

The Social Development of Children of Irregular Overseas Filipino Workers: Life Stories from Manila, Cavite, and Rizal

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Abstract

The entire population of migrant workers worldwide includes permanent, temporary, and irregular workers. Moreover, a significant portion of OFWs today are parents hence, this has brought several inquiries concerning on its impact on the social development of their left behind children. Within this context, this paper aims to focus on irregular OFWs only. In light of Karl Marx's Historical Materialism and Rauniyar and Kanbur's aspects of Human Capital Development and Social Capital Development, this paper examines the impact of irregular migration on the social development of children from Manila, Cavite, and Rizal. The qualitative data collected from one-on-one, unstructured interviews were thoroughly weaved into five narratives in order to find out the status of these children in terms of Education, Health, and Participation in the decision making in the family.

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Introduction

International migration has become a fundamental feature of globalization and has perpetuated mostly in developing countries such as the Philippines. As an outcome of this, the country is considered to have the most number of migrant workers (Chia, 2007) distributed in more than 190 countries around the world (Custodio & Ang, 2012). In the Philippine society, sustaining the basic necessities of the family appears to be a major priority but as a result of unstable economy and lack of decent job opportunities in the country, Filipinos are now inclined to seek for better options and for some, migration has always been a more acceptable way of addressing the needs of one's family (Bala, 2008).

A significant portion of OFWs today are parents (Edillon, 2008) who are motivated to leave their families in pursuit of substandard but better-paying job overseas (Bala, 2011). Although it may seem to be a positive inclination for most Filipinos, this issue has brought several inquiries concerning its impact on the social development of their left behind children. In the Philippines, there is around 3 to 6 million (10-20%) children left behind (Tobin, 2008). Moreover, an array of studies (Ang, 2008; Edillon, 2008; Tobin, 2008; Sutaria, 2011; Bala, 2011) associated with parental migration have exposed diverse effects on the social development indicators of children such as education, health, microfinance, social networks, institutions, and participation in decision making in the family thus, most of them have claimed that migration improves the economic status and social capabilities of the family which according to UNICEF (2011) are considered to be crucial factors towards development.

Notably, the entire population of Overseas Filipino Workers worldwide includes permanent, temporary, and irregular migrant workers (Custodio & Ang, 2012; Fresnoza Flot, 2009). However, a considerable amount of literatures would often give emphasis on the children left behind, but not discriminating if they are children of permanent, temporary, or irregular migrant workers.

Within this context, this paper aims to focus only on irregular Overseas Filipino workers. Furthermore, the main objective of this study is to further examine the impact of irregular migration on the social development of left behind children in the Philippines. The sub-objectives of this study are as follows;

- a. To find out their academic status
- b. To examine their health status and their access to health care services
- c. To examine their participation in decision making in their family

Guided by Karl Marx's Historical Materialism, a Marxist class analysis attempts to establish the current situation of irregular OFW workers. Since local studies are rather lacking, this study contributes to further studies concerning children of irregular OFWs. Moreover, the findings of this study have also provided recommendations that will cater to the social development of children of irregular OFWs. Lastly, this paper argues that irregular migration has its significant effects on the social development of left behind children based from their access to opportunities and essential services.

Studies on the Social Development of Children of OFWs

The concept of social development is merely broad but it can be understood as the enhancement of well-being and the progressive enrichment of the quality of people's lives (Bautista, 1997). According to Rauniyar and Kanbur (2010), there are four components of social development namely; Human Capital Development, Gender and Development, Social Protection, and Social Capital Development. However, this study specifically focuses on the concepts of Human Capital Development and Social Capital Development.

Human Capital Development refers to access to education, primary health care, and other essential services. On the other hand, Social Capital Development means increasing the opportunity of the poor for participation in decision-making and self-managed community services such as in the creation of community-based groups in microfinance, health, and natural resources management. To provide a better grasp on these two concepts, this section will be divided into three different development indicators: Education, Health, and Participation.

Education

A study conducted by Ang (2008) suggests that migration does affect basic education indicators positively. This result is consistent in the improvement in the drop outs, participation and cohort survival rates. However, this effect becomes significant only if the migrant is a female. This claim can be supported by studies from (Mansour et al., 2011; Edillon, 2008; Morooka & Liang, 2009) and they have also pointed out that migration has a positive outcome on the economic mobility of the families left behind thus, it improves the attendance and performance of children in school. However these claims are in contrast with the study of Sutaria (2011) which indicated that while the improved economic status of migrant families has produced more healthy OFW children, the children of migrant mothers did not do as well in school compared to other children. This has implications for the nature of care giving that should be provided children of migrant mothers in order not to dwarf their development and to develop them into citizens ready to face the challenges of the new millennium.

Health

In terms of health, most studies claimed that migration has a negative implication on the psychological well-being of children (Robila, 2011; Hoang & Yeoh, 2012; Smeekens et al, 2012). With this, children of migrant workers are more prone to depression and anxiety due to the absence of the migrant parent especially the mother. On the other hand, children that are living with their parents are found to be psychologically stable. In terms of reproductive health, children of migrant workers tend to be sexually active. In a study conducted by Ramos et al (2010), they found out that children of migrant workers would engage in different risk taking behaviors such as drinking, partying, outing that often makes them susceptible to do sexual activities.

Participation

In a study conducted by Edillon (2008), children of OFWs are less likely to participate in family decision making, in the community and organizations compared to children of non-OFW parents. However, this is in contrast with the study of Ang (2008) which indicates that migration increases participation rate of children specifically among secondary students.

Above all, the gathered literature findings on international migration provided a substantial amount of positive and negative claims on the education, health, and participation of left behind children. However, local studies concerning social development of children of irregular OFWs are rather lacking and therefore, this is what the study would like to direct its focus on.

Theoretical Lens

Historical Materialism

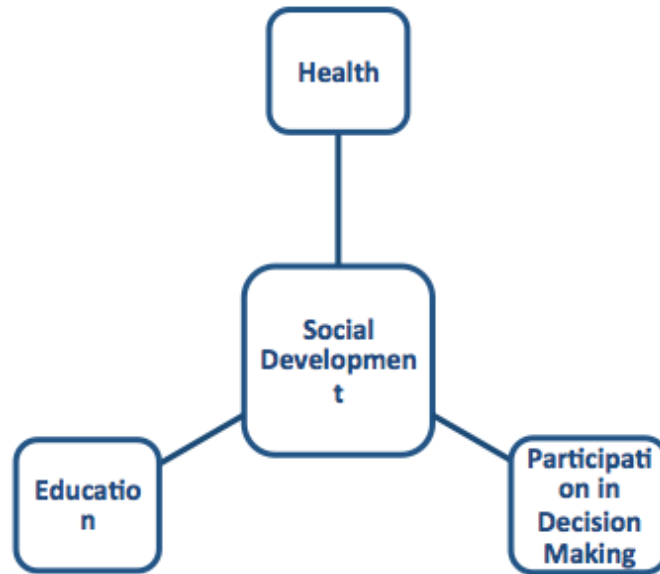
The study uses Karl Marx's Historical Materialism in order to provide a theoretical foundation on the nature of Social Development.

Historical materialism studies the most general laws of social development. Significantly, this theory recognizes the role of labour production, people, social classes, social communities, and social consciousness in Social Development (Afanasyev, 1987). In relevance of this theory to the study, a Marxist class analysis attempts to establish the current situation of the irregular migrant workers.

In the context of migrant workers, their entire population worldwide could be classified into three distinct classes namely; permanent, temporary, and irregular migrant workers (Custodio ang Ang, 2012; Fresnoza Flot, 2009). Among those three classes, the irregular migrant workers are considered to be the underprivileged because they earn less and their status reduced their bargaining power with employers compared to permanent and documented workers. Moreover, irregular migrant workers often face numerous structural, bureaucratic, and financial obstacles (Fresnoza Flot, 2009) which make their access to opportunities and services limited and which can also greatly affect the social development of left behind children specifically on their education, health, and participation in the decision making in the family.

Conceptual Framework

This study is guided by Rauniyar and Kanbur's concepts of human capital development and social capital development in order to further examine the impact of irregular migration on the social development of left behind children. Given in this conceptual framework are the different development indicators namely; Education, Health, and Participation in decision-making.



Indicators of Human Capital Development and Social Capital Development based from Rauniyar and Kanbur (2010)

Methods and Design

The method of the study is qualitative and utilizes a narrative approach of presenting the data. Narratives are understood as stories that include a temporal ordering of events and an effort to make something out of those events: to render or to signify the experiences of persons-in-flux in a personally and culturally coherent, plausible manner (Sandelowski, 1991). For the respondents, five children of irregular OFWs were chosen from Manila, Cavite, and Rizal through snowball sampling. Notably, they have successfully met the criteria for the respondents that; (a) they should be within the ages of 13 years old to 25 years old and (b) their parents must be working abroad for two years in above.

As revealed in table 1, the respondents are composed of two males and three females with their age ranging from 14 years old to 24 years old. Educationally, most of them are still in school as high school and college students. One respondent is already a college graduate and was formerly enrolled in a private and secular school. Two respondents are currently enrolled in private and non-secular schools while the rest are enrolled in public and secular schools.

Table 1 Socio Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Indicators	Frequency	Percentage
Sex		
Male		
Female	2	8.3
Total	3	12.5
	5	20.8

Age			
	14-16		
	17-19	1	4.2
	20-22		
	22-24	3	12.5
	Total		
		-	-
		1	4.2
		5	20.8
Educational Level			
	Elementary		
	High School	-	-
	College	2	8.3
	Others		
	Total		
		3	12.5
		-	-
		5	20.8
Type of School			
	Public		
	Private	2	8.3
	Total		
		3	12.5
		5	20.8

In table 2, three of the respondents have their mothers as their migrant parent while the two have their fathers. Subsequently, their parents have been working abroad within the course of six years to nine years. In terms of location and work classification, three migrant parents are working in Middle East as unskilled workers while the rest are working in USA and Russia as skilled and semi-skilled workers.

Table 2 Respondents' Migration Characteristics of their OFW Parents

Indicators		Frequency	Percentage
Migrant Parent			
	Father		
	Mother	2	8.3
	Total	3	12.5
		5	20.8
Years of Work			
	5-6		
	7-9	3	12.5
	Total	2	8.3
		5	20.8
Work Destination			
	Asia		
	Middle East	-	
	Europe		
	North America	3	12.5
	Central America		
	South America	1	4.2
	Sub-Saharan Africa		
	Australia and Oceania	1	4.2
	Ocean		
	Total	-	
		-	
		-	
		-	
		5	20.8
Work Classification			
	Skilled		
	Semi-Skilled	1	4.2
	Unskilled		
	Total	1	4.2
		3	12.5
		5	20.8

For the data gathering instrument, one on one unstructured interviews were conducted and consisted of open-ended questions that have allowed the respondents to answer adequately. With the consent from the respondents, the interviews were audio

recorded for data analysis purposes. Consent forms were also provided for the protection of the anonymity and confidentiality of the respondents.

Results

This section summarizes the life experiences of five children of irregular Overseas Filipino Workers. The data collected from the interviews were thoroughly weaved into five narratives in order to reveal the impact of irregular migration on the social development of the respondents prior to their access to opportunities and essential services specifically on the areas of education, health, and participation in the decision making in the family.

Criza

Criza, 14 years old, is a sophomore high school student from Bacoor, Cavite. Her mother has been working in Dubai as a waitress since when she was 8 years old. She is an only child and unfortunately, her father died when she was still very young. Her aunt assumed the responsibility of being her primary caregiver ever since her mother decided to work overseas.

Criza is an outstanding student in school. She likes Mathematics because she loves solving computations thus; she also recalled how she was awarded as best in math in her class last year. On the other hand, she considers Araling Panlipunan as her least favorite subject because she is not very much fond of doing memorizations. Criza makes it a point to attend her classes regularly in order not to miss a lesson. She is also an active member of their school's dance group and a choir member in their local church. She also mentioned that she admires her teachers from Math and TLE because of the way they facilitate their students. Criza belongs to a small but close-knit class in their school. She was always friendly towards her classmates and she also have a best friend whom she is very close with.

Criza admitted that her mother's remittances from abroad are not merely sufficient to support her tuition fee in school. Criza narrated that when she was still studying in her former school, her mother's remittances could only then afford a small percentage of her school expenses and the rest will then be shouldered by her aunt. Due to the fact that life is hard in the Philippines, her mother would keep reminding her to study very well in order for her to achieve her dreams in the future.

Criza seems to be a healthy child as she stated that she has not been experiencing any health problems for quite some time now. Normally, she seeks for a medical check-up only when she gets sick. Criza stated that if she gets sick, the most common are fever, coughs, colds, but nothing more severe. Criza stated that she maintains her health by eating healthy foods and taking her daily vitamins which she could afford through the aid of her mother's remittances. Her mother always reminds her to take care of herself because they do not have enough money to buy medicines.

As a young child who could be easily tamed by words and promises, her mother explained to her that working abroad would provide her a better life, a chance to study in a private school, and a bright future. As she explained, she eventually accepted her mother's decision to work abroad.

Despite of growing up without her parents around, Criza has maintained her close relationship with her mother. She is also very much close and open with her aunt whom she sees as her second mother. At home, whenever there are household decisions or problems that need to be sorted out, her aunt would usually seek for her help and would listen to her opinions. Criza believes that children must also be consulted by their parents when making family decisions in life.

Jeric

Jeric, 18 years old, is currently enrolled in the Alternative Learning System program in Bacoar, Cavite. Due to their family's financial hurdles, his mother decided to work in Riyadh as a dish washer when he was 13 years old and since then, his older sister became their primary caregiver at home. According to him, his father left them for another woman when he was still young and they did not hear from him again ever since.

Before getting into the ALS program, Jeric recalled that his grades during high school were merely problematic which resulted from spending too much time with his friends and randomly skipping classes. However, he mentioned that he likes English because he loves writing essays while his weakness was Science because he was having a hard time most especially when doing a Science module. In ALS, Jeric stated that he is very close with his teachers. When it comes to his classmates, he would treat everyone differently depending on their personality and maturity. Jeric admitted that he is not good terms with some of his classmates but he gladly mentioned that he have friends in class that he can get along with.

Jeric sadly narrated that his mother's remittances from abroad are merely not enough to provide for his needs in school. Financially, his mother's side of the family are entirely dependent of the remittances and other than that, they have no any other source of income. His mother would constantly remind him to study hard and do well in school because it's not easy to work and earn money overseas.

When consulted about his health, Jeric insisted that he is physically well though he had also mentioned his experience with having an ulcer before and how he has not undergone a medical check-up ever since he was young. At that time when he was dealing with his ulcer, he would just drink some sterilized milk and eat biscuits because they cannot afford to seek for a proper medical attention. Currently, his mother's remittances are still not quite enough to sustain their health needs. But fortunately, Jeric is not experiencing any health problems at the moment but his mother would always insist him to stop drinking and to sleep early so that when she gets home, she would see him healthy.

As a child who has been motherless for years, Jeric sadly admitted that he had developed a feeling of resentment towards his mother. He stated that sometimes he would feel mad when their mother cannot send them money back home whenever they need it. Aside from his mother, Jeric also described his relationship with his siblings especially with his older sister as somewhat problematic ever since they were still young.

When asked about his opinion towards his mother's decision to work abroad, Jeric admitted that he was not in favor of it because for him, it's not easy to grow up without a mother around. Jeric deeply expressed his great longing for her mother's care and support. Jeric felt angry when his mother did not explain to him why she suddenly needs to work abroad and instead, she just promised them that she would send them money in order for them to buy the things that they want.

In terms of family decisions, Jeric does not usually join or voice his opinions out because he feels that no one tends to listen but for him, it is important in order to be called a member of the family.

Jon

Jon, 19, is a senior college student from Manila. His father started working in United States as a watch technician when he was 13 years old. He is the youngest son in the brood of 4.

Since high school, Jon is an academic achiever as he had already received numerous awards from actively participating in different organizations. He also recalled that he graduated in high school with academic distinctions. At present, he is taking up Bachelor of Arts in Sociology in a prestigious university in Manila. Aside from that, he is also an active member of their school organization since junior year. When asked about his current academic performance, he admitted that his last semester grades were way better compared to his recent grades because he had primarily directed his attention on his responsibilities with his organization and on his thesis.

In regards with school subjects, he profoundly expressed his interest for History and anything that falls under Humanities; specifically Art Appreciation and Literature. Jon loves reading history books and he can thoroughly express his self through aesthetics. But then, he also had his academic weakness just like any other students especially when it involves Mathematics. In terms of school attendance, he professed that at times he is absent in class due to his unorganized schedule and constant lack of sleep.

In school, Jon described his relationship with his professors as solely professional. However, he expressed his appreciation towards his professors who are very much passionate and dedicated in teaching. On the other hand, he also mentioned a professor that he is not in good terms with. As for his classmates, he stated that his relationship with them is okay as he could interact with them inside the classroom. He also have friends in school.

When asked about his father's remittances, Jon explained that the shoulder of the money is not their tuition fee but rather, their monthly house dues. He explained:

In regards with his health, Jon said that he is physically okay yet he mentioned that his asthma came back when he was in freshman year. He also admitted that he has not undergone an executive check-up in his whole life though it is one of his mother's perks from work.

However, he recalled that he was rushed in the hospital when he was 7 years old because of dengue fever. For Jon, his father's remittances are not doing any help in

maintaining their health because his mother also happens to be the one who shoulders it aside from their education and other expenses.

Despite of the relatively great distance, Jon has maintained his good relationship and communication with his father with the help of the internet. However, he admitted that until now, he is still not in favor of his father's decision to work abroad because he worries about his father's health very much.

Just like with his father, Jon is also very close with his mother whom he often shares his life stories to. However being the youngest in the family, Jon admitted that he is slightly distant towards his siblings because of their great age gap.

Jon admitted that his parents do not usually listen to him when he tries to voice out his opinions regarding family decisions.

For Jon, he believes that his parents should also take into consideration his opinions about family decisions in life because he is a member of the family and he is knowledgeable enough to know what is right from wrong.

Gabrielle

Gabrielle, 20, is a journalism student from Cainta, Rizal. She was 11 years old when her mother decided to leave their family in order to work in Kuwait as a domestic helper. Throughout her college life, Gabrielle is a consistent president's lister since her freshman year and she attends her classes regularly. Now that she is already in her senior year, she stated that school is much easier for her because they are now primarily more focused on writing subjects. Then again, just like everyone else, she also mentioned that she hates Mathematics. In school, Gabrielle admitted that she is currently not involved in any of their organizations because she wants to focus more on her studies.

As a student, Gabrielle is close with some of her professors because at times, she and her friends get to hang out with them. She also regarded them as her favorite professors from her news writing class. Inside the classroom, she is very much okay with her classmates. She have a barkada in school and at the same time, she also revealed that she have enemies. When it comes to her education, Gabrielle stated that her tuition fee in school is cheaper unlike any other universities/colleges and her father is usually the one who provides for it.

When it comes to giving advices, her mother would always tell her to study well so that her efforts to work overseas would not be put into waste.

Gabrielle is physically well and so far, she does not have any health problems. She sees to it that she gets a medical check-up regularly.

She recalled that when she was 3 years old, she had undergone a kidney re-implementation wherein a tube was placed in her kidney. However, her kidney problems did not end there and it continued to occur until she reached her elementary years. At present, she maintains her health by lessening her intake of sodium and soft drinks. She also added that through her mother's remittances from abroad, she can afford to get her regular check-up and her daily dose of vitamins. As she explained,

her mother prioritizes their health very much and she would always remind her to stay away from anything that could harm her health and to never tire herself too much. Despite of the fact that she had spent the rest of her teenage years without her mother, Gabrielle insisted that she is still close and in good terms with her just like how she is close with her father and her siblings. As she explained the reason behind her mother's decision to work abroad:

At home, Gabrielle does not express her thoughts and opinions that often though for her, she believes that parents should also consult their children about family decisions in life.

Lovely

Lovely, 24, is a college graduate from Manila. She was 16 years old when her father decided to work in Russia as an Electrical Engineer. She is the eldest daughter in the family.

Lovely earned a degree in Computer Science in an ICT university in Manila. She recalled that during her college days, she had no problems with her grades and she did not incur any failing marks. She mentioned that she likes Computer because she can easily apply it in her course while the least was Mathematics because she admitted that she is having a hard time dealing with numbers and computations. Lovely was also a working student during college and according to her, she was able to support her needs in school without asking her parents for allowance. Fortunately, her part time job did not affect her studies and with the support of her friends, she was still able to attend her classes regularly. In school, she was always friendly towards her teachers and her classmates.

When her father became an irregular OFW in Russia, looking for a decent job became completely difficult. His father's remittances could only then afford her tuition fee and as a result, her other sibling was forced to stop attending school.

Lovely is fortunately a healthy person. She believes that getting a regular check-up is not really necessary because for her, it costs a lot of money. However, back when she was in college, she had experienced some health problems such as fever, flu, and pneumonia. Interestingly, she mentioned that she was never brought in the hospital because of a severe illness. For her family, there are more important things to prioritize rather than health.

When asked about her relationship father, Lovely admitted that she belongs to a broken family. As compared to her father, she is much closer with her mother whom she tells all of her problems to and the same goes for her younger siblings. She also mentioned that aside from them, they also have some relatives staying in their home which for her is really hard because they lack some sense of privacy.

Lovely narrated that she was in school at the time her father suddenly left without providing her any further explanations. She was so upset with her father for leaving without them knowing but eventually, she had accepted it because her father never failed fulfilling his obligation towards them.

When it comes to family decisions, her mother is more open and amiable towards her opinions rather than her father who likes to put all things under his control. For Lovely, parents should also turn to their children in sorting out family matters.

Discussion

The prevalence of international migration in the Philippines brought about by globalization mirrors the present economic condition of the country wherein Filipinos often deals with the difficulty of pursuing a decent job and sustaining the basic necessities of the family. Due to the financial gains that can be accumulated from working overseas, most Filipinos considered migration as an avenue for acquiring the quality life that they desire for their families and children left behind.

Based from the narratives on education, this study found out that children of irregular OFWs have a positive academic status which stem from getting good grades, consistent school attendance and establishing a good rapport towards their teachers and classmates. According to Alunan Melgar & Borromeo (2012), the children's peer group, school, and community provide a sense of belongingness while both the school and community foster positive involvement for the children. However, it is also observed that children of irregular OFWs experience delays in paying their tuition fee and other needs in school significantly whose parents are unskilled workers abroad because the amount of remittances that they receive back home could only then cover a limited proportion of their school expenses. In the context of children of irregular OFWs, the financial gains that they accumulate from their parents' remittances significantly depend upon the work classification and the status of their parents abroad.

In accordance with health, it is observed that children of irregular OFWs are physically stable at present yet they also have a history of health problems. In addition, these children only seek for proper medical attention when they experience some health problems because they think that getting a regular check-up is not merely necessary hence, it will only cost them a lot of money. This suggests that their access to health care services is rather limited and as claimed by Edillon (2008), the economic advantage resulting from the presence of an OFW parent does not seem to have altered health-seeking behaviour, which remains poor. In general, visits to the doctor and dentist are event-conditioned, meaning that an individual only seeks health care when he or she becomes ill.

When it comes to family decisions, this study found out that children of irregular OFWs are less likely to participate and express their opinions when sorting out family related matters and this was proven by Edillon (2008) who pointed out that most children of OFWs do not feel that they have active participation in the decision-making in the family. Moreover, this study found some factors that could significantly affect the way children perceive and participate in the decision making in the family such as the age gap between family members and the relationship that they have with them.

Conclusion

This study concludes that irregular migration has its significant effects on the social development of left behind children prior to their access to opportunities and essential services which are in line with education, health, and participation in the decision making in the family. It is figured out in this study that the social development of children of irregular OFWs is greatly influenced by the status and work classification of their parents abroad wherein children whose parents are considered to be unskilled workers often experience delays and problems in their access to education, health care services and the way they perceive and participate in the decision making in the family as compared to children whose parents are skilled and semi-skilled workers overseas.

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