

The Role of Ate and Kuya: Eldest Siblings' Responsibilities and Emotional Experiences among Mindanao State University-Sulu Senior High School Students

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Abstract. This study aims to determine the level of responsibilities undertaken by eldest siblings, identify their level of emotional experiences, and to examine whether there is a significant relationship that exist in the aforementioned variable and how they differ when grouped according to gender. Guided by these objectives, a descriptive, comparative, and correlational quantitative research design were employed, and data were gathered using validated research instruments to ensure it is reliable and accurate. This study involves 72 respondents which was selected using purposive sampling. The data was analyzed using total scores, Independent Sample t-Test, and Pearson r Correlation. The findings revealed that there is no significant difference in the level of responsibilities for male and female ($p= 0.241$), as they generally demonstrate very high level of parentification. Findings revealed no significant difference in the emotional experiences in male and female in both positive and negative aspect (positive $p=0.690$, negative $p=0.094$). Consequently, the null hypothesis was rejected as the p-value obtained was less than the set level of significance ($p=0.013$, $p= 0.005$) for negative and positive affects. This result implies that responsibilities has a significant relationship to the emotional experiences of eldest siblings, whether it is in positive or negative affect. This study underscores the need to have further studies about other factor that affect the level of responsibilities and emotional experiences, such as family needs and cultural expectations, rather than gender alone.

Keywords: Eldest sibling; Emotional experiences; Responsibilities

Introduction

In many cultures, older siblings are expected to serve as secondary caregivers and take on significant household responsibilities. This expectation is often linked to filial responsibility, which is conceptually categorized into two types—instrumental and emotional filial responsibilities. According to the citation of Leung and Shek (2024), instrumental filial responsibility includes providing practical support for the family, such as helping with chores or taking care of younger siblings, while emotional filial responsibility involves providing comfort and emotional support to family members. With these responsibilities, eldest siblings are expected to serve as role models to their younger siblings.

Although Leung and Shek (2024) stated that these roles can establish close connections among family members and build family identity, they can also become emotionally demanding. Anwar and Oktavia (2025) noted that children who take on the role of caregiver often face not only physical but also emotional burdens. In an article published by Teng et al. (2021), it was stated that parentification—wherein children assume the responsibilities of their parents—can impact a child's psychological resilience. In the aforementioned article, psychological resilience was defined as the ability of an individual to overcome challenges, adapt to trauma, and manage various sources of stress. However, these studies mainly discuss the psychological effects of these responsibilities on eldest siblings, rather than their emotional experiences.

Within the Philippine community, culture frequently places the burden of caregiving and household management on the eldest sibling, referred to as Ate (older sister) or Kuya (older brother). Eldest daughters are expected to be mature, help with most household chores, and take care of younger siblings, while eldest sons are often tasked with heavier work, which may sometimes include providing for the family's financial needs. Furthermore, Leung and Shek (2021) stated that men are usually responsible for work outside the home, while women manage responsibilities within the household.

Despite the potential impact of these roles on individuals, there is limited research on how they affect the emotional experiences of eldest siblings. Studies have shown how responsibilities influence a child's psychological well-being; however, research examining how these responsibilities affect the emotional

experiences of eldest siblings, and how these experiences vary by gender, remains underexplored. Kittelsen et al. (2024) supported this claim, stating that siblings' emotional experiences are often overlooked, as studies tend to focus more on parents' perspectives rather than those of their children.

This study, *The Role of "Ate" and "Kuya": Eldest Siblings' Responsibilities and Emotional Experiences Among Mindanao State University–Sulu Senior High School Students*, aims to address this gap by focusing specifically on eldest siblings studying at MSU–Sulu Senior High School. It seeks to explore three main areas: (1) the responsibilities they undertake within their households and how these vary by gender, (2) the emotional experiences associated with these responsibilities and how they differ when grouped by gender, and (3) the relationship between responsibilities and emotional experiences. By investigating the lived experiences of Ate and Kuya, the study aims to inform society about this issue, contribute to a better understanding of it, and support eldest siblings who are burdened with these responsibilities.

Research Questions

This study examined whether there was a relationship between the level of responsibilities and emotional experiences of eldest siblings.

Specifically, this study sought to address the following questions:

1. What is the level of responsibilities of eldest siblings within their family settings?
2. What is the level of emotional experiences linked with these responsibilities among eldest siblings?
3. Is there a significant difference in the level of responsibilities of the eldest siblings when grouped according to gender?
4. Is there a significant difference in the level of emotional experiences of the eldest siblings when grouped according to gender?
5. Is there a significant relationship between responsibilities and emotional experiences among eldest siblings?

Literature Review

The Roles and Responsibilities of Eldest Siblings within the Family Setting

In many Filipino households, particularly in lower-income settings, eldest siblings often assume caregiving and co-parenting roles. These responsibilities include assisting with household chores, supervising younger siblings, and providing emotional and educational support (Lasco & Mendoza, 2025). Such dynamics are especially evident when parents are preoccupied with work or other obligations. Within the Filipino context, these roles are associated with cultural values such as *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and *pakikisama* (harmony with others), which contribute to the normalization of the eldest sibling as *tagasalo* or burden bearer (Lasco & Mendoza, 2025). Capuz (2024) reported that eldest children experience heightened parental expectations and are often regarded as the "family's hope," leading to pressure to excel in their endeavors. Similarly, Rabuya et al. (2023) identified a theme of "role intensification," particularly in cases of parental separation, in which the eldest child is expected to assume greater maturity and responsibility within the family. Beyond sibling-specific roles, broader research on Filipino filial responsibility provides cultural context for these expectations. Joya et al. (2024) found that while Filipino adults demonstrate moderate readiness to provide emotional, spiritual, physical, and psychological support to aging parents, many report being unprepared to meet the financial demands associated with such responsibilities. These findings reflect the wider cultural emphasis on familial obligation within Filipino families. While existing studies document the caregiving roles and expectations placed on eldest children, there remains limited understanding of how these responsibilities influence their personal development, mental well-being, and coping strategies. Addressing this gap provides a foundation for further exploration in subsequent sections.

Emotional Experiences of Eldest Siblings in Fulfilling Family Responsibilities

In Filipino families, eldest siblings often carry out their roles as *ate* or *kuya* alongside significant household responsibilities, which can influence their emotional experiences. Del Mundo and Macalandra (2025) noted that firstborns may develop strong leadership skills due to these responsibilities, but they may also experience frustration or conflict when younger siblings challenge their authority. Pabatang and Naparan (2023) reported that participants who take on the role of *tagasalo* experience emotional strain and exhaustion due to the weight of responsibilities, particularly when caring for siblings with special needs. Some participants described feeling burned out and unable to fulfill plans and duties, while others acknowledged fatigue but found strength in familial bonds. The study also highlighted that traditional family structures, where older siblings care for younger ones, contribute to these experiences by creating expectations and a hierarchy within the household. These studies suggested that the emotional experiences of eldest siblings involve navigating both the responsibilities of caregiving and their own developmental needs. However, there remains limited research specifically examining how senior high school students

experience these roles, especially in particular cultural contexts such as MSU-Sulu. Further investigation is needed to better understand how family responsibilities intersect with the psychological well-being of young adults.

Gender-Based Differences in the Responsibilities of the Eldest Siblings

Boys and girls often undertake different responsibilities within the household, including learning, helping at home, and caring for others. In general, girls are more likely to undertake emotional and filial responsibilities than boys (East, 2010, as cited in Leung & Shek, 2024). According to Evans (2025), eldest daughters often act as a “second parent” to their siblings, taking on tasks such as babysitting, cooking, tutoring, or serving as a support system for their parents. Boys are commonly raised to become financial providers, while girls are encouraged to take on household responsibilities. This reflects the long-held cultural belief expressed in the saying “Nan zhu wai, nu zhu nei,” meaning that men handle work outside the home, whereas women are responsible for managing things within in (Leung & Shek, 2021).

Gender-Based Differences in the Emotional Experiences of Eldest Siblings

Eldest siblings’ responsibilities can affect them both physically and emotionally. Social Role Theory proposed by Alice Eagly suggests that different roles are prescribed to men and women. These roles shape the responsibilities individuals assume and how they emotionally deal with these expectations. Although these responsibilities may promote leadership, high academic achievement, and self-motivation, they can also cause emotional exhaustion (Prajith & Bhuyan, 2025). For instance, Gonzalez (2025) reports that young girls who act as caretakers may experience difficulties in managing their emotions, highlighting how responsibilities affect the emotional experiences of eldest daughters. Foundational research also suggests that children assuming caretaker roles may face emotional burdens (Hurlock, 1978, as cited in Anwar & Oktavia, 2025). In contrast, males in cultures emphasizing traditional masculinity may face restrictions in expressing emotions, as emotional expression can be perceived as a sign of weakness (Kimmel, 1994; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, as cited in Cleary, 2022), highlighting the limited studies on the emotional experiences of eldest sons.

The Relationship Between Eldest Siblings' Responsibilities and Their Emotional Experiences

Previous studies highlight the relationship between eldest sibling responsibilities and emotional outcomes, including emotional well-being and stress. Literature indicates that caregiving roles and family responsibilities are associated with emotional maturity and psychological development among eldest siblings. For example, research demonstrates that sibling structure and caregiving roles are associated with emotional maturity; eldest siblings often develop stronger self-regulation, stress-tolerance, and interpersonal skills due to their increased responsibilities within the family (Patil & Hemanthkumara, 2025). At the same time, studies emphasize that eldest siblings frequently assume leadership and caregiving roles that help shape emotional development. However, these responsibilities also increase emotional pressure, which may lead to elevated stress levels and psychological burden. Healthy sibling communication and warmth have been shown to reduce stress and support positive mental health outcomes, as eldest siblings often serve as role models in demonstrating effective coping strategies (Lev, 2024). In contrast, dysfunctional sibling relationships or unresolved conflicts may contribute to negative emotional outcomes such as anxiety and depression (Gonzalez, 2025). Overall, existing literature indicates that while the responsibilities of eldest siblings may introduce emotional strain, they also promote emotional maturity, resilience, and psychological well-being through enhanced self-regulation and family support roles (Patil & Hemanthkumara, 2025; Lev, 2024; Gonzalez, 2025).

Methodology

Research Design

This study used a descriptive, correlational, and comparative research design. A descriptive research design is used to systematically describe the characteristics of a group or phenomenon without manipulating any variables (McCombes, 2022). In contrast, a correlational research design is used to examine how variables are related to one another, without implying a cause-and-effect relationship (Bhandari, 2021). Meanwhile, comparative research design studied the differences and similarities of two or more cases or object of the study (Iranifard & Roudsari, 2022); in this study, the gender. As descriptive, correlational and comparative research design were implied, the researchers were able to describe the responsibilities and emotional experiences of eldest siblings, determine whether a significant relationship exists between these two variables, identified the differences and similarities of responsibilities and emotional experiences of male and female eldest siblings. These research designs were appropriate because it allowed the researchers to

observe, describe, compare and analyze these variables as they naturally occur, without manipulation or control.

Research Locale

This study was exclusively conducted at Mindanao State University – Sulu Senior High School, which is physically located within the main Capitol Site campus of Mindanao State University in Patikul, Sulu. The primary focus for this research is on the Senior High School Department itself. This department, which is situated near the university gymnasium and directly beside the multipurpose hall, is housed in dedicated classroom buildings within the Senior High School section of the Capitol Site campus, and is equipped with facilities to support instruction in technical and general academic disciplines. Participants for this study were selected from students enrolled at this specific location.

Sampling Design

This study used a purposive sampling technique which was defined by Nikolopoulou (2023) as a type of sampling technique in which the units or respondents is selected because they have the characteristics needed in the study. Which means the researchers selected participants who meet specific criteria related to the title, namely, being the eldest child in the family. This sampling technique allowed the researchers to gather information from individuals who directly experience the responsibilities and emotions that come with being the eldest child. It ensured that the data collected were relevant, focused, and meaningful to the purpose of the study.

Research Participants

The respondents of this study consisted of students in Grade 11 and Grade 12 in the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Strand (STEM) and the General Academic Strand (GAS) of Mindanao State University-Sulu Senior High School. These students were the respondents of this study since they belong to the target respondents that are deemed relevant to the purpose of the study. This study had 72 respondents to ensure that the purpose of the study is achieved. The sampling technique that was used in this study is the purposive sampling technique, as not all students in the STEM and GAS are the eldest siblings in their respective families. This sampling technique was deemed appropriate in this study since the respondents to be selected should possess the criteria that are deemed relevant to the purpose of the study, such as the respondents being the eldest in their respective families.

Research Instrument

In this study, the researchers utilized adapted questionnaires to gather data regarding the responsibilities and emotional experiences of eldest siblings. Two instruments were used as the basis for data collection, and both were slightly modified to fit the context of the present study. The first instrument was adapted from the Parentification Questionnaire for Junior High School (Chinese Version) developed by Xu Ling (2025). This questionnaire was used to measure the responsibilities of eldest siblings. The original instrument consisted of 19 items; however, two items were removed based on the recommendations of the researchers' validators, resulting in a total of 17 items. The questionnaire is rated using likert scale. The second instrument was adapted from Positive and Negative Affect Schedule Short Form (PANAS-SF) developed by David Watson, Lee Anna Clark, and Auke Tellegen (1988). This questionnaire was used to measure the emotional experiences of eldest siblings and consists of 20 items. One item was slightly modified by adding a brief definition to ensure that respondents clearly understood the term. The aforesaid questionnaire have two dimensions— positive and negative affect. The data gather in these dimensions was interpreted differently since individuals can feel positive and negative emotions simultaneously. The questionnaire was also rated using Likert scale.

Data Gatering Procedures

The researchers sought prior consent from the Senior High School (SHS) Director and the advisers of the chosen Grade 11 and Grade 12 students of Mindanao State University – Sulu Senior High School prior to the conduct of the study. Once the consent was approved, the researchers asked for the assistance of the advisers in choosing the qualified respondents who meet the criteria of the study. The respondents were made aware of the purpose of the study and their voluntary participation in the study prior to the distribution of the survey questionnaires. After the distribution of the questionnaires, the researchers collected the responses from the participants. The data obtained from the participants will be properly organized, tabulated, and analyzed for interpretation. All the information obtained from the participants were kept confidential and was used for research purposes only.

Results and Discussions

Research Question 1: What is the level of responsibilities of eldest siblings within their family settings?

Table 1. Level of Responsibilities of Eldest Siblings

	N	Mean
Responsibilities	72	71.0

Table 1 presents the level of responsibilities taken by the eldest siblings. The total score is 71.0, which falls under the Very High Parentification category, indicates that eldest siblings are significantly engaged in adult-like responsibilities. These responsibilities include caring for younger siblings, providing financial support, and performing household tasks. This finding supported the study of Gavcar et al. (2026), which emphasizes that children are performing task that are not appropriate for their age. This result highlighted the importance of raising awareness and providing adequate social support to help them cope effectively with their responsibilities

Research Question 2: What is the level of emotional experiences linked with these responsibilities among eldest siblings?

Table 2. Descriptive Statistics on the Level of Negative and Positive Emotional Experiences of Eldest Siblings

	N	Mean
Negative Emotional Experiences	72	26.6
Positive Emotional Experiences	72	31.9

Table 2 represents the emotional experiences of eldest child, and this is categorized into negative and positive emotions. On the one hand, the total scores for negative emotional experiences is 26.56, which falls within the range of 24–36, indicating a moderate level. This means that eldest siblings at Mindanao State University-Sulu Senior High School sometimes experience negative emotions such as stress, sadness, and frustration, but these are not too intense. On the other hand, the total scores for positive emotional experiences is 31.9, which also falls under the moderate level. The results demonstrated that eldest siblings regularly experience positive emotions such as happiness, interest, and enthusiasm, in an average level. This shows that eldest siblings maintains a balance emotions. These findings are supported by Geng et al. (2020), which explains that although negative emotions can affect well-being, their impact is lowered through resilience and social support, allowing individuals to cope effectively. Similarly, Leger et al. (2020) highlights that positive emotional experiences help lessen negative emotions and improve recovery from stress, supporting to better overall well-being. Overall, the results shows that eldest siblings experience both positive and negative emotions at a moderate and manageable level, indicating that they are able to handle challenges while maintaining emotional balance and stability.

Research Question 3: Is there a significant difference in the level of responsibilities of the eldest siblings when grouped according to gender?

Table 3. Level of Responsibilities of Eldest Siblings According to Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	t	P
Responsibilities	Female	53	71.7	1.18	0.241
	Male	19	69.0		

The findings in Table 3 revealed that both male and female eldest siblings exhibit very high levels of parentification, with mean scores of 71.7 for females and 69.0 for males. The independent samples t-test (Student's t-test) showed no significant difference between the two groups ($t = 1.18$, $p = 0.241$), indicating that the level of responsibilities does not significantly differ between male and female eldest siblings. This result is consistent with the study of Kimutai (2024), which found no significant gender difference in parentification, suggesting that both boys and girls experience similar levels of responsibility within the family. In addition, Lumba et al. (2025) reported that eldest children commonly take on instrumental responsibilities such as managing household chores, running errands, and handling financial matters, which extend beyond age-appropriate expectations. These findings align with the present study, where eldest siblings demonstrated very high levels of responsibility regardless of gender.

Research Question 4: Is there a significant difference in the level of emotional experiences of the eldest siblings when grouped according to gender?

Table 4. Comparison on the Level of Emotional Experiences Between Males and Females Eldest Siblings

		N	Mean	t	p
Negative Emotional Experiences	Female	53	27.6	1.70	0.094
	Male	19	23.6		
Positive Emotional Experiences	Female	53	32.2	0.401	0.690
	Male	19	31.0		

The findings in Table 4 revealed that there is no significant difference in the emotional experiences of male and female eldest siblings. For negative emotional experiences, female respondents obtained a mean score of 27.6, while male respondents obtained a mean score of 23.6. Although females appear to have slightly higher negative emotional experiences, the independent samples t-test (Student's t-test) showed that this difference is not statistically significant ($t = 1.70$, $p = 0.094$). This indicates that both groups experience similar levels of negative emotional outcomes. Similarly, for positive emotional experiences, both male and female respondents obtained scores within the moderate range, with females having a mean of 32.2 and males having a mean of 31.1. The Independent Sample t-test (Student's t-test) also showed no significant difference between the two groups ($t = 0.401$, $p = 0.690$), suggesting that gender does not significantly affect positive emotional experiences among eldest siblings. These findings suggest that emotional experiences among eldest siblings are relatively similar regardless of gender. This can be linked to the shared responsibilities experienced by both male and female eldest siblings within the family context. Laishram (2025) explains that both boys and girls who experience parentification may encounter emotional challenges such as stress, anxiety, and difficulties in emotional regulation. This implies that emotional outcomes may be more closely associated with the level of responsibility rather than gender alone. In contrast, some studies suggest that gender may influence emotional expression, with females generally showing higher emotional awareness and males exhibiting more restrained emotional expression due to social expectations. However, these differences do not necessarily result in significant differences in overall emotional experiences, which aligns with the findings of this study.

Research Question 5: Is there a significant relationship between responsibilities and emotional experiences among eldest siblings?

Table 5.1. Correlation Between Responsibilities and Negative Experiences

		Responsibilities	Negative Emotional Experiences
Responsibilities	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
Negative Emotional Experiences	Pearson's r	0.291	—
	df	70	—
	p-value	0.013	—

Table 5.2. Correlation Between Responsibilities and Positive Experiences

		Responsibilities	Positive Emotional Experiences
Responsibilities	Pearson's r	—	
	df	—	
	p-value	—	
Positive Emotional Experiences	Pearson's r	0.329	—
	Df	70	—
	p-value	0.005	—

Table 5.1 revealed a significant positive relationship between responsibilities and negative emotional experiences ($r = 0.291$, $p = 0.013$), indicating that higher levels of responsibility are associated with higher levels of negative emotional experiences. This includes feelings such as stress and emotional burden. At the same time, Table 5.2 showed a significant positive relationship between responsibilities and positive emotional experiences ($r = 0.329$, $p = 0.005$), indicating that higher levels of responsibility are also associated with higher levels of positive emotional experiences. These findings are consistent with the study of Borchet et al. (2021), which explains that the effects of parentification may include both positive and negative outcomes occurring at the same time, where individuals may demonstrate maturity and social

development while also experiencing difficulties in emotional regulation. Additionally, findings from Cho et al. (2024) show that carrying adult responsibilities without sufficient acknowledgment of personal needs is associated with emotional outcomes such as stress and anxiety. These results support the present study, where increased responsibilities are associated with both negative and positive emotional experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was sought by requesting formal permission from the University Director and the advisers of the respondents. All respondents were asked to provide informed consent, ensuring they understand the purpose of the study, the procedures involved, and that their participation is voluntary. The confidentiality of respondents was maintained, and all data collected were handled confidentially and stored securely.

Conclusion

Based on the results, the overall level of responsibilities of eldest siblings in Mindanao State University-Sulu Senior High School was very high, indicating that they consistently undertakes responsibilities concerning their family. Additionally, the emotional experiences, which is linked with these responsibilities, of the students in the aforesaid institution was moderate for both the negative and positive affect. This shows that the respondents feel balance emotions. For instance, eldest siblings may feel proud leading their younger siblings while they can also feel distressed while doing it. In addition, statistical analysis revealed no significant difference in the level of responsibilities when grouped according to gender. This suggest a need for more intensive study about other factor that may affect it such as family size, expectations, and cultural norms. Moreover, in the context of emotional experiences, gender also did not modify the level if emotional experiences of the eldest siblings, in both positive and negative affects. This implies that emotional outcomes does not depend on gender, but rather on the level of responsibilities. Furthermore, statistical analysis found out that responsibilities have a direct relationship with the emotional experiences of eldest siblings, in both positive and negative area. This result suggest that knowledge on this link can help promote emotional well being to eldest siblings. Overall, the findings highlight the importance of giving proper attention to the eldest siblings level of responsibilities and the emotional outcomes that links with this. Understanding this result can help the eldest siblings build a better environment while fulfilling their duties in their family setting.

Recommendations

The study offers several recommendations for different stakeholders. Eldest siblings are encouraged to practice self-care, seek support when needed, and openly express their emotions about their responsibilities within the family. Parents, on the other hand, should carefully assess the responsibilities their children undertake at home and recognize and appreciate the efforts of eldest siblings in fulfilling these duties. Guidance counselors and mental health care professionals are advised to conduct workshops or seminars on coping strategies, emotional regulation, and communication skills, while also encouraging students, especially eldest siblings to prioritize self-care. The community is likewise encouraged to provide resources and establish support systems for eldest siblings and their families. Lastly, future researchers are recommended to explore more diverse populations and examine other factors that may influence the experiences of eldest siblings, as well as to conduct qualitative or mixed-method studies to gain deeper insights into their emotional experiences.

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