

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF MULTIDISCIPLINARY: APPLIED BUSINESS AND EDUCATION RESEARCH

2025, Vol. 6, No. 4, 2032 – 2044

<http://dx.doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.04.31>

Research Article

Tomorrow's Dreams: Left-Behind Children and Migration Effects on Their Future Aspirations

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Article history:

Submission 03 March 2025

Revised 29 March 2025

Accepted 23 April 2025

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated how parental migration affected the future aspirations of left-behind children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in Angeles City, Philippines. With a qualitative explanatory case study approach, the research focused on understanding the impact of parental migration on future aspirations among students at Angeles University Foundation. Through semi-structured interviews with a purposively sampled group of three participants, the study explored the complex interplay of factors influencing their aspirations. Findings suggest that while parental migration introduces challenges like emotional distance and altered family dynamics, it also fosters resilience, financial opportunities, and a strong motivation, often linked to reciprocating parental sacrifices. Key themes emerging included navigating expectations and responsibilities, forging futures amidst parental absence, the duality of migration's impact (both positive and negative), and the crucial role of resilience and support systems. Support from various sources, including teachers and peers, appeared significant. While the small sample size limits the generalizability of the findings, this study emphasizes the importance for educators to provide targeted support addressing the unique educational and emotional needs of left-behind children. It contributes nuanced insights into the impact of migration on family dynamics and children's aspirations, emphasizing the need for strategies to support these children

Keywords: *Left-behind children, Parental migration, OFW*

How to cite:

Chu, S., Jerica Miranda, J., Tapang, A., Balagtas, P. A. S., Credo, C. G., & Pineda, M. S. (2025). Tomorrow's Dreams: Left-Behind Children and Migration Effects on Their Future Aspirations. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*. 6(4), 2032 – 2044. doi: 10.11594/ijmaber.06.04.31

Background

The Philippine Statistics Authority (2023) sheds light on the magnitude of parental migration in the Philippines, with approximately 1.96 million Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) employed abroad from April to September 2022. Approximately 1.96 million Filipinos are working abroad with women dominating the number of OFWs based on a survey made by the Philippine Statistics Authority in 2022. Low wages and lack of job opportunities in the Philippines are causing Filipinos to work abroad in order to sustain and provide the needs of their families (Lu, 2023). In addition, the study of Abenir (2019) states that OFWs aim to provide their children basic needs and send them to good quality schools. According to the study of Navarez and Diaz (2017), a lot of parents choose to seek employment abroad in order to sustain their needs and provide support to their families in the Philippines.

Within families, the dynamics of parental migration pose significant challenges to children's academic development and well-being. Abenir (2019) defined left-behind children in the Philippines as the anak ng OFW or children of Overseas Filipino Workers. Tesfaw and Minaye (2022) explored the dynamics faced by left-behind children, emphasizing the disruption of parental involvement and supervision due to migration. Hence, children may encounter difficulties in maintaining academic performance and engagement in their studies. Despite the OFW parents' financial support with regard to their children's education, the academic performance of the children is affected negatively. The findings in the study of Atienza et al., (2012) states that the left-behind children experience academic decline as their parents are not present to provide them guidance and discipline to do well in school. In line with this is the study of Machica and Montallana (2018) that asserts that the left-behind children's academic performance was not satisfactory due to lack of parental guidance and attention.

Conversely, the study of Navarez and Diaz (2017) found that the capability of left-behind children to perform well academically is not affected by their parents' migration whether their mother, father, or both parents are not

physically present. The use of technology like cellular phones and computers plays an important role in the communication between OFW parents and their left-behind children as they can monitor and motivate their children to improve their academic performance. The left-behind children aim to achieve high grades in order to make their parents happy and it also serves as a reward for their parents' sacrifices. Moreover, the study of Delima (2022) affirms that left-behind children know the sacrifices that their parents are making and in order to reciprocate their parents' hard work, they strive to improve their academic performance. Moreover, the study of Delima (2022) also states that left-behind children only experience decline of academic performance at the initial departure of their parents but as the time passes by, the left-behind children will understand the reason why their parents work overseas, thus reciprocating their sacrifices with satisfying academic performance. The study of Abenir (2019) suggests that even if left-behind children face challenges due to parental separation as their parents work abroad, it taught them how to be resilient. The American Psychological Association defined resilience as the ability to adapt or to recover from difficult life situations.

Despite significant challenges, left-behind children exhibit remarkable resilience and determination in their academic pursuits, as noted by Taolo et al. (2024). Academic success serves as a means for them to honor their parents' sacrifices and secure a better future for themselves. However, Unay and Villosino (2023) draw attention to the significant hurdles faced by these children in achieving their future aspirations. The lack of parental guidance and support, compounded by communication difficulties, undermines their academic performance and diminishes their prospects for success. According to Abenir (2011), there are several studies that indicate that the parent migration of one or both parents does not affect their left-behind children's behaviours such as becoming delinquents. Moreover, the portrayal of the Philippine media that families with OFW members are "broken" is inaccurate. Dialde, F. C. (2023) states the challenges faced by Filipino

students with parents who work abroad include lack of parental guidance and pressure to succeed. However, the study finds that the students' academic performance is not negatively affected by their parents' absence because they are more motivated to succeed in order to make their parents proud.

Previous studies mostly focused on the exploration of the link between parents' migration and the academic performance of the students. However, aside from this factor, it is also important to explore the career paths and future aspirations of left-behind children.

A person's aspirations are sometimes represented as desires, hopes, or related to stable beliefs. It summarized the subset of an individual's beliefs, preferences, and capacities necessary for their future (McShane 2019). The study of Khattab (2015) is relevant since it investigates how students' aspirations, expectations, and school achievement influence their future educational behaviour. According to the study, children's academic performance improves when their aspirations and expectations are higher. Similarly, the study discovered that the highly significant predictor of the future educational behaviour of the students is the blend of ambitions, expectations, and school achievement.

A career path is closely related to an individual's goals and ambitions. It begins with self-actualization and assessment of personal interests and capacities, aligning with available opportunities (Aziz, Mustafa, Rasli, Saari, & Yassin, 2021). In the study of Herr et al. (1996), as stated by Mtemeri (2017), a career pathway is combined with rigorous and high-quality education, training, and other services that equip a person with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in secondary or tertiary education and support their achievement of educational and career goals.

Anonuevo and Sopena (2003), as cited by Campos and Distor (2020), provide insights into the career aspirations of left-behind children, who often seek to emulate their parents' footsteps. However, the decision to pursue higher education and work abroad comes with its own set of challenges, impacting not only career choices but also social lives and coping mechanisms among left-behind children.

The findings of Artajo (2016) suggests that the children of migrants tend to replicate their parents' migratory patterns. Parents highly influence the employment ambitions and migration decisions of the left-behind children. As parents endure hardships to work overseas, children in turn aspire to work abroad to secure parents' financial stability upon retirement. This results to a cycle of migration in the Philippines. Asi et.al (2024) further shows the influence of parents' migration in career paths of the left-behind children. Better career opportunities in another country are perceived among the children and they believe that their parents become financially stable due to working overseas. This perspective reflects the influence of their parents in their future aspirations.

To this date, limited studies are focused on the identification of the influence of migrants to their left-behind children. A research gap exists in qualitatively exploring the influence of migrant parents to the career paths and aspirations of children. Specifically, the study aims to identify how parental absence due to migration shapes the future aspirations of left-behind children and to identify the factors that influence the relationship between parental migration and the aspirations of left-behind children. Moreover, the study also aims to identify the perceived opportunities and challenges faced by left-behind children in pursuing their future aspirations.

Methods

The study employed an explanatory case study approach. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to explore participants' experiences and perspectives. Thematic analysis was utilized to identify key patterns and themes within the data, shedding light on the impact of parental migration on left-behind children's aspirations. The conceptual framework showcases the structure for understanding participants' experiences with OFW parents and their aspirations, aiming to discern the connection between parental migration and their future aspirations.

Study Participants

This qualitative study used purposive sampling to select participants who met the

inclusion criteria. Out of the initial pool, three participants qualified, ensuring diverse experiences while maintaining manageable data collection.

Inclusion criteria were: (1) left-behind children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) employed abroad for over five years, (2) legal age (18+), (3) currently enrolled in a university under a scholarship program, and (4) proficient in English or Filipino. Exclusion criteria included individuals outside the age range, those with mental health conditions, communication impairments, lack of consent, or disruptions in education unrelated to parental migration.

Data collection involved semi-structured interviews guided by a validated interview protocol exploring the impact of parental migration on participants' future aspirations. Questions addressed attitudes toward higher education, socio-emotional influences, and perceived challenges and opportunities. The interview guide was reviewed by experts in education, communication, and social science research.

Ethical procedures were rigorously followed. Informed consent was obtained, and participants were assured of anonymity, the right to withdraw at any time, and access to results upon request. A formal request for approval was submitted to the appropriate university office prior to data collection.

Interviews were conducted in a private setting to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Following each session, participants were debriefed. Data was securely stored on password-protected cloud drives, accessible only to the researchers and adviser, and set to be disposed of after six months.

Throughout the research process, participant well-being, autonomy, and confidentiality were prioritized through strict adherence to ethical standards.

Data Collection and Analysis

Semi-structured interviews allow flexibility through probing "why" or "how" questions, enabling exploration beyond pre-determined items (Adams, 2015). This approach requires careful planning—participant selection, question design, interviewing techniques, and data analysis.

Participants were scholarship students enrolled at a university. Depending on availability, interviews were conducted face-to-face or online, following a pre-interview briefing to ensure participant readiness. Interviews were recorded with consent, and debriefing was conducted by the researchers, with experts available if needed. Observations, such as participant gestures and interactions, were also documented as they could yield meaningful insights (Sheppard, 2020).

Recordings were securely stored online, accessible only to the researchers and adviser. Transcripts were translated and validated by faculty experts to ensure accuracy. Data analysis followed an inductive coding approach (Palys & Atchison, 2014, as cited in Sheppard, 2020), with codes developed after each session to identify recurring words, ideas, and patterns.

Thematic analysis was used as the primary method, offering a flexible and structured approach to identifying and interpreting patterns within qualitative data (Braun & Clarke, 2012). Following Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase process, researchers: (1) familiarized themselves with the data through transcription and repeated reading, (2) generated initial codes, (3) searched for and grouped codes into themes, (4) reviewed and refined themes, (5) defined and named them, and (6) produced a narrative report connecting themes to the study's central question on the future aspirations of left-behind children.

Result and Discussion

The researchers meticulously approached the process by manually coding and data identification, involving repeated sorting of statements and careful highlighting of relevant information. This methodical process included grouping questions and carefully identifying key terms and significant statements from the interviews. As a result, a comprehensive set of 25 codes emerged, each encapsulating specific aspects of the data. These codes were subsequently organized into 8 distinct themes, reflecting the patterns inherent in the participants' narratives.

Similar Concepts	Themes/Categories
Theme 1: Navigating Expectations & Responsibilities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parental expectations to excel academically due to their sacrifices working abroad. ● Feeling the need to succeed in higher education as the eldest child to support the family. ● Extended family pushing towards specific career paths, such as becoming a doctor. ● Pressure to make significant life decisions to ensure family stability. ● Taking on caregiving responsibilities for a sibling with special needs. ● Expectations to manage household chores in the absence of parents. ● The idea that marrying involves also taking care of a sibling. ● The role of being a second parent to siblings. 	Societal and Familial Pressure
	Altered Family Roles & Responsibilities

Theme 1: Navigating Expectations & Responsibilities

This theme captures the complex web of societal, familial, and self-imposed expectations and responsibilities that left-behind children navigate due to parental migration. It encompasses pressures to succeed academically, adhere to cultural or gender norms, and take on new roles within the family.

Societal and Familial Pressure

Participants expressed feeling pressure, often from extended family, to pursue specific prestigious career paths or to excel academically as a form of reciprocation for parental sacrifices. One participant noted the expectation to become a doctor, stating, *"my extended family, like my aunts who ask me why I didn't become a doctor"*. Another felt pressure *"as the eldest, to succeed in higher education... to graduate, work, and support my family... like a way to repay them"*.

Altered Family Roles & Responsibilities

Parental absence often necessitates children taking on additional roles. One participant described becoming a "second mom" to a sibling with special needs, including managing household chores like laundry. Another mentioned the expectation to care for their sibling long-term, stating, *"the expectation from my family is that I will take care of him once they are gone..."*. These added responsibilities intersect with cultural expectations and influence future plans.

Reflecting on the research by Abenir (2011), parental migration does not necessarily lead to behavioral issues such as delinquency. This underscores the complexity of how cultural norms and family dynamics intersect to shape the experiences and aspirations of these individuals.

Theme 2: Forging Futures Amidst Parental Absence

- Considering an alternate path.
- Potential difficulties with alternate career choices.
- Parents' acceptance of any career choice as long as it leads to completion.
- Greater influence from external authorities than the parent working abroad.
- Specific career choices within teaching.
- Plans to follow parents' path of working abroad for better pay.
- Consideration of brain drain due to working overseas.
- Expedited Career Choices
- Desire to complete studies quickly to reunite with a parent working abroad.
- Influence of the parent's prolonged absence on career timelines.
- Importance of parents' overseas income for educational opportunities.
- Speculation on a different career path if financial stability was lower.
- Potential simpler or shorter courses if financial constraints were present.

Theme 2: Career Aspirations

Career aspirations are the driving force behind the professional journeys individuals embark upon, shaped by a complex interplay of passions, values, and acquired skills. For many, the choice of career is not merely about earning a living but also about making a meaningful impact in a chosen field. Some are drawn to careers that allow them to leverage their unique talents, while others are motivated by the desire to solve pressing societal issues. However, behind these aspirations lie deeper personal stories, often influenced by circumstances that extend beyond individual choice. One such poignant example is the experience of left-behind children. These are young individuals whose parents migrate for work, leaving them under the care of relatives or in the custody of one parent.

The absence of their parents fundamentally shapes the career aspirations of these left-behind children. It's not just about what they want to become, but also about who they want to become in relation to their parents' sacrifices. Anonuevo and Sopena (2003), as cited by Campos and Distor (2020), shed light on this aspect, revealing that many left-behind

children aspire to follow in their parents' footsteps. They see their parents' migration not just as a physical separation but also as a demonstration of sacrifice and commitment to providing a better future.

"I needed to be sure because I couldn't afford to waste time. If I wasted time here, he would stay longer in another country, prolonging the feeling of him being far away from us," As reflected by one of the participants, grappling with the emotional weight of their parent's absence. This sentiment showcases urgency felt by many left-behind children to succeed academically and professionally. Every decision, every effort is seen through the lens of reciprocity and gratitude towards their parents' sacrifices.

As they navigate their aspirations, these children often internalize their parents' work ethic and determination. Their aspirations are not only shaped by personal interests but also by a deep-seated desire to make their parents proud and to contribute meaningfully to their families' well-being. *"I did my best, and when I started high school, that's when I felt the need to reciprocate everything my dad has given me"*

Theme 3: The Duality of Migration's Impact	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Enhanced Financial Stability ● Improved Living Conditions ● Increased Access to Resources ● Improved Access to Education ● Affordability of Educational Necessities ● Homeownership and Property Acquisition ● Ease of Affording Basic Necessities ● Access to Higher Education (Private University) 	Financial Improvement & Opportunities
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Distance as a Barrier to Communication ● Online Restrictions ● Feelings of Loneliness and Longing ● Emotional Disconnect ● Lack of Physical Presence During Significant Events ● Perceived Abandonment ● Difficulty Resolving Past Issues 	Communication & Emotional Challenges

Theme 3: The Duality of Migration's Impact

This theme highlights the contrasting effects of parental migration, acknowledging both the significant material benefits and the profound socio-emotional challenges experienced by left-behind children.

Financial Improvement & Opportunities

A major positive outcome reported was enhanced financial stability, leading to better living conditions and access to resources, particularly for education. One participant shared, *"It changed significantly, especially in our living*

conditions... my dad can provide them easily, especially the essential gadgets I need for education". Another noted being able to buy a house and afford necessities easily: "we were able to buy our own house and land... we could buy anything we needed". This financial security directly translated into better educational opportunities, such as affording private university tuition.

Communication & Emotional Challenges

Conversely, migration created significant hurdles in maintaining close relationships. Participants cited difficulties communicating due to distance and online restrictions. The

physical absence led to feelings of loneliness, longing, and emotional disconnect. One participant lamented the lack of physical presence during achievements: "even if she tells you words that she's proud of you, it's still different when you're together. That, I feel, is the biggest challenge". Another described long-term emotional effects stemming from perceived abandonment and difficulty resolving past issues due to distance.

Autonomy and resilience is fostered among left-behind children as they learn how to make decisions in regards to their future aspirations as well as take more responsibilities to fulfill due to the absence of parents (Abenir, 2019).

Theme 4: Communication	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Difficulty in effective communication due to distance ● Impact of physical separation on relaying messages and resolving conflicts ● Stress from family issues affecting academic performance ● Balancing academic responsibilities with familial responsibilities ● Lack of parental guidance and support in daily activities ● Challenges in learning independence and responsibility ● Missing significant life events and daily interactions ● Emotional toll of not having parents physically present 	Long Distance Challenges
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Experiencing abandonment issues from early childhood ● Emotional distress from parents' absence and sudden departures ● Lack of emotional support from parents due to distance ● Difficulty in opening up and expressing emotions to distant parents ● Difficulty in maintaining emotional bonds with parents ● Challenges in communicating deeply and resolving past issues ● Developing coping mechanisms like ending relationships prematurely ● Residual resentment and unresolved emotions from past events 	Emotional Disconnect

Theme 4: Communication

Communication plays a vital role in the relationship between parents and left-behind children due to the long distance that they have. Unfortunately, communication barriers appear as certain platforms used to communicate are restricted in the country where their parents work. It results in communication difficulties among parents and left-behind children. This entails the feeling of lack of emotional and practical support.

Long-Distance Challenges

This addresses the difficulties in maintaining communication with parents working

abroad due to the restrictions of communication platforms that the parents and left-behind children use. "It's difficult to communicate, especially with online restrictions in certain countries." This pertains to the problems encountered due to the long-distance relationship that parents and left-behind children have.

Emotional Disconnect

This highlights the lack of emotional and practical support of parents to the left-behind children created by physical separation and its effect on the quality of relationships. It explores the feelings of loneliness and longing experienced by individuals due to the lack of physical

presence of their parents. *"We always have awards and stuff, even if she tells you words that she's proud of you, it's still different when you're together. That, I feel, is the biggest challenge when you have an OFW parent."* The absence of parents has impacted the left-behind children in a way that they feel disconnected emotionally with their parents.

The study of Unay and Villosino (2023) states that the academic performance of left-behind children are affected by the lack of parental guidance and emotional and practical support due to communication difficulties that the parents and left-behind children experience.

Theme 5: Financial Improvement	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Improved Housing Situation ● Access to Modern Amenities ● Availability of Educational Resources 	Enhanced Living Conditions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Ability to Afford Luxuries ● Increased Financial Capability ● Support for Extended Family ● Funding Higher Education 	Financial Security

Theme 5: Financial Improvement

Financial improvement involves the betterment of an individual's stability and wealth. It's illustrated by the hard work and sacrifices of Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) parents who work abroad to provide their children with better resources, greater financial security, and a high standard of living.

Enhanced Living Conditions

This focuses on the huge increase in living standards and resource availability for parents working abroad. It emphasizes the beneficial effects of financial stability on people's quality of life. *"It changed significantly, especially in our living conditions. Before, our life was simple; we couldn't afford luxurious things, but it's different now since my dad can provide them easily, especially the essential gadgets I need for education,"* said the participant. This narrative reflects the significant changes that have positively

impacted the future of left-behind children, particularly regarding their education.

Financial Security

Financial security is a crucial aspect of financial improvement. It's the stability and the ability to plan for the future that it brings. This is crucial in individuals' ability to pursue their goals and dreams. *"Then, when my mom left for Israel, we were able to buy our own house and land, we were able to build, and we could buy anything we needed. Even if I just mentioned something, like, 'I need this,' it would be immediately provided."* This illustrated the stability of the OFW parents in terms of their finances, and they could provide the needs and wants of their children instantly. Navarez and Diaz (2017) state that many parents opt to work overseas to meet their financial needs and offer support to their families in the Philippines.

Theme 6: Opportunities	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Increased Determination to Succeed ● Pressure to Achieve Academic Excellence ● Influence on Career Choices ● Improved Financial Stability and Educational Resources ● Networking and Job Opportunities ● Shift in Aspirations 	Educational and Career Prospects

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Sense of Responsibility and Independence ● Enhanced Resilience and Adaptability ● Development of Time Management Skills ● Strengthened Family Bonds Despite Physical Distance ● Impact on Mental Health and Emotional Well-being ● Cultural Exposure and Broader Worldview 	Personal Development
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Theme 6: Opportunities

Parental migration can have a positive impact on their children's lives. It opens up new opportunities for the children, including enhanced access to quality education, better career opportunities, and personal development. When parents migrate, their children may benefit from exposure to new cultures, languages, and environments, which can contribute to their overall growth and development.

Educational and Career Prospects

Parental migration presents opportunities for educational growth, career advancement, and personal development. It underscores the favorable outcomes and prospects from the financial support and experiences acquired through migration. As stated by the participant, *"The two opportunities are, first, I can pursue my hobbies freely because I have money and I'm given an allowance...Second, more on job opportunities."* This demonstrates the opportunities available to left-behind children whose parents work abroad, providing them with opportunities through their work.

Personal Development

The impact of parental migration on left-behind children goes beyond the financial stability and job opportunities it can bring. It also encompasses the opportunity for personal growth, self-exploration, and pursuing

individual interests. This aspect of migration recognizes its broader influence on individuals' personal development and fulfillment. It involves the ability to withstand and overcome challenges related to parental migration, manage emotions, maintain a positive mindset, and develop effective coping strategies to navigate difficult circumstances. *"I feel, financially, that's probably it, financial, because almost with OFWs, it's really financial that's the main thing...And if she wasn't there, if she wasn't an OFW, I'd just be at home,"* this illustration shows that if their parents were not working as OFWs, their needs could not be met because their finances were not being provided. Financial support is the main thing they need. Left-behind children often display resilience by setting clear educational and career goals, formulating concrete plans, and actively working towards achieving their aspirations despite their challenges.

Alviar et al. (2024) stated that many OFWs choose to work overseas to improve their living conditions and provide better opportunities to their left-behind families in the Philippines. OFW parents provide their left-behind children with possibilities for new opportunities since they want to help their families, specifically their children, to have a better future by giving them opportunities for education, career, and development.

Theme 7: Reciprocity

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Recognition of parents' sacrifices as a motivation to excel academically. ● Feeling a duty to succeed as a way of reciprocating parents' efforts. ● Development of emotional resilience due to parental absence. ● Learning independence and self-reliance at a young age. ● Balancing personal career interests with practical considerations like financial stability. 	Academic and Career Drive
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Better educational opportunities due to financial support from parents working abroad. ● Influence on academic performance and career choices. ● Impact of cultural identity on academic and career decisions. ● Mitigating the emotional impact of parental absence through supportive relationships. ● Internal motivation to succeed for personal fulfillment and to support family. ● Sense of responsibility towards family's well-being and future. 	
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Theme 7: Adjustment

Left-behind children frequently have to adjust to significant changes in family dynamics and roles, resulting in profound personal growth and resilience. These children, often separated from one or both parents due to economic or social circumstances, find themselves in environments where they must adapt to new living arrangements, caretakers, and responsibilities. This necessity to adjust and adapt is vividly demonstrated in the experiences shared by various individuals, highlighting their remarkable capacity for growth and resilience.

Role Adaptation

Individuals' ability to adapt and perform various tasks and duties within the family structure as a result of parental migration. It entails taking on new responsibilities, such as caregiver or decision-maker, to compensate for the absence of one or both parents. *"My brother, as I mentioned earlier, has special needs. He used to go to OT (occupational therapy), and sometimes I would accompany him if I didn't have classes."* This demonstrates that left-behind children have a role when their parents are gone working abroad.

Emotional Resilience

The capacity of individuals to cope with and bounce back from adversity or challenges related to parental migration. It involves managing emotions, maintaining a positive outlook, and developing effective coping strategies to navigate difficult circumstances. *"I'm the eldest. Whatever my mom tells me, I pass it on. Sometimes it really affects academics. Academics are affected because it's already heavy with academics and then their issues add to it, and it's difficult to communicate with both of them because they're far apart, so it feels stifling."* This demonstrates how difficult it is for left-behind children to manage their emotions while retaining a positive perspective on the situation.

Theme 8: Determination

The desire to succeed and make their parents' sacrifices worthwhile is a powerful force that drives the determination and perseverance of left-behind children. These children, who have been separated from their parents due to economic or other challenges, frequently have a strong desire to succeed in various aspects of their lives. This goal is more than just personal achievement; it is a sincere effort to recognize and justify their parents' efforts.

Theme 8: Social Support

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Parents working abroad create a sense of responsibility and motivation to excel academically. ● Parents' sacrifices instill a strong drive to succeed in education and career to repay them. ● Emotional challenges like loneliness and longing due to parental absence. ● Development of resilience and independence through managing emotional and academic pressures. 	<p>Support Systems</p>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Balancing personal growth with the expectations and support provided by absent parents. ● Role of extended family (grandparents, aunts, uncles) in providing emotional and sometimes practical support. ● Influence of family values and cultural background on educational and career choices. ● Financial stability and improved living conditions due to parental earnings abroad. 	
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Academic and Career Drive

The determination exhibited by left-behind children to excel in their education and pursue their career goals. It involves a strong desire to succeed academically and professionally, often driven by the desire to reciprocate their parents' sacrifices and create a better future for themselves and their families. *"Because as you see them, your parents are far away from each other just so you could have a better living condition, it's very natural for someone or for a child to think that they are working hard, enduring the distance. So in return, I have to study well, I have to do better in academics."* This demonstrates the great desire to pursue education, perform intellectually, and graduate in order to give back.

Diaz (2017) found that the capability of left-behind children to perform well academically is not affected by their parents' migration whether their mother, father, or both parents are not physically present.

Goal-Oriented Behaviour

The focused and purposeful actions taken by left-behind children to achieve their educational and career objectives. It involves setting clear goals, creating plans, and actively working towards fulfilling their aspirations, often in the face of obstacles or setbacks. *"because it's like, you feel like crying, because of course, your parent is far away from you, so as a child, it's like you need to excel more in school because that's even though they're not asking for anything in return, that's just your way of thanking them for what they're giving you, that's their sacrifice."* This demonstrates that the goal of left-behind children is to complete their education and graduate in order to assist their parents while also developing future plans and desires.

Dialde (2023) states the challenges faced by Filipino students with parents who work abroad include lack of parental guidance and pressure to succeed. However, the study finds that the students' academic performance is not negatively affected by their parents' absence because they are more motivated to succeed in order to make their parents proud.

Conclusion

This study, based on in-depth interviews with three left-behind children of OFWs, concludes that: Parental migration significantly shapes future aspirations, often motivating children to succeed academically and reciprocate sacrifices. Autonomy in decision-making is fostered, as parents often grant freedom in career choices, though this also creates urgency to finish studies promptly. Aspirations are influenced by multiple interacting factors—improved socio-economic status, emotional distance, communication gaps, and cultural expectations—which together reflect the dual impact of migration.

Participants identified opportunities such as better education and resources due to financial support, alongside challenges like emotional strain and increased responsibilities.

Implications for education include the need to recognize the emotional and academic pressures on left-behind children, and to provide support systems through peers, families, and schools (Objective 2.5). Though migration presents challenges, it also fosters resilience, highlighting the need for tailored institutional support.

Limitations

This study is limited by its small sample size—three participants—restricting generalizability. While the case study approach yielded

rich, context-specific insights, it may not represent broader experiences of left-behind children in the Philippines. Factors such as age at separation, family dynamics, socio-economic status, and the parent's country of work were not fully explored. Future studies with larger, more diverse samples are recommended.

Recommendations

The study recommends developing and implementing support policies for left-behind children, including services that enhance their well-being and guide career aspirations. Stakeholders must ensure these programs are effectively delivered to create nurturing environments that foster independence, decision-making, and resilience. These supports may also inspire academic motivation and a desire to honor parental sacrifices.

Future research should broaden participant pools across institutions, regions, and socio-economic contexts, and consider mixed-methods to enrich findings. Additional themes and variables beyond those studied here should be explored. Researchers should be prepared for unforeseen challenges and aim to compile extensive literature to strengthen future studies.

Lastly, schools can empower left-behind students through targeted programs such as skill-building workshops. These initiatives may support their personal growth, improve decision-making, and cultivate responsibility and independence.

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