

Lived Experiences of *Tagasalo* Personality Among Ifugao Adults

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ABSTRACT

The study examined the lived experiences of Ifugao individuals with a *tagasalo* personality through Husserl's descriptive phenomenological method. Through semi-structured interviews with sixteen absolute *tagasalos*, nine emergent themes emerged: provider and caretaker, caring for the family, mediating in the family, strong family-orientation, rising to life circumstances, societal expectations, perceived qualities, emotional uncertainties, and motivations of the *tagasalo*. These themes highlight the behaviors and responsibilities of the *tagasalo* role, which involves maintaining the family's well-being through financial support, caregiving, emotional mediation, and personal sacrifice. The study also highlights the internal and external factors that shape the emergence of the *tagasalo* personality, such as rising to life circumstances, societal expectations, and inherent qualities. The emotional landscape of the *tagasalo* is complex, driven by a deep love for their family, duty, and hopes for future stability. The study provides a holistic understanding of the *tagasalo* personality as a culturally embedded role shaped by circumstance, relational expectations, and personal values.

Keywords: attitudes, behaviors, challenges, lived-experiences, tagasalo

INTRODUCTION

The family is central to individual growth and well-being, especially in the Philippines, where values like respect, solidarity, and elder care are emphasized (Kapur, 2022; Gozum, 2020). While families provide emotional support, they can also be sources of stress (Masanda, 2021). Well-being, defined by Huppert et al. (2009) and Diener (2009), is strongly linked to family harmony. Family well-being (FWB), encompassing individual wellness and relationship quality (Fahey et al., 2012), has been contextualized for Filipinos by Chua et al. (2022).

Within this framework, the *tagasalo*—a responsible family member who reduces tension and maintains harmony—is vital (Carandang, 2001; Udarbe, 2001). Rooted in *salo* (“to catch”), the *tagasalo* serves as mediator and emotional anchor. Originally considered a syndrome in stressed children (Carandang, 1987), it is now viewed as a culturally developed personality (Udarbe, 2001).

Carandang's clinical work (1987) described the *tagasalo* as often a female middle child who takes on caregiving duties, sometimes compulsively. Later, she distinguished between compulsive and non-compulsive types. Critics argue that framing it as a syndrome pathologizes a culturally embedded role (David & Okazaki, 2006). Udarbe (2001) reframed it as a personality trait rooted in family dynamics and duty, not necessarily gendered or birth-order specific.

The *tagasalo* shares traits with caregiving roles like the sandwich generation (Friedman & Weimers, 2021) and parentification (Tamar et al., 2014) but remains uniquely Filipino due to cultural values like *utang na loob* and *kapwa* (Tuazon et al., 2021). It can be found across genders and identities (Perez, 2022; Delos Santos, 2021) and often starts in childhood, continuing throughout life (Pabatang & Naparan, 2024).

Udarbe (2001) identified nine traits of *tagasalo* behavior, including responsibility and mediation. Later studies (Tuazon et al., 2022; Go Tian-Ng & Umandap, 2023) categorized these into internal (e.g., self-reflection) and external (e.g., support-seeking) behaviors. Tools

developed by Tuazon et al. (2021) and Perez (2022) aim to measure this personality more systematically.

Despite its importance, the *tagasalo* role can lead to stress, exhaustion, and role strain (Hernandez & Salvajan, 2024). However, from a positive psychology lens, these challenges can foster resilience and growth (Cavasoz et al., 2010; Horikoshi, 2023). This study adopted Udarbe's more balanced view of the *tagasalo* as a potentially empowering identity rather than a pathological one.

Grounded in *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*, the study uses "indigenization from within" to explore Filipino experiences. The *tagasalo* concept exemplifies this, emerging from lived realities and cultural values rather than foreign constructs.

The Ifugaos, an Indigenous group in the Cordillera region, maintain strong kinship systems and multigenerational households. Customary laws emphasize filial duty, with children supporting elders and siblings. While the *tagasalo* has been studied in urban and lowland areas, its manifestation in Indigenous contexts remains underexplored.

In Ifugao culture, the *tagasalo* often becomes the breadwinner and is responsible not only for daily needs but also for providing materials for rituals and ceremonies—integral to maintaining cultural identity and family honor (Barton, 1919). Economic hardships and limited access to services heighten the burden, but also shape deeply rooted values of responsibility and care.

This study adopted Udarbe's (2001) perspective, viewing the *tagasalo* as an active family mediator shaped by Filipino cultural values like *pakikiramdam* and *malasakit*. While the role can cause burnout, it also nurtures personal growth and deepens understanding of Filipino identity—especially in collectivist and tradition-bound settings like Ifugao communities.

With this, the study sought to explore how an individual experiences being a *tagasalo*. To explore the said purpose, this study determined the following: profile of the participants, the attitudes and behaviors Ifugao adults display that reflect the *tagasalo* personality, the process on how an individual with the *tagasalo* personality comes to realize and understand their role, and the challenges or difficulties individuals with the *tagasalo* personality face in assuming their role.

The study assumes that Ifugao adults with a *tagasalo* personality demonstrate behaviors centered on supporting and caring for their families, often taking on multiple responsibilities. This sense of duty is believed to develop gradually through life experiences and cultural expectations. It is also assumed that *tagasalos* may experience mixed emotions—feeling both valued and overwhelmed—yet remain motivated by deep-rooted cultural and personal commitments to their family's well-being.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study used Husserl's descriptive phenomenology to explore the lived experiences of individuals with a *tagasalo* personality. Semi-structured interviews allowed participants to reflect on their emotional, cognitive, and social experiences, helping researchers uncover how meaning is constructed around their familial role.

The study was conducted in Kiangán, Lagawe, Banaue, and Mayoyao—Ifugao municipalities in the Cordillera region. From 130 initial respondents screened with Perez's Panukat sa Tagasalo Personality Scale, 16 Ganap na Tagasalo (Absolute Tagasalo) individuals were selected using purposive and convenience sampling. Participants were aged 18–40, chosen for their deep familiarity with the *tagasalo* role.

Three instruments were used: (1) Panukat sa Tagasalo Personality Scale (Perez, 2021) to confirm the presence of the tagasalo personality, (2) Robotfoto form to collect demographic data, and an (3) interview guide – a researcher-made tool validated by a registered psychometrician and guidance counselor.

Validated instruments were distributed via Google Docs and paper forms. Participants scoring 3.50–4.00 on the scale were considered absolute *tagasalo*. Interviews were held in secure, private spaces, lasted 15–30 minutes, and were audio-recorded with consent. Transcripts were analyzed using Colaizzi’s Seven-Step Method, ensuring in-depth thematic analysis.

Researchers practiced reflexivity to avoid bias and maintain objectivity throughout data collection and analysis.

The study was approved by the Saint Mary’s University Research Ethics Board (SMUREB). Researchers followed ethical research protocols regarding consent, risk management, and data protection. Participants were assigned pseudonyms. Data was stored in password-protected files and permanently deleted after the study. Only the research team had access. Acknowledging potential emotional risks tied to family discussions, a Distress Protocol (Draucker et al., 2009) was in place. A registered guidance counselor was available, and no distress incidents were reported.

Participants were fully informed of their rights and could withdraw at any time without penalty. Findings will be shared via the university repository, conferences, and journals. Participants may request a summary of results. The thesis is university-owned, with authorship credited to the researchers.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Section 1. Profile of Ifugao Adults with *Tagasalo* Personality

Sixteen individuals scoring above 3.5 on the *Panukat sa Tagasalo* Personality were selected for the study. Participants included 11 women and 5 men, aged 24 to 39. Most were middle children, with others being eldest or youngest siblings. Twelve were single, and four were married. They were evenly distributed across four Ifugao municipalities—Lagawe, Kiangon, Banaue, and Mayoyao—with balanced representation from Ayangan (5) and Tuwali (9) ethnic groups. This diversity provided a well-rounded view of the *tagasalo* personality.

Section 2. Attitudes and Behaviors of the *Tagasalo*

Provider and Caretaker

The *tagasalo* shows strong responsibility through household chores, financial support, and cultural duties, such as providing for rituals like *bogwa*. They often act as breadwinners, ensuring family stability and cultural continuity, which shapes their identity and emotional growth.

Caring for the Family

Tagasalos provide physical, emotional, and spiritual care—caring for the sick, maintaining communication, watching younger siblings, ensuring safety, and offering emotional and spiritual support. Their caregiving embodies moral and cultural obligations, reinforcing family interdependence.

Mediating in the Family

Tagasalos mediate family conflicts using silence, open dialogue, active listening, neutrality, promoting mutual understanding, and adaptability. Their emotional regulation and mediation skills support harmony and healthy family dynamics.

Strong Family-Orientation

They prioritize family over personal goals by sacrificing finances, careers, education, romantic relationships, and personal. This selflessness reflects culturally rooted expectations that shape identity and psychological development.

Section 3. Individuals' Understanding and Realization of Their Role as a *Tagasalo*

Rising to Life Circumstances

Certain family circumstances can contribute to the development of the *tagasalo* personality. This study found that factors such as a parent's or sibling's illness, the death of a family member, complex family dynamics, single parenthood, parental unemployment or unstable work, and family separation can trigger the emergence of this caregiving role. Life situations such as parents' and siblings' health conditions, death of a family member, complicated family dynamics, single parenthood, separated parents, and unemployed parents may be factors for the participants

Societal Expectations

The *tagasalo* role often emerges from social and cultural expectations placed on individuals based on their position within the family. This study found that certain roles—such as being the eldest, employed, single, educated, or physically present—naturally come with responsibilities, often pushing individuals into caregiving and supportive functions.

Perceived Qualities

The *tagasalo* personality is often shaped by traits that naturally position individuals as strong, dependable figures within the family. In the case of the *tagasalo*, qualities like empathy, initiative, selflessness, resilience, and thoughtfulness stand out. These personal dispositions, identified by the participants, may also contribute to the realization of the *tagasalo* personality.

Section 4. Challenges of the *Tagasalo*

Emotional Uncertainties

The *tagasalo* often carries heavy emotional burdens due to their role as the family's primary problem-solver and caregiver. Emotional uncertainties such as stress, emotional burnout, loneliness and isolation, emotional labor, confusion, and guilt were conveyed by the participants. Recognizing these challenges is vital to creating support systems that not only offer practical help but also emotional validation. By understanding the *tagasalo's* experiences, support can be tailored to reduce stress, encourage self-care, and promote long-term resilience.

*Motivations of the *Tagasalo**

Despite the challenges, the *tagasalo* remains driven by deep-rooted motivations centered on family. Their actions are fueled by a desire for future stability, need for love and belongingness, protecting family from unpleasant experiences, personal satisfaction, family unity, moral compass, and cherishing limited time. Parents also play a central role as sources of inspiration, motivating the *tagasalo* to honor and ease their burdens.

Conclusion

The tagasalo is not merely a helper; he plays a multifaceted role but takes the welfare of the family as his primary goal. By bridging the roles of provider and mediator, they ensure family stability. Moreover, the *tagasalo* role is often ascribed because of the situation but driven by a deep love for family and the presence of societal expectations. And while the tagasalo presents a strong personality, being one can be psychologically taxing. Ultimately, the *tagasalo* is a manifestation of family orientation but often at the expense of the individual person.

Participants in the study maintained a hopeful and optimistic outlook despite setbacks, suggesting that positivity and forward-thinking are central to the *tagasalo* identity. The study, then, reveals that Ifugao *tagasalos* perform their roles not out of compulsion, but from genuine concern and voluntary commitment to their family's well-being.

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