

Introduction:

Much has been written about the effects of split families on the well-being of children, particularly when the reason for the split is divorce, and particularly in western contexts. In this research we investigate the extent to which family structure influences children's educational outcomes, employment decisions, and emotional well-being among migrant and non-migrant families in the Philippines. We analyze data collected in two waves of in-depth interviews. In the first wave (2008-2009), we interviewed 40 high-school aged children in order to compare the experiences of those from households in which one or both parents were overseas with households that have remained intact in the Philippines. The second wave of data was collected in March – July 2013, and captured half of the same children interviewed five years earlier. In this analysis, we seek to understand the impact parents' overseas migration has had upon the lives of children who remain behind in the Philippines.

In the Philippines, divorce remains illegal, but split families have become increasingly common, in part because of ongoing large scale overseas labor migration. The migration of adult members of the family is not a new phenomenon, but early international migration was often male migration. Structural changes in many receiving countries have also created abundant job opportunities for women, often in the service sector and entertainment industries. The rapid growth in demand for female workers in these sectors has contributed to the large volume of overseas migration among women from the Philippines and other developing countries. In the 1990s, in Spain, for example, roughly 70 percent of documented migrants were women, and the vast majority went as domestic workers (Tacoli, 1999). Female overseas contract workers (OCWs) from the Philippines have outnumbered males in most years for the last two decades, and while many overseas Filipino workers are single, substantial numbers are married with children. Thus, in addition to an already considerable number of children who have grown up without a father present for a significant portion of their lives, the increasing number of female migrants has created a large number of families in which the mother is abroad. An additional (smaller) number of children experience all or some of their childhood without either biological parent present, in cases in which both the mother and father become overseas workers.

The role of family structure

Analyses by researchers across disciplines, much of which have been based in the United States and other industrialized countries, have indicated that growing up in a single parent family often has negative consequences for the school participation and educational success of children. The basis for this is thought to be one of limited resources, i.e., children in alternative family structures lack the necessary social, economic, and cultural wherewithal that should serve to improve child well-being, including educational outcomes. The role of economic resources, in particular, has been studied extensively and has been found to account for a sizeable amount of the difference in child outcomes across family types. Research that focuses primarily on family structure tends to find that two-parent households, on average, hold an advantage over single-parent families in economic terms and thus in their ability to invest in children. Once economic differences are controlled, the effect of family structure often disappears. In addition to the economic disadvantages that may be experienced in single-

parent households, however, reduced parental involvement in child-rearing is also argued to contribute to a lower likelihood of school success for children.

One important contribution of our research will be to try to assess how much contact (and support) is maintained between teens and migrant parents over time and how well-being may change as a result. In migrant families, there are often substantial contributions to the household economy through remittances, which are at times directed to children's schooling and, in fact, part of the motivation for the migration. Whether the migrating parent is the father or the mother may be important, both where remittance patterns vary between men and women, and where mothers and fathers engage differently with children at home.

Prior to conducting our initial round of in-depth interviews, we analyzed survey data to get a general sense of the effects of family structure on schooling outcomes, net of impacts of parents' human capital and economic resources, as well as the number of siblings in competition for parental time and financial resources (Arguillas and Williams, 2010). We found that the economic rewards of parental migration often translate to educational success of children, and this can vary according to the gender of the parent who is away and of the child left behind. For example, at the time of the survey, school outcomes for sons were more affected by parents' human capital variables, household wealth, and remittance behavior than were those for daughters. That said, Filipino daughters maintained an educational advantage over their male counterparts. The gender differentials in educational success we observed were consistent with research that indicated that at the tertiary level women were enrolled at higher rates than men (see, for example, Virola, 2005), and that in a sample of rural provinces women were receiving approximately 1.5 more years of schooling than men (Estudillo, Quisumbing, and Otsuka, 2001). These studies suggest that when resources were limited, families were choosing to invest more in daughters' education than in sons'. There has been considerable speculation regarding this point, however. It has been suggested that daughters tend to demonstrate a stronger commitment to the family and that they may remit more regularly, prompting investment decisions regarding children's education that tend to favor daughters. While we cannot evaluate these possibilities, others have reported that parents do rely on their daughters more than their sons to study, work, and support them in their old age (King and Domingo, 1986 in Medina, 2001).

While the overseas employment of family members may bring tangible economic benefits to those left behind, the consequences on other aspects of children's well-being are less clear. For example, some studies have found that Filipino children who are left behind experience psychological and emotional stress (Parrenas, 2001), while others suggest that the children have better self-reported physical health (NIRP, 2001). A recent study concluded that children with absent parents are less well socially adjusted (Gastardo, 1998), but an earlier study (Paz, 1987) reported results to the contrary. Whether children's academic performance is affected is also unclear, as evidence on this topic is meager and has also been mixed.

We intend to contribute to this debate, analyzing the educational and emotional outcomes of children in different family structural arrangements that have developed specifically because of overseas migration of one or both parents. We pay particular attention to the ways in which outcomes may vary (or not) according to the gender of the child.

Data, methods and study sample

The sample drawn for the first round of in-depth interviews loosely followed the logic of the Survey of Households and Children of Overseas Contract Workers that was conducted in 1999 by the Departments of Psychology and Sociology at the University of the Philippines (UP), Friends of Migrant Workers, and the UP Population Institute. Forty children were selected through the local school system for our in-depth interviews if one or both of their parents had been overseas for at least three consecutive years, or if neither parent was overseas (or working elsewhere in the Philippines) and the family was intact. Ten children (five boys/five girls) were interviewed in each subgroup (mother overseas, father overseas, both overseas, neither parent overseas). Children who had one or both parents abroad, but whose parents had left more recently were not interviewed. Although it might also have been desirable to interview teens from single-parent families that developed as the result of separation or factors other than migration, teens from those families were not included in the original survey design.

We had hoped to re-interview all 40 study participants for Wave II (2013). Despite extensive efforts to locate all respondents, however, only 20 have been reinterviewed thus far. Those lost to follow-up have either changed residence within the Philippines or have joined their parents abroad. Two children were not available for interview despite several call backs. The second wave of our study may thus include only the following (all of whom have been interviewed this year): seven children with mother away, seven with father overseas, one participant with both parents overseas, and five children with neither parent abroad. The interviews completed to date provide a rich sense of teens' experiences and, when compared with Wave I, will allow us to assess change and/or stability over time. We can also analyze the interviews of those who did not participate in Wave II to assess whether or not they appeared more "at risk" at time 1 than those we were able to relocate; in other words, are the experiences of those who have been interviewed twice selective in particular ways?

During each set of interviews, we asked the children to describe their experiences in school and at work (and those of their siblings); we ascertained who (if anyone) helped them with school work, what their hopes and expectations were about future schooling (and what their parents' expectations were), what their commitments were to work at home or in family enterprises, whether they held outside jobs, and what their expectations were about future work and family circumstances. We asked about their parents' migration, the amount of financial help they provided (to the extent that that was known), and parents' anticipated return. We gathered information about how much contact teens and parents had maintained and how that contact (or lack of contact) affected school outcomes. We tried to gain a full understanding of the educational and work experiences of individuals and siblings within the household and their parents' influences on these experiences. We also obtained information about how teens with absent parents were faring emotionally.

Preliminary results

Emotional costs

Consistent with the literature (e.g. Arellano-Carandang et al, 2007; Asis, 2006; Anonuevo and Anonuevo, 2002; ECMI-CBCP/AOS-Manila, SMC and OWWA, 2004) and clearly no surprise, children who are left behind do experience emotional distress when their parents

leave. If one were to rely solely on the interviews done for this study for evidence of severe emotional impact, however, the migration of one or both parents may not affect children as profoundly as anticipated. Although teens reported experiencing sadness, they also reported adjusting well to their parents' absence and demonstrated considerable resilience. Perhaps to these children, the emotional costs of their parent's absence are not as severe as has been true in the past because emotional ties and parenting roles are maintained through frequent communication that has been made possible by technology that was once neither easily available nor accessible to low wage earners overseas.¹

Indeed with technology, parents are just a call away. Overseas calls or SMS by parents to the family left behind or vice-versa have become more regular and can be instantaneous. Whereas in the past overseas communications was more apt to occur when there was family emergency, the availability of inexpensive modern technology has enabled parents in transnational families to perform intensive parenting roles. The children we interviewed reported that many parents call or send SMS/text messages daily or nearly every day and that these communications cover a wide range of topics. There is transnational assistance for children with their school work, assurance for children of their parents' love, and even transnational discipline. Video-chatting is also a means for some multilocal families to communicate. These technologies help some children deal with the absence of their parents and allow them to experience their notion of a complete family.

Many children do certainly experience emotional hardships, however. It is not uncommon for children to report emotional strain when their parents return from abroad and for some whose parents have returned home for good, their long separation makes re-adjustment to their presence at home an uneasy experience. The stories of Sam and Ona depict this.

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I: When your mother returned home for good did you have difficulty adjusting?

S: Yes, I was uncomfortable. I was a bit embarrassed to do what I did with my grandmother when my mother was around. I am sweet to my grandmother. When my mother noticed that I was sweet to my grandmother, she was somewhat upset. This became an issue. She reported this to my father. I am not sweet to my mother.

I: Until now?

S: I don't hug her, I couldn't do it.

I: You hug your grandmother?

S: Yes. One time I slept next to my mother and she told me "Sleep on the other bed, it's very hot." I pretended to be asleep and extended my arm to embrace her and she shoved my arm. I wondered why she did not want me to sleep next to her. Since then I start to wonder why my mother was like that.

(Sam, female)

¹ It is also possible that children underreported unfavorable experiences.

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I: Can you tell me – when your father came home for good, what were the adjustments?

O: Whenever I went out ...Fathers would always ask their children “Where are you going?” My father would sort of interview me. My mother allowed me to go home anytime for as long as I got permission from her. With my father he wanted to know everything – where I was going, what time I was coming home – every detail.

I: Did you adjust to that?

O: Yes. Whenever my mother scolded me, it went in one ear and out the other, with my father it was different – it hits right through the flesh. My father is very strict. Whenever I’d ask permission from my mother, she’d now ask me to also get permission from my father.

(Ona, female)

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Motivation to finish schooling

Parents work overseas in order to improve the material conditions of their families at home and more importantly to invest on the human capital of left-behind children. Almost all children of OFWs that we have re-interviewed in Wave 2 remain in school (i.e, did not drop out), generally perform well in school, and are highly motivated to obtain college education. To most children, to finish their schooling is a ticket to a better future for their parents and siblings. For some, it could also be a means to reunify the OFW parent with the family left-behind in the Philippines.

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I: What else? Why are you very eager to finish (your studies)?

R: I want to finish because I want to help my parents, especially my mother. I want her to come home already. She will come home for my graduation and she’s not sure if she will go back there (Hong Kong) or she will stay for good; she’s not sure if she’ll go back to finish her contract which I think will end in September next year. Maybe after my graduation she’ll not go back. It will still depend on her whether or not she will go back to finish her contract after I graduate.

(Allan, male)

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I: Tell me, how important is education for you and why is it important?

M: It’s very important. First of all I already have a child. I want to repay my mother’s sacrifice. Not all parents accept their children who bear a child at a very young age like me. My mother just cried. She told me that it was OK but she asked me to promise her that I finish my education. She said that if I’ll finish, I’ll

become an engineer and I'll be able to provide a better future for my son. I promised my mother that I will work hard to graduate. I also promised my father that I will fulfill his dream of becoming an engineer. My father wanted to be an engineer but his family did not have the means to send him to college so he got a vocational course. He is an electrician. Now I am continuing my father's dream. It's very important for me to finish. My father is abroad and he is working very hard there. I want to finish so that he does not have to work anymore. I'll provide their income. It's a way for me to repay their sacrifices.

(Noy, male)

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I: What motivates you to graduate?

R: My family because my parents tell us that it's their only legacy to their children. I will make my parents feel proud about themselves if I finish/graduate despite our circumstance. My other motivation is my siblings. I want to graduate because of our present status...I want us to be more comfortable.

(Cel, female)

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Then and now: changes in the family with the return of an OFW parent

For children whose parents have returned home for good, we asked them to describe some changes that they observed in their family when their OFW parent returned home for good. We report here the changes in their economic status and family relationship.

Economic status

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I: Based on your experience, were you financially better off when your mother was working in Japan?

E: Ah, financially we were better off then because ... the flow of income was better... we were able to buy luxuries ('luho') and we were more "laid back" with managing our money.

I: What were the changes? What luxuries did you have then that you could not afford now?

E: Uhm... there's not much change in our luxuries but I'd say there's change in our financial situation... let's say my allowance. Before (when mother was in Japan), my school allowance increased to two hundred (pesos) then there were occasional increases. Twice my allowance increased so I was able to buy things for myself. When my mother returned, I had to control my expenses. We are more prudent with our expenses.

(Sonny, male)

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I: Economically what's the difference then and now?

K: Before (when mother was in the US), we were able to afford luxuries ('luho') in life. Every 6 months she would send a box, especially at Christmas, then we'd ask her to buy for us stuff there.

I: Is that balikbayan box?

K: Yes, that's balikbayan box. Now my mother still affords to give us what we want but in lesser quantity unlike when she was still in the US, she would send me and my older brother two pairs of shoes. Now we still get the shoes we like but when we do we buy only a single pair at the mall. Also that time (when mother was in the US), my two older sisters were in college and their tuition fees were expensive – one was a nursing student while the other was studying accountancy. More or less their tuition was 60K per semester but since my mother was in the US she was able to send ...

I: for their tuition?

K: Yes for their tuition and that time we were also not renting (an apartment) so we were comfortable.

I: Your life was comfortable then even if your sisters' tuition fees was 60 thousand?

K: Yes, unlike now. When my mother came home she had no work and then my sister left to work abroad but she is not remitting enough. And my older brother and I are both in college. Plus were also paying our house rental so we have simultaneous expenses...

(Ken, male)

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Family relationship

I: Now that your father is home, would you say you are closer as a family?

O: Emotionally, physically, everything... because now that he is here, it is not difficult to bond together every day, at home. In the past, of course it was difficult.

I: Why?

O: We were not complete. My older siblings were always out of the house. They each had their own life.

I: So when your father returned did you start eating meals together, something like that?

O: Sort of... There's a set time when we should all be at home. Now we have rules and regulations at home.

(Ona, female)

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I: . . . in terms of your relationship, would you say you are closer now that she is here or were you closer as a family when she was not here?

E: We're closer not that my mother is here because she is our "binding agent". We have bonded together as a family. We now talk/discuss. When she was not here, each one of us somewhat had a life of our own. When she returned our family is better.

I. Can you tell me what you mean by that.

E: We're ... we're OK in terms of our relationship...we've become... we became closer. We cook together, go to church, or something...

(Sonny, male)

Research Plan:

We are currently doing extensive coding and analysis of all transcripts and we will determine the extent to which these preliminary excerpts are representative of the full range of experiences of those who have taken part in our research. We plan to focus on gender differences in our analysis: how girls who remain in the Philippines may describe their circumstances differently from boys (or whether differences in articulation are quite minor), and how the impact of absent mothers varies from that of absent fathers. Finally, as indicated above, we will assess the extent to which those who were not interviewed in the second wave may have been different in particular ways at time 1 from those who took part in both sets of interviews, and we will acknowledge any potential sample selectivity we identify.