



## BREADWINNERS DENYING PERSONAL ASPIRATIONS TO PRIORITIZE FAMILY NEEDS: PERCEPTIONS OF STUDENTS WORKING AT AN EARLY AGE

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### Abstract:

High demands in fulfilling family basic needs are a social problem. I explored the perspectives on this social problem that drove minors to work at an early age. Utilizing qualitative descriptive research design, interviewing 10 participants selected through purposive sampling, and using thematic analysis, I found that aside from becoming breadwinners, the working minors tend to deny personal aspirations to prioritize family needs. Hence, the Theory of Household Economic Theory was modified. There is an urgent need for inclusive education and community practices that support working children and empower teachers as agents of social change. Future research may examine family economic hardship's effects through mediation and develop questionnaires using sub-themes from this study.

**Keywords:** breadwinners, denying personal aspirations, prioritize family needs, perceptions of students, working at an early age

### 1. Introduction

I have learned that high demands in fulfilling family basic needs remain a pervasive problem worldwide. The 2024 UNICEF report made me realized how families still struggle to meet basic nutritional requirements despite global efforts to improve access to essential resources (UNICEF, 2024). Similarly, the State of the World's Children report in 2025 report revealed that over 417 million children in low- and middle-income countries experience severe deprivation in at least two critical areas of daily needs (UNICEF, 2025). These numbers helped me understand the persistent challenge families face in providing core household needs amid rising costs and limited access to vital services.

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Through my exploration, I noticed that in Senegal, roughly four out of 10 children live in poverty, which means many families cannot ensure adequate nutrition, water, shelter, or healthcare for their children (UNICEF, 2025). In Afghanistan, ongoing food insecurity has forced millions into crisis or emergency levels of deprivation, with humanitarian aid being necessary for survival (WFP, 2025). In Turkey, I found how steep living costs push families into situations where basic food, shelter, and education for children become difficult to afford, sometimes leading children to work at young ages to help meet household needs (Reuters, 2024).

Looking at the Philippine context, I found that about 10.9% of Filipino families are still unable to buy the minimum basic food and non-food necessities according to official poverty thresholds, showing that many households face limitations in fulfilling fundamental living requirements (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). From these observations, I realized that families across different regions confront high demands in meeting essential daily needs. I also learned that these difficulties have serious consequences for children's health, growth, and overall wellbeing (Russell, 2024, 2025), which drove the importance of conducting this study to better understand the lived experiences of families struggling to meet their basic needs.

## **2. Significance of the Study**

This study is highly relevant to Sustainable Development Goal 4, which seeks to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all. Exploring the experiences of school-age minors engaged in work, it highlights the challenges they face, contributing to a deeper understanding of barriers to accessible and learner-centered education in the Philippines. Additionally, the research aligns with Holy Cross of Davao College's mission of transformative education and community engagement, providing insights that support the formation of socially responsible and morally grounded individuals committed to equity, compassion, and sustainable development in their communities.

### **2.1 Research Question**

In this study, I explored the perspectives on high demands in fulfilling family basic needs that drove minors to work at an early age. Specifically, I sought answers to the following questions:

- 1) What are the viewpoints of minors concerning the socio-economic constraints of their family which drove their decision to work?
- 2) What are the perceptions of the minors on their decision to work in meeting the household needs and maximizing the overall well-being of their family?
- 3) What is the feedback of the minors on their contribution in fulfilling the existing basic needs of the family?

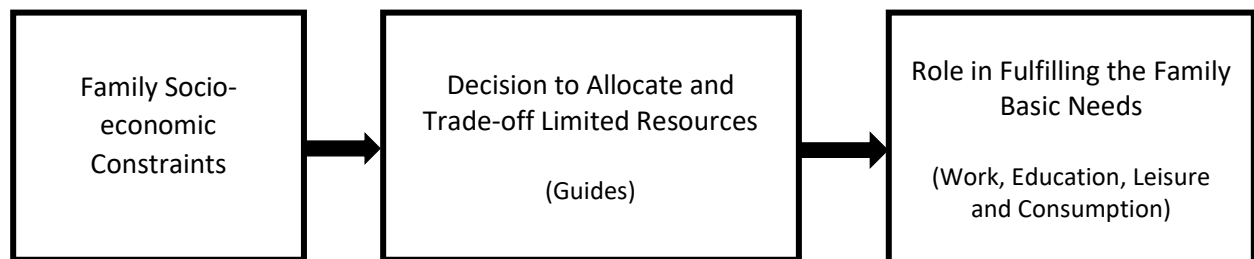
### 2.3 Assumptions

I assumed that minors who work at an early age are influenced by family household constraints and by decisions to allocate and trade off limited resources, which lead them to participate in fulfilling their family's basic needs. These experiences may involve various challenges and responsibilities as they contribute to their families. I further assumed that other components may emerge from the revelations of the study participants, which may reshape the assertions of the theory.

### 3. Theoretical Lens

This study is anchored on the Household Economic Theory developed by Gary S. Becker (1965), which explains how families make decisions about the allocation of their limited resources, such as income, time, and labor to meet household needs and maximize overall well-being. The theory views the household constraints as a decision-making unit that balances trade-offs between work, education, leisure, and consumption. In the context of poverty, households may decide to involve all available members, including children, in income-generating activities as a survival strategy to meet basic needs.

**Figure 1: Conceptual Paradigm**



### 4. Methodology

#### 4.1 Research Design

In this study, I utilized qualitative descriptive research design. I applied a flexible approach that aimed to provide a detailed summary of the perceptions of my study participants on the phenomenon related to working at an early age (Ayton *et al.*, 2023). I emphasized the essence of perceptions of the minors by setting aside biases or preconceived notions to uncover the reality of the participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

#### 4.2 Locale of the Study

I conducted this study in Barangay Pitu, Malalag, Davao del Sur, a rural agricultural community where most families depend on farming, small-scale labor, and other informal sources of income for daily subsistence. In this local context, economic instability and limited livelihood opportunities often place pressure on households to meet their basic needs, making children's participation in income-generating activities a common and socially accepted practice.

### **4.3 Sample and Sampling Technique**

In this study, the participants were 10 school-enrolled children aged 17 years and below who were actively engaged in work at an early age. They are minors who engage in farm work, vending, or other forms of labor at an early age to supplement family income and help sustain household survival. Having 10 participants is consistent with qualitative research recommendations for in-depth exploration, which typically involve 6 to 20 participants (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Purposive sampling was utilized to deliberately select these minors who met the criteria of the study and detailed narratives that capture the lived experiences of minors working within a rural context.

### **4.4 Data Gathering Technique**

In gathering the data, I used in-depth interviews as a method of data collection in this study. In-depth interviews are a qualitative technique that involves one-on-one, open-ended conversations to explore participants' experiences, meanings, and perspectives in detail. It allows flexibility for probing and follow-up questions, enabling the researcher to gain rich, comprehensive insights into the phenomenon being studied (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

### **4.5 Data Analysis Technique**

I used thematic analysis to examine data from in-depth interviews, a qualitative method that identifies, organizes, and interprets patterns or themes within a dataset. This approach, valued for its flexibility, provides a rich and detailed understanding of qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I systematically coded the data, grouped similar meanings, and developed themes that capture the essence of participants' perceptions. The method was appropriate as it allowed for the organized and systematic interpretation of the shared experiences of minors working at an early age.

### **4.6 Trustworthiness of the Study**

In this study, ensured trustworthiness by following Lincoln and Guba's (1985) criteria of credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability. Credibility and dependability were maintained through accurate reflection of participants' experiences and careful documentation, while confirmability and transferability were addressed through transparent methodology and detailed contextual descriptions. These measures allowed the study to obtain ethical clearance from the Society for Moral Integrity and Legal Ethics (SMILE)

## 5. Results

### 5.1 Growing Up in Family Economic Hardship: Viewpoints of Working Children

This theme about Growing Up in Family Economic Hardship that I have identified from the viewpoints of my study participants has three sub-themes:

- Financial Scarcity,
- Material Deprivation, and
- Family Financial Stress.

#### 5.1.1 Financial Scarcity

In my conversations with my study participants, the financial scarcity turned out to be one of the highlights. One of them said:

*Kanang gusto ko mamalit og sapatos para naa ko souton sa pag skwela tapos dili ko mapalitan kay walay kwarta, -CWA-4-L54-P3 (I wanted to buy shoes to have something to wear to school, but I couldn't because we didn't have money.)-CWA-4-L54-P3*

Listening to this, I felt as if a heavy fog had settled over my heart, shrouding the simple joys of childhood in shadow. The participant's longing for something as ordinary as a pair of shoes became a mirror reflecting the harsh void left by financial scarcity. I saw this longing when my study participant looked-up, not just a gesture of frustration, but holding back the tears. His words were like small, unheeded cries echoing through a corridor of unmet needs, and I could not help but feel the weight of dreams deferred before they had even begun. Another participant shared:

*"Pangbaon sa skwelahan, pangpalit project nako sa skwelahan usahay pag mangayo ko dili ko matagaan kay tungod walay kwarta akong ginikanan." (CWA-6-L86-P4)*  
*("Money for school snacks or to buy materials for my school projects is sometimes unavailable, and when I ask for it, I am not provided because my parents have no money." (CWA-6-L86-P4))*

Hearing this, my heart twisted like a tree bending under a storm, weighed down by the quiet truth that even simple school activities are clouded by poverty. As my participants spoke, I noticed their eyes briefly drop, and their lips press together, as if holding back words. Their quiet resignation felt like invisible chains, binding them to limits they never chose. It made me realize how even small things, like a snack or a school project, can carry the weight of exclusion, like a half-tended garden where not every seed grows. One of my participants shared:

*"Kung naa me project ug kanang gusto me mo laag mangayo ko kwarta wala sila mahatag kay kulang pa palit pagkaon." (CWA-10)*

*“When we have a school project or when I wish to go out, I request money, but my parents are unable to provide it, as the funds are still needed to purchase food.” (IDI-P10)*

As I reflected on this, it felt as if opportunities ran dry before reaching their hands, leaving behind parched hopes. As the participant spoke, I noticed a faint, restrained smile that quickly faded, and their gaze drifted downward as if weighed by the memory. Her words were soft yet revealing, showing how financial hardship limits not just education but also the small joys of childhood. Her experiences painted a quiet picture of deprivation, where even laughter and learning are shaped by daily survival.

### **5.1.2 Material Deprivation**

In my conversations with my study participants, material deprivation emerged as a recurring and deeply concerning reality. One of them shared:

*“Isa sa amoang problema kay kulang kami sa mga gamit sama sa mga sinina, gamit sa balay og labaw sa tanan ang kakulang sa pagkaon namo sa adlaw-adlaw.” (IDI-1)*  
*“One of the major problems we experience is the insufficiency of basic necessities, including clothing, household materials, and most importantly, the lack of adequate food for daily consumption.” (DI-P1)*

Hearing this, I felt as though a heavy shadow had been cast over his childhood, dimming the simple joys most take for granted. As the participant spoke, I noticed his face grow still, with a slight tightening around the eyes as if holding in discomfort. His struggle with scarcity showed a life of survival, where even basic needs are difficult to meet. I could sense the quiet weight of hardship, like a silent echo within their home, as the participant shared:

*“Kanang maglisod me kay wala me kwarta, kulang ang mga konsumo na amoang kinahanglan sama sa pagkaon sa pang adlaw-adlaw na lisod namo mapalit.” (IDI-3)*  
*“We struggle because we have no money, and the basic necessities we need, such as daily food, are difficult for us to afford.” (IDI-P3)*

His words sank into my heart, leaving a quiet heaviness in my thoughts. As he spoke, I noticed his eyes lower, and the facial expression turned subdued, as if carrying a burden that they could not easily express. His struggle showed how even basic needs are often unmet, shaping a life marked by constant worry. It felt like a subtle tether, limiting the freedom every child deserves, as another participant's account stirred a strong emotional response within me:

*“Ang always na problema sa maong pamilya kay ang mga panginahanglanon namo sa matag adlaw sama sa bugas, sud-an, tanan panginahanglaon namo sa balay na dili mapalit, kwarta na kailangan namo.” (IDI-P8)*

*“Our family’s constant problem is meeting our daily needs, such as rice, viands, and other household necessities, which we are unable to afford due to a lack of money.” (IDI-P8))*

Listening to this, my heart felt heavy as if carrying the weight of their daily burdens. As she spoke, I noticed her shoulders slightly droop and her voice soften, reflecting quiet exhaustion. Her narrative showed a life of constant struggle, where even the act of eating is shaped by scarcity. I felt a deep sense of compassion for children whose everyday lives are defined by unmet necessities.

### **5.1.3 Family Financial Stress**

In my engagement with the participants, family financial stress became strongly evident in their narratives. One of them shared:

*“Isa sa lisod mahatag sa akoang pamilya sa akong kwarta na ipalit nako og mga butang na akoang gikinahanglan sama sa sabon, pagkaon og uban pa.” (IDI-1)*  
*“One of the challenges my family faces is the inability to consistently provide financial support for my basic necessities, such as soap, food, and other essential items.” (IDI-P1))*

Hearing this, I felt as if a cold wind had swept through the warmth of their home, leaving behind the chill of unmet needs. As the participant spoke, I noticed his eyes briefly lower and his face grow still, as if holding in something unspoken. The struggle for basic necessities became a quiet shadow across their daily life, revealing how poverty reaches even the most personal aspects of living. Similarly, I felt a sense of helplessness when the participant spoke:

*“Kung naa koy paliton sama sa sinina, duyan, tsinelas ug uban pang gamit nako sa pagtrabaho, walay ikahatag.” (IDI-9)*  
*“When I need to purchase items such as clothes, a hammock, slippers, and other materials necessary for my work, there is no financial support available” (IDI-P9))*

As the participant spoke, I felt the weight of helplessness pressing down on me. I noticed how his voice softened, and their eyes lingered on the floor, as if holding back unspoken wishes. Each item they mentioned reflected needs shaped by limited means, showing a quiet resilience despite scarcity. His admission painted a picture where even small comforts remain out of reach, and this feeling intensified as the participant expressed:

*“Kwarta, mga gamit, pangload og pang wifi usa kana sa ginapangayo nako pero dili mahatag kay tungod walay sapat na kwarta” (IDI-5)*  
*“Money, essential materials, mobile load, and internet access are among the things I request; however, these are often not provided due to insufficient financial resources.” (IDI-P5))*

Listening to this, I imagined her world as a place where opportunities are limited, and support is often out of reach. As the participant spoke, I noticed her eyes briefly lift before lowering again, and her expression seemed quietly restrained. The lack of financial resources became a clear barrier, not only affecting daily needs but also limiting her learning and social connections. Her words carried a quiet longing for access to things many take for granted.

## **5.2 Working as a Family Survival Strategy: The Decision Made Amidst Scarcity**

This theme about Working as a Family Survival Strategy, I have discovered two sub-themes:

- Helping Support the Family, and
- Burden of Responsibility.

### **5.2.1 Helping Support the Family**

In my conversations with the participants, I was deeply moved by their strong sense of responsibility toward their families. Their stories reflected personal sacrifices and a maturity beyond their years. One of them shared:

*“Kung mohunong ko og trabaho wala man koy kwarta og wala pud koy matabang sa akoang pamilya.” (IDI-1)*  
*(“If I stop working, I won’t have any money and I won’t be able to help my family either.” (IDI-P1))*

This made me reflect on the heavy responsibility they carry, often sacrificing their own needs to support the family. As the participant spoke, I noticed a fleeting tension in his shoulders and a hesitant glance, showing the quiet burden they bear. His words felt like a tethered balloon, pulled by the gravity of duty, revealing the delicate balance between survival and childhood. Similarly, the participant deeply touched me with this statement:

*“Dili nako udangon ang pagpanghurnal kay dako kaau kini ug tabang alang kanamo kay aduna pa pud koy manghud nga nag skwela nga among suporta-an.” (IDI-10)*  
*(“I will not stop working as a laborer because it is a great help to us, especially since I still have a younger sibling who is studying and whom we support.” (IDI-P10))*

The words shone like a small candle in a storm, modest yet powerful, revealing the sacrifices they make for their family. As they spoke, I noticed a brief tightening around their eyes and a quiet pause in his voice, showing the weight they carry. I felt a mix of admiration and sorrow, realizing how childhood is often exchanged for responsibility. This feeling deepened when the participant expressed concern for his parents, creating a strong emotional connection to their sense of sacrifice, saying:

*"Kay luoy man akoang ginikanan kung mo undang ko kay louy man akoo ginikanan labi na si mama kung siya lang usa ang manarbaho." (IDI-3)*

*("I am reluctant to discontinue working because it would place a heavier burden on my parents, particularly my mother, who would be left as the sole provider for our family.") (IDI-P3)*

This statement showed her role as the keystone of the household, quietly carrying the weight of financial survival. As they spoke, I noticed a subtle tension in her posture, reflecting the pressure they bear. Her commitment to work became a symbol of responsibility; each coin earned a thread holding the family together. I felt the deep emotional weight of her sacrifice, as if her youth had been pledged to sustaining the household.

### 5.2.2 Burden of Responsibility

Feelings of jealousy, resentment, and sadness were evident as participants compared themselves with peers who were not required to work and could freely enjoy childhood activities. Unequal responsibilities also created emotional strain, affecting social interactions and perceptions of fairness. Indeed, a participant shared:

*"Syempre masuya gyud ko kay parehas ra me batan on pero ako nanginabuhi na tungod sa among kalisod imbis magdula rako mas ginatagaan nako ug pag tagad ang pagpanginabuhi sama sa pagpanghormal." (IDI-9)*

*("Of course, I feel envious because we are the same age, but I am already working to support our family due to our financial difficulties. Instead of just playing, I give more attention to earning a living, such as doing odd jobs.") (IDI-P9)*

A pang of envy tugged at their heart like a shadow stretching across a bright day. This reflection paints a picture of childhood weighed down by necessity, where the carefree laughter of peers becomes a distant melody. Their life is a balancing act on a tightrope of responsibility, where the joy of play is exchanged for the steady rhythm of labor. It highlights the resilience required to grow up too quickly under the pressure of economic hardship. This reflects the statement of a participant who remarked:

*"Makabati ako og selos sa ilaha tungod kay sila abundano sa kunsumo, dili na nila kinahanglan ang motabang og trabaho sa ilaha pamilya og abuhat nila ilahang gusto." (IDI-1)*

*("I feel a sense of envy toward them because they have abundant resources; they do not need to help with their family's work and are free to do as they please.") (IDI-P1)*

This sentiment highlights the emotional toll of inequality, where financial scarcity quietly separates children from the freedoms their peers enjoy. As the participant spoke, I noticed a fleeting look of longing in their eyes, a silent reflection of what they lacked.

Her words conveyed how envy and responsibility intertwine, shaping her sense of fairness and opportunity. Indeed, this sentiment was echoed by the participant, who noted:

*“Ma-inggit ko sa ilaha kay sila maduladula lang, unya akoa kay mitabang sa akoang pamilya og trabaho.” (IDI-4)*  
*(“I feel envious of them because they can just play, while I have to help my family by working.”) (IDI-P4))*

The statement envy flickered like a small candle in the wind, subtle yet intense against the weight of obligation. As they spoke, I saw a brief tightening of his lips and a downward glance, revealing the quiet burden they carry. His statement reflects the tension of growing up under financial pressure, where personal desires are often set aside for the family. It highlights the sacrifices made and how economic hardship shapes both experiences and emotions from a young age.

### **5.3 Breadwinner: The Role Played in Fulfilling Family Basic Needs**

This theme, Breadwinner, participants experienced mixed emotional responses as a result of their work and family responsibilities. This theme comprises one sub-theme:

- Pride in Helping the Family.

#### **5.3.1 Pride in Helping the Family**

Despite physical exhaustion, participants expressed happiness and fulfillment from being able to help their families financially. According to one participant:

*“Akong gibati kay malipay rasad ko kay tungod ni ana nakatabang ko gingagmay sa akoang pamilya.” (IDI-P2)*  
*(“I felt happy because, despite the situation, I was able to help my family in small ways.”) (IDI-P2))*

Like a small spark brightening a dark room, even my little acts of help brought warmth to my heart. As the participant spoke, I see, a soft smile and a brief lift of the eyes, reflecting quiet pride and fulfillment. This statement shows personal resilience, where contributing, no matter how small, grows into satisfaction and purpose. It also highlights how acts of support, even amid life’s challenges, nurture positive emotions and strengthen family bonds. This sentiment was echoed by another participant, who remarked:

*“Kuan makabati ko og kakapoy, kalisod sa pagtrabaho. Pero usahay malipay sad ko kay nakatabang ko.” (IDI-3)*  
*(“I feel the fatigue and difficulties of working. However, at times, I also feel happy because I am able to help my family.” (IDI-P3))*

The hardships weigh like mountains on my shoulders, yet the joy of helping my family feels like a gentle breeze lifting my spirit. As the participant spoke, I noticed a brief relaxation in his posture and a faint smile, reflecting the quiet satisfaction behind his effort. This captures the duality of struggle and fulfillment, showing both the toil and the small rewards of supporting one's family. Even amid fatigue, these victories shine like sunbeams breaking through clouds, as another participant shared:

*"Tungod ana mabati rasad ko og kalipay kay nakatabang ko sa ilaha." (IDI-4)*  
*("Because of this, I also feel joy and satisfaction knowing that I was able to help them.")*  
(IDI-P4))

This statement reflects the emotional reward and sense of purpose that come from supporting one's family despite challenges. Even small contributions can foster feelings of accomplishment, resilience, and stronger family bonds, turning hardship into a space for growth and personal fulfillment.

#### **5.4 Self-Losing: The Role Played in Denying Personal Needs**

The last theme, Self-Losing, comprises two sub-themes:

- Loss of Childhood Leisure, and
- Difficulty Keeping Up in School.

##### **5.4.1 Loss of Childhood Leisure**

The inability to participate in recreational and social activities due to financial constraints resulted in feelings of disappointment and social exclusion. Limited access to recreational activities causes disappointment and emotional stress. According to one participant:

*"Sama anang gusto ko magbasketball sa layo kanang mangdayo me tapos dii ko maka adto kay walay pang gasoline sa motor, magpuyo nalang ko." (IDI-3)*  
*("When I want to play basketball in a distant place and go on a trip, I cannot go because we cannot afford gasoline for the motorcycle, so I just stay at home." (IDI-P3))*

A quiet barrier seemed to rise before his steps, invisible yet hard to overcome. As the participant spoke, I saw a lingering pause and a downward gaze, reflecting the weight of limitation. His words echoed like softly closing doors on childhood experiences, showing how financial constraints restrict freedom and social participation. This subtle frustration of growing up under economic pressure was echoed by another participant, who shared:

*"Kanang mga kalingawan sa amoang barangay sama anang disco, naay mga party og kanang mga activities na gusto unta ko motan-aw pero dili ko maka adto kay walay kwarta mahatag sa akoo." (IDI-9)*

*“Recreational activities in our barangay, such as parties, and other events, are things I would like to attend, but I cannot go because I am not given money to do so.” (IDI-P9)*

Hearing her words showed how financial scarcity casts a shadow over opportunities for social engagement, leaving the vibrancy of community life just beyond reach. The activities appeared like distant lights on the horizon, visible and desired, yet unattainable. The gap between desire and possibility seemed to stretch endlessly. This concern was further echoed by a participant, who shared:

*“Gusto unta nako magdula ug basketball pero dili ko maka dula kay wala koy sapatos ug wala koy kwarta nga ipalit ani mao ng dili na lang ko mo dula.” (IDI-10)*  
*“I would like to play basketball, but I cannot because I do not have shoes and do not have money to buy them, so I choose not to play.” (IDI-P10)*

This statement highlights how financial limitations can stifle even simple joys, shaping choices and opportunities for recreation. As the participant spoke, I noticed a fleeting glance downward and a quiet pause, reflecting the weight of these sacrifices. Her words echoed like silent traces of unplayed games, showing how economic hardship affects leisure, social interaction, and childhood freedom. It felt as if her dreams of play were gently caged, small wings clipped before they could soar.

#### **5.4.2 Difficulty Keeping Up in School**

Several participants disclosed that they stopped schooling to lessen their parents' burden and to prioritize income generation for family survival. Indeed, according to one of my participants:

*“Mao ng ni undang ko sa akong oag skwela kay tungod sa among kalisod hilabi na wala me ikabayad sa akong bulante na looy nako sa akong ginikanan.” (IDI-10)*  
*“That is why I stopped studying because of our financial difficulties, especially since we had no means to pay for my allowance. I felt deep concern for my parents.” (IDI-10)*

The response above illustrates how financial hardship directly influenced the decision to stop studying, especially due to the inability to afford daily expenses. It also reflects the participant's deep concern for their parents, placing the family's needs above personal educational goals. This sentiment was echoed by a participant, who shared:

*“Naka undang nako sa akoang pagskwela kay mas gipili nako ang mangita og trabaho kay maka income man ko tapos makatabang sad ko sa akoang pamilya pang palit pagkaon namo sa pang adlaw-adlaw.” (IDI-9)*  
*“I stopped attending school because I chose to work instead, as I could earn an income and help my family buy food for our daily needs.” (IDI-P9)*

This statement highlights the difficult choice of placing family needs above education. As the participant spoke, I saw, a fleeting frown and a slight tightening of the hands, revealing the weight of responsibility they carry. They chose to work to support daily living expenses, showing care and commitment, even at the cost of their schooling. This concern was further echoed by another participant, who shared:

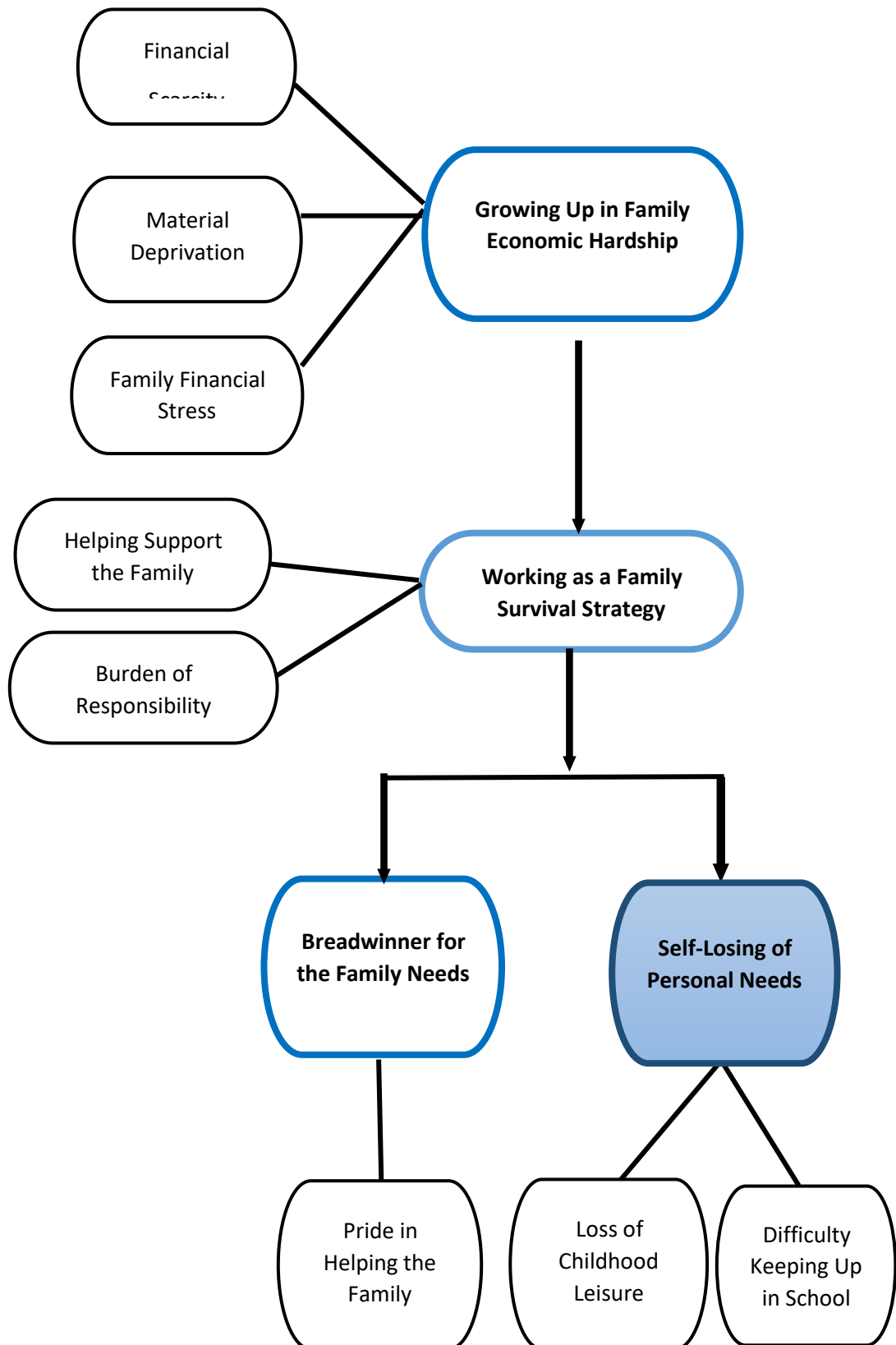
*“Kalisod, kapait sa kinabuhi, mao gipili nalang nako ang pagtrabaho kaysa pag skwela. Tungod ana naka undang nako og skwela kay ang rason walay kwarta.” (IDI-4)*  
*(“Hardship and the bitterness of life led me to choose working over attending school. Because of this, I stopped studying, and the reason was lack of money” (IDI-P4))*

This statement shows how financial hardship and life’s challenges pushed the participant to place work above education. As he spoke, I noticed a brief slump in his shoulders and a downward gaze, as if carrying an invisible weight. The lack of money became a quiet barrier, closing the doors of schooling and shaping the path of their life. His words painted a scene where opportunities felt like distant lights, visible but just out of reach.

## 6. Summary of Findings

- 1) The participants grew up in families struggling amidst socio-economic constraints.
- 2) The participants worked as a way of trading off resources for family survival.
- 3) The participants assumed the role of breadwinner to help fulfill their family’s basic needs.
- 4) The participants denied their personal aspirations in order to prioritize family needs.

## 7. Modified Paradigm



## 8. Discussion

In this section, I presented the discussion of the findings based on the themes generated from the results of the study. I presented the implications for practice, and the future direction of the study.

### 8.1 Growing Up in Families Struggling Amidst Socio-Economic Constraints

My finding illuminates the economic hardships experienced by families of children who engage in work at an early age. Through the narratives shared by my participants, it becomes evident to me that financial constraints are deeply embedded in their everyday realities, shaping not only their living conditions but also the choices they are compelled to make. These accounts reveal how limited economic resources influence decisions related to schooling, household responsibilities, and participation in income-generating activities. Furthermore, my study highlights that growing up in such conditions of deprivation profoundly shapes the perceptions of these children. Participants consistently conveyed how they struggled to meet basic needs, sustain educational demands, and maintain family stability, creating an environment where engaging in labor becomes not merely an option, but a necessity for survival. This finding supports the study of Edmonds and Theoharides (2020), who found that economic hardship and low household income significantly increase the likelihood of child labor, as families depend on children's contributions to meet daily needs. Similarly, this study aligns with the report of UNICEF (2021) that poverty and economic vulnerability remain the primary drivers of child labor globally, particularly in low-income households where basic necessities cannot be consistently secured.

However, based on my findings, I oppose the claim of Basu *et al.* (2020) who argued that child labor does not arise solely from poverty but may also be influenced by social norms, household expectations, and cultural perceptions of children's roles. This suggests that economic hardship interacts with social factors in shaping children's participation in labor.

### 8.2 Working as a Decision of Trading-Off Resources for Family Survival

In this study, I ascertained how participants encountered the intersecting demands of educational responsibilities and work obligations within the context of financial hardship. Their narratives offer rich insights into their perspective as children, revealing not only resilience and determination but also a deep sense of commitment to their families. Their daily struggles make it evident that engaging in work is not merely a choice but a necessary compromise shaped by their circumstances. In this context, time, energy, and opportunities are continuously negotiated and redistributed, reflecting the difficult balance they maintain in striving to sustain both their education and their family's survival.

My findings align with the study of Basu and Tzannatos (2020), explaining that children participate in income-generating activities as a coping mechanism for household poverty while attempting to remain in school. Likewise, I support the report of UNICEF (2021) containing that many children in low-income households' balance school and work to contribute to family income. However, my finding is inconsistent with the study of Rogoff (2020), claiming that children's participation in productive activities is not always driven by economic hardship. In some contexts, work is viewed as a form of cultural learning and social participation, suggesting that it does not necessarily conflict with schooling.

### **8.3 Taking the Role as Breadwinner to Help Fulfill Family Basic Needs**

My findings highlight the emotional perceptions of children who take on the role of breadwinner within their families. My participants expressed mixed emotions, including fulfillment, pride, frustration, envy, and disappointment, as they navigated responsibilities at a young age. While some found meaning in helping their families, others struggled with the emotional burden of early responsibility. With this finding, I agree with Fanta *et al.* (2025), who found that economic hardship and financial stress are associated with emotional and socio-emotional difficulties among children, including internalizing problems and behavioral challenges linked to parental stress. However, I disagree with the study of Ribeiro and Keles (2025), asserting that the effects of economic hardship on children vary, and positive routines and supportive environments may mitigate the negative emotional impacts, indicating that not all children respond negatively to economic pressures.

### **8.4 Denying Personal Aspirations to Prioritize Family Needs**

My findings highlight how economic hardship directly affects participants' educational experiences and personal aspirations. My findings reveal that financial instability creates significant barriers to educational continuity, academic engagement, and learning opportunities. My participants described how the need to contribute to family income often conflicts with their schooling, leading to absenteeism, academic difficulties, and in some cases, school discontinuation. With this finding, I agree with the contention of Edmonds and Pavcnik (2019), who found that financial hardship forces children to divide their time between school and work, negatively affecting educational participation and outcomes. In the same way, I agree with the report of the International Labour Organization (2021), stating that children from economically disadvantaged households often experience absenteeism, poor academic performance, and reduced educational attainment due to work responsibilities. On the contrary, I disagree with Bourdillon *et al.* (2020), who argued that not all forms of children's work negatively affect education, and suggested that the impact depends on the nature and context of the work.

## 9. Implication for Practice

Upon reflecting on the modified paradigm, there is an urgent need for responsive and inclusive educational and community-based practices that directly address the realities of children experiencing financial scarcity and family economic hardship. Educators may design and implement flexible learning approaches that cater to and consider the needs of students who are working. Teachers may realize their role in society as agents of change. Teachers may engage in anti-poverty advocacy, a political movement that helps liberate students from child labor.

## 10. Future Directions

Future studies may explore mediating research design, with Working as a Family Economic Hardship as a mediator, Growing Up in Family Economic Hardship as a predictor, and Breadwinner for the Family Needs and Self-Losing of Personal Needs, as criterion variables. Additionally, future research may employ Exploratory Factor Analysis to develop questionnaires based on these variables, utilizing the sub-themes identified in this study as measurement indicators.

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### Conflict of Interest Statement

The author declares no conflict of interest

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