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Family Resilience in the Context of Migration: Exploring the Lived Experience of Filipino Migrants' School-Going Older Adolescent Children

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Abstract

Using Froma Walsh's Family Resilience Framework, this study explored the experiences of overseas Filipino workers' (OFWs) families as narrated by adolescent children of migrant parents. Ten (10) Filipino college-level older adolescents (five were female) served as participants in an in-depth interview. Their narratives explored key family resilience processes using a Deductive Qualitative Analysis using various domains of family resilience (i.e., family belief system, communication processes, and organizational patterns). The study found that: (1) The family adjusts belief systems to accommodate unsettling realities of international labor migration; (2) Roles change in the family to compensate for responsibilities fulfilled by the parent before leaving for another country; and (3) Communication processes were strained, but family members serve as moderators to ease tensions and maintain a pre-migration relationship. This study concluded that the family resilience framework is a robust lens through which migrant families' experiences can be understood. Families generally exert effort to maintain homeostasis and cope with migration's psychological and social costs. A resilience-focused model for addressing psychosocial needs is proposed. Processes more apparent to the Filipino family and opportunities for future research are also discussed.

Keywords— migration, family resilience, adolescence, overseas Filipino workers

1 Introduction

Millions of Filipinos are away from their families as they struggle in foreign lands. Their families in the Philippines go about their lives, also facing challenges, some arising from parental absence. While the traditional view of the family still prevails as the norm in Filipino society, homes, where one or more family members are away due to international labor migration are no longer uncommon [1, 2]. Although there have been studies arguing the benefits of two-parent families living within the same households [3, 4, 5], families, either by choice or under duress of situations (e.g., financial need, need for career growth), may decide to accommodate some changes in the family structure to meet their goals. These trajectories towards alternative family arrangements are apparent, most especially in the case of migration. Considering the impact of changing family structures on family dynamics and the role that family dynamics play in the psychosocial well-being of family members[6, 7, 8], the present study sought to examine how the prevailing conceptualization of family resilience can be used as a framework in gaining insights on the internal family processes involved in migration as well as in designing psychosocial programs for adolescents whose parents are abroad.

1.1 Family and Migration

The centrality of the family in the migration phenomenon has been previously conceptualized and explored [9, 10, 11, 12]. Earlier works have underscored that in the context of migration research, the family, not merely individual members, should be the focus since the decision to migrate is more often a family decision and has some consequences for the internal family structure as a whole [9, 10]. In line with this, the need to maintain family cohesion and consider how governmental policies on migration should factor in these changes in family structure have been underscored [10]. Family orientation has been viewed either as a motivator or hindrance towards migration [10]. Migration entails "leav[ing] the context of origin and giv[ing] up the immediate participation in all interaction processes of the family" [**p.28**, 10], but when there are family members in the country of destination, assimilation is facilitated. The latter underscores the need to consider not only situations in the home country but also in the land of destination when examining the impacts of migration to the family unit [10, 11].

In the past decades, there have been two main areas in conceptualization and empirical investigation of the family in the context of migration. Taking a micro-level approach, the first area has gone beyond examining the impact of migration on family structure and has focused more on unpacking specific trajectories in family dynamics and well-being [12, 13, 14, 15]. The goal of this research strand is to understand the experiences of individual migrants and their families to aid in addressing individual-level and family-level psychosocial needs. Another area, taking a macro-level approach, problematizes how to make migration policies more responsive to family needs [16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21]. This strand aims to examine structural factors that propel the decision to migrate and facilitate or hamper assimilation in the receiving country to aid institutions involved in implementing such policies (e.g., government) in developing policies and programs policies and programs related to migration. In sum, extant literature highlights migration as a phenomenon that involves actors and agents across levels of the socio-ecological system. The present study takes a micro-level approach to examine the intersection between migration and the family. It sought to investigate internal family processes which are affected by parental migration. It catapults from the view of migration as a psychosocial phenomenon that takes its toll on family processes and adjustment outcomes of the family members.

1.2 Psychosocial Dimension of Migration

Migration permeates various facets of family life. On one hand, prior studies have shown how labor migration has empowered women, more specifically in decision-making, physical mobility, and participation in non-domestic activities [8, 12, 14]. Similar studies, however, noted emotional and psychological costs due to separation. As a family experience, migration can be viewed as a crisis. A family member leaving home is a significant life event, potentially causing tension and disequilibrium. Its impacts on family members, such as children, are well studied, as well as how migration yields stress and other practical and emotional concerns to the family and its members [2, 22, 23, 24, 25]. An emerging concept referred to as parental capital—i.e., nurturing interactions between the parent and the child—is challenged in migration, leading to adverse consequences due to parental absence [22].

Nevertheless, despite evident social costs, economic benefits amid migration remain to be emphasized [26, 27], overlooking family's struggles [26] and coping [28]. Furthermore, while it is established that migration is challenging for migrant's children [24, 25, 29, 30], systematic support remains elusive, accentuating the need to develop and implement services that address psychosocial needs [15]. These realities exemplify the need to explore the psychosocial dimension of parental migration, which the present study sought to address. It is hoped that a more profound understanding will be gained about how families transcend migration challenges, what potentials and strengths can be drawn from them amidst their struggle, and how their psychosocial needs can be addressed.

1.3 Family Resilience

Froma Walsh's [31, 32, 33] family resilience framework is salient for working with families in difficult circumstances. Walsh [**p.261**, 31]defined resilience as "the ability to withstand and rebound from crisis and adversity". Unlike other conceptualizations of resilience, which focus on the individual, Walsh [**p.3**, 32] views resilience as relational, with the premise that "serious crises and persistent adversity have an impact on the whole family."

The family resilience framework "offers a conceptual map to identify and target key family processes that reduce the risk of dysfunction, buffer stress, and encourage healing and growth from the crisis" [**p.132**, 32]. It suggests vital processes—i.e., family belief system, communication processes, and organizational patterns—which "mediate the adaptation of all members and their relationships" [**p.415**, 32]. Most importantly, as a basis for intervention, it offers a strengths-based perspective on how families can better deal with difficulties [32]. The application of resilience in addressing many challenges and diverse family situations has also been founded [32].

Among Filipino families who would instead seek counsel from friends and relatives than approach a counselor or therapist [34], this might be a strategic entry point in addressing families' psychosocial needs. The family "represents an institution with conflicting interests, priorities, and concerns for its members" [**p.375**, 21]. However, despite power differentials and struggles, the family collectively molds itself to establish stability and unity.

1.4 The Present Study

Based upon Walsh's framework and the realities of migration, the present study explored the following qualitative hypotheses about the psychosocial impacts of migration on family resilience:

1. The family of the migrant worker will adjust family belief systems to accommodate the unsettling realities of international labor migration.

2. Roles will change in the migrant's family to compensate for responsibilities fulfilled by the migrant parent before s/he leaves for another country.

3. Family communication processes will be strained, but family members shall serve as moderators to ease tensions arising from such strain to maintain pre-migration relationships.

It was hoped that this research would allow a closer examination of the situation of adolescents in migrant families to propose doorways for psychosocial intervention.

2 Methodology

Deductive qualitative analysis (DQA) developed by Gilgun [35] was employed in the study primarily because it did not only wish to understand participants' lived experiences as migrant's children, but it also wanted to verify if Walsh's [31, 32, 33] family resilience framework serves as a meaningful lens in understanding these experiences. DQA is found helpful in the field of family psychology [35], upon which this study also anchored itself. This approach enabled a balance between eliciting narratives through semi-structured interviews from the eyes of the participants and testing the qualitative hypotheses about how families respond to migration challenges from the lens of family resilience. Such balance between the subjective and the objective is essential in understanding a prevalent phenomenon such as migration, which cuts across different life spheres: personal, familial, and societal, and at the nexus of cultural, political and economic realms.

2.1 Participants

The participants in this study (labelled in this report using pseudonyms) were purposively selected through the snowball technique, wherein peers within the researcher's social network recommended potential participants. For the adolescent to be considered as a participant, s/he must be: (a) an older adolescent (18 to 20 years old) (b) a child of an overseas Filipino worker who is still actively working in the foreign country at the time of the interview; and (c) a consenting participant who agreed to participate after being informed of the processes and goals of this study.

The participants were diverse. Five have migrant fathers, three have migrant mothers, and two have both parents abroad. Most of them have parents working in the Middle East, except for two whose parent is working in Africa and Southeast Asia, respectively, and for another whose parents are in Europe. It was gathered from the interviews that the structure and dynamics of the participants' families varied—some reported closely-knit family ties, while others reported loose family structures and boundaries.

2.2 Data Collection Procedure

While the analytic frame was logico-deductive, the data-gathering process was mainly influenced by an appreciation of phenomenology [36, 37, 38]. This stance was a response to Graham and Jordan's [39] suggestion for a contextualized understanding of migrant's children's well-being. This research aimed to develop a psychosocial intervention model for migrant families; thus, contextualization by listening to participants' stories is needed. Participants' narratives were evoked through a 1 to 1.5 hours in-depth interview. The interviews were audio-recorded after informed consent was sought.

The conversations revolved around the following central questions: What were their experiences as Filipino migrants' children? What was the context of these experiences, *i.e., what were the circumstances surrounding these experiences?* Moerer-Urdahl and Creswell [38] suggested such a form of questioning. Participants were allowed to refrain from answering follow-up questions if they were uncomfortable.

Purely qualitative, the study necessitated reflexivity—i.e., examining the researcher's role and positionality [40]— from the researcher's side. The researcher was also an overseas Filipino worker in the Middle East, currently providing psychosocial services to adolescents and families experi-

encing adversities. A researcher's memo was kept to document thoughts and feelings after each interview, and the researcher winnowed the transcripts during the data analysis stage.

2.3 Data Analysis Procedure

Qualitative data analysis was done by transcribing audio-recorded conversation, winnowing the transcripts iteratively, identifying themes, and preparing the report using essential verbatims based on the procedure recommended by Braun and Clarke [41]. This entails a six-step process: (1) reading and re-reading the transcripts, (2) generating initial codes, (3) categorizing codes to determine themes, (4) reviewing the themes, (5) defining and labeling themes, and (6) reporting. To ensure that essential narratives were culled out, member checking [42] was done wherein the participants were asked to read, comment on, and validate the findings.

2.4 Ethical Considerations

The researcher ensured that potential participants were made aware of the nature and purpose of the study, and before collecting any information, informed consent was sought. Confidentiality and anonymity were assured among the participants. Most importantly, psychosocial support was readily available to the participants in case they expressed the need for such after participating in the study. Although none of the participants required any counseling support during or after the interview, it was planned earlier in the study to refer the clients to the university's counseling services should such be needed.

3 Results and Discussion

3.1 Migration as a Family Crisis Situation

Resilience gains meaning when viewed in the context of human strife and struggle. The ability to withstand strain comes to light amidst situations that endanger equilibrium [31]. These situations are aptly called crises or adverse life experiences, which include but are not limited to disaster experiences, domestic violence, life-threatening diseases, and the death of a family member. From a psychological viewpoint, crisis gives birth to complex emotional problems that individuals may have limited ability to process and about which made the right decisions are constrained [38]. As a family phenomenon, migration is a crisis that results in many complex family processes and disturbs the family equilibrium. The participants' narratives validated this assumption.

3.1.1 Anxiety of Separation

> *The first instance of separation was a profound experience.*
>
> *They simply told me that my mother was leaving then she'll be back soon.… I was bribed with chocolate… (George)*
>
> *We all share the same room, and my father was the one laying us down to sleep. He sang lullabies to us. Then, suddenly, it was gone. (Kayla)*

For some, it was a moment of promise. For others, it was a realization that things would never be the same. This instance was tinged with sadness: an agonizing feeling they had to bear for weeks, months, or, for some, even years after. Literature shows that children whose mothers worked abroad face socio-emotional challenges [43]. Compared to their counterparts, migrants' children tended to loneliness [44] and higher anxiety and depression [45].

The participants shared that they had a stable and secure relationship with their migrant parents before the latter's departure. However, this security was shaken by the distance, thus, catering to a sense of uncertainty in the relationship. Such ambiguous relationships might have elicited higher anxiety [46] among migrant's children.

Interestingly, while several participants took time before being able to accept their parent's decision fully, others took it more easily:

> *Mama was the one who frequents the house, taking care of us. Daddy just came home occasionally. So, when he left, I did not find it hard to adjust. (Jennelyn)*
>
> *I did not think too much. I got used to her not being around. As if nothing changed. Anyway, even before she left, we didn't usually see her because she was at work. (Kayla)*
>
> *I was not able to build a foundation between us, [a foundation] that would bond us together, so it was OK. (Kenneth).*

Emotional distance before parents' deployment seemingly helped some participants easily accept their parents' absence. Unlike others who had something to miss (e.g., lullabies, Friday bonding), they had been habituated to their parent's absence before migration such that separation was not difficult to bear.

3.1.2 Realities of Absence

Absence was another recurring theme in the participants' stories. It was challenging to deal with the realities of parents' absence, especially during special occasions or events the whole family was expected to attend, such as Family Day, class card distribution, enrollment, competitions, school performances, and graduations. The participants compared themselves to their peers, fostering a feeling of envy.

> *Perhaps… perhaps, sad… Perhaps, until now because of the pain…like, when you grew up asking [why], and envious of your classmates, of your friends. Why is their mom there but mine was not? (George)*
>
> *I also miss her so much, but I need to cope. I need to bear my loneliness. I also need her attention. Sometimes, I seek attention from other people, but I have no one to seek it from. I just stay inside my room and cry. I begin to think of other people, who are with their parents, and begin to realize their family is complete and they are together. I feel envious of them. I think my siblings feel the same way as I do. (Philip)*

D'Ambrosio and Frick [47], in their exploration of happiness, opined that while humans may be satisfied "in absolute terms," how far we are satisfied in reality depends on what we "see around". This phenomenon depicts Runciman's [48] concept of relative deprivation. The adolescents felt relatively deprived because they did not have one of their parents while they saw their peers with their respective parents. This made them recall instances when they had the same moments and thought that if only their parents did not leave, they would not have experienced such aloneness. In a society where an intact heteronuclear family is desired, having absent parents aggravates the feeling of deprivation. Accordingly, the participants appreciated their parents' determination to attend special events and occasions. For instance, even when they were working abroad, Jason's parents came home regularly to participate in special activities such as his elementary and high school graduations.

Participants had varied reasons why they wanted their parents to be present at special events. Kayla wanted her mother to be present so she could realize from her children's successes that all her efforts in working away from home were not wasted. Such expression of reciprocity manifests the Filipino's culture of "gratitude/solidarity", even without being obliged or demanded from [**p.54**, 49]. Despite the distance, Kayla has kept her emotional ties with her mother. George, on the other hand, had a different reason:

It was very important for me [that they are present] because there's this belief that your friends, your peers, they can leave you, but the family remains… the family is always just there. But that's the sad part, because [in spite of that belief] my mom's not there, she's in another country…My achievements… my mother did not see my achievements.

3.1.3 Social Costs and Perils of Distance

While the participants saw the benefits of migration (i.e., economic), they had many things to say about the social costs they had to pay:

The pro [advantage], I believe, is that children become more independent when the parents are not around. The only con [disadvantage] I see is in terms of my confidence when it comes to aspect like identity…since I did not have any model, there was no guidance, it was too difficult. (George)

Eh, I was used to my dad's absence, so I would usually text mommy even if he's here. I seldom text him, about which he might have felt bad. I'm not usually updating him, only mom. Whatever I need I also ask from mom, so in that part, I think he must also be feeling bad about it. (Kenneth)

The parents' absence affected the participants personally. It was more challenging to relate with the migrant parents with whom they never had the opportunity to build intimacy. This lack of intimacy posed some challenges, as one participant conveyed:

Daddy, he likes tinkering with car parts, eh, I didn't get used to doing it, as well as fixing things, fixing the roof. I never got used to those things because daddy was not there. What I am used to is cooking, cleaning, and helping with the household chores. So, when daddy comes, he would ask me to help him clean the car. I am not engaged in doing it, because I'm not used to it. My interest is not just there (Kenneth)

Migrant parents' vacation, especially after the first instance of separation, was deemed an awkward situation by some participants. Distance made it difficult to build rapport as it was also challenging to find common ground with the migrant parent.

At the extreme, the parent's absence resulted in marital infidelity. Some participants reckoned the struggle they had when their parents had an affair:

Mom did not have a fair fighting chance. We also did not have anyone to talk to because only Daddy was there. We couldn't just leave because he was…they were…sending us to school…I mean, caring for us. (Kayla)

When my mother left, that's the time their relationship got murky. It was too traumatic. Too traumatic: what dad did. It was so difficult, so difficult. Seemed like he had just abandoned his responsibilities. (George)

Marital infidelity in migrant's families has been mentioned in literature [50]. Marital conflict is a crisis that aggravates the challenges of migration. In the participants' case, their parents' marital conflict cast an additional burden upon their shoulders while they struggled to deal with their migrant parent's absence.

Regardless of their recognition of economic benefits, most participants saw migration neither as absolutely good nor a practical choice. Participants said they would rather have their parents with them than enjoy material things. Upon weighing the costs, some even saw it as more unfavorable, especially regarding its effect on the family's social life and relationship. This paradox between financial benefits and emotional costs has been painted in the stories of transnational mothers and their children [2].

3.2 Embracing Realities: Family Belief Systems

Walsch [32] proposed that family belief systems encompass the family's ability to find meaning in life even amid crises, gather its strength and potential amidst difficulties, and see more significant purpose in their challenging experiences. This study hypothesized that the families of migrant workers would adjust their belief systems to accommodate the unsettling realities of international labor migration.

3.2.1 Making Meaning of Migration

During the conversations, participants shared their understanding of why their parents had to leave. All conveyed financial stability as the key reason. Several shared that the decision was made because the family had to pay debts or the parents had to find a better job to provide for their basic needs and send their children to better schools. They gleaned that unequal opportunities for better jobs, unemployment, and poverty were the larger contexts compelling their parents to migrate. These insights aligned with Cortes' [27] analysis that, particularly among Filipinos, parents leave "to provide for their children economically" (p. 2), which in most cases, is driven by inequalities in peoples' opportunities to provide a better quality of life for their children in the home country [2].

For some who were able to see and experience the plight of the migrant parent, the reward goes beyond financial. Jason was able to visit his parents. There he saw how difficult it was for his parents to work abroad. Hence, for him, his parents' reward from migration was not money but what they could do because of this money (i.e., being able to send him to school and fulfill his needs). Money per se was not a reward because, according to him, his parents needed to work painstakingly to get that. Alyssa, who was also able to experience living in her parent's country of work, affirmed this:

> *I think the reward is that they can provide us with those things that they never had the chance to have or experience when they were children. They do not let those difficult experiences they have when their children to be experienced by us. That, I think, is fulfilling for them. That's also what they explained to me.*

Direct experience of migration provided additional context to the family situation. The participants learned to see beyond the immediate outcomes and appreciated their parents' underlying motivations and circumstances.

Participants acknowledged that their parents' financial motivation was not for selfish comfort but a selfless desire for the betterment of the children and the family. Gaining the situation from their parents' eyes benefited them and the family. It allowed participants to empathize with their parents and willfully share the weight of migration.

At the family level, understanding made a difference in parent-child relationships. Jennelyn shared that since his brothers were very young when their father left, they were emotionally distant from their father, which was not true in her case because she already understood the situation. This misunderstanding could have been reduced if only Jennelyn's siblings could share the realities of their parent's migration. [32] noted that approaching family struggle as one is a fundamental characteristic of resilient families. This shared approach among the participants' families was facilitated by a common understanding of the motives and circumstances surrounding the experience.

At the individual level, understanding parents' motives helped me adjust to the situation easily. For Cynthia, it was easier to accept her father's decision knowing that his father made that decision willfully; his father always had this "dream to go abroad." For Jennelyn, it was her understanding that, beyond financial reasons, leaving for abroad might lead to better outcomes for his father, who has been *"trapped into gambling", looking at migration as "sort of rehabilitation."*

3.2.2 Positive Outlook

Gathering "strengths and potential" [**p.132**, 32], both at the personal and familial levels, enhances families' ability to withstand and recover from challenges. George shared that there were times he thought he was the only one experiencing all the struggles of having an absent parent. Then, it dawned upon him that he was not alone. This epiphany spelled out his change of attitude. He said: *"I told myself: Instead of being a victim, why don't I be a hero? Even after going through all those, you can still stand up and have a positive disposition in life."* When we asked the participants if they see migration as positive or negative, some answered, *"It depends."* Philip's response represented other participants' attitudes:

> *I think that the effects of migration depend on the people who will be affected by it: if they will take migration in a positive way or in a negative way. In our case, like my mom told me, we have a different take on her needing to leave the home. We are not like other children who become rebellious, or who go astray and wayward, when their parents leave for abroad, as if their lives are senseless and directionless. We take my mom's leaving the home as a motivation to be good children and good students.*

Studies abound, showing how positive thinking influences people's evaluation of a stressful situation and coping [51], even in the context of migration [52, 53]. Coping through "thinking positive thought" was also observed among Filipino children [**p.100**, 24]. For George, Philip, and some other participants, keeping a positive disposition enabled them and their families to transcend the arduous reality of parental migration.

3.2.3 Transcendence and Spirituality

In some participants' stories, spirituality and faith manifested as strongholds among migrant families. Victor, when sharing about how they dealt with the challenges of their father's migration and the significant family problems they encountered, said:

> *We do not anymore mind it too much. We have surrendered everything to God. For my father's welfare… That way, we would not be overly affected anymore by what he is doing, whatever he is doing. We have given it all to God. We do not want to be much affected by it. We do not want to have a heavy heart. Just move on… Just move on…*

While there remains a dearth of studies focused on Filipino adolescents' religiosity and spirituality [54] or on religiosity among distressed families [33], available literature suggests that being maka-Diyos (God-loving) [**p.63**, 55] is within the set of values upheld by Filipino adolescents. Religiosity in the family is also regarded as a protective factor against psychosocial risks [56]. Mansukhani and Resurreccion [**p.281**, 54] found that spirituality among Filipino adolescents shapes positive character and is shaped by various influences, including "overcoming difficult life experiences". In the case of Victor, the strife experienced both by the migrant parent and the family in the home country was hefty enough, such that the comforts offered by their faith in God emboldened them as they faced their struggles.

3.2.4 General Findings on Family Belief Systems

Having presented how the informants made sense of their experience of parental migration, several insights can be gleaned: (1) they, as migrant children, understood the context of their parent's decision to work abroad, and this understanding helped them and their family tackle the circumstances with empathy, (2) degree of understanding varied according to the level of maturity, (3) in case of confusion, the role of parents in explaining the circumstances was necessary, (4) positive thinking helped them cope, and, in the case of some informants, such positive disposition emerged as a

conscious choice; and, (5) religion and spirituality added meaning to perplexing circumstances surrounding and emerging from parent's migration. All of these depict how the family adjusts their beliefs to maintain the ties that bind the migrant parent and the family in the home country.

3.3 Changing Roles: Organizational Patterns

Walsh [32] theorized organizational patterns as of how roles in the family adapt to challenges and demands in the aftermath of a crisis, the degree of connection established between and among members of the family, and the social capital which serves as resources for the family in crisis. This study hypothesized that roles change in the migrant's family to compensate for the responsibilities of the migrant parent.

3.3.1 Flexibility

In the aftermath of parental migration, there were modifications in the role of the migrant's children and family. The absence of one parent obliged non-migrant parents to keep an open line of communication between them and their children. Concurrently, it also compelled children to set aside biases towards their parent who was left behind and explore possibilities in their relationships.

Kayla shared that she learned to do household chores and became an Ate (older sister) to her younger siblings. George reckoned becoming more independent because his mother was not there. The dynamics of role adjustment could be viewed in the story of Victor:

> *My mommy always tells me that if daddy leaves, I shall substitute him since I am the eldest.… When I first heard that, I thought it was too difficult! I am just a child, I am not yet done with my studies, why should I have such a big responsibility? But as time passes by, I see it not as a burden anymore.*

Carandang [57] and Udarbe [**p.46**, 58] theorized about the phenomenon of *tagasalo*, which Carandang defined as "one who 'takes care' or one who comes to the rescue". The *tagasalo*, according to Udarbe [**p.58**, 58], gains meaning when gleaned from the "context of siblings", wherein the sibling takes care of the family's needs materially and emotionally. In some participants' case, such a phenomenon could be observed, especially when the non-migrant parent was inaccessible or did not readily provide the care or attention the children needed. The migrant child, in some ways, stood as parents to their other siblings, something that migrant children in different cultures also do [28].

3.3.2 Connectedness

Mutual support, respect, and nurturance are also characteristics of family resilience, alongside the family's ability for reconciliation [32]. Amidst the realities of his mother's absence and the perils of his father's extra-marital affair, Philip figured: We understood each other more... I realized people in the family cared: they take notice! Everyone seems to be helping one another. Karina, as she explored what helped her address the challenges of migration, shared that her mother was a big help in filling her father's "physical absence" in their life. In Philip's and Karina's stories, the non-migrant parent who took care of the children while the spouse was away and other relatives who expressed genuine respect compensated for the absence of the migrant parent. They served as physical representations of intimacy and social support.

In some cases, absence settled concerns that could not have been resolved with presence. Philip shared that his relatives, who used to be dependent on his mother, started to try to become more economically independent by building their businesses. Jennelyn shared that one of the rewards in their family was the resolution of their parents' issues, especially the conflicts that were so frequent before his father's migration. The migrant parent's absence seemingly reinforced

families' ability to reconcile differences and conflicts. Family members needed the distance to reflect upon circumstances.

3.3.3 Social and Economic Resources

Social networks are a valuable resource among families in adversity [31]. Many participants expressed that people not part of the nuclear family offered relief as they battled the impact of their parent's absence.

Even when his father was still here, Jason stayed with his aunt's family since it was nearer to his school. He only saw his father once a week. Jason shared that it was not that easy to adjust, but he was able to adapt to the circumstances because of the presence of his aunt. Other participants referred to *lolo* (grandfather) and *lola* (grandmother) as sources of support. In the Philippines, just like in some other cultures [28], extended families may assume responsibility for taking care of migrant's children when parents leave [43]. The extended family is a resource, especially for children [24]. The extended family provided physical care, nurturance, and a parent figure.

The involvement of the extended family in caring for and rearing migrant's children was not free from concerns. While Jason said his aunts had been watching, he recognized the strains this set-up was causing his relatives. On the other hand, George noted that guardians would have parenting styles different from his parents, which made it challenging. These show that while the extended family is a valuable support system, adequate arrangements to ensure migrant children are appropriately taken care of by their relatives must be in place [28].

Friends also served as social support to some participants:

> *One of my friends told me that she also experienced having parents away from home and she assured me that this sadness will also go away as time goes by. (Cynthia)*
>
> *I learned to understand things, why things must happen, and I became more understanding with my friends, whose parents are also not around, sometimes not just one parent but both. The circumstances I experienced as a child of a migrant parent, as well as communicating with friends helped me to be more understanding. (Philip).*

Hearing peers' stories of facing challenges of parental absence fortified the participants' belief that they, too, can deal with the same experience. Bandura [59] referred to this as vicarious learning, suggesting that people tend to be more efficacious when they see others capable of doing the same thing. Peers also served as a listening ear to share one's issues with. Kayla, as she reflected upon the needs of migrant children, mentioned that having someone to talk with bolsters her ability to cope. Despite opportunities for communication between her and her mother, there were some issues she found more comfortable sharing with peers than with her family.

Lastly, being in the school also helped some participants in their adjustment. Studying became a distraction, which watered down the sadness of their parents' absence. This valuable contribution of the school in adjustment and coping was mirrored in the narratives of children with Filipino migrant mothers [24].

3.3.4 General Findings on Organizational Patterns

From the informants' stories, the following insights could be garnered: (1) when their parents left, the informant accommodated additional responsibility for themselves and for their siblings, which contributed to their being independent and understanding; (2) specific conflicts existing before parent's departure seemingly got resolved naturally, which informants attributed to distance; (3) the non-migrant parent compensated for the migrant parent's absence since the migrant's child also played parenting roles to their siblings; and (4) extended family, friends and school served as compensators to the migrant parents' absence by providing social and emotional support. These showed that available social support systems are in place upon which children can rely, at least

emotionally, in their parent's absence. They also showed how roles have changed, not just in the migrant children's families but also in other people with whom they had direct relationships due to the absence of the migrant parent. Remarkably, in the case of some families, members did not merely adjust to maintain a pre-migration relationship but even worked towards improving this relationship.

3.4 Maintaining Relationships: Communication Process

Walsh [31] proposed that communication processes include exchanging clear and unambiguous messages, sharing emotions, and collaborating in making decisions for the family and its members. This study hypothesized that communication processes within the family, i.e., between the child and the migrant parent, will be strained. However, other family members will serve as moderators to ease the tension from such strain and maintain pre-migration relationships.

3.4.1 Clarity of Communication

From Walsh's [32] perspective, clarity pertains to how the family ensures the exchange of unambiguous messages to arrive at a correct and truthful understanding of family situations. For the migrant's family, whose distance demanded mediated communication, clarity seemed to be a challenge.

Participants shared using a variety of technologies to facilitate communication: social media (e.g., Facebook), mobile applications (e.g., WeChat, Viber, Wazzup), email, cellular phone, webcam, and short messaging systems (SMS, text messages), among others. Media depended on availability. For instance, Kayla shared that how she and her mother communicated depended on what technology was available to her mother, who worked in a country where free communication applications were barred. Interestingly, others conveyed that personal communication would have been better.

> *If it's in person, I feel we'll become more open. (Cynthia) Phone calls or chat messaging do not give value to the conversation, because you could not see the reactions. (George)*

In the participants' sharing, the preference for proximity in communication has something to do with the relational context that face-to-face communication affords, like being able to figure out emotional reactions from the migrant parent. This relational context, which is not readily available in mediated distance communication, adds to the clarity of the message. Migrant's children elsewhere considered mediated communication as "poor substitute for real contact, which is more profound" [**p.31**, 60].

Despite challenges, all participants emphasized that communication was indispensable to maintaining healthy relationships between the migrant parent and the family members back home. Hence, the family adjusted to make sure that communication was maintained. Whoever had the opportunity or was available first initiated the conversation.

The family and the migrant parents also created venues through which communication could smoothly transpire. Cynthia shared that a week after her father left, they acquired an internet connection to check on their father constantly. His father, on the other hand, also exerted effort. In some cases, like Alyssa, whose family had trouble managing the time difference, families resorted to asynchronous communication, where they can reply to each other's messages when they can.

Conversely, being unable to keep the line of communication had consequences. Estrangement arising from a lack of meaningful communication [60] was also observed among other migrant's children. Knowing what was happening to the migrant parents was valuable for the family in the home country. The absence of precise knowledge about the whereabouts and activities of the migrant parent catered to insecurity in the relationship and aggravated doubt among family members. Participants believed that knowing what was happening back home also mattered to their migrant parents — being consulted in decisions, even when afar, cultivated a sense of

belongingness. It addresses the insecurities within family relationships, which creates a cycle of emotional uncertainty.

3.4.2 Open Emotional Sharing

Emotional sharing as a process in the context of migrant's children could be collected from the experiences of Kayla and Jason. Kayla shared that even before her mother left for abroad, communication in the family was not completely open. However, her mother's migration changed how they shared emotions and thoughts within the family.

Distance necessitated that parents inquire about the whereabouts of their children. The children also longed for the opportunity to be listened to by their parents. It seemingly washed away hesitations about genuinely expressing one's thoughts and feelings. It stabilized the kind of communication between and among family members. Most importantly, it served as an opportunity to be more open emotionally. Suler [61] coined the term online disinhibition effect, which posits that people tend to be more expressive in mediated communication than in real-life situations since such setup lessens the probability of outright rejection or immediate setback. Communication stabilized because the distance dissipated emotional tension. Aguila [**p.93**, 62], in an exploration of computer-mediated communication in long-distance relationships, shared that couples try to avoid arguments in computer-mediated communication.

There were reasons why openness was desirable. For Jason, keeping an open line of communication with his parents allowed him to address his feeling of relative deprivation as an outcome of his parents' absence. For George, such emotional openness fulfilled inner needs, particularly *"emotional, moral support"*, which he thought were *"what the migrant's children need."* Between the migrant parent and their children back home, since physical intimacy is unavailable, emotional connection afforded by mediated communication created a sense of virtual presence, which Gergen [63] referred to as absent presence.

3.4.3 Collaborative Problem Solving

Another aspect of communication processes is engagement and participation in confronting concerns arising from the crisis [32]. In Kenneth's case, for instance, the family was exploring options for what could be done, especially since his father is getting old. He felt glad he was involved in the decision-making process, although pragmatic reasons prevailed and were the fundamental basis for the family's decision. George, who realized a gap between him and her mother, also sought ways to level off with his parent to bridge the gap. As an aftermath of migration, the family unit gained fortitude from its members' ability to participate in family decisions, negotiate their roles and go the extra mile to ensure family stability.

3.4.4 General Findings on Communication Processes

By and large, informants' stories demonstrated that in the aspect of communication: (1) both the migrant parent and the family in the home country sought knowledge about the day-to-day affairs of each family member and that such knowledge was afforded by constant communication; (2) however, mediated communication posed challenges (i.e., time difference, lack of context) which the family had to transcend by making adjustments in their use of technologies or in their role in the communication process (e.g., exploring various strategies in using communication technologies, adjusting one's behavior to facilitate more open sharing of ideas and feelings); (3) role negotiations by the family members served as a source of grit for the members in need of support and the family, at large. All these findings support the hypothesized scenario of a family in a stressful situation making accommodations to ensure that the relationships they had before migration will be preserved and sustained.

3.5 Guiding Children and their Families amidst the Reality of Parental Migration

Having painted the overarching narrative on how the adolescent participants experience family resilience in migrant families, this study could consolidate a model of intervention that may support the psychosocial needs of migrant's children, their migrant parent, and their family. Table 1 presents doorways for intervention based on Walsh's framework and the participants' narratives.

Since migration is a family experience, mechanisms to support migrant parents and their children are needed. For the children, the focus shall be on helping them cope with their parents' absence and the consequences of this absence. For the parent left with the children, the focus shall be on empowering them to adjust their roles and accommodate the additional tasks and responsibilities to compensate for the migrant parent's absence. For the migrant parent, the focus shall be on helping her or him cope with the psychosocial implications of migration and the stress and strain of working in a different country while still trying, through mediated means, to keep up with the roles in the family.

Table 1. Doorways for Family Resilience-based Intervention

*K*ey Process	Migrant Parent	Family in the Home Country
Family Belief System	• Orientation on the psychosocial implications of migration • Training on financial management and risk diversification • Opportunities for religious expression and spiritual growth	• Education on migration and coping • Involvement of children in migration-related decisions • Strength- and hope-based decisions psychosocial support • Opportunities for religious expression and spiritual growth
Organizational Patterns	• Constant exploration of marital familial roles • Helping single parents creatively address complex roles • Couples' education on constructive and affirmative conflict resolution • Lobbying for better work-related policies for migrant workers	• Involving children in household activities • Expediting standard procedures in processing of documents (for seafarers) • Ensuring care arrangements before entrusting children to relatives (Owosu, 2011) • Organizing psychosocial support group comprised of migrant's children • Educational scholarship for migrant's children
Communication Processes	• Orienting parents on positive use of communications media and other alternatives • Discussing gender stereotypes and leveling off expectations on levels of emotional openness • Involvement of parents in decisions in the home country through open lines for consultation	• Orienting children and other family members on positive use of communication media and other alternatives • Discussing gender stereotypes and leveling off expecations on levels of emotional openness • Involvement of parents in decisions reintegration

3.6 Limitations and Future Direction

Some limitations temper the interpretation of results from this study. First, this study only focused on one group of Filipino adolescents attending school and may not capture the breadth and depth of experiences of adolescents beyond this context. Second, the lived experience of migrant children is complex and filled with challenges. The same is true for their migrant parents and other family members. The present study only examined family resilience from the lens of the children. Further research should focus on the narratives of parents or caregivers—those who migrated and those left behind. Using a family case study design where all members within the same family unit are interviewed might also provide a fulsome understanding of the phenomenon.

Given these limitations, further studies are recommended in the following areas: (1) Filipino migrant's children in various socioeconomic strata, (2) experiences of Filipino families who were estranged as an outcome of migration, (3) migrants whose spouses were trapped in extra-marital affairs, (4) self-efficacy of migrants and their children in coping with the challenges of migration, (5) interaction between family-level dynamics with macro-level influences on migrants and their families' well-being, (6) psychological resilience of individual family members; (7) experience of migrants by the cultural environment in the destination country (especially in the context of cultural and religious adaptation); and (8) testing the doorways of intervention proposed in this study in an actual setting.

4 Conclusion

In sum, this study explored the lived experiences of migrants' adolescent children using Walsh's family resilience framework. Narratives from the participants afforded a closer look at the plight of their migrant parents and their families. These narratives showed that the decision to migrate is multicausal; various factors influence families to resort to parental migration to respond to their specific family contexts and needs. It is also multifinal; the migration experience yields different results and impacts on the family unit and its internal processes. The current conceptualization of family resilience as comprised of changing family belief systems, communication processes, and organizational patterns is a valuable framework for making sense of these nuanced impacts of migration in family dynamics.

Even though migration has been a perennial experience among families, much is yet to be learned regarding the nuances in social costs of parents' decision to work abroad. Enjoying a meaningful and rewarding life is a primary motivator for parental migration. A meaningful and rewarding life, at least from the lens of adolescent children of migrant parents, refers to a life with sufficient access to material needs without sacrificing healthy and valuable relationships. Separation due to migration seems not to be the predominant choice among adolescents interviewed in this study, notwithstanding the concurrent material gains it offers. Children would prefer their parents to be present and proximate if given a chance.

On the other hand, parents were viewed as more willing to take the psychosocial risks of migration to provide for their family's material needs. There is an apparent disconnect in how parents and their children set priorities, leading to the decision to migrate. Notwithstanding these, families may take the risk of separation for various reasons (e.g., providing for children's education, paying debts, and fostering career growth). Hence, the notion of a family living within the same household is not plausible. The present study provides insights into how families deal with the migration experience and offers doorways for psychosocial interventions which professionals and institutions working with migrant families can use as a basis for their programs.

Another important insight from this study is the role of family resilience as a construct for consideration in the migration context. While families exert effort to be resilient and try their best to cope with the challenges of migration, two structural influences need to be considered to aid the family. First, deciding if parental migration is a worthy choice, and second, planning how to

tread the migration experience more effectively should parents decide to leave the country to work abroad. Opportunities for parents and their children to level off motivation and expectancies should be available to weigh the advantages and disadvantages of such a decision. This way, the decision to migrate becomes a carefully planned family decision, and family members are psychologically prepared for potential psychosocial risks emerging from this decision. All efforts should be made to foster family resilience in the migration context.

Most importantly, structural influences (e.g., poverty, lack of employment opportunities that sufficiently provide resources to meet family needs) remain an underlying theme in migration. Socioeconomic factors and the link between family dynamics and macro-level influences (e.g., policies, programs, social norms) warrant further attention. On a larger scale, efforts to address socioeconomic inequities that compel family members to work abroad should be prioritized. Strengthening programs that assist migrant families to meet their goals in a shorter term so that long-term migration is just one of the options and not the only alternative must be considered. Until these inequities are resolved and international labor migration becomes more of a choice than a requisite, the ethical direction is to ensure that services for migrants and their families are made available, including those which foster their psychosocial well-being and quality of life.

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