Securing OFW Children's Rights to Safeguard Social Development

Mark Anthony Dayot Abenir

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**Securing OFW children’s rights to safeguard social development**

Mark Anthony D. Abenir¹,²

**Abstract**

Securing the rights of the children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) is of vital importance in order for the gains they receive from their parent/s’ migration to be sustained, and for its negative consequences to be mitigated. However, present literature fails to capture children’s voices on what those rights should be. Thus, through the use of mixed methods approach, this study utilizes nationwide cross-sectional surveys and selected small group sharing sessions in order to reveal those rights based on the expected duties and responsibilities of migrant parents by the children of OFWs. Quantitative results reveal that a majority of OFW children agree that their migrant parents are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their families but their age, level of education, which of their parent is abroad, and type of schooling affects children’s propensity to agree on this matter. Conversely, qualitative findings reveal four major rights of the children of OFWs that can serve as a basis for public and migration policies that can safeguard the social development of left behind children by migrating parents.

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**Key words:** children of OFWs, left behind children, rights of the child, social development, mixed methods, Philippines

**Introduction**

With international migration becoming an ever-increasing worldwide trend (International Organization for Migration, 2011), the rights of all children and adolescents affected by migration processes have become a matter of growing concern to the global community (Global Migration Group, 2008; Valtolina & Colombo, 2012; Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Children of migrant workers, whether those born to migrant parents in destination countries or those who are left behind by migrating parents, face both the positive and negative consequences of migration. Thus, greater efforts are needed to ensure their social development through securing their rights (Abramovich, Cernadas, & Morlachetti, 2011; de Haan & Yaqub, 2009; de la Garza, 2010). The ultimate goal of social development is the improvement of the quality of life of all human beings, especially those who are considered vulnerable and marginalized, by helping them achieve the fulfillment of their human rights.

This study considers the children of OFWs as a special population group who warrants specific attention and informed help so that their quality of life can be improved. This can be done by sustaining the benefits they have gained because of their parent/s’ migration, while at the same time mitigating the negative consequences such a phenomenon brings.

The total number of children of migrant workers all over the world is unknown, but in the Philippines, there is a conservative estimate of 3 to 6 million children who are considered left-behind by their migrating parents (Bryant, 2005; Tobin, 2008). These children are more locally known as children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). General

studies on them have extensively dealt with understanding the impact of migration on various dimensions of social development, such as their economic condition (Custodio & Ang, 2012; Ducanes & Abella, 2008; Go & Postrado, 1983), health and nutritional outcomes (Edillon, 2008; Scalabrini Migration Center et al., 2004), educational performance and career aspirations (Ang, 2008; Asis, 2008; Battistela & Gastardo-Conaco, 1996; Cruz, 1987; Edillon, 2008; Espero, 2009; Scalabrini Migration Center, et al., 2004; Tullao & Rivera, 2008), psychological and social well-being (Aguilar, Peñalosa, Liwanag, Cruzi, & Melendrez, 2009; Alunan-Melgar & Borromeo, 2002; Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004; Carandang, Sison, & Carandang, 2007; Harper & Martin, 2012; Hochschild, 2003; Parreñas, 2006; Tanalega, 2002), and transnational communication and power relations outcomes (Madianou, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Parreñas, 2005a, 2005b, 2008; Tadeo-Pingol, 1999; Uy-Tioco, 2007).

Such studies suggest that the economic resources children of migrant workers enjoy because of remittances cannot equally compensate the social consequences they face when one or both of their parents are not by their side. While children learn to be resilient and communication technologies have helped maintain transnational family ties, studies indicate that the problems of children worsen when it is the mother who is working abroad. While such situation does not necessarily lead to a life of truancy and delinquency, they become suspect to be considered as a special group that warrants social protection from government agencies, since remittances have generally uplifted their quality of life (Abramovich, et al., 2011; de la Garza, 2010).

Despite the economic advantages they have over children of non-OFW parents, they still face consequences due to family separation, and these cannot be ignored. The unique issues they confront cannot be anymore relegated to

the private sphere, for these have now become a public concern since both sending and receiving countries benefit highly from this international trade of labor that has caused many children to face and endure family separation. Thus, there is a need for concerned states to safeguard the social development of the children left behind by migrating parents by securing their rights.

Although, there is seminal work done by Edillon (2008) that measured the impact of migration on the rights of the children of OFWs, there is a literature gap on understanding how children of OFWs perceive their rights amidst the issue of family separation. This literature gap is also reflected on studies across the globe that often discourse about the rights of the children of migrant workers guided by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) (Abramovich, et al., 2011; de la Garza, 2010; Global Migration Group, 2008; Tobin, 2008) but often fail to extensively discuss and reflect children’s voices on what those rights should be, especially on the rights of the children left behind by migrating parents.

Thus this study, by making use of the Philippines as a case, aims to identify these rights of the children of OFWs by asking the concerned children what they think the duties and responsibilities of their migrant parents toward their families should be. This is an important question to ask since children are not considered able to exercise rights themselves; hence, rights are translated into duties and responsibilities toward children by the Family (Ansell, 2005), particularly by the migrating parents.

**Understanding Children’s Rights in the Context of Migration**

Children, by reason of their physical and mental immaturity, need special safeguards and care, including appropriate legal protection, before as well as after birth (United Nations, 1959). Because of this recognition, world leaders around the world came together in November 1989 to adopt the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) since they are convinced that these rights are crucial in the full development of people who are under 18 years old (UNICEF, 2013).

Consisting of 54 articles, the CRC is the first international instrument that legally binds signatory countries to safeguard the best interest of the child through observing, promoting and fulfilling the full range of children’s indivisible rights, namely: (1) right to survival (to be provided with social security, quality health care and nutrition in order to live), (2) right to protection (to be safeguarded against neglect, abuse, cruelty, exploitation, discrimination, and other conditions prejudicial to their development), (3) right to development (to be ensured of access to education, have time to play, and be provided with care and nurturance to develop completely), and (4) right to participation (to be encouraged to contribute their views affecting their development in the family, community, school, the nation, and in the world) (Ansell, 2005; Candelaria, 1997; UNICEF, 2013). Although children are recognized complete human individuals, with identities distinct from their parents, they are not considered able to exercise rights themselves; hence, the rights mentioned above are translated into duties and responsibilities toward children by the Family and State as primary duty bearers and by the community, school, and civil society groups as secondary duty bearers (Ansell, 2005).

The CRC is one of the international human rights treatises that has been incorporated in the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of All Migrant Workers and Members of their Families (ICRMW) (Grange, 2006; United Nations, 1990). The ICRMW is the first universal codification which provides a synthesis of human rights that addresses the specific vulnerabilities migrant workers and members of their families find themselves in when they are outside their state of origin and at all stages of the migration process (Grange, 2006).

The phrase “members of their families” pertain to the spouses and dependent children of the migrant workers. Specifically, the ICRMW has devoted two articles for safeguarding the rights of the children of migrant workers, namely: Article 29 which refers to children’s right to a name, to be registered at birth and to a nationality (this corresponds to Articles 7 & 8 of the CRC which is under protection rights); and Article 30 which refers to children’s right to education on the basis of equality of treatment with nationals of the country concerned (these corresponds to Articles 28 & 29 of the CRC which is under development rights).

In the Philippines, the local counterparts of the ICRMW are two Republic Acts (RAs), namely RA 8042 (The Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995) and RA 10022 (An Act Amending RA 8042). These RAs primarily focus on the protection of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) and run on the assumption that when OFWs are guaranteed of their rights and safety, the members of their families will also benefit from it, a kind of trickle-down effect. Regarding children, RA 10022 through Section 19 addresses the issue of underage migration through automatic repatriation of the victim and penalty imposed to responsible persons or agencies who deployed underage (below 18 years old) migrant laborers.

The common thing about ICRMW and RAs 8042 & 10022 is that they focus on migrant workers in general and to some extent, children of migrant workers who are born to migrant parents in destination countries, and children who are migrants themselves. However, both of them are silent in protecting the rights of children who are left behind by their migrating parents. Thus, this study is an important contribution in bringing to the fore the specific rights that they need so that their social development can be ensured.

**Method**

**Design**

The design is that of mixed method research (MMR). It involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study or series of studies (Creswell & Plano Park, 2007). Mayoux (2006) explains that MMR results in a good cross-check or triangulation of information and at the same time helps to disseminate information in different ways for different audiences, to ensure beneficial outcomes. It is the third major research paradigm, adding an alternative (when it is appropriate) to quantitative and qualitative approaches. Thus, presenting findings in MMR requires explicitly integrating the quantitative and qualitative aspects of the study as a coherent whole (SAGE Publications, 2014). It also requires drawing inferences using both qualitative and quantitative approaches (Ibid).

**Respondents, Study Site, Instrumentation & Collection Procedures**

The quantitative part of this study made use of cross-sectional surveys conducted by UGAT Foundation, Inc.—PANATAG Program (UGAT-PANATAG) in the years 2011-2013 during its ANAK workshop sessions held with the children of OFWs in the different parts of the Philippines.

The ANAK Workshop is a one-day counseling-style workshop held in participating public and private schools and aims to help the children of OFWs understand their situation, share their feelings and cope with them in positive ways. From the years 2011 to 2013, the UGAT-PANATAG was able to accumulate 4,871 survey respondents ages 8 to 21 years old from the three major island groups of the Philippines, namely: (a) Luzon, (b) Visayas, and (c) Mindanao. However, only 2,446 answered survey forms were validly included in this study after conducting clustered random sampling to ensure geographic regions are equally represented and after excluding survey forms which were not propelty filled out and lacked information (see Table 1).

The data-gathering instrument used in the quantitative part of the study is the ANAK Registration and Survey Form (ARSF) administered at the beginning of every ANAK Workshop. The ARSF is divided into two parts: (1) gathering the socio-demographic profile of the participants along with basic information regarding the migration of their parents; and (2) eight close-ended questions supplemented by eight open-ended questions which aim to gather the following information: (a) the problems faced by the children of OFWs and by their migrant parents; (b) the frequency and quality of communication they have with their migrant parents; (c) their coping strategies and the people they trust; (d) their perspectives on why their parents have to go abroad; and (e) their expectations of the duties and responsibilities of migrant parent(s) towards their families.

The ARSF is designed to be self-administered but facilitators in the ANAK Workshop also assist participants who need help in clarifying and understanding some questions. After the ARSF has been completed, they are

properly archived to be encoded later on and used for statistical analysis.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Geographical Areas</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Luzon Island</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baguio</td>
<td>171</td>
<td>7.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bataan</td>
<td>274</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bulacan</td>
<td>259</td>
<td>10.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cagayan Valley</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>1.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cavite</td>
<td>233</td>
<td>9.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ilocos Sur</td>
<td>279</td>
<td>11.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Laguna</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>6.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pampanga</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rizal</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tarlac</td>
<td>159</td>
<td>6.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zambales</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>8.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>2018</td>
<td>82.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Visayas Islands</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cebu</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>5.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leyte</td>
<td>129</td>
<td>5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subtotal</strong></td>
<td>274</td>
<td>11.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mindanao</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surigao del Norte</td>
<td>154</td>
<td>6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Overall Total</strong></td>
<td>2446</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Meanwhile, the qualitative part of this study made use of small group sharing sessions (SGSS) conducted during the ANAK Workshops held in Bataan and Cagayan Valley during the months of July 2013 and October 2013, respectively. The SGSS gathered rich information about the various aspects of the children’s lives, such as: (1) their views on their parent’s migration; (2) the advantages and disadvantages of having a parent abroad; (3) the problems they encounter related to their parent’s migration; (4) the things that they do in order to overcome their situation; (5)

their means of communicating with their migrant parents and the contents of their conversations with them; (6) their expectations on the duties and responsibilities of their migrant parents; (7) their views on financial remittances and their monetary practices; (8) the influences of their parent’s migration on their identity formation; and (9) their career aspirations and mobility dispositions in life.

A total of 6 SGSS were audio-recorded, transcribed verbatim, and translated into English by the author. The total running time for each audio-recorded SGSS is 2.5 to 3.5 hours each. However, each SGSS is divided into three separate parts with a 1.5- to 2-hour break intervals in order to avoid participation fatigue. All-in all, there were 50 SGSS participants. As depicted in Table 2, the socio-demographic characteristics of the SGSS participants show that more than half of them (60%, n=30) are males and more than half (62%, n=31) are adolescents (13-17 years old). About 84% (n=42) of them are high school students and more than two-thirds come from private schools (86%, n=43) which are religious in orientation (86%, n=43). Finally, more than two-thirds of the SGSS participants (84%, n = 42) have their fathers to be working abroad followed by their mothers (12%, n=6) and both parents (4%, n=2) working abroad.

### Table 2. Socio-Demographic Profile of SGSS Participants

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>f</th>
<th>Valid %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sex</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>School Type</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>60.0</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40.0</td>
<td>Private</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>86.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age Level</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Childhood (08 – 12)</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>38.0</td>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>14.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (13 – 17)</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0</td>
<td>Secular</td>
<td>43</td>
<td>86.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Young Adult</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
<td>Religious</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

23

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Level</th>
<th>(18 – 21)</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Elementary (Grades 4 - 6)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school (1st – 4th Year)</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>84.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College (1st – 4th Year)</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Migrant Parent</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Father</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mother</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Both Parents</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Location</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bataan</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cagayan Valley</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td><strong>50</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Ethical Considerations**

The protocols of confidentiality and informed consent, protection from harm and avoidance of deception (Neuman, 2007) were strictly observed in the conduct of this research. In the quantitative part of this study, letters of consent addressed to parents and/or guardians were secured by responsible authorities of schools who partner with UGAT Foundation in implementing the ANAK Workshop for the benefit of their students who are children of OFWs. The letters of consent contained information about the purpose of the ANAK workshop and asked their permission to allow their children to answer the ARSF, participate in SGSSs, participate in discussions, and write letters to migrant parents. At the beginning of each workshop, participants are oriented of the voluntary nature of their participation with no foreseeable risk on their part and that they can withdraw at any point without need for any explanation.

**Mode of Analysis**

Quantitative data from the ASRF were properly encoded and subjected to statistical treatment using the Chi-Square test of independence with the help of SPSS. The Chi-Square Test of Independence was used for data which have

nominal/ordinal measures for both independent and dependent variables (Agresti & Finlay, 2009; Corty, 2009). $\alpha = 0.05$ was used to determine the level of statistical significance; thus, the null hypotheses were rejected when the $p$-value was $< 0.05$. Finally, Phi ($\Phi$) and Cramer’s V were used for determining the effect size.

Conversely, qualitative data from the written responses to the open-ended questions of the ARSF and from the SGSS were encoded and subjected to phenomenological text analysis using Atlas.ti7. Phenomenological text analysis is: a) intended to be interpretative, rather than purely descriptive (van Manen, 2011); b) the interpretation is open to re-interpretation which is dialectical in nature (Annells, 1996); c) focuses on the illumination of the essence and uniqueness of the human experience (Sternberg & Barry, 2011); and d) gives attention to how things are understood by people who live through these experiences and by those who study them (Embree, et al., 1997, cited in de Guzman, et al., 2012). Thus, such analysis utilized the following four steps: (a) discovering themes and subthemes; (b) winnowing the themes into a manageable manner; (c) building hierarchies of themes or code booking; and (d) linking themes into theoretical models (de Guzman, et al., 2009).

**Results**

**Demographic Profile of the Survey Respondents and their Migrant Parents**

As revealed in

**Table 3**, a little more than half of the survey respondents are females (53%, $n=1303$) and about 70% ($n=1702$) of the total number of respondents are adolescents (13-17 years old). About 81% ($n=1972$) of them are high school students and more than two-thirds come from private schools (85.4%, $n=2090$) which are religious in orientation.

(80.8%, \(n=1977\)). Finally, more than half of the survey respondents (59.1%, \(n=1431\)) have their fathers to be working abroad followed by their mothers (28.4%, \(n=687\)) and both parents (12.5%, \(n=303\)) working abroad.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 3. Socio-Demographic Profile of Survey Respondents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indicators</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle Childhood (08 – 12)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adolescence (13 – 17)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Early Young Adult (18 – 21)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Educational Level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elementary (Grades 4 – 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school (1st – 4th Year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College (1st – 4th Year)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition, when it comes to the migration characteristics of the survey respondent’s parents, it can be seen in

Table 4 that their fathers can either be skilled (51.4%, \(n=751\)) or semi-skilled (39.8%, \(n=582\)) migrant laborers. Examples of their skilled work are professional seafarers, engineers, and medical practitioners, while examples of their semi-skilled work are construction workers, drivers, and plumbers. When it comes to their mothers, the dominant

jobs they are engaged into are classically classified under unskilled work (39.9%, \(n=304\)) such as domestic helpers, followed by semi-skilled work (34.4%, \(n=262\)), such as caregivers.

The top three work destinations of their migrant fathers are: (1) Middle East and Greater Arabia (44.3%, \(n=720\)), (2) Asia (13.8%, \(n=224\)), and finally, (3) North America (12.7%, \(n=207\)). For migrant mothers, the top three work destinations are: (1) Middle East and Greater Arabia (34.5%, \(n=333\)), (2) Asia (25.8%, \(n=249\)), and (3) Europe (16.5%, \(n=159\)), followed closely by North America (16.1%, \(n=156\)). Finally, it can also be seen in

**Table 4** that the overall average that the migrant parents of the respondents have experienced working abroad is at least 6 years, but it is the mothers who stay longer working overseas since it is common for them to be gone for at least 3 years before they have an opportunity to be reunited with their family back in the Philippines.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 4. Migration Profile of the Survey Respondents’ OFW Parents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Indicators</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Classification</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semi-skilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unskilled</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Indicators</th>
<th>OFW Fathers Valid %</th>
<th>OFW Mothers Valid %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Work Destination</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia</td>
<td>224</td>
<td>13.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle East. N. Africa &amp; Greater Arabia</td>
<td>720</td>
<td>44.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>12.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central America</td>
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<td>0.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>1.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sub-Saharan Africa</td>
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<td>2.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australia &amp; Oceania</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ocean/Seas</td>
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<td>7.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsatisfied/Unknown</td>
<td>1627</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>819</td>
<td>100.0</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Missing</strong></td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Length of Years Working</th>
<th>Overseas</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Average</th>
<th>Most Common</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Overseas</td>
<td>1259</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>years</td>
<td>2 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>746</td>
<td>6.2</td>
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<td>3 years</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**An Overview of the Success of Migrant Parents**

Before having in-depth information regarding the views of children on the duties and responsibilities of the migrant parents towards their families, it is noteworthy to know first the categorical response of the survey respondents on the question, “are your migrant parent(s) able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward your family?” Overwhelmingly, 91% of the respondents ($n = 2216$) categorically agreed that their migrant parent(s) are able to do so. This may mean that for the majority of the survey respondents, in some way or another, they have experienced the life their migrant parent(s) have promised them and/or a life that they have imagined or expected. However, there are nuances behind the agreement of the

children regarding this matter depending upon their demographic characteristics as determined by the results of the Chi-Square Test of Independence.

Statistical analysis revealed that both male and female children of OFWs agree that their migrant parents are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their families \[X^2 (1, N = 2446) = 1.56, p = .21\] (89.9% males, 91.3% females), but children studying in private schools tend to more likely agree on this matter \[X^2 (1, N = 2446) = 41.35, p < .00, Cramer’s V = .13\] (81.5% Public, 92.2% Private). In addition, as they grow older, children of OFWs tend to less likely agree that their migrant parents are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities towards their families \[X^2 (2, N = 2446) = 41.23, p < .00, Cramer’s V = .13\] (93.9% MC, 90.1% A, 69% EYA), and the same is observed with their increasing levels of education \[X^2 (2, N = 2446) = 30.92, p < .00, Cramer’s V = .11\] (92.3% Elem, 90.9% HS, 71.2% College).

Nonetheless, children whose fathers are migrants are more likely to agree that their parent is able to fulfill his duties and responsibilities towards his family when compared to children whose both parents and mothers are abroad respectively \[X^2 (2, N = 2421) = 17.35, p < .00, Cramer’s V = .09\] (93.3% Fathers, 90.8% Both Parents, and 87.9% Mothers). Finally, there is no sufficient evidence to claim that the work classification of the children’s migrant fathers \[X^2 (2, N = 1462) = .93, p = .63\] (94% Skilled, 94.2% Semi-skilled, 96.1% Unskilled) or mothers \[X^2 (2, N = 762) = 1.04, p = .60\] (91.3% Skilled, 89.4% Semi-skilled, 88.4% Unskilled) is associated with children’s agreement on whether migrant parents are able to fulfill their the duties and responsibilities towards their families.

Having known these statistical results, what do the children of OFWs mean by the duties and responsibilities of their migrant parents? What exactly are they?

**The Duties & Responsibilities of Migrant Parent(s) according to the Children of OFWs**

Based on the phenomenological text analysis of their written responses in the ARSF and transcripts of SGSS, there are 4 major duties and responsibilities of migrant parents according to the children of OFWs: (1) ensuring a good and prosperous life; (2) providing transnational emotional and moral support; (3) making sure that a responsible parent and/or guardian is left behind to take good care of the family; and (4) informing family members when they will leave abroad in conjunction with guaranteeing family reunification. Each of these is explained in the subsequent sections.

**Ensuring a Good and Prosperous Life**

One thing that is very clear for the children of OFWs is that the regular sending of money remittances, no matter how large or small, is one of the crucial duties and responsibilities of the migrant parent/s toward their families. As one SGSS participant explains: *Even though he is having difficulties, he still sends money to us; he gives to us his salary squarely.* However, they are fully aware that the money remittances only serve as a means toward a nobler end, that is, ensuring a good and prosperous life for the family.

By a good and prosperous life, the survey respondents and SGSS participants mean (a) having access to quality education, (b) having all basic needs met, (c) a bright future ensured by having their dreams and ambitions in life supported, (d) enjoying luxuries and/or comforts in life, and (e) freedom from debt. The following are examples of written responses from the survey respondents in explaining how they are able to attain a good and prosperous life because of the migration of their parent/s:

**Access to quality education:** They (both parents) chose to be away from us so that we can study and be able to graduate from a reputable school.

**Satisfying basic needs:** Our life is better now than before. We do not have anymore a hard time paying our bills and buying the things we need every day like food and buying things for my school projects.

**Ensure a bright future:** I'm happy with my life and my parents help me fulfill my dreams.

**Enjoy luxuries and comfort:** If not for him (migrant father), we will not experience a good life, all the things we want and request of him, he gives it to us.

**Freedom from debt:** My family has a lot of debt. That is why the money my mother sends help us a lot in paying those debts.

**Providing Transnational Emotional and Moral Support**

The second duty and responsibility of migrant parents goes beyond economic fulfillment, but more on fulfilling the expectations of the survey respondents and SGSS participants that in spite of the physical separation due to overseas work, parents should be able to fulfill their parenting roles from afar. By parenting roles, they mean that migrant parents should be able to provide transnational emotional and moral support to the family. But what are these kinds of emotional and moral support? The survey respondents and SGSS participants mean that the migrant parent (a) is able to overtly express feelings of love from a distance, (b) looks after them from afar, (c) gives moral support, and (d) establishes open and regular communication. The following are examples of statements coming from SGSS participants:

Expresses feelings of Love: The love that he gives is not lacking. My father often says he loves me and I tell him that I love him also. He loves all of us.

Looks after them: They (both migrant parents) do not leave us on our own even though they are away and doing a lot of things there (abroad). They always think of us, monitor our activities, and give valuable advices.

Gives moral support: Whenever we have problems, he (migrant father) is always there for us. He often finds out our problems and I also tell him my problems. He helps me find a solution to my problems. He also supports us in our different activities.

Establishes open and regular communication: She buys gadgets for us so that we could often talk to her via cellphone, Facebook or Skype. Even though she is in another country she does not forget to call us.

*Making sure a Responsible Parent and/or Guardian is Left Behind*

The third duty and responsibility of migrant parent/s is that they should ensure that even though they are away, there is a responsible parent and/or guardian who is left behind to take care of the children and the entire family. In cases when the OFW is the father, children expect that the mother takes on both mothering and fathering roles. As one survey respondent explains: *Even if my father is abroad, our mother still takes care of us.* When it is the mother who is away, they have the same expectations for their fathers, but if not, a guardian who could either be a grandparent, relative, or house help is expected to temporarily take the mother’s place. As one survey respondent has written: *Even

If my mother works abroad, we have a guardian (Auntie) who never fails to express her love for us. If both parents are OFWs, then there must be a guardian and a household help that is ready to assist the children in various matters, including the upkeep of the house. As one SGSS participant verbalizes:

Even though our parents are not with us, our grandparents and relatives (aunties and uncles) often look after us. They check on us every day. We also have a household help that cooks, does laundry, and helps in cleaning the house.

Informing when to Leave and Guaranteeing Family Reunification

Many of the SGSS participants have experienced that their migrant parent did not inform them of the day when they will leave for abroad. What their parent did was to sneak out of the house early in the morning when they were asleep or leave them when they are already in school. The reason for this according to them is to avoid seeing each other crying, which makes it a lot harder for both parties to part from each other. As one SGSS participant explains:

Every time she (mother) leaves, she does not inform us when she will leave, she just goes. She tells us it must be done so that there will be no crying moments together which will only make it harder to leave each other.

The immediate effect of parting without personally saying goodbye makes the children feel very sad and they often find themselves crying. But for others, the moment bears an emotional scar. As one SGSS participant verbalizes:

It is painful on my part whenever my father leaves without telling me. I feel a sense of displeasure and become envious because

others know (relatives and other older family members). I do not even know the date when he will leave because they keep it secret from me. I think, my father is angry at me, I feel powerless over the situation, maybe he is just hasty and busy about leaving, or maybe he does not care for me anymore.

Based on the above statement, it is important for the children to know when their parents will leave and although painful, it is also important for them to have an opportunity to personally say goodbye. In addition to this, in order for the children not to feel abandoned, it is also crucial that their migrant parent/s reunite with them by at least coming home at the end of their contract or visiting home when there are opportunities to have a vacation with the family. As one survey respondent comments: *My mother is able to do it (duties and responsibilities) because she is able to at least come home. She gets to come home every two years*. Aside from this, the children expect that parents not only come home, but spend quality time to make up for the lost moments when they were away. As one SGSS participant explains:

Every time he (migrant father) leaves and is gone for two years, a lot of things happen...we tend to grow apart, my feelings for him become distant and I become shy of him even though there is the internet. That is why when he comes home for a vacation, he maximizes his time with all of us. He spends his whole vacation with us. Whenever he is here, we are seldom inside the house because we always go out as a family. We have good bonding moments together. That is what I really like whenever my father comes home.

Hence, aside from migrant parents personally informing their children when they will leave, it is also important for the respondents that their parents are able to guarantee them quality reunification.

**Discussion**

**On the Rights of the Children of OFWs**

It is a reassuring to find out that in spite of family separation brought about by international migration, majority of the children of OFWs in this study report that their migrant parent/s are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their respective families. However, this should not serve as a reason to downplay the pain of separation and its long-term consequences often felt and experienced by the children (Nazario, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim, 2011). Support mechanisms and policies must be made in order to sustain this seemingly positive phenomenon.

Aside from this, the issue of the minority of children in this study who find that their migrant parents are not able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities should not be taken for granted. They offer wonderful insights on what those duties and responsibilities should be based on their failed expectations. Thus, in this study, phenomenological text analysis was used to reveal the expected duties and responsibilities of migrant parents so that rights specific to children can be uncovered.

First, the finding that migrant parents must ensure a good and prosperous life proves that the views of the children regarding their parent’s migration is not merely materialistic, as other studies have claimed (Scalabrini Migration Center et al., 2004), but they understand that the ultimate goal of the sacrifices made by their parents is to uplift the quality of their lives. Such views correspond to

children’s right to health (Article 24 of the CRC), right to social security (Article 26 of the CRC), right to adequate standard of living (Article 27 of the CRC), right to education (Article 28 & 29 of the CRC) and right to leisure, recreation, and social activities (Article 31 of the CRC) (Candelaria, 1997).

Second, migrant parents should provide transnational emotional and moral support, for these are vital for children so that family ties can be maintained across national borders. In this way, parents can still perform their parenting roles which children still expect of them. Thus, children expect their migrant parents to function as parents, not merely as an OFWs providing financial support to the family. Fortunately, this can be done with the advent of various communication technologies which have given migrant parents the power to maintain relationships with their children and assert their roles in the family (Aguilar et al., 2009; Madianou, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011; Uy-Tioco, 2007; Zentgraf & Chinchilla, 2012). Such expectation of children to their migrant parents corresponds to children’s right to personal care and support (Article 5, 9, & 18 of the CRC) and the right (if separated from one or both parents) to stay in contact with both parents (Article 9 of the CRC) (Candelaria, 1997).

Third, the children of OFWs in this study expect that when one or both of their parents leave to work abroad, there must be a responsible left behind parent and/or guardian that will take good care of them. The guardian can be a household help and/or members of the extended family such as grandparents and aunts or uncles. This expectation corresponds to children’s right to personal care and support (Article 5, 9, & 18 of the CRC) (Candelaria, 1997).

Previous studies on OFW families have shown that guardians are essential family members that contribute to the children’s unbounding and expanding the meaning of

‘family’ (Asis, et al., 2004; Parreñas, 2006; Rule, 2009), which the children define as “composed of individuals whom they love, for whom they care, whom they trust, and with whom they feel comfortable and secure” (Parreñas, 2006, p. 53). The migration of women has caused the emergence of guardians to fill the void that mothers have left due to their absence. These guardians, who are usually women relatives act as “the other mother” (Añonuevo, 2002; Parreñas, 2005a; Rule, 2009) who give up their jobs and their "individual lives" to be able to take charge of the household and the children of migrant mothers (Aguilar, et al., 2009; Añonuevo, 2002; Parreñas, 2006). However, guardians are seldom needed when it is the men who leave because their left-behind wives perform both mothering and fathering roles (Edillon, 2008; Harper & Martin, 2012; Parreñas, 2008).

Nevertheless, guardians often play complex roles in the family as surrogate parents, household managers, role models of children, confidants of the OFW parents abroad, gatekeepers to information, and facilitators of affection between OFW parents and their children (Rule, 2009).

Lastly, fourth, the children of OFWs in this study expect that their migrant parents inform them when they leave and guaranty them family reunification. This corresponds to children’s right to information (Article 17 of the CRC), right to stay in contact with parents (Article 9 of the CRC), and right to family reunification (Article 10 of the CRC) (Candelaria, 1997). Although children generally experience fear and anxiety when a trusted adult separates from them, whether they are sons and daughters of OFWs or not (Bredekamp & Copple, 1997), left-behind children in transnational families become well-prepared for the separation if the situation is framed as temporary, necessary for the good of the family, and when parents personally inform their children when they will leave (Alunan-Melgar & Borromeo, 2002; Scalabrini Migration Center, et al., 2004;
Suárez-Orozco, Todorova & Louie, 2002). Also, guaranteeing the children family reunification realizes their right to family life, since the family is vital to their overall well-being and upbringing, and this is recognized for every human being in many international human rights treatises (Abramovich, et al., 2011), including Articles 8, 9, 10 & 16 of the CRC (Candelaria, 2011). Thus, family reunification should be promoted and be fulfilled not only by migrant parents, but within migration policies (Abramovich et al., 2011).

**On the Results of Chi-Square Analysis**

Statistical treatment using the Chi-Square Test of Independence reveals nuances in the agreement of the children regarding the fulfillment of their migrant parent/s’ duties and responsibilities towards their respective families.

First, it has been found out that the children tend to less likely agree that their migrant parent/s are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their families as they grow older and as they progress in their education. One can surmise that as children grow older, coupled with an increase in their level of education, they become more critical of their surroundings (Ogwo, 2013), which leads them to demand reasons for things they previously accepted without question (Inhelder & Piaget, 1958; Maccoby, 1984). Hence, children of OFWs become more cautious and discerning of the duties and responsibilities that they expect from their migrant parents and tend to look beyond the usual economic advantages gained through their parent’s migration. These other aspects can be emotional and moral support, actual love and care directly received from the migrant parent, and the much-needed family reunification. Also, as Alunan-Melgar & Borromeo (2002) pointed out, children of OFWs who are older and who have already established the parent-child bond prior to their parent’s

migration, especially with their mothers, found it difficult to adjust to the absence of their parent.

Second, children whose fathers are OFWs are more like to agree that their parent is able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities towards their families when compared to those whose both parents and mother are abroad respectively. The reasons behind this can be elucidated from the findings of previous studies which claim that children benefit more from financial remittances when it is the father who is working abroad since they tend to earn more than their female counterparts (Heymann, et al., 2009; Parreñas, 2008). Aside from this, the dynamics of gender division of labor in OFW families may also help clarify this matter. Previous studies have shown that when fathers work abroad, they leave their children under the custody of stay-at-home wives who assume more responsibilities as being both the mother and father in the home (Edillon, 2008; Scalabrini Migration Center et al., 2004).

Meanwhile, when mothers work abroad, most left-behind husbands are unable to take on the "feminine responsibility" of managing the household and taking care of their children (Dizon-Añonuevo & Añonuevo, 2002; Parreñas, 2005a; Tadeo-Pingol, 1999). Thus, most of them pass the nurturing role to other women in the household. These dynamics of traditional gendered divisions of labor in OFW families have led children to find it more acceptable for their fathers to work abroad since they expect their fathers to be the primary breadwinner of the family and they perceive them to be fulfilling the role of a good provider (Parreñas, 2006; Scalabrini Migration Center, et al., 2004).

However, when it comes to their mothers, children believe that their mothers are more competent than their fathers in performing both mothering and fathering roles (Edillon, 2008; Parreñas, 2005a; Scalabrini Migration Center, et al., 2004); hence, children become more reluctant when

Their mothers go to work abroad, and more so when both parents leave them, since not having both father and mother by their side presents the worst-case scenario. As Parreñas (2006) discloses, children with both parents abroad experience both emotional gap and care drain characterized by great emotional insecurity, bottled pent-up emotions, poor guardianship, and lack of discipline.

Lastly, third, children of OFWs enrolled in private schools are more likely to agree that their migrant parent(s) are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their families when compared to children of OFWs enrolled in public schools. This can be explained by understanding that in the Philippines, OFW parents are found to heavily invest on the education of their children (Ducanes & Abella, 2008; Llorente, 2007; Tabuga, 2008; Yang, 2008) in expensive private schools (Asis, 2006; Scalabrini Migration Center, et al., 2004; Yeoh & Lam, 2006). The reason for this is that private schools in the Philippines are generally known to offer good quality education and have better educational facilities and services, as compared to public schools which are perceived to be deteriorating due to meager budget allocation by the government and overwhelming student population (Jimenez, Lockheed & Paqueo, 1991; Musa & Ziatdinov, 2012; Yamauchi, 2005). Also, most private schools in the country are run by religious orders or Christian denominations which tend to be conservative and are known to produce well-behaved students (Gutiérrez, 2007).

This attracts migrant parents to enroll their children in such schools, for discipline will be instilled while they are away. Given these factors surrounding the advantageous perceptions about private schools, it makes sense that being enrolled in private schools forms part of children’s expectations of a good and prosperous life, specifically, having access to better quality education.

**Conclusion**

The main goal of this paper is to identify the rights of the children of OFWs in order to safeguard their gains in social development and minimize the negative consequences of family separation brought about by the migration of one or both of their parents. Their rights in this study are understood in terms of the duties and responsibilities of their migrant parents towards their families. This is the case because children are not considered to exercise rights themselves but rights are expressed through the expected duties and responsibilities of migrant parent(s) toward children.

Using phenomenological text analysis, the study reveals that children expect their migrant parents to (1) ensure them a good and prosperous life, (b) provide transnational emotional and moral support, (3) make sure that a responsible parent and/or guardian is left behind to take good care of the family, and (4) inform them when they will leave abroad and guaranty them family reunification. These expected duties and responsibilities of migrant parents by the children correspond to their various survival, protection, and development rights as provided for by the CRC. However, children’s participation rights as also accounted for in the CRC is silent in this study since the issue of having their voices heard concerning their parent’s migration is not brought up by the survey respondents and SGSS participants. Future researchers may focus and elucidate on this matter.

Meanwhile, Chi-Square Test of Independence reveals that as children grow older and progress in their education, they become more critical of their expected duties and responsibilities from their parents. The reason for this is that they may become less satisfied of the economic gains brought about by migration and want more of emotional...

care and support as they grow older. Such emotional care and support may refer to the different avenues of transnational communication, the extended family system, and family reunification.

Also, the same statistical test suggests that children tend to more likely agree that their expected duties and responsibilities from migrant parents are fulfilled when it is the father who is working abroad as compared when both parents and mothers are OFWs. The reason for this may come from traditional gendered expectations that it is okay for fathers to leave home as long as they fulfill their expected role as good providers of the family, while having a mother, especially both parents, working abroad would mean a crucial loss of emotional care and support that children need.

Finally, the same statistical test also reveals that children of OFWs enrolled in private schools tend to more likely agree that their migrant parents are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their families as compared to children enrolled in public schools. This is probably because being enrolled in private schools (a symbolic representation of good quality education) forms part of the expectations of children of having a good and prosperous life.

Having already known the rights of children of OFWs through understanding their expectations of the duties and responsibilities of their migrant parents, public and migration policies in both sending and receiving countries must be attuned to fulfill such rights. Even though such rights are drawn from the expectation of children within a family setting, such rights cannot anymore be just relegated to the private sphere. It has now become a public concern since countries from the Global North and South are benefitting highly from the migration-induced family separation being endured by left behind children.

Also, since many sending and receiving countries are signatories of the CRC, including the Philippines, they are duty-bound to ensure that the best interest of their children are fulfilled, in this case, the views of the children of OFWs regarding their rights in this study should be taken seriously. Once their specific rights are ensured, left-behind children can continue to benefit from the positive impacts of migration on their social development. At the same time, the negative consequences of family separation can be mitigated.

References


