

## Exploring the Adjustment of Wives of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) Through the Perspective of Hermeneutic Phenomenology.

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**Abstract** – The study explored the lived experiences of Wives of Overseas Filipino Workers. The Study made use of the Hermeneutic Phenomenological approach. Moreover, the study was conducted in Cebu, Philippines and the participants of the study are the ten (10) wives of OFW. They were selected using purposive sampling. Moreover, the participants of the study are the six (6) wives of OFW. They were selected using purposive sampling. In addition, the study employed the Colaizzi approach to analyze the data. The procedure consists of seven steps, which guarantee precise and strong analysis, ensuring the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the results. After analyzing the Data, three core themes emerged from the experiences of Wives of OFW. These are; (1) The Long Road Ahead, (2) Coping with the Challenges, and (3) Appreciation. The Long Road Ahead refers to the emotional and psychological journey that wives of OFWs face, as they navigate through long periods of separation and the uncertainties that come with it. Coping with the Challenges highlights the various difficulties these women encounter, such as managing household responsibilities alone, raising children single-handedly, and dealing with financial constraints. Lastly, appreciation emphasizes the deep gratitude these wives have for their OFW spouses' sacrifices and hard work, recognizing their efforts in providing for the family despite being physically distant.

**Keywords:** *Overseas Filipino Worker, Adjustments and Phenomenology*

### Introduction

Parenting entails numerous obligations. It is their responsibility to foster their children's development in all areas. These include, among other things, their welfare, their mental well-being, their physical demands, and their educational requirements (Reyes et. al., 2023; Beduya et. al., 2023). Parents are also tasked with instilling values and teaching important life skills to their children. Additionally, they play a crucial role in providing emotional support and creating a nurturing environment for their kids to thrive in. Filipina women who have OFW husbands and who choose to remain in the Philippines and become housewives have dual obligations as they take on the roles of both mother and father to their children. These ladies not only attend to their children's daily needs but also offer emotional assistance and advice, guaranteeing their overall welfare and growth. Mothers have a vital role in imparting values, instructing practical skills, and fostering their children's ambitions and goals.

For the wives left behind by their OFW husbands, the separation can be emotionally challenging. They often have to take on the

responsibilities of both parents, managing the household and raising the children on their own. Additionally, they may also face financial difficulties as they rely solely on remittances from their husbands for their daily needs. According to Ghimire et. al. (2021), The migration of husbands could worsen the already heavy workload and lack of free time experienced by women globally, leading to negative impacts on their mental and physical well-being. Moreover, considering the significant role that wives play in the welfare of the household and the process of reproduction, any alterations in their circumstances could potentially have a profound impact on the lives of other family members who remain. Furthermore, numerous studies have demonstrated that women are progressively engaging in tasks that were traditionally exclusive to men (Maharjan, Bauer, and Knerr 2012; Gartaula, Niehof, and Visser 2010; Thapa et al. 2019).

Furthermore, various studies have shown that women who are left behind often experience feelings of solitude, longing for their husbands, concerns about their well-being, and distress regarding their husbands' possible involvement

with other women in the places they migrate to (De Snyder, 1993; Menjívar and Agadjanian, 2007; Roy and Nangia, 2005). According to Menjívar and Agadjanian (2007), when a spouse who is a migrant is away for a lengthy period, it might lead to a decrease in emotional connection and intimacy within the marriage. Hence, the act of residing apart from migrant spouses may elevate the stress levels experienced by women who remain behind, thereby compromising their overall well-being.

As previously stated, women who are abandoned by their overseas Filipino worker (OFW) husbands face exceptional conditions and must fulfill many responsibilities. Therefore, the objective of this study is to document the experiences of these remarkable women. By understanding their experiences, we can gain insights into the challenges they face and the coping mechanisms they employ. This study aims to shed light on the emotional, financial, and social implications of being abandoned by OFW husbands, providing a comprehensive understanding of their unique circumstances.

### **Methods and Materials**

The study explored the lived experiences of Wives of Overseas Filipino Workers through the use of a Hermeneutic Phenomenological approach. Hermeneutic phenomenology is a qualitative research methodology that enables researchers to examine the influence of experiences, traditions, and culture on commonplace, routine behaviors. This approach enables individuals to share narratives as a means of gaining insight (Allen et. al., 1986). Hermeneutic phenomenology is a valuable study approach as it enables researchers to elucidate and express how the regular and routine actions of wives of OFW (Overseas Filipino Workers) are influenced by their diverse experiences. By employing hermeneutic phenomenology, researchers can delve into the lived experiences of wives of OFWs and uncover the underlying meanings and interpretations that shape their everyday actions. This methodology allows for a deeper understanding of how cultural norms, societal expectations, and personal histories intertwine to shape their behaviors and decision-making processes.

Moreover, the study was conducted in Cebu, Philippines and the participants of the study are the ten (10) wives of OFW. They were selected using purposive sampling. Moreover, the participants of the study are the six (6) wives of OFW. They were selected using purposive sampling. Purposive sampling is a non-random sampling technique that involves selecting participants based on specific criteria. In this study, the researchers specifically chose the six wives of OFWs as participants to gain insights into their unique experiences and perspectives. By focusing on this particular group, the researchers can obtain a more in-depth understanding of the challenges and impacts faced by these individuals, contributing to a more comprehensive analysis of the study's objectives.

In addition, the study employed the Colaizzi approach to analyze the data. The procedure consists of seven steps, which guarantee precise and strong analysis, ensuring the legitimacy and trustworthiness of the results. The Colaizzi approach is a widely recognized and rigorous method for qualitative data analysis. It involves thoroughly examining the collected data, identifying significant themes, and extracting meaningful insights. By following this systematic procedure, the study was able to provide a comprehensive understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

### **Results**

After analyzing the Data, three core themes emerged from the experiences of Wives of OFW. These are; (1) The Long Road Ahead, (2) Coping with the Challenges and (3) Appreciation. The Long Road Ahead refers to the emotional and psychological journey that wives of OFWs face, as they navigate through long periods of separation and the uncertainties that come with it. Coping with the Challenges highlights the various difficulties these women encounter, such as managing household responsibilities alone, raising children single-handedly, and dealing with financial constraints. Lastly, appreciation emphasizes the deep gratitude these wives have for their OFW spouses' sacrifices and hard work, recognizing their efforts in providing for the family despite being physically distant.

### Theme 1 The Long Road Ahead

This theme explores the notion of acceptance among millennial parents as they navigate the difficulties and obligations that arise from having a husband who works overseas as an OFW. Consequently, these parents must invest additional effort in caring for their child or children. It demonstrates a readiness to confront difficulties for the benefit of the larger cause while also explicitly recognizing the hurdles encountered. The theme also highlights the resilience and adaptability of millennial parents as they find creative ways to maintain a strong connection with their spouses despite the physical distance. It sheds light on the sacrifices made by these parents, showcasing their determination to provide a stable and loving environment for their children despite the challenges they face.

#### Subtheme 1.1. Acceptance

Wives understood full well that they would be placed in a difficult situation where they would be left to their own devices and would have to temporarily become both parents and fathers when they committed themselves to their OFW partners in this particular situation and accepted their responsibilities. They recognized the sacrifices they would have to make, such as managing household chores, financial matters, and raising children single-handedly. Despite the challenges, these wives embraced their roles with determination and resilience, ensuring that their families remained intact and well-cared for in the absence of their OFW partners.

*“Gi dawat nalang, kay pag abut nalang nga pag panguyab, imuha’ng huna-huna mu abut ra gyud na ang time nga ikaw ra ju’y ma habilin sa balay. Wala gyud namu na [feel nga] shock kay na dawat na man namu sa wala pa gayud mi na minyu.” (Informant 7).* **(I simply accepted since on the day he pursued me, my mind was already aware that there would be a moment when I would be left alone to care for the child. I did not experience any surprise as I had fully embraced it before to getting married).**

#### Subtheme 1.2. Struggles

Being alone and left behind by the migrant husband, the wives would encounter difficulties and challenges. These difficulties and challenges may include financial struggles as they are often left

responsible for managing the household expenses on their own. Additionally, they may also face emotional hardships due to the absence of their partner, leading to feelings of loneliness and isolation.

*“Lahi pud pag dala kung wala imong bana kay sila bug-at man ilang buot para sa ilang Daddy. For example, kung imo silang badlungon, dili sila ingon nga motuo dayun nimo kay mangita sila sa side sa ilang Daddy.” (Informant 8)* **(The absence of the husband elicits a sense of longing in the children as they yearn for their paternal figure. For instance, I enforce discipline upon them. They exhibit resistance due to their want to listen to their father's perspective).**

*“para nako ma’am is lisod gyud kaayo siya nga experience nga isip inahan nga magpakamahan kay kay ngano man? Example, masakit imong mga anak, ikaw rang usa. Wala kay kaabagan nila. Unya sa ila sad nga pagdako or sa imong pagamuma nila sa imo, sa buluhaton sa balay, ikaw ra tanan. Maong lisod jud kaayo nga wala ang imong bana man. Mao ra akong mastorya ma’am (Informant 4).* **(for me ma'am, it is a very difficult experience as a mother to be a father because why? Example, your children are sick, you are the only one. You are the only one who can take care of them. Then raising them, taking care of them and doing the housework, you are all alone. That's why it's so hard without your husband. That's all I can talk about ma'am).**

Furthermore, an additional issue arises when the parents of the migrant spouse meddle in the wife's affairs, particularly in the upbringing of their children. This interference from the parents can lead to conflicts and strained relationships between the migrant spouse and their in-laws.

*“Oo mo interfere bitaw ang parents unya lahi baya. Maglagot jud ka. Kanang mo apil ang ugangan ba.” (Informant 7)* **(Yes, the parents interfere and it's a different vibe and you get outraged when the in-laws get involved.)**

Due to marital dynamics, emotional separation and temporal adaptability are constants. Their spouses live in different countries, so they have different time zones. The overseas Filipino worker (OFW) may only sometimes have a reliable internet connection for video calling or chatting, making it harder for the wife. Since their

husbands are employed, they must contact them whenever their spouse is available and has a reliable internet or signal connection. This situation often leads to limited communication between the spouses, causing loneliness and frustration. Additionally, the OFW's wife may have to adjust her daily routine and sleep schedule to accommodate the time difference and maintain regular contact with her husband.

*“Kapoy sad jud kay ug naa silay signal, mag sakripisyo pud jud ka. Kung naa didto pang buntag ikaw jud ang mag adjust nila kay sila man ang nag trabaho.” (Informant 8)” (It’s very exhausting because if they have signal, you sacrifice. You’re the one who will adjust to them because they’re the ones who are working.)*

### **Theme 2 Coping with the Challenges**

The second theme covers the wives' strategies to cope with their struggles. Solving problems is part of overcoming obstacles. This theme highlights millennial parents' problem-solving approaches. By showcasing the wives' strategies, the second theme emphasizes the importance of adaptability and resourcefulness in navigating challenges faced by the wives of OFW.

#### **Subtheme 2.1 Optimism**

This subtheme entailed the self-assurance and positivity of the wives of OFW so that they could deal with their problems. They displayed remarkable resilience and determination, often finding creative solutions to overcome challenges. Their unwavering belief in their abilities and the support they provided to one another created a strong network of empowered women, ready to face any obstacle that came their way.

*“sa akoo ma’am isip kuan, kay sauna nag-bata gyud mi nga wala jud mi. Kay wala, wala, as in wala jud. Pobre mi ma’am ba, so kami, maka-ingon ko nga naay advantage ang pagka-OFW sa akong bana kay naka-provide siya sa tanan namong needs. Di lang kay nako, hasta sad sa akong mga anak. Siguro, layo man tu-od pero naa man juy mga kuan pod, mga advantages pod nga layo siya kay ngano man, akong mga anak makakaon sa usa ka adlaw, kaupat. Usahay, maka-snacks ba. Makapalit pa sa mga butang nga ganahan nila or mga gadgets. Murag importante sad jud kaayo nga naa jud bitaw moy kuan, financial stability. Kay of course, akong bana OFW so daghan siyag kwarta, daghan siyag*

*masend sa amo-a. Si ma-o ra ma’am, nice ra pud siya. Para nako ma’am, okay rajud sad mi. Pero long distance, nagsugod man sad gud mig kong distance ma’am maong dili kay ko ka-differentiate ba, karon nga nag-OFW na jud siya ug katong wala sa-una kay nagsugod jud mig long distance jud mi ma’am. So, mao rana akong ika-kuan ma’am , ikapa-ambit”(Informant 3). **I was raised poor, but now I can claim that having an OFW partner can provide our needs and wants, including food and snacks. They can buy devices. He can transfer a lot of money; therefore, financial stability is most crucial now. After he became an OFW, I can't tell him apart because we were long-distance prior***

#### **Subtheme 2.2. Patience**

This subtheme explained that to deal with the struggles of having an OFW husband, the wives must have a lot of patience in dealing with problems in the households. They must also possess strong communication skills to maintain a healthy and supportive relationship with their husbands despite the distance.

*“Para mu tuo na aku na sila ilut-ilutan og mga for example “dong ali sa gud dong, kuana sa kadali si mama bi tabangi sa niya ikahuman kay ayaw kabalaka kay paduwaon tika unlimited pa ang imong load ingon-ingana ra ma’am ang akong mga strategies, kana bitaw mura sa kanang nay gamay pahalipay ba kana bitaw ‘ng manugo ka ingana mao ra jud ma’am.” (Informant 4) **(For them to trust me I ask them to do something for me and I give them something like unlimited load as a reward. Something to make them happy).***

### **Theme 3. Appreciation**

This theme emphasized that the wives of Overseas Filipino Workers appreciate the hard work of their migrant husbands. They understand the sacrifices made by their husbands to provide for their families and are grateful for their dedication and commitment. This theme sheds light on the strong bond and support system that exists between these wives and their migrant husbands, highlighting the importance of mutual understanding and appreciation in maintaining a healthy relationship despite the distance.

*OFW man jud akong bana no sa akoo ang impact ana kay lisod siya pero at the same time nice siya kay ngano man mao man ang among kuan ang impact ana niya kay daghan makuha among mga*

*anak like for example naka pa eskuyla mi dili lang kay ingon makakaon mi tulo sa usa ka adlaw nay panahon maka snacks sila, naa say panahon akong mga anak maka suroy -suroy namo sa asa-asa nga mga lugar mao ra ma'am." (Informant 4)"* **(My husband is an OFW, He is demanding but nice, in my opinion. Cause why? My kids have much to gain. We can meet educational demands. More than three meals every day are allowed. They have time.**

*Inig uli mao na nga mag lag-laag gyud mi kay reward sa ilang pag tagbo-tagbo didto sa bawud. Para pud magka bonding siya sa iyang (mga) anak." (Informat 8)"* **(To reward him for always coping with work, we go somewhere nice when he returns home. For him to bond with his kids).**

## **Discussion**

Three main themes arose from OFW wives' experiences. (1) Long Road Ahead, (2) Coping with Challenges, and (3) Appreciation. The Long Road Ahead describes the emotional and psychological journey of OFW wives through protracted separation and uncertainty. Coping with the Challenges shows how these women struggle with domestic duties, child-rearing, and finances. Finally, Appreciation shows these women's thankfulness for their OFW spouses' sacrifices and hard work in supporting the family while far away.

The first finding of the study revealed the emotional and psychological journey of OFW wives. Nguyen et al. (2006) found that left-behind women in Asia are exposed to increased workload, exploitation, and mental and physical health concerns owing to their husbands' absence. Moreover, Desai and Banerji (2008) revealed that left-behind spouses in India must rethink their identities and responsibilities without their husbands. Due to financial and emotional stress, left-behind women commonly develop sadness and anxiety (Graham et al. 2015; Thomas et al., 2003; Zachariah et al., 2001). These findings highlight the significant impact of husbands' absence on the emotional well-being of left-behind wives. The added burden of increased workload and the need to redefine their roles further contribute to their mental and physical health concerns.

Another finding of the study revealed how wives of OFWs cope with the challenges. The study found that wives of OFWs employ various coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges they face. Khalaf (2009) stated that because of migration, women perceive a shift in their traditional role and an increase in responsibilities due to the absence of their husbands. This change in roles and responsibilities often leads to women taking on multiple roles simultaneously, such as being the primary breadwinner, caregiver, and decision-maker in the household. As a result, women experience significant changes in their daily lives and have to adapt to new challenges and expectations. Likewise, if a migrant with a low-paying job overseas fails to send adequate remittances for his family, forcing the lady to work on a farm along with other duties. Women become sole breadwinners with additional family and household duties (Gulati, 1993).

Finally, the study revealed that appreciation shows these women's thankfulness for their OFW spouses' sacrifices and hard work in supporting the family while far away. Migrants maintained relationships through phone calls, letters, and other long-distance communication to minimize marital problems and wayward children (Platt et al., 2014). These forms of communication helped migrants stay connected with their families and provided emotional support despite the physical distance (Derasin et. al, 2023). Additionally, maintaining these relationships allowed migrants to actively participate in their family's lives and stay updated on important events.

## **Conclusion**

The study identified the various difficulties and struggles that wives of overseas Filipino workers (OFW) encounter and how they choose to address these difficulties. To cope with these difficulties, they employ different strategies. They are also very grateful for the sacrifices that their husbands make for the sake of their families' future. Despite the challenges they face, these wives express immense appreciation for their husbands' dedication and determination to provide a better life for their families.

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