

# Behind the Parents Light: A Phenomenology of the Adjustments of Overseas Filipino Workers Children

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**Abstract— Background:** A chronic problem in the Philippines is that many children are growing up without their parents because of lack of regular employment. Working abroad is a necessity and the only option they can take in order to make their lives better and for their children. It creates an impact in their daily lives which was obtained from different experiences. **Method:** This qualitative paper made use of a phenomenological research design to understand the lived experiences of the participants, specifically Overseas Filipino Workers' Children, relative to the central question: "What are the adjustments of Philippine School Doha students who grew up without their parents?" Data were gathered through a twenty-five semi-structured interview; and were analyzed using an inductive approach in theme development. **Findings:** Findings have shown the difficulty in adjustments and living of children in terms of adjustments, coping mechanism, emotional effects, and attitude gaps for the past years; which implies the changes in their development along with their other life experiences. **Conclusion:** The implication of parental migration affects their families left behind. Their relationship can be distressed if the parents do not communicate to their children. Their relationship with their children can face challenges. It leaves the children struggling with coping during the time of parental absence. **Recommendation:** The researchers recommend that there must be communication between the parents and their children left behind to maintain a positive relationship. The presence of the parents must be felt by the child through communicating with any means despite the distance.

**Index Terms— Working Abroad, Children, Live Experiences, Development, Communication.**

## I. INTRODUCTION

Overseas migration of labor has featured prominently in the Philippines since the 1970s, triggered initially by the oil boom in the Middle East and the demand for construction workers, but has since spread to many other countries covering myriad occupations.

With so many households in the country either having an overseas worker or receiving remittances, migration is likely to have had an impact on overall household welfare. There are many questions about whether overseas migration has been good or bad for the country, or somewhere in between

(Ducanes, 2015). According to Philippine Statistics Authority, gathered from the 2018 survey on Overseas Filipinos, there are currently a total number of estimated Overseas Filipino Workers at 2.3 million. Overseas employment continues to rise, meaning that labor migration in the Philippines will continually occur in the future. Remittances are beneficial to support the financial resources needed by the families, and it is a question whether remittance income can be enough as a compensation for the families (Yoon, 2014). With so many households in the country either having an overseas worker or receiving remittances, migration is likely to have had an impact on overall household welfare (Ducanes, 2015). Migration often strains the parent-child relationship, leaving children with strong feelings of abandonment and resentment which may result in problematic behaviors and worse mental health outcomes (Dreby 2010; Silver 2011; as cited by Mayol-Garcia, 2016).

The main reason why parents decide to go abroad is represented by the financial aspect and the desire to make a better life for their children (Sănduleasa & Matei, 2015; as cited by Petrov and Dafinoiu, 2017). Migration is often a stressful experience for workers, many are willing to accept and deal with the stressors they face in order to pursue financial security and earn a livelihood for themselves and their family (van der Ham, Ujano-Batangan, Ignacio, and Wolffers, 2014). Different patterns of attachment and interactions with parents also reflected children's perceptions of migration and disrupted family relationships. In most cases the parents were aware of the effects of migration on their children, and attempted to closely monitor the emotional and behavioral well-being of the children, at home or over distance (Zhao, Wang, Zhou, Jiang, and Hesketh, 2018). Parental migration may impact development in early childhood through the changing environment as well as the family dynamics brought about by the parents' decision to migrate. When parents are away, the main caretaker—who plays a key role in the child's development process—is no longer a parent(s). A child's tie to parents, especially the mother, may be disrupted due to parental migration. Young children in migrant families are likely to experience disruption in building attachment with caregivers. Thus, children of migrant parents are at higher risk of growing up with less strong attachment with their primary caregiver, and thus lacking the stability necessary for learning and development (Jampakalay, Richter, Tangchonlatip, and Nanthamongkolchai, 2018). According to the UNICEF Working Paper, children may be left in the care of someone

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who can dedicate time and attention to child-rearing, without pressure to provide for the family financially. A well-equipped guardian may be as capable of caring for a child as the migrating parent. Yet parents play an important role in a child's life, and communication between parents and their children can lessen the negative psychological impacts experienced by children. They further add that children "left behind" can achieve healthy psychological development when they have continuous contact with their parents and are supported by in-country guardians and community. Migration brings forth remarkable changes in the family and community environment in which children are cared for. Several economic, developmental, sociological and psychological theories provide insight into how family separation due to parental migration may influence children. Additionally, the absence of parents leads to diminished parental involvement which may be consequential for the development of left behind children (Xie, 2019). Parental migration shapes children's living arrangements, resources and family transitions, which in turn influence child behaviors and outcomes. Children left behind may be more likely than other children to experience family transitions with respect to residence, household composition and socioeconomic status, which in turn influence child responsibilities, behaviors and outcomes (Mayol-Garcia, 2016).

Monetary remittances from two migrant parents do not seem to buffer the negative consequences of family disruption due to parental migration (Lu, Yeung, Liu, and Treiman, 2019). The impact of migration is likely the twofold impact of the positive benefits associated with remittances and the negative effect of parental absence. Furthermore, whilst remittances help alleviate financial problems of the household, the absence of a family member leaves emotional consequences to the children left (Jamil, 2017).

As these points were taken into account, this paper argues that children left behind by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) experience struggles in their childhood as their parents are absent in times of their wellbeing of growing up. Yet parents play an important role in a child's life, and communication between parents and their children can lessen the negative psychological impacts experienced by children (UNICEF Working Paper). Correspondingly, this paper focuses on determining the adjustments of students who grew up without their parents, the factors of how they have dealt with these experiences during their childhood will bring answers as how those have influenced their behavior and actions. Several economic, developmental, sociological and psychological theories provide insight into how family separation due to parental migration may influence children (UNICEF Working Paper). The aspect of lebenswelt in this study interrelates the behavior and wellbeing of the individuals and how they adapted to their conditions around the period of parental absence at the time of their childhood and the factors of how they coped with those experiences in the past and how those affected their attitude and perception.

II. METHOD

Research Design

This study is qualitative in orientation and categorically, a phenomenological research design. The main approach of the qualitative research is to understand the events and experiences that happens in the real world. Qualitative research is a type of social science research that collects and works with non-numerical data and that seeks to interpret meaning from these data that help to understand social life through the study of targeted populations or places (Ashley Crossman, 2019). It provides a thorough understanding of the ways people act and manage their day to day situation in a particular setting.

Phenomenological approach is employed in this study as it is designed to understand the adjustments of the participants, regarding their experiences and struggles on growing up without their parents due to the migration as OFW.

Research Locus and Sample



Figure 1 Map of Qatar

This study was conducted at Philippine School Doha (PSD), the leading learning institution in the State of Qatar. Philippine School Doha was established in October 3, 1992 to serve the educational needs of the children of the Filipino community in the State of Qatar. Its birth

was the result of the determination of pioneering members of the Filipino community in Doha under the auspices of the Philippine Embassy. This was selected considering the accessibility of the place to the researchers.

The chosen participants of this study were students who grew up without their parents due to their migration as OFW. The selection of six participants was made through qualitative purposive sampling strategy (Creswell and Plano, 2011; Bernard 2002; Patton, 2002 as cited by Vallesteros, 2019).

This is characterized by the incorporation of specific criteria met by the participants at the moment of selection (Padilla-Diaz, 2015). They were chosen considering their years of growing up without their parents by their side and what adjustments and experiences had they gone through.

**Data Collection and Ethical Consideration**

Data needed in this study were gathered through a semi-structured interview with the help of instruments such as: the robotfoto and the twenty-five semi-structured interview guide. The Robotfoto refers to personal data sheets of the research respondents, which include their vital personal and professional information (de Guzman & Tan, 2007). It is vital for the demographic sketch of the participants to identify their years of separation from parents, and their present situation as migrant in the State of Qatar. The twenty-five item semi-structured interview guide was also used in following up on specific ideas or issues to explore specific experiences ensuring that the sensitivity of subject being researched will float in participants’ consciousness (Fossey, 2001 as cited by Garcia & Acosta, 2016). Data gathered were transcribed verbatim with the help of the recording gadget, and the participants were assured that their responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality (Kayed & Hassan, 2013).

Prior to the data collection proper, pilot interview was enacted. This is an integral aspect and useful in the process of conducting a phenomenological qualitative research as it highlights the preparation for the major study (Majid et al., 2017). Subsequently, the researchers sought approval from the participants through a written consent.

**Data Analysis**

The researchers have followed an inductive steps in theme development to analyze the gathered data in this study: (1) the researchers listen and understand to know what the participant’s opinion or idea about on a certain topic; (2) read and reread the transcribe data to see the point of the participant; (3) transforming the participant’s opinion or idea (Emic) to the language of the researchers (Etic); (4) sorting formulated meaning into categories of themes through a dendogram; (5) creating a simulacrum of the data for the visual representation of the findings; (6) subjecting themes to triangulation and member checking procedure to ensure the validity and data trustworthiness.

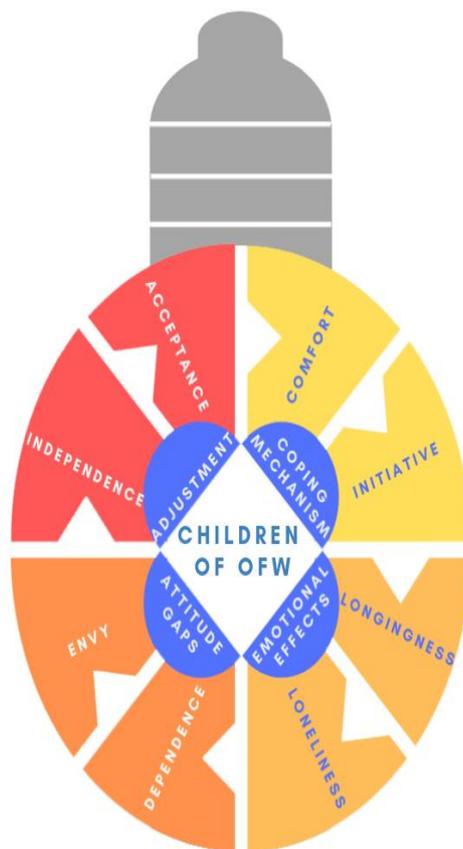


Figure 3 Simulacrum  
Interrelated Factors Dealt from the Absence of OFW  
Parents

**III. FINDINGS**

This phenomenological study describes the struggles and the adjustments of students whose parents are OFW, specifically children who are left by their OFW parents in a period of time, relative to the central question: “*What are the adjustments of Philippine School Doha students who grew up without their parents?*” Furthermore, this study focused on the specific question: “*What are the common struggles of Philippine School Doha students who grew up without their parents?*” Alongside, parents play a major role in helping children take career decisions. Parents are the ones that shape the future of their children and guide them every step of the way. The children’s fate almost depends in the hands of the parents. Both the father and the mother play an important role in the mental, physical, social, financial, and career development of the children. They help them in every step of life. In a time of mistakes, they are like a teacher. Children are train to be ready for the future (Kumar, 2013).

Figure 3 shows the simulacrum in light bulb shape focused on four major themes: *adjustment, coping mechanism, emotional effects and attitude gaps*. These highlight the live experiences of children left by OFW parents. Consequently, for the maximization of labor, development, and profit, the Philippines continues to simultaneously fashion migrant workers as temporary, yet heroic and sacrificial (Alipio,

2019).

### Adjustment

Children who grew up without their parents occur major adjustments with themselves. These adjustments made them feel uncomfortable, because it is not normal that a child will be far away from their parents. However, adjustment is a big factor for a child to be able to cope up in the absence of their parents. As time goes by, they will be able to cope up and adjust themselves to the absence of their parents. However, even if they managed to adjust that their parents are going to work abroad there will still be sadness and loneliness that a child will experience.

*“At first it is sad because they left then you'd feel that no one is there who would love you, eventually, you will realize as time goes on that you will meet people that will stay. It's sad to think that even your family will be like that.” P4*

As time passes by they would realize why their parents are working abroad, and choices to go to other countries than here in their home country, Philippines. It would lead to a new understanding of why their parents choose to work abroad.

*“At first, I did not really understand what and why, but as I grew up I realized that their reasons were acceptable but also very selfish.” P4*

*“I understood them because at that time I was already 7 or 8 years old. I was matured enough when my mom explained it to me. I understood her but as a kid, it's hard for me to avoid to keep on crying.” P3*

They would realize that they choose to work abroad because they want to have a better future, they wanted to have everything that they wanted and gave a prosperous life. The parents thinking, is that they can provide their children with a better life if they work abroad because the opportunity in the Philippines is lesser, and more benefits they would receive if they work abroad.

*“At first I didn't accept it because I was still young. But now that I'm older, I already know that they're doing this for us. To give us the best future that we can have and that they can provide us with things that we want. So that, they can see that their child is satisfied.” P5*

*“In the beginning, my brother and I said, ‘Why do they have to go overseas just to work and not to work here in the Philippines?’ and they responded, ‘The opportunities there are better and there's a lot of benefits.’ That's why they have to pursue to work in other countries. Eventually, we understand them because it's not only for them but also for our family. For me, it's for our future.” P2*

However, children adjusted in their academic performance in school without their parents.

### Coping mechanisms

In the Philippines, like in several other low and middle-income countries in the world, it is usual for parents to leave the country to work abroad in order to improve the situation of their children who remain behind. However, stressful life events such as the separation from a parent are known to have a severe impact on physical and mental health

of children. They have stated below how their parents' migration emotionally affected them.

*“The process that has side effects up to this day I still carry it with me.” P2*

*“I was just a kids when they left me, I was dramatic and would always cry because I miss them.” P3*

*“It was passive, I would feel it every night. Every morning, I would say good morning to them, then every night when I'm about to sleep, I'd cry to them and tell them everything that happened during the day.” P6*

*“I didn't cope with it but I wish I coped with it.” P6*

*“One challenge that I encountered was me being spoiled. They had difficulties whenever what I wanted wasn't followed.” P3*

Migration involves challenges for families and children such as having difficulty in communicating due to the parents' being busy with work and the child with his/her academics and also due to the time gap of Philippines and Qatar. They have shared below the challenges they encountered:

*“We communicate with each other every day, but our conversations are not that long because the time gap of Philippines and Qatar is big, plus I'm busy with school and they are busy with work.” P5*

*“I communicated with them once or twice a week because of school and every time I go home during weekdays I'd fall asleep. I'd talk to them using yahoo, wechat, and skype.” P6*

Due to them being away from each other it left an emotional impact having a varying influence on both according to the conditions under which migration occurs, they suffer from the effects of longingness to be with and see each other again.

*“We were the first one to reach out to them through a video call and we asked them that when are they going back or when we'll be a whole family again even though the documents are always rejected, eventually it will be accepted.” P2*

*“I reached out to them first because I kept asking my grandparents if they already arrived in Qatar, then they would tell me it would take 6 or 8 hours to get there, I would count the time and I would constantly message them if they arrived or not, and I wait for their reply.” P6*

*“They approached us first. When I was a child, they still wanted to give the means of our communication to not cut off our relationship so at least they could express that they still cared.” P4*

*“I can't actually remember, but I know that my parents were the ones who initiated. They took the stand to talk to us. They were the ones who always check if we were okay.” P5*

They used different strategies such as their hobbies, talents, and things that they like to do, to cope up and to fill the gaps in their heart to make them look happy and to help manage painful or difficult emotions due to their parents' migrating. They stated below how it helps them adjust to sad events to help them maintain their emotional well-being.

*“I play so I can distract myself from the sadness.” P3*

*“I amuse myself by doing physical activities or eating because those are the things I can do because of my status in*

life but sometimes I manage to pull through in such situations.” P2

“Instead of feeling down all the time, I played games and my guitar.” P3

“I think what would be its effect in my future and I focus to improve myself.” P4

Even though their parents migrated, they still have someone by their side to stand as their parents like their aunt, uncle, grandparents, and friends to support, take care, and make them feel the love and feel that they are not alone.

“Yes, they comfort me by making me feel that they’re by my side.” P1

“Yes, they comforted us because they are with us when we don’t have our parents with us, my uncle and aunt stood as our guardians. They comforted us through cooking our favorite dish and telling stories which eventually lead to opening up to each other towards our feelings and through physical activities that we do.” P2

“I have my aunt, there are many factors as to why I didn’t feel homesick because they were there for me. We always play games and sports.” P3

“My relatives comfort me whilst my parents weren’t by my side, they showed the love that I didn’t experience. My cousins and aunts cheered me up to make me forget or set aside the pain I felt when they left.” P4

“Yes they comforted me. I do remember this time where I kept crying every time I go on a call with them and how they comfort me is by bringing me to places like SM and buying me toys. The best comfort for me is keeping me on call with my parents while they’re on work.” P6

“In my situation, I don’t open up to my relatives because I’m not an open person towards my family. I mostly open only to my mom or to my friends.” P5

They easily cope up with different type of events or times such as activities in school because they have their other relatives to support them and stand as if they are their real parents, but even though they have someone by their side they still tend to seek their parents presence and love.

“My uncles and aunties were always there to support me, so I didn’t feel the absence of my parent’s because of them.” P1

“I coped up with the presence of my aunt. She was always there for me, for example, meetings and council. They are the ones who represent my parents whenever the school needed them.” P2

“I cope pretty well. If I’m in school I don’t think much about my parents. Since there is a lot of stuff to think about in school. But for example, family day and you’ll see other children having their parents around and you having no parents. I’m not saying that I’m not thankful for my grandparents but it’s different when it’s your parents that are with you during those times, you’ll start to feel like, ‘Why do they have their parents and I don’t?’” P6

### Emotional Effects

Based from the experiences of children who had their parents work overseas for a period of time, they suffer from the effects of loneliness and longingness. It took a big turn from

living their life with their parents and to suddenly see them leave and them not being by their side. These resulted from the time of their absence, as the relationship of the child to their parents. Presenting the lived experiences of the respondents who have similar experiences.

“At first I wasn’t able to accept that my parents weren’t beside me, because they are one of the factors that should be by my side growing up. They’re the ones who will teach us what’s right and wrong.” P5

“When they were about to go to the airport, I kept on crying whilst they said that they were going to leave. It was sad to think that they would go.” P3

At first, there was a period of adjustment to get used to. Around transitioning to living their lives without their parents for the time being, they expressed:

“Before we felt being down, it felt sad but my brother and I are the only ones helping out each other to fill our empty gap and space in our hearts.” P2

“I actually cried for a month or more because I can’t really accept it and I thought that they don’t love us anymore. But it’s fine now.” P5

“I do remember crying every time I would go on a call with them and every night I’d stay up just so that I could talk to them because my grandparents would let me sleep very early and I would not have the chance to talk to them.” P6

“During the first week, I didn’t feel anything. I felt that they went to go somewhere but as months and years pass, I missed them and the feeling of homesickness.” P3

Around the period of the parents’ absence, it left an emotional impact. It was dealt in a way with the experiences of feeling loneliness and how a child’s experience differs with others who had their parents around. They have shared the challenges encountered:

“When the teachers needed to call my parents but no one was able to attend. And maybe when I call my parents, all we do is only talk about money and things that I need.” P1

“In my studies, I had no moral support. For example, you walk up to the stage or during competitions, your opponents are there with their parents who are cheering for them and when it comes to me, only my relatives are there to support me but I am not underestimating them, it is different when you have your parents with you.” P4

“For example, if I need school supplies, it is difficult for me because I don’t have my dad to take me to the store and I don’t have access to malls that easily. I don’t have modes of transportation and for the food. I still long for the food that my mom used to prepare for me.” P5

“The first challenge is trying to talk to them since different time zones and every time I would go back from school it’s late. The other one is academics, they’re not there to reprimand you if you’re not studying. One of the challenges I faced mostly is hygiene, because my grandparents didn’t monitor anything. They let me be myself and do what I want. Whilst my parents, they care about hygiene a lot and when I arrived there that’s the only time I focused on it.” P6

Accordingly, despite the difficulties of growing up without their parents by their side, there is a part of gratefulness for the sacrifices they have done to support their families, the respondents have affirmed this with sharing their own

thoughts about their situation.

*"It wasn't easy to grow up without the presence of your parents and just do your best and they're the reason why you're on your place right now. Though your efforts are there and we should always thank them and do our part in life to prevent problems and to make things fine and make the family close."* P2

*"I want to let people know that having to grow up without your parents is very difficult and they should be very thankful for their parents."* P4

*"Appreciate your parents and their presence. Because there is a saying that 'Your parents will not stay with you forever.' You need to cherish every moment that you are together. Because in my situation, I grew up without my parents beside me. And for me, that was a big gap that was missing. But now that we're together, it's all okay."* P5

### Attitude Gaps

Children who were separated from their parents tend to experience a gap within their relationship. These experiences would often cause them to look for someone to depend on or make them feel envious. Children would ordinarily experience certain problems but doesn't know who to rely on. The findings of this study revealed that the factual experiences of the OFW children regarding relationship gaps. They expressed:

*"I ask advices from my friends, uncles, aunties, and my grandparents."* P1

*"I often ask for advice from my aunt. Since they are our neighbor, when she's not busy we knock on their doorstep and spend the day there."* P2

*"Other than my aunts and uncles, I ask advice from my brother."* P3

*"I usually go to my aunt, grandmother, cousin, brother, and friends."* P4

*"I'm not the type of person who opens up problems. I'm a type of person who keeps problems until eventually, I resolved the problem. But if you'll ask me to whom I'm opening up, that would be my aunt because every time something is odd to me she knew that I'm having problems."* P2

*"Not really. Because I have my friends with me and I always ask them first before my parents."* P1

Positioning a child in a state of being left by their parents cause them a feeling of jealousy towards their peers specially when growing up. Children that were left by OFW parents witness their classmates growing with the intimacy of a family that results them to be envious of parents.

*"We felt jealous because it's still different growing up with a parent. I grew up without the care of my parents. I'd rather choose to be poor or lack of financial as long as we're together, instead of in our situation right now, we're together but got separated. We have money but we're not together."* P2

*"When I was a child, I felt jealous. To be honest, seeing my classmates with their parents. Especially when we go to field trips, they have chaperones but for me, I didn't have."* P3

*"I felt I bit envious because you see them complete and happy. At the same time, I'm thankful and happy even if we aren't complete, I still find a way to be happy."* P4

*"Before, I was so jealous when every time there is an activity in school, I can see their parents waiting outside watching them and I'll be thinking, 'Where is my dad?, Why is he not here?' But now that I've grown up, I already understand why."* P5

*"I feel a little envious towards them because they get to spend most of their childhood with their parents whilst I spend it with my grandparents. I'm thankful that I spend it with my grandparents but it's still different when you experience those childhoods with your parents."* P6

## IV. DISCUSSION

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child is a human rights treaty which sets out the civil, political, economic, social, health and cultural rights of children. As indicated in the United Nations Convention, the "family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love and understanding" is paramount for the "full and harmonious development" of a child's personality. Every parent knows this and dreams of co-habiting in such a situation.

A normal family unit is made up of a father and a mother and their children. However, life throws many curve balls and parents are often forced to re-invent the conception of a normal family so as to ensure or, at the very least, hope for the "full and harmonious development" of their children. A classic illustration of the above occurs when one or both parents are employed overseas. In a country where unemployment is a colossal and ongoing fact-of-life, working in a foreign country and the resulting remittances, offers a way out of omnipresent poverty. Overseas work helps in decreasing Philippine unemployment as well as feeding, sheltering and clothing entire households. In short, because of an entrenched poverty, Filipinos view overseas work as the only alternative to escape from debt and hopelessness. OFW's will travel to foreign nations, legal or not, to escape the dark cloud of poverty and they often do without considering the possibility of suffering inhumane abuse from foreign nationals or worse, jail. (OFWs and the Children Left Behind; PhilippineOne, 2017)

### Adjustments

The primary purpose of this study was to know the adjustments of the OFW children who grew up without their parents. Acceptance is one of the coping mechanisms that the children went through. It is emotionally and physically challenging for the children to accept that their family setup is not the same with other families. But, as the child matures, he begins to understand why the parent has to work abroad and can get back on track and take on the responsibility of managing their household and family life on their own. 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.

OFW parents usually compensate for their physical presence with the sort of material things that they provide for their left-behind children, resulting in their kids cultivating a consumerist mentality (Unicef, 2017). Such children are usually the kind of left-behind people who kind of tend to mostly be one-day millionaires, definitely spend too much, luxuriously fulfilling their wishes, which is quite significant. Parents do their very best always just to provide their children the things they wanted to have.

Lee (2011) in Lu et al, (2015) found that left-behind children in rural China were shown to put greater emphasis on social recognition than their peers did and were more likely to care for school grades and demand the attention of their parents than the children who lived with their parents. Lu et al (2015) found that the more children receive care or guidance from their family, the more they become worried about the behavior of their parents towards them. It illustrates the significance of the left-behind children's well-being of parenting style and communication between parent and child.

In the study of Kim (2016), the greater your general trust is the better your mental health would be. General trust can be attained by a group of neighbors, close relatives, and friends that the left-behind children consider as sources of support in times of need. It is really needed to have such group of friends or relatives especially if your parents are far away from you, it would be a big help for you especially if you need someone to be with when you are in your saddest moments.

Multiple attachments are likely to develop left-behind children; for example, relationship forms the children left behind and extended family members including family and friends. These left-behind children's caregivers play a role in sustaining family unity and in alleviating the emotional burden of displacement (Yanovich, 2015). The relationships formed with these people by the left-behind child are both a reaction and an adjustment to the absence of migrant parents (Owusu, 2015).

Despite the emergence of social media use, Racidon and colleagues (2015) reported that the old forms of communication – SMS, snail mail and voice calls – are not completely replaced by social media. However, a study on migrant women reported that having a mobile phone in their home country was critical in maintaining contact and friendship with their family and friend (Platt, et al., 2014). By using mobile phones, migrant parents can now call whoever they want to meet, unlike using landline telephones, where they can only speak to anyone at home. Nevertheless, the frequency and quality of communication between the migrant parents and the left-behind children varies due to circumstances that are not controlled by both left-behind children and migrant parents (Racidon, et al., 2015).

Nevertheless, Javanese and Filipino children, apparently passive in the presence of adults, are aware of their situation and reflect it. Even if they show a 'decreased type of agency' by having little power over the decision-making processes of their parents' migration, children from both countries form their own independent views on the absence and care

arrangements of their parents and establish and express their agencies through indicators of agreement, resistance and denial that may affect the decisions of their parents on migration. Within their families, they learn to navigate their way into becoming social actors, whether in care arrangement decisions or their own education. Located in a position relative to other people of varying ages and power, children are constantly independently experimenting, adjusting, resisting and reworking plans. In addition, adults may also change their plans to fulfill the needs of their children or reach an agreement with them (Collins and Tymko, 2015).

### Coping Mechanism

Childhood and adolescence are important life stages that involve great changes for the individual. The social and cultural environments along with family circumstances are some of the factors that influence children's development. Furthermore, migration is also an important factor that affects children and families. Migration is a worldwide phenomenon that has always been part of human history. Moving to a new country may impact children and adolescents in a variety of ways, including their family relationships, and their social and educational performance (Watters, 2008; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001) as cited by Gomez (2015).

Botezat (2018) claims that most would agree that "home" is where our families are. But for many children whose parents are working abroad, "home" means the absence of parents, emotional and psychological distress, and often physical and mental health problems. These children usually stay behind in the care of close relatives: grandparents, older siblings, uncles and aunts. The phenomenon of children left behind, which is having a profound effect on societies in Eastern Europe, Asia and South America, is causing serious concern in the affected communities. Indeed, in some places it has been called a national tragedy.

According to Navarez & Diaz, (2017) regarding acceptance as a coping mechanism, the students are used to the idea that their situation happened and that they learn to live with it. This result is supported by Carver et al. 1989 cited in Aldebot & Weisman de Mamani (2009) as cited by Navarez & Diaz (2017) when they argued that acceptance as a coping mechanism is found to be more beneficial than others for children may learn to accept reality for the meantime while their parents are away. It is also the most effective coping mechanisms in dealing with disappointments and hindrances for this can help people to keep up their spirits and feel satisfied because it has a positive effect (Stoeber & Janssen, 2011 as cited by Navarez & Diaz, 2017).

When it comes to planning as a coping mechanism, it means that students try to come up with a strategy about what to do. They also think how problems can be best handled as well as think deeply about what steps to take when difficult times are present. In fact, Parrenas (2000) as cited by Navarez, J. & Diaz, K.R. (2017) said that there is a need for OFW children to prepare and arrange on what to do with the current condition for them to be more productive.

According to Navarez & Diaz, (2017), the use of

instrumental support also helps the students with OFW parents cope with challenges in life. They do it by trying to get advice from someone about what to do, learn more about the situation, and ask people who have had similar experiences with them. Many experts claim that social support can assist a person cope with the demands of stress (Schwarzer & Leppin, 1989, 1991; Veiel & Baumann, 1992) as well as concentrate on deriving meaning from the stressful experience (Brannon & Feist, 2009). The use of instrumental support is available to anybody through linkages and social ties to other individuals, organizations, groups, and the community as a whole (Ozbay et al., 2007 as cited by Navarez & Diaz, 2017).

When active coping is being used, students with OFW parents try to concentrate their efforts on doing something about their situation and to take direct action to get around the problem. It is also avenue for these students to function well and move forward (Navarez & Diaz 2017). Carver, Scheier, and Weintraub (1989) as cited by Navarez, J. & Diaz, K.R.(2017) explained that students left behind need to take active steps to remove or avoid the pain or to enhance its effects which include initiating direct action, increasing one's efforts, and trying to execute a coping attempt in a stepwise fashion (Navarez & Diaz, 2017).

When students use emotional support as a coping mechanism, they get emotional support from friends or relatives to talk to someone about how he or she feels, and discuss his or her feelings with someone. Burluson (2003) pointed out that when feeling hurt, disappointed, or upset, virtually everyone would like to receive sensitive support from caring others. Goldsmith (2011) added that emotional support is helping to lift someone to higher ground so an individual can see their way through the difficulty. Having someone to rely on is one of the best parts of being in a relationship. In the final analysis, it can be said that all of the above cited seven subscales or coping mechanisms were being exhibited, applied and were seen as clearly evident, though in varying degrees, in the day to day lives of students with OFW parents as measures to overcome challenges in life (Navarez & Diaz, 2017).

As was found in studies by Hogan (2002), children of separated parents have found formal services very helpful in their recovery. The detachment from general peers has emerged because of fear that they might be treated differently. Subsequently, talking about parental separation is considered a private issue preferring group of people they believed can understand their situation and for them not to stand out different (Sarmiento, 2015).

According to Muthukrishnan & Xiani (2019), coping strategies in the academic domain is referred as resilience, everyday resilience, or academic buoyancy, and is characterized as a set of resources a student can access to help them to be resilient after a setback or failure and to take part in the academic work. Taken together in its different forms, coping repertoire of behaviors can be adaptive, allowing for effective management of stressors and continued engagement with challenging situations, or maladaptive, leading to a state of helplessness and disaffection from academic challenges. Earlier findings confirmed that the nature of a child's coping

profile, that is, the most common pattern of response to stressful academic circumstances, also exerts an influence on a student's level of engagement. Coping refers to the thoughts and behaviors that a person uses to manage the internal and external demands of stressful situations Folkman and Moskowitz (2004). It involves the conscious efforts placed on adjusting emotion, cognition, behavior and physiology in response to stress (Compas et al., 2001 as cited by Muthukrishnan & Xiani, 2019).

Fredrickson and Branigan (2005) as cited by Gan and Hall (2019) have observed that those with positive emotions about life (i.e., life satisfaction) broaden their scope of attention and thought-action repertoire, which helps them cope with stress and adversity. Similarly, adolescents who are reported to be happy and satisfied with their lives tend to possess creative and flexible thinking (Fredrickson, 2004; Rowe, Hirsh, & Anderson, 2007; Stiglbauer, Gnamb, Gamsjäger, & Batinic, 2013), better adaptive psychosocial functioning (Suldo & Huebner, 2004, 2006), and more effective coping mechanisms (Park, 2004; Proctor et al., 2009, 2010). Thus, when LBC (Left behind children) have built emotional resources due to the sufficiency of family resources that they receive, it is likely that they will be able to deal effectively with difficulties and eventually decrease their risk of having mental health problems.

### **Emotional Effects**

Ducanes (2015) finds overseas migration to be an important driving factor for household social mobility in the Philippines. Moving them up the income ladder, supports their increased consumption - including spending for education, medical care, real property and equipment, food, clothing and recreation - reduces their poverty.

The absence of parents affects children's psychology, behavior, lifestyle etc. This even changes the decision making process among the left behind families. Absence of authoritative figure from home leads to possible consequences of division (Kaur, 2016). According to Navarez and Diaz (2017), the increasing number of students that are experiencing school life without the presence of their parents is now a global phenomenon. It is always said that migration is the solution to the rising financial instability of the families but the persistent concerns are on the issues on students being left behind by such migration that have attracted growing attention and grow into a global concern. Additionally, the need for caregivers to look into the general satisfaction of children under their care can make them feel better and make life manageable even in their current situations and conditions.

As stated by Démurger (2015), the effect of a family member's migration on those who stay behind can be either positive or negative, depending on individual circumstances. In particular, the physical absence of the migrant may have multiple adverse effects on family members' education, health, labor supply response. Albeit the advantages and benefits experienced while their parents were working abroad, also often felt sad, isolated, and abandoned after one or both parents migrated. Material benefits could no longer be a substitute for their parents' presence when they needed them physically, longing for the presence to be taken

care of by them (Machica, Jr. & Montallana, 2018).

Though the intention of parents working abroad is good, providing for the material needs of their children is not enough, especially those with very young and adolescent children who need the most guidance from their parents. Academically, the left-behind adolescents may do good, but emotionally, the loneliness and longing for the physical presence of their parents will always be there no matter how the children would convince themselves that their parents are working abroad for them to have a better life (Rendeza, 2017). Children may feel uncertain of their parents' love for them whilst they are abroad, of course they still love and care for their children. Simple letters or messages can alleviate the uneasiness of their children and as well as help them cope with the situation, to be able to be connected with their parents (Castro, 2015).

Loneliness has negative effects towards mental health and everyone is vulnerable to it (Hawkins-Elder, Milfont, Hammond, Siibley, 2017). It often has severe consequences for individuals and society, often stemming in social relations one desires (Bouwman, Aartsen, Tilburg, & Stevens, 2016). The experience of loneliness is prevalent and detrimental. Personality may influence individual perceptions of loneliness and it poses a major risk to the health and well-being (Lyyra, Välimaa, & Tynjälä, 2018 ; Wang & Dong, 2018). Notable across the lifespan, it may have particularly deleterious effects in childhood and adolescence, leading to increased risk of emotional impairment (Ritchwood, Ebesutani, Chin, & Young, 2016).

Calantas & Lobaton (2018), stated that as immigration progressively increases, so does the number of children left behind. OFW parents leave their children behind under the care of their grandparents, relatives or with their aunts and uncles for a substantial amount of time. Moreover, 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. Calantas and Lobaton (2018) further added that they know that they have a future and envision it to be bright for them. Additionally, they are usually left to be taken care of by their relatives, but they cannot provide the same love, affection, and support of the parents. This may cause the children to feel sad and neglected.

Effects suffered can lead to uneasiness leading to negative effects such as feeling loneliness and longingness, leaving them vulnerable to those kinds of emotions. They long for being connected with their parents abroad, they are left with their relatives but they cannot provide the same love as how parents would love their children. Parents would send remittances or material goods but that cannot compensate for their absence for a certain period of their child's life abroad.

#### **Attitude Gaps**

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 (Calantas and Lobaton, 2018).

The phenomenon of children left behind, which is having a profound effect on societies in Eastern Europe, Asia and South America, is causing serious concern in the affected communities. Social scientists are showing increasing interest in understanding the consequences for children's development of living in transnational families. In terms of financial and material resources, the children left behind may be better off. Yet being deprived of their primary caregivers can have a very harmful effect on children's overall well-being. Children who remain behind when their parents leave their countries of origin are more likely to experience depression, anxiety, and other emotional and mental health problems (Botezat and Pfeiffer, 2014).

The left-behind children's experiences can be conceptualized as "ambivalence" in that they incorporate simultaneous existence of opposing emotions towards their parents' migration. Such experiences are grounded in the structural and cultural contexts associated with migration on the one hand, and on the other, provide the driving impetus for children to reproduce and/or transform their structural and cultural contexts by adopting agentic strategies either more engaged with the present or more directed towards the future (Xiao, 2015).

A sense of being alone, with no advocate, no support and with no one looking out for them, someone to whom they felt emotionally connected to, were ideas that were very striking because of the number of young people who expressed them. Ideas that expressed an absence of "nurturing" and "care" were mentioned many of the young people who were keen to leave school and seek independence. For those young people who wanted to continue on it to further and higher education, status was also important but, arguably more the status associated with securing non-manual work. For these students, freedom was also key but "freedom" from their current environments and experiences (Fuller, 2018). The parents of these young people were very keen that their children should experience a different kind of life to theirs and education was seen as a key route to securing a better future. Whilst they lacked the skills to support their ambitions and plans that they were supportive was significant (Hong and Fuller, 2019).

Parental migration resulted in challenges in child psychosocial well-being, due to the emotional impacts from prolonged parent-child separation. Parental absence also led to inadequate care and support for left-behind children. The negative effects of parental migration may be exacerbated by other vulnerabilities such as parents' divorce, poverty, and grandparent caregivers' frailty. Concerns about child well-being made some migrants decide to return home permanently, because of the altered trade-offs of migration (Zhao et al., 2018).

#### **V. CONCLUSION**

Migration of parents abroad for working purposes may be an important way of generating income and reducing unemployment in sending countries. Migration may have also positive and/or negative consequences for children left at home. On one hand, parents often get better paid jobs abroad,

providing their children with more financial and educational resources and fostering social and school achievement. On the other hand, however, missing the main adult caregiver may be harmful for children's well being (Botezat and Pfeiffer, 2014). While the purpose of parental migration is for financial stability, the compositional change in the family can bring adverse effects on the children left behind. The sudden change in family composition, that is, having a parent away could affect the children's well-being and upbringing (Agonos, Bade, Cabuling, and Mercene, 2015).

Filipino parents consider leaving the country to work elsewhere even though it would trade off being afar from their families. This is both a challenge for both the family left behind and the OFW-parent. Both experience feelings of abandonment in many different ways. To be in a long distant relationship with someone you love requires so much emotional labor; from having to cope up with their physical absence to getting used to not feel their existence at all (Atenas et al., 2016). Additionally, children of migrants could be affected emotionally, due to the distance apart from their parents. Drawing communication from the two parties bring them closer despite the distance, it would prevent awkwardness that would build up from a series of neglect (Maculada, 2018).

With this assumption, the researchers recommend that there must be communication between the parents and their children left behind to maintain a positive relationship. The presence of the parents must be felt by the child through communicating with any means despite the distance. For the parents, they must be willing to listen to their children and to make time for them even for the simplest of things, to make sure that they are making their presence known despite they are physically absent in their children's life for a period of time.

Along with this, the implication of parental migration affects their families left behind, especially the well-being of their children. Their relationship can be distressed if the parents do not communicate or make their presence shown through any means to their children. Although their main goal is to provide financial stability for their family, their relationship with their children can face challenges. It leaves the children struggling with coping during the time of parental absence. They would be emotionally struggling due to the distance from their parents. Based from the simulacrum of the study, the interrelation of the following themes particularly adjustments, coping mechanism, emotional effects, and attitude gaps are elements that affect a child whilst their parents work hard abroad for the betterment of their situations. These factors are all interconnected, the participants have gone to similar experiences in terms of dealing with the absence of their parents. Over time, they have realized the efforts they have gone through. However, materialistic values cannot compromise for the period of time working abroad. Despite the struggles faced, the participants were able to overcome those with the help of their surrounding relatives and friends. It has shown developments of how they perceived the absence of their parents, to realizing that they are doing what is best for them.

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**BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**



**James Ryan A. Agtoto** is currently in senior high school as an ABM student at Philippine School Doha. In just a few months he will be finishing his high school and attending college at the College of the North Atlantic-Qatar in the course of Human Resources. He has participated in many activities such as Volleyball Varsity, Intramurals and others at the Philippine School Doha. He has attended various seminars on Research, Financial Literacy, and Stress Management that helped him take college courses as well as the universities of the Philippines who visited his school to announce their school content



**Chrangel Eve M. Castillo** was born on August 18, 2001. She is currently a Grade 12 student under the strand of Accountancy, Business, and Management (ABM) at Philippine School Doha. She also participated in different seminars regarding research over the past years in Senior High. She may not be a laureola awardee, but she makes sure that she maintains high grades. Recently, she is the top 14 in her class with an average of 92 in the final term of the first semester. She has already experienced to work as an assistant teacher in K-2 and a Register Clerk in the Registrar's Office of Philippine School Doha.

After she graduates in Senior high school on April 2020, she plans to continue her studies and pursue Interior Design in De La Salle College of Saint Benilde.



**Miles Nicolas A. Corvera** was born on October 30, 2001. He is currently in Senior High School as an ABM student in Philippine School Doha. He studied in Philippine International School Qatar during his 6th grade until grade 10 and received a lot of academic awards. He also participated in different seminars regarding research, which will help boost his research knowledge. He may not be a laureola awardee, but he always maintains high grades and included in the top students in the class. Apart from his academics, he is also active in non-academic activities such as the basketball

varsity which he is consistently part of. He has already experienced to work in the Supplies and Inventory Department and being an assistant teacher in the Primary Department of Philippine School Doha. After he graduates in senior high school in April 2020, he plans to continue his studies in the Philippines and pursue Accountancy in Ateneo De Davao University.



**Frances Erica P. Galvez** is currently a Grade 12 student in Philippine School Doha under the Accountancy and Business Management (ABM) strand. She previously studied in Gloria Marizz Academy of Bulacan and she moved to Qatar in the year of 2011. During her Junior High School life, she participated in several poster making contests as art is her major interest. She continued to participate in other events such as the Intramurals. She has won the scrabble competition, placing as the First Runner-up in

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**Daniel John S. Sonza** is currently a Grade 12 ABM student in Philippine School Doha. He received a bronze medal as a Laureola Awardee in the second semester of his 11<sup>th</sup> Grade. Additionally, He is the current Captain Ball of the Senior Volleyball Varsity. He finished his Junior High School with full confidence and proud in Philippine International School-Qatar. In his last year in Philippine International School of Qatar, he also became the Captain Ball of the Junior Volleyball Varsity.



**Yasser G. Ulod** is currently in Senior high school as ABM student in Philippine School Doha. He has been a top student in his class and still pushes further. He studied in Philippine International School Qatar and transferred to Philippine School Doha during his 2<sup>nd</sup> grade. He had received several awards throughout his academic years. He also participated in the Research Congress during his 10<sup>th</sup> grade in the year 2018. Apart from his academics, he also participated in different competitions such as winning the title "Ginoong Agham" in his 11<sup>th</sup> grade. After he graduates in high school on April 2020, he plans to continue his studies in the Philippines and pursue Aeronautics in the Southern City Colleges.