THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH OVERSEAS FILIPINO WORKER PARENTS

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Abstract - Being left behind by parents could be one of the most challenging turning points of an adolescent. The absence of the parents can affect children in many ways especially when it comes to the decision-making process. This gives them a burden or additional pressure on the cognitive ability of teenagers. Narratives of experiences of students with parents working abroad are revealed and described through this phenomenological study. The purpose of this qualitative research is to facilitate in-depth understanding regarding the lived experiences of senior high school students with Overseas Filipino Worker parents and the life struggles of these individuals.In this study, the researcher conducted series of interviews and developed four (4) sets of questions, one (1) central question and three (3) sub-questions to know the perspectives of senior high school students with OFW parents. These questions were answered by the participants aged 16-18 which the average age of senior high school students is enrolled in University of the East-Manila. The data gathered were analyzed using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Four (4) master themes were formed, namely: Factors that affect the student's decision making, Coping strategies in parental absence, Factors that affect the attitude towards studies, and Development of behavior in the absence of parental role. The results of this research led to the improvement of the existing intervention program of the Guidance and Counseling Office for students at risk (S.T.A.R.).

Keywords - Adolescents, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW), lived experiences, perspectives,

I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty is one of the problems that the world is facing towards economic success. It is the lack of access of the families to the basic necessities, thus, depriving them of food, water, clothing and other resources that they may need for everyday living. However, due to poverty, families, especially the parents tend to immigrate abroad for them to support their children's needs and for their future. Today, the Philippines is considered as one of the world's largest exporter of labor migrants, and these citizens who worked abroad were called Overseas Filipino Workers. Moreover, these OFWs helped oureconomy rise by simply sending remittance to their families, making the country's gross national income high. The volume of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) working abroad during the period of April to September 2015, it was estimated at 2.4 million (PSA, 2015). In addition, millions of teenagers in the developing world grow up with at least one parent living abroad (Cortes, 2011). The teenager's social life is so much affected by having either one or both parents working abroad. Children whose parents are abroad could experience having difficulty in psychological development (Battistella and Conaco, 1996). However, in the study, the study of Scalabrini (2003), children had shown to be socially adjusted because of the strong social support from family members and relatives. Despite the parents' absences, teenagers tend to be more responsible in the household and more socially independent. The absence of parents creates "displacement, disruptions, and changes in caregiving arrangement." There will always be emotional and psychosocial effects to the teenagers left-behind by their parents working abroad. Still, it is a good way for the extended family to look for the children. However, it will not change the fact that these children left-behind are longing for their parents' love, care, and presence (UNICEF, 2008).

II. METHODOLOGY

A. Research Design

The study focused on the qualitative type of research (case study). It is an examination that sought to answer the demands to clarify human conduct and involvements to discover the perspectives of students with OFW Parents (Corbin and Strauss, 1990).

B. Data Analysis Procedure

The researchers have utilized an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. as stated by Pietkiewicz &Smith (2014), studies of this kind of analysis are based on the perspective or the test of the personal involvements of an individual on how he/she gives sense to them. Likewise, it is expected that people are 'self-interpreting beings', who want to achieve in this type of analysis is to examine how an individual answer.

From specific to overall assumptions, IPA includes steps of data analysis: (a) development from the researcher ideas to what is shared among the co-researchers, (b) portrayal of the experiences that transfer to an elucidation of it, (c) allegiance to comprehend the members' minds and thoughts, and (d) psychological focus on how an individual makes sense to a specific life event inside a framework.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 1. Master Themes and the Related Superordinate Themes

Master Themes	Superordinate Themes
Factors that Affect the Students' Decision Making	Longing for Parental Care
	Guidance from Relatives
	Self-reliance
Coping Strategies in Parental Absence	Resiliency
	Appreciation of Parents' Hard work
	Peer support
Factors that Influence their Attitudes towards their Studies	Initial adjustments
	Inspiration from parents
	Determination and optimism
Development of Behavior in the Absence of Parental Role	Positive traits
	Negative traits

The basis of this section was formed from the exploration of these master themes and their superordinate themes, with every subject represented by verbatim concentrates from the interviews. These themes did not cover all aspects of the co-researchersexperience and were chosen due to their applicability to the question.

A. Factors that Affect the Students' Decision Making

This master theme explains that even though their parents are not around, there is someone who can still help and guide them in making the right decisions.

1. Longing For Parental Care

The students with OFW parents long for the love of their parents who earn a lot of money but do not have the time to be with their children. This can be a reason of not having communication with the parents and because of that; the students seek for a parental love of their real parent by their side. In that way, they can earn more money and afford a private school but cannot have one thing without sacrifice.

Social behavior of teenagers can also be affected by migration of the parents. In the study by Battistella and Conaco (1996), children without their mothers showed poorer social adjustment and suffered from impeded psychological development. In contrast, in the study of Scalabrini (2003), it resulted to positive effects of the teenagers as they adjusted physically, mentally, and socially in a proactive way, because they have strong social support from the other family members and relatives. As stated by respondent T, "Sometimes it's sad because I'm not with my parents, but I think of what they are doing is for me." Longing for parents was manifested by depression, loneliness, feeling of helplessness and lack of affection. Regarding to the impact on health, young adolescents or teens are experiencing physical separation. Children are being fed incorrectly, that may cause to serious medical conditions. (Youth Essentials, 2013). This was one of the experiences of respondent I, saying "It's hard, because they're not here. It's still different when they're here, rather than they just give me what I need." The absence of parents creates "displacement, disruptions, and changes in care giving arrangement." There will always be emotional and psychosocial effects to the teenagers who are left-behind by their parents who work abroad. Still, it is a good way for the extended family to look after and take care of the children. However, it will not change the fact that these children left-behind were longing for their parents' love, care, and presence (UNICEF, 2008).

2. Guidance from Relatives

This superordinate theme explains that they still get the guidance that they need, from their parents, sibling, or relatives who communicate and give them information and advice. The respondents also verbalized having strong connections with those who give them advice. They still seek those peoples' wisdom before they make decisions that can affect their lives, and according to respondent J, older relatives give advice because first they already have many experiences in life.

3. Self-reliance

This superordinate theme explains that the co-researchers have the tendency to keep their problems within themselves and don't seek help from others if they can handle the problems themselves. It can also be interpreted that some of the co-researchers only think of the outcome after they had done the action.This theme is supported by the statement of respondent A,"I do not expect if my decisions are always right because it is difficult to expect something. So, when I decide, I expect two possible outcomes: the positive and the negative. If it's positive then it is all right and if it's negative I should learn from it," and "I don't ask for advice from my parents sometimes."

B. Coping Strategies in Parental Absence

This master theme talks about the coping or surviving strategies of the teenagers with their parents working abroad. They seek the help of their friends and relatives whenever they encounter problems.

1. Resiliency

This superordinate theme explains that the teenagers develop a sense of being strong by transforming problems or struggles as a motivation or lessons to learn for them to be tough when they encounter problems and struggles in the future.

Regardless of whether the parents are present or absent, teenagers do basic responsibility such as doing household tasks. Example of these common tasks is cleaning the house, setting the table, washing dishes, taking care of their siblings, running errands, taking care of the plants and animals and other tasks. Although these children have been reported experiencing difficulties and longing for their absent parents, they also acknowledge that they learned to be more independent in the process (UNICEF, 2008), proving the statement of respondent B, "if it is only possible that they would not go abroad again, but they come and go so it is okay."

2. Appreciation of Parents' Hard work

This superordinate theme explains the coping strategy of teenagers of giving value to the work of their parents that they understand that this is for their future. According to respondent C, "it is for us that they go abroad so their hard work should not be wasted." Some teenagers whose parent/s is/are working overseas tend to use their parent/s absence to good use. They also use it as a motivation and for a better outcome for their family. Some students tend to perform well in school even if their parents are not present, thinking of a good way to repay them by finishing school and eventually helping their parents when it is time for them to retire and rest from the hardships (UNICEF, 2008).

3. Peer support

This superordinate theme explains the importance of peer relationships of the students who encounter problems with their OFW parents. These will help them to lessen the pressure and struggle by sharing their problems with their friends or classmates which is according to the statement of respondent

C. Factors that Influence their Attitudes towards their Studies

This master theme indicates that the Senior High School students of the University of the East – Manila developed positive attitudes towards their habits in their studies. They take the absence of their parents as an inspiration rather than a hindrance to their academic performance. However, it was also noted that the students also encountered problems with adjustments in their school performance.

1. Initial Adjustments

The co-researchers shared their experiences having on adjustment to their new environment where there are no parents to guide them as they learn in school. One of the examples that they have encountered was their difficulty to accept their situation at firstand having depression as the lack of parental role during their growth years and in their school performance that was experienced by the co-researchers. However, as time goes by, the teenagers slowly recovered as they already adapted to their new environment of not havingthe presence of their parents.

2. Inspiration from Parents

This superordinate theme indicates the way the students perceive their situation of parents having to work abroad. The co-researchers explained and told the researchers that they see their parents' hardships and sacrifices as their inspiration and motivation to study hard.

3. Determination and Optimism

Determination is a vitalfactor to the lives of students in succeeding into one's endeavor. This value motivates them to study hard and brings their best during their stay in the school. The co-researchers also explained that they strive hard to finish their studies because of the sacrifices of their parents who work abroad. Instead of taking their situation in a negative way, the co-researchers explained that they took their experiences in an optimistic way so that this kind of situation will not affect their studies.

D. Development of Behaviors in the Absence of Parental Role

The master theme explains the positive and negative effects of having OFW parents to the teenagers' attitudes and how they face and deal with it. The master theme also explains in what ways the co-researchers developed their behaviors according to the experiences that they went through.

1. Positive Traits

The superordinate theme states that many of the co-researchers have become independent in spite of the absence of their parents, and because of that the foundation of their family has grown stronger as stated by respondent B. Many of the co-researchers have also realized that the teachings of their parents were not worthless and that it was for their own good which is according to respondent C, "I also became bad at first, but as time passes, I thought that it is for us. So, I just study hard."

2. Negative Traits

The superordinate theme explains that the co-researchers tend todo things that are not good to the community due to the lack of guidance. Numerous investigations across disciplines have argued that growing up in a single-parent family had negative consequences on their school participation and educational success of teens (McLanahan, et, al, 1985). At the social level, the impact of migration was reflected in the risk of these teens because sometimes they are abused emotionally, physically and sexually. Teens become aggressive and very violent, therefore, cannot establish friendships with their peers (Youth Essentials, 2013), such as the statement of respondent A, "it is because of the lack of attention of my parents that I became bad." According to respondent D, "the negative side is that they are not here to guide me so sometimes I lie." In addition, many of them have deviant behavior. They

begin to smoke, take drugs, steal, drop out of school and run away, although they have the means to finance their education (Youth Essentials, 2013).

CONCLUSION

The study aimed to know the lived experiences of Senior High School students in the absence of their OFW Parents for the improvement of the existing program intervention of the Guidance and Counseling Office for students at risk (S.T.A.R.).The researchers distinguished the factors that affect the students' decision-making and identified the struggles that the students encounter and are needed to be discussed with his/her relatives or friends. The researchers alsodistinguished that the students used the hard work of their parents abroad as inspirations to their studies and identified that there are positive and negative attitudes that the students develop because of the absence of their parents.

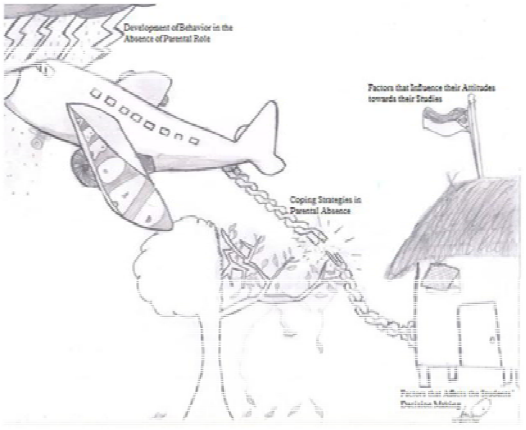


Figure 1. The Lived Experiences of Senior High School Students with OFW Parents

Therefore, the researchers came up with an airplane, a house, a flag, and a broken chain which symbolized the different themes gathered through the conducted interviews. The flag represents the place where the child was left; the house represents the master theme, "Factors thatAffect the Students' Decision Making" and the "Factors that Influence the Students' Attitudes towards their Studies."This means that despite the situation of the teenagers having OFW parents, they developed positive attitudes or traits towards their studies, thus making it an inspiration to strive hard. Moreover, the house also represents the relatives who support the teenagers, and the independence of an individual, particularly the teenager in which he/she will stand firm and develop a better personality. As for the airplane, it represents the master theme, "Development of Behavior in the Absence of Parental role." This shows the way how the teenagers perceive their parents going abroad where they look at the airplane (in this case, their parents) and think about how they work hard just to provide the needsof their children and the storm represents the struggles of parents working abroad. The broken chains represent the master theme, "Coping Strategies in Parental Absence," showing the connection between the children and the parents' relationships towards each other. The results of this research led to the improvement of the existing intervention program of the Guidance and Counseling Office for students at risk (S.T.A.R.). It focuses on the student-centered approach by providing rigorous needs analysis, psychoeducation, psychosocial development, and counseling. Moreover, providing more academic-related activities that will help the students overcome the longingness to their OFW parents.

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