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## Research Article

### Migrant Filipino Workers: Impact on the Values Orientation of College Students with OFW Mothers

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#### ABSTRACT

Maternal labor migration has become a defining feature of Filipino family life, reshaping caregiving arrangements and developmental contexts for children left behind. While economic benefits are well documented, less is known about how prolonged maternal absence influences the values of young people in emerging adulthood. This study examined the values orientation of college students with Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) mothers within a transnational family context. Guided by Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory and Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values, the study employed a qualitative descriptive design using open-ended written responses collected through an online questionnaire and analyzed using thematic analysis. Eight first-year college students whose mothers had worked overseas since early childhood were purposively selected from a private higher education institution in the Philippines. Five interrelated themes emerged: material stability amid emotional scarcity, accelerated independence and self-reliance, emotional distance and adaptive relational patterns, school engagement as responsibility rather than attachment, and future orientation shaped by sacrifice and aspiration. The findings indicate that maternal migration reorganizes students' value systems, heightening the salience of independence, resilience, duty, and achievement while sustaining strong family-oriented commitments. Rather than uniformly impairing development, maternal absence prompts adaptive negotiation between loss and opportunity. The study underscores the need to view children of migrant mothers as active agents who construct moral meaning within altered family ecologies and highlights the importance of supportive interventions for transnational Filipino families.

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## Background

Labor migration has become a defining socio-economic feature of the Philippines, with millions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) seeking employment abroad over the past several decades. This phenomenon yields substantial economic benefits, as remittances contribute significantly to national income and enhance household living standards. These gains, however, are accompanied by profound social and emotional costs for families left behind. Asis (2006) observed that while migration improves material conditions, it often disrupts family structures and reconfigures traditional parenting roles. Among those most affected are the children of migrant workers, who experience prolonged parental absence and altered patterns of care, communication, and guidance.

In recent years, a growing proportion of Filipino mothers have joined the overseas workforce, challenging long-standing cultural expectations that position mothers as primary caregivers and moral anchors within the household. Maternal migration represents a particularly consequential shift in family life, as it alters the emotional climate of the home and the everyday processes through which values are modeled and transmitted. For young people navigating emerging adulthood, especially during college years, this transformation raises important questions about how value systems are formed, sustained, or reshaped in the absence of a mother's physical presence.

Empirical studies on children left behind by OFW parents reveal complex and sometimes contradictory outcomes. Gaspan and Sasot (2024) reported that college students with migrant parents often develop independence and adaptability yet also describe experiences of loneliness and emotional gaps that influence their relationships and priorities. Similar patterns were observed by Distor and Campos (2021) among senior high school students, who exhibited increased maturity and responsibility in some cases, but emotional detachment and diminished motivation in others. Pelongo and colleagues (2024) emphasized that

although digital communication facilitates emotional connection, it cannot fully substitute for the nurturing and regulatory functions of physical presence. Aguilar and Perez (2025) further demonstrated that the well-being of left-behind children is shaped by family functioning and the quality and frequency of communication between parents and children. When contact is inconsistent or strained, young people may adopt compensatory orientations, placing greater value on independence, ambition, or self-reliance over emotional closeness.

Values orientation refers to an individual's enduring system of beliefs and moral principles that guide decision-making and behavior (Schwartz, 2012). These values are typically acquired through family interaction, parental modeling, and shared experiences. Balangiao and Mendoza (2024) found that parental value orientations exert a significant influence on adolescents' personal and societal values. When a parent, particularly the mother, is physically absent, this process of transmission may be altered. Research on Filipino families presents mixed conclusions. Some studies identify positive outcomes, such as gratitude, perseverance, and a strong sense of purpose among children of OFWs (Banaybanay et al., 2023). Others caution that material gains associated with remittances may foster materialistic tendencies and shifting priorities (Navarez & Diaz, 2017). These divergent findings suggest that the effects of migration on value formation are contingent on contextual and relational factors, including emotional support, communication practices, and individual coping strategies.

Despite the expanding literature on transnational families, research that directly examines the values orientation of college students with OFW mothers remains limited. Existing studies have largely focused on adolescents, academic performance, or psychosocial adjustment, with less attention given to the moral and social values that shape young adulthood. Moreover, the gendered dimension of migration, particularly the implications of maternal absence for value formation, has received

comparatively little scholarly attention. This gap highlights the need for focused inquiry into how college students construct and negotiate their values within the context of maternal migration.

The present study is grounded in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) and Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values (Schwartz, 2012). Bronfenbrenner conceptualizes development as occurring within nested environmental systems. The microsystem, which includes family, school, and peers, directly shapes behavior, while the exosystem, such as a parent's workplace or migration context, exerts indirect influence. For students with OFW mothers, maternal migration constitutes a salient exosystemic factor that reshapes the microsystem by altering emotional dynamics, communication patterns, and sources of moral guidance.

Schwartz's framework identifies ten universal value domains, including benevolence, conformity, achievement, and security, which guide individual priorities and choices. These values typically emerge through socialization within the family and culture. In households affected by maternal migration, changes in family structure may lead students to emphasize values such as independence, self-reliance, or achievement more strongly than peers whose mothers remain physically present. Integrating these perspectives provides a comprehensive lens for examining how external migration contexts intersect with internal processes of value formation.

This article reports an empirical investigation into the values orientation of college students with OFW mothers, examining the dominant values they endorse, the perceived influence of maternal absence on their moral and social outlook, and the factors that shape value development within transnational family contexts. Through this inquiry, the study seeks to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how maternal migration influences the formation of values during emerging adulthood in the Philippine setting.

### **Research Questions**

This study aimed to explore the values orientation of college students with mothers

working as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions:

1. How do college students with OFW mothers describe their lived experiences within a transnational family context?
2. What values do these students develop and prioritize as a result of prolonged maternal absence?
3. How does maternal labor migration influence their emotional, relational, and academic orientations?
4. How do students interpret and assign meaning to their mothers' migration in shaping their future aspirations and value systems?

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

The study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the values orientation of college students with mothers working as Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). This approach was chosen to provide a clear and contextualized understanding of participants' experiences and value formation within transnational family settings.

Rather than relying on numerical analysis, the study focused on capturing participants' perspectives through open-ended written narratives, allowing for rich and reflective accounts of their lived experiences. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns and meanings within the responses.

### **Research Locale**

The participants were selected through purposive sampling from a private higher education institution in the Philippines. Inclusion criteria required that participants be first-year college students whose mothers had been working overseas since their early childhood.

Eight (8) students met the criteria and voluntarily participated in the study. Participants were between 18 and 19 years old, with most identifying as Catholic. Their mothers were employed primarily in Middle Eastern countries and had been working abroad for extended periods, typically exceeding ten years.

While the sample size is limited, it is considered appropriate for qualitative research, where the emphasis is on depth of insight rather than generalizability. Data collection continued until thematic sufficiency was observed, wherein no substantially new insights emerged from the responses.

### **Population and Sampling**

The study population consisted of undergraduate students enrolled in a private higher education institution in the Philippines. An initial screening was conducted among first-year students to identify individuals whose mothers had been working overseas since the participants' infancy or early childhood. From this population, purposive sampling was employed to select participants who met the inclusion criteria and were willing to share their experiences.

Purposive sampling was appropriate given the study's focus on a specific subgroup of interest, namely college students who had experienced prolonged maternal absence due to overseas employment. This approach ensured that participants possessed direct and sustained exposure to the phenomenon under investigation. Eight students satisfied the criteria and consented to participate, forming the final sample for qualitative analysis.

### **Research Ethics**

Approval to conduct the study was obtained from institutional authorities. Participants were recruited through classroom announcements and referral screening. Each eligible student received a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, potential risks, and rights as a participant.

Written informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Participation was voluntary, and students were informed that they could withdraw at any time without academic or personal consequence. Confidentiality was assured using pseudonyms and the removal of identifying information from transcripts.

### **Research Instrument**

Data were collected using a researcher-developed questionnaire containing open-ended questions designed to elicit participants'

experiences and values orientation. The instrument covered key domains including socio-economic conditions, emotional development, family relationships, academic engagement, and future aspirations.

The questionnaire was subjected to expert validation by a licensed psychologist, a psychometrician, and a guidance counselor to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the study's objectives.

### **Data Gathering Procedure**

Data collection was conducted through an online platform (Google Forms), where participants responded to the open-ended questionnaire at their convenience.

Participants were first informed about the purpose of the study, and informed consent was obtained prior to participation. The online format allowed participants to reflect on their experiences and provide thoughtful, detailed responses without time pressure.

### **Data Analysis**

The collected responses were analyzed using thematic analysis. The process involved:

1. Familiarization with the data through repeated reading
2. Identification of meaningful units of text
3. Initial coding of responses
4. Grouping of codes into categories
5. Development and refinement of overarching themes

Themes were generated inductively, allowing patterns to emerge directly from the participants' narratives. To ensure analytical rigor, interpretations were grounded in the data and supported by representative excerpts.

### **Researcher Reflexivity**

The researchers acknowledge their academic background in psychology and familiarity with issues related to family dynamics and overseas employment. These perspectives may have influenced the interpretation of the data.

To minimize bias, the researchers remained attentive to participants' actual narratives and ensured that interpretations were grounded in the data rather than preconceived assumptions.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participants were informed of the purpose of the research, their voluntary participation, and their right to withdraw at any time.

Informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity were ensured by excluding identifying information from the dataset and reporting findings in a generalized manner.

### **Results and Discussion**

Analysis of the participants' responses revealed five interrelated themes that characterize the lived experiences and values orientation of college students with OFW mothers: (1) material stability amid emotional scarcity, (2) accelerated independence and self-reliance, (3) emotional distance and adaptive relational patterns, (4) school engagement as responsibility rather than attachment, and (5) future orientation shaped by sacrifice and aspiration. Together, these themes illustrate how maternal migration reshapes students' value systems through both constraint and opportunity.

#### **Material Stability Amid Emotional Scarcity**

Participants consistently described the economic benefits associated with their mothers' overseas employment. One participant recalled the financial struggles prior to migration, stating,

"Before my mother went abroad, we were struggling a lot financially... we even reached the point where we only ate kangkong every day."

Another participant shared,

"When my mother started working abroad, our financial situation improved, and our needs were finally sustained."

Despite these improvements, participants emphasized the emotional cost of maternal absence. As one student expressed,

"We have what we need now, but it still feels different without my mother at home."

These accounts illustrate how students navigate the tension between economic stability and emotional deprivation, shaping values centered on endurance and practicality.

Most reported improved living conditions, access to educational resources, and financial security. These material gains were recognized as instrumental in enabling their academic pursuits. Several students expressed gratitude for the opportunities made possible by remittances, often framing their mothers' migration as an act of sacrifice undertaken for the family's future.

However, this material stability coexisted with emotional absence. Participants spoke of missing everyday maternal presence, guidance, and affection. While basic needs were met, emotional needs were often experienced as unmet or deferred. This tension between economic sufficiency and emotional scarcity shaped how students evaluated success and well-being. Consistent with prior research on transnational families, the findings suggest that financial security does not fully compensate for relational loss, and that young people learn to negotiate these dual realities (Asis, 2006; Pelongo et al., 2024).

From a values perspective, this theme reflects an emerging orientation toward pragmatism and endurance. Students learned to appreciate material provision while simultaneously downplaying emotional dependence, reinforcing values of resilience and self-management over expressiveness and vulnerability.

#### **Accelerated Independence and Self-Reliance**

A prominent pattern across narratives was the early development of independence. Participants described learning to manage household responsibilities, academic demands, and personal concerns with minimal maternal guidance. Many attributed their self-reliance directly to the prolonged absence of their mothers.

One participant shared,

"I learned to take care of myself and not depend too much on others because my mom is not always there."

Another noted,

"I became more responsible at a young age because I had to help myself and sometimes help others at home."

These responses suggest that independence is not only a coping mechanism but also a deeply internalized value. Students framed self-reliance as both a necessity and a strength, reflecting a shift toward autonomy and personal responsibility.

This accelerated autonomy aligns with findings by Gaspan and Sasot (2024), who observed that children of migrant parents often develop adaptive competencies earlier than peers. In the present study, independence emerged not merely as a skill but as a core value. Students emphasized being “strong,” “practical,” and “not dependent on others.” These orientations reflect Schwartz’s value domains of self-direction and achievement, suggesting that maternal migration may intensify the salience of these values during emerging adulthood.

Within Bronfenbrenner’s framework, maternal migration functions as an exosystemic force that restructures the microsystem. With the mother physically absent, students recalibrate expectations of support and develop alternative coping strategies. Independence thus becomes both an adaptive response and a moral stance, shaping how students define maturity and competence.

### ***Emotional Distance and Adaptive Relational Patterns***

Participants reported varied patterns of emotional closeness with their mothers. While most maintained regular communication through digital platforms, they acknowledged that mediated interaction could not fully substitute for physical presence. Some described emotional distance, noting discomfort in sharing personal struggles or uncertainty about their mothers’ reactions.

One participant explained,

“We talk through chat or video call, but it’s still different when she’s not physically here.”

Another shared,

“Sometimes I don’t open up everything because I don’t want to worry her.”

These responses indicate a pattern of emotional restraint and self-regulation. Rather than expressing distress openly, students often

internalize their emotions, reflecting a shift toward emotional independence and controlled expression.

Rather than framing this distance as rejection, students often interpreted it as a natural consequence of separation. Several reported becoming more reserved or emotionally contained, preferring self-regulation over disclosure. These patterns suggest a shift in relational values, with emotional restraint and self-containment prioritized over dependency and intimacy.

This finding resonates with literature indicating that prolonged separation can alter attachment processes and communication norms within transnational families (Aguilar & Perez, 2025). Over time, students adapt by redefining closeness in functional rather than affective terms. Values related to emotional autonomy, composure, and endurance become central to their interpersonal orientation.

### ***School Engagement as Responsibility Rather Than Attachment***

Academic engagement was frequently framed as a duty rather than intrinsic motivation. Participants described studying as an obligation tied to their mothers’ sacrifices.

One participant stated,

“I study hard because I don’t want to waste the sacrifices of my mother.”

Another expressed,

“My motivation is my mom. I want to make her proud because she works hard for us.”

These responses highlight how education is perceived as a moral obligation. Academic success becomes a way of honoring parental sacrifice, reinforcing values of duty, gratitude, and achievement.

Education was viewed as the primary justification for migration and, consequently, as a moral responsibility. This orientation reflects a value system grounded in reciprocity and obligation. Success in school was not merely personal achievement but a form of moral repayment. Students reported persistent pressure to perform well, even in the absence of direct parental monitoring.

Such findings align with Banaybanay et al. (2023), who observed that children of OFWs often internalize achievement as a family obligation. Within Schwartz's framework, values related to conformity and benevolence toward family are integrated with achievement-oriented goals. School becomes a site where gratitude, duty, and aspiration converge.

### ***Future Orientation Shaped by Sacrifice and Aspiration***

Participants described future aspirations strongly influenced by their mothers' experiences. Many expressed a desire to improve their family's situation while also avoiding the emotional costs of migration.

One participant shared,

"I want to succeed so my family won't have to go through the same struggles again."

Another stated,

"I want to help my family, but I also want to be present for them in the future."

These narratives reflect a balance between ambition and relational commitment. Students view their mothers' sacrifices as both inspiration and caution, shaping values that integrate achievement with emotional presence.

This ambivalence informed students' long-term value orientation. They expressed aspirations rooted in upward mobility, family provision, and emotional presence. Several indicated a desire to "do better" by remaining physically present for their own children. Thus, maternal migration functioned not only as context but as a moral reference point against which future life choices were evaluated.

This theme highlights the intergenerational transmission of values under conditions of transnational separation. Students reinterpret their mothers' sacrifices as both model and caution, shaping aspirations that integrate achievement with relational commitment.

### **Conclusion**

Together, these themes demonstrate that maternal migration influences values orientation through a dynamic interplay of economic security, emotional adaptation, and moral

obligation. In line with Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, the exosystemic condition of overseas employment reshapes microsystem processes within the family, altering pathways of socialization. Within this altered ecology, students construct values that emphasize independence, resilience, duty, and future-oriented striving.

Consistent with Schwartz's Theory of Basic Human Values, participants' narratives reveal heightened salience of self-direction, achievement, and security, alongside enduring commitments to family-oriented benevolence. Maternal absence does not simply weaken value formation; rather, it reorganizes priorities in ways that reflect both constraint and agency. The findings suggest that values among students with OFW mothers are neither uniformly impaired nor uniformly strengthened. Instead, they emerge through adaptive negotiation between loss and opportunity, dependence and autonomy, and gratitude and longing.

These findings highlight the need to view children of migrant mothers not merely as at-risk individuals, but as active agents constructing moral meaning within transnational family systems.

### **Limitations of the Study**

This study is subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings. First, the sample size was limited to eight participants from a single private higher education institution, which may affect the transferability of the results to other contexts. Second, data were collected through self-reported written responses, which may be influenced by participants' level of expressiveness and willingness to disclose personal experiences. Additionally, the absence of face-to-face interaction limited the opportunity for probing and deeper clarification of responses. Despite these limitations, the study provides meaningful insights into the values orientation of college students with OFW mothers within a specific sociocultural context.

### **Practical Implications**

The findings of this study have several practical implications for educators, guidance counselors, and policymakers. Educational

institutions may develop targeted support programs and counseling interventions that address the emotional and developmental needs of students from transnational families. Guidance counselors may design initiatives that promote emotional expression, resilience, and healthy coping strategies among students experiencing parental absence. Furthermore, policymakers and school administrators may consider strengthening family support systems and communication programs that help maintain meaningful parent-child relationships despite physical separation. These efforts may contribute to fostering both academic success and psychological well-being among students with OFW mothers.

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