

LIVED EXPERIENCES OF TEENAGERS WITH OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKER PARENTS**Ery Lyn L. Calantas****Pryor I. Lobaton**

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Abstract:

This research endeavor used a phenomenological approach that looked into the lived experiences of teenagers with Overseas Filipino Worker parents. A purposeful sampling method was used to identify the ten (10) teenagers whose both parents are working abroad as the participants of this study. This study is anchored on the Attachment Theory of John Bowlby and Lazarus and Folkman Cognitive Stress Model. The data were gathered through a semi-structured in-depth interview and observation to gather information of the participants. Following Creswell's approach, the data were recorded, transcribed, analysed and interpreted by the researcher and verified by the professionals in the field of Psychology and Guidance and Counseling. The data obtained nine important aspects of these lived experiences (1) A vision for a better future (2) Acceptance being away from parents (3) Act of rebellion (4) Being envious of families who are complete (5) Companionship of friends (6) Feeling of extreme sadness (7) Isolation from others (8) Neglected as child (9) Self-reliance. This phenomenon was presented through thematic presentations of each participant's lives, and results showed that teenagers have the tendency to be rebellious and envious to others. They tend to be alone, sad and feeling neglected. However, these teenagers have developed acceptance and understanding to their life situation. They wanted to have a better future not just for themselves but also for their future family to be stable and to avoid separation. These teenagers will have seminar-workshop, learning and group session at school.

Key Words: Attachment, Stress, Teenagers with Overseas Filipino Worker Parents

Introduction

International migration observed as a tool towards development, and customarily it is viewed as established in adverse improvement in the sending regions (Cortes, 2007). Over the previous decades, the quantity of individual migrating worldwide has been expanding drastically. UN assessed 700 million people work outside their nation of birth in the year 2012. As more people choose to move out their countries of origin, the impact of working abroad to their children left behind addressed an utmost attention.

The Philippines is known as one of the largest labor-sending countries, accounts for 27% of the overall Filipino youth population left behind. Negros Island Region shares 13.5% of Overseas Filipino Workers as the Philippine National Statistics had released its survey last year 2016. As immigration escalates, there is an increase in the number of left-behind children. OFW parents often leave their kids in the care of their grandparents, aunts and uncles, relatives, friends, or no one at all for the significant periods of time.

The alarming impact of OFW phenomenon has stimulated the interest of the researcher because of her experiences in her work. As a guidance associate, the researcher has encountered a lot of junior high school students with OFW parents who have violated the rules and regulations of the school such as cutting classes because of computer addiction, bullying, public display of affection and staying in taverns wearing school uniforms. Ten percent (10%) of the student population whose parents are working abroad sent to the guidance office are problematic, and they manifest behavior and academic problems.

Moreover, this study explored the lived experiences of teenagers with OFW parents.

This study is anchored on the Attachment Theory of John Bowlby (Mutie, 2015) and the Cognitive Stress Model of Lazarus & Folkman (Smeekens, 2010) to explain the phenomenon on teenagers with OFW parents.

Lazarus and Folkman (2013) states that the stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person sees that the "demands exceed the personal and social assets the individual can mobilize." Lazarus and Folkman (2013) stated that cognitive appraisal happens when a person considers two central factors that significantly contribute to his response to stress which includes the dangerous propensity of the stress to the individual and the assessment of assets required to limit, endure or eradicate the stressor and the stress it produces.

Coping is a process of "always showing signs of cognitive and behavioral endeavors to manage particular external or internal demands that appraise as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person. Another key variable of relevance to the situation of adolescents with parents abroad is loneliness. However, family members are often taking up social support, which might lead to a better adjustment concerning loneliness (Reyes, 2009).

In the recent study, mothers working abroad also emphasized their roles, as parents, in maintaining or re-establishing cohesive parent-adolescent relations. Some parents described adjusting and understanding to adolescence should be appropriate and provide opportunities to facilitate adolescents' developmental needs. Thus, Filipino immigrant mothers mobilized their

most excellent resource, cultural values of family cohesion and strong family relations, in overcoming challenges and optimizing their family functioning (de Guzman, 2011)

Moreover, de Guzman (2011) indicated that communication processes in Filipino immigrant families seen as a vital strategy not only for managing conflicts but also for promoting close family relations. During transitions in adolescence, mothers expressed feeling disconnected to adolescents as daily conversations decreased and young people began forging intimate relationships with friends and peers. However, open communication facilitated cohesive family relations and functioning and reinforced an emotionally close environment.

Most likely, Svasek, (2008), noted that keeping up connection and communication among the subject groups inside the care triangle may be critical to the versatility of the transnational family. Previous studies have noticed the routes in which modern telecommunications have changed the potential outcomes for communicating over distance.

Furthermore, in the study done by San Pascual (2012), migrant mothers defined their parenting roles as being the provider, friend, and guide, and findings reveal that these functions manifest the features of nurture and control articulated by Le Poire (2006). The results also demonstrate that these three parenting roles motivated by these mothers' desire to attain the family goals of securing their teenage children's well-being as well as maintaining and sustaining healthy mother-child relations.

On the other hand, in the discussion paper of Botezat et, al, (2014), they stated that the positive impact of parental migration on the academic achievement of children left at home might be astonishing. In the Philippines, it is emotionally and physically trying for the children to admit that their family set-up is not the same with some families. But as the child matures, he begins to understand why the parent has to work abroad and can get back on track and assume the responsibility of dealing with family and family life on their own (Atienza, et al. 2012). Even if circumstances are difficult, some children can build resilience and appear not to be affected.

In Parreñas's analysis as cited by Alampay (2014) children were more likely to see migrant-mother families as not normal and to feel that their care had been inadequate (albeit adequate substitute care may have been available) because migrant mothers are unlikely to meet their traditional role expectations for mothering.

On the contrary, Smeekens (2010) findings in her study which could indicate a lack of causal relationship between migration and adolescents' health are the fact that adolescents did not appraise overseas labor migration as mainly positive or negative, the OFW group being slightly

more favorable. However, it can argue that, although being separated from a parent is emotionally challenging, adolescents may try to reconcile themselves to the situation that considered as entirely reasonable in the country.

Moreover, while parents work abroad to provide the needs of their children, there were poorer outcomes. Also, those whose mothers were abroad, and who exhibit avoidant coping, were particularly at risk (Smeeckens, 2012).

Furthermore, based on the 2016 survey of the Philippine Statistics Authority, 2.4 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) have worked abroad at any time during the period April to September 2015.

This study aimed to document the lived experiences of teenagers with OFW parents. In this study, ten participants were included. The findings of this study were limited to the following variables such as age, sex, and family income, the number of siblings, birth order, and family social system. The participants included teenagers with both OFW parents whose age range between 12 to 18 years old based on the age bracket of adolescence in Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development (Schultz, 2012).

Methodology

This chapter presented the methods and procedures that were used in the study. Detailed information on the research design, participants, variables, and actions that will be taken by the researcher to pursue the study is presented.

In this research, the researcher utilized a qualitative research design. It sought to understand a given research problem or topic from the perspectives of the local population it involves.

The researcher made use of the phenomenological approach by Creswell (2013). In this approach, the researcher described the lived experiences of individuals about a phenomenon as described by participants. This description culminated in the essence of the experiences of several individuals who have experienced the phenomenon.

This study primarily employed phenomenological in-depth interviews, introspection, and observations to teenagers with OFW parents to find out the nature of their experiences with both parents working abroad thus what this particular experience was like for them.

In this study, the researcher used purposeful sampling to identify the participants. Creswell (2009) cited that three to ten participants are adequate in the phenomenological approach. Ten (10) teenagers with both OFW parents, five teenagers from private school and five teenagers from the public school which came from Northern, Central, and Southern Negros were qualified as participants based on the inclusion criteria formulated.

The following criteria were used to determine those considered as participants: (1) teenager; (2) age between 12 and 18 years old; (3) both parents are working abroad; (4) from Northern, Central, and Southern Negros.

An in-depth researcher-made phenomenological interview guide was used as the primary data gathering instrument to understand the lived experiences of teenagers with OFW parents. It will comprise of two parts: Part I: Demographic Profile of Participants namely; participants' name (optional), age, sex, family income, the number of siblings, birth order, and family social system. Part II: Participant's views on personal experiences of teenagers with OFW parents.

Validity in qualitative research refers to the extent to which an account accurately represents the social phenomena to which it refers (Silverman, 2011). Researchers responded to validity concerns by describing the warrant of their inferences. The three (3) jurors who are experts in research in psychological dynamics evaluated the face and content validity.

Reliability in Qualitative research refers to the level of consistency with which cases assigned to the similar category by various observers or by the same observer on numerous occasions (Silverman, 2013). For the reliability of this study, the researcher made sure that the transcriptions were precise and considered the consistency of the responses/answers. This research study applied inter-rater reliability. The researcher asked three professionals in the field of guidance and counseling to assess the codes obtained in the data. Organization and uniformity of the results were evaluated and established among the raters.

In gathering the data, the researcher wrote a letter to the principal to asked permission to interview the students. Participants were personally approached by the researcher to participate voluntarily in the study and consent was sought to their guardian/s. The researcher made sure that the selected participants were qualified in the inclusion criteria formulated namely: teenager; aged 12 to 18 years old; both parents are working abroad; from private or public school; and from Northern, Central and Southern Negros.

As soon as the participants agreed to meet the researcher, they were informed about the objective of the research study, and each participant was given a free, prior informed consent form (see

Appendix A) before participating in the study and in maintaining their complete anonymity. When the participants already agreed to take part in the study, the interview was scheduled at the convenience of the participants.

A semi-structured interview was used to collect pertinent information of the participants. The researcher used in-depth interviews which were audio-taped.

This study involves the following steps by Creswell (2009):

1. Collection of data
2. Data preparation: prepare data for analysis, for example, transcription of interview verbatim
3. Open coding: Distinguish significant sections from the material
4. Axial coding (analytical coding): analyze and gather data into classifications
5. Repeat the above procedures, obtain more categories from the data sets
6. Simultaneously combine categories into themes.

Results, Discussion, and Implications

The following were the themes culled from the interview transcripts of the lived experiences of teenagers with OFW parents.

A vision for a better future. People work abroad for greener pasture and to achieve a successful life just like the participants. For instance, Jim shared, “*To finish my studies and maybe I will be an army, or I don't know I don't have an idea yet, but it depends on, but I want to be an army because I want to help other people. However, regarding working abroad, I don't have any plans yet. I have to finish my studies first and to achieve my dreams as an army. Then, I will help my parents.*”

Many studies had found that children of migrant households had better health than children because of the utilization of remittances for children's education and health needs (Adhikari, 2012). With additional money coming from payments, left-behind families can eat more nutritious food and buy expensive medicine (Salah, 2008).

Acceptance being away from parents. No matter how painful and terrible the life because of separation from parents, the participants showed their acceptance and understanding to their parents.

In a polite manner, Mark stated, *“There are times that I want to go outside, but they won't allow me. There are also times that I want to play computer games, but they won't let me mainly if I stay long. I follow my parents and guardian's advice because I loved them. What they are doing is for me. I understand what they want for me because it is for my security.”*

It is now well-accepted that international migration of a parent or relative can have both positive and negative impacts on non-migrant children in the home country. There is the likelihood that remittances sent from abroad will relax the family budget constraint and result in an expansion in child schooling, child well-being, and a corresponding decrease in child labor (Yang, 2008).

Act of rebellion. Growing up without the presence and proper guidance of the parents would lead to rebellious acts among teenagers. For instance, Sapphire shared, *“The time my mother went abroad, and the time she has another man, I became rebellious. It was the moment I learned how to smoke, drink, and I became a rebel. So, when she worked abroad, I think I was happier. Those times that I was still a rebel, I am very stubborn. Hmm...if my friends and I go out to drink I just dress like a lady. It was terrible we drink and smoke always. Another thing is, I always curse, every sentence there's always a curse on it. Also, I am lazy to attend school.”*

Gavriliuc (as cited by Tarrojo et. Al), found out that children who were left behind were also reported to have more behavioral problems, such as dropping out of school, engaging in vices, and drug abuse. This acts suggests that migration is associated with problematic family situations, which in turn affect children's well-being (Mazzucato et. al, 2014). Givaudan et. al (2013) pointed to the "dangers" of children knowing how to express disagreement and feelings. They interpreted it as promoting rebelliousness among children.

Being envious of families who are complete. Teenagers whose both parents are working abroad are forced to live with their grandparents or other relatives. This situation leads to a feeling of jealousy to other teenagers who have a family that is complete. Andi exclaimed, *“I envy. Most especially if I remember the times, we go out together, the four of us as a family. Hmm... every time I see a child with his parents while I am at the mall or riding on a jeepney.”*

Ren and Treiman (2016) concluded that in the Chinese context of family arrangements, they have little interaction among their parents. Children left behind suffer emotional deficits and relatively without their parents; it suggests a negative envy effect that might operate to these individuals.

Companionship of friends. Our friends considered to be a baggage counter. In times of problems, most of the teenagers go to their friends who are there and ever ready to help. Since the

participants cannot tell everything to their parents because they are working abroad, in times of difficulties and challenges in their lives, participants in this study confide to their closest friends.

Anastasia in a grateful manner said, *“For me, I go to my friends because I am thankful to them because they are supportive. So, if I have a problem I go to my friends.”*

Some studies conducted in Western culture have indicated that companionship and support from friends were conducive to decreasing or eliminating children's internalizing problems (Rubin et al., 2006).

Feeling of extreme sadness. Being separated from the people we loved is never easy there are always painful or sad experiences that curved your whole being. Juan shared, *“You missed your mother then you will cry. The life is so sad without my parents, and that is our situation.”*

Feelings of loneliness and emptiness predominate when parents leave to work overseas (Carandang et al., 2007). Children with both parents away feel greater sadness than those with only one OFW parent (Scalabrini Migration Center as cited by Tarroja et al., 2013). They also experience more emotional distress compared to children of non-migrants. Children left behind went through emotional turmoil and experience lots of longing for their parents (Tarroja et al., 2013).

Isolation from others. Being alone makes someone think deeply and internalize the life challenges. Finding solitude emerged as one common theme for the six teenage participants. Shamous shared, *“I tend to enjoy myself alone in my room. Through that, I could be able to clear up my mind.”*

In this study, there are times that the participants want to isolate themselves. When they tend to be angry, or they have problems, they choose to be alone to compose their emotions. Even though they feel helpless because their parents are not present, the need to be alone is a shred of evidence to cope their stress. However, the isolation of the participants doesn't necessarily mean that they don't want to interact with other people anymore, it is a justification that other people could think deeply and be able to make solutions to the current problems by being alone.

Neglected as a child. Feeling neglected is one of the themes culled out from the interview. This feeling is one of the upsetting feelings in the adolescent years. Moreover, Princess said, *“I am hurt that she is taking good care of other children abroad while in here, we are being neglected.”*

No one takes care of us here. I'm the one who takes care of my siblings. It is difficult being neglected."

The emotional neglect felt by these children is associated with lack of affection and physical intimacy (Valtolina et al., 2012). Moreover, children of migrant parents have been found to feel lonely, angry, unloved, afraid, and worried compared with the kids of non-migrants.

Self-reliance. One of the things that teenagers have learned is to be self-reliant. This character helped them to stand still despite the lack of assistance. Shappire shared, *"Currently, it's just me, I self-study especially that I am older than my sister. However, I have adjusted to the special science curriculum. I have mastered the techniques on how to study."*

Datu et, al, (2012) noted that adolescents want to feel that they are independent, they demand of coping independently with their problems, rebuffing attempts on the part of parents and teachers to help them. Furthermore, being left to tend for themselves might have the opposite effect, increasing self-reliance, self-confidence, and initiative (Ren and Treiman, 2013).

Many Filipinos nowadays choose to work abroad to have a bigger income. The remittances they send to their family in the Philippines utilized for the household expenses and the education of their children left behind. Most of these parents can send their children to a private school where they pay higher tuition in exchange for an excellent education.

However, not all parents working abroad could send their children to a private school because of some circumstances. For instance, the child wants to study in a public school because of his friends or the situation at home wherein the eldest child should attend to their grandparents who are supposed to take good care of the kids left behind by their parents. Another reason is that the eldest child has to take good care of younger siblings because no one will attend to their needs. Most likely, there is a tendency to drop out of school because of these adverse reasons.

Thus, the living conditions of some children are a concern. Children are usually in the care of close relatives who often cannot provide the same love, affection, and support as that of the parents. This situation is also a reason why children may feel too much sadness and neglected. It happens because most of the caregivers have other obligations to attend. Not all the time they will be with them. Moreover, the main reason is the absence of their parents.

As a result of being away from parents, they resort to rebellious activities to cope with life. They find comfort in the company of friends who believe are always there for them. Together they

surpass problems. However, it is not all the time that they can rely on friends. Some of them ask the guidance of the Divine Providence. Isolation from others doesn't mean that they don't want other people to intervene with their problems. Rather, it is their moment of silence and a way of communicating with God.

Children may suffer stress, or emotional distress manifested as anger, guilt, loneliness, sadness and fear. It is noteworthy that being aware of their situation, they try to do something about their plight. They know that they have a future and envision it to be bright for them. Hence, they took it upon themselves to finish their studies and accept that their parents are working abroad for their welfare.

The teenagers with Overseas Filipino Worker parents have a vision for a better future for themselves and their families too. They want to secure their future by finishing their studies and finding a stable job to support their family.

Moreover, the findings imply that teenagers have the tendency to capture the attention of their parents through rebellious acts just like drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking and staying outside late at night with friends that seemed to be unacceptable to their guardian/s, to other people and even to their parents as well.

The findings imply that teenagers feel that they are neglected or not properly taken care of, for some reason that their parents leave them and choose to work abroad. There are also moments that they tend to be alone. Maybe, isolation of oneself could make them think deeply and weigh things in their most appropriate resolutions.

Teenagers being left behind by their parents become more independent and responsible. It implies that they learn on their own and could stand in life making decisions through their perspectives. It is their friends who make them happy and help them in most of their problems and difficulties in life.

This study implies that parents should take part in the growth and development of their children. Even they are working abroad they should not let their teenage children left behind feel neglected. Also, parents must check their children's whereabouts now and then. In this way of close monitoring and communication through this, their children will feel that they are being loved and cared by their parents.

Likewise, teachers should go deeper to what do their students feel. That perhaps their change of behavior entails that they are going through something that embodies their actions and performance at school.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This part of the research study presents the conclusions and recommendations based on the significant findings of the study.

The following conclusions are illustrated based on the significant findings of the study:

Teenagers with Overseas Filipino Worker parents perceived that it is because of money their parents work abroad. These teens accepted the fact that they have to be away from their parents to support and provide them a better life. They desire to have a complete family just like the other children. Also, they planned to finish their studies and have a better job to give back what their parents have done for them. However, children left at home felt the loneliness and sadness in significant events of their lives.

Finding solitude in the verge of their problems helps them connect and communicate with their inner self and also with God. In that sense, they could find a better solution and even a temporary one to solve or rather escape from their real world. As time goes by, self-reliance has been a valuable progress to the teenagers with parents abroad brought about by the experiences that made them stronger and become wise in making decisions for their future. Despite the life challenges they encountered, they were able to survive because of support they received from their friends. Henceforth, these teenagers found the value of life as they grew up.

Based on the conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are presented:

1. The guardian/s of teenagers with OFW parents may provide:
 - a. The appropriate care needed by these individuals to feel loved and valued. The guardian/s must spend time talking and going out with them so that they will experience belongingness.
 - b. Momentous support in all of their school activities. Giving attention to what they are doing in the school to make them feel happy and proud.
2. Administrators and teachers may consider the following:
 - a. The implementation of the guidance activities for the children of Overseas Filipino Workers and the allocation of budget and time for the proposed programs. Also, teachers must work on different teaching competencies to avoid various numbers of students failed in their subjects.

- b. There is collaboration among the personnel of the school and stakeholders to ensure the wellness and improve the growth and development of the students.
3. The guidance counselors at the schools make use of findings in developing their guidance services that offered to the students. Create activities that will address the development of psycho-social, academic and career aspects of the students.
4. Parents of the teenagers may use the results of this study as a reminder that they have to give enough time and effort in connecting with their children so that they could strengthen their relationship and avoid the misconception that leads to the poor performance of their children in school and affects their well-being.
5. Future Researchers may consider the following:
 - a. Conduct related studies: a quantitative-qualitative research to further investigate the life experiences of these teenagers that will focus on the dilemmas experienced taking care of younger siblings and dropping out of school.
 - b. A wider scope of this study by differentiating those life experiences of teens having parents working abroad that based on high economic countries to the Asian countries and their job description.

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