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Technology-mediated parenting: Narratives of Left-behind Adolescent Children of Overseas Filipino Workers

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ABSTRACT

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The Philippines, being one of the largest migrant-sending countries in the world, is also one of Asia's biggest source of labor workers to more than a hundred countries. International migration among Filipinos is driven by the desire for economic advancement, not of the migrant workers themselves but of their respective families. Specifically, Filipino parents single out their children's education as the most vital motivation for working overseas. In the absence of both parents, what becomes of the family back home? To what degree can parents perform their parenting duties from afar? What are the impacts of child-parent separation? To answer these questions, indigenous qualitative methods were used to elicit information from 15 purposively chosen college students who are also children of OFWs. Several findings are notable. First, the left-behind children recognize the economic upturn brought about by overseas employment resulting to their family's increased purchasing capacity. Second, communication mediated by technology (skype, facebook, messenger) are heavily relied upon by parents to "parent" their children. Despite the consistency of communication, the children think that there are areas in their lives that only a face-to-face encounter would suffice, especially between them and their mother. Third, familial roles are reconfigured as the oldest child, most often the daughter becomes the pseudo-parent, requiring a lot of effort and time resulting to emotional and academic difficulties on her part.

It is recommended that higher education institutions provide appropriate interventions to address the needs of these students.

Keywords: *overseas Filipino workers, left-behind children, parenting, technology-mediated.*

INTRODUCTION

"I'm sorry Ms., I have not been coming to your class. You see, my younger brother's fever is on and off. I had to bring him to the E.R. when he started vomiting too. We just got home. He's actually alone at home now, I just asked a neighbour to check on him. I don't know, maybe, I have to drop some classes. I'm way behind my requirements anyway. I don't know if I can still catch up, that is, if my professors will allow me to make up."

Such narrative is not uncommon among our Filipino college students saddled with numerous responsibilities in the absence of one parent or both due to overseas work. For many of us who have had students whose parents are OFWs (overseas Filipino workers), the general assumption is that notwithstanding the financial gains, they are disadvantaged academically, judging from their low grades, frequent absenteeism and inability to comply with requirements. It is tacitly understood that at our end, i.e., the school, little can be done to help these students, because the single most important resolve is for their parent or parents to return home. Hence, we just have to accept the reality that children of OFWs will generally exhibit less-than-desirable academic performance, and that, this pattern will persist for as long as their parents are working overseas. Given our migration statistics, the prognosis seems unfavourable.

The Philippines, being one of the largest migrant-sending countries in the world, is also one of Asia's biggest source of labor workers to more than a hundred countries (European Union External Action, 2008; International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, 2013; Graham and Jordan, 2011). The World Bank reports that in 2014, the Philippines deployed an average of five thousand OFWs per day, and in 2015, it rose up to 6,000. Male OFWs mostly work as plant/machine operators and assemblers (23.2%), trade and other related workers (23%), and service/shop /market sales workers (17.1 %). On the other hand, female OFWs are mostly laborers and unskilled workers (54.5%), and service/shop/ market sales workers (18.1%). In particular, women work as caregivers (nannies and elderly care workers) as well as domestic workers (cleaners of private households). Remittance flows from OFWs have become the most important source of foreign exchange to both the Philippine economy and the recipient families (Ang, Sugiyarto, and

Jha, 2010). In 2008, remittances account for roughly 12% of our gross domestic product (GDP) and about 10% in 2015. The World Bank further reports that money sent home by overseas Filipino workers reached \$29.7 billion in 2015, making the Philippines the world's third largest recipient of remittances, after India and China.

In 2015, the Philippine Overseas Administration notes that women have outnumbered men (1,209,000 /51.1% vs. 1,168,000 /48.9%). The outmigration of Filipino women implies an important shift in gender roles in the Philippine society in general, and in the household, in particular. It has placed women outside the domestic sphere, contesting the long-accepted notion that her place is in the house fulfilling the reproductive role. Furthermore, it suggests that more and more women have become breadwinners not only to their families, but to the whole nation as well, given their remittances.

International migration among Filipinos is driven by the desire for economic advancement, not of the migrant workers themselves but of their respective families. Specifically, Filipino parents single out their children's higher education as the most vital motivation for working overseas (Philippine Institute for Development Studies 2008; Parreñas 2005). Hence, OFWs consider migration not so much for personal ends but for the family's well-being.

In the absence of both parents, what becomes of the family back home? To what degree can parents perform their parenting duties from afar? What are the impacts of child-parent separation? How do left-behind children cope and how do they feel about it? As discussed above, the economic benefits of migration have been established, and with parents in absentia, close relatives become pseudo-parents/guardians. This has been the arrangement and it seems to work. In a large study by Graham and Jordan (2011) that compared the psychological well-being of left-behind children in southeast Asia, children in transnational families with "other" caregivers are not significantly different from children living with both parents. However, recent studies indicate that more and more teenage left-behind children become themselves the pseudo-parents by choice or by appointment by parents (Parrenas, 2018).

Pessar (1999) observes that in many studies about migrant parents and their families, excluded in the narratives is the perspective of the left-behind children as well as the sentiments of relatives whose roles have also expanded to include caring for them. Relatively little attention has been paid to separation resulting from migration, and those studies that do examine impacts on children left behind tend to be retrospective.

To address this gap, this study will focus on the viewpoint of the adolescent children enrolled in college regarding their experiences of having parents who are currently working overseas. Some areas the study will investigate are as follows: how mothers and fathers “parent” their children from afar, how familial roles are reconfigured, especially that of the mother who is traditionally expected to be home-based, and the concerns children have at home and in school. Finally, based on the results, the study will point out some strategies schools can adopt to help adolescent children of OFWs cope well in the absence of their parents.

Migration and a shift in parenting

Migration transforms families. The absence of one parent or of two parents results to a reconfiguration of what we think families should “look” like and the roles of each member, as the transformation from the traditional nuclear arrangement, to a transnational structure challenges the conventional notion of gender division of labor, husband-wife, and parent-child relationships.

The succeeding sections begin with a discussion of customary Filipino parenting style. It is followed by a review of studies on the reconfiguration of parenting when migration happens. It includes a discussion of how children cope in the absence of their parent or parents through radical changes in gender roles, including their own roles in the family and by extension, how these shifts affect their duties in other roles they need to fulfill, such as being students. Finally, cognizant of the hardships that OFW children go through, a section on strategies adopted by schools to address them is presented.

Traditional Filipino parenting

Studies on Filipino parenting emphasize authoritarianism as the dominant approach. Parents are generally considered strict, exacting respect for authority and obedience from their children. The transgression of rules is not tolerated and warrants punishment.

Parental authority and influence pervade beyond childhood years. At any stage in their lives, Filipino children expect their parents to be emotionally and instrumentally involved (Quiñones 2009). In one study, Filipino adolescents describe how influential their parents were not just in their domestic roles and academic lives (Parrenas: 2006, Lamug 1989), but also in their relationship with the opposite sex and even in how they spend their free time. It is widely held that if a child develops into a responsible adult, he/she grew-up with parents whose child-rearing practices are replete with sound values (Dela Cruz et al. 2001; Durbrow et al. 2001). If the child is irresponsible and lacking in

discipline during adulthood, Filipino parents deem themselves accountable for their child's deviance (Alampay and Jocson 2011).

On the part of the children, they are expected to make meaningful contributions to the family via household roles. Assignment of chores most often coincide with conventional gender roles and birth order. Daughters engage in work that mostly involves the domestic sphere, such as cleaning, cooking, and care of younger siblings; while sons are expected to assist their fathers. In addition, greater responsibilities are typically expected of first-borns, especially the female, who takes on more household and child care tasks compared to their father (Liwag et al. 1998; Parreñas 2006). By default, the eldest daughter takes on the role of the parents in their absence. Thus, it is not unusual for her to sacrifice her self-advancement—for instance, delaying the completion of her education so as to earn an income—in order to support siblings' education or aging parents (Peterson 1993). Last-borns are considered the parental favorites and often get a lighter responsibilities compared to older siblings. Older children may feel burdened or pressured by their responsibilities if the work is especially heavy and their schooling is compromised (Liwag et al. 1998 ; Parreñas 2006 ; Dela Cruz et al. 2001). However, Filipino children, young and old, rarely question or reject these expectations. Most have a genuine desire and goal to help their families (Dela Cruz et al. 2001) and are averse to disappointing their parents (Wolf 1997). Indeed, Filipino children and adolescents consider the fulfilment of their familial duties and responsibilities as a central and significant aspect of their identities (Garo-Santiago et al. 2009).

The above discussion of family dynamics traditionally practiced is disrupted when one parent or both embark on overseas work.

Transnational families and parenting

Transnational families are formed when one or both parents migrate, leaving their children in their country of origin. Transnational families are common in international migration.

In the Philippines, no recent statistics indicate the number of children left behind when their parents work abroad. However, one non-governmental organization catering to OFWs called KAKAMMPI (Kapisanan ng mga Kamag-anak ng Migranteng Manggagawang Pilipino, Inc.) reported that in 2006, approximately nine million children, comprising 27 % of the overall Filipino youth population are growing up without at least one parent due to migration. While the gender breakdown of transnational parents is not available, one can assume that transnational mothers form the bigger bulk considering the POEA

report that women comprise at least 70% of the newly hired migrant labor workers from 2000 to 2006 and more than half of all OFWs in 2015.

Due to this feminization of migration, transnational mothering as a strategy for household maintenance is turning into a norm. Parrenas (2006) defines transnational mothering as 'the organizational reconstitution of motherhood that accommodates the temporal and spatial separations forced by migration.' This concept redefines the role of mothers from simply caregiving to include breadwinning. Although many Filipino women do paid work prior to migration, their income is seen as supplemental; it is the husband's earnings that is deemed the family's primary source of livelihood. The marginalization of the woman's income is reversed as soon as the family receives substantial amounts earned from overseas work. Remittances are crucial in the family's maintenance not only important economically but they are also a means to express care for the recipients in a way that makes kinship, friendship and other social ties transparent (Castaneda and Buck)

Parrenas (2006) states that the management of bank accounts that serve as conduit for remittances is understandably, the most important strategy for migrant mothers to stay involved with the day-to-day challenges of family life in the Philippines. The financial support coming from her ensures that she has a say in many decisions, most notably those that require money. It however requires help from someone back home. Parrenas (2006) reports that mothers often elect their elder daughter, not their spouses, to co-manage these accounts. As co-manager, daughters are expected to comply with the accompanying task of ensuring that the money received is spent according to the mother's stipulations. The maintenance of a joint bank account with the elder daughter suggests that mothers entrust a great deal of responsibility to their daughters, implying that children are more likely to control joint bank accounts than fathers and other adults. On the other hand, many sons collect remittances directly from their mothers, but these funds were oftentimes for personal allowances (Parrenas 2006). Access to a bank account potentially increases the decision-making power of a child over other members of the family or household, potentially causing friction among those who feel that their authority has been subverted by the migrant mother's decision to give the money directly to their children. The allocation of remittances to daughters is indicative of the father's absence in day-to-day decision making.

In sum, while upholding women's traditional role of controlling the purse strings in the family, the maintenance of a shared bank account also enables migrant mothers to redefine mothering to include breadwinning. Hence, transnational mothering disrupts traditional Filipino gender roles because it not only removes mothers physically from the confines of the home, but it

also redefines traditional mothering, which is historically associated with nurturing children in close proximity.

Given that the husbands of migrant women left behind in the Philippines maintain gainful employment or is able to find one, the gender roles of men and women remain despite the women's economic contributions to the family. Migrant women continue their mothering role in spite of their physical absence. However, the migration of mothers has fueled worries about left-behind children becoming spendthrift, delinquent, addicted to drugs, and emotionally scarred (Asis, 2006; ECMI-CBCP/AOS–Manila, SMC, & OWWA, 2004). This is the prevailing theme in many popular literatures, including movies and news reports: migration results to wantonness in transnational children and mothers bear the brunt. Her migration is equated with abandonment and the consequent emotional and psychological difficulties suffered by her children. Yet, in the course of vilifying migrant mothers, news reports and anecdotal evidences leave fathers free of any responsibility for the care of children. There seem to be a presumption that men are naturally incompetent caregivers of the family and in the absence of his wife, there is no expectation that he will take over her nurturing role. Hence, by default, our cultural expectation of non-nurturing fathers absolves them of responsibility for care.

This presupposes that mothers are held accountable to the ideology of women's domesticity. Parrenas (2006) argues that the refusal of "sending societies," to recognize the redefinition of mothering spurred by women's migration is what aggravates children's emotional difficulties. It is as if only the mother's physical presence can reverse the turmoil left-behind children experience in her absence.

The Children Left behind

The Central Bank of the Philippines reports that OFW remittances consisting of personal remittances from sea-based and land-based OFWs reached US\$7.2 billion in the first quarter of 2016, up by 4.3 % compared to last year's level while their cash remittances channelled via bank transactions in March 2016 amounted to US\$2.4 billion, an increase of 1.5 % year-on-year. With funds coming in, families with overseas workers have become better off financially compared to families who do not have (Edillon 2008, 1). This financial advantage is an enabling device: it is now within their means to purchase things they could not afford prior to the migration of a member. Asis (2006, 51) calls these things "consumer durables". These consist of designer clothes and shoes, gifts like toys, and gadgets like cell phones. According to Asis (2006, 51), children of migrants generally ranked their families in the

middle of the line or not poor, whereas most children of non-migrants considered their families in the middle or poor." Thus, children of OFWs know that their new-found material wealth is due to remittances from abroad.

More than the consumer durables that is now within their reach, economic advantages likewise bestow academic advantages. Edillon (2008,19) states that OFW parents spend twice more on their children's education than non-OFW parents do. Greater educational expenses usually mean that children of OFWS are in private schools which command higher fees compared to public schools. The academic gains are manifested in Edillon's (2008, 18) study: children of OFWs are able to achieve 93% of their potential educational level at a certain age, compared to the 88% of educational attainment achieved by their peers with non-OFW parents.

The social costs however are undeniable. From an early age, children are subject to a lack of parental intimacy. Reyes (2007, 2) states that young children see migration as a form of abandonment, teenagers may either accept this sacrifice or resent their parents for it. Nevertheless, to them, remittances and balikbayan boxes from their OFW parents are the only forms of affection they have—"the most tangible reassurance of their parents' love" (Parrenas 2002, 50). What is interesting to note, as well, is that this desire for parental attention increases as children age (Edillon (2008, 43). Thus, while children relish in getting new toys and gadgets when they are young, teenagers are more willing to trade these material possessions "if only to have both parents stay in the country for good" (Ibid).

When left behind adolescent children of migrants get involved in vices, delinquency and sexual matters, parental absence during their childhood years is faulted (Parrenas 2001, 375). For others, resentment arises from the inability of parents to recognize that their children too have made tremendous sacrifices to keep the family united in their absence. In particular, eldest daughters take over the maintenance of the household, which mothers perform before overseas work. When this goes unrecognized, daughters become aggrieved. This happens because when a mother leaves a household, a "reshuffling of care-giving functions" occurs (Asis 2006, 57). Instead of fathers assuming the mother's duties, daughters generally feel responsible to become the surrogate parents. Having to take on an adult role, that of a mother, daughters could understandably feel distressed. Furthermore, Parrenas (2002,49) notes that daughters "are made to undergo a mental process of readjusting and redefining traditional familial roles in the home...". In most cases, Parrenas adds that daughters likewise are forced to accept non-conventional roles, exacerbating the burden they feel. Dr. Maruja Asis, research director of the Scalabrini Migration Center (SMC) resonates the

configuration of familial roles and further stressed how crucial guidance and support is on the 13–16 age group: "it is not just the issue of these children wanting more time or money but it could be that they may be handling bigger responsibilities in the household that their young minds cannot still fully grasp and deliver. "

School's response

The 2003 survey of Scalabrini Migration Center among high school and college students revealed that parents' overseas employment is seen as financially advantageous. Moreover, teachers reported very few students (8%) in the sample having behavioural problems that warranted the attention of school officials. The teachers' rating generally placed the students with migrant parents in a more favourable light than even the students' own parents' or guardians' assessment, at least in three areas of school performance: interaction with classmates, assertiveness, and participation in co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. However, two out of three parents or guardians stated that the children have some problems at home and in school but these are generally manageable. On the part of the students, a small percentage among the students confessed to becoming disobedient, rebellious, and naughty.

Similarly, Arcinas (1991,134) found that the impact of parental absence on the discipline of children did not seem meaningful as a mere 12% of the respondents reported that their children had indeed become unruly during their absence. The percentage of "spoiled behaviour" was slightly higher (23 %), but the effect on schooling was also low, since only 11 per cent felt the education of children had suffered during the migration of parents.

Other studies however oppose the lack of negative effect. In an earlier study, Battistella and Conaco (1998) study of 709 Filipino children aged 10 to 12 years, stated that it is specifically the absence of the mother that had the most disruptive effect as manifested in poor academic performance and difficulty in social adjustment. Several recent studies echo this sentiment. Mother-absent children tend to be more angry, more confused, more apathetic, more afraid, and to feel more different from other children (Episcopal Commission for the Pastoral Care of Migrants and Itinerant People–CBCP/Apostleship of the Sea–Manila, Scalabrini Migration Centre & Overseas Workers Welfare Administration [ECMI-CBCP/AOS–Manila, SMC, & OWWA], 2004; Parreñas, 2005). This is exacerbated by the absence of intervention specific to the needs of OFW children. Schools may have guidance offices tasked to oversee the personal and psycho-emotional needs of the students in relation to their academic performance without . Tarroja and Fernando

(2013) expressed that current practices in schools reveals a lack of structured and programmatic interventions in school, which mental health professionals in schools recognize to be essential to help OFW children adjust better. Both recommend that more purposive school-based and family-focused psychological services are implemented to help the children and families left behind by OFW parents.

METHODOLOGY

The study utilizes the indigenous research method of pagtatanong-tanong (informal and unstructured interview) and pakikipagkwentuhan (informal conversation) to gain a deeper understanding of the experience of left-behind children of OFW parents (see Pee-pua and Marcelino, 2000).

Peepua used pagtatanong-tanong as the main method in an early study of migration and return migration among Ilocanos (Filipinos from the Ilocos region in the Philippines) who have lived in Hawaii for ten years or more. Peepua found this method appropriate for his migration study largely due to an engaging respondent participation despite the sensitivity of the topic, which in turn influenced the quality of data he obtained.

Pakikipagkwentuhan is a form of socialization or verbal exchanges among Filipinos. It is a cross between the interview and the focus group discussion. As an informal conversation, the distinct characteristic of pakikipagkuwentuhan is the free exchange of ideas leading to stories that can be analyzed. In their own words, the respondents of this study will be free to narrate their experiences as left-behind children of current OFWs. Questions will be asked if probing is needed.

The native language Tagalog was used because it is the language through which the members can best and comfortably express their ideas, emotions, beliefs and attitudes.

This study employed an in-depth analysis of the left-behind children's interpretations of their transnational family life. Hence, the data will be taken from the perspective of the adolescents. Due to the emphasis on in depth investigation, only a total of 10 students were chosen purposively, based on the following criteria: a college student, with one or more siblings, and have parents both working abroad, who may be living together or apart, but are still married.

FINDINGS AND RESULTS

Respondents' Background

This study gathered data from 10 left-behind children of OFWs of which 6 are males and 4 are females and with age ranging from 17 to 22. Except for two, the rest are first-born in their family. All of them are students in college, with five in their last year and the rest are in their 3rd or 2nd year. Generally, the respondents' mothers have worked abroad for 3-14 years while their father for 2-12 years. When asked to describe their parents' work abroad, most of them stated jobs in the service industry which are not in the top management position. Their pay is enough to sustain their needs, and to buy things that they want to have, like electronic gadgets.

Table 1. shows a rundown of their background characteristics.

Name *	Sex	Age	Year in college	Birth order	Mother's Job/Location	Number of years as OFW of mother	Father's Job/Location	Number of years as OFW of father
Paolo	m	22	2 nd	1 st of 3	Chef/ Myanmar	12	Foreign Affairs officer/ Myanmar	12
Angela	f	18	2 nd	2 nd of 3	Domestic helper/ Dubai	5	Construction work/ Saudi Arabia	2
Jan	m	20	4 th	1 st of 2	English Tutor/ Japan	6	Seaman	2
Sophia	m	19	4 th	1 st of 2	Nutritionist / Saudi Arabia	5	Electrician/ Saudi Arabia	6
Eden	f	18	3 rd	1 st of 3	Store manager/ Dubai	10	Store manager/ Qatar	10
Shenna	m	20	4 th	1 st of 3	Nurse / Saudi Arabia	10	Nurse / Saudi Arabia	8
Karen	f	20	4 th	1 st of 3	House manager/ UK	14	Head cook/ Jordan	6
Kevin	m	17	2 nd	1 st of three	Sales rep/ Malaysia	5	IT expert/ Malaysia	9
Eden	f	18	3 rd	1 st of 3	Store manager/ Dubai	10	Store manager/ Qatar	10
June	f	19	3 rd	Only child	Teacher/ Dubai	3	Teacher/ Dubai	3
Samuel	m	20	4 th	2 nd of 3	None/ US	10	Liaison officer/ Thailand	10

*not their real names

When asked about the marital status of their parents, three said that their parents have separated, with one stating that both his parents have new families, one thinks that both of them have new relationships, but are not open about it while another one saying their separated parents have no partners. Table 2 shows this information.

Table 2. Background information of respondents

Name	Marital Status of parents
Paolo	Married and together
Angelica	Separated, not in new relationship
Jan	Married and together
Sophia	Married and together
Eden	Married and together
Shenna	Married and together
Karen	Separated, in live-in relationship
Kevin	Married and together
June	Married and together
Samuel	Separated, both remarried

Among the 10 respondents, three left their residence to live with their grandparents, one with her aunt's family and five live on their own, without any relatives with them. Table 3 shows this information.

Table 3. Living arrangement of respondents

Name	Living arrangement
Paolo	on their own
Angelica	on their own
Jan	on their own
Sophia	with grandparents
Eden	with grandparents
Shenna	on their own
Karen	on their own
Kevin	with grandparents
June	with aunt
Samuel	on their own

Parenting from Afar and Reconfiguration of Rules

All respondents recall that prior to working overseas, they belonged to a conventional Filipino family where the father does paid work and the mother stays at home to do chores with the help of the children. Also, as students, they were not often obliged to help out in chores, especially the youngest who received the most favour in the family. Paolo however says that although his mother was a stay-at-home mom, she was gainfully self-employed,

augmenting her husband's income. Other respondents said their family had no other source of income except what their father earned. Angelica resonates the views of the rest regarding their financial status: "before, money was tight. There were things that we needed to do, or buy but we just couldn't afford it." It is in the area of discipline where the role was shared. Respondents disclosed that their parents had different style of discipline: fathers are strict while mothers are more indulgent. Thus, respondents say that they often confided with their mother compared to their father.

When their parents became OFW, respondents say that the changes were abrupt and required quick adjustment especially in living arrangement and money matters.

For those living with their grandparents and aunt, money is channeled through them. It is their grandparents and aunt who receive money on their behalf. For the five respondents who live on their own, money is sent through the bank account they opened with their mother prior to going abroad. It is their own mother who instruct them about the budget allocation. When asked why, the respondents said that being the eldest, the responsibility is automatically given to them. However, Angelica, who is a second child in the family is relegated this task because her older brother left home and lived on his own away from them. Respondents say that it was difficult at first, because it meant they had to think of so many things: from groceries, to electric bills to tuition fees and allowances of siblings. It gets easier after several months. It is their mother who send money and they make sure they can itemize the expenses once they talk to their mother. The respondents qualified that the money sent to them is both coming from their parents.

Jane who lives with her aunt complained that her aunt does not spend the money according to her mother's allocation saying "she has kids of her own, so I know that some of what I should be getting goes to them." In contrast, those living with their grandparents say that budgeting is not of great concern. Their grandparents handle this task well, because there are instances that their parents could not send money on time and it is their grandparents who found ways to provide for them.

The most important change that needed immediate adjustment was not having anyone to depend on. Angelica, who lives apart from relatives says, "all of a sudden, I had to take charge of my 6 year old brother, because our eldest left home for work far from us, and father, well, he just left after a few months. Mom got us a helper so I won't have to do chores, except paying bills, buying groceries and budgeting."

Sofia, who also lives with her sibling and away from relatives said that she sort of became "the mother and father" saying that

" I make sure we spend wisely, so all bills are paid on time. I'm the one who remind them to do their assignments, attend PTA meetings, and sometimes even become a disciplinarian."

The OFW children recognize how easy it is to circumvent the rules of their parents because Shenna says "it's way too easy to make them believe everything is okay". Shenna proceeds to give an example: "say you are in your friend's house, just doing nothing; you can easily lie and say you're in school and they have no way of checking if it's true." Paolo however admonishes: "never sway and always prove that what you are doing with their money is all worth it." Karen resonates this though saying that children should always keep in mind that no parent want to be separated from their children, but there is no other way to ensure financially their future but to work abroad.

The challenge then is how to build a strong and honest relationship with their parents. Sophia argues that it is still possible to have constant communication between children and parents despite physical separation:

"why, if parents and children live together, does that really mean that they will have a better communication, or have a very good relationship? That's no guarantee."

Kevin adds that it is the duty of the left-behind's children's to make their parents feel that they are not really far and says that skype, fb, messenger , albeit virtual means– these are very important to maintain a close relationship.

From the above, the Filipino value of "utang na loob" (debt of gratitude) is clearly rooted in their idea of parental sacrifice. The western notion that parents are duty-bound to provide for their children is seen differently in the Filipino context. In the same token, Filipinos think that children too are duty-bound to repay their parents. In that, a child who does not help out by sending his/her other siblings to school or by taking care of his/her parents during old age is considered ungrateful.

Problems at home and in school

Examples of the feelings of despair and other emotional insecurities were generally articulated by the left-behind children interviewed in this study. The results are not meant to support the denigration of OFWs in public discourse but to understand how complex the issue is.

The respondents all echo the notion that parental absence contributes to emotional turmoil felt by left-behind children of OFWS. Kevin says that

"even if I am an adult by age, I still want to be cared for; actually, I long for it. It's different when parents are around."

Nevertheless, Eden and Sophia qualified by saying that if the children are left to a very loving carer/s, then parental absence shouldn't be a great concern. They expressed that the relatives may not be able to approximate parental love, but Eden said,

"knowing that you have people to call on, to ask, or just to talk when you arrive home, that is a great help, compared to having none."

However, not everyone see how imperative having surrogate parents are. For Karen,

"in the end, it is you, just you who will have to face the challenges, so better just really get used to it fast. It is when you keep on longing for their presence that you can't handle things."

Respondents all resonate the thought that to maintain smooth communication, both OFW parents and their left-behind children have to screen out information that they tell each other. Samuel says

"This is what we've been doing, and it makes sense. Because you don't want them worrying over something they can't personally and physically deal with so you don't tell them the bad stuff or you sugar coat things. if you tell them exactly what is happening, it will just worry them unnecessarily and they can't really handle them anyway because they're not here. Now, when the parents go home, that's when you talk things over. But mostly, we don't. They will just learn about it from others."

It is in the area of college education that the respondent and their parents have a lot of discussions because in the first place, the respondents note that getting a college diploma is the most important push factor. Hence, every call parents make would not be complete without update of grades in the courses enrolled.

Respondents all agreed that being conscientious in their studies is no longer easy to do because their chores take most of their time, including what is supposed to be allotted for studying and accomplishing assignments and projects. Sofia explains the sentiment of the rest:

It's not because you can't understand the test. It's not because the assignment is too hard. It's not because the project is too complicated. It is because you do not have time to accomplish them. Or when you try to do them, but it would be just for the sake of complying. How can you, by the time you're done with chores, you are already very tired, so you just want to sleep."

Karen adds:

" Plus, do not forget we have younger siblings who also have schoolwork to do, so, you help them with their assignment too. In the end, you can't do your own schoolwork, because by then you will be so tired."

Sophia also adds that even if school sometime give one satisfaction, it is still not enough saying that,

“getting praises for a school project done well make your heart burst with pride, but there is no one, and suddenly it feels as if no one really cares.”

Moreover, apart from school concerns, those who live on their own lament also the difficulty of managing certain situations that necessitated parental presence and handling. Karen said she had to go to the police station when her brother was apprehended by the police for drugs. She explained that she failed in a major subject because she had to attend to the legal procedure her brother needs to go through or to submit documents. She incurred a lot of absences resulting to failing grade.

Respondents express that school gives them a lot of stress, consequently, they feel down at times and they don't have anyone they can express these feelings with and who will give them comforting words. Apart from school-related activities, Jane and Eden added that it is during important events like Christmas, birthday and graduation that the longing is strong. Others pointed at

The longing for greater intimacy by all respondents illustrate what children imagine they would receive if their parents were to return and stay in the Philippines. Familiarity might be what they desire, but it seems they are longing to be part of a family that follows the normative household model in the Philippines, one that follows the traditional structure. This is comprehensible given that the normative household model is taught from elementary to high school students as mandated by DepEd. A cursory glance at a Grade 6 textbook shows that the “traditional” Filipino family which is nuclear in structure is celebrated. Those who subscribe to the normative household model presented in the Values Formation courses taught at elementary and high schools would consider transnational families to fall outside the norm. Hence, the respondents of the study are “normally” reacting to what they perceive as an anomaly to what has been deeply ingrained in the consciousness of Filipinos.

The left-behind children's sentiments are undoubtedly gendered and shaped by traditional notions of mothering in the Philippines. They illustrate that children resist the redefinition of mothering facilitated by women's migration as they instead staunchly hold onto the idea that mothers are the *ilaw ng tahanan*—light of the home. These suggests that migrant women's efforts to be the breadwinners of the family have not always eased their responsibilities to be the nurturers of children. Children still view their

mothers, regardless of income contribution to the family, as the proper caregivers.

The "right" kind of help

Undeniably, it is the economic upturn that propels migration. The respondents know that had their parents stayed here, college education would not be possible. Except for one respondent, all the rest prefer that their parents continue working overseas because of the financial advantage. The respondents said that once they graduate and have work, then their parents can go home and rest.

For now however, respondents all agreed that the difficulty of coping with school requirements seems too much, and exacerbated by teachers who often rebuke them for not performing as well as their classmates.

Karen for example says,

" I enrolled originally in civil engineering during freshman, but at the end of the year, I had 5 failing subjects, so I had to shift to a business course, which I thought was ok. And I failed in 2 subjects and had been asked to shift once more. That's why I am here in this course."

Failing in courses, being kicked-out and shifting are common experiences of these students. When asked what they think can be done on the part of the school, all the respondents say that their professors are part of the solution because according to Sofia,

"the failing grade they give is what sets-off the strings of hardships. Maybe, if they could only understand how difficult our lives are, they might be more considerate and understanding. Not that I want special favors, but maybe, deadlines are extended, lates and absences are excused..."

When asked whether their professors know about their background, only Kevin and Karen said yes. The rest expressed that they do not want to give the impression that they want special consideration. What the students strongly suggested can be categorized into 2: first, chance to talk with fellow OFW and for teachers to be aware of the struggles of OFW children, without them actually telling them.

Students affirm the importance of counseling, which they avail of when required to, such as when they have incurred numerous successive absences, or failing grades. However, what they desire is emphatic understanding. Jan explain,

It is very hard to make a person understand how hard it is to live on your own and be responsible for so many things. Others can offer sympathy, but it is way better to discuss these things with people who are going through the same lives we have – those who are also children of OFWs.

Respondents think that only those who are in the same background as theirs could fathom the depth of their difficulties. At present, there is not a specific program for them apart from occasional counseling. What the respondents suggest is a get-together of OFW children, where they could share their stories, both the happy and the sad. Angelica reasoned that,

It's important to hear others' struggles in their daily life as OFW children because you will feel a sense of connection, that you are not alone, that others are going through the same stuff, or that others have been here, and they have overcome these hardships.

The respondents suggests that counseling be made suitable to what they need. They further explained that a counselor be present, who will facilitate the whole process of sharing. Hence, it becomes a group counseling where the OFW children themselves help each other. The respondents added that this should not be on "as the need arises" basis. Rather, it should be a regular meeting, so the positive effect could be sustained and if there are issues, these are addressed early on. The other "help" the respondents envisioned is awareness seminar for teachers which they think should have input coming from the OFW children themselves. Karen says,

"It is not to excuse our poor performance but to make everyone understand that where we are coming from. We have more roles, and tasks than the average student. So, the teachers might understand better why we cannot really give our best. And perhaps, they would be extra careful when admonishing us for not performing well."

CONCLUSION

International migration is a response that Filipinos do to mitigate economic hardships. In particular, parents work abroad to contend with financial struggles. Consequently, the Filipino family at present has been reconfigured, changing household structures, marshalling the development of new forms of household, including the grandparent-headed households and transnational families. However, what is not acknowledged in many studies is when older children become surrogate parents, even when their father is at home.

The roles and tasks associated with becoming practically the head of the family fall on them and it is taking a toll on their role as students. Failing due mainly to absenteeism and non-compliance with requirements make the OFW children's lives stressful. With so many tasks, the OFW children struggle to handle problems related to school, home and in their own personal lives. In the end, given the gender shift in migration, the number of female OFWs will

continue to escalate. Hence, schools must address this problem, and improve their usual response of counseling to truly accommodate what students, who are OFW children, need.

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