Maintaining a healthy lifestyle, seeking medical advice, and doing relaxation or self-care are part of it because, for me, my greatest success is my health."* Love yourself". Participants also emphasized emotional balance as equally important as physical health. Normie explained: *"The general formula for a healthy lifestyle in old age is avoiding stress... through financial management, emotional stability, and maturity"*.

These accounts show that successful aging is achieved through intentional routines that sustain independence and vitality. Emotional stability, particularly stress management, was also considered essential to maintaining overall health. These findings align with multidimensional frameworks of successful aging. Rowe and Kahn (1997) emphasized disease prevention and physical functioning

as core components of aging well, reflected in participants' attention to diet, medical check-ups, and avoidance of vices.

Active Lifestyle Management

Distinct from the previous theme, which focuses on health and well-being outcomes, this theme highlights the everyday behaviors, routines, and practices that participants intentionally engage in to maintain their physical, emotional, and social well-being. For participants, successful aging involves staying active, practicing mindful nutrition, and proactively managing daily activities that support independence and vitality. Healthy consumption emerged as one way participants actively manage their well-being.

Normie explained how producing her own food supports her health: *"I am really fond of organic so at my age, I plant my own vegetables and fruits so that I know exactly what I'm eating because I raise them myself"*. Participants also emphasized structured daily routines as part of active aging. Abel described a typical day that integrates spiritual practice, physical movement, and household activity: *"Every day, I wake up early, pray, do light exercise and walking, clean the house, and take care of my small garden"*.

The participants' active engagement in gardening, walking, and other daily routines aligns with research showing that purposeful activity strengthens older adults' physical and emotional well-being. Trică et al. (2024) described active aging as multidimensional, combining physical movement, mental stimulation, and meaningful engagement. This echoes Diamond (2014), who found that daily routines such as light physical activity and household tasks promote emotional satisfaction and a sense of meaning. In the Philippines, Loa et al. (2023) highlighted that older adults maintain purpose through interdependent roles, not isolated leisure, but tasks that reinforce connection with family and community.

Factors Shaping Successful Aging

This subsection presents the factors that participants identified as important to successful aging. They stressed the importance of a healthy lifestyle, supportive relationships, faith, and cultural values. These factors showed how health, mental well-being, and spirituality work together to promote aging well. Their reflections indicated that a holistic approach combining exercise, diet, family, community, spirituality, and culture help build resilience, emotional stability, and fulfillment in later years. Addressing personal well-being and connections offers a comprehensive view of aging well.

Health-Oriented Practices

Grandmothers viewed that staying healthy is essential to aging well. For them, successful aging does not happen by chance but through habits that protect the body and maintain daily functioning. Marian emphasized the importance of staying active and avoiding unhealthy habits: *"Avoid foods that harm the body, and stay active, like gardening, to release sweat. Maintain a healthy mindset and avoid stress because it affects your physical health"*. Similarly, Normie highlighted the role of monitoring diet and engaging in preventive care: *"The first thing is to watch what you eat, have monthly checkups, and take action if something's excessive"*. Abel further demonstrated the integration of physical and mental activity: *"I exercise every morning and read sometimes to keep my mind active"*. Collectively, these experiences indicate that successful aging involves deliberate choices to remain active, build resilience, and maintain independence in daily life. They demonstrate a proactive approach to aging, integrating movement into their routines to preserve vitality and mental sharpness.

Across participants, health-oriented practices emerged as intentional and sustained efforts involving exercise, diet, and stress management. These practices enable older adults to maintain independence, energy, and resilience. The findings align with research emphasizing that physical activity, proper nutrition, and preventive care are critical to functional ability and well-being in later life (Stanko, 2016; Wang

et al., 2023).

Family and Social Relationships

This theme reflects the relational and emotional dimension of successful aging. Participants emphasized the importance of maintaining close relationships with family members, particularly children, grandchildren, spouses, and relatives, as sources of emotional support, belonging, and personal fulfillment in later life.

Filipino grandmothers emphasized that maintaining close ties with children, grandchildren, and extended relatives helps reduce stress and fosters a sense of belonging. Positive family interactions were seen as contributing to happiness, self-esteem, and resilience in later life. Abel associates her happiness and rejuvenation with the presence of family, demonstrating that emotional connections positively impact mood and vitality. *"My happiness comes from my family. When they are around, I feel young again"*.

Abel emphasized the importance of family cooperation: *"Our family always helps each other, so I do not feel stressed"*. Abel shows that practical support from family minimizes daily stressors, illustrating the tangible benefits of interdependence. Patt highlighted mentoring as a meaningful role. *"It is important to talk with my children and grandchildren and guide them on what is right"*. Mentoring and giving advice provide older adults with a sense of purpose and agency. Patt's engagement in advising the younger generation illustrates the intergenerational transmission of knowledge and values.

Edith highlighted the importance of mutual respect and communication within the family: *"My children are my friends. I listen to them and do not insist that I am always right"*. Also, Patt emphasized the role of friendships in managing stress: *"I always socialize with friends because that is where I find joy and forget stress"*. Participants also described their roles as mentors and caregivers, maintaining relevance through guiding younger generations. As grandmothers, they actively shared life lessons, transmitted

family values, and provided emotional support to their grandchildren. These intergenerational roles reinforced their identity, strengthened family bonds, and provided a sense of continuity across generations.

These narratives demonstrate that both family and social networks provide emotional fulfillment, companionship, and psychological support. These findings support intergenerational solidarity theory, highlighting how ongoing family relationships contribute to emotional well-being, belonging, and family cohesion in later life. Relationships serve as protective factors against loneliness and contribute to a sense of belonging and identity. The findings support studies indicating that strong social ties enhance emotional well-being, reduce stress, and promote resilience among older adults (Santini et al., 2020; Plužarić et al., 2023).

Spirituality and Cultural Values

Participants emphasized that spirituality and cultural practices provide strength, guidance, and emotional stability as people age. Faith and prayer were cited as sources of inner peace, resilience, and coping mechanisms, while cultural traditions offered structure and a sense of identity. Older adults viewed spirituality not just as ritual but as an active part of maintaining mental, emotional, and social well-being. Sonya shared that involvement in church strengthened her personal resolve, suggesting that spiritual practices provide tools for coping with challenges. *"The church helps me because I strengthen myself through faith in God"*. Sergia emphasized that faith provides a sense of accomplishment and success in aging, highlighting how spirituality influences self-perception and emotional resilience. *"The church has helped me in my aging... we must have strong faith in God"*. Edith reflected on the combined role of cultural and spiritual beliefs: *"As I grow older, our cultural and spiritual beliefs play a significant role in my life. I believe that praying, attending church, and acknowledging God have helped me remain strong and peaceful throughout my life"*. These narratives indicate that cultural identity and traditions provide continuity and meaning, helping older adults navigate changes and challenges. Spirituality and

culture together offer moral guidance, structure, and psychological comfort, highlighting their role in successful aging. Participants actively engage in both domains, demonstrating that these practices are not passive but central to resilience and well-being.

These accounts show that spirituality functions as both a strategy and a framework for meaning-making. Cultural beliefs reinforce identity, continuity, and moral guidance, helping older adults navigate life transitions. The findings are consistent with research indicating that spirituality and cultural engagement enhance emotional stability and resilience among older populations (Cruz et al., 2025; Junaković et al., 2023).

Rewarding and Challenging Experiences in Later Life

This section shares the participants' memorable experiences and challenges as they age successfully. The responses emphasize that success in later life is not measured by wealth or luxury but by fulfillment through family, service, and faith. The participants' stories reveal that while they take joy in witnessing their children's successes and living with purpose, they also encounter physical limitations, emotional struggles, and financial hardships as part of the aging process.

Sacrifice and Intergenerational Success

Grandmothers show how poverty, hardship, and daily labor shaped their view of successful aging. For them, success is not personal comfort but the progress and stability of their children. Their stories reveal that sacrifice was lifelong, rooted in love, duty, and survival. These sacrifices gained meaning when reflected in their children's education, employment, and family-building.

Financial sacrifice emerged as a central experience shaping both their lives and their understanding of success. Participants described how poverty required constant effort, discipline, and the prioritization of their children's needs over their own. Marian reflected that *"Before,*

when my children were still studying, I didn't want to sit around; I wanted to find money to help support their schooling. They finished despite our hardship; we had no wealth to support them, only our own effort". Similarly, participants viewed education as the most valuable inheritance they could provide in the absence of material wealth. Bebung shared that "I am thankful that I lived to see my children working. Since I was young, I really strived so my children could study and succeed because I had nothing to leave them except education". Participants expressed that seeing their children graduate, gain employment, and build their own families represent the culmination of their life's efforts. Normz emphasized, "Their children's graduation was the greatest reward they could receive as parents, bringing them deep happiness and a sense of accomplishment". This reflects how parenting extends beyond child-rearing into a lifelong commitment that shapes their identity even in old age. For many participants, these sacrifices became more meaningful through grandmotherhood as they witnessed the educational achievements, personal growth, and family formation of their grandchildren. Their continued involvement in the lives of younger generations reinforced a sense of purpose and fulfillment in later life.

These findings align with existing literature emphasizing that older adults derive life satisfaction and emotional well-being from fulfilling key family roles and witnessing intergenerational success. Studies have shown that Filipino elders often measure their own success through their children's achievements, reflecting a collectivist orientation where family progress defines personal fulfillment (Domingo & Asis, 2020). Similarly, research highlights that perceived contribution to children's stability enhances resilience, pride, and meaning in later life (Leder et al., 2007; Grünwald et al., 2024).

Burdens and Emotional Adjustments

Despite positive experiences, participants described aging as accompanied by financial strain, caregiving responsibilities, health challenges, and emotional adjustments. Successful aging, therefore, was not the absence of hardship but the ability to adapt with resilience

and dignity. Marian reflected on the financial struggles tied to raising her children: "My biggest problem before was supporting my children... I really dreamed that all of them would finish their studies because I didn't want them to end up in the same situation as us".

Similarly, being the primary provider strengthened their sense of responsibility and identity. Hydie expressed that "I was the breadwinner... I supported my children through my own earnings", highlighting how financial responsibility became central to her role as a mother. Caregiving responsibilities also remained a significant part of their later years. Normie shared that "I have a special-needs child... I prayed to God to help us because we could no longer handle everything on our own," showing how caregiving extends into old age and requires continuous emotional strength. Participants acknowledged that aging affects their emotional responses, making them more easily hurt or irritated. Hydie shared, "When we get old, we get easily hurt", highlighting the need for understanding and patience from family members. These changes reflect the natural emotional shifts that come with aging and require continuous adjustment.

These findings underscore that successful aging is a dynamic process shaped by both challenges and coping strategies. Unlike idealized Western models that emphasize decline avoidance, participants embraced aging as a continuous process of adjustment. At the same time, these narratives reveal that successful aging is not a uniformly positive experience. Participants continued to face financial pressures, caregiving demands, and emotional vulnerabilities even as they considered themselves aging successfully. This apparent contradiction suggests that successful aging in the Filipino context is not defined by the absence of hardship but by the ability to navigate challenges while maintaining purpose, family commitment, and emotional well-being.

Strategies and Support Systems Sustaining Well-Being

This subsection explores how grandmothers maintain their well-being

while facing the challenges of aging. Their stories reveal strategies based on faith, family support, meaningful routines, and community involvement. These strategies demonstrate resilience, adaptability, and the lasting Filipino values of *pagpupunyagi* (perseverance), *pananampalataya* (faith), and *pakikipagkapwa* (social connectedness).

Faith and Emotional Resilience

Grandmothers described successful aging as closely linked to their faith and daily spiritual routines. For them, aging well involves more than just staying healthy or reaching personal goals. They believe that regular prayer, trust in divine providence, and spiritual grounding help them stay emotionally resilient, strong, and clear-minded when facing everyday challenges. Hydie emphasized the role of prayer in maintaining strength: *"Through prayer, I remain strong and healthy so I can continue supporting my family"*. Similarly, Bebung highlighted reliance on faith during difficulties: *"Prayer is all I can do... with strong faith in God, every problem eventually fades"*. Patt further described faith as a guide for managing challenges: *"You need to adjust to solve problems... every problem can be resolved if you have faith in God"*. These narratives illustrate how spirituality enables participants to manage stress, accept uncertainty, and maintain a positive outlook despite challenges. Prayer enables participants to manage stress, reinterpret challenges, and maintain a sense of control and hope. The findings align with research showing that spirituality strengthens emotional resilience and supports coping in later life (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). In contrast to Western secular models of aging, participants integrated faith into everyday life as a practical and emotional resource. From a symbolic interactionist perspective, spirituality also shapes how individuals interpret aging, transforming hardship into meaningful experience.

Active Lifestyle and Self-Regulation

For grandmothers, successful aging meant staying physically active and engaged in daily life. For them, aging well is not only about physical health but also about maintaining

emotional balance, independence, and social connectedness. Their sense of fulfillment is shaped by the belief that daily movement, purposeful routines, and community participation enhance vitality, resilience, and happiness.

Marian described integrating activity into daily routines: *"I keep myself busy cleaning and gardening, and sometimes I join the barangay Zumba sessions"*. Hydie emphasized exercise and mobility: *"Every day, I exercise at home and ride my motorcycle; it makes me happy that I can still do that at 70"*. Normie highlighted the importance of staying positive and engaged: *"Exercise, taking a bath, good aura, always positive, and keeping oneself busy"*. These narratives show that physical activity and structured routines are not only health practices but also coping strategies that promote emotional stability and independence. Staying active helps maintain mobility, reduces stress, and fosters a sense of purpose. The findings align with literature emphasizing that active engagement supports both physical and psychological well-being in older adults (Yen et al., 2023; Wang & Tsai, 2021).

Community, Faith-Based, and Organizational Support

Grandmothers identified community, faith-based, and organizational support as important resources that help sustain their well-being in later life. Successful aging was described not only in terms of personal health and family stability but also through continued participation in social, religious, and community networks that provide connection, purpose, and support. For them, aging well is not only about personal health and family stability but also about engaging in activities that foster social connection, emotional support, and a sense of purpose. Their narratives reveal that community involvement provides companionship, recreation, emotional reassurance, and practical assistance, all of which contribute to their overall well-being.

Marian emphasized the value of organized social groups: *"In the senior citizens' group, we enjoy dancing and socializing"*. Sergia explained church-based support: *"Church members are very supportive, providing emotional and*

sometimes financial support". Sergia also referred to *bayanihan* as an expression of mutual assistance and social solidarity: *"My husband's tribe practices bayanihan or helping one another. We should also live with good character."* This reflects how community cooperation fosters social cohesion, moral guidance, and a sense of collective responsibility.

Edith described the practical benefits of community organizations: *"Organizations like Kalipi, the senior citizens' association, women's groups, and World Vision have helped us a lot financially, especially during my husband's operation"*. For these grandmothers, involvement in organized groups, faith-based activities, and civic programs cultivates emotional well-being, strengthens social bonds, and provides practical resources.

These experiences demonstrate that successful aging is not merely individual but relational, nurtured through shared support, collective participation, and continuous engagement with the broader community. Community involvement provides emotional, social, and practical resources that help sustain well-being in later life. Participation in social networks also strengthens social connectedness and support among older adults. The findings support research indicating that community involvement enhances life satisfaction and emotional well-being in later life (Cattan et al., 2005).

Intergenerational Connection and Adaptability

Grandmothers defined successful aging as closely tied to maintaining relationships with younger generations, particularly children and grandchildren. For them, aging well is not only about physical or emotional health but also about being socially engaged and maintaining a sense of relevance within the family. Intergenerational connections provide joy, purpose, and continuity of family values while encouraging adaptability in a changing world.

Abel described the joy of bonding with grandchildren: *"I play with my grandchildren and share my life experiences"*. Edith emphasized

her role in guiding *"I give advice to the younger generation to guide them and maintain my connection with them"*. Patt highlighted adaptability to modern trends: *"I go along with them on social media like TikTok; we elders must adjust"*. These narratives show that successful aging involves maintaining relevance and connection within the family. Adaptability allows grandmothers to bridge generational gaps while preserving their identity and values. These experiences highlight grandmotherhood as an active and evolving social role in later life, where maintaining meaningful relationships with grandchildren contributes to emotional well-being, purpose, and successful aging.

The findings align with research emphasizing that intergenerational relationships enhance emotional well-being and resilience among older adults (Chen et al., 2020). These findings further suggest that maintaining meaningful relationships with younger generations and adapting to changing social contexts help grandmothers preserve their sense of purpose, relevance, and connection in later life.

CONCLUSION

Successful aging among Filipino grandmothers is best understood as relational rather than individualistic. While health remains important, meaning, family continuity, spirituality, and social usefulness are equally central to their well-being. These findings contribute to the existing literature on successful aging by demonstrating that, within the Filipino collectivist context, aging well is understood through family reciprocity, intergenerational connectedness, spirituality, and community engagement rather than individual independence alone. These findings highlight that aging successfully in the Filipino context is deeply rooted in interdependence and collective values, underscoring the need for culturally responsive aging policies that recognize older women not only as care recipients but also as active contributors to family and community life. Strengthening intergenerational support, promoting community engagement, and ensuring access to holistic health and social

services are essential to sustaining their well-being.

This study is limited by its focus on self-identified grandmothers from a single community and does not capture the perspectives of grandfathers or older adults in different family contexts. As such, the findings should be interpreted within the specific cultural and social setting of the participants. Future research may explore the experiences of grandfathers and older adults from diverse living arrangements to provide a broader understanding of successful aging.

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