Stories of struggles and success: Unveiling the societal pressures among professional unmarried women

Abigail Quimosing-Ocay[1]*, Daisy A Mamaril[2], Jay France D. Taclawan[3], Ronald B. Bulwayan[4]
[1]College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences, Kalinga State University, Philippines; abquimosing@ksu.edu.ph (AQO.).

Abstract: Despite growing societal interest in the experiences of professional unmarried women, research often overlooks their specific vulnerabilities and challenges, particularly within the Philippine context, specifically in Kalinga province. This phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of professional unmarried women regarding their concept of success, the struggles they face in their personal and professional lives, the impact of these struggles on their mental health and social well-being, and their coping strategies. The research disclosed that success is viewed by these women through the themes of career and position, health, and peace of mind. Their struggles often stem from societal pressures, emotional needs, cultural issues related to marriage and career, health issues, bullying, and discrimination in the workplace. These experiences were found to have implications for their mental health, potentially leading to anxiety and depression, and their social well-being, including stigma and social isolation, feelings of inadequacy through social comparison, and confusion between societal norms and personal values. Despite these challenges, the women employed coping strategies such as diverting attention to family and loved ones, keeping themselves busy, practicing self-acceptance and self-care, and engaging in church activities while maintaining faith. The study is grounded in social role theory and intersectionality theory, highlighting the influence of societal expectations and the intersecting nature of gender, marital status, and profession on the experiences of these women. The findings provide a deeper understanding of the complexities faced by professional unmarried women in navigating societal norms while pursuing professional success.

Keywords: Phenomenology, Professional unmarried women, Societal pressures, Struggles, Success.

1. Introduction

Professional unmarried women's struggles are a growing interest in today's society, yet they often deal with the unique challenges and societal pressures that can impact their mental health, well-being, and career advancement. Despite their achievements and contributions to the workforce, these women are often subjected to societal expectations and stereotypes that can lead to feelings of guilt, shame, and isolation.

Several studies noted that professional unmarried women face significant societal pressures in various cultural contexts. In Muslim-dominant countries like Indonesia, career paths do not alleviate the societal expectation for women to prioritize marriage and motherhood over professional success [1]. Similarly, in China, the "leftover women" phenomenon highlights how patriarchal structures, and parental influences constrain marital choices for single professional women [2]. Studies in Indonesia reveal discrimination and stereotypes against unmarried, educated career women, leading to societal intolerance and pressures [3]. Furthermore, research on women's ascent to senior executive positions in Brazil indicates that societal and familial pressures can influence women's career trajectories, with different phases reflecting varying levels of pressure and isomorphism to male stereotypes [4]. These findings collectively emphasize the complex interplay of societal expectations, gender norms, and familial influences on the lives and choices of professional unmarried women.

Historically, marriage has been a central concept influencing the perceptions and roles of single women. In various historical periods, single women, including spinsters, widows, and never-married women, have challenged traditional societal norms by working, owning property, and forming alternative living arrangements [5, 6].

The same is true for several Filipino women, who are recognized for their successful stories as single, independent women. One of them is from Kalinga, the recipient of the Presidential Medal of Merit, Whang-od Oggay. Her success story as the oldest Filipino traditional tattoo artist serves as an inspiration to women, especially those who remained single up to their old age but remained steadfast and dignified. However, most studies conducted among Filipinos only focused on the stories of married women or the general population of women. In reality, the unmarried group of women are more vulnerable due to expectations because they may lack the financial support and legal protections that come with marriage, leading to increased vulnerability in terms of economic stability and social status [7, 8].

Consequently, success stories of unmarried women can be gathered through struggles that may invoke social implications of societal pressures and discrimination, which may have influenced their views of marriage. The language surrounding marriage and women's experiences is deeply intertwined with issues of sexism and success [9]. While feminism has made strides in reforming language to be less biased, negative sexist commentary persists, reflecting enduring androcentric beliefs [10]. In the context of same-sex marriage debates, the failure to define marriage has led to misunderstandings and conflicts [11]. The struggles faced by unwed women in navigating societal expectations and discriminatory language highlight the need for continued efforts to challenge sexist narratives and promote equality in relationships and institutions [12]. Success for women in the realm of marriage and relationships is often hindered by entrenched sexist attitudes and language practices, emphasizing the ongoing need for advocacy and reform.

This study encapsulates the dual narrative of the difficulties faced by unmarried women due to societal pressures and the successes they have achieved despite these challenges. It highlights the themes of resilience, societal expectations, and professional accomplishments among unmarried women in the workforce.

Thus, it is along the concepts discussed above that this study is accentuated, with the purpose to shed light on the challenges and triumphs of the professional unmarried women in navigating societal norms related to marriage. By exploring the lived experiences of these women, the research seeks to uncover the complexities of managing societal pressures while pursuing professional success. Through a phenomenological approach, the study provides insight into how professional unmarried women cope with societal expectations, offering a deeper understanding of their daily struggles and success within the context of societal norms.

This study accentuates the social role theory by Ridgeway [13] and the intersectionality theory by [14] which foregrounds the purpose of the study to unveil the lived experiences of the professional unmarried women.

In this study, Social Role Theory highlights the impact of societal expectations on professional unmarried women's perception of marriage and singleness. According to this theory, cultural norms and expectations influence women's social roles and interactions, leading to behaviors that align with traditional gender roles. This theory suggests that societal structures shape women's roles, with men often assuming dominant roles while women tend to take on more subordinate roles [13]. These roles can impact women's social integration, acceptance, and overall well-being within their communities and societies. Additionally, the theory emphasizes the importance of understanding how social roles and expectations affect women's experiences, interactions, and well-being in various social contexts.

Significantly, social well-being refers to the ability to communicate with others and build meaningful relationships where one can freely be themselves. It is an important dimension of overall health, along with physical and mental well-being. The key aspects of social well-being include: 1) Social integration - the quality of one's relationships and connection to the community; 2) Social acceptance -

the perception of society and other people as generally positive and trustworthy 3) Social contribution - the belief that one is a vital member of society, with something of value to give; 4) Social actualization - the evaluation of the potential and trajectory of society; and 5) Social coherence - the perception of the quality, organization, and operation of the social world [15].

Further, factors like marital status, gender, and physical activity can influence different aspects of social well-being [15]. To improve social well-being, experts recommend maintaining regular contact with friends, spending quality time with loved ones, engaging in volunteer work, joining interest-based groups, and participating in community events [16, 17]. Fostering positive social relationships and feeling connected to one's community is vital to enhancing overall social well-being.

The theory of intersectionality by Koekemoer, et al. [14] could provide a useful framework for studying the lived experiences of professional unmarried women. Intersectionality examines how different aspects of identity, such as gender, marital status, and profession, intersect and create unique experiences of privilege and oppression.

Professional unmarried women face discrimination and stereotypes at the intersection of their gender, marital status, and career. They are often perceived as less committed to their jobs, more likely to leave the company, and a distraction to male colleagues. These biases may make employers reluctant to promote or hire single women. Consequently, intersectionality theory recognizes that unmarried professional women are not a monolithic group. Factors like age, race, and socioeconomic status further shape their experiences. Older, never-married women may face additional stigma and concerns about financial dependence and loneliness.

Significantly, the theory is applied in this study to examine how gender, marital status, and career intersect to create unique challenges and opportunities, to recognize the diversity within the group and how other identities like age and race impact experiences, to analyze how societal expectations and stereotypes about unmarried professional women manifest in the workplace, and to explore how single women navigate and resist these pressures to build fulfilling lives and careers.

By centering on these theories, this research can provide a more sophisticated knowledge of the intricate realities of professional single women and move beyond simplistic narratives of struggle or success to reveal the multifaceted nature of their lived experiences. Therefore, the study drew insights from the lived experiences of selected professional unmarried women of Kalinga as to their stories of struggles and success. Through phenomenological approach, the lived experiences of the participants would project output on the resolution for organizing program to cater to the social well-beings of the participants that would establish an organization that conducts annual citation for significant women of Kalinga. The specific relationship of the indicators is shown in Figure 1:
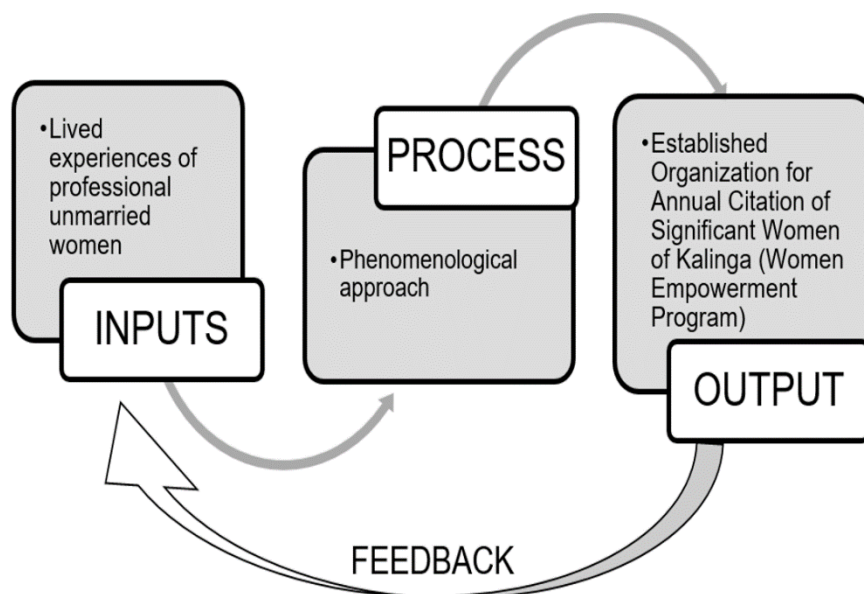
Figure 1.
Research paradigm.

2. Objective

This study examined the lived experiences of selected professional unmarried women of Kalinga through their stories of struggles and success. Specifically, it identified the themes of success among the participants, their common experiences of struggles in their personal and professional lives, the implications of the lived experiences of the participants on their mental health and social well-being, and the strategies they employ to overcome societal pressures and succeed in their careers.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research Method

This qualitative research utilized a phenomenological design to uncover the lived experiences of the professional unmarried women of Kalinga. The phenomenological approach analyzed the participants' lived experiences, which, in this study, essentially focused on the meanings of the participants' experiences. Thus, this research design is appropriate in narrating the lived experiences of the professional unmarried women of Kalinga, as to their struggles in their personal and professional lives, and their success stories, highlighting their strategies for coping with societal pressures.

3.2. Data Collection and Analysis

Data analysis was partly adapted from the phenomenological research method of Clark and Minami [18] which comprised recorded interviews, transcription, reduction, and regrouping and coding. The difference with this study is the use of written interviews of some of the participants instead of pure face-to-face interview and the translation of some answers spoken in the participants' vernaculars. This is why some participants could share their experiences better when it is written or when it is delivered in their most comfortable language. Ten (10) participants were scheduled for semi-structured face-to-face interviewing and four (4) for narrative writing. In order not to limit what the participants would be able to share, the researchers gave them enough time to undertake the interviews at about 40 to 60 minutes or write their narratives at about 2-3 days. After the interviews were recorded, transcription was undertaken, where the researcher wrote word-for-word what was audio-recorded during the interview process. With that, translation was undertaken and themes or codes on the participants' lived experiences were extracted through reduction and coding. In reduction, only the experiences related to

the study were extracted, while in coding, experiences were classified according to themes. The significant themes were analyzed through thematic analysis. It systematically analyzed text data to identify patterns, themes, and meanings. It is a flexible approach with various data sources, including textual, visual, and audio. Finally, the themes were interpreted according to the questions posed in the study.

4. Results and Discussion

4.1. Themes of Success among Professional Unmarried Women

Table 1.
Themes of success among professional unmarried women.

Informant	Response	Theme
IN1	You know my position already. Yes, we may say I am successful on that aspect. I am fulfilled with my position. Maybe, this is how being single can focus much on building her career.	Career and Position
IN2	Of course, I am satisfied and fulfilled with my career. With that, I can say, I had a successful journey.	
IN4	Given my career right now, yes, I consider this a success already.	
IN5	Achieving my stable career is what success for me. I have worked hard and studied in order to reach this success.	
IN2	I was never hospitalized in my entire life. I think that is another successful story for me.	Health
IN3	Well, when we are healthy and can work and earn a living; that is also a form of success.	
IN6	Success, for me, is gained when we are happy and fulfilled. Like, you are at peace with your life with or without a family of your own.	Peace of mind
IN7	I see success in different forms. It can be when you are financially stable because you have the career. However, I think it is the peace of mind that I consider the peak of success. We may have everything, but without the peace of mind, it is useless… Yes, I am successful because I have the peace of mind.	

Table 1 presents the findings on the themes of success among the selected professional unmarried women. These include *career and position, health,* and *peace of mind.* These aspects are seen by the participants as forms of success, considering their professions and marital status.

4.2. Career and Position

As narrated, all the participants are fulfilled in their careers, having reached the position they aspired to and having a stable job and established career. This indicates the prioritization of careers to achieve their goals.

Several studies noted that many professional unmarried women focus on building successful careers to achieve a sense of fulfillment and self-worth [14, 19]. Career advancement and professional growth are important indicators of success for these women, and they often strive to achieve higher positions and greater responsibility in their careers [14]. This is for the reason that career success can also bring personal fulfillment and satisfaction, which is vital for the mental health and social well-being of single professional women [19]. They may find that their careers provide a sense of purpose and direction, which helps them navigate the challenges of being single.

4.3. Health and Peace of Mind

Interestingly, the study identified other forms of success, such as health and peace of mind. As for health, two participants specified that when one is healthy, she can work and earn a living, which is also a form of success. Another participant emphasized how she has never been hospitalized in her entire life and considered it a successful story. On the other hand, two identified the significance of peace of mind, as it is considered a form of success. One mentioned that success is achieved when you are at peace with your life, where you project happiness and fulfillment. The other participant emphasized on the ultimate

part of success as achieving the peace of mind, noting that "We may have everything, but without the peace of mind, it is useless (IN7)."

The above-mentioned findings indicate a different concept of success from this group of women. However, studies revealed that career success is a substitute for marriage among professional unmarried women. Single professional women often view career success as a substitute for marriage and family, as they may feel that their career provides a sense of fulfillment and security that they might not find in a romantic relationship [19]. Additionally, they often measure their success by their career achievements and positions, which can be a source of pride and fulfillment [14, 20].

Hence, the concept of career and position as a form of success is a crucial aspect of the lives of professional single women. While it can provide a sense of fulfillment and accomplishment, it is essential to recognize the broader implications and challenges that come with this focus.

4.4. Struggles of Professional Unmarried Women

Table 2.
Struggles experienced by professional unmarried women.

Informant	Response	Code	
IN1	Mmm. The truth is I also feel pressured being single at my age, but people never stop asking when I will get married.	Societal expectations and pressures	*Struggles in their personal lives*
IN2	Just imagine people teasing me about my standards of a man because I am not yet married at late 30s. It is sure stressful, you know… You know…the pressure of meeting their expectation.		
IN3	I had one [boyfriend], but I was cheated. There, the more I got pressured of what to expect for my next relationship. So, I never get to set my mind for a man anymore.		
IN4	Some say, it is never too late for marriage at whatever age. However, I also lose hope waiting for that time when I finally meet the man destined for me. I have the profession, stable job, and looks (laughing), but I don't know why. Is it not normal? (laughing)		
IN6	Sometimes, it is distressing to listen to people reiterating that I am a waste of a woman for not getting married.		
IN7	I just laugh when they [other people] say I can still get married even at my age. They say I have this career and established finances, but I cannot get away with the pressure of marriage.		
IN2	Of course, there was a point in my life when I needed and wanted a partner because it is hard to live alone. We also need care and the sense of being loved.	Emotional needs fulfilled by a partner and one's own child	
IN3	Thanks to my nieces and nephews, I went by. However, there is still this longing of my own child. Even without a partner, it's okay, but for a child, please.		
IN5	Yes, ma'am. There is a point in life when I also envied my batch mates who are happily married, having their own kids. Sometimes, I actually realize my life is boring, but I just got used to it…home and work.		
IN6	I think, it's getting sick, and you're alone, treating yourself. We need other people [family] in our lives.		
IN1	It was due to culture, maybe, as for one reason I was not able to get married. I come from a very conservative culture that in marriage, you go through the process. Because of that, that supposed-to-be "the one" got away. He was a foreigner. I got sick, so it didn't happen the way I may have thought, if ever.	Cultural issues of marriage and success	
IN5	Well, because of the traditions that you are successful when you have the career first, I may have set too much focus on career and eventually forgetting about marriage. My parents were really strict.		
IN1	I had this illness where I had to file leave for two years…without pay. That was the worst time in my life, wherein I had to stop with my post-grad studies for me to undergo therapy.	Health issues	
IN4	It's hard to get sick, especially when you're living alone and you're far		

	from your family. There that I realized I needed a family of my own.		
IN2	Yes, I also experienced being bullied in the office because I am still single. They often call me "baak" (single at 30s). I just don't show I am offended, but I do, sometimes. You know…the pressure of meeting their expectation.	Bullying in the workplace	*Struggles in their professional lives*
IN3	Well, I am not the only unmarried in the office. They may find it fun to laugh and tease us by pairing us together, but I feel like being offended, sometimes.		
IN4	I am used to it anyway, especially with my colleagues. Though they keep teasing me to get married, I just laugh and go along.		
IN7	There was even a time before when I was called "lesbian" because I never had a boyfriend.		
IN2	They often call me "baak" (single at 30s). I just don't show I am offended, but I do, sometimes. You know the pressure.	Discrimination and Sexism	
IN5	It is just discriminating, sometimes, when there is a conversation with co-workers, and they tell you it is not for me to comment because I have not experienced having a family. Well, it is true, but it hurts deep inside.		
IN6	I supposed to get promoted. I expected to get the position because I ranked first during the evaluation and I have been in the office longer than the others who applied. However, they have considered the one who is a family person over me who is still single. Well, I just gave way. I cannot do anything but wait for next time.		

Table 2 shows that there are struggles experienced by the participants in their personal and professional lives, which include four (4) themes of struggles in their personal lives and two (2) themes of struggles in their professional lives. Themes of struggles in the personal lives of the participants include *societal expectations and pressures, emotional needs fulfilled by a partner or one's own child, cultural issues of marriage and success,* and *health issues.* As for the themes of struggles in the participants' professional lives, these include *bullying in the workplace* and *discrimination and sexism.*

4.5. Societal Expectations and Pressures

The study found that societal expectations among professional unmarried women lead to pressures regarding their marital status and career. Interestingly, age is seen as a factor in their experiences of such struggles, as the study noted that older professional unmarried women experience more struggles in their personal lives due to societal pressures. People tend to set higher expectations among this group of women in their careers and marital status when they are already professionals and have stable jobs and established careers. However, the study also noted that this group of women often experience struggles intrapersonally and that there are implications of chronic stress and depression.

Several studies revealed that societal pressure, which is the thought of meeting society's expectations, may lead to negative impact in the lives of these professional unmarried women. Antwi [21] and Saili and Saili [22] disclosed in their studies that this group of women face significant societal pressures, including stigmatization, marginalization, and verbal/nonverbal comments that stereotype and discriminate against their single status, leading to feelings of isolation, low self-esteem, and pressure to conform to societal expectations [21].

As experienced by the participants, they are pressured by people's expectations that at their age, in their late 30s, they are supposed to have established their careers and should be married. The participants specified that they get stressed when people tease them and never stop asking when they will get married. One even mentioned the distress she felt when people reiterated she was a waste of a woman for not yet getting married. Moreover, one even asked if it is normal not to marry or have a boyfriend at her age and with her career and looks, while another is pressured on what to expect in her next relationship because she fears being cheated again. In direct point, all the participants struggle because of the pressure to meet the expectations of the people around them.

In a different context, like the cultures of Malay and Chinese societies, unmarried women are labeled with derogatory terms like "old virgin" or "not sellable," intensifying the societal stigma and pressure [23, 24]. These women often experience parental pressure to marry, leading to feelings of unhappiness, anxiety, and stress due to peer, family, workplace, and community expectations. Despite pursuing professional careers, Muslim women in Muslim-dominant countries still face challenges in being socially and religiously accepted if they remain unmarried, highlighting the persistent prioritization of marriage and family over individual career aspirations [1, 25].

4.6. Emotional Needs Fulfilled by a Partner or One's Own Child

The study revealed that the sense of loneliness in living alone triggered the participants to long for a partner or a child. They too are human beings with emotional needs. As to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, emotional need is accentuated on his third level of need, love and belonging needs. This makes emphasis that human behavior is motivated by the need for emotional relationships [26] and it conforms to the emotional urge that people have for interpersonal interactions, affiliation, connectedness, and belonging to a group [27].

Consequently, the findings of this study conform to Maslow's love and belonging needs. As narrated, some professional unmarried women felt enviousness over their colleagues who are married or with a child. One even shared her longing for a child that it does not matter with or without a partner. One also emphasized the need for care and sense of being loved, while another expressed life is boring, sometimes, because she lives alone, just keeping her routing at work and at home.

Hence, the participants are but human beings with belonging needs such as friendship, intimacy, trust, acceptance, receiving and giving affection, and love [27] or as specified by Cherry [26] romantic attachments, family relationships, and social groups, community groups, churches and religious organizations.

4.7. Cultural Issues of Marriage and Success

Culture is found in this study as intervening factor in the perceptions of the professional unmarried women regarding marriage and success. In their stories, two mentioned that it is due to culture and traditions that they are not yet married in their late 30s. One narrated that she comes from a conservative culture and that in marriage, she has to go through the process. She cannot marry her boyfriend unless she is healed. That made the turning point in her supposed-to-married life when her boyfriend left. In another story, due to the strict traditions of their parents that she has to have a career and stable finances first, she forgot about her love life.

This phenomenon among professional unmarried women is a global issue. For instance, in the United States, the marriage rate has declined significantly, and many highly educated women are choosing not to marry [28]. In countries like Turkey, India, Poland, Germany, and Ghana, professional women decide to remain unmarried due to reasons of prioritizing career over marriage, fear of sacrificing autonomy, mistrust in men, societal stigmatization, and enjoying singlehood [29-31].

Moreover, this result corroborates with Shahrak, et al. [32] that "cultural and religious norms and expectations may influence the needs and behavior of single women" (p 2.). Thus, this implies that the selected professional unmarried women have a strong sense of cultural traditions and values, which they tend to emulate in their choices and decisions for marriage and career.

4.8. Health Issues

Health is found as another peripheral issue among the selected professional unmarried women, as it affects their decisions of marriage and career. As narrated by two of the participants, illness is seen as setback in fulfilling their dreams of having their own families and establishing their careers. One of the participants mentioned about her plan of finishing a post-graduate degree but has to stop due to illness, and she was not able to continue her relationship with supposed-to-be boyfriend due to her illness. Another participant shared her realization that it is hard to get sick when living alone. Thus, these lived

experiences of the participants conform to the fact that this group of women also has needs for love and belongingness, which could be projected by a family of their own.

Rafiq, et al. [30] emphasized on the impact of illness on career among single professional women, including the challenges it may cause to their emotional stability. He specified that illness can disrupt a professional unmarried woman's career, reducing productivity, missed deadlines, and decreased job satisfaction. This can negatively impact her professional growth and financial stability. On the other hand, illness can also bring emotional challenges, such as feelings of isolation, depression, and anxiety. These emotional struggles can make it difficult for unmarried professional women to maintain their usual routine and sense of fulfillment [30].

4.9. Bullying in the Workplace

The study revealed that professional unmarried women are also vulnerable to bullying, which were noted in their lived experiences. As narrated by the participants, they encounter colleagues who called them "baak" (old but not married) or "tomboy" (lesbian). One of the participants even shared that she is being paired with an unmarried male counterpart. This implies that bullying knows no age, profession, or status. This finding coincides with Striebing [33] that women are more likely to report experiences of bullying and sexual discrimination compared to men.

According to the study of the Department of Ventura County Health Care Agency [34] workplace bullying is a common issue, where women are commonly the target of bullies. Their study further emphasized that workplace bullying can lead to negative effects such as stress, lowered self-esteem and depression, anxiety, digestive upsets, high blood pressure, insomnia, and trouble with relationships due to work-related stress. In the longer effect, the lived experiences of female professional targets of workplace bullying reveal that bullies pursue their victims unrelentingly in an attempt to fire them, often with limited support from colleagues or the company [35]. Hence, addressing workplace bullying is essential to prevent negative consequences for both the individual targets and the organization as a whole.

4.10. Discrimination and Sexism

The study found that there are experiences of discrimination and sexism among the professional unmarried women involved in the study. As per responses of the participants, they mentioned the discrimination they experienced due to being single. Others shared how they were called "baak" (old but still unmarried). Another story shared is she was discriminated in a conversation regarding family matters because she was presumed to know nothing about the topic. One participant also shared about being discriminated in a promotion she applied for because they had to consider first the family person over her. So, she has to accept it and wait for the next time. This implies that single women may face discrimination in the workplace due to their marital status. They may be seen as a "hire risk" or face questions about their personal life and plans for marriage and children [36]. However, during the promotion level, they may face discrimination for being the less priority over married women.

Studies have shown that workplace bullying, sexual harassment, and discrimination can have detrimental effects on female employees' career progression and job satisfaction [33, 37]. Gender, age, and nationality play crucial roles in the likelihood of self-identifying as a target of workplace bullying, with women generally experiencing higher vulnerability, especially in academic settings [38].

Gender differentiation in sexism may contribute to gender discrimination in the workplace and that studies have shown that higher levels of sexism are related to greater bias against working women [39]. Unfortunately, women in the workplace face criticism on various characteristics, which Liu [40] identified as age, attractiveness, body size, education, and parental status, which can be used as excuses for underlying gender bias. These criticisms can hinder women's career growth and lead them to internalize negative feedback, which can further exacerbate gender disparities [40].

In summary, there are more struggles identified by the participants in their personal lives as compared to their struggles in their professional lives, though the degree of their struggles was not

measured. This may profess that these women are more flexible in the workplace, where they identified lesser struggles. This could be attributed to the finding that single women tend to have higher job attitudes compared to married women, which can contribute to their success in the workplace [41].

4.11. Implications of the Lived Experiences of the Participants

Table 3.
Implications of the lived experiences of the participants to their mental and social well-being.

Themes	Implications
Struggles in their personal lives:	On Mental Health:
Societal expectations and pressures	*Anxiety and Depression*
Emotional needs fulfilled by a partner or one's own child	On Social Well-being:
Cultural issues of marriage and success	*Stigma and social isolation*
Illness as setback in fulfilling dreams	*Sense of inadequacy through social comparison*
Struggles in their professional lives:	*Confusion and internal conflict between societal norms and personal values*
Bullying in the workplace	
Discrimination and sexism	

Table 2 shows that there are implications of the lived experiences of the participants on their mental health and social well-being. The struggles of the professional unmarried in their personal and professional lives are found to project implications of anxiety and depression on their mental health and imply stigma and social isolation, sense of inadequacy through social comparison, and confusion between societal norms and personal values on their social well-being.

4.12. Implications on Mental Health
The study disclosed that the struggles experienced by the selected professional unmarried women have significant implications on their mental health. The participants' struggles in their personal lives such as societal expectations and pressures, emotional needs fulfilled by a partner or one's own child, cultural issues of marriage and success, and health issues, including their struggles in their professional lives such as bullying and discrimination and sexism indicate the vulnerability of this group of women, resulting to psychological implications on their mental health such as stress and depression.

Grundström, et al. [42] discussed that for women, being single is more strongly linked to mental health issues compared to being divorced/widowed. Consequently, potential explanations for the link between singlehood and poorer mental health include lack of social and emotional support from friends and family [43, 44] lower satisfaction with one's sex life [44] and adherence to the cultural view that marriage is more desirable than singlehood [44].

Moreover, research has shown that societal stigmatization and discrimination against unmarried female professionals can lead to negative psychological effects such as unhappiness, anxiety, and stress [21]. Additionally, comparisons between married and single working women have indicated that marital status can impact psychological well-being, with single women scoring lower [45]. The same is true with Fekih and Meziane [46] finding that single women have a higher rate of mental health problems, irrespective of their educational attainment. Common issues include emotional issues including worrying and irritation, mental and physical exhaustion, and feelings of inadequacy [46]. These findings underscore the need for tailored support systems and interventions to promote the mental well-being of single professional women.

4.13. Implications on Social Well-being
The study revealed that aside from the implications of the struggles experienced on the mental health of the participants, implications on the participants' social well-being are also accentuated. This

study found specific implications such as *stigma and social isolation, sense of inadequacy through social comparison,* and *confusion and internal conflict between societal norms and personal values* as inevitable.

Berg-Cross, et al. [28] discussed in their study that society overvalues relationship status, which contributes to stigmas and discrimination against single women. Thus, they may face pressure to get married and start a family, with their singleness seen as a personal failure or a reflection of their character [47]. Moreover, Antwi [21] posited that women may face challenges in achieving work-life balance due to inter-role conflict, role ambiguity, and external pressures, impacting their productivity and effectiveness. Furthermore, comparisons between married and single working women indicate that marital status can influence psychological well-being, with married women generally exhibiting better levels of self-acceptance and purpose in life [48]. These findings underscore the importance of addressing societal stereotypes, providing support structures, and promoting a more inclusive and understanding environment to enhance the social well-being of single professional women.

4.14. Strategies in Overcoming Societal Pressures

Table 4.
Strategies in overcoming societal pressures among the professional unmarried women.

Informant	Response	Code
IN1	I am fulfilled already. I just divert my attention to my family. I am closed with my family, especially my nieces and nephews. I just focus my attention to them whenever they're around.	Diverting attention to family and loved ones
IN5	Spend time with the people you love – your family, friends, and neighbors also.	
IN6	How I overcome struggles? I give time for leisure and bonding with my friends and with myself, of course.	
IN7	Just focus your attention to things that matter to you. For instance, you go out with your family and friends.	
IN2	Well, yes. I have been busy studying and pushing myself more at work that I tend to forget I am getting old. I kept myself busy. That's my strategy, I think.	Keeping self busy
IN4	Nothing. Just keep yourself busy, maybe.	
IN5	Get busy. Spend your work time wisely. Keep it up in your workplace. In that case, you will tend to forget your loneliness.	
IN7	I also involve myself into groups, which I believe would help me get busy during lonesome time like during Feb 14 (laughing).	
IN1	Well, there is no first step aside from acceptance. For me, I have learned to embrace my situation. That maybe is what I am here for. Anyway, I am happy with my career. I am fulfilled already.	Self-acceptance and self-care
IN3	I believe it is trough accepting the fact that there is time under heaven. When it is your time, then it's your time. Anyway, I am not yet that old. Others got married at 40s, 50s…	
IN5	One more thing. Spend more time for yourself. Love yourself first.	
IN7	I was able to overcome also this point in life when I got to travel places, here and abroad. In that way, I have learned self-care more than ever.	
IN4	What I do is I spend most of my time in church activities. I am a choir member. We have twice practice each week. I think that is the best thing I will ever do with my time.	Engaging in church activities and keeping the faith
IN6	As to my routine. I go to school, I go home, and I go out with friends. Most of my friends go to the same church. We spend out Saturdays and Sundays together at church, most of the time. We have this "Women for Christ Ministry," where we spend our Sundays at church. We cook, we visit fellows, we sing, we play, just like that.	
IN7	I know there is nothing wrong with me. It is called "single blessedness" as I learned from a preacher (laughing). We just have different calling. I still found my purpose even if I stay single for life. I just keep the faith.	

Table 4 presents the themes on the strategies employed by the participants in overcoming their struggles, which the study identified as *diverting attention to family and loved ones, keeping self busy, self-acceptance and self-care*, and *engaging in church activities and keeping the faith.*

Every struggle requires strategy to overcome it. This study notes that the selected professional unmarried women consider coping strategies in overcoming societal pressures. The participants recognize the significance of people in one's life such as family, friends, or relatives. They emphasized that the presence of such individuals in one's life is a means of diverting their attention from a solo, boring life to a warm and lively environment. Another strategy mostly identified is keeping self busy. Most of the participants spent their singlehood studying so that they were able to finish their post-graduate degrees, while the others extend work in their offices just to get busy. While for others, they consider self-acceptance and self-care as the prior strategy in overcoming the struggles they encounter. Without acceptance, they cannot move forward, and caring and loving self first is crucial in determining the next step. Finally, some emphasized the significance of faith in their process of overcoming, as they mentioned about the strategy of engaging in church activities and keeping the faith. One even emphasized that "single blessedness" (being single) as but normal. These findings conform to Shahrak, et al. [49] strategies as adapting to being alone by getting used to solitude, living with family or developing closer relationships with friends, accepting God's destiny, striving for beauty and health, and becoming absorbed in work and education.

Moreover, several studies have identified other strategies in overcoming societal pressures among professional unmarried women. It may include promoting female empowerment, setting high standards in life, enjoying singlehood, and pursuing autonomy and independence in relationships [24]. Addressing parental pressure by understanding and communicating differing viewpoints on marriage, romantic relationships, and gender roles can help single women navigate societal expectations and assert their own choices [50].

These findings suggest that professional unmarried women can cope with struggles of societal pressures by addressing their emotional, social, and lifestyle needs, seeking support from family and friends, religious faith, and self-coping to achieve success and well-being. Significantly, by recognizing the impact of age, culture, family orientation, religion, and societal norms on single women's experiences, empowering strategies can be developed to support their well-being and autonomy in the face of societal pressures.

5. Conclusions

Drawing from the discussions of the findings, the study concludes that success is viewed differently among the professional unmarried women, as noted by the themes of career and position, health, and peace of mind. This implies that the ultimate goal of this group of women does not only rely on mundane possessions, but rather on internal matter, such as peace of mind. Moreover, this group of women also experience struggles in their personal and professional lives, often indicated by societal pressures, emotional needs, cultural issues of marriage and career success, health issues, bullying, and discrimination in the workplace. These experiences indicate implications on the mental health and social well-being of this group of women, including stigma and social isolation, sense of inadequacy through social comparison, and confusion between societal norms and personal values, which all may result to anxiety and depression. Despite the struggles experienced, they adapt coping strategies such as diverting attention to family and loved ones, keeping self busy, self-acceptance and self-care, and engaging in church activities and keeping the faith. These coping strategies reflect the ways in which these women adapt to their single status and manage the challenges that come with it. Overall, the study strongly conforms to the concepts of the social role theory and the intersectionality theory, as the study generally implies that choices and behaviors of professional unmarried women are affected by societal expectations, and the concept of success and struggles experienced intersect with marital status, age, and career.

Transparency:

The authors confirm that the manuscript is an honest, accurate, and transparent account of the study; that no vital features of the study have been omitted; and that any discrepancies from the study as planned have been explained. This study followed all ethical practices during writing.

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