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THE SOCIAL COSTS OF LABOR MIGRATION AND ITS EFFECTS ON THE DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS OF LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN: THE CASE OF THE PHILIPPINES

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The Social Costs of Labor Migration and Its Effects on the Developmental Domains of Left-Behind Children: The Case of the Philippines

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STUDY CONTEXT

When people traverse international borders to work overseas, they embark on an unfamiliar path filled with hope, yet at the same time, filled with the feeling of uncertainty. In the Philippines, about 10% of the total estimated population of 90 million works abroad (Commission on Filipinos Overseas, 2010), combining their productive and reproductive labor with the needs and resources of receiving countries to benefit themselves and their families. Because of this, the country is largely regarded in the world as a sending country of migrant workers, and its government, a model in the management of international labor migration (Opiniano, 2008).

On the other hand, the social costs of labor migration, particularly on children left behind, are a cause for great concern. Though there is no systematic data on the number of children left behind in the Philippines, it is estimated to be nine (9) million or 27% of the total youth population (Reyes, 2008). It is believed that as children of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), they are forced to endure the absence of one or both parents. While there is massive evidence of economic benefits that children of migrant workers enjoy (Alunan-Melgar & Borromeo, 2002; Ang, 2007, 2008; Ang, Sugiyarto, & Jha, 2009; Battistela & Astardo-Conaco, 1996; Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002), anecdotal evidence through surrogate indicators suggest that the social cost of labor migration on left-behind children are juvenile delinquency, drug abuse, psychosocial maladjustments, the loss of self-esteem, early marriages, teenage pregnancies, and family breakdown (Coronel & Unterreiner, 2007). But do all of these represent the situation of all OFW families? The only way to find out the truth on this matter is to look into empirical studies which delved into the issues of labor migration and its effects on left-behind children.

The general aim of this paper is to comprehensively assess recent studies on the social costs of labor migration and its effects on the developmental domains of left-behind children. In so doing, the study endeavours to achieve the following three-fold tasks:

1. To review the methodologies used in the different studies.
2. To analyze research findings by culling out themes and trends.
3. To identify research issues and gaps.

Although there has been a ground breaking literature review done on the effects of labor migration on the children left behind by Reyes (2008), this study aims to verify the study and contribute to the existing literature using the developmental domains of child development as an analytical tool in understanding the effects of labor migration on children who are left behind. Also, this study covers other issues related to labor migration as it culled out common themes and trends tackled by the different researches used in this literature review. Thus, it not only focus on left-behind children but the root causes of labor migration in the country, the issues faced by the male and female migrant workers, the gender-based difference of the effects.
of labor migration on left-behind children, and the complexities faced by left-behind husbands, wives, and guardians. The study concludes by indentifying research recommendations.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Children in this study pertain to all persons below the age of 18 (Candelaria, 1997). The developmental domains of child development pertain to the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development (Berger, 2000). Physical development includes all the growth and change that occurs in a child’s body. Changes in height, weight, and bone thickness, as well as in the muscles, glands, the brain and sense organs are part of physical development (Protacio-De-Castro, et al., 2003). Motor skills such as running, learning to write, hand-eye coordination, are also part of this domain so are nutrition and health (Protacio-De-Castro, et al., 2003). Cognitive development includes all the mental processes that are used to obtain knowledge or to become aware of the environment. It can include perception, imagination, judgement, memory, learning, thinking and language (Protacio-De-Castro, et al., 2003). Psychosocial development focuses on personality and social development, such as identity processes, gender development, emotional and moral development (Protacio-De-Castro, et al., 2003).

The three domains are interrelated with one another, meaning, one domain cannot be isolated from the other areas of development (Protacio-De-Castro, et al., 2003). Thus, this implies that child development is holistic and unified. This framework is used to understand the effects of labor migration to the left-behind child.

However, it must be noted that context plays a crucial role in determining the effects of labor migration on left-behind children. Thus, this study also uses meso- and macro- perspectives which makes the ecological systems approach of Brofenbrenner (1994) an additional useful theoretical tool in understanding the effects of labor migration on left-behind children. Protacio-De-Castro et al. (2003) best summarizes Brofenbrenner’s ecological systems approach through the following passage:

“The micro system refers to the basic level of face-to-face interactions such as the home, school, church or neighbourhood. The mesosystem recognizes the interactions of individual microsystems, such as between home and school, school and church, etc. The exosystem on the other hand, details the settings beyond children’s immediate environment but may nevertheless influence their development. Examples of this are parent’s place of work, other institutions that operate such as local government, and other social service institutions such as hospitals. Last, the macrosystems represents the most complex of customs, values and laws considered important in the child’s culture.”

(Protacio-De-Castro, et al., 2003, pp. 40-41)

Combining the two theoretical frameworks vis-à-vis the themes culled out from this study, this research came out with the following conceptual framework that served as a guide in the presentation of the results of the study (see Error! Reference source not found.).

Figure 2.Conceptual Framework of the Study
In the level of left-behind children, the research findings delved on the
gendered views of children regarding the migration of their parents. Adults in the
family pertain to the migrant parent(s), and left-behind fathers, mothers, and
guardians who interact with the left-behind children. Under this level, a gendered and
class analysis is made to understand the structure, and family dynamics in the
transnational household. The root causes of migration pertain to the discussion of the
political economy and feminization of labor migration in the Philippines. All of these
levels affect the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development of left-behind
children which leads to negative and positive results.

**METODOLOGY**

This study uses a systematic documents review of 16 local empirical studies
dated from the years 2002 up to 2010 which pertains to the economic gains and
social costs of labor migration and its effects on left-behind children. The choice of
the inclusive dates was determined by the availability of the materials accessible to
the researcher which was taken from (1) the online peer reviewed journals
downloaded from EBSCO and JSTOR; (2) the masteral and dissertation theses from
the libraries of the University of the Philippines-Diliman and the University of Santo
Tomas; and (3) published studies by concerned local NGOs and research centres.
To facilitate in synthesizing the volume of data generated from 16 studies, the
researcher first systematically summarized each study through the use of a data
matrix that culled out the research objectives and the results of each objective per
study aside from making use of an annotated listing. Second, the researcher used
the **QDA** (qualitative analysis software) for analyzing the summarized textual
data.
REVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODS

Based on Error! Reference source not found., in terms of research design, more than one-third of the studies (7 out of 16) used qualitative methods followed by quantitative (5 out of 16) and mixed methods (4 out of 16) respectively. This suggests that qualitative methods is the popular choice because it has the ability to provide complex textual descriptions of information about the "human" side of an issue — that is, the often contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions, and relationships of individuals (Family Health International, 2011). Añonuevo (2002) claims that qualitative studies could unravel the stories on migration and their effects versus quantitative studies which seem to belittle the magnitude of the social cost because their findings do not show statistically significant incidents and correlations. Psychological trauma, the pain of separation and sad experiences can only be probed deeply through the use of qualitative studies (Añonuevo, 2002).

Table 3. Annotated Listing of Literatures Used in this Study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Author &amp; Date</th>
<th>Research Locale</th>
<th>Research Sample</th>
<th>Research Design</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The relationship between the adjustment patterns with the personality traits and other variables of high school students with OFW parents.</td>
<td>De Silva, M.L. (2003)</td>
<td>de La Salle Lipa - Unified School, Batangas</td>
<td>83 students from Level 7 to 10 (high school), Age range is from 12-17 years old (adolescents).</td>
<td>Quantitative: Descriptive and Correlational Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author &amp; Date</td>
<td>Research Locale</td>
<td>Research Sample</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Hearts Apart: Migration in the Eyes of Filipino Children</td>
<td>SMC, ECMI- CBCP, AOS- Manila, &amp; OWWA. (2004)</td>
<td>NCR (Manila, Taguig); Bulacan (Hagonoy, Angat); Cavite (Cavite City, Imus); Laguna (San Pedro, Los Banos); Negros Occidental (Bacolod City, Binalbagan); Cebu (Cebu City, Liloan); Davao del Sur (Davao City, Digos) October 2003-January 2004</td>
<td>1,443 children of migrants and non-migrants 10-12 age group.</td>
<td>Mixed Methods: Interviews Sampling Surveys FGDs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author &amp; Date</td>
<td>Research Locale</td>
<td>Research Sample</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>Determining the Social Costs of Overseas Filipino Workers' Remittances: A Check through Education Indicators</td>
<td>Ang, A. P. (2008)</td>
<td>16 regions in the Philippines, including NCR (uses a 5 year panel from 1996-2000)</td>
<td>secondary school age children of OFWs (10-14 &amp; 15-19) Male and Female OFWs Employment statistics</td>
<td>Quantitative Three (3) panel regressions utilizing pooled ordinary least squares (OLS); Survey of Overseas Filipinos (SOF); Labor Force Survey (LFS); Region and year dummy variables</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author &amp; Date</td>
<td>Research Locale</td>
<td>Research Sample</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>in the Philippines.</td>
<td></td>
<td>to October 5, 2007</td>
<td>and 126 non-OFW households or control households</td>
<td>Interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>Group interviews of 3 to 4 children with the same age group (6-8, 9-12, 13-16, and 17)</td>
<td>Qualitative: One-hour-long in-depth, open-ended and tape-recorded interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transnational Fathering: Gendered Conflicts, Distant Disciplining and Emotional Gaps.</td>
<td>Parreñas, R. S. (2008)</td>
<td>Central Philippines that is composed of 6 provinces with an approximate population of 6 million. January and July 2000 May 2001 to April 2002</td>
<td>26 children of migrant fathers who have spent at least 5 years of their adolescence in a transnational household and were still in a relationship of economic dependence to a migrant parent. 13 guardians of children of migrant fathers</td>
<td>Qualitative: Survey</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Migration status and transnational mothering: the case of Filipino migrants in France.</td>
<td>Fresnoza-Flot, A. (2009)</td>
<td>Île-de-France region March to October 2006</td>
<td>35 Filipino migrant mothers (the respondents have been in</td>
<td>Qualitative: semi-structured interviews (lasting one and a half to three</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Title</td>
<td>Author &amp; Date</td>
<td>Research Locale</td>
<td>Research Sample</td>
<td>Research Design</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Effects of Empowerment Intervention Program (EIP) on the adjustment of children with mothers working abroad.</td>
<td>Pascasio, C. S. (2010)</td>
<td>University of Santo Tomas – College of Engineering</td>
<td>1st year college students. The experimental group: 9 males and 6 females. The control group: there were 8 males and 7 females.</td>
<td>Quantitative Experimental Pre-test and Post-test survey</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

But it is also good to know that four out of the 16 studies mentioned have used mixed methods. According to Creswell (2003), mixed methods research is formally defined as the class of research where the researcher mixes or combines quantitative and qualitative research techniques, methods, approaches, concepts, or language into a single study (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). Thus, it could be said that mixed research is far better than qualitative only or quantitative only research designs.

In terms of research locale, the studies seem to suggest that migration hot spots in the Philippines are the regions and/or provinces near urban centers of Ilocos, Calabarzon, Negros Occidental, Cebu, Davao del Sur, and NCR. In terms of research sample, the studies also covered all members of the OFW families from migrant workers themselves up to the left-behind family members such as husbands, wives, children, and guardians.

**THEMES AND TRENDS**

*The political economy and feminization of labour migration in the Philippines* The effects of globalization and structural adjustment programs (SAPs) in the Philippines have weakened its domestic economy resulting to greater disparity

In addition, there is a growing feminization of labor migration and there are a growing number of second and third generation migrants due to the active recruitment of relatives to work abroad by the OFW women (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). In some countries, such as France, where immigration controls are tighter, OFW women have recently started to rely on illegal recruitment agencies to obtain tourist visas which gave way to the ballooning of undocumented migrant workers (FRESNOZA-FLOT, 2009). According to the latest migration statistics of the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (2010), there are about 700,000 undocumented or irregular migrant workers all over the globe, and most of them are women. To take France as a case in point, according to the Commission on Filipinos Overseas there were 47,075 Filipino migrants in France in 2007, among whom 7049 were permanent migrants, 1026 were temporary migrants and 39,000 were in an irregular situation (FRESNOZA-FLOT, 2009).

**Father-away, mother-away, and guardians in transnational families: structure and dynamics**

The Filipino family is a source of emotional, economic, material and social support for the individual; in return, individual members strive to promote the interests of the family (Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004; Medina, 1991). Beyond the support and security that the family bestows on its members, affective ties are also important, and remain strong even in the context of the Filipino transnational family (Asis, et al., 2004). However, according to Parreñas (2006), Philippine society upholds the ideal supremacy of the patriarchal nuclear family whereby the father is considered the disciplinarian, the major decision maker, and the breadwinner while the mother is the primary nurturer, the supporter, and the fiscal manager of the household. Because transnational families require the absence of one or both parents, this family situation is considered abnormal especially when the migrant worker is the mother. The public has a more negative view of migrant mothers since they are blamed for the absence of nurturance in their families which is perceived to be a major contributory factor why their husbands and children commit deviant acts. With these external perceptions, let us take a closer look on how OFW Families fare by understanding their structure and dynamics in terms of (1) father away families, (2) mother-away families, and (3) household with guardians.

**Father-away families**

If the father is the OFW, the following changes takes place in the household: (1) increase in household size, (2) increase in the number of children who belong to the nuclear family, (3) increase in the number of children who do not belong to the nuclear family, (4) decrease in the number of adults belonging to the nuclear family, and (5) decrease in the number of adults who do not belong to the nuclear family (Edillon, 2008). These changes indicate that the families of migrant men tend to be

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nuclear in structure and they rarely depend on extended kin, but instead more often help extended kin (Añonuevo, 2002; R. S. Parreñas, 2008).

The division of labor in father-away families conforms to the notion of men as the pillar of the home and women as the light of the home (R. S. Parreñas, 2008; Rule, 2009). This means that when fathers work abroad, they leave their children under the custody of stay-at-home wives, who they often discourage from entering the formal labor market (R. S. Parreñas, 2008) and who assume more responsibilities as being both the mother and father in the home (Edillon, 2008; SMC, ECMI-CBCP, AOS-Manila, & OWWA, 2004). However, the left-behind wives do not just ‘stay at home’ but instead capitalize on the income earned by the migrant spouse and for some who have jobs, most work as school teachers (R. S. Parreñas, 2008).

Another way of looking at the migrant father as the pillar of the home is Philippine society’s expectation of fathers to be successful in acquiring a home for their family – the larger the house, the larger attribution of masculinity given to them (R. S. Parreñas, 2008). This is confirmed in the study of Edillon (2008) where she found out that there are more families with father OFWs (54%) than with mother OFWs (29%) who were able to build a new house and continued home improvement project since the OFW began working abroad. Perhaps it may be due to the higher income being remitted by the father OFW or the better financial management of the mother who is left behind, or both. Nevertheless, this confirms society’s expectation of fathers, and in addition, the building of the home allows migrant fathers to “be there” or be “present” in the family in spite of their physical absence (R. S. Parreñas, 2008).

Mother-away families

If the mother is the OFW, the following changes takes place: (1) decrease in household size, (2) decrease in the number of children who belong to the nuclear family, (3) increase in the number of children who do not belong to the nuclear family, (4) decrease in the number of adults belonging to the nuclear family, and (5) increase in the number of adults who do not belong to the nuclear family (Edillon, 2008). These changes indicate that the families of migrant women are extended and consanguineal in structure since the absence of the female migrant has brought along their mothers and/or other siblings (sisters and brothers) to take over the role of the migrants’ responsibilities (including child caring) in the household (Ang, 2008; Asis, et al., 2004; Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005; SMC, et al., 2004).

The migration of mothers have prompted left-behind husbands to do women’s work (Asis, et al., 2004), making househusbands as now an ever-present fixture in high migration sending regions in the Philippines (Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005). However, most husbands of migrant women are unable to take on the “feminine responsibility” of taking care of the household because their machismo socialization makes it difficult for them to assume the role left behind by their wives (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006). Thus, most of them pass the nurturing role to other women in the household – if the left-behind husband belongs to a working class family, other kin-related women or the eldest daughter takes over the work left behind by their wife; if the left-behind husband belongs to a middle class family, they usually rely on paid domestic help (Edillon, 2008; Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005; 2006; SMC, et al., 2004). The only areas where fathers are more prominent than the other female relatives are the discipline of the children, helping the children with school work, attending school meetings, teaching the children good manners and teaching them about what is right and wrong (SMC, et al., 2004).

As migrant women take on the role of the often “ unofficial” breadwinners of their respective families, the remittances they send serve as a means of fulfilling a family project, whether it was to put their children or siblings through school and college, or lift their family’s economic circumstances (Asis, et al., 2004). But in terms
of financial gains, Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo (2002) found out that despite years of hard work, most of the migrant women do not have substantial savings and immediate plans for returning home for good. The growing needs of their immediate and extended families, the increasing cost of living in the home country, the extravagant lifestyle that most of their migrant families are leading, families' dependency on migrant earnings and the debt trap that many of them are in, are the reasons why most migrant women are unable to save.

But the greatest source of anxiety and guilt feelings of migrant mothers is the separation from their children (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). In spite of their intensive mothering from afar (through remittances, sending gifts and phone calls), most of them experience an emotional gap between them and their children due to their failure to witness their children growing up (Fresnoza-Flott, 2009). Also, because of the continued rejection of caretaking by most men, most migrant mothers find themselves in a no-win situation since their children always find their intensive mothering from afar not enough to fulfill their emotional needs (Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005). This has led migrant mothers to feel a mixture of sadness, joy, guilt and regret when they talk about their physical absence from home.

**Household with Guardians**

The guardians in transnational families are the extended kin or relatives, and some cases, paid domestic help. The migration of women has caused the emergence of guardians who have to fill the void. These guardians, usually women relatives of migrants act as “the other mother” (Añonuevo, 2002; Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005). When it is the men who leave, it is seldom that guardians are needed to substitute for them or they play a minor role because left-behind wives perform both the roles of mothering and fathering. According to Rule (2009), guardians often play complex roles in the family as surrogate parents, household managers, role models of children and confidants of the OFW parents abroad. They also act as both links and gatekeepers to information and to some extent, even affection between OFW parents and their left-behind children. For example, aunts help in the schoolwork for children of OFW mothers and the uncles help in to fix or repair broken things and bring the children to and from school for children of OFW fathers (Edillon, 2008). For mother-away transnational families, the guardians are largely involved in taking care of the family (Edillon, 2008) and are pressured to perform much better than the real mother to assure the female migrant that “things are well” at home (Ang, 2008). Many of the guardians give up their jobs and their “individual lives” to be able to take charge of the household and the children of migrant mothers (Añonuevo, 2002). However, according to Parreñas (2005), the responsibility of caring for “other people’s children” potentially strains relations between women across nations as extended kin resent migrant mothers for saddling them with work that they see as not really their responsibility. But this resentment is not unknown to children, thus, many children try to limit their dependency on extended kin by distributing the work of emotional care among them or by turning first to their migrant mothers.

**Children’s view of labor migration and its effects on them**

The departure of a parent to work abroad has been both a welcome and dreaded occasion in the lives of Filipino families. Migrants and family members who had been separated for an extended period usually express pain and a sense of dislocation with these departures. Because of the separation, they feel their family as “not complete.” Let us now take a closer look at the effects of labor migration on left-behind children vis-à-vis the child developmental domains. The proceeding discussions below tackles on three themes: (1) effects on children when the father is the migrant, (2) effects on children when the mother is the migrant, and (3) effects on children when both parents are migrants.
In the eyes of children, it is acceptable for their fathers to work abroad since they expect their fathers to be the primary breadwinner of the family. Children perceive their migrant fathers as fulfilling the role of a good provider and rationalizes that such situation is needed for the career advancement of their fathers (Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006) and for them to have a house to live in (R. S. Parreñas, 2008). The fulfillment of the role of a good provider can be seen in the majority of father-away transnational families to be living in comfortable middle-class households (R. S. Parreñas, 2008) and such families have more bank savings than mother-away transnational families (Edillon, 2008). The following are the particular effects of labor migration on left-behind children when the father is the migrant worker vis-à-vis child developmental domains:

**Physical.** Boys left-behind by migrant parents are particularly more vulnerable to being touched in sensitive areas and this was found highest among the sons of land-based migrant fathers (SMC, et al., 2004).

**Cognitive.** According to Canlas (2008), children of OFW fathers have fair general weighted average and the parenting style of their left-behind mothers have no significant relationship to their academic achievement.

**Psychosocial.** Children of OFW fathers have a low average self-concept and are sober but have average level among personality traits (Canlas, 2008). Most left-behind boy-children are rated feminine while girls are average (De Silva, 2003). Commonly, both boy- and girl-children feel an emotional gap with their fathers (R. S. Parreñas, 2008). This emotional gap refers to the sense of social discomfort, unease, ambivalence, awkwardness, and emotional distance that children feel toward their dad (Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006). The children themselves better describe this gap as feeling embarrassed or “nanginay” when their father is around (R. S. Parreñas, 2008). The root cause of this emotional gap is due to the parenting style of most OFW fathers. As the ‘good provider’, most completely depend on their stay-at-home wives to take care of the emotional needs of their children. This clear-cut division of labor strains intergenerational ties in their family, as their children cannot help but feel emotionally distant from them (R. S. Parreñas, 2008). Also, most migrant fathers often communicate to discipline their children. They remind children of their authority in the household by frequently reprimanding their children from a distance for having low grades, selecting the ‘wrong’ major, or not performing adequately in other school activities. This tendency to constantly discipline children aggravates the emotional rift that already exists in their families (R. S. Parreñas, 2008). Thus, children of migrant men often voiced their preference to minimize the time they spend with their fathers. They prefer to reduce their ties to monthly remittances and would rather prolong their father’s stay outside the country (R. S. Parreñas, 2008; SMC, et al., 2004).

**Effects on children when the mother is the migrant**

If someone in the family had to migrate, in general, the popular choice of the children was the father since they expect their father as the primary breadwinner of the family (Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006; SMC, et al., 2004). They are often reluctant when their mothers go to work abroad because they view their mothers as the main provider of emotional comfort and support, thus, they only find the situation acceptable when the family condition is already dire and there are no other options left (Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006). Children believe that mothers are more competent than fathers in performing both mothering and fathering roles (Ang, 2008; Edillon, 2008; Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005; SMC, et al., 2004). Based on this, one can expect that children of migrant mothers are more disadvantaged in terms of their
general well-being as compared to children of migrant fathers (Agot, 2007). The following are the particular effects of labor migration on left-behind children when the mother is the migrant worker vis-à-vis child developmental domains:

**Physical.** Mother-absent children are observed to be the most susceptible to cold, cough, headache, stomach ache and loss of appetite (Hochschild, 2003; SMC, et al., 2004). Also, most of them get the least amount of sleep per day (SMC, et al., 2004).

**Cognitive.** Among children of OFWs, children of migrant mothers do not do as well in school as those whose fathers are working abroad (SMC, et al., 2004). In terms of gender-based difference, eldest daughters of migrant mothers have deteriorating school performance as compared to boys and other younger siblings since they are burdened with more household responsibilities and workload in the family (Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005). However, inconsistent with the above findings, the five-year panel study of Ang (2008) has shown that migration of mothers decrease drop-out rates, and increase both survival rates and participation rates of boy-and girl-children in secondary schools all over the Philippines provided that left-behind fathers do their share of domestic work. Hence, a migrant mother and a domestically working father increase the chances of children completing their secondary level. Ang (2008) conjectures that the absence of mothers is already the worst case scenario for a family tradition where the father is the breadwinner. If the child is thinking that the reason for the mother to leave for abroad is to finance their studies, then it is but proper to study hard to return the sacrifice and finish on time.

**Psychosocial.** For left-behind children, the family becomes an extended network of their mothers’ relatives who fill the void their mothers have left (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). But despite the rearrangement and reassignment of the gender roles to fathers (if present) and other family members, children often actively negotiate or passively yearn for their mother’s return (Asis, et al., 2004; Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002; R. S. Parreñas, 2008). Because of this yearning, children of migrant mothers reported feeling lonely, angry, unloved, unfeeling, afraid, different from the other children, and worried compared to all groups of children, including non-OFW children (SMC, et al., 2004). Thus, children suffer psychologically from the separation of their mothers (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006). Children often suffer this way because society has strongly conditioned them to believe that mothers are the proper nurturers of the family and that mothers should nurture their children from up close. With these expectations, shortfalls in family life are bound to trouble the children of migrant mothers, regardless of the tremendous efforts that migrant mothers put into the achievement of intimacy (Rhacel S. Parreñas, 2005; 2006). Also, prolonged and continued separation of mothers to children contributes to the relationship of ambivalence and estrangement between the mother and the child (Alunan-Melgar & Borromeo, 2002; Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002; Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006). This means that children have already developed indifference towards their mothers. They do not care anymore if their mother comes home or not and they feel that their relatively "free" lives will be disrupted if their mothers come home (Alunan-Melgar & Borromeo, 2002).

**Effects on children when both parents are migrants**

Having both parents abroad is considered the worst case scenario for children; thus, it is the rarest phenomenon among OFW families as indicated in government and NGO statistics and as seen on the limited literature regarding this topic. In this rare situation, guardians take full responsibility of the care of the children. The quality of care of the guardian determines the effects of migration on the child. In terms of the **physical domain**, children with both parents working abroad appear to be the most resistant to common ailments (SMC, et al., 2004). In
the cognitive domain, many are reported to have dropped out from either secondary or tertiary school (Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006). Lastly, in the area of psychosocial domain, children with two parents abroad appear to have been more involved in discussions about their parent’s departure than children from other migrant families (SMC, et al., 2004). But these children experience both emotional gap and care drain characterized by great emotional insecurity, bottled pent-up emotions, poor guardianship and lack of discipline (Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, 2006). In terms of gender-based difference, the feeling of abandonment is more pronounced for boys than girls when both their parents work abroad (SMC, et al., 2004).

**ISSUES AND GAPS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH**

Although work overseas has raised the standard of living of families, it has not contributed substantially to the economic development of their hometowns (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). In addition, there is a prevalent ambivalence towards migrant return among caretakers, children, husbands and migrant women which is caused by a fear of losing the lifestyle made possible by overseas work once the migrants return home (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). They are fully aware of the lack of job opportunities and the general economic difficulties that the country is facing. They also have to adjust to the slow laid-back way of life in the community. Also failed business endeavours push them to work abroad again (Sta. Ana, 2008). Ironically, a number of migrant organizations such as self-help groups, savings groups, and cooperatives have made contributions to community development projects but the LGU has been unable to tap into migrant earnings and social capital for economic projects and activities (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). Thus, there is a need to look into this matter and help develop mechanisms on how migrant organizations and LGUs can work together to spur economic and social development in their respective municipalities so that working abroad does not continue to become the be-all and end-all for succeeding generations of Filipino families.

Both Government and NGOs have initiated noteworthy and role model programs that addressed the economic and social requirements for OFW reintegration. However, their efforts have not made a significant impact (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). It could be speculated that there is low awareness and even lower utilization of the benefits of these programs by OFW families due to concerns about trust and confidentiality (Edillon, 2008; SMC, et al., 2004). Also, the low utilization of government programs for OFWs may indicate a disconnect between intended objectives of the programs and the needs of the OFWs and their families (Edillon, 2008). Thus, there is a need to investigate on this so that possible solutions could be made.

There is an absence of systematic, sustainable, and well-coordinated intervention from local government units (LGUs), NGOs, the school system, etc. that offers psychosocial support to OFW families, especially to left-behind children who experience psychosocial strains (Edillon, 2008; SMC, et al., 2004). Migrant women also have a hard time coping with their estranged relations with their children and who have expressed resistance of being dependent and submissive wives to their husbands (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002). Although there are existing programs targeted at Families of OFWs, there is a need to review and fine tune these programs to see if they are child friendly and gender responsive. Gender responsive programs are needed since the issues and effects of labor migration to left-behind children and other family members are gendered. Thus, a regular assessment of existing programs is necessary to review objectives, approaches, and developing plans of action to further improve these programs.

Lastly, since there is no clear cut evidence that would definitely conclude that labor migration has a positive or a negative effect on left-behind children, but a
complex mixture of both, then there is a need to conduct more researches that would highlight the resiliency factors and strategies used by these children to soften the impact of the social cost of labor migration.

REFERENCES


