

Towards enhancing capabilities of children of Overseas Filipino Workers to sustain resilience and mitigate vulnerabilities

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The Capabilities Approach was used in this study to understand the experiences of resilience and vulnerabilities in the lives of children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the Philippines. It argues that the impact of family separation on the functionings and capabilities of the children left behind must be analyzed. This will provide the context for identifying what specific human capabilities should be safeguarded to ensure that migration benefits are sustained and vulnerabilities are mitigated. Through focused ethnography, this study draws qualitative and quantitative insights from 2,446 workshop participants of ANAK (Anak ng Nangibang-bansa Aruga at Kaagapay or Nurturing and Support for the Children of Overseas Workers) held nationwide from 2011 to 2013. Three valuable capability sets were identified that reflected the voices of children of OFWs. Findings from this study can serve as a guide in crafting migration and development policies that are sensitive to meeting the needs of the program participants in particular, and left-behind children by migrating parents in general.

Keywords: left-behind children, children of migrant workers, capabilities approach, resilience, vulnerability

Introduction

Left-behind children of migrating parent(s) have become a matter of growing concern to the global community (Abramovich, Cernadas, & Morlachetti, 2011) given the ever-increasing worldwide trend in international migration (ILO, 2013). The concern for these children is anchored upon the issue that separation from their parent(s) exposes them to certain risks such as being abused or trafficked (de la Garza, 2010), as well as becoming vulnerable to the psycho-social impacts of family separation (Valtolina & Colombo, 2012). Thus, calls have been made for migrant-sending countries to develop policies that can address the specific vulnerabilities of these children by ensuring the benefits that they have

gained from their parent(s)' migration can be sustained and the negative consequences brought about by family separation can be mitigated (Abramovich et al., 2011).

In the Philippines, left-behind children by migrating parents are known as the anak ng OFW (children of OFWs) since their migrant parent(s) belong to a population sector known as the Overseas Filipino Workers or OFWs. Local studies extensively deal with understanding the impact of family separation on the children's (a) economic condition, (b) health and nutrition status, (c) education, (d) psycho-social well-being, and (e) transnational relationship with their migrant parent(s). However, there is limited literature on how family separation impacts the functionings and capabilities of these children that contribute to their experiences of resilience and vulnerabilities. The central argument of this study is that understanding the impact of family separation on the functionings and capabilities of the children of OFWs will help identify which specific human capabilities should be safeguarded in order to ensure that migration benefits are sustained and negative consequences are mitigated.

Studies on Left-behind Children of Migrating Parents

Studies regarding the impact of family separation on left-behind children of migrating parents from different migrant-sending countries of the Global South were examined using the following measures: economic condition, educational outcomes and career path decisions, state of physical health, psychosocial well-being, transnational relationship with migrant parents, and power relations.

First, when economic conditions are considered, studies of Edillon (2008) and Heymann et al. (2009) are unanimous in declaring that left-behind children enjoy more monetary benefits and fewer chances for them to be involved in child labor compared to their counterparts whose parents are not migrant workers. But embedded in such economic gains are what Fresnoza-Flot (2009) points to as problems concerning children's conspicuous consumption and what Mohapatra, Ratha, & Silwal (2010) claim to be greater vulnerability of these children to experience economic shocks due to global factors affecting political and economic conditions in the host country where their parents are working.

Second, when it comes to educational outcomes and career path decisions, studies of Dillon & Walsh (2012) and Ducanes & Abella (2008) found out that left-behind children are more able to continue schooling

and are enrolled in private schools compared to children whose parents are local workers. However, when it comes to their academic performance, there are conflicting findings. Some studies, such as those of Ang (2008) and Mansour, Chaaban, & Litchfield (2011), claim that left-behind children do relatively well, if not better, in school and are able to finish schooling. On the other hand, Halpern-Manners (2011) and Lahaie, Hayes, Piper, & Heymann (2009) assert the contrary, especially in situations when the mother or the primary caregiver is the migrant worker in the family.

Third, in terms of the state of physical health, Flores, Sunil, Palencia, & Hernandez (2012) found that the level of infant mortality decreases when a parent is working abroad, and the study of the Scalabrini Migration Center (2004) seems to bolster this, as their findings show that left-behind children are generally found to be taller, heavier, and more hygienic. But Edillon (2008) claims in her study that left-behind children have poor health-seeking behavior and have a high-incidence of hygiene-related problems. When the gender of the migrant parent is taken into consideration, the studies of Smeekens, Stroebe, & Abakoumkin (2012) and Hochschild (2003) have shown that children with a mother abroad have poorer physical health than those with both parents at home, due to the emotional loneliness and stress brought about by the mother's absence.

Fourth, when psycho-social conditions are taken into account, the studies of Harper & Martin (2012) and Marchetti-Mercer (2012) have claimed that left-behind children, during the initial stages of separation, suffer a sense of loss resulting to mixed feelings of distress and anxiety. But this becomes more pronounced and enduring in cases where the mother is the migrant worker in the family – as in the studies of Senaratna (2012), Gustafson & Elliott (2011), and Parreñas (2005) which found that children yearn more for their migrant mothers than they do for their migrant fathers, resulting to the children's emotional woes and various risk-taking behaviors.

Fifth, when prolonged separation coupled with sporadic and poor communication becomes the norm in the family, the studies of Suárez-Orozco, Bang, & Kim (2011) and Alunan-Melgar & Borromeo (2002) observed that left-behind children eventually develop emotional distance and estranged relationships towards their migrant parent(s). Also, even if technological communication devices are frequently used by migrant parent(s) to bridge long-distance relations, Aguilar, Peñalosa, Liwanag, Cruzei, & Melendrez (2009) and Tanalega (2002) found that such “techie” parenting is still not able to replace the emotional bond forged by daily

face-to-face interactions. However, other studies, such as Furukawa & Driessnack (2012) and Bacigalupe & Lambe (2011), emphasize that access to communication technology cannot be taken for granted since it is able to provide transnational families an essential link in connecting children with their parent(s) and maintaining relationships with them.

Sixth, and lastly, when power relations in terms of decision making are factored in, Edillon (2008) and Parreñas (2006) found that a substantial number of left-behind children are not involved in the decision making of their parent(s) concerning migration. Because of this, Dreby (2007) explains that children often use whining, nagging, complaining, protesting, and refusing to engage with their parent(s)' agendas as a form of exerting power to shape the nature and course of their families' migration experiences. In turn, parent(s) use the control of economic remittances in an attempt to bribe and appease their children (Aguilar et al., 2009; Dreby, 2007).

The preceding literature review demonstrates that left-behind children tend to encounter more challenges when their mother or their primary caregiver is the migrant worker, but the overall impact of family separation on them has yielded a mix of positive and negative results. This may suggest that in spite of being separated from their parent(s), these children have learned to become resilient. Even though the pain caused by family separation is still a source of vulnerability in their condition, they are doing something to move on with their lives. However, studies are not clear on what factors are involved in sustaining children's resilience and in mitigating their vulnerabilities. Thus, the goal of this study is to identify such factors using the Capabilities Approach by investigating the lives of selected children of OFWs.

Capabilities Approach, Resilience, and Vulnerability

The Capabilities Approach is a development theory by Amartya Sen (1999) and Martha Nussbaum (2001) that focuses on enlarging people's capabilities when making normative evaluations on whether individual or societal progress has been successfully achieved or not. For Sen and Nussbaum, people's capabilities are analyzed in terms of the core concepts of "functionings" and "capabilities." Functionings refers to the achievement of the person – what he or she manages to do or be (Sen, 1999); and capabilities refers to the actual ability of a human person to function in different ways (Sen, 2005) and have the agency to achieve plans and goals in life which s/he has a reason to value (Nussbaum, 2001).

Examples of functionings are being well fed, being sheltered, and being able to work in the labor market (Robeyns, 2003).

On the other hand, although Sen proposes no definite list or examples of capabilities, Nussbaum (2003) has created the list of human capabilities as follows: (a) Life; (c) Bodily Integrity; (d) Sense, Imagination, and Thought; (e) Emotions; (f) Practical Reason; (g) Affiliation; (h) Other Species; and (j) Control over One's Environment. The list mentioned above, according to Nussbaum (2001), isolates those human capabilities that can be convincingly argued to be of central importance in any human life. However, Sen (2005) argues that any attempt to create a pre-determined list of capabilities must be sensitive to context and must undergo public discussion. Hence, Sen espouses a capabilities list that is determined by the individuals or groups concerned.

Applying the capabilities approach in this study, one should look at how the parent(s)' labor migration has impacted the children of OFWs in terms of the increase and decrease in their capabilities, understood in terms of "functionings and capabilities enlargement" (FCE) and "functionings and capabilities deprivation" (FCD) respectively. More so, this study surmises that FCE contributes to the said children's resilience while FCD contributes to their vulnerabilities. Resilience in this study refers to the ability to cope and transcend adversities caused by the family separation that enables the children of OFWs to maximize the benefits gained from the labor migration of their parent(s). On the other hand, vulnerability refers to their diminished capacity to cope with and transcend the adversities caused by family separation which then increases the negative consequences of their parent(s)' labor migration in their lives. Clustering the different FCEs and FCDs into relevant themes can lead to the creation of a capabilities list that is reflective of the said children's voices. In this way, the derived list of capabilities becomes sensitive to their context and runs parallel with the position of Sen (2005) that the creation of any list of human capabilities must come directly from the people concerned or affected by it.

Methods

Data reported here is part of a focused ethnographic study of the children of OFWs during ANAK Workshops (*Anak ng Nangibang-bansa Aruga at Kaagapay* or Nurturing and Support for the Children of Overseas Workers) conducted in the different migration hotspots in the three major islands (Luzon, Visayas, and Mindanao) of the Philippines from 2011-2013.

The ANAK Workshops are implemented by UGAT Foundation, Inc. via their PANATAG (*Pamilya ng Nangibang-bansa, Aruga, Tulong at Gabay* or Nurture, Support and Guide for OFW Families) program in partnership with the guidance and counseling departments of public and private schools. I have been part of the PANATAG program of UGAT since 2008 as a facilitator and mentor for OFW families, specifically for the children of OFWs during the ANAK Workshops and summer camps. I have been involved with UGAT as a way of paying it forward since I have also been a beneficiary of UGAT as a son of a former OFW father. Thus, this study is a product of numerous personal stories shared, from the years 2011-2013, with fellow children of OFWs who belong to a much younger generation, mostly, those who were born between 1995 and 2005. Data from this study is taken from 2,446 ANAK Workshop participants who participated in answering survey questionnaires and shared their personal stories through focus groups formatted in small group sharing sessions (SGSS). Survey questionnaires called the ANAK Survey and Registration Form (ASRF), answered by the ANAK Workshop participants, generated both quantitative and qualitative data used in this study. On the other hand, focus groups, through the small group sharing sessions (SGSS), which are conducted three times within the duration of each ANAK Workshop, became an avenue for more in-depth discussion of the ANAK workshop participants' responses in the ASRF. Discussions held in the SGSS were documented using a combination of field journals and audio recordings.

Quantitative data extracted from the ASRF were encoded in MS Excel and subjected to descriptive and inferential analysis using IBM SPSS version 21. In contrast, qualitative data obtained from the ASRF and the focus groups cum SGSS were encoded and subjected to phenomenological text analysis using Atlas.ti7. Phenomenological text analysis is intended to be interpretative, rather than purely descriptive (van Manen, 2011); the interpretation is open to re-interpretation which is dialectical in nature (Annells, 1996); the focus is on the illumination of the essence and uniqueness of the human experience (Sternberg & Barry, 2011); and attention is given to how things are understood by people who live through these experiences and by those who study them (de Guzman et al., 2012). The parameters used for such text analysis are the keywords and phrases often used by the ASRF respondents, interview respondents, and SGSS participants. Thus, the keywords and phrases were analyzed using the following four steps: (a) discovering themes and subthemes (open coding); (b) winnowing the themes into a manageable manner; (c) building hierarchies of themes or code booking; and (d) linking themes into theoretical models (de Guzman et al., 2012).

Quantitative results and qualitative findings presented in this study were validated in three ways. First, the data were cross-checked using different methods to search for regularities in the research data and to yield stronger evidence. Second, data gathered through surveys were validated through the use of three correspondence strategies: (a) I validated information taken from the ARSF with the help of other UGAT-PANATAG mentors through discussions during the SGSSs and plenary sessions held during the ANAK workshops; (b) I presented the preliminary results of the descriptive statistics based on the ARSF to a national conference held in the University of the East–Manila on September 26, 2013 which was attended by a significant number of students who are *Anak* ng OFW and who then gave feedback that helped me improve and further understand the reasons behind the statistical results; and (c) I presented the results of the study to the PANATAG program manager and project director to help improve the design of the program, to fulfill my voluntary role as consultant, and to receive feedback from them. Hence, through these three correspondence strategies, immediate validation became possible as a means to make sure that the answers written in the ARSF were reflective of the thoughts and emotions of the *Anak* ng OFW. Lastly, interpretations of the findings were subjected to a member checking procedure. Here, I corresponded with the five research assistants involved in the data gathering regarding the truthfulness and trustworthiness of the data being researched. The five research assistants, whom I trained on how to do data analysis, provided their analytical interpretations of the data and these were compared with the ones I made. This was done to cross-check if my explanations were reasonable, convincing, and could possibly be open to another re-interpretation.

All activities pertaining to the conduct of data gathering in this study were done using the Filipino language, and the researcher provided the English translation. Ethical consent was secured for the entire conduct of the research process through parental consent forms obtained by partner schools who implemented the ANAK Workshops on their campuses. Names used in this study which refer to workshop participants are fictional to protect their identity.

Results

Demographic Characteristics of Research Respondents

Table 1 displays the total number of ANAK Workshop participants per case study site used in this study. As shown in Table 1, out of the total number of 2,446, 83% ($n = 2,018$) came from Luzon, while 11% ($n = 274$) and 6% ($n = 154$) came from Visayas and Mindanao, respectively. Since a

significant percentage of the ANAK Workshop participants were from Luzon, further categorizing reveals the top three regions where they came from, namely: (1) Central Luzon region (45%, $n = 1,083$), (2) CALABARZON region (19%, $n = 444$), and (3) Ilocos region (11%, $n = 279$), respectively. These regions in Luzon, according to the Philippine Statistics Authority (2016) belong to the five migration hot spots where most of the OFWs in the Philippines come from.

Table 1: Number of ANAK Workshop Participants per province

Geographical Areas		f	%
Luzon Island			
<i>Cordillera Administrative Region</i>	Baguio	171	7
<i>Ilocos Region</i>	Ilocos Sur	279	11
<i>Cagayan Valley Region</i>	Cagayan	41	2
<i>Central Luzon Region</i>	Bataan	274	11
	Bulacan	259	11
	Pampanga	184	8
	Tarlac	159	7
	Zambales	207	8
	Subtotal for Central Luzon	1083	45
<i>CALABARZON Region</i>	Cavite	233	10
	Laguna	161	6
	Rizal	50	2
	Subtotal for CALABARZON	444	19
	Subtotal for Luzon Island	2,018	83
Vizayas Island			
<i>Central Visayas</i>	Cebu	145	6
<i>Eastern Visayas</i>	Leyte	129	5
	Subtotal for Vizayas Island	274	11
Mindanao Island			
<i>CARAGA Region</i>	Surigao del Norte	154	6
Overall Total		2,446	100

Table 2, on the other hand, portrays the socio-demographic profile of the ANAK Workshop participants. As revealed in Table 2, a little more than half of the workshop participants were females (53%, $n = 1,303$) and about 70% ($n = 1,702$) of them were adolescents (13-17 years old). About 80% ($n = 1,972$) were high school students and more than three-fourths came from private schools (85%, $n = 2,090$) which are predominantly sectarian

(Catholic or Christian schools) (81%, $n = 1,977$). Finally, more than half of the workshop participants (59%, $n = 1,431$) had fathers working abroad, followed by those whose mothers (28%, $n = 687$) and both parents (13%, $n = 303$) were working abroad, respectively. This confirmed the OFW deployment statistics of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (2016) in which many of the migrant workers from the Philippines were still males, followed closely by females whose number was beginning to close the gap with that of men being deployed abroad.

Table 2: Socio-Demographic Profile of ANAK Workshop Participants

Indicators	F	%	Indicators	F	%
<i>Sex</i>			<i>School Type</i>		
Male	1,143	43	Public	356	15
Female	1,303	53	Private	2,090	85
Total	2,446	100	Total	2,446	100
<i>Age Level</i>			<i>School Orientation</i>		
Middle Childhood (08–12)	686	28	Secular	469	19
Adolescence (13–17)	1,702	70	Sectarian	1,977	81
Early Young Adult (18–21)	58	2	Total	2,446	100
Total	2,446	100			
<i>Educational Level</i>			<i>Migrant Parent</i>		
Elementary (Grades 4 – 6)	408	17	Father	1,431	59
High school (1st – 4th Year)	1,972	80	Mother	684	28
College (1st – 4th Year)	66	3	Both Parent(s)	303	13
Total	2,446	100	Missing	25	
			Total	2,446	100

Phenomenological Text Analysis of Qualitative Data

Phenomenological text analysis of the qualitative data derived from the ASRF and SGSS reveals three major capability sets that form part of the capabilities list that is reflective of the voices of the *Anak* ng OFW.

These three major capability sets are (a) the capability to achieve a good and prosperous life, (b) the capability to form enduring transnational ties, and (c) the capability to reconstitute the social structure of the family. Each of these is explained in the following subsections.

A. Capability to achieve a good and prosperous life

According to the ANAK Workshop participants, the main reason why their parent(s) worked abroad was to have gainful employment. This strongly indicates that the ARSF respondents were aware that employment opportunities in the Philippines are inadequate both in terms of availability and as a source of income to raise a family. As Anina wrote in the ARSF:

“Because my parent is not able to get job opportunities here (in the Philippines), if there is one, the pay is not enough to lift us out from poverty.” – Anina, 16

Thus, when the workshop participants were asked what advantages they experienced when their parents started working abroad, most of them (89%, $n = 2,176$) quoted the phrase, “they are now able to achieve a good and prosperous life.” By this, they meant that the overseas work of their parents and the economic remittances served as a ticket to improve the lot of the entire family and help them escape from the clutches of poverty. This, in turn, became a critical capability set for them. But what is meant by this? Further probing into their answers in the SGSS and applying phenomenological text analysis in the transcribed focus groups reveal six essential criteria that the workshop participants navigated so that they could live a good and prosperous life brought about by the overseas work of their parent(s). These criteria correspondingly translate into the FCE they experienced in their lives, namely: (a) being able to study in good quality schools, (b) being able to acquire basic needs, (c) being able to realistically hope for a bright future, (d) being able to enjoy the comforts of life, (e) being free from the bondage of debt, and (f) being able to save money for future needs.

Essential to the experience of the abovementioned FCEs is the sufficient economic remittances sent by OFW parent(s) to their families. Such economic remittances were maximized into what the workshop participants refer to as a good and prosperous life. However, about 11% ($n = 262$) of the workshop participants claimed that they are not able to experience such a life as they experienced money-related problems. Such was the case of Kiko, a 15-year-old workshop participant, who viewed economic remittances as a source of conflict because of the constant demands of his relatives to have the

lion's share of his father's economic remittances. As Kiko revealed in one of the SGSS:

"I am angry at my father. He makes my mother cry. Why does he always have to give money to our relatives? Mama is already having a tough time making ends meet. He promised us our life would be better if he goes abroad. But what happened is that we are just the same as before." – Kiko, 15

Second, another form of FCD that some of the workshop participants experienced was when their OFW parent was a "TNT" (short for tago ng tago), which means "those who keep on hiding" from immigration authorities, or those who are undocumented migrant workers. This led them to vulnerable situations which I discovered often translated into the vulnerabilities of their children as well. Such was the case of Jena, a 19-year-old student studying in a private school, who explained that when the US visa of her father expired, her father continued to stay and hide from immigration authorities. Because of this, her father found it difficult to secure a job and lived under precarious conditions. Jena was also aware that her father could not go back to the Philippines for fear of being blacklisted. Thus, as her father chose to stay on in the USA, the economic remittances were significantly reduced which led to financial constraints in their family. As Jena verbalized in the SGSS:

"When my father still had a visa, he could afford my tuition fee and that of my younger brother. But when he lost his visa, he had a hard time looking for a job, and he struggled to provide for my education." – Jena, 19

Lastly, in some other cases, some of the workshop participants complained that on top of having their parent not by their side, what added insult to injury was that they could not see and feel that the quality of their family's life had improved. As Sarah explained in the SGSS:

"The economic remittance he (migrant father) sends is low. Come to think of it, what he earns there would be just the same if he would work here. I wish he stays here, because our life did not even change." – Sarah, 17

Thus, based on the above narratives of the workshop participants, one can surmise that migration of parent(s) could either be a boon or a bane for their children, depending upon the amount and wise use of economic remittances that they send to their families.

B. Capability to form enduring transnational ties

One of the advantages brought about by the labor migration of parents that workshop participants consistently mention is the acquisition of information communication technology (ICT) devices and the use of the internet. When asked how many days in a year were they able to transnationally communicate with their parents through the use of the internet and ICT devices, descriptive statistics revealed that almost two-thirds of the respondents (62%, $n = 1,486$) were able to communicate with their migrant parent(s) ranging in frequency from at least once a week up to every day. In contrast, those who reported that they were able to transnationally communicate with their migrant parents only once a month (12%, $n = 294$) or only once a year (4%, $n = 187$) complained that their access to the internet was low since (a) their family could not afford internet service, (b) there was no available internet service provider in their area, or (c) internet connectivity was very poor. This forced them to resort to making traditional long-distance calls which were very expensive and, thus, hampered them from communicating with one another transnationally. Thus, it can be said that possession of ICT devices and access to the internet enables OFW families to form enduring transnational ties which then leads them to feel that, even though they are separated, they are not left behind. As one of the workshop participants explained in the SGSS:

"It can be seen in my OFW family that we are still intact and we are not left behind because we can talk to each other using the cellphone, the internet, and usually through online chat also." – Vicky, 15

But what forms of FCE do the workshop participants get out of this? Phenomenological text analysis reveals three important FCEs that workshop participants experience when transnational ties are fomented between them and their migrant parents, namely: (a) being able to receive transnational parental support, (b) being able to transnationally convey thoughts and emotions, and (c) being able to establish transnational emotional bonds.

C. Capability to reconstitute the social structure of the family

This capability set is derived from the implicit negative experiences of the workshop participants in this study (a) when gender inequality prevails in their family, (b) when the existence of OFW families are not recognized, and (c) when immediate family reunification is not fulfilled. Such conditions contribute to the experience of FCD of the workshop participants, further

exposing them to vulnerabilities. However, when such FCD is successfully turned into an FCE, such as (a) being able to live in gender egalitarian family, (b) being able to enjoy the recognition that OFW families are transnational families that have different needs, and (c) being able to pursue immediate family reunification, then this could promote the resilience of the Children of OFWs. This is further explained in the following subsections below.

1. FCD when gender inequality prevails in the family

Data show that the workshop participants, regardless of their sex, do not feel comfortable when it is their mothers who work abroad. Verifying this in the ASRF, Chi-square analysis as shown in Table 3 (see Appendix A) reveals that workshop participants whose mothers are migrants are the least likely to agree that their parent(s) are able to fulfill their duties and responsibilities toward their families when compared to those whose fathers and both parent(s), respectively, are abroad (93.3% Fathers, 90.8% Both Parent(s), and 87.9% Mothers). The reason given by the participants is that, when their mothers work abroad, their fathers do not take on the roles of caring for and nurturing them. As Cherry explains in the ARSF:

“My father is always drunk when she is not here. My father also is of no help in doing household chores.” – Cherry, 15

Thus, this has led some of the workshop participants to assert that the provision of care and nurturance is the primary duty and responsibility of their mothers. As one of them writes in the ARSF:

“Even though she works hard for us abroad, she cannot do what a mother is supposed to do, that is, to take care of us. You cannot expect a father to do that.” – Kim, 16

The narratives reflect the resulting views of the workshop participants who witness gender inequality expressed through gender role stereotypes. This becomes unfortunate for their OFW mothers since they too make sacrifices for the betterment of their children's lives. But because such gender role stereotypes are pervasive, workshop participants have a hard time truly appreciating the efforts of their mother. This is reflected in the results of the Chi-square analysis as shown in Table 4 (see Appendix B) where the workshop participants whose mothers are abroad (including both parents) are the ones who are more likely to report that they feel lonely (25.7% both parent(s), 20.1% mothers, 14.9% fathers), lack parental support (17.2% both parent(s), 16% mothers, 12.5% fathers), spend time with questionable peers

(11.5% mothers, 10.6% both parent(s), 7.8% fathers), and cry more often (35% both parent(s), 28.7% mothers, 25.2% fathers).

However, there is hope that such unfortunate situations can be reversed. Further scouring through the responses of the workshop participants in the ASRF reveal that there are rare cases in which they report that their fathers do perform caring and nurturing roles in the home. In such cases, the participants have less qualms about the migration of their mothers. As Sandra verbalizes in the SGSS:

“Even though Mama is in another country working, my Papa is with us who nurtures and teaches us the right manners and ethical conduct.”
– Sandra, 15

Although the above statement is a rare case, there is a glimmer of hope that when fathers learn to cross gender role stereotypes, then the children will no longer blame their OFW mothers for not fulfilling their duties and responsibilities towards the family.

2. FCD when the needs of OFW families are unrecognized

More than half of the workshop participants (60%, n = 1,459) report that they continually yearn for their migrant parent(s). As explained in the ASRF, they envy other children who enjoy the presence and companionship of both parents. Such envious feelings are especially heightened during family days in schools. On such occasions, the children of OFWs feel isolated and pity their families as they see their classmates celebrate the family day with both of their parents in the school. As Maria explains in the SGSS:

“I envy my classmates who are with their parent(s) during the family day in school. I find it difficult to see them complete, and there is a program for them.” – Maria, 17

Unlike her classmates, both of Maria’s parents are in Europe. However, she can communicate with them every day as she reported in the ASRF. Maria also writes, “Everything that is expected from a parent is fulfilled by my parent(s),” and yet, every family day in school, she finds herself envying her classmates. Her words connote there is a pain in her seeing them celebrate what a typical family is, as marked by the family day program held in her school.

3. FCD when immediate Family Reunification is not fulfilled

My close interactions with the children of OFWs during the ANAK Workshops have given me the advantage to probe deeper into the lives of workshop participants, especially those whose migrant parent(s) are TNTs. The precarious nature of OFW parents who are TNTs in a foreign land vis-à-vis what life looks like when there is prolonged separation is best explained by the workshop participants who have TNT parent(s). As Kokoy writes in the ARSF:

“I have not yet experienced the love and care of a father. This is because when I was born, he was already not by my side, he was already working abroad. It has been ten years since he came home in the Philippines.” – Kokoy, 17

Being separated for ten years is indeed a long time and has taken an emotional toll on Kokoy. In some cases, the TNT situation of migrant parents has also led them to abandon their families, as is often done by OFW fathers who are TNTs. As Carl writes in the ASRF:

“He already has a different family in another country and the family there is what he focuses his attention on.” – Carl, 16

The TNT situation of the migrant parent(s) negatively impacts the children of OFWs, both emotionally and economically, especially in the case of abandonment. The TNT situation tends to hinder family reunification, aggravating the negative emotional consequences felt by the children on the issue of family separation.

Analysis: Capabilities of children of OFWs

Three essential capability sets of children of OFWs were then generated from the different data sets. These three major capability sets are (a) the capability to achieve a good and prosperous life, (b) the capability to form enduring transnational ties, and (c) the capability to reconstitute the social structure of the family. When achieved, these capability sets contribute to the children's resilience or FCE. On the other hand, the failure to attain such capability sets leads to their vulnerabilities or FCD.

First, on the capability to achieve a good and prosperous life, previous studies of Ang, Sugiyarto, & Jha (2009) and Sabates-Wheeler & Koettl (2010) have shown that families of migrant workers rely on economic remittances as their means to reduce poverty and to promote human development in various aspects. In the case of children of OFWs, poverty reduction and human

development for them is concretely understood and felt in terms of the six FCEs they experience under the capability to achieve a good and prosperous life. Such FCEs are: (a) being able to study in good quality schools, (b) being able to acquire basic needs, (c) being able to realistically hope for a bright future, (d) being able to enjoy the comforts of life, (e) being free from the bondage of debt, and (f) being able to save money for future needs. These FCEs may serve as critical indicators to gauge whether left-behind children in general and the children of OFWs in particular, are truly benefiting from the labor migration of their parents. But at the same time, they also help further define children's rights to survival, protection, and development as accorded in the 1989 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Thus, I strongly suggest that CRC signatory states, such as the Philippines, ensure that the said children are enjoying such FCEs. However, this would entail long-term solutions to sustain such benefits gained from the labor migration of parents. This would require the Philippine government to create policies to channel the use of economic remittances for asset formation to build its domestic capacity to absorb more workers (CODE-NGO, FDC, & UNDP, 2010). Through this, more parents would be enabled to fulfill their obligations to their children in realizing their capability to achieve a good and prosperous life without the need to be separated from them.

Second, on the capability to form enduring transnational ties, previous studies of Rule (2009) and Parreñas (2005) have shown that transnational communication between the migrant parent and their family is crucial in maintaining a feeling of solidarity among the family members across the miles. Also, Furukawa & Driessnack (2012) and Bacigalupe & Lambe (2011) have found that access to ICT – such as mobile phones, full availability of very affordable international phone calls, and mainstreaming of internet connectivity and social media – plays a crucial role in helping left-behind children in general, and the children of OFWs in particular, in cushioning the pains of family separation and further allowing transnational ties to thrive. In the case of children of OFWs, transnational communication with migrant parents via access to ICT and the internet has contributed to their FCEs in terms of (a) being able to receive transnational parental support, (b) being able to transnationally convey thoughts and emotions, and (c) being able to establish transnational emotional bonds. Such FCEs cut across the capability set on “emotions” and “affiliations,” as Nussbaum (2003) explains that being able to have attachments to those who love and care for us (emotions) and being able to engage in various forms of interaction such as being able to live for and in relation to others (affiliation) are crucial to human development. Thus, the capability to form enduring transnational ties can be deemed essential for the human development of the children of

OFWs.

Based on this, the Philippine government should commit to providing universal access to the internet by making it reliable, affordable, and accessible through private-sector and market-based information infrastructure development (Lallana & Soriano, 2007), increasing the value derived from online services (Lallana & Soriano, 2007), and establishing Community eCenters (CeCs) in municipalities and in every barangay where there are no shared internet access facilities and transform existing public school computer laboratories into internet hubs (DOST, 2014). CeCs can be tapped to serve as gateways for transnational communication between children and their migrant parents which can be very useful for OFW families who have no internet access.

Lastly, on the capability to reconstitute the social structure of the family, Nussbaum (1997) argues that the family is not a fixed unit, for it can come in all shapes and sizes, and it does not only consist of people related by blood and marriage; hence, families have the right to define themselves and appropriate negotiated roles among its members. This is true in the lives of the children of OFWs, where they find themselves living in the historical era of international migration, which exerts various pressures that either expand or limit the social structures of their families.

Hence, this study advocates three FCEs that should form part of the capability to reconstitute the social fabric of the family, namely: (a) being able to live in a gender-egalitarian family, (b) being able to enjoy the recognition that OFW families are transnational families that have different needs, and (c) being able to pursue immediate family reunification. Safeguarding such FCEs would entail the promotion of gender equality by the Philippine government, guided by the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and its Magna Carta of Women (Republic Act 9710 of 2009). The government should also find ways to help transnational families strengthen transnational ties by providing social services and immigration policies needed by OFW families to help enhance transnational family bonds and facilitate actual family reunification (Zentgraf, 2012). Lastly, it should establish strategies to help shorten the duration of family separation experienced by transnational families through subsidizing return trips of OFWs so they can annually visit their children and respective families (International Labour Organization, 2013).

On a related matter, the Philippine government should do more to prevent the phenomenon of undocumented OFWs by establishing a Shared Government Information System on Migration (SGISM) as promoted by the

Center for Migrant Advocacy (2012). This would provide a harmonized mechanism for gathering statistics on regular and irregular migrants by different government agencies through gathering information and creating a database on how long Filipino migrants have stayed in a particular country, what migrants do when they return, the situation returning migrants find themselves in, how many years migrants remain overseas, and if they are subsequently redeployed to the same or a different country. If such database could be developed and made readily available, it would greatly help in the formulation of sound policies and programs concerning family reunification.

Concluding Note

The capabilities list drawn from the study is reflective of the voices of the children of OFWs. These three major capability sets are (a) the capability to achieve a good and prosperous life, (b) the capability to form enduring transnational ties, and (c) the capability to reconstitute the social structure of the family.

Each of the aforementioned capability sets have their own Functionings and Capability Enlargements (FCEs) and Functionings and Capability Deprivations (FCDs). For the capability to achieve a good and prosperous life, the FCEs are (a) being able to study in good quality schools, (b) being able to acquire basic needs, (c) being able to realistically hope for a bright future, (d) being able to enjoy the comforts of life, (e) being free from the bondage of debt, and (f) being able to save money for future needs. Its FCDs on the other hand are: (a) when economic remittances become a source of family conflict, (b) when the precarious conditions of the undocumented status of migrant parents result to financial constraints in the family, and (c) when the salary of the migrant parent is not enough to make ends meet.

When it comes to the capability to form enduring transnational ties, the FCE are (a) being able to receive transnational parental support, (b) being able to transnationally convey thoughts and emotions, and (c) being able to establish transnational emotional bonds. However, FCDs occur (a) when the family cannot afford an internet service, (b) when there is no available internet service provider in their area, and (c) when internet connectivity is very poor.

Finally, in terms of the capability to reconstitute the social structure of the family, its FCEs are (a) being able to live in gender-egalitarian family,

(b) being able to enjoy the recognition that OFW families are transnational families that have different needs, and (c) being able to pursue immediate family reunification. Its corresponding FCDs are: (a) when gender inequality prevails in the family, (b) when the needs of OFW families are not recognized, and (c) when immediate family reunification is not fulfilled.

However, one may notice that the list as mentioned above greatly differs from that of Nussbaum. This is because as Sen (2005) would argue, any attempt to create a pre-determined list of Capabilities must be sensitive to context and must reflect the interest of those affected in the formulation of the Capabilities list. Thus, the list culled out here is a product of a social constructivist approach that is sensitive to the unique context of the Anak ng OFW and is reflective of the epistemological worldview of how the children of OFWs perceive what is beneficial for them. This study shows that the Capabilities Approach can be grounded based on the lives of the children of OFWs. In this way, the study contributes to the localization of the Capabilities Approach as understood and valued by concerned groups, like the children of OFWs.

Notes:

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Appendix A

Table 3: Crosstabulation of Agreement on whether Migrant Parent(s) can perform their Duties and Responsibilities by which Parent is Abroad

Dependent Variable	Father	Mother	Both	X2	P	Cramer's V
Agreement on Parent(s)' Fulfillment of Duties and Responsibilities (N = 2,421; $df = 2$)	93.3% (3.9)	87.9% (-3.9)	90.8% (-0.5)	17.35	.000	.085

Note: Adjusted standardized residual frequencies appear in parentheses below observed percentages.

Appendix B

Table 4: Crosstabulation of Problems Faced and Coping Strategies of the ASRF respondents by which Parent is working abroad

Dependent Variable	Father	Mother	Both	X2	P	Cramer's V
Problems Faced						
1. Feel Lonely	14.9% (-4.4)	20.1% (1.9)	25.7% (3.9)	23.91	.000	.099
2. Lack of parental support	12.5% (-2.7)	16.0% (1.7)	17.2% (1.6)	7.42	.025	.055
Coping Strategies						
3. Spending time with questionable peers	7.8% (-2.9)	11.5% (2.5)	10.6% (0.9)	8.610	.013	.060
4. Crying	25.2% (-2.9)	28.7% (0.9)	35.0% (3.2)	12.709	.002	.072

Note: Adjusted standardized residual frequencies appear in parentheses below observed percentages.

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