

THE GOOD, THE BAD AND THE UGLY:
SOCIAL COSTS AND BENEFITS OF FEMALE
MIGRATION ON FILIPINO FAMILIES

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Abstract

This study is a contribution towards the research on the circumstances of those left behind and how their lives have been affected in complex ways by the departure of parents of migrant families. It will revisit the experiences and explore the social impact, the benefits and costs of the increasing number of female overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) on the family. More specifically, it will attempt to describe and analyze: 1) the problems brought about by distance among family members and how this affects the exercise of parental authority over children as well as marital relations between the spouses and how each of the family members cope; 2) the reproductive health and rights of the spouses and the economic status and social mobility of the family members. It will attempt to distill the main findings and insights from earlier empirical studies done on the same. Additional empirical data has been generated for this research from field interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Bataan Christian School in Balanga, Bataan.

INTRODUCTION

A CONSPICUOUS NEW FEATURE OF INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION in the recent context of globalization is the feminization of labor migration.

Official sources reveal that international migration flows from low income to high income countries and regions which accelerated in the 1980s and early 1990s show the following trends: a) increase in traditional flows; b) greater diversity in the region of origin; c) and increase in the number of female migrants (Gender International).

While for several decades women constituted a significant proportion of migrants worldwide, they were a small proportion of the workforce. In Asia, for example, the last few decades since the 1970s, saw a progressive increase of women migrant workers from a low of 15 percent of Asian overseas workers to 50 percent or more in 2003 (International Conference on Gender and Development). International migration within and from Asia was limited in the postwar period up to the 1970s. However with the petroleum boom in the 70s the Middle East became a major destination for labor migrants from all parts of Asia including the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. The 1980s and 1990s saw further increase in levels of migration within and from Asia as well as diversity in both country of origin and destination.

In the Philippines in the early seventies, women constituted only 12 percent of the total workers sent abroad. In 1987, their proportion in relation to all departing workers reached 47 percent. In 2002, women already constituted nearly two-thirds (69 percent) of 288,155 newly hired or deployed workers (NCRFW 2003). The Philippines in the same year sent workers to 140 countries; 45 percent went to West Asia, and the rest to East Asia (35 percent), Southeast Asia (7 percent), Europe (7 percent), the Americas (2 percent) and other areas like Africa and the Trust Territories (3 percent) (Sobritchea 2003).

According to the Philippine Overseas and Employment Agency (POEA), in 2003, more than 70 percent of the total numbers of workers abroad were women. Most of were between 25-29 years old, 37 percent of them married, 7 percent either separated or widowed. By then, women migrants lived and worked in more than 192 countries. They worked as professional and technical employees, nurses, clerical and sales workers, entertainers, caregivers and domestic workers. Statistics show that the heaviest concentration of women is at the lower end of the job hierarchy. In 1999-2000 about, 97 percent of out-migrating Filipinas work as domestic workers and entertainers (Ferraren 2007). In 2006 while statistics reveal a slight decrease in number of female workers, 59.26 percent of 317,680 newly deployed that year, females nonetheless constituted the larger proportion of documented migrant workers (POEA website).

The pattern of Filipino migration given the above data was thus appropriately characterized by a recent study as having a large percentage of temporary and undocumented workers, a young migrant population, a high percentage of migrants being married and a growing feminization of temporary documented and undocumented workers (Edillon 2008, 1).

Given that there are now over eight million Filipinos who are working abroad where a significant number of them are mostly mothers, more serious concern has been raised on the social cost of female labor migration on families left behind especially the children estimated at nine million, or 27 percent, of the youth population (Reyes 2008). This, in light of the fact that earlier studies indicate that “the absence of the mother has the most disruptive effect in the life of the children” (Battistela and Conaco 1998; Pingol 2001; Annonuevo 2002; Parrenas 2005).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

While concern has long been raised and numerous studies done on migration, fewer studies have examined with more depth the circumstances of those left behind and how their lives have been affected in complex ways by the departure of parents of migrant families. Carandang has succinctly remarked in her lament on the state of discourses in conferences and the paucity of studies done on families that;

“There seems to be a silent agreement ... to gloss over the real predicament of the families of female migrant workers. Such reluctance has prevented us from knowing what really happens to the families left behind. It has prevented us from giving them the assistance that they truly need. The well-being of the families left behind remains the hidden cost (Carandang et al. 2007, 1).

This research is a humble contribution in this direction. It will revisit the experiences, explore the social impact, the benefits and costs of the increasing number of female overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) on the family. More specifically it will attempt to describe and analyze: 1) the problems brought about by distance among family members, how this affects the exercise of parental authority

over children as well as marital relations between the spouses and how each of the family members cope; 2) the reproductive health and rights of the spouses and the economic *status* and social mobility of the family members.

This will focus on families left behind by migrant mothers. This will attempt to distill the main findings and insights from earlier empirical studies done on the same. Additional empirical data was likewise generated for this research from our own field interviews and focused group discussions (FGDs) conducted in Bataan Christian School in Balanga, Bataan. The choice of this research site was due to the fact that the school's guidance counselor is a sister-in-law. She herself became the source of more in-depth information in later interviews with her in regard to both father and child as each at one time or another became a counselee. She arranged to have the FGDs conducted one day among eight participants: five of which were children and three fathers. The fathers and children were grouped separately, each FGD lasting for 2-3 hours each. This was the first time these migrant families sat together to share their experiences. The FGDs were also meant to be psychotherapeutic interventions for each group. More data was further drawn from additional respondents who are not from the school friends and kin with who we have intimate knowledge of. This is to complete at least five full family narratives and an additional three respondent-fathers and two more children. Total respondents therefore for this study is 15 respondents, eight fathers and seven children.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

There had been various studies on migration in general. As earlier noted, these studies recognize that migration is not merely the business of the individual but also involves and affects the migrants families (Yeoh and Lam 2007). While there had been relatively few studies that specifically focus on families left behind, there had been a number of empirical studies that focused on families with particular focus on children left behind.

The most current *Literature Review on Migration and the Filipino Children Left Behind* by Reyes (2008), which reviewed

20 seminal studies on effects of migration on children had been most helpful in charting the direction for this study and culling the findings and insights for this research as these were revisited. The findings in these studies though sometimes mixed reflect the varying approaches and methodologies that had been adopted to explore the complex and relatively uncharted terrain of the effects of migration generally on children left behind. While these did not focus specifically and singly on children of migrant mothers but were included in the sample, some of the studies revealed a difference when the mother is the migrant worker. Three categories of left behind children are mostly included in these studies, that is, when the migrant worker is 1) the father 2) the mother 3) or both. These are mostly compared to children of non-migrants. Of all three categories it was found that the absence of the mother has the most disruptive effect on the life of the children (Battistella and Conaco 1998; Pingol 2001; Anonuevo 2002; Parrenas 2005).

Two of the above studies were also found most useful for insights on the fathers left behind. Pingol (2001), *Remaking Masculinities: Identity, Power and Gender Dynamics in Families with Migrant Wives and House-Husbands* focused on changing notions of masculinity by men whose wife work abroad. It provided rich insights in its investigation of the condition of men when role reversal, particularly the changes in their perceptions of gender identity happens and how this affected marital as well as parental relations in the family. Arellano-Carandang et al., *Nawala ang Ilaw ng Tabanan: Case Studies of Families Left Behind by OFW Mothers*, provided also an intimate look not only into the changes taking place with the children but with the father as well. These case studies of ten families also looked at how they coped in the absence of the mother.

FEMALE MIGRATION: ITS BENEFITS AND COSTS

Female labor migration has been said to be a mixed blessing (Huang et al. 2003). At least on an official level there is consensus among countries of origin like the Philippines, one of the largest labor exporting countries in the world, of the benefits of labor

migration. On a macro level, migrants remittances are acknowledged as pillars of these countries respective economies. The Philippines has been noted as having gone the farthest in recognizing this in calling migrant workers, "Mga Bagong Bayani" (new heroes) for remittances that had kept the country afloat.

However, the enormous social costs of female migration both to the female worker and to the families left behind obscure the benefits of this economic windfall. Because of a mother's aspiration to better her loved one's living conditions, she is put into a condition where she is at risk and vulnerable to the social conditions of living abroad. Aside from dealing with homesickness and loneliness, they also feel guilt in leaving their children and fears that they would get sick, meet an accident or go astray because of lack of proper guidance (Sobritchea 2003). They tend to give in to the luxurious and extravagant requests of their children in able to fill for their absence which is also the main reason that they are not able to save (Crisostomo 2003) and thus extending their work contracts overseas. Employed in large numbers in the domestic and entertainment sectors, Filipinas are frequently submitted to harassment and sexual abuse ("Left Behind, Left Out" 2006). There has been documented evidence of Filipinas who lived in a world of fear, degradation, sanity and sexual abuse. Rape has been a "common occurrence" in some areas. And murder has been the fate of a few women (Eviota). But despite such risks, women continue seeking jobs abroad all for the love of their family.

Studies show that while there appears massive empirical evidence of economic benefits from migration, the social costs are only beginning to surface in varying degrees and via different surrogate indicators (Coronel and Unterreiner 2007). Most commonly mentioned as negative social impacts of migration to children for example include, juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, psychosocial maladjustments, loss of self-esteem, early marriages, teenage pregnancies and family breakdown.

The discussion below explores the social benefits and costs of female migration on Filipino families left behind.

SOCIAL BENEFITS

On the Family's Economic Well-being

One of the major benefits of labor migration is that the remittances from overseas workers have indeed provided temporary relief from the serious problem of unemployment. According to a recent study, families with parent OFW have higher per capita income by at least PhP 20,000 (2003 prices) while per capita expenditure is higher by PhP 16,000 (2003) compared to “similar” non-OFW families. OFW families have a significantly lower incidence of poverty (0 percent vs. 3 percent). Families with OFW parent expend less labor, 65 hours per week VS families without an OFW parent who work 102 hours per week (Edillon 2008).

Children of OFW parents also enjoy more monetary benefits than those of non-OFW parents, particularly concerning food (PhP 7,800 vs. PhP 5,400), clothing (PhP 2,100 vs. PhP 1,100), education (PhP 7,500 vs. PhP 4,400), and money deposited in the bank under their names (PhP 1,500 vs. PhP 100) (Edillon 2008). “When ‘migrants’ economic prospects improve, they send more money home. In turn, the recipient households use these resources to make crucial investments for the future, leading to increased child schooling, reduced child labor, and greater entrepreneurial activity in the migrants’ source household (Yang Dean 2004). Another recent evidence in the economic well-being of migrant families can be found in the study of *Greater Air Access in DMIA* (de Guzman and Gorospe-Jamon 2008) wherein because of their increased economic standing and affordable flights now provided, the families’ mobility is not anymore limited locally. “...OFWs can now afford to visit their long separated loved ones in their jobsites where visas are not a hindrance, like in such open countries such as Hong Kong, Singapore, Macau, Indonesia, Malaysia, and even the United Arab Emirates. Migrant workers can also come home often. This eases the pains of separation and loneliness. Thus, the attendant social costs of labor migration are greatly reduced.”

Moreover, children of school age who belong to families with an OFW parent are more able to go to school. The children of OFW

parents spend almost twice at PhP15, 400 compared to children of non-OFW parents at PhP 8,200. The difference of quantity is small but the difference in the quality of education may be substantial. Children of OFW parents go to more expensive schools, or if they go to public schools, they enjoy more school supplies such as books and notebooks (Edillon 2008).

Children with migrant parents are provided opportunity for better education; they have the means to enroll in private schools (Yeoh and Lam 2007). In the research we conducted in Bataan Christian School, which is a private school, out of 825 enrolled students from pre-school to high school, 321 of them have one or both parents working as an overseas worker. Thirty-nine percent of the entire student population is children of OFWs. This clearly shows that children of OFWs have better access to good education. We also found out that there are more female migrant workers than male – amounting to 242 female OFWs while male OFWs are only 31. There are also 48 students having both parents as migrant workers. The table below shows the distribution of children of OFWs from pre-school to high school.

Table 1: Distribution of Children of OFWs, from Pre-school to High School

	Mother OFW	Father OFW	Both Parents OFWs
PRE-SCHOOL	36	4	7
GRADE SCHOOL	120	20	30
HIGH SCHOOL	86	7	11
TOTAL	242	31	48

The participants we interviewed in Bataan were high school students.

On Parenting

Husbands are often the key to a successful migrant

experience. Child outcome cannot be investigated without studying the response of husbands to migration. When the men are employed and comfortable with the role reversal of wives being the major breadwinner and themselves playing caregiver roles for their children, the goals for overseas work can be achieved without huge social costs to children (“Left Behind, Left Out” 2006). The Fernandez family’s main source of resilience in one of the cases in Arellano - Carandang’s study, 2007 is “largely due to the father’s openness to change and ability to take the role of the mother.” Boy and Oscar, fathers in our own study, proudly shared how they had taken the reproductive roles of their wives. They also shared that while this was not easy in the beginning years of their wives. They are proud that they had successfully managed the difficult transition. Boy and Oscar’s wives are nurses in London. Boy’s son has just finished nursing and plans with Boy to migrate to London, and Oscar’s daughter graduated as valedictorian and now a pre-med student.

Religion has become a refuge for migrant families and a source of family. In some cases, migrant workers and their families become closer to God. Church work and related activities fill their time as well as become a cure for loneliness, anxieties and worries. (Beltran, Samonte and Walker 1995, 5). Our respondents reveal that they have become more prayerful. Their going to church every Sunday has been a source of bonding. They attest to the power of faith in their ability to cope. They admit choosing Bataan Christian High School because of its emphasis as well on spiritual and value formation. They said the right school is an important help in the formation of their children.

“Migration of mothers strengthened the roles of extended families” (“Left Behind, Left Out” 2006). Extended families have played an important role in being guardians of children of OFW parents. When migrant mothers leave, they primarily leave the care of their children to either their own mothers or aunts. The extended family has been a source of caring support for some. Kat (an interviewee in this research), whose mother worked as a nurse for 15 years in Saudi Arabia, lived in a house near her relatives. She and her siblings were always looked after by their aunts, uncles, and grandparents when her father is working. *“Malaking bagay na*

nakatira kami malapit sa mga pinsan ko, mas pakiramdam namen na hindi kami nag-iisa dahil wala palagi si mommy.” (It’s a good thing that we lived near our relatives’ house. Somehow as we were growing up, we somehow didn’t feel alone since mom is always away,” she said.)

On Children’s Relationship with the Mother

Families had creatively used existing technology to bridge the gap in communication. In order to maintain communication with the migrant mother, the children-participants, in our research, resorted to different ways of bonding and expressing themselves with their mother overseas. “*Parang nandiyan lang sa tabi ko si Mama kapag nagkakausap kami sa chat at webcam sa internet!*” says Joel Jr., one of the high school student participants that we interviewed in our research. With use of the Internet, he chats and talks to his mom who has been working as a caregiver in Belgium for more than two years. He shares that somehow, the role of technology has made him cope with his longing for a mother easily. Some young adults feel the intimacy of their absent parents in a different way. The advent of technological advancement in communication promotes a different level of intimacy between and among transnational families. This has strengthened linkage and nurturing bonding among members especially the migrant mothers and their children (Parrenas 2005).

Oscar, one of our fathers in this study relates how life changing it was (for migrants in London where her wife works) when they learned how to use the computer. When he visited his wife for six months, he taught a total of 80 migrant Filipinas how to use the computer and their children were happy that they now could communicate more frequently and intimately with their parents.

Also, in a recent study on the parent-child communication between children and migrant parents, it was discovered that letter writing appeared to be effective means of expressing oneself. From the sample households in one research, letter writing affords them greater freedom to share their deepest feelings. Although the telephone is still the fastest means of communication, letter writing brings more depth to the exchange and promotes better bonding

(Edillon 2008).

On the New Role of the Husband

Fathers in migrant families are discovering new and challenging role for themselves. In families with migrant mothers, it is very important how the father, who remained at home with the children, handles his new function in the family giving both the providing and the caring work for the family. Mr. Cacnio (Jerry) one of our interviewees, whose wife is a nurse in Norway, did a great job with his children. Although his wife earns a lot abroad, he continued to work hard and build a career in the Philippines. His children respect him. His daughter Marj shares that she never felt that their family is incomplete because of his father's loving care. "Fathers who are college educated tend to be respected more and better models for children" (Pingol 2001).

In the Philippine setting, it cannot be avoided that in-laws will always have opinions about the husband remaining at home. Some husbands try to be more responsible. "To free themselves from indignities from in-laws and to deserve better treatment, other husbands pursue a number of ways to provide additional income for the family. Work restores their sense of self-respect. They try to match their wives' earnings in various ways" (Pingol 2001, 45). 7 out of 8 husbands from our research continued to earn for their family even though their wife earned more overseas. Besides the fact that they need to help their wife make a living, they also didn't want other people especially their in-laws to think less of them if they would just rely on their wife's remittances. Interviewees Joel and Ernesto, from the FGDs conducted, asserted that their in-laws respected them because they had jobs. They are not bums who simply waited for the remittances of their wives. "Some husbands invent compensatory ways to ensure that their power is retained in such forms as handling their in-laws, being good housekeepers, employing their own skills to add to the wife's earnings, and showing they are also competent 'mothers'" (Pingol 2001, 64).

In an interview with Boy, a husband of an nurse in London, it was interesting to find out that the wife even encouraged the husband

to quit his job in order to focus on his son full time. Boy agreed and resigned from his job. He assumed the role of a househusband. It was hard for him at first, but later found fulfillment in guiding and caring for his son on a full time basis. Boy was raised in a family where there was not much gender role differentiation. Others have been working as househusbands earlier. They are the ones who proved to be competent fathers; some even found satisfaction from assuming such role” (Pingol 2001, 35).

On Children’s Education and Socialization

A good education for migrant families has been established by studies as one of the primary reasons for working abroad. Among our respondents, the fathers admit that the decision to migrate was made by the couple after realizing that with only one parent and even when both are working, family income will not be sufficient to support their children’s education. They wish their children could go to private schools, buy the school supplies they need and have a better life than they had. Sadly, they also say it is their wives who had to work.

As quoted by Reyes, Melanie in her 2008 study on children of migrants, “unlike common perceived notions on children of migrant’s performance in school, children migrants did well especially during grade school compared to non-migrant children” (Scalabrini 2003). It was also evident that children of migrant mothers tended to score lower than the other children. This suggests the importance of the mother’s presence in the academic performance of the children (Battistella and Conaco 1996).

In our research, most of our student participants assert that they studied hard in order to repay the sacrifices made by their migrant mother. Angelica’s older sister even graduated valedictorian from Bataan Christian School. This implies that with the proper guidance especially by the father left behind, the mother’s absence is compensated to improve children’s academic performance. A recent study showed that children of OFW families have a significantly higher proportion of achievers than those in non-OFW families. They receive academic awards (47 percent vs. 32 percent); non-

academic awards (25 percent vs. 12 percent); and they join academic organizations (41 percent vs. 24 percent) (Edillon 2008).

In terms of modeling and mentoring, “the strength of family relationship particularly the children’s closeness to their parents, is reflected in the children’s choice of their parents as role models” (Scalibrini 2003). Children try to follow their parents’ footsteps. In our research where the husband’s (Jun) wife is a nurse who worked abroad for 15 years and still continues to teach nursing in the Philippines, 2 out of 3 of their children are nurses. The eldest already migrated in the US with her family. This is a clear example of how the children, in the case of Jun’s family, interpreted their mother’s choice to work abroad. They followed her footsteps to ensure a better life for their future.

However, in the FGD’s we performed in Bataan, 4 out of the 5 students have no plans of working abroad. They said that in the future, they wish to have a complete family and that they don’t want their future children to go through what they are experiencing – missing their absent mother.

SOCIAL COSTS

On Family’s Economic Well-being

While remittances are a great help in improving the quality of life of migrants and their families. For some low-income families however remittances do not significantly improve the lives of families. They also had developed consumer patterns that sometimes had put them in debt.

One study found out that, only a very small proportion of remitted funds seem to go to income-earning, job-creating investment and property acquisition. The remittances represent the most important social safety net of poor families, especially in times of disasters or difficult times. Far from being productive, remittances increase inequality, encourage consumption of imports, increase domestic prices for education and health and create dependency (Ferraren 2007).

However, as shown in other stories of left behind families in Arellano-Carandang’s study in urban poor communities,

“despite the gains of remittances, there is not much tremendous improvement in the lives of the families. The money being sent is just enough or sometimes hardly meets the demands and needs of the families left behind” (Carandang et al. 2007). There is not really much of a significant difference with regard to the family’s economic status as they remain poor. Hence, other priorities such as health considerations including hygiene-related health problems are taken for granted. Visit to doctors only occur when very ill. They are also vulnerable to “economic shocks” especially related to the country’s economic or political situation (Edillon 2008).

In the FGDs, Angelica, one of the high school interviewees shares that she always asks her OFW mother to buy her new things such as clothes and gadgets. When her mom comes home, she would ask her to go shopping. Her mother, who misses her very much and would like to repay her lost time with her daughter, would agree to buy her the things that she desires. Research shows that the spending habits of the family increase—shopping sprees, spending more on luxurious items and other non-essential buying. Consumerist practices have been prevalent among migrant families and so they become a target for commercial capital (Ferraren 2007).

On Husband’s Reversal of Roles and Parenting

When women migrate, their children are left to the care of other family members besides their husband. Since in most cases, the husband also works and has less time for the children, a sister or a mother of one of the couple looks after them. In one of the interviews, Jun’s children were raised by his OFW wife’s cousin who also lived in their house. When his wife went home from a 3-year work-contract in Saudi, she was very jealous to see her children closer to her cousin than her. She then decided to go home every year so that her children will get to know their real mom. “Those who left when their children were very young admitted being pained by the closer bonds established between their children and the surrogate caregivers” (Sobritchea 2003).

However, the men who become house bound and are fully dependent on their wives’ income feel threatened. They themselves

admit their diminished sense of self-worth as in-laws and other men look down on them (Pingol 2001). Serious problems can arise if the husband who has been used to monopolizing the decision-making role would insist on the same role exercised before her work abroad (Beltran, Samonte and Walker 1995, 31).

In our interviews, Joel, one of the fathers whose wife had been working abroad for two years, says: “*Na-culture shock ako pagkalis ni misis! Iba parin talaga ‘pag may kaagapay ka sa pagpapalaki ng mga bata.*” (I was in a state of culture shock when my wife left. It’s still better having a partner in raising your kids). Solo parenting is regarded as a negative aspect of the vicarious overseas experience because of the burden of taking care of the children with no partner (Beltran, Samonte and Walker 1995, 30).

It was discovered in other studies that fathers in families of migrant mothers felt more stress in their lives than fathers in non-migrant households. A higher percentage of husbands in migrant households admitted to drinking than fathers in non-migrant households. Daily and weekly alcohol intake was clearly higher for fathers in families of migrant mothers. The highest proportions of fathers using drugs were in families with migrant mothers (“Left Behind, Left Out” 2006).

Jun, one of the interviewees shared that during the time that he felt lonely while his wife was away, there was phase when he drank regularly with his peers. For him, it was his way of coping with his wife’s absence. In those days, he once mismanaged some of his wife’s remittances dedicated for the refurbishing of their home. He almost wanted to transfer his youngest child to a public school so that he could have more money to spend with his peers. Because of this, his wife lost her trust in him in regard to financial matters. His children also noticed this phase in his life. He was ashamed of it. Similarly in many cases, the vices (womanizing, drinking) of the father can lose the respect of the children. These kinds of fathers eventually lose their authority over the children as they are no longer being followed (Pingol 2001).

On Reproductive and Sexual Relations

When the wife leaves, the husband loses his sexual partner. The absence of their wives forces the men to confront their sexual needs. The more traditional men fear their dependence or neediness and doubt the loyalty of their own wives. Others kept working to divert themselves and pursued some other means of pleasure. Some however become alcoholics (Pingol 2001).

In our research, 8 out of 8 husbands admitted that they missed their sexual partner when she's away. They have their own ways of coping with their longing. Some found alternatives in dealing with the sexual urge such as focusing on the children and playing sports. Others however drink to ease the longing and go to clubs and strip joints. They also resorted to masturbation, claiming that they can be partially satisfied doing it by themselves. "*Sariling sikap nalang*" (masturbation) says one of the interviewees. Perry, a participant in the research, however shares having had a sexual relationship with a neighbor. He claims that this certain neighbor knew that he had a family. Their sexual affair made him cope with his sexual urge, and longing for the migrant wife.

"For other men, there is an interplay of the productive, the sexual, and the nurturing dimensions of the self. The primacy of one over the other cannot be ranked consistently. It may depend on the ages of the couple, the ages of the children, their class position, or the masculine code they have chosen to keep" (Pingol 2001). This was validated in our research in regard to sexual relations between husband and wife. Ernesto and his wife, who are already in their 50's, says that he and his wife are already old to pay much attention to their sex life. When asked if he's afraid that his wife might have an affair abroad, he said laughing "*Lipas na yun!*" (His wife is already too old for it). Oscar also said that at their age, which is late 40's; his relationship with the wife is more about companionship. It can be shown here that the sexual relationship of the husband and wife also depends on the ages of the couple whether or not sex still plays a huge part in their relationship.

The absence of one spouse and temporary separation has occasionally resulted in cases of infidelity or even in a reported suicide

of a wife. Separation and complete break-up of the family has taken place (Beltran, Samonte, and Walker 1995). In our field study, out of the 15 participants from 10 OFW families, one case resulted in the break-up of the marriage. Junior, when his wife worked in Hong Kong, lived with his son in his in-laws house. Without a job at that time, his in-laws did not like him. They saw him as a burden to their family. They controlled their daughter's remittances and told her lies about her husband's womanizing and drinking. The couple ended up separating because of the in-law's meddling.

Care Expectations from Migrant Mothers

Despite the material benefits and improved communication through new technology, families still long for the physical presence and quality caring of their mother.

Perry, one of the interviewees in our study said that his children were very mad at him when their mom left. They were angry with their father for allowing their mother to leave. "Regardless of the material benefits and possibly the care that these children left behind receive from their parents from abroad; children of migrant particularly of migrant mothers still consider the migration as a form of abandonment." Children have much higher expectations for mothers to provide care for the family even if they are working abroad. Though they recognize the economic benefits they are gaining, they do not recognize this as a form of care (Parrenas 2006).

The bond between mother and children is weak if the mother left them when they were still very young and the children have no early memories of her. Daughters often become closer to grandparents. In one case in our own field research, since a migrant's daughter couldn't consult his father about certain issues such as her first menstruation or her crush on boys, she confides these things to her grandmother. For mothers who left just after weaning their babies, the first vacation can be traumatic. They may have come to know their mothers later on but the weak bond made the mothers ineffective disciplinarians (Pingol 2001, 69-72). Children often do not see the economic contributions of their mothers unless they maintain their maternal duty of nurturing the family (Parrenas

2006).

Mothers often had to assert their influence over the handling of the money they sent home, either by re-channeling it to a more trusted or dependable child or relative, or by temporarily withholding the remittance. Many of the women mentioned the difficulty of dealing with their in-laws who often meddled in the day-to-day financial affairs of their own families (Sobritchea 2003). This is also the case in one of the interviews conducted in our research. We were surprised to find out that Niko's mom sends the remittances to her son, not the husband, and entrusts him to budget the money. Niko shares that he is also the one tasked to withdraw his mom's remittances from the bank and budgets for the family's expenses. Some OFWs entrust their remittances to other family members and not all to their husband. They do this to make sure that the money that they've worked hard for will not be mismanaged.

These days, OFWs have easier ways to communicate with their families in the Philippines with the use of information and communication technology. Most of the high school students in the interviews communicate with their mother through the cell phone and the internet. However, they claim that this is not enough. Angelica, one of the participants, had wished for her mom to be home especially when she reached puberty. She said: "*Kahet na nakakausap ko siya palagi, iba parin talaga 'pag nandidito si mommy.*" For her, it is not enough that she and her mom always communicated in cyber space. She wants her mother to be present with her. "Although the absence of parents are replaced by technological mechanisms (emails, cell phones), this will still not replace the emotional bonding if they were physically present. They will miss the growing up years of their children and their value formation" (Tanalega 2002).

ON CHILDREN'S GENERAL WELL-BEING

Weak emotional bonds

Children have different levels of acceptance or tolerance of their situation as migrant children depending on their "cognitive development" (Carandang et al. 2007). For pre-school children (0-5 years of age), there can be indifference and withdrawal of affection

from the biological mother to their surrogate mothers (could be their elder sister, aunt, or grandmother). For this age group, the absence of their mothers is somewhat accepted since no bonding has yet been established. However, rebuilding the affection with the mother might take a long and painful process. The adjustment for those children 6-16 years of age is more difficult because they had already known and established affection with their mothers.

Difficulty in making decisions

Children of OFWs also have difficulties in making decisions since they had to consult their guardians which may not really be able to decide and wait for the approval of the children's parents (Melgar and Boromeo n.d.)

Jerome, one of the high school participants in the FGD's conducted in Bataan, was brought up by his mom's sister. Both his parents worked in the Iraq when he was born. In the discussions, we noticed that he was shy, unlike the other student interviewees. When we asked about his mother, he simply said, "*I don't ask much from her*". Jerome's experience exemplifies the first category of 0-5 years old, as discussed by Melgar and Boromeo, where there is indifference and withdrawal of affection from the biological mother whom she hardly knows to their surrogate mothers. Jerome found a surrogate mother in his aunt.

Deep feelings of inadequacy in family life, abandonment, lack of intimacy and confusion

OFW children feel inadequate in the aspects of having a happy family life. This feeling of inadequacy coincides with feelings of adequacy in other aspects mostly in association with financial advantages. Older children in OFW families are unhappier with their situation relative to the other age groups. This is perhaps because these children were being assigned the care of their younger siblings and other responsibilities that are supposedly beyond their age (Edillon 2008). Parent-absent children have greater difficulty coping with such feelings as sadness, anger, confusion, anxiety, fear

and other emotions compared with those living with their parents (Battistella and Conaco 1996).

“The presence of a mother is still different from that of a father!”

This is what most of the children in our research say. All of them had hoped that instead of the mother being the one who works abroad, it should've have been the father. “Children of migrant fathers are more likely to say that their father left the Philippines to provide for the family, whereas children of migrant mothers more commonly claim that their mothers left to escape poverty” (Parrenas 2006).

In most cases, young adults with migrant mothers feel neglected and abandoned. They do not see their fathers performing the “caring” work in the family; rather they pass over the caring responsibilities to other women in the family, more often the eldest daughter (Parrenas 2005). This has been the experience of one of the participants in the FGD. When Jerna’s mom worked abroad, his father didn’t assume the household function that her mother left. Being the eldest daughter, she took over the household chores and care for her younger siblings. She told us that her studies had been greatly affected by this set-up. She wished for her mom to be home. The guidance counselor validated this description in a later interview when she said *“Napakabait niyang si Jerna, nakakaawa nga siya, maagang gumising para ihanda sa umaga and mga kapatid sa iskwela. Pagpasok niya sa school kitang kita na puyat siya...masipag din kasi siya magaral kasi. Panganay din kasi.”* [Jerna is such a kind daughter She wakes up very early to prepare her siblings to school When she comes to school it is obvious that she has not gotten enough sleep as she is also a very diligent student. This is because she is the eldest in the family.]

When the father is the one left at home, there is an impact to children of the reversal of roles of fathers from being a main provider to that of a nurturer (Pingol 2001). There is also confusion and resentment of children over the transformation of traditional gender roles especially where most fathers refuse to perform nurturing roles even in the absence of the mothers (Yeoh and Lam 2007).

Adolescent Woes, Tantrums and Teenage Pregnancy

Some children grow up with anger and pain; they show their resentment by being undisciplined and resentful (Mission n.d.; Mendoza 2003). In a more recent study, children of solo parents have lower educational attainment, more behavioral problems, and a greater likelihood of experiencing teenage pregnancy. (Bryant 2007) On average, around 20% of children in all ages showed increased temper tantrums after the departure of the mother. Temper tantrums were higher in the adolescent age groups, a naturally “rebellious” phase where stubbornness and disobedience is already strong.

On Education

Despite improvements in access to better education and improved school performance, evidence also shows that when it is the mother who leaves, the school performance of their children is adversely affected. In a recent study, around 10% of older children (15-18 years) showed lower concentration levels. Educational performance of children left behind by migrating mothers was clearly lower than that of non-migrant households; The highest proportion of children obtaining the lowest scores in all three subjects were children of migrant mothers and the highest proportion of children obtaining the highest bracket of scores (over 75) were children of working mothers (“Left Behind, Left Out” 2006).

Most children of migrant parents dream of finishing college education. However, there are a great number of them who are not able to finish school for the simple reason that they would prefer to work abroad and get a high salary even without having a college diploma (Anonuevo). Anxieties experienced by the children of migrant workers is seen in their school performance, health and relations with members of the family. A Soroptomist survey of Quezon City states the alarming increase in the incidence of school drop-outs, ranging from 15-30% in the five districts surveyed (Beltran 1995, 30).

LIFE NARRATIVES

The characters in this section were already mentioned in the discussion of the social benefits and costs of female labor migration. Here is an in depth look at their stories.

I. JUN AND HIS DAUGHTER KAT

Jun manages a canteen in a hospital in Dagupan, Pangasinan. His wife, Fe, worked as nurse in Saudi until their children were in high school. They have 3 children. Their eldest is already a nurse in the US while the youngest just finished nursing and also plans to work abroad. Kat, their, 2nd child, however is currently taking Medicine. Fe is now a college professor teaching nursing in a local university in Dagupan.

JUN

Jun and Fe had been married for 31 years. They live in Dagupan City, Pangasinan. Fe is a nurse. She now teaches nursing in a local university in Pangasinan. Jun, however, runs a canteen in a hospital near their home. Fe used to work as a head nurse in one of the hospitals in Saudi Arabia. She stopped working there 10 years ago and pursued her teaching career in Dagupan.

They had their first born only after five years after they got married. Fe had been working abroad even before they had children. Their first child, Kristeen, was even born in the Middle East.

Jun and Fe had agreed that they could save more money for the family if one of them will grab the opportunity to work overseas. Already by that time in the early 80s, nurses were in demand all over the country. Fe had the privilege to work in the Middle East.

In the early 80s, the Internet and cellular phones were not yet invented. Jun and Fe only communicated through letters. They wrote each other as regularly as possible to communication.

The couple knew that it would be difficult raising the children by only one of them. Fe however was secure and confident that her husband will do a good job in raising them. Fe's cousin Nida helped Jun rear their children. Nida lived with them in their home.

She became the surrogate mother to their children in their early years.

When Fe comes home to the Philippines for a vacation in between contracts, she had noticed that her children didn't know her. They even responded more to her pictures than her actual presence when they first meet her after a long time. Fe grew jealous of this. She had felt that her children had grown to love her cousin more than their own mother. When her second child, Kat, was four years old, the couple no longer asked for Nida's help in their home.

Fe: *“Kapag umuuwi ako sa bahay nung maliliit pa ang mga bata, ituturo nila yung picture ko at sasabihin, “yan si mommy”. Di nila alam na ako pala yung nasa picture. Parang selos ang naramdaman ko sa pinsan kong si Nida dahil mas malapit pa sa kanya ang bata kaysa sa'kin na nanay niya.”* (When I come home, they my children knew my pictures more. I was so jealous that they were closer to Nida.)

When his wife is abroad, Jun had the privilege of having a support system nearby. His family lived only a couple of blocks from his house. This had been a great deal of help in raising the children. Jun grew closer to his children because of his wife's absence. He felt more responsible. He was afraid that something bad would to them. He also wanted to spare Fe the worries if something happens to the kids because she would just feel helpless being far from them. There was a time that Kat, their second child broke her arm to a bicycle accident. Jun hid Kat's casted arm from the camera so that Fe wouldn't notice it from the pictures that he mailed to her.

Jun: *“Takot na takot ako kung may mangyari sa kanila. Noong napilayan ‘yang si Kat, itinatago ko sa mga picture yung kamay niya para di mapansin ng nanay niya.”* (I was so afraid that something bad might happen to the children. I hid Kat's casted arm from the pictures so that my wife wouldn't notice.)

In one of those years that Fe was away, there was a phase that Jun had peers who drank regularly. Almost every night after work, Jun would spend time with his friends through late hours.

Because of this, he had mismanaged some of Fe's remittances. Some of the money dedicated for the refurbishment of their home was spent elsewhere. There was even a time that Jun even considered transferring his youngest son – Pong – to a public school for cheaper tuition. Fe lost trust in him when it came to money matters even to this day. In those days, Jun's image as a husband and father was frowned upon by his in-laws. They looked at him as an irresponsible husband who burned Fe's hard-earned remittances.

Such a difficult phase in the couple's life only lasted a year. Jun eventually stopped seeing his peers. He had done his best in winning back his in-law's trust and he did. He turned out to be a loving responsible father and husband to his family.

Jun never had an affair with another woman. He proved to be trustworthy of his wife. For him, raising their children well was the ultimate priority. However, since the sexual urge is a normal, Jun said that there many ways in dealing with the longing. Jun focused his attention on other things. He kept himself busy with the children and his job. In his free time, he gambles moderately. He played *Majong*, *Bingo* and *Tong-its* with his family and friends. He said that keeping oneself busy is one of the best ways in fighting sexual temptation. He also said that when the time comes that one couldn't really beat the feeling of the sexual desire; one can do it by himself.

Jun: “*May mga paraan naman para maiwasan ang mga tukso. Maghanap ka dapat ng ibang paglilibangan.*” (There are a lot of alternatives to draw away temptations.)

KAT

Kat is the second child of Jun and Fe. She has two other siblings - an older sister and a younger brother. Fe had been working in Saudi as a nurse even before they were born. She had work-contracts for 2-3 years. In between contracts, she stays in the Philippines with her family. Her last job in Saudi was when Kat was 15 years old until she finally decided to stay in the Philippines to teach nursing at a local university in Dagupan.

Since her father was also busy with his work, Kat and her siblings were also raised by her mom's cousin Nida, who lived with them in their home. They had maids who took care of the household chores.

When her mom visits the Philippines, Kat felt estranged from her mom because she had grown to love her guardian who was always present with them. Her mom however had tried to win the hearts of her children whenever she was home.

When they were growing up, Kat and her siblings lived a few blocks away from her grandparents, aunts and uncles, and cousins' homes. They grew up as a community. Kat believed the presence and closeness of her extended families had eased the burden of not having a complete family.

Kat had noticed then that her sister, being the eldest, had become strict with them when they were growing up. She assumes that perhaps, her sister became more responsible because of the absence of her mother. Somehow, Kat felt that her sister had taken such role to help her father watch over them.

Kat: “*Kapag wala si Mommy, lagi kami pinagsasabihan ni Ate. Nagiging strict siya saaming magkapatid. Siguro, nagpapaka-ate siya dahil wala si Mommy.*” (My older sister became strict with us when my mom was away.)

There were times when Kat had wished that her mother was always present. At the height of the Dengue outbreak, Kat and her sister were diagnosed for the disease when they were in high school. It was one of those times that she had prayed that the comforting presence of her mother was there to give them comfort and strength.

Kat: “*Noong high school, nung nagka-dengue kami ni Ate, nasa Saudi si Mommy no'n. 'Yun yung time na talagang hinanap ko mommy ko. Sa mga ganoong pagkakataon mo aasahan ang kalinga ng isang mommy.*” (When my sister and I were sick of dengue fever, I really wished that the comforting presence of my mom were there.)

Kat and her siblings went to private schools. She acknowledges

her mother's sacrifices abroad in the quality of education they have experienced. Kat is now a medical student in the University of the East and is being supported by her sister who also works as a nurse in the US.

Although her mom worked abroad, Kat didn't experience being more financially well-off than her other classmates. Since she studied in a private school, most of her classmates were also well-off. Kat worked hard in school. She believed that doing well in school is a somehow her way of paying back her mother's sacrifices for them.

Kat's father had a good relationship with his children. Kat said that her dad had tried to make up for their mother's absence. He made sure that nothing bad happened to them. There was however a phase when her father had regular peers whom he drank with almost every night for a period of time. There was a time that some of her mother's remittances were mismanaged by his father. Her mother had lost trust in him when it comes to finances since then up to this day. Despite what had happened Kat never lost respect for his father. She believes that he had done well in raising them especially in those times that he raised them all by himself.

When her mom was abroad, Kat never got to communicate with her regularly. At that time, there were no emails, Internet, or cellular phones. Her mom wrote them letters every month. She understood her mom's choice to work overseas. She believed that her mom did it for their family's well-being and education. She attributes to her mom's hardships their family's privileges of a better life.

Kat doesn't have plans on working abroad like her mother in the future. This is the reason why she went to Medical School instead of becoming a nurse. She intends to practice medicine in the country. Kat's siblings however followed their mom's footsteps. They became nurses. Kat's older sister is now a nurse in Pennsylvania. She and her family had migrated there in 2006. Kat's brother had just finished his course in nursing. After passing the nursing board exam, he also intends to join their older sister in the US to find work.

2. OSCAR AND HIS DAUGHTER ANGELICA (FGD)

Oscar is a businessman in Bataan. His wife has been working in

London as a baby sitter for seven years. Before, Oscar and his wife both worked abroad until Oscar decided to go back to the Philippines to be with Angelica and her three other siblings. His wife regularly visits them every year in the country.

OSCAR

Oscar and his children live in their own house separate from extended family members. Since his wife is not present at home, he does the household chores with the help of their maids. He got used to washing clothes and cooking. It didn't matter to him being the man to be doing the housework. He was used to doing chores when he was still working in the US. His children also learned household duties such as cooking, cleaning the house, washing the dishes, and washing clothes.

During the time that his children reached puberty, Oscar, being both the mother and father in the house, taught his daughters about the bodily changes they will encounter. He taught them about menstruation. He believed that even if their mom isn't always with them, he can raise his children well through proper communication and guidance. He finds it very important that the children could approach him when they needed someone. He also acknowledges the important role of the extended family members who were always there to give his children guidance.

Oscar: *“Noong nag-dalaga ‘yang si Angelica, ako pa mismo ang nagturo sa kanya tungkol sa menstruation. Wala kasi ang mama niya dito at importante na maturuan sila sa mga ganoong bagay.”* (When Angelica reached puberty, I taught her about menstruation. It is important to get your children informed especially since their mother is not here to teach them about it.)

Oscar claims that at their age, he and his wife's relationship now is more about companionship. The urge for sex is somehow replaced by his desire to focus on the children's welfare. In order to compensate for the sexual longing, he masturbates instead. He says, *“Sariling sikap nalang!”* (masturbation), and then laughs. There was

never a time that he had an affair or paid for sex because of his wife's physical absence.

Sometimes, Oscar tells his wife that when the time comes that she wanted to look for another man; she just has to tell him. His wife in response would always say that there can never be another man for her but him. He and his wife are very open with each other. She even knows about the things that Oscar does when he goes out with his friends.

Oscar has a group of friends who occasionally go out. He calls it his "Boys Out." Sometimes, they do go to beerhouses where there are other women. He claims that he just goes there for entertainment and not to enter into relationships with other women. His wife knows about this and understands that it's what men usually do for entertainment.

Both Oscar and his wife together decide on family matters like the family budget and the children's education. However, he doesn't tell his wife anymore about problems which can solve on his own. He doesn't want to give his wife any more problems since she's very far away, alone, and working hard.

Oscar encourages his wife to save for her own as long as she gives her share for the family's needs. He invests the family's savings in businesses such as condominium units, livestock (piggery) and educational plans.

Oscar's wife comes home every two years. When his wife is abroad, he uses the Internet to chat and call his wife almost everyday. He and his daughters enjoy video conferencing with their mother frequently over the Internet. Oscar claims that because of information and communication technology, it's as if his wife is always there with them.

Oscar relationship with his in-laws is not good. They have been giving him a hard time ever since the day he married his wife.

Oscar: "*Palamunin nga ang tawag sa'kin, lalo na pag nakainom na ang byenan ko!*" (When my father in-law is drunk, he calls me a burden to his daughter directly at my face.)

Oscar confronts his in-laws when they tell him directly that

he's just another mouth to feed by the wife. He explains to them that he and his wife shares equally for the family's budget (35,000 each) In order to avoid conflict with in-laws, he encourages his wife to send his in-laws money directly to them. He said that it always becomes an issue when the money is being sent through him.

Oscar: "*Dapat mayroong batas na nagbabawal sa pakikialam ng mga byenan at bayaw!*" (There should be a law prohibiting the meddling of the in-laws)

There were times that he and his wife quarreled because of the meddling of his in-laws. He said that even though he's not having an affair, his in-laws still believe that he has another woman.

Oscar: "*Kahit naman wala akong ibang kalaguyo maliban sa anak nila, ang tingin parin ng byenan ko, may kabit ako!*" (Even if I'm not doing anything wrong, they still think that I'm having an affair.)

Although he worked for a long time abroad and his wife still earns for the family baby-sitting in London, Oscar doesn't want the same kind of life for his children. For this reason, he invests so much for the children's education so that they will be competent in building their own career in the future. He wishes for his children to someday have a complete family of their own.

Oscar believed that everyone should be given equal educational opportunities in order to achieve more areas of competencies in the job market. He suggested that the Philippine Embassies in other countries should employ programs to educate OFWs in their respective countries for skills development. He proposed that OFWs should be given basic training on the use of ICTs in order for them to communicate better with their families at home. He also recommended that Filipinos should be trained to put up businesses so that they wouldn't have to work in other countries in order to survive.

ANGELICA

Angelica was only six years old when her mom left. After a few months, her father followed and stayed with her mom in America for six years. Angelica and her siblings grew up with their grandparents until her father went back to the Philippines when she was 12.

When Angelica reached high school, she had really wished for her mother's presence. She said that everything was new during the age of puberty. Thus, it was her father who guided her through menstruation and her adolescence. When her mother left, she became closer to the helpers in the house.

Angelica studies hard in school. Because of her mother's sacrifices in working abroad, she believes that doing well in school is her means of repaying her parents' hardships for them.

Angelica became a daddy's girl. She got closer to her father because of her mother's absence. However, although she shares a lot of personal things with her dad especially when she has problems, she still finds it difficult to talk to her dad about suitors. It's easier for her to tell her mom but she isn't.

Angelica: "*Iba parin ang nanay. Mahirap magkwento sa daddy tungkol sa mga manliligaw.*" (It's hard to talk to my dad because he is a guy. It's easier if it were my mom.)

Angelica said that if she had a choice between her father and mother being the one present at home, she would choose her mom. Even if her mom is away, Angelica asked her permission about entering into a relationship with a suitor. She communicates with her mom almost everyday using webcam and chat over the Internet.

Angelica: "*Iba parin talaga ang nanay sa tatay. Sana andito ang mommy ko at lumaki kami nang kumpleto.*" (The care of a mother is still different. I wish that my mother is here with us. I wish for a complete family.)

However, Angelica sometimes envies those families who are

complete. She said that a barrier grows between families who are apart. She has no plans of working abroad and be away from her own family in the future.

3. MR. CACNIO AND HIS DAUGHTER MARJ

Mr. Cacnio is an accountant who lives with his two sons in Cubao. His eldest, daughter Marj, is also an accountant who is now living and working in Makati. Mr. Cacnio's wife, Rose, is a nurse in Norway and regularly comes home every six months.

MR. CACNIO

Mr. Cacnio was working as an accountant in a finance department of a company when he married his wife. His wife was then an overseas nurse working in Norway. When they had their first child, a daughter named Marjorie, her wife stopped working abroad. She didn't want to work as a nurse here in the Philippines because the pay was meager and because she didn't like the attitude of doctors towards nurses here. She became a full-time housewife for a year, while Mr. Cacnio continued working for their new family.

However, his wife felt useless as a housewife. He knew that his wife wanted to go back to her old work thus leaving the family in the Philippines. At first he didn't want to permit her to go. There was no need to go abroad and leave the family since he was earning well for them. But he couldn't bear his wife feeling so sad and disempowered. After awhile, he agreed. Their daughter was just a year old that time.

During those days, there was no email or text messaging, the young couple communicated through weekly mail. For the first few years, they consistently wrote each other every week. As time passed, they decided to not continue it because it made them miss each other more and it was just harder for them.

It was not an easy task to raise a daughter. Since he was also working full time, he had to make sure that he was home at a certain time to attend to his child. It was indeed a real challenge for a young father act both as a mother and a father to Marj. He had a yaya to help him but she helped only with the physical needs of the child. Mr. Cacnio read all the books he could to learn how to raise a child.

After a year, it became easier. Raising his daughter eventually became part of who he was.

If not for a good family background that made him a man without any issues within himself, it would have been harder to trust his wife and harder for him to resist temptation. Most of his friends would usually invite him to go to dirty saunas but he always thought of Marj. He always thought about the consequences of his prospective actions and how the effect will ripple to his loved ones. Because of this thinking, he was able to fight temptation. During those days, he would go home right after office and take Marj to Jollibee. He had a special connection with his daughter that made it easier for him to become a single parent.

His wife at first had a working set-up wherein she was in Norway for 10 months and then goes home for two months. Eventually, because his wife was valued in the hospital she was working at, she was given a special set-up wherein she could go home every six months to her family. During the months apart, he and his wife rarely communicate on the phone. The wife trusted his husband to make all the decisions at home while she is gone. When his wife comes home, she then becomes in command and he takes those six months as his rest from being the one in-charge. He sees the set-up in a positive light and even says that after six months of being apart he falls in love with her all over again when she comes back.

The six months here and six months abroad set-up was hard for the younger boys. He usually brings his sons at 11 p.m., after taking their mother to the airport, to Burger Machine in their pajamas to entertain them. The children never asked why their mother always leaves. He also didn't explain it to them because he felt that it was no use rubbing in the situation to them. He waited for his children to ask the questions and speak out about it, but they never did.

Raising their children was a long learning process especially because the sons are severely affected by their mother's departure. He had a hard time disciplining the middle child because he seems disinterested in school unlike the youngest that excelled. There was a point when he punished his middle child physically when he was

only seven years old. It came to a point that the child became afraid of him and he then realized that he was only damaging his son. He then hugged his son and never punished him physically ever again.

He was also the butt of jokes because of his situation. His officemates called him a “houseband,” they even made stories that he was sleeping with his mother-in-law. Despite these jokes, he never truly got affected, instead, he even added to their stories.

He didn't have a good relationship with his in-laws specifically his mother-in-law. There was a turning point where he slapped Marj's hand to punish her. As Marj was crying, she ran to her grandmother. The grandmother (her mother-in-law) told him that he shouldn't punish his daughter. He said that if ever she ever intervenes with the way he's raising her daughter again, he will also punish her mother in-law (“*papaluin din kita*”). After that, his mother in-law packed her bags and never returned ever again. When his wife went home, he said what happened and the wife said it was okay.

He believes that the sexual relationship of a married couple is just the icing on the cake or the thing that sparks a relationship. Love, after a long time, becomes the overwhelming respect for your partner. He never wanted the set-up that his family has, but for him, he has to make the most out of it. “I was stuck in this situation, so all I can do is make the most out of it,” he said. He plays a hard role of being a girl for his daughter, a mother to his children and at the same time -- a father. He might not be perfect at it but he's good at it. He learned how to grow with his children.

He always imagines what his life would have been if he didn't get married. He regrets getting married and not following his siblings in America when he had the chance when he was younger (when he had his VISA). He usually daydreams that by this time he would have been a hotshot accountant living life as a bachelor with a great condo in New York and with a cool sports car. He also wishes that his wife was always with him while raising their children, but everyone of course wishes for a perfect life which one rarely gets. With all that has happened to him and to his family's life, he believes it was an experience where he knew himself and learned what he can do. He also believes that if not for Marj, he wouldn't have been able to bear their set-up as a family and they would have separated a long

time ago.

Now that his children are nearing adulthood, he and his wife usually jokes about their future set-up. His wife said that he will not go home anymore and will just send money to him. He however intends to settle in Alaminos, Pangasinan where he has a resort and a rice field.

His recommendation to lessen the social cost of migration to the OFWs and families left behind is to establish an organization manned by psychologists for OFWs that will serve as a support group to them. Government should also give seminars on how husbands, wives and children of OFW families can play their roles better with their situation. Embassies should also have psychologists where OFWs can go to tend to their psychological and emotional needs.

MARJ

Marj is the eldest of three siblings. She has two younger brothers. Even before her parents got married, her mother was already a nurse in Norway. When her parents got married, they played the traditional role of the father being the breadwinner, while the mother was the housewife. She quit her job as a nurse and tried to be a stay-home mom. However, it wasn't long when she missed her life being independent and empowered by earning a living. After a year, her parents decided that her mom should follow her heart and work again abroad. Her mother left her at the young age of one leaving her to the care of her father and grandmother. Her mom went back to the hospital she worked for in Norway and was able to get a set-up of working for six months and taking a leave for the next six months to be with her family in the Philippines every year. Marj is now 25 years old and the set-up has been like that ever since.

As she was growing up, she never felt that there was something missing in her life. Instead, she even felt that she was more privileged than the other children of OFWs because her mother gets to stay here for six months every year, unlike the other mothers who are only able to go home once in two years. She only misses her mother during recitals or performances where a mom is expected to do her

daughter's hair and make-up. Marj learned to do things on her own.

It was her father who really took care of them and reared her and her brothers. He was always present and acted both mom and dad to them. Her father never told them the reason why their mother always left every six months. During the milestones in her life such as her first period, it was her grandmother from her mom's side who was there for her. Their long-time nanny also became her mother figure and confidante.

During her early years, she even hated it when her mother was home. She got used to her not being home as long as she can remember and she finds it annoying that her mom, someone who is not always there, changes the rules and becomes stricter when she's home. Since she was used to her father being more lenient when it comes to studying and cleaning the house, she had a hard time adjusting to the rules of her mama when she's in the Philippines for six months. She was happier when her mama was not around because they are not disciplined stringently. It was only when she reached high school, when the whole family had a trip to the US, that she saw the fun side of her mother. From then on, she became closer to her. However, her mother was never touchy or affectionate to her. She was never used to being hugged by her mom. It is her younger brothers who are sweeter to her mom.

Her mother rarely communicates with them when she is working abroad. She only calls when there are special occasions such as graduations or birthdays. There is no use in calling for it will only make them miss each other more. They also don't call when they are sick because they don't want their mom to get lonely.

Marj never despised her mother for choosing to work abroad. She respects that her mother is a strong and empowered woman who finds fulfillment in working as a nurse and earning her own money. Even if her father never explained to her why her mother leaves every six months, she never felt there was a need to explain. Ever since, she felt that their family was normal.

Even if Marj feels that she never had a problem with having an OFW mother, she said that she feels that if her mother was around, maybe she wasn't as tough as she is right now. She would have been more affectionate to her brothers and would have had

different perspective on things. All of her influences were from her dad. They have a very close relationship and it is because of her father that she took up accounting and all her other principles and values came from her father. She also doesn't believe that she needs a man in her life to be happy. Just like her mom, she knows she can be happy with or without someone. She also doesn't like kids.

However, when she gets to have a family in the future, she doesn't want to leave her children and work abroad unless it is severely needed. She believes that there cannot be two full-time working parents, one has to stay home and take care of the kids (in their case it was the father) or else the kids will suffer.

Now that she is working, she also doesn't believe in the Filipino tradition of contributing money to the family unless it is really needed. She believes that the value of the money to whom she is giving it to is more important than just for tradition's sake. She believes in paying it forward and not looking back. She is currently paying for the schooling of her nanny's child. Her mom, now that she is working, expects her to contribute money to the household, however she finds this unnecessary. During conflicts like this, it is the father who mediates and is the one who tells the mother why the daughter doesn't believe in giving even if it is not needed. She doesn't usually fight with her mom, if ever they have arguments it is only about having messed-up things and an untidy room.

4. JOEL SR. AND HIS SON JOEL JR. (FGD)

Joel is a fireman and farmer in Bataan. His wife has been working as a caregiver in Belgium for two years. They have three children. Two of their children are college students in Manila while their youngest son, Joel Jr., is a high school student in Bataan Christian School. Since his wife has just been gone for two years, Joel's family is still adjusting to her absence.

JOEL SR.

Joel and his wife have both been planning to work abroad for a long time. His wife had a chance to work in Saipan as a caregiver so she took the opportunity. She wants earn more to give her children

a good education.

Joel and his wife have been shared the house work ever since. When she left, Joel didn't have a hard time adjusting to the daily tasks in the house. They also taught their children to perform chores in the house. However, his youngest son (Joel Jr.) is still adjusting with his mother's absence. He was already 12 when she left. He's very close to his mom.

Joel does his best to keep a good relationship with his sons. He encourages Joel Jr. to take part in sports programs such as basketball. For him, this is a form of father and son bonding. However, when it came to going out at night, he is bit strict with his son. Joel thinks that being out late is more dangerous these days because of fraternities. Thus, he gives his son a curfew and also advice him not to join gangs. He wants his children to be close to him and be open with him as much as possible.

The first few months after his wife left were the hardest. He lost his partner in raising the children. For him, it is very difficult to raise the children alone. They are all adjusting to their present situation.

Joel Sr.: "*Para akong na-culture shock nung mga buwan pagka-alis ng asawa ko!*" (I was in a state of culture shock after my wife left.)

Joel's wife often warns him about other women. He however always promises to her that he will never have an affair. This would be unfair to her and their children. He knows that their children are big enough to notice it when he's doing something wrong. He wants to make a good example to his children.

In coping with the sexual urge, Joel admits that he just does it on his own (masturbates). He said that he doesn't need to have another woman in order to satisfy the sexual longing.

Joel Sr.: "*Sariling sikap nalang, pwede naman.*" (I can be satisfied by myself.)

When he got married, Joel refrained from going to beerhouses. He never resorted to drinking to suppress the feeling of

loneliness caused by his wife's absence. He said: "*Barkada ko nalang mga anak ko.*" (That his peers now are only his son) and that they play basketball as a hobby.

Joel and his wife share the family's budget. They both decide on family matters. He and his wife have agreed that she will only work abroad for a maximum of five years. It is difficult for them to save because a huge part of their earnings go to the children's education.

Joel has no problems in relation to his in-laws. They don't meddle with their decisions. He claims that his in-laws can't say anything bad about him because he is also working, has his own house, and contributes to the family budget. He does his best to earn like his wife.

Joel Sr.: "*Hindi ako tambay kaya walang masasabi sa'kin ang mga byenan ko. Naghahati kami ng asawa ko sa mga gastusin ng pamilya.*" (I'm not a bum. My in-laws can't say anything about me. Both my wife and I spend for the family's expenses.)

Joel wants his children to finish a course in college that would enable them to build a career in their own country. In the future, he wishes for his children to work here in the Philippines and so that they will be complete.

Joel Sr.: "*Mas maganda parin ang sama-sama ang pamilya!*" (It is always best when your family is complete.)

JOEL JR.

Joel is a 3rd year high school student in Bataan Christian School. His parents have been planning to work in another country since he was in elementary. His mother worked abroad as a caregiver when he was 12. His father wasn't able to leave because he had to manage a farm at home. He lives with his dad in their own house. Both his siblings study and live in Manila.

Joel misses his mom's cooking. He said that when his father cooks, it's just always fried. He misses his mom especially during

occasions such as birthdays and Christmas. However, Joel claims that nothing really changed much in the house. They all have chores and his mom always went home late when she was still here. He was used to being alone. It made him more independent.

Joel's mom's absence didn't affect his schoolwork. He claims that nothing really changed in his school performance when his mom left. It's still the same. Joel speaks with his mother through chat, calls, and webcam through the Internet. He said that technology has somehow eased the burden of longing for your loved ones.

Joel Jr.: *“Dahil sa internet, parang nababawasan ang pagka-miss ko kay Mommy.”*

Joel maintained a close relationship with his father especially since they are the only ones left in Bataan. They spend quality time by playing basketball. When they talk about his future plans, he shares with his dad that he also likes to work abroad while he's single in not yet married. He wishes for his family to be complete once again.

5. ERNESTO AND HIS SON JEROME

Ernesto is a tricycle driver in Bataan. He and his wife met in Iraq in the 70's where they both worked. His wife now works as a caregiver in Myanmar. They have 3 children. Their eldest son, Jerome, was raised by his aunt because they both were still working abroad when he was born. Jerome is now in high school in Bataan.

ERNESTO

Ernesto worked abroad since 1976. This is where he met his wife. He was an employee in an air-conditioning company while his wife was a factory worker. However, he was unable to go back to the Middle East when the war in Iraq began in the 1990s. His wife now works in Myanmar and comes home every six months.

Ernesto and his wife have three children. His eldest son, Jerome, grew up with the latter's aunt. The aunt raises him to this day. Ernesto claims that he and Jerome have a good relationship. He

often communicates with him. Even though Jerome didn't grow up with them, Ernesto said that he's always there for him. He bonds with him from time to time and jokes with him about matters of the heart.

In maintaining a family, Ernesto and his wife had to sacrifice a lot. They grab the opportunity that there is work. However, he had a lot of help from the relatives in raising his children. His house is a block away from them.

Ernesto acknowledges that her wife's remittances are very good for their children's education. He wants to invest for his children's future so that they wouldn't have to work in other countries when they grow up.

Ernesto shared that at their age, he and his wife are not anymore sexually active. He also doesn't worry that wife might have an affair abroad. He said jokingly, "*Lipas na yun!*" (That his wife is already old to still be sexually active) His wife suspects that he has another woman when he fails to call her cellular phone regularly. Because of this, he makes sure that they always talk on a regular basis. He said that his wife is working hard abroad and it would be unfair to her if I repay all her hardships with betrayal.

In relation with his in-laws Ernesto said that they already have respect for him because he also contributes for their upkeep. His wife always reminds him to share the remittances with his in-laws from time to time. Ernesto said that such a gesture had been an old Filipino tradition in order to win the hearts of the in-laws.

Ernesto: "*Tradisyon na nating mga Pilipino na makisama sa pamilya ng asawa. Kaya paminsan minsan, binibigyan ko rin ng pera ang byenan ko.*"

JEROME

Jerome is a 2nd year high school student in Bataan Christian School. His mother has been working abroad even before he was born. He was raised by his aunt. His father, who also worked overseas before, is a driver in Bataan. His mom comes home every 6 moths.

Jerome is the eldest of three children. Although he was raised

by his aunt, he still has a good relationship with his father who works hard for them. Jerome said that he doesn't get to talk much about personal matters with his mom. He's closer to his aunt because she's the one who raised him. He also doesn't ask much from his parents.

In the future, Jerome doesn't plan to work abroad like his mother. Someday, he wants to have a complete family.

6. BOY (FATHER)

Boy and his wife were college sweethearts before they got married. He was then taking up civil engineering while his wife was taking up BS Nursing. They had already agreed before that she would practice nursing abroad because she will definitely earn more. The couple got married in 1984. Boy worked for two years in Saudi Arabia while his wife was left in the Philippines to gain experience as a nurse in the country. Boy went back to the Philippines in 1986 and their son TJ was born the next year.

In 1989, Boy's wife began working abroad in order to earn more for their son's future. She first worked in Saudi Arabia for 10 years. In 1999, she transferred to London where she still works to this day. She is now a citizen there and wishes to petition her family when TJ also becomes a nurse. Since then, she visited the Philippines every year and stayed for 45 days with her family.

Boy and his son first lived in Marikina City with his in-laws for five years. Though he had a full time job, living with his wife's extended family was a big help in raising TJ. In 1992, Boy and TJ moved to San Fernando, Pampanga. They lived in a house just in front of Boy's parents' home. Although they didn't have maids, Boy's mother helped him look after TJ.

Boy never had helpers in their home. He and his wife used to share the household chores. When his wife left, Boy did all the tasks from cooking to washing clothes and cleaning. As a man, it was never an issue for him to do the house chores.

In 1998, the couple agreed that Boy should resign from his job in order to rear their son and focus on his well being on a full time basis. Since his wife's remittances were big enough for them to live-off, Boy agreed. It was however a big adjustment for him at first with nothing else to do but stay home and watch after his son.

However, he was happy to make such decision. For him, it was very important to give a lot of attention to TJ since his mother is away.

Boy always explain to his son that his mother works hard abroad for his future and education. TJ understands their situation. He never gave them problems in school. He is a self-motivated student. Boy said that he never tutored him. He studied on his own. TJ has just graduated from college last year and just took the Nursing Board Exam last November. It is their plan to follow his wife in London after TJ gets a few years of work experience in the Philippines.

Raising his son is one of the greatest gifts in life for Boy. He's very happy when his son shares about personally things to him such as his love life. There are times however that they also quarrel. He said that it is normal for the both of them to argue and fight about certain things. Boy admits that he had a bad temper due to his diabetes. When he's mad, he doesn't cook for TJ. TJ however have learned to do chores on his own.

Boy: "*Kinareer ko talaga ang pagpapalaki sa anak ko!*" (I really do my best to be a good father.)

Boy had mentored TJ singlehandedly. He taught him good manners and respect for others. Being a father, he advices him on what he thinks is best for his well-being. Although he admits that good advice is not enough because once his son is out in the real world, he will have to decide on his own. Boy always tells TJ to quit his smoking. Since Boy knows that TJ has to learn quitting on his own, Boys asks TJ's girlfriend to help him quit the bad habit.

In the five years that they lived with his in-laws in Marikina, they never had major problems. However, in times that his in-laws always expect money from his wife, Boy always reminded them of his wife's sacrifices -- that it isn't easy being apart from your own family and that money doesn't grow in trees in London – it is hard-earned.

These days, Boy seldom visits Marikina. However, when they needed money, he personally delivers his wife's remittances to them. Just last year, Boy visited his sister in-law who was very sick. His wife paid for all the hospital bills.

When his wife is gone for many months, Boy admits that he misses her. He said that the sexual urge will always be there. It is natural. In coping with it, he drinks and goes to strip clubs and beerhouses before. Despite the absence of a sexual partner, Boy never had an affair. He is open with his wife that he sometimes drinks and goes out. His wife understands this. Boy said that being open to his wife has made her trust him more. And he will never do anything to lose that trust.

Boy: *“Paminsan minsan, mamimiss mo talaga asawa mo. Hinahanap mo talaga ang sex. Inaamin ko, lumalabas ako, pumupunta sa mga beerhouse na may mga sumasayaw na babae. Pero hangang doon lang. Ni minsan, hindi ako nagka-affair sa iba. Kinikuwento ko ito sa asawa ko at naiintindihan niya. Malaking bagay ang maging open kayong magasawa sa isat isa para maging matibay ang tiwala ninyo.”* (There are times, because I miss my wife, I drink and go to strip clubs. I never had any affair. I share this with my wife and she understands me. It is important to be open with your wife about these things)

Boy is not accustomed to using the computer and the Internet. He communicates with his wife regularly through the cellular phone. He said that there were times that he felt his wife’s loneliness when they talk on the phone – that she longed to be with her family – especially during the first five years that she was away.

For a month and a half every year, Boy’s wife is on a vacation with them. Boy used to make detailed written reports pointing out to where remittances go. His wife does not require it but for him, it was his way of showing his wife that he is responsible and worthy of her trust. His son TJ is very sweet in relation to his mother when she is home. His wife does her best to be close to TJ and make up for her long absence. Just last year, the 3 of them had an excursion in Hong Kong. Boy said that this is important in sustaining the family bond.

7. PERRY (FATHER)

Perry is 35 years old. He is a carpenter. He and his wife had been married for 11 years. His wife works as a tailor in Brunei. She had already been working there for two years. They share the expenses

for the family's upkeep. They have 3 children. Perry's mother helps him in raising the children.

When his wife left, Perry took over all household chores with the help of his mother. Although he was used to doing house chores even before he was married, it was difficult for him to adjust in maintaining the household singlehandedly especially in raising his three kids. For him, it was too overwhelming in the beginning.

Doing the household work is not an issue as to how unmanly it may seem for other people. He said that in life, one has to rise to the occasion especially when necessity calls for it. That's what life is all about, he said.

Perry: "*Sa buhay, kailangang magsikap lalo na kapag kailangan.*"

Perry's children got mad at him when their mother left for work. At first, they were angry with their dad for letting their mom leave. Of course, he explains to them that it was for their own well-being, education, and future. The wife's absence drew their family closer to each other. He bonds with his children at every opportunity. In those times that they long for her, they appreciate how lucky they are to still have each other and be together.

Perry visits his in-laws regularly even if his wife is abroad. He said that this is very important especially for the children so that they will have a good relationship with their extended family members.

Perry maintains good relations with his in-laws. However, he said that one cannot avoid that they become protective of his wife. His in-laws always report to his wife how Perry and the children are doing. His mother-in-law sometimes interferes with his decisions, he said. He and his wife quarrel sometimes because of this.

Perry has somehow gained the respect of his in-laws because he is a good provider, father, and husband. He also respects his in-laws. He said that maintaining good status with your in-laws is very essential for a good marriage to work.

Perry: "*Malaking bagay na maganda ang relasyon mo sa mga*

biyanan.”

In coping with the sexual urge due to his wife's absence, Perry masturbates to ease the longing. Because of this, he misses his wife even more. However, there was a phase that he had casual sex with his neighbor. He doesn't consider it as an affair. He said that his neighbor understood his situation and their relationship was purely physical.

Although he knows that his wife may meet other men abroad, he trusts his wife and believes that she will not dishonor his trust for her. They communicate regularly. Perry's wife calls him through the cellular phone regularly 2-3 times a week.

Although his wife earns more than him, Perry doesn't feel intimidated in his relationship with her. However, when it comes to money matters and the management of her remittances, he said that his wife is boss. This doesn't mean that his wife becomes dominating. They simply agreed that his wife will decide on money matters. Perry still maintains his role as the head of the house. His wife and children continue to respect and love him because he is a good husband and father.

8. JUNIOR (FATHER)

Junior is 33 years old. He works as a driver in Pampanga to earn for a living. Before his wife decided to work in Hong Kong as a domestic helper, Junior and his family lived with his wife's parents. They were married for seven years and separated in 2005. Their son was five years old when they decided to part ways.

Junior and his wife were together for three years before his wife found work abroad. He and his son were left in the house of his in-laws. Junior's marriage was dissolved primarily by miscommunication and mistrust brought about by the meddling of the in-laws.

When his wife left for work overseas, his mother-in-law helped him raise his son. Junior helped in the household tasks after a whole days work. However, most of the family's decisions were made by his in-laws. They controlled their daughter's remittances. It was hard for him to assert himself because he was living in their

house.

Junior had a bad relationship with his in-laws especially with his father-in-law. He considered him as a burden to the family. He often called him “palamunin,” an extra mouth to feed. Even before they were married, his father-in-law didn’t like him. Living with him under the same roof was the most difficult thing that he had to do for his family.

Junior’s in-laws reported to his wife stories that were untrue. They said that he had illicit affairs and often came home drunk. His in-laws really wanted him out of their daughter’s life. They thought that he wasn’t good enough for her. He always wanted to punch his father-in-law’s face. There was even a time that he invited him to square off and box with him. He felt inadequate in the eyes of his in-laws. He hated them and to have left them and their daughter was the best decision he had made.

Junior didn’t have any affairs when he lived with his in-laws. His father-in-law was very strict and kept watch over his behaviors. As a coping mechanism to ease the longing for his partner, Junior masturbated to lessen the sexual urge. He also drank alcohol at night in order to sleep well.

Because of the meddling of the in-laws, Junior’s wife had lost trust in him. Instead, she believed the stories made by her family. His wife lost respect for him when she started earning for a living abroad. Junior thinks that perhaps, she also wanted him out of her life.

When he decided to give up on his marriage and leave the house, his in-laws kept his son, claiming that they could give him a much better life than he ever could. Junior decided to be with another woman who had given him all that was missing in his prior relationship. He now has a child with her.

9. JERNA (DAUGHTER)

Jerna is a 2nd year high school student in Bataan. She is the eldest among three children. She lives with her father in their own house. He works as a driver. Jerna’s mother however is a cook in Saipan. Jerna and her younger siblings are also looked after by her grandmother who lives near their home.

Jerna's mom used to take care of the household chores. When she left to work abroad, being the eldest daughter, Jerna took over the cooking, cleaning and caring for her younger siblings. Because of this, her time for her studies was affected. However, she tried her best to balance her time for her family and for her schoolwork. According to her guidance counselor, despite the very difficult situation that Jerna performs for her family, she is a very outstanding student maintaining top grades in class.

Jerna: "*Sana si Tatay nalang ang nagtatrabaho sa ibang bansa at hindi sa nanay. Mahirap pagsabayin ang pag-aaral at dami ng gawaing bahay.*" (I hope that instead of mom, it's my father who's working abroad. I wish my mom's here to help me with the house work. It's very difficult to balance my time for studies and house chores.)

Jerna loves her mom. She understood that her mother needed to work abroad for their well-being, especially for their education. She frequently speaks with her mother through the telephone. When they talk, her mom always encourages her to share about her life. However, Jerna, said that she's not used to telling her mom about her personal life.

In the future, Jerna doesn't plan to work abroad like her mother. For her, having to work abroad is only an option when it is most needed for the family's well-being. She said that someday, when she would have a family of her own, she wouldn't want her family to go through the same difficulties that she is now experiencing with her family.

10. NIKO (SON)

Niko is 17 years old. His father is a retired policeman. His mom is a seafarer. He was only 13 when she worked overseas. She comes back to the country after every eight months and stays for three months. Niko grew up with his grandmother when his mother worked abroad.

Niko and his two other siblings were taught to do chores in the house. They didn't have a hard time adjusting to the housework when their mom left for work. His older sister became more involved in cooking while he washed the clothes.

His mother sends the remittances to Niko. He's the one who budgets for the family's expenses. Because of this, he learned how to handle money carefully. His father understands it and believes that it would be best to teach their children how to budget money.

Niko studies hard in school. He wants to show his mom that they are doing fine even if she's not home. He regularly chats and talks to her on the phone. However, Niko wishes that it was his father who was working abroad instead of his mom. He claims that a mother's presence is very different from that of a father.

Niko: "*Iba parin pag ang nanay ang nasa bahay. Sana palagi naming siya kasama.*" (A mother's presence at home is still different. I wish she's always with us.)

Niko has no plans of working abroad in the future like his mom. He wants his family to be complete here in the Philippines. He however is very thankful for the support of his extended relatives while they were growing up. It made them cope with their situation easily.

CONCLUSION

There is indeed trade-off between the economic benefits and social costs of labor migration to the family left behind. Although the monetary benefits contribute remarkably for the children's education and their economic well-being, these still could not compensate for the absence of the migrant parent. It is more difficult especially for the social, psychological and emotional development of the children when it is the mother who leaves the family home. As reiterated in previous studies and interviews on children of migrants -- A mother's presence is still different.

In the focused group discussions and interviews, it appears that the general well-being of the family depends tremendously on how the father reacts to the wife's migration and his new role in the family. The children suffer when the father does not take over the caring role left by the mother. However, there are families who have done a great job coping with their situation. The husband sometimes

becomes more responsible. He makes sure that the needs of his children are given proper attention. Children from these families turn out to be responsible and finish school. There are times however, in situations when the father is unable to negotiate his new role as care giver, not only the migrant wife suffers but children as well. He turns to alcoholism and drugs, distant emotionally from his children and despised by specially his in laws. The children already lonely and abandoned at the loss of their mother who is their primary caregiver and whom they prefer to be physically present with them become distant and unhappy. They turn to their peers and extended families for comfort, love and affection. Others become more responsible, especially the eldest daughters who take over the reproductive roles of their mother.

In the stories however, behind the material benefits experienced by the family... behind the good education that children experience... and behind the responsibility and independence they learn, is an empty space that only a mother can fill.

Thus as has been rightly observed, if male migration had expanded women's roles female migration has reconfigured many aspects of the family (Huang et al 2003).

"There is thus a tension between what is good for the country versus what is good for the families and individuals, between economic gains and social costs, between short-term benefits and long-term impacts." (Huang et al. 2001)

As eloquently quoted:

"I guess the price paid for overseas employment is sometimes high – it separates families, it breaks them up sometimes and people can get maltreated. In fact, some have died already. [...] We cannot close our eyes to that but we cannot close our eyes either to the fact that if one million people came back to this country and could not find jobs, we'd all be in trouble." (Sto. Tomas, 1996: 226 in Huang 2003)

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