



Unveiling the Journey of Overseas Filipino Workers: Interview Analysis for Education

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ABSTRACTS

As much as the Philippines is considered a "third world country," Filipinos are more likely to work overseas rather than remain in their country. Thus, the major focus of this research is the Overseas Filipino Workers who are willing to give up their lives overseas to support their families in the Philippines. The Purposive Sampling Technique was used to gather the five (5) Overseas Filipino workers (OFW) who have spent more than a decade working abroad and residents in the province of Sultan Kudarat to serve as the participants in the study. We conducted a one-on-one interview to consolidate depth information on each participant. Further, the data analysis was based on Colaizzi's (1978) phenomenological method of analysis and with the coding process, six (6) emergent themes emerged: Poverty, More Career Opportunities, Better Salary, Culture Shock, Racial Discrimination, and Self-Reliance. Poverty is the major reason why many Overseas Filipino Workers were unable to offer a better living for their families. Due to poverty, Overseas Filipino workers are prepared to incur the risk of working in a foreign country to survive the deprivations they are facing. Overseas Filipino Workers must be self-reliant to cope with the challenges and difficulties they face while working abroad. OFWs must get more moral support from their family since working abroad is not easy.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW), hailed as 'New Modern-Day Heroes,' are catapulting themselves outside the country to render something for their families. Filipino migrant workers, termed Overseas Filipino Workers, are individuals having Filipino citizenship who work in a foreign nation for a brief amount of time. All of them go through a great deal of suffering as a result of their sacrifices. They are, nevertheless, continuing to work hard because they want to provide for their family in some capacity.

First-time OFW in a private hospital in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, a medical caretaker was struck by a coronavirus. In such conditions, Filipino medical caretakers are at the forefront of dealing with patients of their host nations and are subsequently in danger of gaining the coronavirus (Amit et al., 2022). Overseas Filipino Workers are sent home as a result of their lawless experiences while working abroad (Cocjin, 2021). It is because of various challenges that they are experiencing overseas that they are compelled to return home. Further, the general problem of this study was to unveil the journey of Overseas Filipino Workers who had been working in another country for more than a decade. Specifically, this study sought to answer the following questions: (a) Why did these Overseas Filipino Workers work abroad?, (b) What were the struggles of Overseas Filipino Workers when they went abroad?, and (c) How did these Overseas Filipino Workers overcome the challenges?

During the pre-migration phase and migration, labor migrants are subject to a variety of distinct happenings. Like the journey that the 'Modern Day Heroes' have faced, the agendas separating their ways from their family were the enormous sacrifices they made. The knowledge gathered in this study will serve as an eye-opener to unveil how challenging the situation of an Overseas Filipino Worker is.

2. METHOD

The study employed the qualitative research design where the phenomenon investigated the various journeys of Overseas Filipino Workers. Specifically, Transcendental Phenomenology had been used and participants were interviewed through the internet platforms via Google Meet or Zoom. Moreover, semi-structured interviews were used to gather the data. After collecting the data through online platforms, the data gathered were analyzed by following Colaizzi's phenomenological analysis method.

2.1. Participants of the Study

The participants have been chosen based on the following criteria: (a) OFW can be of any sexual identity, (b) OFW must be a resident in the province of Sultan Kudarat, (c) OFW must have been working abroad for more than a decade, and (d) it barely matters whether they are graduates or undergraduates as long as they are working in another country.

2.2. Data Gathering Instrument

To attain the appropriate data needed, we identified the participants fitted in the study and set a semi-structured interview. This allowed us to consolidate depth information, thoughts, experiences, and feelings that the selected OFW participants have. To obtain more information from the participants, the guiding questions and follow-up or clarifying questions were added. The structure for the interview procedure had been supplied by the interview questions.

2.3. Data Gathering Procedure

The initial stage for us was to send the "letters to conduct" to the adviser and the High School Chairperson. Further, the research participants were five different Sultan Kudarat residents who were recruited using the Purposive Sampling Method. Every participant was given a pseudonym by us to help keep the participants identities private. Next, we then requested permission to record the interview to compile the data, which was useful to them. Finally, as a result of the continuing pandemic, we ensured that all letters and in-depth interviews with participants were delivered and conducted via online platforms.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this study, the journey of chosen five participants shared their life in venturing to another country. Six emergent themes were generated which are as follows: (1) Poverty, (2) More Career Opportunities, (3) Better Salary, (4) Culture Shock, (5) Racial Discrimination, and (6) Self-Reliance. There are several discussion points:

3.1. Why do Overseas Filipino Workers Work Abroad?

By segmentation of data obtained from the interview, we found out that Overseas Filipino Workers work abroad because of their experience and deprivation in their country of origin. Specific themes were distinguished; the three (3) themes analyzed are (1) Poverty, (2) More Career Opportunities, and (3) Better Salary.

3.2. Poverty

Overseas Filipino Workers are gamblers and risk takers in some ways (Hall, 2019). They put a lot of money into leaving the nation. Even if they fall prey to some unlawful recruiters at times, they do not give up quickly. They are too willing to gamble than to settle in their origin fed up with poverty. Among the responses of four participants, one main theme emerged. The participants implied that settling in the Philippines is very poor. Analysis of prior panels suggests that impoverished households being able to send a member abroad for employment and therefore rising out of poverty is occurring.

Since it started long ago, the poorest households that most successfully transitioned from poverty were those with migrants, which is vital to remember. As poverty was the reason for most Overseas Filipino Workers to work abroad, it is their only key to lift their fellow loved ones to surmount such and is related to the responses of the participants. Several comments are in the following:

- (i) "Budlay gid ang kinabuhi diri sa Pinas. Mahirap gid siya, damo gid nga hirap. Budlay nga magpalayo ka sa pamilya mo labi na gid sa husband mo." It has meaning that *"It is very hard to have subsistence here in the Philippines. It is hard to be away from my family, especially to my husband."*
- (ii) "Kaya rin ako nag abroad noong mga panahon nayungrabe talaga kahirap ng buhay salat kami sa pera." It has meaning that *"That's why I went abroad at those times since it is hard to live on and we're lacking money."*
- (iii) "I choose to work abroad because... first ... is for my family given na anak ako ng farmer and second it is a big opportunity working abroad ... because the reality in the Philippines there's a lot of graduates unemployed plus mahirap talaga ang buhay dito." It has meaning that *"I choose to work abroad because: First, for my family given that I am a daughter of a farmer and second it is a big opportunity working abroad. The reality in the Philippines, a lot of graduates were unemployed and life here is very poor"*

3.3. More Career Opportunities

With that, the first reason why Filipino want to work abroad is because of better career opportunities which seemingly connect to the responses of the majority of the participants. Several comments are in the following:

- (i) "...at isa pa mas dali abi mangita trabaho didto sa abroad nga taas ang sweldo kaysa diri sa Pilipinas." It has meaning that *"Moreover, it is easy to find a job abroad that has a higher salary compared here in the Philippines."*
- (ii) "In abroad marami talagang opportunity na nag aantay sa atin and ang aim natin to be there abroad is to make our family have a comfortable life". It has meaning that *"In abroad there are lots of opportunities that are waiting for us and our aim to be abroad is to make our family have a comfortable life."*

The implication of positive impacts on Overseas Filipino Workers that could with the provincial turn of events is a point likewise deprived of additional consideration. The formation of open positions abroad is viewed as a solution to the absence of open doors in the Philippines.

3.4. Better Salary

Overseas Filipino workers are striving to offer a better life for their families. With that, the majority of the participants are willing to sacrifice and risk everything to work overseas and earn higher pay. Filipino laborers working abroad aspire for greater pay to fulfill their family's needs and desires. Their goal was to improve their compensation so that they could save more money for their family. Adding up In all of the responses, it is very explicit to notice that they all share the same motive for going abroad: to have a better life by earning a higher salary. Several comments are:

- (i) "Siyempre mas gipili ko mag-ubra sa abroad kay sa sweldo. Ang sweldo kung icompare mo diri, kabulig man o maestra sato nga panahon, dako gid ang diperensya. Mas dako salary digto kesa sa Pilipinas." It has meaning that *"Of course, I chose to work abroad because of the salary. The salary here, a helper or teacher way back those days, there's a big difference. There's a better salary abroad rather than in the Philippines."*
- (ii) "At saka... mas malaki ang sahod... doon kesa dito kayayun napagisipan ko na mangibang bansa." It has meaning that *"The salary is much better overseas compared to our country. With that, I have thought about working abroad."*

Overseas Filipino Worker earns more money in dollars (Yang, 2006). That is why many Filipinos are keen to work abroad to make a lot of money because working there can be quite lucrative (Lorenzo et al., 2007).

3.5. Struggles of Overseas Filipino Workers

The difficulties that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) must overcome place them at increased risk for developing mental health issues. As soon as they set foot in a new nation, they are immediately faced with the challenge of adapting to its strange surroundings, cuisine, housing, and way of life.

There are also instances of abuse, both physically and emotionally, as well as marginalization, racism, and other forms of discrimination. Consequently, two (2) themes have emerged: (1) Culture Shock, and (2) Racial Discrimination.

3.6. Culture Shock

This is the main theme that has generated the responses of the participants on what challenges they faced working overseas. Among this theme, two (2) generated sub-themes emerged; Longing for Filipino cuisine and Homesickness.

3.7. Longing for Filipino Cuisine.

Food plays an important part in promoting a country's culture and identity. Despite the fact that millions of Filipinos live and work in countries all over the world, with many in the hospitality business, Filipino food has yet to make an impact abroad. One of the main needs of humanity is to feed their stomach with such foods daily. However, going abroad and linking to another culture is a great challenge for everyone. Below are the responses of three participants concerning how they miss Filipino cuisine while taking battles outside the country. Several comments are:

- (i) "Iba ang kultura nila, ginakaon nila iban gid. Tung unagapangita gid ko sang lutong Pinoy." It has meaning that *"Their culture is different, their foods are entirely different. At first, I longed for some Filipino cuisine."*
- (ii) "Tapos hindi ako makakain ng mga pagkain nila kasi parang hindi tanggapin ng tyan ko. Nanibago talaga ako sa mgapagkain nila. Kahit nga sa sabon nila panlaba grabe ka tapang compared sa Pilipinas." It has meaning that *"Then I cannot eat their food since my stomach is unwilling to receive it. I felt strange about their food. Even on their soaps that are used in laundries, it is stronger compared to the Philippines."*
- (iii) "But some of those struggles are like a culture shock because first is the food. I'm not really into spicy food but it does not affect my work here in Thailand, in the Kingdom."

Being away from home for an extended amount of time, it is easy to miss out on home cooking and regional food. Driven by another culture, these three participants are longing for Filipino cuisine that will likely take those months to taste another savory flavor in their native lands. Be that as it may, Overseas Filipino Workers are longing for Filipino cuisine as they love their food so much. Homesickness and loneliness are frequent among OFWs, and it takes a lot of effort and resolving to overcome them while working abroad. This implies they will have to be self-sufficient, ensuring they survive every day overseas while also dealing with (alone) any problems that arise. Several comments are:

- (i) "First time I went abroad was an unforgettable experience...What I had encountered was...we cannot understand each other's culture... since it is very different and I miss home."
- (ii) "First thing I felt of course was homesickness from the family; this is one of the hardest to overcome when you are new."
- (iii) "...unang gabi doon parang hindi ako makakain dahil... masarap yung mga ulam ko, naalala ko yung mga anak ko dito na baka walang ulam at saka doon parang kunti lang yung kain ko dahil sa homesick lang yun siguro ang naramdaman ko." It has meaning that *"On my first night I cannot eat, it is like I was shocked since my foods are yummy. I remembered my children and thinking they do not have food. In abroad, I seldom eat because of homesickness and that is what I felt."*

Among the top 10 challenges that Overseas Filipino Workers face, homesickness finishes in the top one per their study. In their results, homesickness got the highest score on the list, followed by salary, then challenges with their employer, and last, their fellowmen. More so, Overseas Filipino Workers are having difficulty dealing with foreigners because of the language barrier, so they opt to communicate in English and by using body language.

3.8. Racial Discrimination

Living in a foreign nation necessitates adapting to a new race, but that is not the only challenge faced by Overseas Filipino Workers. Even in this day and age, racism exists. It could also come in a variety of shapes and sizes. Discrimination against a person based on race, color, descent, national origin or ethnic origin, or immigrant status is illegal. Despite their discriminatory experiences, they remain steadfast in their resolve since they have a purpose to achieve in their life as OFWs. It is a major deal to be mistreated in another country simply because of their nationality. The three participants had similar racial discrimination experiences; they were all singled out because of their nationality. Several comments are:

- (i) “Amo lang to gikulong ko sang amo ko nga may deperensya. Kay Pilipino abi ko kag ang lantaw niya saakon pirte ka gamay amuna okay lang saiya nga ubrahon saakon to.” It has meaning that *“That is it; I was locked out by my boss who was diagnosed with the illness. Since I am a Filipino, she treats me so small.”*
- (ii) “Kung sa ibang bansa ka need mo gid mag-adjust. May one time gani nga tung ano... naapakan ko ang tiil ka isa ka citizen grabe akig niya sa akon. Buti at inawat si ma’am, yung nagagalit. Gitulok lang kami, daw feel ko bala gina drisciminateko kay akon lahi Pilipino lang.” It has meaning that *“If you are abroad, you need to adjust. There is this one time I have stepped on someone's foot. She gets mad at me, luckily there is someone who has broken the tension. All eyes were on me. I felt discriminated against because I was a Filipino.”*
- (iii) “I was always subjected to discrimination because of my nationality. Every time I did something wrong at work, instead of understanding me and teaching me the proper way to do things, they screamed at me in a discriminatory manner.”

The Philippines have allowed the massive outflow of Filipino labour to other countries. Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) are already being hailed as the country's new heroes. Many people look up to them not just for their contributions to the Philippine economy but also for their selfless sacrifices. Many Filipinos want to work as Overseas Filipino Workers, but some might not know how hard their job is. The common misconception of these people was that they have easy access to their careers and occupations. The study discovered that Overseas Filipino Workers fear violence, discrimination, abuse, false charges, cultural shock, and the weakening of their family after identifying the themes.

3.9. How do Overseas Filipino Workers overcome the challenges?

It is a testament to the resiliency of Filipino migrant workers that they can perform under the most trying of working situations, even when they are doing their jobs in another country. These employees can be found all over the world. They have developed a wide range of survival strategies, and some of them have even successfully utilized these strategies to deal with challenging situations. Under this, one (1) theme has emerged: (1) Self-Reliance.

3.10. Self-reliance

Based on the responses given by the participants, they tend to have different ways of coping with the challenges that they are facing while taking a battle overseas. Their response has been divided into two sets which imply that having a reliance on oneself and making such a way to overcome situations is a must rather than dwelling on the negative vibes. They also implied that trusting in the Almighty Father is always a great choice to allow unwanted stuff to be converted into a strong positive foundation to have a continuation in the chosen job.

On the other hand, they gave a flavorful seasoning to their response that being happy and having determination is a must. More so, Overseas Filipino Workers were wrapped up with confidence. Therefore, despite any coping mechanisms they had, the sixth emergent topic flowed; if there's one thing for Overseas Filipino Workers to drink medicine that can surmount the problems and challenges they are experiencing abroad, it would be their reliance on themselves.

Filipino migrant workers worldwide are using their resiliency and can deal with extremely difficult working conditions and even when working in another country. They have devised a variety of survival techniques, and some have even applied their coping mechanisms to adverse conditions. Self-reliance is the most effective technique for them to eliminate all hesitancy in dealing with their problems. As a result, every Overseas Filipino worker relies only on their feeling of resilience to deal with their challenges and difficulties. Several comments are:

- (i) "Maovercome mo na kung may salig ka sa sarili mo. Arana gid na sa imo ya kung paano mo sulbaron. Kay wala ka naman saligan kundi sarili mo." It has meaning that *"I can overcome it since I have a reliance on myself. It is up to me how I can save it. You do not have to rely on someone since you have yourself."*
- (ii) "Sa Riyadh dasal lang talaga ang ginagawa ko, na sana makaya ko lahat ng mga pagsubok doon. Tiwala sa sarili at sa may itaas sa ating Diyos." It has meaning that *"In Riyadh, I always pray that I can do all the challenges. Trusting in myself and God helped me."*
- (iii) "I handle my situation ... easy lang ... you work happy... sunod kalang sa mga rules nila ..., ma hahandle mo lahatng situations, walang problema, walang maltrated, wala lahat basta sundin mo lang sila." It has meaning that *"I handle my situation easily. It is easier as long as you work happily. Follow their rules. You can handle situations, there's no problem, no maltreated, as long as you follow their instructions."*
- (iv) "I overcame the challenges working abroad. It is I know what I'm doing and I keep on learning, I keep reading, I keep on researching, then I have a new platform for this teaching. As a teacher you need to reinvent yourself, you must know how to make your students happy and lively."
- (v) "Ang journey ko as OFW is successful. Pinagtyagaan ko kahit anong hirap ng trabaho ko, iniisip ko na maka suporta samga anak ko at tiwala lang sa sarili." It has meaning that *"My journey as an OFW was successful because I always exerted effort despite how hard my job was. I always think about the support I can give to my children. Above all I trust myself."*

4. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of the study, we have concluded that poverty is the major reason why many Overseas Filipino Workers were unable to offer a better living for their families. Due to poverty, Overseas Filipino workers are prepared to incur the risk of working in a foreign country to survive the deprivations they are facing. Further, foreclosing on the theme of more career opportunities, one of the reasons why the participants chose to work abroad was discovered. They wanted to work in other countries since more employment opportunities exist. Since there are more job openings abroad than in the Philippines, it implies they will most likely discover more career opportunities. As they began their journey as independent Overseas Filipino Workers, it was found that they experienced homesickness due to the theme of Culture shock. Before they even begin to experience culture shock, there will be cultural differences that will astonish them. Lastly, in accordance with the theme of self-

reliance, it was discovered that having trust in oneself is the best way to deal with all of their problems.

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6. AUTHORS' NOTE

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article. The authors confirmed that the paper was free of plagiarism.

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