



# Phenomenological Study on the Long-Term Effects of Parental Absence and Coping Mechanisms of Children of Overseas Filipino Workers

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## Abstract

With the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who significantly boost the economy through their remittances, the Philippines stands out as one of the largest labor-exporting nations in the world. However, their absence often brings about emotional and social difficulties for the families and children they leave behind. This phenomenological qualitative research determined the long-term effects of parental absence on children of OFWs and analyzed their coping mechanisms. Twelve (12) participants were chosen purposively and underwent semi-structured interviews guided by a set of 10 open-ended self-constructed guide questions. Using the Colaizzi's thematic method, their responses were familiarized, identified, formulated, clustered, interpreted, and affirmed. The findings revealed three major long-term effects on children of OFWs: challenges to emotional health; shaped independence; and changes in family dynamics. The coping strategies varied among participants, with some effectively managing their experiences by seeking external support, maintaining communication with their parents or guardians, and participating in positive activities. Some unhealthy coping behaviors were also observed, such as self-isolation, bottling up emotions, and becoming overly independent. The results showed that while having absent parents can help children develop adaptability and resilience, it can also make them vulnerable in ways that impact their emotional growth and relationships with others. This study offered valuable insights into the experiences of children of OFWs. Therefore, it is essential among OFWs to maintain consistent contact with their children and loved ones. Regular check-ins help demonstrate care and support, reducing the likelihood of experiencing harmful coping mechanisms.

**Keywords:** coping mechanism; Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW); parental absence; qualitative study



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## INTRODUCTION

The Philippines is known as one of the largest labor-exporting countries, in which Filipino parents leave their children behind in search of larger and better opportunities abroad. While this migration has economic benefits, it is crucial to recognize the emotional challenges faced by children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), who often struggle silently with fears and hopes that go unspoken. Parental absence due to labor migration can strongly affect family dynamics. The children left behind may have to take on extra responsibilities and may begin to carry the pressure of societal expectations and

obligations. These pressures can lead to behavioral changes, academic challenges, and difficulties interacting with others. In addition, physical distance can also weaken the emotional bonds between OFW parents and their children, despite regular digital communication.

Many studies have examined the experiences of children of OFWs, but the long-term emotional and psychological effects of parental absence remain unclear. Pinzon (2021) found that children of OFWs and their parents mostly stay connected through digital communication. However, these interactions tend to be shallow

and routine rather than deeply meaningful. Despite frequent contact, it is still uncertain how this affects the children's emotional health and overall well-being over time. They often rely on coping strategies that may not fully satisfy their emotional needs. Butler et al. (2022) found that some children seek support from friends and family, but the effectiveness of these coping methods is not well established. Frei-Landau et al. (2024) reported that these children primarily use problem-focused coping strategies, while emotion-focused and support-seeking approaches are less common. Similarly, Distor and Campos (2021) observed that Senior High School students with parents working abroad often turn to hobbies and specific thought patterns for comfort. However, this study did not assess how effective these strategies are over time or whether they might have negative consequences. Taola et al. (2024) discussed the emotional difficulties faced by children of OFWs and their coping mechanisms but did not explore how parental absence directly impacts their well-being. Recognizing the coping strategies used by families of OFWs is necessary for creating support programs (Capol et al., 2024).

While these studies highlight the complexity of coping with parental absence and underscore the need for further research on the long-term effects of parental absence and the effectiveness of coping strategies on children's emotional and psychological health, the present research focuses on the emotional and psychological impact of parental absence on children of OFWs, specifically, the children's mental health, social interactions, and general development, emphasizing the need for support systems addressing the emotional and psychological needs of these children. The study assists professionals in crafting meaningful programs that promote the overall development and well-being of children of OFWs despite all the challenges of having migrant parents.

## LITERATURES

Emotional and psychological impact of parental absence on children of OFWs. Parental absence

due to migration has a profound emotional and psychological impact on children left behind. Children of OFWs hope for a better future but regularly experience sadness, loneliness, and envy of peers with present parents, especially when they are burdened with extra household duties or academic struggles (Fabros et al., 2023). Some adolescents develop self-reliance and acceptance, but many feel incomplete and weighed down by family expectations and gender roles (Villarama et al., 2024). Family disruptions, such as parental infidelity, can intensify emotional pain and strain relationships, prompting children to seek support from friends (Rokach & Chan, 2023). The absence of parents—particularly mothers—places children at higher risk for anxiety, depression, loneliness, and behavioral issues (Adhikari & Adhikari, 2024). Naz et al. (2022) found even with financial support, emotional and behavioral problems persist, with boys more likely to engage in rule-breaking and girls more prone to mental health concerns. Feelings of abandonment and sadness are common, often leading to behavioral and academic difficulties (Tremblay & Pagé, 2024).

While technology helps maintain communication, it cannot replace the comfort of a parent's physical presence, leaving adolescents with ongoing anxiety, fear, and emotional pain (Torres et al., 2025). Naz et al. (2022) highlights that financial support alone does not prevent behavioral issues or emotional distress arising from a lack of parental guidance. The importance of a mother's love and support is highlighted as crucial for discipline and motivation, with the absence of this guidance increasing the risk of negative outcomes (Harries et al., 2023). Although some children benefit from better education and living conditions, others experience disrupted family reunification and gender inequality (Naranjo et al., 2023). Children's resilience and conscientiousness can help them perform better in school, and many cope by understanding their parents' sacrifices, working hard academically, and relying on family and friends for support (Taola et al., 2024). Miller et al. (2021) and Acoba (2024) show that support from friends and family is crucial for lowering

the risks of self-harm and suicide. Strong relationships act as a helpful shield. However, when parents separate, it often weakens these emotional bonds. This can lead to anxiety, a lack of motivation, self-isolation, and feelings of detachment, which hurt overall well-being (Fauk et al., 2024). Without secure attachments, children may struggle to build healthy friendships and face challenges, which can slow their emotional and mental growth (Ren et al., 2025). Good parental relationships help children build emotional strength, while a lack of these connections can result in low self-esteem and trouble with relationships (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2019). Lin and Qu (2025) report that serious delinquency is uncommon, but sadness, loneliness, and minor issues like skipping school are frequent. Although support from caregivers and schools can help, it does not completely fill the emotional void left by absent parents. Lacuesta et al. (2023) found average emotional maturity and adaptability, while Franklin et al. (2017) pointed out higher risks for psychological issues and suicidal thoughts.

Academic outcomes and pressure on children of OFWs. The academic experiences of children left behind by OFWs are shaped by emotional, family, and personal factors. Midgette et al. (2022) found that these children often feel a strong sense of gratitude for their parents' sacrifices, which motivates them to do well in school. However, this motivation can also lead to increased anxiety about studying and feelings of isolation from teachers and authority figures. Even though children of OFWs may do well academically, they often feel sad and miss their absent parents, but they usually do not feel rejected or abandoned (Villarama et al., 2024; Rendeza, 2017). Personality traits also affect their school performance. Tolentino (2018) reveal these children tend to be pleasant, with traits like neuroticism and openness impacting how they perform in school. However, Jiang et al. (2022) found that academic pressure resulted in deviant behavior from students. Resilience and conscientiousness help these children face the challenges of having a parent away (Post, 2025). Emotional well-being and coping skills are key to the academic success of children of OFWs. Gaspan and Sasot (2024)

found that being away from parents for a long time can lead to feelings of loneliness and emotional distance. These feelings can either motivate them to excel academically or make it harder for them to succeed. Good communication with parents, along with support from extended family and schools, is crucial in helping children manage these challenges (Bokayev et al., 2021). Navarez and Diaz (2017) discovered that effective coping strategies, like planning tasks and seeking help result to better academic results. Left-behind children often take on parental roles at home, which affects their academic performance and emotional well-being (Aguilar, 2020). Similarly, Lu (2014) reported that more chores for left-behind children can hinder their educational progress.

**Coping Mechanisms and Resilience.** Coping mechanisms and resilience play a crucial role in how individuals, especially children of migrant workers, manage emotional challenges. Meyers et al. (2024) show that problem-focused coping leads to better adjustment and emotional healing over time, while Franklin et al. (2017) notes that emotional coping predominates but carries ongoing psychological risks. Comparably, Rachmawati et al. (2023) emphasize that although emotion-focused coping is common among adolescents with migrant parents, problem-focused strategies result in better adjustment, with family support, especially from relatives, proving essential. In a related study, Hariyati et al. (2024) finds that families adjust their beliefs, shift roles, and navigate communication challenges to maintain stability and manage the emotional and social impacts of migration. Likewise, Thornton et al. (2024) highlighted that engaging in enjoyable leisure activities strengthens resilience, protecting individuals against stress and supporting better mental well-being. Complementing this, Shokrpour (2021) concluded that positive thinking helps reduce pathological worry and anxiety, while Zięba et al. (2022) found that prioritizing positivity sharpens cognitive processes, empowering individuals to seek new opportunities and foster personal growth. In another perspective, Liu et al. (2025) showed

that crying can have a cathartic effect by releasing oxytocin, which reduces anxiety and negative emotions. Buser et al. (2024) demonstrated that art interventions can significantly lessen sadness while boosting happiness and overall mental health. Qin et al. (2022) found that a high level of empathy helps left-behind children build stronger social competence, aiding their adjustment despite parental absence.

**Parent-Child Relationship and Communication.** Parent-child relationships among OFW families often become strained, distant, or resentful, with communication dynamics shaped by technology but still unable to replace face-to-face emotional support (To, 2018; Parreñas, 2015). Aguilar (2020) found that while technology keeps bonds intact, left-behind children often assume adult roles, impacting their academics and well-being. Alampay et al. (2017) highlighted that daughters of OFWs communicate more frequently, influencing their future aspirations. Similarly, Pinzon (2021) noted that though conversations with migrant parents can feel routine, core family values remain strong. Taola et al. (2024) emphasized that financial support and virtual communication offer some comfort but cannot fully ease emotional pain. Harries et al. (2023) and Naz et al. (2022) stressed the risks of behavioral issues in the absence of parental guidance, while Bokayev et al. (2021) and Mendo-Lázaro et al. (2019) pointed to the crucial role of strong family communication in building emotional resilience. Naz et al. (2022) and Navarro and Gorospe (2014) further explored vulnerabilities, showing how stress levels and coping strategies vary with gender and religious affiliation. Despite the hardships, DeWaard et al. (2018), Bălătescu et al. (2023), and Hariyati et al. (2024) found that family adaptability, shared responsibilities, and support networks help left-behind children maintain stability and emotional strength.

**Material, Physical, Mental, and Emotional Support.** Many people seek work outside their home countries for better economic opportunities; however, working abroad tends to cause physical separation within a family

(Bautista & Tamayo, 2020; Solheim & Ballard, 2016). Naranjo et al. (2023) revealed that the physical separation caused by migration has the potential to bring about both negative and positive effects on the children left behind, on one hand, having migrant parents may result in the child having access to quality education, having a comfortable life, and being free from debt, it may also result in unfulfilled family reunification and households with gender inequality, among other negative effects. Bernardo et al. (2018) associated materialistic attitudes in the children of OFWs with overall lower well-being, suggesting that gratitude can improve these children's well-being. Meanwhile, Fauk et al. (2024) stated that parental separation is often a root cause of weakened emotional bonds, which lead to negative emotions like anxiety, loss of motivation, self-isolation, and feelings of detachment. These findings are backed up by Mendo-Lázaro et al. (2019), with both studies emphasizing the role of parental guidance in shaping a child's emotional stability and how parental absence often results in low self-esteem and difficulty in forming relationships with others. Hariyati et al. (2024) finds that coping mechanisms allow the children of OFWs to alleviate the negative effects of parental absence, alongside with Rachmawati et al. (2023), Acoba (2024), and Taola et al. (2024) emphasizing social support from friends and family as a key method of reducing these negative effects. Miller et al. (2021) and Rokach and Chan (2023) expand on this, with the former finding that seeking the company of helpful friends and family members can reduce suicidal risk, while the latter finds that support from friends can help manage the feelings of the children of OFWs. However, it should be noted that the capacity of parental absence to hinder a child's ability to form relationships may reduce the possibility of seeking support from others.

Indeed, the absence of parents can sometimes result in the left-behind child experiencing a wide range of physical and mental health issues. Lin and Qu (2025) emphasized the higher likelihood of the children of OFWs developing various problems with their mental

health, such as higher rates of depression, anxiety, and loneliness, while Dominguez and Hall (2022) pointed out that poor mental health often leads to poor physical health, as the children of OFWs can turn to unhealthy habits like over-eating, smoking, and alcohol misuse among others. The detrimental health effects caused by parental separation can be reduced by partaking in healthy habits like sports (Lovett & Smith, 2024). Emotionally alleviating practices like forgiveness and positive thinking can also reduce symptoms of depression, anger, anxiety, and pathological worry (Barcaccia et al., 2019; Shokrpour et al., 2021). It is also found that emotionally cathartic behaviors like crying can serve as a self-soothing behavior that reduces negative emotions (Liu et al., 2025).

## METHODS

**Research Design.** This study used a phenomenological design, which focused on understanding people's experiences (Wahyudi et al., 2024). It aimed to explain the significance of an event by investigating how those affected feel and think about it (Taola et al., 2024; Distor & Campos, 2021). This method helped researchers explore and provide details about the experiences of children of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). As reported by the participants, the study looked at the long-term effects of parental absence and how children of OFWs cope with, through semi-structured interviews guided by a set of 10 open-ended self-constructed guide questions.

**Context, Participants, and Sampling.** The study was conducted in a provincial university, in Nueva Ecija, Philippines. Guided by Creswell (2013), a sample size of five (5) to 25 participants is recommended for phenomenological studies. Therefore, the study covered 12 student-participants selected purposively, following that (1) they must be of legal age (at least 18 years old); (2) at least one parent has been working abroad for at least a year; (3) has a parent/s who has worked abroad for at least a year; and (4) willing to participate and share their experiences. The participants

were identified anonymously as S1, S2, S3, S4, S5, S6, S7, S8, S9, S10, S11, and S12.

**Instruments.** During a series of four-week semi-structured interviews with 12 student-participants, the study was guided by a set of 10 open-ended self-constructed guide questions as reviewed and content validated by five experts composed of registered guidance counselor, psychologist, social science researcher, statistician, and language teacher. The instrument was divided in three components: (1) informed consent form and data privacy clause; (2) questions on long-term effects of parental absence on children of OFWs; and (3) questions on how the children of OFWs cope with the absence of their parents. Participants were well-informed and willingly agreed to have their interviews documented using written, audio, and video recordings.

**Data Collection Procedures.** After receiving the approval of ethics clearance from the Central Luzon State University (CLSU) Ethics Research Committee (ERC), the researchers reached out to the student-participants to provide the informed consent forms and other documents before the conduct of interviews. In scheduling the semi-structured in-person interviews, the researchers considered the participants' availability and time-restrictions. After settling the schedules, the semi-structured interviews took place for four weeks. The participants' identities remained anonymous throughout the study. Responses were recorded, transcribed, organized, and analyzed thematically.

**Data Analysis Procedures.** The responses were scrutinized to further gain insights into the long-term effects of parental absence on children of OFWs and their coping mechanisms. Following the thematic analysis method by Colaizzi (1978), their responses were familiarized, identified, formulated, clustered, interpreted, and affirmed. To verify the accuracy of the information and the reliability of the results, data cross-checking was followed through inter-researcher counterchecking, select participants' revalidation, and review of findings.



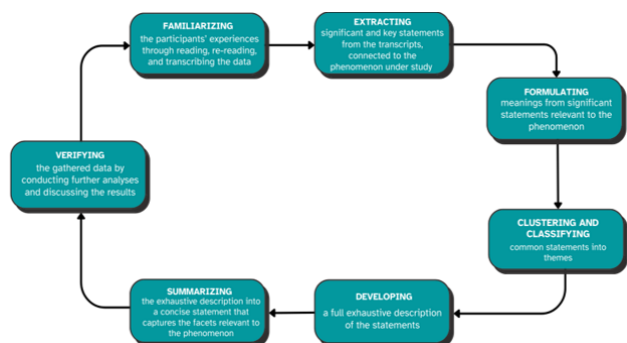


Figure 1  
Adapted approach to data analysis anchored on Colaizzi's method (1978)

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Long-term effects of parental absence on children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Figure 2 below illustrates nine major themes with 21 subthemes in total, encapsulating the diverse experiences and adaptive strategies of children of OFWs in response to long-term parental absence.

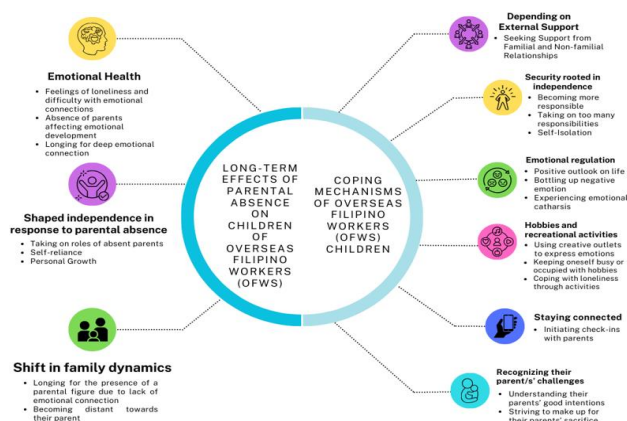


Figure 2  
Illustration on the effects of parental absence and coping mechanisms of children of OFWs

**Theme 1. Emotional Health—feelings of loneliness and difficulty with emotional connections.** Majority of participants felt the feeling of loneliness brought by the absence of key parental figure. This feeling coincides with a marked difficulty in forming new connections with others, with several responses citing a fear of potential abandonment or rejection as their reasoning for their inability to form emotional bonds. The participants also expressed experiencing difficulty in opening up and seeking help from others due to the same fear of rejection.

*"Trust issues have been a major obstacle in my relationships. I struggle to open up, fearing abandonment or rejection [S2]. Given the recent events, I've grown up to develop trust issues because of them [S3]. It makes trusting others harder and keeps me on edge, always expecting someone important to walk away" [S9].*

The lack of parental guidance can cause feelings of loneliness and abandonment to form in children. This is due to the inability of absent parents to aid the child in key emotional and cognitive development (Ren et al., 2025). The absence of secure attachment relationships can hinder the ability of a child to form healthy peer connections (Delgado et al., 2022).

**Absence of parents affecting emotional development.** The children of OFWs would often describe how the lack of parental figures in their lives would affect their emotional and behavioral development. This affected development would express itself through several negative behaviors, such as a lack of trust in others and the rise of self-doubt and poor self-esteem. The children of OFWs would also go on to express positive behavioral developments, such as developing feelings of greater empathy and understanding for other people.

*"On the other side, it also helped me grow a deep empathy for others [S9]. Sometimes I feel like my emotional well-being is the most affected aspect of my life because of my father's absence" [S10].*

Children with highly involved parents tend to exhibit higher self-esteem and stronger emotional stability. Conversely, a lack of parental connection would tend to lead children to exhibit low self-esteem and difficulties in interpersonal relationships (Mendo-Lázaro et al., 2019). A high level of empathy is essential to children with absent parents, as it is conducive to developing social competence in children left-behind by their parents (Qin et al., 2022).

**Longing for deep emotional connection.** Several children of OFWs expressed a deep longing for emotional connection, both with peers and with

their absent parents. This longing for emotional connection was exemplified by their professed need for validation and desire to have someone they could rely on. Some responses would express envy towards those with stable relationships with their parents, which would also be indicative of a desire for connection.

*"One would be my longing for someone to support me, or someone to lean on and ask for advice during the days that I found myself lost" [S3]. "I think it's just the feeling of loneliness that there were times when he was absent during our special days that gives me the sense of sadness and yearning whenever I think about it" [S10]. "I envy those who are close to their father" [S11].*

The children of OFWs would sometimes express feelings of isolation, longing, and a lack of motivation due to the absence of their parents. They would also express feelings of envy towards individuals who they perceive to have a better family environment (Agustian et al., 2024)

*Theme 2. Shaped independence in response to parental absence—taking on roles of absent parents.* To fill the gap left by their parents' absence, several children of OFWs have taken on the responsibility of caring for their families, leading them to become more independent. They are the ones their families rely on. As they take on these roles, it can help them grow up faster and become more resilient. This independence may be considered a positive trait, but it also puts a lot of pressure on them. They tend to manage their own needs while also meeting family obligations.

*"As I grew up, I just got used to "taking his role" in our family like helping my mother and taking care of my sisters whenever he's away. So, I think my father's absence shaped me to become responsible and to be the one taking care of our family" [S10].*

The change in roles is influenced by family expectations, gender roles, and cultural values such as *"utang na loob"* or sense of gratitude, which encourages children to compensate for their parents' sacrifices by taking care of the

family (Midgette et al., 2022). This "parentification" leads to a sense of independence and responsibility, although it can also create emotional distance and pressure (Dariotis et al., 2023).

*Self-reliance.* Children of OFWs develop independence over time as a result of their parents' absence. This often leads to them learning things the hard way and figuring things out on their own. They have developed the ability to handle their problems independently while managing their emotions themselves. They have become used to relying solely on themselves due to their parents being away.

*"I had no one to guide me through the modern landscape and the digital age, having to learn things the hard way. When the time came that they gave me advice, they were often about lessons that I had already learned a long time ago" [S3]. "A part of me that was shaped by my parent's absence is my independence. Growing up without my parents made me learn how to figure things out on my own" [S9]. "Sometimes I can feel a sense of tendency to suppress emotions to stay strong, but I find myself to be more self-reliant and independent as a person" [S12].*

Despite the emotional challenges associated with parental absence, many children develop self-reliance as a positive outcome. These children often learn to manage household responsibilities, cope with feelings of loneliness, and adapt to changes in their family dynamics (Agustian et al., 2024).

*Personal Growth.* As children of OFWs strive to do things independently, not only did they take on more responsibilities but it led to their personal growth. The challenges brought about by their parent/s' absence shape their individuality, helping them develop greater strength and maturity as they grow. The more they rely on themselves, the more they grow as individuals and realize their capability to accomplish greater things.

*"I think it's made me a tougher person because it's made me understand my emotions better,*

*since I tend to handle them alone because of my parent's absence" [S5]. "My father's absence taught me to become responsible and mature enough to stand on my own. I think in a way, I also just got used to solving my problems on my own, knowing that my father is away and I don't want to become a burden to my mother. So, as much as possible, I try to do things on my own" [S10].*

Many children of OFWs develop resilience that enables them to cope and transcend challenges despite adversities caused by parental absence. Therefore, this enhances their personal growth and capabilities as time pass by (Naranjo et al., 2023).

**Theme 3. Family Dynamics—longing for the presence of a parental figure due to lack of emotional connection.** Children of OFWs grow up without their parents present, leading to a deep longing for their guidance and companionship. The distance can make communication inconsistent, resulting in missed opportunities for emotional connection. Being physically present is essential, as it satisfies the child's need to be close to their parents.

*"Special moments just hit different without a parent around, and family gatherings sometimes feel a little emptier without them" [S9]. "Although we still get in touch with each other most of the time through calls and messages, there are still some moments when I wish that he was with us, sharing a time together, especially on special occasions or when I get through a tough time" [S10].*

Children of OFWs experience strong emotions because their parents are away. They often feel longing, sadness, and a strong need to connect with their absent parents (Lin & Qu, 2025). These children wish to see their parents during long periods of separation and want to feel emotionally close to them (Butler et al., 2022). Without a parent present, family structure can break down, and family relationships can weaken. This can make the longing for emotional connection even greater (Chu et al., 2025).

*Becoming distant towards their parents.* Because of inconsistent communication and the lack of physical presence, children of OFWs feel disconnected and uncomfortable with their parents, leading to emotional distance. As the parent remains away for an extended period, the emotional connection between them weakens, breaking the original bond. When the parent eventually returns after a long separation, the relationship may not be the same, resulting in a strained connection between the child and the parent.

*I am much closer to my mother and sometimes I am uncomfortable interacting with my father [S11]. And given the sheer length of time they've spent away from me, I found myself to be more attached to my grandmother, and more distant towards them. It's something that I feel bad about, but it is how I feel [S3].*

Limited communication and lack of physical presence make it hard for children to share their feelings and miss the comfort of family. These challenges create emotional distance and isolation from their OFW parents, making it difficult for children to maintain close relationships (Butler et al., 2022).

Coping Mechanisms of children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Below are the themes generated as expressed by the participants.

**Theme 1. Depending on external support—seeking support from familial and non-familial relationships.** In the absence of parental support, children of OFWs often turn to friends, close relatives, or the remaining parent for guidance and emotional support. As they grow up without their parent(s) physically present, they become increasingly dependent on these familial and non-familial relationships. This reliance on other people can be seen as a coping mechanism for the absence of their parents, with several of the participants admitting that their friends and family fill the void that their parents left.

*"I found it effective to seek support from other family members, like my grandparents and uncles [S1]. I just looked for other people who*



*could substitute the guidance my parents couldn't provide me" [S3]. "While I didn't have direct parental guidance, my relatives helped fill in some gaps; they offered advice when needed, supported me, and taught me important life lessons" [S9]. "Although my father was not around, I still have my mother to guide me how to take care of myself" [S11].*

Children of OFWs often rely on support from friends and relatives in the absence of their parents. This highlights the importance of these support networks for their adjustment and well-being. To compensate for the emotional gap left by their absent parents, they tend to spend more time with family and friends. Relying on these relationships helps them cope with feelings of loneliness, share their experiences, and get practical and emotional support (Harries et al., 2023).

*Theme 2. Security rooted in independence—becoming more responsible.* The children of OFWs would often be pushed by their circumstances to become much more responsible as a means of coping with parental absence. This change tends to be out of necessity, as the lack of parental presence means they would have to do things their parent(s) would otherwise do for them. Several participants have developed mindsets conducive to more independent lifestyles, such as believing they are enough on their own or becoming more comfortable with the idea of decision-making.

*"I developed the habit of managing my own responsibilities early" [S4]. One belief that keeps me going is that I am enough on my own [S9]. "I think the effective way of coping with the absence of parents absence is to try to step up and stand on your own and just live the moment when you are together and make the most out of it" [S10].*

The children of overseas workers may have to endure increased household obligations (Lu, 2014) due to the greater potential for responsibility sharing among the members of the household left-behind by migrants (DeWaard et al., 2018).

*Taking on too many responsibilities.* Children of OFWs considered taking on of too many responsibilities to be an ineffective coping mechanism. However, there are others who chose to employ this strategy through mindsets such as "no pain, no gain," despite acknowledging the possible unhealthiness of their methods.

*"It was really tough at first, but I learned to adapt and figure things out on my own. I had to grow up faster and take care of myself, which was hard, but it made me stronger. I also had to prioritize and manage my time well, so I could balance school, chores, and other responsibilities. It wasn't easy, but I learned to be resourceful and independent, and that's helped me a lot" [S2].*

Children of migrant parents were found to often take on an excess of adult-like responsibilities, such as having to work at an early age to fulfill the needs of the household or having to care for their younger siblings (Bălăţescu et al., 2023).

*Self-Isolation.* Several children of OFW would employ self-isolation as a means of coping. This was expressed by how they would take time alone to process and clear their mind through quiet reflections. The participants also expressed their self-isolation by taking on responsibilities on their own and by keeping to themselves while trusting in their personal perspectives during tough situations.

*"I find that solitude best clears my mind and helps me build myself back up when things get messy and stressful [S5]. One belief that keeps me going is that I am enough on my own [S9]. I handle things by trusting my own perspective during tough situations [S12]. Quiet reflections, or by spending time doing things that help me feel connected and at peace" [S12].*

Separation from one or two parents can lead to fractured bonds, resulting in negative emotions, such as anxiety, loss of motivation, self-imposed isolation, and feelings of detachment, which ultimately affect the well-being of these children (Fauk et al., 2024). However, isolation can also be a positive factor, as it presents an

opportunity for deeper self-examination and the possibility for meaning-making (Bayram & Artan, 2024).

*Theme 3. Emotional regulation—positive outlook on life.* A common way of coping employed by the children of OFWs is to have a positive outlook on life. They would often focus on positive thoughts while refraining from entertaining negative thoughts, like anxiety about the future. The children of OFWs would also cope by using positive affirmations and by looking toward the possibility of having a happy future.

*"Sometimes I'll also talk to myself, which might sound weird, but it actually helps. I'll say things like 'I've got this' or 'I can get through this' to remind myself that I'm strong and capable. I'll also try to focus on the present moment and do things that bring me comfort."*[S2]. *"I do it all for the life that awaits me at the end of the tunnel"* [S3]. *"The key thing I always kept in mind was to avoid stressing myself out because, if I can't change the situation, there's no point in worrying"*[S5].

Positive thoughts serve as an effective method of coping with negative feelings such as anxiety and worry (Shokrpour et al., 2021). Positive thinking also serves as a way to relieve tension and stress and allows people to have a clearer cognitive process, which encourages people to actively seek opportunities and experience positive emotion (Zięba et al., 2022).

*Bottling up negative emotion.* A way of coping that some of the children of OFWs would consider ineffective would be the method of bottling up emotions. The participants would go on to say that bottling up or avoiding emotions only leads to emotional build-up, which only serves as a temporary (and ultimately unhelpful) solution to negative feelings.

*"I tend to bottle up my emotions whenever their absence affects me"* [S7]. *"Ineffective ways would be bottling up feelings or avoiding them altogether, which only leads to emotional build-up"* [S9]. *"While bottling up feelings or avoiding emotions is often unhelpful for me"*[S12].

The suppression of emotion is a coping mechanism that is largely associated with a considerable number of negative effects, such as the accumulation of unresolved negative emotions and the suppression of positive emotions. It can also bring about negative habits or unhealthy lifestyles, like emotional eating (Urbón & Salavera, 2023). Emotional repression also comes with negative effects on health, such as an increased likelihood of developing anxiety (Patel & Patel, 2019).

*Experiencing emotional catharsis.* The children of OFWs occasionally cope with their emotions through catharsis, which is the process of releasing strong or repressed emotions. This would often be done through emotionally relieving activities like crying, which helps to release heavy feelings, though some children of OFWs would express catharsis through harmful methods like self-harm. Some participants would refrain from expressing their emotions altogether; rather, they would choose to remain silent and overcome their emotions on their own.

*"I cry and sometimes hurt myself to numb the pain"* [S1]. *"I won't say that I can express them well when I'm under a lot of stress, I just stay silent and think for a bit"* [S8]. *"I usually cry when I feel lonely or stressed so I can let the heavy feeling get off of my chest"* [S10]. *"When dealing with loneliness or stress, I usually don't express it and just overcome it on my own"*[S11].

The emotionally cathartic behavior of crying is regarded as a self-soothing behavior that reduces negative emotions such as anxiety through the release of oxytocin (Liu et al., 2025). However, on the other hand, behaviors like self-harm, though capable of temporarily staving off negative thoughts, are often indicative of a higher risk of suicide in the long term (Miller et al., 2021).

*Theme 4. Hobbies and recreational activities—using creative outlets to express emotions.* Some children of OFWs believe that creative expression often becomes a silent yet powerful companion in times of coping with emotional stress. These outlets such as music, poetry,

drawing, and journaling might be effective ways for them as it represents not just as hobbies, but these can be considered as methods to navigate the pain and difficult feelings brought by parental absence.

*"When I'm feeling lonely or stressed, I usually express my emotions through music, or writing. I'll listen to songs that match my mood, or write in my journal. Sometimes, I'll also draw or paint to get my emotions out"* [S2].

Activities such as drawing, music, and journaling can serve as expressive arts therapy which facilitates emotional expression and coping. Arts also play a vital role in coping with such difficulties as art interventions significantly improve emotional well-being, reducing feelings of worry and sadness while enhancing happiness and overall mental health (Ugurlu et al., 2016).

*Keeping oneself busy or occupied with hobbies.* Engaging in hobbies and distracting themselves serve as constructive coping mechanisms, which allows children of OFWs to channel their energy to meaningful activities. These ways, such as organizing things, not only provide a distraction from stress factors but also nurture to have emotional balance and resilience in the long run.

*"For me, an effective coping means taking care of myself through healthy eating and hobbies"* [S2]. *"I handled things by staying organized, keeping myself busy with hobbies"* [S12].

These hobbies serve as effective coping mechanisms that help students manage and recover from burnout by providing relaxation, emotional balance, and stress relief (Feliciano & Calderon, 2023). It was found to provide emotional stability and can be seen as a protective factor against depression and anxiety. Engaging in enjoyable leisure activities promotes mental health by enhancing resilience (Thornton et al., 2024).

*Coping with loneliness through activities.* Loneliness is a common emotional struggle, especially among youth, and a lot of individuals

cope with this by engaging in physical or social activities. Interactive online games can also serve as an effective strategy to combat those feelings of loneliness. It can also be through sports, online games, or outdoor activities, that provide emotional resilience and help them lessen the feeling of self-pity and loneliness.

*"I express my emotions by playing volleyball to relieve stress. It keeps my mind occupied and fill up the loneliness I have"* [S7]. *"My effective coping mechanism involves staying connected through online games"* [S12].

These activities significantly improve various aspects of mental health, such as anxiety, depression, stress, and reduce feelings of loneliness and depressive symptoms by nurturing peer relationships and social support (Lovett & Smith, 2024). Moreover, perceived stress was identified as a mediator in the relationship between social support and mental health outcomes, which highlights the importance of social connections or relationships in reducing stress and improving mental well-being (Acoba, 2024).

*Theme 5. Staying connected—initiating check-ins with parents.* Some children of OFWs continue to make efforts to stay connected with their parents despite the physical distance. They cope with their situation by regularly checking in and maintaining communication. Through these interactions, they share updates about their lives, keeping their parents informed. They also open up about their problems and seek advice, using these conversations as a source of emotional support and guidance.

*"I also initiate a call or message to him just to check on him and to share some things that would keep him updated with us"* [S10]. *"I rely on consistent check-ins from my mom to keep myself steady and composed"* [S12].

Regular check-ins and emotional support from parents, even from afar, help children handle the challenges of having an absent parent. This support can lower the risk of behavioral problems (Lin & Qu, 2025). While technology allows for frequent communication, it cannot

fully replace the close emotional connection formed through daily face-to-face interactions. Many children of OFWs say their talks with parents feel routine, shallow, or even “performed.” Both children and parents often hide their real struggles to prevent worrying each other (Pinzon, 2021).

*Theme 6. Recognizing their parent/s’ challenges—understanding their parents’ good intentions.* Children of OFWs who appreciate and understand the reasons behind their parents’ absence, like working abroad to provide better opportunities can aim for healthier and more effective coping mechanisms. This understanding enriches emotional resilience and reduces feelings of abandonment.

*“I know that they are working abroad not because they like being far away from us, but they are doing it in order for us to have better lives” [S1]. “I believe that those times that my father was away was for the sake of our family because he is also the main provider in our family” [S10].*

Many children of OFWs recognize that their parents’ decision to work abroad is primarily motivated by the desire to provide for the family’s material needs and secure a better future, especially regarding education (Gaspan & Sasot, 2024).

*Striving to make up for their parents’ sacrifice.* Children of OFWs often process things such as their parents’ sacrifices, especially in contexts where parents work abroad or under challenging conditions to provide better opportunities for their children. This attracts a strong motivation to excel academically and personally, driven by a desire to honor and reciprocate their parents’ efforts.

*“I developed a mindset that I must not let my father’s effort go to waste so I strive to keep my father and of course my mother be proud of me” [S11].*

Many are driven by a strong desire to make their parents proud and to reciprocate their

sacrifices, especially by excelling academically (Taola et al., 2024). However, higher levels of gratitude are associated with greater well-being and life satisfaction. When children focus on gratitude rather than material gains, they experience better self-esteem and positive affect (Bernardo et al., 2018).

In conclusion, this study provides key insights into the complex experiences of the children of OFWs. The long-term effects of parental absence and the coping mechanisms used to alleviate the challenges that come with being left behind by parental figures that are found in this research exemplify the depth of the lives of Filipino children with OFW parents.

In determining the long-term effects of parental absence on children of OFWs, the findings revealed three primary impacts: emotional health, shaped independence, and changes in family dynamics. While these effects often pose challenges to the children’s well-being and their relationship with their parents, they also highlight some positive outcomes. Prolonged parental absence frequently leads to a lack of guidance and emotional connection, which can hinder emotional development and alter family relationships. As the parent-child bond shifts, these children grow distant and uncomfortable with their parents’ presence. However, these experiences also encourage a sense of independence, as children take on new roles and responsibilities in the absence of their parents. This shift leads to self-reliance and contributes to their personal growth, shaping their ability to navigate life despite the challenges of separation.

In analyzing the coping mechanisms of children of OFWs, participants demonstrated a range of strategies, some of which were effective while others were not. Findings from the study indicated that seeking external support from both family and friends is one of the most effective coping strategies. Other positive approaches included taking on more responsibility, maintaining a positive outlook, engaging in hobbies and recreational activities, staying connected with their parents, and understanding their family’s situation.

Conversely, some children adopted less adaptive behaviors, such as excessive independence that led to them taking on too many responsibilities, as well as self-isolation. When it comes to emotional regulation, participants often suppressed negative emotions but also found ways to release repressed emotions; some of these methods brought relief, while others caused self-harm. The least effective coping mechanism identified was rebellion or holding grudges against their parents, stemming from a lack of understanding of why their parents had to work abroad.

Though this study only focused on the effects of parental absence as perceived by the participants and the coping mechanisms used by the children of OFWs from Luzon who are within legal age, the insights found still have greater implications for the experiences of other individuals with migrant parents regardless of age or locality. However, it is undeniable that the study would have the greatest implications for individuals who are from the Philippines. The primary contribution of this study is its provision of new insights into the experiences of children of OFWs by delving into the otherwise rarely covered topic of the long-term effects of parental absence and the effectiveness of various coping mechanisms used by children of OFWs. However, several important areas remain unexplored. These include the experiences of children from various age groups, educational and cultural backgrounds, and different localities. The study has also left untouched the topic of the effects and consequences of the coping mechanisms of children of OFWs.

For future researchers interested in exploring the topics covered in this study, it is suggested that future research involve a larger number of participants from a wider variety of age ranges, locations, educational backgrounds, and cultures. It is recommended that studies employ a more randomized method of subject selection to minimize potential biases associated with non-randomized methods. Researchers should also consider asking a broader range of in-depth questions to provide a more comprehensive basis for data interpretation.

For the children of OFWs, it is advised that they primarily reach out to friends and family as a method of coping with their parents' absence. It is also suggested that these children adopt productive and fulfilling coping mechanisms, such as taking on additional responsibilities, maintaining a positive outlook, engaging in hobbies and recreational activities, staying connected with their parents, and understanding their family's situation. It is important to avoid harmful coping methods, such as excessively taking on responsibilities, repressing emotions, and harboring resentment towards parents, as these can lead to negative outcomes. To parents who work abroad, it is essential to maintain consistent contact with children. Regular check-ins can help demonstrate care and support, reducing the likelihood that they turn to harmful coping mechanisms.

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