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Journal of Family Issues 2013 34: 270 originally published online 25 October 2012

DOI: 10.1177/0192513X12462364

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Journal of Family Issues
34(2) 272–292
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DOI: 10.1177/0192513X12462364
<http://jfi.sagepub.com>



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Abstract

Transnational migratory labor remains a primary method many Filipinos use in an effort to gain financial security for their families. Based on data collected from an urban Southern Visayan province during the summer of 2007, this study examined a sample of 116 OFW (Overseas Filipino Workers) families and a sample of 99 traditional two-parent households. Comparative analyses revealed that mothers from OFW families demonstrated lower levels of warmth when compared with mothers from two-parent homes. Children from OFW families were reported to demonstrate greater internalizing and externalizing problems when compared with children from homes in which both parents lived in the home. Subsequent regression analyses showed that fathers who worked abroad may contribute to mother behaviors and child outcomes in certain direct and indirect paths.

Keywords

Filipino fathers, transnational migration, migrant labor, overseas labor, father–child relationship

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In the Philippines, the issue of poverty is at the very core of society. Adult family members, when able, often seek overseas job opportunities that will provide increased economic prosperity for their loved ones. As a leading source of income for the country, these individuals are often heralded as “heroes” for their sacrifice and willingness to go abroad and send back money to help the struggling national economy. An individual taking on this responsibility to work abroad is referenced simply as an OFW (Overseas Filipino Worker). According to systemic perspectives, any change in one part (or member) of a system creates ripple effects in all other parts of the system. Depending on the situation, these changes have the potential for positive or problematic effects. As previously noted, decisions to work abroad are often made to ensure economic prosperity for the family. This increased financial prosperity has the potential for significant positive change for both mother and child, including better housing, nutrition, and education.

Though there is potential for great economic gain, the potential for problems also exists. Many of these workers sign contracts that require years of service. Though many OFW men attempt to maintain connection with family by visiting in person, they often have strict limitations on the amount of time they can travel home and spend with their families. For some, this means going for years without seeing their families in person. These prolonged absences from family have the potential for negative consequences when it comes to the mothers and children who are left behind. Because of the inability to spend time in person with their families, many fathers attempt to maintain close ties through phone contact. Compared with years past, technological advances allow these men relatively inexpensive opportunities to keep in touch with family members. Though these efforts do not go unnoticed by family members (Parrenas, 2005), is it enough to compensate for not having the physical presence of a husband and father in the home?

A Brief Overview of Traits and Values Within Filipino Society and Family Life

Prior to further consideration of the OFW, an overview of Filipino culture and family life is warranted. Studies are replete with examples of common values and positive traits that characterize Philippine society (Dolan, 1991). Among these are respect for authority, a high regard for *amor proprio* (self-esteem), a strong religious faith, and smooth interpersonal relationships (Astorga, 2006; Dolan, 1991). Filipino personal alliance systems are also highly anchored by kinship, starting with the nuclear family. Their identity is deeply embedded in the web of kinship with lots of care being taken not to cause “shame and

embarrassment” to family or even members of society (Astorga, 2006; Dolan, 1991; Verder-Aliga, 2008). A particular value that is pertinent to our examination is that of *pakikisama* (smooth interpersonal relationships). This cultural value fosters good feelings and harmony among family members. An additional value is that of *familism* (the value of family), which places a very high value on the well-being and interest of the family (Verda-Aliga, 2008).

Astorga (2006) further enumerates three core values within the Filipino society. These values are said to manifest the quality and disposition of the Filipino heart and spirit—the very core of their personal being—and the depth and transcendence of interpersonal relationships. These core values are *lakas-ganda* (gracious power), *lakas-awa* (compassionate force), and *lakas-saya* (indomitable joy). The term *lakas* means power, strength, energy, vigor, capacity, or pull. Within the Filipino society, the notion is held that power or authority without graciousness, compassion, or joy only leads to the manifestation of authoritarianism, lovelessness, inconsideration, and unhappiness (Astorga, 2006; Dolan, 1991; Verda-Aliga, 2008).

Traditional stereotypes of Filipino parenting suggest that the father often symbolizes authority and suggests authoritarianism, whereas the mother stands for understanding and compassion (Tan, 1994). Historically speaking, the role of father brings about ideas of a strict disciplinarian, while the mother is the warm and forgiving person in the family. The father, who works outside the home, often seems distant, while the mother, who makes the home, is always near. The father is rational, and the mother is affective. When in need, therefore, a child would prefer to approach his or her mother precisely because, of the two, she is the one who is approachable and understanding while the father tends to be stern and unbending. It must be borne in mind that these are historical stereotypes held by the Filipino society for many decades, but Filipino social and family life is rapidly changing. Medina (2001) depicts the more contemporary role of father as more supportive and nurturing than in previous generations. Based on the self-reports of 133 fathers from an urban Visayan region of the Philippines, Harper (2010) found that many of these men were actively involved in the day-to-day activities of their children, such as helping with homework, participating in leisure activities, playing or working on projects together, and participating in religious activities.

Difference Between OFW and Non-OFW Families

A primary concern of this study was to consider potential differences between OFW families and non-OFW families on issues of mother behavior, the child's relationship with both parents, as well as the child's problematic outcomes.

Using family stress theory, we first consider the potential negative effects of working abroad on family life. According to this perspective, stress on the family comes from both acute and chronic stressors. The acute stress comes through the sudden disruption of family equilibrium when the father departs from the home. This disruption can contribute to increased difficulties for the mother and children. One of the areas of stress involves boundary and role ambiguity. When fathers move abroad, they leave mothers in a position of being a single parent. Mothers in these situations may be forced into certain roles and responsibilities not faced by mothers in dual-parent homes. In particular, mothers may take over many of the disciplinary responsibilities, the role generally reserved for fathers in this culture. By doing this, mothers may be less apt to hold to the “warm and forgiving” role to which she is accustomed. The boundary and role ambiguity can become problematic for other family members as well. Fathers who are accustomed to taking a hands-on approach in parenting their children are now left in more of a precarious role of parenting from afar. Although these men may see themselves as providing financially for their families, they may become frustrated because of the fact that they are unable to perform other “fathering” roles.

Previous research with U.S. military families who experienced one member being deployed supports the idea that boundary ambiguity is experienced by the parent that remains at home, the parent who serves abroad, and by the children themselves (Faber, Willerton, Clymer, MacDermid, & Weiss, 2008; Huebner, Mancini, Wilcox, Grass, & Grass, 2007). Although many of these parents are ordered for deployment, many parents in these settings choose to go abroad for increased income and career advancement (Newby et al., 2005). A recent study of 101 parents in the U.S. Army found that one third of the children between the ages of 5 and 12 were reported by the parent to have exhibited significant psychological problems (Flake, Davis, Johnson, & Middleton, 2009). Through the use of semistructured interviews with 148 teachers, counselors, and administrative staff, Chandra, Martin, Hawkins, and Richardson (2010) found that while some children were coping well, many were exhibiting increased anxiety that kept them from functioning well in school. This increased stress and anxiety that stay-at-home parents and children experience as a result of a parent’s military deployment is noted in other studies as well (Chartrand, Frank, White, & Shope, 2008; Ternus, 2010). Given these findings, it is hypothesized that children from OFW families will exhibit increased internalizing and externalizing problems when compared with children of non-OFW families.

Additional theoretical principles used for this study were based on the perspectives of attachment theory (Bowlby, 1969). Children who develop a secure basis of attachment with their caregiver feel free to explore and develop

a healthy sense of autonomy while still maintaining a close connection to family. The development of a secure attachment for a child generally occurs when a parent is responsive, warm, and nurturing. Children develop a sense of trust in this person, thus helping to form a relational bond that subsequently leads to fewer problematic outcomes, more prosocial outcomes, and an overall healthy sense of self-worth. Both mother and father have the potential to help their children develop a strong relationship and attachment that will lead to positive outcomes, but what about children who must spend long periods of time separated from their father because he must work abroad? Often, these children are limited to phone conversations, letters, or brief visits when their father has limited opportunity to return from his work overseas. In a recent text that addressed perspectives on transnational migration as it pertains specifically to Filipino workers, Parennas (2005) describes the "gap" that often exists between fathers and their children in these situations. In the various interviews that were conducted, she found that children often reported feeling awkward around their father, unsure of what to say. Although appreciative of his sacrifice, they felt that the constant distance had created a sense of unfamiliarity and inhibition. At several points in her interviews, the ideas of embarrassment and even fear arise to describe the children's feelings toward the father. Accordingly, we expect the quality of the relationship between the child and father to be lower when fathers move to work abroad when compared with families where fathers remain in the home. As for the relationship quality between child and mother, we do not expect significant differences in the child's feelings of closeness toward the mother when comparing OFW families and non-OFW families. However, principles of attachment theory would suggest that if mothers demonstrate less warmth in OFW families, this could have negative repercussions on the closeness the child feels toward the mother.

OFW Father Contributions to Familial Outcomes

Beyond comparing differences between OFW and non-OFW families, a primary goal in this study was to empirically examine how various paternal factors may influence mothers and children within OFW families. Based on family stress theory, the impact of a potential stressor is exacerbated or diminished by the level and types of social supports that are available to the system as well as the perception and attitudes of the member(s) of that system that is being stressed. Parennas (2005) speaks of how a father may seek to ease the divide that often psychologically and emotionally separates him from his family. By improving this relationship, the father can lay a foundation of trust and acceptance that will benefit the family system as a whole.

This improved relationship should also serve to make assimilation back into the family much easier when the father returns from his work abroad.

There are several ways the father can potentially buffer any negative effects of his absence from the family system. First is by providing financial support for the mother of the child that comes in the form of a monthly remittance. Each month, many fathers who work abroad send back certain sums of money to help provide financially for their family. This economic increase may well provide increased emotional security and decreased stress for mothers. These feelings could subsequently spill over to positively influence aspects of her parenting behaviors and relations with children, subsequently affecting the outcomes of the children.

A second potential influence on mothers and children is the frequency of communication while the father is working abroad. One of the primary ways OFW parents keep in touch with their family is through phone contact. Through this, fathers can keep up with some of the day-to-day or week-to-week activities that take place in the family. While this may not replace face-to-face interaction, it could still play an important role in building and/or maintaining a solid relationship between the father and his family. By keeping a consistent communication with the mother, fathers are able to provide encouragement and support for what she is trying to accomplish. Consistent communication can convey commitment and provide the mother feelings of emotional safety and security in the relationship she has with the father of her children. This would lead to an atmosphere of warmth and support that could positively influence other aspects of the familial environment.

A third potential influence pertains to the length of time that the father is separated from the family. Research with military families reveals that the disorganization and disruption in families is often greatest in the time immediately following a parent leaving the home (Pincus, House, Christenson, & Adler, 2001). Afterward, however, the family then begins to stabilize and adjust to the new family reality. This may hold true for OFW families as well. It is possible that a temporary disruption in normal family functioning may occur when a father departs to work abroad, but these disruptions would stabilize as the father spends increased time abroad.

The fourth potential influence is how often the father physically visits the family. These visitations, while brief, can potentially serve as a time of familial celebration and happiness, thus providing a time to bond and build on the relationship he has with the children. It is possible, however, that in some families the father's return may disrupt the stability that had been formed after the father's primary departure, thus throwing the family back into a temporary state of boundary and role ambiguity. Therefore, our study will investigate

how these times of visitation potentially influence the family system of those that remain at home.

Beyond the effects of father behavior we consider how relationship quality is associated with child outcome. Much of the literature on the effects of parent–child relationship on child well-being derives from Western research and focuses primarily on the mother (see Brumariu & Kerns, 2010, for a review). However, there is limited research on the impact of parent–child relationship in Filipino culture. While following a sample of more than 1,000 Filipino adolescents, Hindin (2005) found that boys who were close to their mothers attained more education when compared with boys who did not report such closeness with their mothers. Though he did not focus directly on relationship quality, Harper (2010) did reveal that increased authoritative parenting (often associated with relationship quality) from Filipino fathers was correlated with decreased externalized and internalizing problems in older children and adolescents. Accordingly, we hypothesize that the father–child relationship quality and mother–child relationship quality will be associated with decreased problematic behaviors in children. In addition, increased contact frequency, increased visitation frequency, and increased remittance will indirectly contribute to decreased problematic child behaviors through increased maternal warmth and increased child relationship quality with the parents.

Method

Sample

Participants in this study were recruited from six elementary schools of an urban city in the central Visayan region of the Philippines during the summer of 2007. Two separate samples were recruited from these schools. Through the use of school records, school administrators were able to identify children living in families where one parent lived abroad. From these children, a sample of 275 was selected for participation. Questionnaires were sent out with children in pre-K to sixth grade. Each of the questionnaires along with a cover letter was enclosed in an envelope and given to each student. Explicit instructions were given in the envelope that only one questionnaire was to be filled out per family, thus ensuring independence of observation. Students were asked to take these questionnaires to a parent living in the home. Instructions were included for the parent to fill out the questionnaire and return it with the student in the sealed envelope that was provided. Out of the 275 questionnaires, a total of 164 questionnaires were returned. In total, 128 surveys were filled out by the mother, 15 surveys were filled out by the father, and the

remaining 21 were filled out by some other caregiver such as an aunt or grandmother. Only mother responses were used for this study. From the 128 surveys filled out by the mother, 116 indicated that the spouse working abroad was the biological parent of the child. Only these surveys were kept for analysis.

The second sample, a comparison group, was recruited from the same six schools as the OFW sample. Teachers were randomly selected by school administrators at each school to identify children in their classes that came from two-parent families in which at least one parent would have an understanding of English. To be included in this sample, neither parent could be considered an "OFW." A total of 250 children were selected to participate. Each of the questionnaires along with a cover letter was enclosed in an envelope and given to each student. Explicit instructions were given in the envelope that only one questionnaire was to be filled out per family, thus ensuring independence of observation. Students were asked to take these questionnaires to a parent living in the home. Instructions were included for the parent to fill out the questionnaire and return it with the student in the sealed envelope that was provided. From the 250 questionnaires that were sent out, a total of 157 were returned. One hundred and five of these surveys were filled out by the mother. From these 105 surveys, 99 indicated that their partner was the biological father of the child. These 99 responses were used in this study.

Instrument

Questionnaires were based in English. Though Visayan is the primary language of this province, the vast majority of individuals are able to read and understand English. This would be especially true of OFW families.

Measures

Two child outcome measures were drawn from the Behavior Problems Index. *Internalizing problems* and *externalizing problems* assessed maternal perspectives on the child's problematic outcomes. This instrument consists of 30 items and has been used in several national studies, including the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth, the Panel Study of Income Dynamics Child Development Supplement, and Child Trends. Each item was set on a 3-point scale that ranged from 1 (*Not true*) to 3 (*Often true*). Higher scores on the measures indicate increased problematic outcomes. The reliability coefficients for the scale were .80 for internalizing problems and .89 for externalizing problems.

Mother warmth was a self-report assessment as to how often they engaged in certain supportive and nurturing behaviors with the child. Father warmth, as reported by the mother, assessed how the father exhibited these supportive and nurturing behaviors toward the child during times he visited the family. The six items used for measuring parental warmth were drawn from a self-report measure developed by Child Trends (Zaslow, Dion, & Morrison, 1997) and were answered on a 5-point scale ranging from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Very often*). Scores for the six items were averaged to obtain a score of paternal authoritative behavior. The reliability coefficient for the mother scale was .76 and for the father scale was .86.

Two measures for parent-child relationship were used. Child-father relationship and child-mother relationship assessed the mother's view of the child's relationship quality with each parent. The seven items used for the study were drawn from the Parent-Child Relationship Survey (Fine & Schwebel, 1983). Mothers reported on a 7-point scale for both measures. Example items from the father scale included "How much does the child trust the father," "How well does the child communicate with the father," and "How well has the child been able to maintain a steady relationship with the father." For the mother scale, the same items were used, simply replacing the word "father" with "mother." The reliability coefficient for the scale of child relationship with mother was .77 and for the child relationship with father scale was .84.

Several single-item variables were selected for analysis. First, *father contact* examined how often the father spoke to the child by phone. Responses ranged from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*Several times per week*). Next, *time abroad* considered the total length of time that the parent had been working abroad. Responses ranged from 1 (*Less than 1 year*) to 6 (*More than 4 years*). Third, *visitation frequency* considered how often the father travelled back to spend time with the family. Responses ranged from 1 (*Never*) to 5 (*More than twice per year*). Fourth, *money sent* was used to examine the amount of money the father sent home each month. Responses ranged from 1 (*Less than P3,000*) to 6 (*More than P20,000*).

Results

OFW Families compared With Non-OFW Families

The goal of the first phase of the study was to examine and compare the sample of 116 OFW families with a sample of 99 families with both parents remaining in the home. Table 1 gives a breakdown of demographic characteristics of the current two samples. The two samples were similar in many aspects. In both

Table 1. Sample Characteristics

	OFW (n = 116)	Non-OFW (n = 99)
Father		
Family income		
Less than P10,000 (<\$215)	15%	37%
P10,000-20,000 (\$215-430)	23%	37%
P20,000-40,000 (\$430-860)	34%	18%
More than P40,000 (>\$860)	28%	8%
Age		
30 years or younger	12%	6%
31-40 years	57%	58%
41 years or older	31%	36%
Religious preference		
Catholic	88%	92%
Protestant/other	12%	8%
Time abroad		
Less than 1 year	14%	—
1-2 years	39%	—
3-4 years	10%	—
More than 4 years	37%	—
Visitation frequency		
Less than once per year	29%	—
Once per year	57%	—
More than once per year	14%	—
Remittance		
Less than P10,000	12%	—
P10,000-20,000	41%	—
More than P20,000	47%	—
Contact frequency (phone)		
Never/seldom	8%	—
Once or twice per month	23%	—
Every week	27%	—
Several times per week	42%	—
Child		
Age		
3-5 years	9%	2%
6-8 years	58%	65%
9-11 years	33%	33%
Gender		
Male	50%	49%
Female	50%	51%
No. of children in home		
1-2	48%	48%
3-4	40%	45%
More than 4	12%	7%

samples, the majority of fathers were reported to be between 31 and 40 years of age, with the vast majority holding to a Catholic belief system. In both samples the children were also quite similar in age, sex, as well as total number of children in the household. The only substantial difference between the groups was family income level. More than 60% of OFW families reported incomes of more than 20,000 pesos per month, whereas only 26% of non-OFW families reported incomes of this magnitude.

Attention then turned to testing statistical differences in mother behavior and child outcomes between OFW and Non-OFW families. To test these differences, dummy coding was incorporated with non-OFW families coded as "0" and OFW families coded as "1." Regression analyses were used to test models predicting mother warmth, child-father relationship, child-mother relationship, internalizing child problems, and externalizing child problems. To be consistent, the same demographic control variables of child age, child sex, number of children in the household, and family income were entered in all analyses. All control and father variables were centered prior to analyses. As seen in Model 1 of Table 3, family type was significantly and negatively associated with mother warmth, suggesting lower levels of mother warmth when fathers worked abroad. A significant positive association was found between family type and maternal reports of internalizing and externalizing problems in children, suggesting increased problems in children when fathers worked abroad. In addition, the negative relation between family type and child-father relationship only approached significance in the expected direction, thus suggesting a potential trend that the relationship between children and their fathers may be negatively affected as a result of the father living abroad. Family type was not associated with child relationship with the mother.

Next, we tested the potential moderating effects of child gender on the relation between family type and problems among children. Results revealed that the product term of child gender and family type accounted for a significant portion of the variance of child internalizing problems over and above the effects of the control variables and family type. To examine the meaning of this interaction, separate analyses were conducted for sons and daughters. These results revealed that the effect of fathers working abroad was pronounced for sons ($B = .40^{**}$), whereas no effect was found for daughters. No other significant moderating effects of child sex were found for the effects of family type on maternal warmth, child relationship or externalized child problems.

Variability Within OFW Families

The goal of the second phase of the study was to focus within the sample of 116 OFW families. As seen in Table 1, 37% of the fathers in the sample had

Table 2. Bivariate Correlations Among Demographic Variables, Father Behaviors, Mother Warmth, Child Relationship, and Child Problems Among OFW Families (N = 116)

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Internalizing Problems	—											
2. Externalizing Problems	.70 ^{***}	—										
3. Child Relationship (F)	-.16 [†]	-.15	—									
4. Child Relationship (M)	-.28 ^{***}	-.30 ^{***}	.54 ^{***}	—								
5. Mother Warmth	-.26 ^{***}	-.31 ^{***}	.30 ^{***}	.53 ^{***}	—							
6. Father Phone Contact	-.23 [*]	-.16 [†]	.28 ^{***}	.11	.21 [*]	—						
7. Father Time Abroad	-.23 [*]	-.11	-.07	.06	.02	.13	—					
8. Father Visitation Frequency	-.17 [†]	-.21 [*]	.01	-.03	.07	.10	.19 [*]	—				
9. Father Remittance	.08	.02	.22 [*]	.27 ^{***}	.25 ^{***}	.07	.22 [*]	.39 ^{***}	—			
10. Child Age	-.14	-.17 [†]	.05	-.06	-.17 [†]	.13	.24 [*]	-.09	.02	—		
11. Child Gender	.04	-.02	.10	-.07	.07	.03	.06	.00	-.02	.03	—	
12. No. of Children	-.28 ^{***}	-.10	.17 [†]	.12	-.18 [†]	.04	-.04	-.07	.06	.22 [*]	.04	—
13. Family Income						.18 [†]	.30 ^{***}	.38 ^{***}	.66 ^{***}	-.06	-.02	-.15

Note. OFW = Overseas Filipino Workers. For child gender (0 = male, 1 = female).

†p < .10. *p < .05. ***p < .01.

been working abroad for more than 4 years, with 71% visiting home at least once per year. The vast majority of fathers in the current sample was reported to contact their families by phone once a week or more. Almost half the fathers sent more than 20,000 pesos per month to their family.

Bivariate correlations revealed associations among many variables of interest among OFW families (see Table 2). Significant findings emerged for several father behavior variables. Increases in father visitation frequency and phone contact were associated with declines in internalizing and externalizing child problems. Increased phone contact was associated with improved relationship quality between the child and father. The positive relation between phone contact and child-mother relationship only approached significance. The amount of remittance from fathers was positively correlated with child-mother relationship and child-father relationship, suggesting that increased financial contributions from fathers were associated with increased relationship quality among children and their parents. In addition, a negative association between time abroad and internalizing problems suggests that children were reported to have fewer internalizing problems when fathers had been gone for longer periods of time. Other relevant correlations were also found. Child-mother relationship was negatively associated with internalizing and externalizing problems in children, suggesting that fewer problems among children were reported when the child had a strong and positive relation with his or her mother. Family income was negatively correlated with internalizing child problems, suggesting that increases in family income were associated with reported declines in the internalizing problems of the child. Increased family income was also associated with increased father contact frequency by phone, increased father visitation frequency, as well as increased father warmth during these visits. Income levels of families were reported to be greater when fathers had spent more time abroad.

The next step was to assess the combined and unique contributions of the control variables and father factors on mother warmth. Family income, child age, number of children in the home, and child sex were included as control variables in all regression analyses. As shown in Table 3, father contact frequency, time abroad, visitation frequency, and amount of remittance were entered to test the combined explained variance as well as their unique contribution to mother warmth. Results revealed that the overall model explained 18% of the total variance. Number of children in the home was significantly and negatively associated with mother warmth, suggesting that mothers reported less warmth when more children were present. The positive relationship between father phone contact and mother warmth suggests that mothers reported increased warmth when fathers called more frequently. Additionally,

Table 3. Regression Predicting Mother Warmth, Child–Father Relationship, Child–Mother Relationship, Child Externalizing Problems, and Child Internalizing Problems

	Mother Warmth (β)		Child–Father Relationship (β)		Child–Mother Relationship (β)		Child Externalizing Problems (β)		Child Internalizing Problems (β)	
	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2	M1	M2
Child Age	-.09	-.16 [†]	.04	.13	-.04	-.00	-.04	-.01	.2	.09
Child Gender	.09	.0	.3	0.5	.00	.05	-.08	-.13	.00	-.10
No. of Children	-.16*	-.20*	-.03	.10	-.03	-.03	.05	-.09	.08	-.06
Family Income	.08	-.11	.11	.09	.08	-.13	-.11	.02	-.23**	-.22 [†]
Family Type	-.21**	-.13+	-.13+		-.12		.24**		.23**	
Phone Contact		.23*		.20*		.01		-.07		-.14
Time Abroad		-.01		-.18 [†]		.05		-.05		-.15
Frequency of Visitation		-.07		-.07		-.14		-.23*		-.14
Remittance		.35**		.15		.29*		.06		.15
Mother Warmth				.25*		.47**		-.19 [†]		-.08
Child–Father Relationship								.06		.03
Child–Mother Relationship								-.25*		-.24*
R ²	.09**	.18**	.02	.21**	.02	.33**	.06*	.20*	.08**	.20*

Note. OFW = Overseas Filipino Workers. For M1, $n = 215$; and for M2, $n = 116$. For Family Type (0 = non-OFW, 1 = OFW) and Child Gender (0 = male, 1 = female).
[†] $p < .1$. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

a positive relationship was found between father remittance and mother warmth, suggesting that mothers reported increased warmth toward the child when fathers sent more money home to the family. No significant effect was found for father time abroad or father frequency of visitation.

Next, the study sought to examine the potential contributing factors to child-father relationship. After entering the control variables, the four father variables along with mother warmth were entered to examine their unique and combined effects. Overall, the model explained 21% of the total variance. Results found a significant and positive relation between phone contact and child-father relationship, suggesting that increased contact by phone predicted an increased relationship quality of the child with the father. A significant positive relation between mother warmth and child relationship with the father suggests that increased mother warmth when the father was abroad contributed to an increase in relationship quality between the child and father. The negative relation between time abroad and child-father relationship approached significance, suggesting a possible trend that the child's relationship with the father deteriorated when fathers spent more time abroad.

Attention then turned to the potential contributing factors to child-mother relationship. After entering the control variables, the four father variables along with mother warmth were entered to examine their unique and combined effects. Not surprisingly, a strong and positive effect was found between mother warmth and child-mother relationship, supporting the idea that increased mother warmth would aid in the formation and maintenance of an increased bond that the child feels toward the mother. In addition to this, results revealed a significant and positive relation between father remittance and child relationship quality with the mother, suggesting that the money sent from the father contributed to increased relationship quality of the child with the mother over and above the effects of mother warmth. Overall, the model explained 33% of the total variance in child-mother relationship.

Next, we examined the unique and combined effects of the four father factors, mother warmth, child-mother relationship, and child-father relationship on internalizing and externalizing problems among children (see Table 3). After entering the control variables, results revealed that the overall model explained 20% of the variance in the internalizing problems among children. A significant negative effect of child relationship quality with the mother suggests that children were reported to have fewer internalizing problems when there was an increased relationship quality with the mother. No other individual father factor was found to contribute a unique variance to the overall regression model. Analyses testing for the effects on externalized child problems revealed a similar negative association between child-mother

relationship quality and externalizing problems. However, these results also revealed a significant negative association between visitation frequency and externalizing problems, suggesting that children were reported to have decreased externalizing problems when fathers visited more frequently. The overall model explained 20% of the variance in externalizing problems among children.

Discussion

This study provides new insight to how OFW fathers play a meaningful role in the developmental outcomes of school-age children. First, we compared a sample of OFW families with non-OFW families. Regression analyses revealed that children from OFW families were reported to display increased externalized and internalizing problems when compared with children from non-OFW families. These findings support the idea that not having the father present in the home promoted problematic outcomes for children. The reason for these effects is unclear, as the reported difference in father–child relationship quality between OFW and non-OFW family types was only marginal and no difference was found between the two groups in the child’s relationship with the mother. There are possible explanations for this lack of significance. First, the majority of fathers in this study maintained a high level of contact with their children both by phone and visitation frequency. These continued affinity maintaining behaviors from the father would be appreciated by the children, thus helping to keep a strong bond. Second, the resident parent plays a key role in how a child perceives of the parent that is no longer physically present in the home. Mothers from divorced families are often referenced as “gatekeepers” for the way they can influence the relationship between father and child. In a similar vein, mothers from these OFW families can contribute to increased relationship quality between child and father by continuing to give positive feedback about the father to the child. If the mother views the father’s efforts in a positive framework, then she will be more likely to remind the children of how much their father is sacrificing for the well-being of the family. These continued positive comments will help build a psychological closeness to the father. These findings seem to suggest that it is not the lack of a strong relationship that is affecting children in a negative fashion, but some other mechanism. This warrants further investigation.

Next, we tested how father contact frequency, time abroad, visitation frequency, and remittance may contribute to improved parent–child relationships in OFW families. Bivariate correlations support the hypothesized positive relation of family income and contact frequency with father–child relationship

quality. Based on regression analysis, the primary factors contributing to increased father–child relationship quality was the amount of phone contact between the father and family as well as level of maternal warmth. Although phone contact may not replace face-to-face communication, children are still able to feel connected with the father when they are a long distance apart. Mothers who are warm and supportive are able to create an environment of trust and love. This type of environment would likely spill over to how the child feels toward the father, especially if the mother is able to reinforce the positive contributions the father makes to the family. In these situations, the child is likely to develop or maintain a strong relationship with his or her father. In this way, both increased remittance and increased phone contact contribute indirectly to increased child relationship quality with the father through the positive contributions to maternal warmth.

We then tested how the various father factors would potentially contribute to the relationship between the child and mother. The two primary factors contributing to child–mother relationship included mother warmth and remittance sent by father. First, the extra income being sent from the father should provide the family with a sense of security and reduce financial stress. Based on these results, this increased remittance contributed to increased child relationship quality to the mother even after controlling for the effects of mother warmth. Increased remittance also contributes to the child’s relationship quality with the mother indirectly through the effects on mother warmth. By not having to focus on these problems, the mother feels greater freedom both physically and psychologically to give attention to the needs of the child. This added nurturance and attention from the mother should subsequently promote a strengthened bond between her and the child. Findings also revealed that father phone contact was indirectly associated with the child’s relationship quality with the mother. Increased phone contact from the father, through its direct relationship with both maternal warmth and child relationship with mother, appears to provide a sense of security and support that benefits both mother and child.

Finally, we examined the possible direct and indirect contributions of OFW fathers to child outcomes. Bivariate correlations supported the idea that children displayed fewer internalizing problems when fathers visited more frequently and had more phone contact. The negative association between frequency of visitation and internalizing problems seems to suggest that the immediate departure of fathers is a strain on children, but as time passes, children begin to adjust to the separation. Results from regression analyses revealed none of the father variables uniquely and independently contributed to internalizing behavior, although increased frequency of visitation was

directly related with decreased externalizing problems in children. The lack of significance may indicate that certain father variables were explaining similar portions of the variance in child outcome. Increased mother–child relationship quality consistently predicted declines in both internalizing and externalizing problems in children. These results provide some support for indirect links between father contact and child outcomes in OFW families.

Specifically, father phone contact and level of remittance appear to be indirectly associated with child problems through their contributions to mother warmth and subsequently effects on child–mother relationship quality. There was little to no effect of time abroad. Based on previous research on military families (Pincus et al., 2001), the family that is left behind often undergoes a period of disorganization that lasts for about a month. After that, however, the family then begins to stabilize and adjust to the new family reality. This may hold true for OFW families as well. The problem, however, is that only 14% of the fathers in this sample had been gone for less than 1 year. Thus, most children and mothers would be well adjusted to this new family structure. Phone contact and money sent from the father appear to contribute to child outcomes through the effect they have on mother behavior and the subsequent child relationship quality with the mother. Findings such as these indicate that OFW fathers can play an important role in the lives of their children by supporting the mother both financially and emotionally. This physical and psychological security that the mother feels will then reveal itself in how she interacts and bonds with her children.

Contribution

This study contributes to present literature in that this is one of the only known empirical studies that gives primary attention to the importance and role of OFW fathers. In the Philippines, transnational migration for the purposes of economic improvement will continue to take place in the foreseeable future. Instead of simply examining the potential negative effects on families and children, this study focuses on the potential ways in which some of the negative effects on children may be mitigated for the families who choose or feel forced into this type of life.

Limitations and Future Directions

Several limitations that can provide direction for future research exist in this study. Several of these issues lie in the methods used to conduct the study. First, all data used for the study were based on single-source questionnaires. Using a single source contributes to the problem of shared method variance. Future

studies should look into using a triangulated approach by gaining multiple perspectives and external points of view. This study would have benefitted from gaining insights from the children regarding their perceptions of relationship with their parents instead of relying solely on the perspective of the mother. Insight from the father's perspective would be beneficial as well. Third, the potential for problems is always present when using American-based instruments in a foreign culture. Though this has been a common practice in the past, future attention should be given to establishing more culturally sensitive instruments for use in this particular country. Next, approximately half of all OFWs are female. Future studies should consider conducting thorough empirical examinations of the effects on families and children when mothers work abroad. Another limitation is that the variables used in the study are based solely on cross-sectional data and are thus correlational in nature. Many of the associations described in the study are potentially bidirectional, therefore limiting any causal relation to be drawn from these findings. Using a longitudinal approach would help alleviate some of these concerns.

Another limitation to the study comes from the limited information we have concerning father phone contact. Although we tested the amount of contact by phone, we did not assess the content of these phone conversations. Parrenas (2005) suggests that many fathers still cling to the traditional father identity, thus spending a great deal of phone time as well as time when they visit simply setting rules and doling out punishment for the children. Perhaps this time might be better used encouraging the child and discussing the child's interests, hobbies, joys, and so on. This is not to say that discipline is ignored, but simply that the father should support the mother's role in this effort. By examining the content of the conversations with both the mother and child, we can gain greater insight into how these men contribute to the well-being of their families while they live abroad. Finally, future studies should focus on how OFW workers assimilate back into the family system after they have been gone for so many years. These studies should focus on how families are affected when a father tries to take on certain roles that may disrupt homeostatic patterns in the familial environment.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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