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**FEATURE**

**Lived Experiences of University Students  
in the Philippines with Overseas  
Contract Worker Parents**

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**Abstract.** *Children cherish the personal time and attention that their parents give them. However, personal time and attention cannot be available to children with parents who are overseas contract workers. Anchored on family systems theory, attachment theory, and structural family theory, this phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of children of overseas contract workers. There were 9 college student-participants studying in a university in Eastern Samar, Philippines who were interviewed face-to-face. Data extracted from personal interviews were recorded electronically with participant's permission, transcribed verbatim, triangulated with available information, and analyzed thematically in conjunction with the research questions of the study. The experiences of overseas contract workers' children included financial security, feelings of desertion and isolation, affected academic performance, unhappiness, and worry. The use of social media played a significant role in sustaining family relationship between the parent-migrants and the children left behind.*

**Keywords:** Family relationship, social media, overseas contract workers' children, phenomenology, Philippines

**Introduction**

Poverty causes overseas migration. Zulueta and Liwag (2001) documented that either the father, the mother, or both parents migrate to different countries to seek better job opportunities as poverty forces them to abandon their children and seek employment in other countries, unmindful of its social costs. Because of overseas migration, numerous children are growing up devoid of their parents' love, time,

and attention. Teodosio (2010) contended that poverty “diminishes the quality of life and erodes the legitimacy of institutions” (p. 106).

The overseas migration of one or both of the parents is not a new phenomenon. The Commission on the Filipinos Overseas (as cited in Yap, 2008) recorded that as of 2006, there were 8.23 million Filipinos abroad, of whom 3.6 million were permanent migrants, 3.8 million temporary migrants, and 0.87 million “irregular” migrants. By 2013, a rapid growth of Filipino migrants was expected and this resulted in 10.4 million Filipinos living in foreign countries. Among the overseas Filipino workers, 96.2% are overseas contract workers (OCWs). The remaining 3.8% are regular and self-employed workers. Most OCWs come from Luzon. The largest group of OCWs comes from the CALABARZON province comprising 18.4%; those that come from central Luzon provinces, 13.9%; and from the National Capital Region, 12.8%. Therefore, 45.1% of all OCWs come from Luzon provinces. The rest come from the Visayas islands and Mindanao. It should be noted that Eastern Visayas (comprising Leyte and Samar) provide 9.4% of all OCWs and Western Visayas (Panay and Negros) has 6.5% (Philippine Statistical Authority, as cited in Sicat, 2016).

Many of these OCWs have their own families. The children who were left behind by their parents because of work abroad may feel emotional and psychological distress and may lack affection and parental contact time (Yap, Cuenca, & Reyes, 2009). Smeekens (2010) stated that the parents have to leave their children at home in order to work abroad to be able to financially support them.

The convention on the rights of the child emphasized that the personality of the child is fully and harmoniously developed in the family under an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding. While parents understand this right of children and the concept of the family that lives together, they need to restructure the concept of a family to be able to take care of its welfare. Thus, parents have to leave their children to work overseas (Edillon, 2008).

Studies by ECMI/AOS-Manila, Aguilar et al., and Asian and Pacific Migration (as cited in Owusu, n.d.) found that Filipino parents motivate their children to perform well in school and complete their education because it is the best legacy that they can provide them. Moreover, the decision of the parents to work abroad is inspired by their aspiration to provide their children with good future through education (Owusu, n.d.). Even when parents are far from their children, motherhood roles or parental roles are still performed (Nicholson, as cited in Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014).

Knowing that the percentage of OCWs from Visayas is higher in the provinces of Leyte and Samar, it was imperative to undertake this phenomenological study to explore and describe the lived experiences of college students whose parents are working overseas and how they manage their academic lives. The findings of the

study could be an addition to the body of information concerning the experiences of children left behind. Likewise, the findings of the study may provide advisory and ready reference.

### **Review of Literature**

The Center for Migrant Advocacy (n.d.) states that the increase in migration on the Philippine population to more than 10% has added to the international identification of the country. It has not only changed the socio-economic and cultural situation of the country, it has also torn the strong interpersonal relationship among family members. Limited opportunities for employment in the country, limited financial incentives, desire to live in a foreign land, and personal advancement comprise the major reasons for overseas migration (Yap et al., 2009). An increase in migration means increase in the number of children left at home at the custody and care of relatives, friends, or no one at all for significant periods of time. In the short term, these children might experience an improvement in their material well-being. Indeed, they have nicer clothes, refurbished homes, better quality school supplies, and more entertainment devices compared to children without migrant parents. However, these children receive less attention for their psychological, educational, and social well-being (Cappelloni, 2011). Concerning parents who work abroad to support the education of their children, some have their efforts come to nothing as their children encounter problems in school and never go back for schooling. This unsuccessful educational pursuit of the children is blamed on the absence of the parents, and the ill effects of the lack of parental guidance overshadows the very few exemplary academic or scholastic performance of children of OCWs (Asis & Ruiz-Marave, 2013).

### **Migration and Its Effects on Academic Performance of Children**

The United Nations International Children Emergency Fund (as cited in Owusu, n.d.) reported that migration of parents is correlated to limited education and child labor. While financial support of the OCW parents enable their children to buy school needs and pay school accounts, they still have the experience of negative educational outcomes, but not all children left behind in all developing countries suffer negative educational outcomes (Cappelloni, 2011). Parreñas (as cited in Reyes, 2008) reported that two boys who were recognized by a guidance counselor as troublemakers were respectful and obedient and had demonstrated higher cognitive skills compared to their classmates. Harris and Godall (2008) also reported that parental assistance in facilitating learning when their children are at home is a significant factor for their children's scholastic achievement.

**Migration and Its Psychological Effects on the Family Left Behind**

Children left behind, according to Dela Garza (2010), are expected to encounter psychological and emotional stresses until they reach adolescence. Furthermore, Parreñas (as cited in Owusu, n.d.) contended that children who have one parent (the mother) left with them at home experiences much care and attention. Parental absence creates “disruptions and changes in living arrangement” (Reyes, 2008, p. 2). Disturbance in feelings and emotions goes with overseas migration of parents. The presence of the extended family to take care of the children only partly relieves emotional disturbance because children always long for the tender loving care of their parents (Reyes, 2008).

For young children, according to Arellano-Caranding et al. and Anonuevo (as cited in Reyes, 2008), migration means abandoning the children resulting in positive or negative effect. The positive effect is that the children become happy because of the material benefits. The negative effect is that they cannot hide their being sad due to their parents’ absence. These children do not recognize that their parents care for them when they are given the material things (Reyes, 2008). This situation is parallel with results of Battistella and Conaco’s study (as cited in Reyes, 2008), which revealed that children consider parental absence as abandonment and source of loneliness. For being lonely, these children whose parents are on overseas employment are far behind in scholastic performance from their classmates with parents living with them (Reyes, 2008). Battistella and Conaco, and Migrante-AnakPamilyaFoundation (as cited in Reyes, 2008) noted that children whose parents are working abroad are less socially adjusted. Other children with mothers on work migration have the tendency to be angry, confused, apathetic, and more afraid than other children. According to Atikha and Balikbayani (as cited in Reyes, 2008), the parents’ long periods of absence is often the reason why children do not know their parents well, and their association is most often forged by monetary remittances, gifts, and phone calls. Their absence at home makes the children feel that they have been abandoned.

**Migration and its Effects to Health of Children Left behind**

The children left behind by OCW parents suffer from malnutrition (Anarfi, Asis, & Coe, as cited in Owusu, n.d.). In addition, Owusu (n.d.) disclosed that children who are left by their OCW parents suffer from mental and physical health problems, and mental health problems and its detrimental effects have been better documented than the physical health problems.

The study of Boabang (as cited in Owusu, n.d.) revealed that migration of parents influence the day-to-day life of the children. Some of them enjoy better life through the support of their parents while others are deficient of their needs.

Capelloni (2011) also disclosed that children with migrating parents met significant challenges such as psychological, educational, and social issues. The children left behind experienced feelings of loneliness and isolation and even severe depression. The result suggested that children of OCWs got lower grades and dropped from school more frequently than children from non-migrant households. Capelloni (2011) showed a link between children left behind and juvenile crime, drug abuse, teenage pregnancy, and other social maladies.

The study of Edillon (2008) concluded that many children of OCWs with ages 13-16 were in more difficult conditions than children of non-OCWs of the same age as they were only receiving less than average financial support and adult attention. The study of Edillon (2008) also revealed that there was lack of economic security among OCW families and there was no systematic assistance or intervention from local government units, non-government organizations, school system, and other institutions that offer psychosocial advice. On the contrary, Arguillas and Williams (2010) reported that schooling outcomes of children with biological parents staying together in the Philippines was not significantly different from children whose parents were working abroad. They further reported that male children whose parents were employed abroad tend to complete fewer years of total schooling compared with those whose parents were living with them. Smeekens, Stroebe, and Abakoumkin (2012) reported that the separation of the children from the parents as a result of labor migration did not provide good health to the family as it brought poorer physical health due to higher levels of emotional stress as the children missed their parents so much.

### **The Importance of Communication After Migration**

It could be noted from several studies that children were not abandoned by their parents despite the distance through the advent of technology. Parreñas (2005) found that mothers who were working abroad did not abandon their children during migration. Instead, they did intensive mothering by providing acts of love and care via available means of communication. This simply shows that being far from the family is not necessarily a hindrance to being responsible in providing emotional security to the children.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was anchored on three theories: namely, family systems theory, attachment theory, and structural family theory. The family systems theory suggests that an individual is a part of the family and cannot live in isolation. Family systems theory further suggests that the family is a complex, dynamic, and integrated whole and there is interaction and influence between and among all the members (Minuchin & O'Brien, as cited in Taylor, 2008). Thus, it is presupposed

that left-behind children often suffer psychological and emotional challenges because they terribly miss their parents.

Attachment theory (Bowlby, as cited in Taylor, 2008) is concerned with personal relationships between human beings. This theory presupposes that children need to develop a relationship with at least one primary caregiver for social and emotional development to occur normally. This theory assumes that students whose parents are working abroad are deficient with the parental care and attention necessary for their social and emotional development (Taylor, 2008).

Minuchin's structural family theory (Minuchin, as cited in Taylor, 2008) describes a family structure that is reinforced by the expectations established by roles. There is hierarchical structure with clear boundaries in which the parents possess the leadership role (Taylor, 2008). Each member of the family holds a number of roles like a mother who serves as a wife and also helps her husband manage the family (Goldenberg & Goldenberg, as cited in Taylor, 2008). This theory presupposes that when parents are working abroad, the immediate role that they play in the family structure as mother or a father is lost.

This phenomenological study explored and described the lived experiences of the college students whose mother, father, or both parents are working overseas. The findings of the study may add to the body of information concerning the experiences of children longing for personal time and attention from the parents. Findings may likewise be utilized for advisory and guidance purposes.

Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions:

1. What are the lived experiences of the children of OCWs?
2. What are the coping strategies of OCW children

### **Methodology**

This study is a qualitative research using phenomenology. For an in-depth exploration of the topic, semi-structured interviews, field notes, observations, theoretical views, and expert reviews were considered to provide triangulated perspective of the study. Validation and cross-checking of participants' information were done as part of establishing rigor in the study. The methodology included the research design, research instrument, sampling and research setting, data collection procedure, ethical consideration, data analysis, and researchers' reflexivity.

### **Research Design**

This is a phenomenological study as this explored the lived experiences of college students whose parents are working overseas. A phenomenology is "a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher identifies the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon as described by participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. *December 2018, Vol. 21, No. 2*

9). Phenomenology describes the subjective reality of an event as perceived by the study population. It is concerned with the lived experiences of a person (Litchman, as cited in Wa-Mbaleka, 2016).

### **Research Instrument**

The study utilized a researcher-made semi-structured interview guide, which was submitted for validation by the research working group of a university. This interview guide written in English was composed of open-ended questions except on personal information of the research participants. A test-run of the interview guide was made with two students of non-OCW parents. This ascertained whether or not the items in the interview guide was clearly understood and answered by the interviewees and likewise ascertained that the data generated from the interview were the needed data for the study. Facial expressions, reactions, and other important observations (Wa-Mbaleka, 2016) from the participants resulting from the interview were noted as inputs for the discussion of results.

### **Sampling and Research Setting**

The selection of participants was through purposive sampling. College students whose parents are OCWs were identified as participants of the study. There were 9 participants: 1 first-year student, 5 third-year students, and 3 fourth-year students. Out of the 9, there were 2 participants whose parents are both OCWs. This study was conducted in the College of Information and Communication Technology at a university in Eastern Samar, Philippines.

### **Data Collection Procedure**

We conducted an in-depth face-to-face semi-structured interview to elicit information from the participants. To ensure that everything was recorded, we used an audio recorder with the permission of the participants. We ended the interview with the participants after gathering all the needed data through the probing questions that we asked them.

### **Ethical Consideration**

We requested permission from the research participants and their approval was manifested through informed consent. We assured the participants of the strict anonymity and confidentiality of their participation in the conduct of the study. Permission to conduct the study in the university was duly approved by concerned authorities.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis was done after transcribing the data. Vernacular terms were transcribed into English to fit the requirement of the readers. In vivo coding (Saldaña, 2015) was adopted so that data were rooted on the language of the participants. Data in sentence codes were connected to categories, and the themes came out as analytical reflections of the codes and categories (Saldaña, 2015). At most, themes were formulated based on gathered data. The discussion of results in thematic presentation was guided by the research questions identified for the study.

### Researchers' Reflexivity

Both of us are faculty members of a state university in Eastern Samar, Philippines. We have siblings who are school goers and we understand their circumstances as students. Our good appraisal of the circumstances of a student or school goer had strengthened the giving of voice to the responses of the participants.

### Results and Discussion

The information presented herein were derived primarily from the responses given by the research participants. Such information aimed to provide categorical perspective on the lived experiences of college students whose parents are OCWs. The participants' personal views, needs, concerns, and other relevant information for the study were constellated by in-depth analyses and reflections.

### Demographic Profile of the Participants

The children of the OCWs who were currently studying at a university were the participants of the study. The oldest among them was 21 years old and the youngest was 19 years old. There were 9 participants: 3 were males and 6 were females. Participants 1, 3, 5, 6, and 8 were left behind by their mothers; participants 2 and 4 by their fathers; and participants 7 and 9 by both parents. Of the six females, two had the experience of early pregnancy. Of the nine, three were fourth-year students, five were third-year students, and one was first-year. These OCW children-participants considered themselves not abandoned because of the benefits that technology offered them. Either one or both parents of the participants had migrated for 1 to 16 years. Majority of their parents were working in the Middle East.

Table 1.

#### *The Demographic Profile of the Participants*

Participants	Year level and age	Number of years of	Either one or both	Positive experiences	Negative experiences	Interventions

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		parent's work as OCW	parents are OCWs			
P1 (male)	Third-year college (19 years old)	10 years	Mother	-Support studies -Renovate house and bought tractor - Happy - Mom is a superhero	-Parents separated -Longing for mother's care	-15-minute talk on Facebook and Messenger twice a month -Hang out with friends
P2 (female)	Third-year college (19 years old)	8 years	Father	-Great provider -Supports studies -Feel free	-Long for father's presence -Difficult	-1-hour talk on Facebook and video call through Messenger four times a week -Be with friends -Keep problems to herself
P3 (female)	Third-year college (20 years old)	6 years	Mother	-Supports and helps us with our studies -Provides our needs	-Early pregnancy -Difficult -Stand as mother -Long for mother's care -Not okay -Worried	-1-hour talk four to five times within a month -Call up mother
P4 (male)	Fourth-year (20 years old)	16 years	Father	-If he gets a better and big opportunity, he could send us a better amount.	-Sometimes could not send money -No permanent work -could not finish contract -Worried	-2-hour talk on Facebook but mostly Messenger six times per week -accept sidelines such as catering services or projects from other students
P5 (female)	Third-year (18 years old)	1 year	Mother	-Sufficient budget for daily needs -Supports studies	-Longing for mother's care and presence -With feeling of no mother	-Mama calls us or we call her through cellphone once or twice a week -Talk to boardmates
P6 (female)	First-year (21 years old)	10 years	Mother	-Needs are provided -Supports studies -Buy gadgets	-Early pregnancy -Longing for mother's presence	- Talk to mother abroad through Facebook and video call in Messenger for 1

				and clothes	-Lacks guidance	to 2 hours three times a week
P7 (female)	Fourth-year (20 years old)	9 years	Both parents	-Long for parents' love and care -Lacks guidance -Not happy -Dissatisfied -Abandoned	-Sustains our daily needs. -Build a concrete house.	-Call almost everyday though Facebook and Messenger for 1 to 2 hours -Keep problems to herself
P8 (male)	Fourth-year (21 years old)	9 years	Mother	-Longing for mother's care	-Supports studies -Financially stable -Buy gadgets and expensive clothes	-Talk to mom almost everyday on Facebook and Messenger, 1 hour talk -Hang out with friends
P9 (male)	Third-year (21 years old)	14 years	Both parents	-Lacks guidance -Feeling abandoned -Disappointed	-Financially stable -Sustain daily allowance -Support studies -Personal needs are provided (clothes and IT gadgets)	-Hang out with friends

The following is the thematic presentation of data gathered from the participants. These thematic information comprise the findings of the study. Discussions of themes are presented based on the sequence of the research questions formulated.

### Theme 1. The Experiences of OCW Children

The participants had their experiences to share. These experiences were narrations of the advantages and disadvantages of having OCW parents. These experiences are reflected in the corresponding sub-themes.

**1.1: Financial stability and well-being.** The children of OCWs studying in the university experience financial security and stability because one or both of their parents are working abroad. The participants conceded that having an OCW parent is really a big help to their general being. These participants were able to

buy their personal needs such as expensive clothes, gadgets, and delicious food. They were able to pursue their education with enhanced periodic allowances. The following are the participants' responses as proof of their financial security and stability.

“Since my mother has started working abroad, she is a big help to us. She was able to support us in our studies, renovate our house and was able to buy tractor for additional income” (P1). “She provides my personal needs and supports my studies” (P5). “She already supports me in my studies and my personal needs” (P6). “They sustain our daily needs and send us to school” (P7). “She could give me whenever I ask money and she is supportive to my studies” (P8).

The participants admitted that they were able to pursue their studies in higher education because their parents were earning dollars abroad. It is precisely the reason that parents pursue overseas employment to be able to support the basic needs of their children such as education. This corroborates with Yap et al.'s (2008) finding stating that the main reason of OCWs for working overseas is to provide good education for their children. Similarly, the Soros Foundation Romania (2007) claimed that the primary beneficial consequence of migration is the provision of socio-economic needs of the children and consequently the improvement of the children's well-being.

Furthermore, Sulehan, Ramli, and Idris (2010) stated that educated people who cannot find good employment in the country have to migrate in order to ensure that their children can be provided for from income earned in a foreign land. Such claim braced up the responses of the research participants' to wit:

“We already have budget for our daily allowance, groceries, and food unlike when she was just here” (P5). “The best thing that happened to us was that we were able to study. We can buy expensive clothes because we are provided with allowances and we could eat delicious foods unlike before that life is very difficult for us” (P9).

The statements above are also consistent with the result of the study conducted by the Soros Foundation Romania (2007), which showed that the income of the parents is intended mostly to establish a permanent type of housing facility and procure other fixed assets for the family. All of the participants shared how fortuitous they were because one or both of their parents left to work abroad. However, while these children enjoy their welfare, security, and financial stability and see how significant these are in their daily lives, it is also noted that love, care, intimate bonding, and immediate acknowledgment of achievement are also equally significant (Iso, 2017), and these intrinsic benefits were lacking in the research participants.

**1.2: Feeling of desertion and isolation.** OCW children, albeit the advantages and benefits they were experiencing while their parents were working abroad, also

often felt sad, isolated, and abandoned after one or both parents migrated. According to them, material benefits could no longer be a substitute for their parents' presence especially when they needed them physically. In this study, the participants expressed how they longed for the physical presence of their parents to take care of them. Their responses reflect so.

"I really missed my mother especially when my father went back to his ex-wife after my mother migrated. My siblings and I were left under the care of my auntie. Our situation became more difficult because they would notice us in everything we do" (P1).

"I miss my dad though he is providing us with our needs. It is still useless because he is not around" (P2). "It's very hard that our mother is working abroad. I stand as mother to my siblings (silence). I miss her so much" (P3). "I missed my mother. I don't have somebody to tell my problems personally. Whenever I miss her, I just go to my board mates and start crying" (P5).

"I got married early. My mother left me under the care of my grandparents who are very strict. I can't even go outside. If there was a chance to go out, I would grab it. When I was in high school, there's no one to talk to and no one to guide me. No one would correct me" (P6).

"We miss our parents so much. If one of us is sick, there is no one to take care of us. No one is guiding us, no one would correct us, and no one to monitor us because they are not around. Just like what happened during the super typhoon Haiyan/Yolanda, (crying) we do not have a father and a mother to save us. Better that we were able to run to our grandparents' house before our house was crushed," P7 plaintively shared her experience. Another 21-year old male participant stated, "I don't care for the big allowance I always receive. I just want them to come home and take care of us. We will be the one who will work for them" (P9).

Majority of the participants answered that they long for the physical presence of one or both of their parents. Most of them agreed that the migration of one or both of their parents affected them psychologically. Some of the participants were taken care of by their relatives such as their aunts or uncles and grandparents. For the two participants whose parents were both working abroad, they woefully said that oftentimes, they felt they did not have parents anymore. They could not understand why both of their parents needed to work abroad. Finally, it could also be observed that it was very challenging for the OCW children to have a different family set up compared with other families. This finding conforms to other studies. The study of Añonuevo (as cited in Reyes, 2008) concluded that pre-school children can tolerate the absence of mothers but children 6-16 years old have difficulty in tolerating their mothers' absence because of the affection that has been fixed between them. Moreover, the Soros Foundation Romania (2007) research also agrees that one of the negative effects of migration is psychological, which

confirms that there is correlation between longing for parents and depression in children.

The study of Taylor (2008) on parenting in Filipino transnational families disclosed that children were aware of the reasons and benefits of their parents' overseas employment. Children little by little understood why one of their parents work abroad. Because of long years of physical separation, children became accustomed to it.

A 21-year old female participant whose father was working abroad stated, "Before, I really missed my father, especially that I am a papa's girl, but since he is working abroad for almost 8 years, I was already accustomed to his absence" (P2). Atienza (2012) supports this claim by stating that as the children get older, they are able to discern the reasons why their parents work overseas and so they become resilient to take the normal way of life even if their parents are not with them. However, though children understand their OCW parents, it cannot be denied that the absence of these OCW parents creates a gap between them and their children. This was divulged by a 21-year old male participant whose parents were both working abroad when he said, "Every time my parents come home, I feel like I am alone. There is already a gap between us. My mother promised me that she will no longer work abroad after 2 years, but she left us to work in Saudi Arabia, so I have no trust on them anymore."

The aforesaid declaration is supported by Reyes (2008) who says that parental absence results to different care-giving attention and practices, and emotional disturbance always goes with migration especially for long periods of time. This statement strongly shows that children are not really satisfied with their parents' physical absence in spite of the adequate financial support and welfare they receive.

**1.3: Academic performance.** Majority of the participants in this study expressed that their OCW parents supported their studies. However, in spite of the monthly allowances they received, most of the participants claimed that their academic performances were not satisfactory, but they promised to do better after the interview. Lack of guidance and attention, early pregnancy, computer game addiction, and going out with friends were the principal reasons why most of the respondents were not doing well in school. These are reflected in the responses of the participants stated below:

"When I was in second year college, I had school deficiencies. I lack sleep because I stand as mother to my younger siblings and a mother for my own family. I also prepare their food every morning" (P3). "My subjects are quite okay but mostly it is not worth appreciating because I don't have a mother around who can guide me" (P1).

A 21-year old and a second-year college female participant also said, "When I was in high school, I got failing grades because I have no one to tell me what to do,

which resulted to commit early marriage. I was not able to attend school for 4years. I am trying now to do better in school” (P6).

“My academic performance is not okay. Our studies are affected because there is still a big difference when we have our parents guiding and supervising us. My parents do not know that we are not doing well in school” (P7).

“The first time that my mother worked abroad, I was addicted to computer games so my grades were affected and I was dropped from my subjects. This school is my third school that I have attended for my college education. I can do what I want because I do not have a mother around” (P8). “I have some deficiencies. I always played DOTA computer game because I want to forget the longingness I felt for my migrant parents” (P9).

It is obvious from the participants’ responses that parents’ migration has negative consequence on the school performance of children. It can be viewed that these children of OCWs need more attention and proper guidance from no less than their parents, especially when it comes to educational issues. This finding agrees with the study of Cappelloni (2011), which revealed the possible negative consequences of migration on the psychological, educational, and social development of children left behind. In her study, Capelloni (2011) stated that Moldovan children admitted that their academic performance diminished after their parents migrated. One Moldovan child explained that “it is difficult to stay at home and study when you are alone and your friends invite you to come out and nobody is there to stop you from going” (Capelloni, 2011, p. 27).

Lu (2014) also disclosed that children who are left behind by OCW parents receive inadequate scholastic assistance and supervision. The environment in their home does not favor for educational achievement. Lu (2014) further disclosed that this condition at home can develop emotional and behavioral problems among the children and cannot be easily compensated by improved economic resources from remittances.

However, the work of Yu, Linxiu, Chengfang, Yaojiang, Di, and Scott (2016) opposed the result of the present study and showed that the migration of one or both parents has no negative effect on left-behind children. The study of Scalabrini (as cited in Yu et al. 2016) confirmed that children of migrants showed good scholastic performance compared to the children of non-migrant parents. At the same time, Arguillas and Williams (2010) found that separation of the children from their OCW parents have neutral and positive results on schooling among older children.

In this study, only three out of nine participants indicated that their academic performance were good and they were doing well in school because they were inspired by the sacrifices of their parents. The participants’ remarks are as follows:

“I’m very much inspired with my studies knowing that my father is working hard abroad for us” (P2). “Sometimes my father fails to send us money, a

reason that sometimes I also hesitate to go to school because I don't have an allowance. However, I don't have failing grades. I have to work on my own. I work in some catering services or if there is someone who would ask me to do projects such as drawing, I accept it for a fee" (4). "My academic performance is okay. I always think of the sacrifices that my mother is experiencing while she is away" (P5).

**1.4: Sadness and worry.** Having OCW parents created mixed emotions in the participants. In spite of financial sustainability experienced because one or both parents were working abroad, they did not deny the fact that sometimes they felt sad and lonely. Majority of them were thankful because of the material benefits they received, but at the same time they were unhappy and worried. When asked about their feelings as children of OCWs, they responded as follows:

"I am happy and I feel that my mother is a superhero" (P1). "A bit okay and at the same time not. I hate when people think we are rich because our father is working abroad. They just do not know that he works very hard just for us" (P2). "We are happy because she [mother] is sending money to us, but we are also worrying on her condition" (P3). "I am little bit worrying about the condition of my father. There is no assurance as to when he will come home because most of his employers are not okay" (P4). "Feeling happy that there is someone who supports me, but it's very difficult that I don't have parents around whom I can tell all my problems" (P6). "I am happy but sometimes not especially when we miss how he [father] disciplines us" (P8).

Conversely, there were three participants who stated that it was not really easy to have parents working abroad. Although they were pampered with monthly allowances and other material goods, the participants confessed that their lives were not the same when their parents were not yet overseas workers. They said,

"Our family set up is different from other families. I feel that sometimes I do not have a mother especially when I want to talk to her and she is not available. It is really hard for me. I always pray that time would fly so fast so she can come home," P5 fearfully said. "I am not happy because both of them are working abroad. I am disappointed because sometimes I feel that we are not important to them and they just abandoned us (crying)" (P7). "I feel sad why they both need to work abroad. I feel sad because my mother also left us" (P9).

This study also found that migration of one parent is more acceptable to children than both parents working abroad. One participant out of the nine sadly admitted that technology was not a big deal to their communication because for him, it was not that important. This can be observed from his response: "My parents call my younger sister always through Messenger. I don't have a direct contact with them. For me, it is not that important anymore. Maybe to them it is,

because they are monitoring us” (P9). When he was asked why communication is not important to him, he responded,

“I have no interest in talking to them anymore after my mother lied to me. I anticipated that after 2 years my mother will stay with us permanently, but when she left us again, it hurts me so much. However, somehow I have already adjusted with our situation and somehow understand that money is also important” (P9).

These were the very sad experiences of the participants. It is therefore convincing that migration of one parent is more acceptable to children than the migration of both parents. This result is well noted for guidance, advisory, and instructional purposes.

## **Theme 2. Intervention or Coping Mechanism**

The participants did not tolerate loneliness and longing for parents to cause them distress. Instead, they made use of coping mechanisms to counter the negative consequences of loneliness and longing for their parents. The interventions or coping mechanisms adopted by the participants are presented in the corresponding sub-themes to wit:

**2.1: My friends are my home.** Children left behind often feel lonely. Despite the fact that they are not really accustomed to having no parents around, they still manage the situation through some interventions. Most of the participants said that whenever they felt lonely or when they longed for the presence of one or both parents, they just hanged out with their friends or called their parents. This can be noted through their responses:

“Whenever I miss my mom, I just hang out with my friends” (P1). “I forget my loneliness when I am with my friends” (P2). “I feel comfortable to hang out with my friends whenever I miss my parents” (P5, P7, & P9). “I call mom. . . . I feel happy when I make a call to her when I am sad, or when I have a problem” (P3). “I send messages to my mother to express how much I missed her. In that way, I could comfort myself” (P6). “I chat with mom even if she is not online, and sometimes I go to my friends and be with them” (P8).

It could be noted from the responses above that the use of technology is very much important to the communication between parents and their children. Because of this, children are able to cope with the longing they feel. Due to the fact that children left behind prefer to hang out with their friends, it must be noted that parents need to know who their children’s friends are.

**2.2: Hello-mom, hi-dad communication dynamics.** Communication is not just important but a requirement between OCW parents and the children left behind. In this study, the use of communication system such as cell phone and social networking sites like Facebook and Messenger played significant roles to

daily communication. Through social media, parents and children could communicate, express their feelings to ease their loneliness and longing, and see and monitor each other. The study also shows that majority of the participants used Facebook and Messenger in communicating with parents overseas. Parents frequently made calls to their children by cell phones or private messages and video calls through Messenger. Parents communicated not only to monitor their children's situations but also to send money. Likewise, children made calls to their parents when they had something important to tell and whenever they missed them.

In this study, communication between parents and children lasted between 1 and 2 hours. Only one participant admitted that communication for him was no longer important. The following responses of the participants confirm the significance of the communication systems used.

"She call us to make sure we are okay and if we are about to receive money" (P1). "He [father] calls mostly four times a week and consumes an hour per call. We use Facebook-Messenger to have a video call. It is very useful to us for we know if he is cheating or not" (P2). "Father would call us through Messenger. Within 1 week we could talk to him 6 times and it lasts for 2 hours. With technology, we would know if he is okay or not" (P5). "My mother would call through cell phone but most of the time Messenger. Our conversation lasts for more than one hour and we communicate with each other three times a week" (P6). "They [father and mother] call us when they do not have work. When we use video call in the Messenger, it lessens our longingness for our parents" (P7).

The foregoing findings corroborate Parreñas's (2005) study, which contended that migrant mothers do not leave their children helpless and loveless as they find ways and means to be able to perform their mothering role via cellphone call or sending text messages. Furthermore, it could also be observed that OCW parents communicate with their children every week, which mostly lasts for 1 to 2 hours. This is parallel with the conclusion of Parreñas (2005) highlighting that communication is not barred by distance as OCW mothers call their children at least once a week.

According to Sorensen (2015), present technology keeps the family members well-informed and connected with each other through text message, Skype, Facebook, Twitter, and emails. The study of Madianou and Miller (2011) confirmed that mothers pursue their parenting, house management, and monitoring roles through the use of phone. Madianou and Miller (2011) likewise confirmed that the use of communication gadgets makes the OCW parents become visible at home when they are needed and the exchange of voice calls, text messages, and pictures among the members of the family can justify the decision of the parents to go on overseas migration. In confirmation, the participants said,

“She [mother] uses cell phone, Facebook-Messenger to call us twice a week but we only consume 15 to 20 minutes just to make sure that we are okay” (P1). “Mostly, our mother calls us through cell phone once in a week and talk to us for only one hour” (P3).

These accounts mean that OCW parents even at a distance never forget to show love and intimacy to their children left behind. Parreñas (as cited in Owusu, n.d.) disclosed that communication technology is of great help to OCW parents in their parenting or mothering role. Madianou and Miller (2011) contended that the use of phones in the communication process is considered by OCW mothers as a means to empower them as mothers of the family present at home. The findings of this study therefore contradicts Minunchin’s structural family theory, which presumes that the immediate role of the OCW parent in the family structure as mother or a father is lost because though one or both OCW parents are afar, they can still perform their roles as parents such as providing the needs of their children and manage family functions.

Indeed, in the present study, majority of the participants’ responses identified Facebook-Messenger as significant communication tools for both OCW parents and children left behind as it provided them easy and convenient communication. It also offered them the best way of knowing each other’s conditions and helped the participants reduce their longing and loneliness caused by the absence of their parents. Furthermore, the identified social networking sites served as the avenue of sending information concerning when and where to withdraw the financial support sent by their parents.

It could be noted that social media is the most valuable tool to ease the loneliness of the children left behind. Majority of the participants in this study admitted that because it was easy for them to communicate with their parents abroad, the gap between them and their parents was not an issue. They felt that their parents were just around whenever they made video calls through Messenger. However, there were two participants whose parents did not use Facebook-Messenger in communicating with them. What they used are cell phones. The following responses of the participants declare the specific social media being used as their communication system:

“Through social media, we could feel that he [father] is near” (P2). “Through Facebook- Messenger, we could lessen our loneliness of missing her” (P3). “The use of social media (Facebook-Messenger) is a substitute to father’s absence” (P4). “Our communication is important to see to it that she [mother] is okay” (P5). “We could share our problems. We could see each other’s situation and lessen from the missing of each other” (P6). “Social network serves as a bridge to show our love for each other (crying). We can show how we are important to each other (P7). “It eases our loneliness from missing her” (P8).

It is expressed in the participants' responses that technology makes the world smaller. The participants can communicate with their migrant parents anytime they want. They feel loved and not abandoned through social media. Subsequently, because of the advent of technology, instant communication is no longer a problem. Besides, it helps parents monitor and provide proper guidance to their children, thus preventing them from any negative activities. These findings are confirmed by the Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (as cited in Parreñas, 2001), which showed that the negative consequences of migration of the parents are lessened because of the communication between the migrant parents and the children left at home.

In addition, the study of Ochoa (as cited in Ariate, 2015) showed that Facebook has features, which help the respondents to communicate with their migrant parents as they tag or post pictures, share videos, and chat with groups. Through the use of social media, the respondents were able to provide their migrant parents with updates about their situation at home and make them feel that they are just near each other despite difference in geographical locations. This finding concurs with the statements made by the participants. This is also what Tanalega (2002) emphasized about global parenting that the use of social media is important and that the absence of the parents at home is substituted by the utilization of social media, including the use of cellular phones and video cameras as means of communication. In effect, their presence at home is felt by their sons and daughters even if they are physically absent.

It could be undeniably noted that because of some social media like Facebook-Messenger, OCW parents can communicate, monitor, and guide their sons and daughters left behind. On the other hand, one participant shared how desperate she was for not having social media during her teenage years. A 21-year old female participant (P6) who unfortunately got married when she was just 17 years old painfully narrated, "If there were only cell phones back then, and if Facebook-messenger existed before, maybe I will not get pregnant early because I have my mother who can guide me in my decisions."

With her statement, it could be noted that Facebook and other social media are not only for sharing photos and exchanging hi's and hello's, they also play a significant role for overseas migrant workers in shaping their children's decision for a better future. The study of Asis (2006) stated that in the Philippines, children left at home by their parents who are OCWs suffer from the social cost of migration because of the absence of the "real" parents to nurture them. The participants' responses testify that social media is already apart of daily living between children and their parents abroad. Through social media, children left behind could still feel their parents' physical presence.

### **Conclusion**

After exploring the lived experiences of university students with OCW parents, we conclude that physical parental care and attention cannot be substituted by material bounties. Sons and daughters of OCWs tackle plenty of experiences. While these children receive material benefits, they still long for their parents' presence. They prefer to hang out with their friends whenever they miss their parents and most of them are not doing well in school. Acting as parents to younger siblings and not being guided during crisis affected the children's academic standing. We further conclude that social media, particularly the social networking sites such as Facebook and Messenger, were the most significant tools used by children in communicating with their overseas parents. Although thankful because of the financial benefits, children are still unhappy and worried about theirs and their parents' safety. Lastly, children whose parents are both working abroad seem to suffer emotionally and do not very well understand why both their parents need to work abroad as compared to those children who have only one parent who is on work migration.

### **Recommendations**

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are offered.

1. The university through the guidance office should provide seminars on coping with loneliness, worry, and other psychological disturbances to be particularly attended by the children of OCWs for them to become emotionally or psychologically resilient.
2. Teachers as second parents of the students should not only look after the physical and material issues and concerns in the classroom. They have to equally focus on emotions, feelings, and other psycho-social needs or concerns particularly those of the children of OCWs.
3. Since Facebook and Messenger are found as significant tools in the communication between children and their OCW parents, there should be a stable internet access in the university so that parents could monitor their children to find out if their children are attending their classes or not.
4. School policymakers should consider children of OCWs with insufficient allowance in the making of school policies especially on the giving of assistance or scholarship benefits.
5. For future studies, participants from elementary grades or high school may be included for deeper analysis, because the study found that one or both parents migrate for work even if children are still at a young age.

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