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REVIEW ARTICLE

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF THE LEFT-BEHIND CHILDREN OF IMMIGRANTS OF THE LAGUNA STATE POLYTECHNIC UNIVERSITY

Portia R. Marasigan

Laguna State Polytechnic University, Philippines

*Corresponding Author Email: bing_marasigan2001@yahoo.com

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ARTICLE DETAILS

ABSTRACT

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The study aimed to determine the psychological well-being of left-behind children of immigrants. It made use of twenty college students whose parents are working abroad. Majority of respondents are 18-20 years old, male, middle born, family monthly income of Php 20,000-30,000, most mothers are working abroad and working abroad for 1-3 years. Majority of respondents have average level of intellectual functioning, have emotional conflict with their mothers, fathers, family unit, fear, guilt feelings and own abilities and have high scores in deviation, persecutory ideas, thinking disorder, and social introversion. Results show significance between intellectual functioning and age, gender, birth order, family monthly income and parent working abroad, significance between emotional status and age, gender and parent working abroad and significance between personal maladjustment and age, gender, and parent working abroad. Further, personal maladjustment is significantly related to intellectual functioning and emotional status.

KEYWORDS

Left-behind children, Immigrants, Intellectual Functioning, Emotional Conflict, Personal Maladjustment.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to a study cited from "Moving Out of Poverty - Making Migration Work Better for Poor People", Department for International Development (DFID), March 2007 "People have been on the move since human life began [1]. Migration is neither a new phenomenon, a failure of development, nor a substitute for development... individuals move as part of their effort to improve their lives and the lives of their families, to learn new skills, to gain new experiences, to find a job or to flee insecurity, disaster or famine. Migration is an economic, social and political process that affects those who move, those who stay behind, and the places where they go." And with the advent of globalization, labor migration has become a worldwide phenomenon. People are crossing borders to search for better job opportunities and to provide a better future for their families. Along this development is the plight of more children being left behind by either one or both parents, leaving them to the care of extended family members or friends.

Experience has shown that children are affected by migration in different ways: children are left behind by migrant parents; they are brought along with their migrating parents; and they migrate alone, independently of parents and adult guardians. Other children do not move but are nevertheless affected because they live in communities that send or receive large numbers of migrants. Some children are return migrants or have been repatriated [2].

Children left behind may benefit from having migrant parents. Innocenti Social Monitor reported that remittances sent home by parents can increase consumption, finance schooling, buy health care and fund better housing. Whether children benefit depends on their access to those extra resources, which may depend partly on sex, age and the context of care when left behind. The involvement of substitute care or the lack of care causes difficulties for some children's emotional well-being and psychological development. Adults and children are affected by the loss of

working-age community members in high out-migration communities (but others may come to replace them) [2].

A common feature of all such migrations is the creation of a transnational family where children are geographically separated from one or both parents over an extended period. It is likely that several million children in the region are currently growing up in the absence of their mother or father, or both, and there is an urgent need for a better understanding of the impacts of family separation on the health and well-being of children left behind [3].

The aim of this paper is to extend understanding of the psychological well-being of left-behind children of Laguna State Polytechnic University, San Pablo City campus by investigating the intellectual functioning, emotional status and personal maladjustment of children in transnational households.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The study aimed to determine the psychological well-being of the left-behind children of immigrants of the Laguna State Polytechnic University, San Pablo City campus. Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: 1) What is the profile of the respondents as to age, gender, birth order, family monthly income, parent working abroad, and number of years working abroad? 2) What is the level of intellectual functioning of the respondents as measured by the Raven's Progressive Matrices? 3) What is the emotional status of the respondents as measured by the Sacks Sentence Completion Test? 4) What is the personal maladjustment of the respondents as measured by the Basic Personality Inventory? 5) Is there a significant relationship between the profile of the respondents and each of the following variables: Intellectual Functioning, Emotional Status, and Personal maladjustment? 6) Is there a significant relationship between the personal maladjustment of the respondents and each of the following variables: Intellectual Functioning, and Emotional Status?

3. METHODOLOGY

The study used a descriptive design. It made use of 20 college students of the Laguna State Polytechnic University, San Pablo City campus. The respondents were selected through purposive sampling technique. The criteria set include he or she must be a student in the said institution and he or she should have a least one parent working abroad. To achieve the stated goals of this inquiry, the researcher used four (4) instruments namely Information Sheet, Raven's Progressive Matrices, Sacks Sentence Completion Test and Basic Personality Inventory. Further, it made use of the following statistical tools: Frequency and Percentage to describe the respondents' profile data and Pearson Product Moment Coefficient of Correlation to find correlation between variables.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Profile of the Respondents

- As to the age of the respondents, majority of the respondents belonged to age group 18-20 years old with 17 or 85%, few belonged to aged 21-23 with 2 or 10% and only 1 respondent or 5% is age 27 years old. This implies that the typical college students in the Philippines are ages 18-21 years old.
- As to the gender of the respondents, majority of the respondents are male with 12 or 60% and the rest are females with 8 or 40%.
- As to the birth order of the respondents, most of the respondents are middle born with 9 or 45%, followed by last born with 7 or 35% then first born with 3 or 15% and only 1 respondent or 5% is an only child.
- As to the family monthly of the respondents, most of the respondents have a monthly income of Php 20,001 – Php 30, 000 with 10 or 50% followed by Php 10,001 – Php 20, 000 with 7 or 35% and few only have above Php 40, 000 with 3 or 15%.
- As to the parent working abroad of the respondents, most of the respondents have mothers working abroad with 10 or 50%, followed by fathers with 9 or 45% and only 1 respondent or 5% has both parents working abroad.
- As to the number of years working abroad of the respondents' parents, most of the respondents' parents have been working abroad in 1-3 years with 8 or 40%, followed by 4-6 years with 5 or 25% and few of the parents have been working for 7-9 years with 3 or 15% and 10 and above with 4 or 20%.

4.2 Intellectual Functioning of the Respondents

Using the Raven's Progressive Matrices to determine the level of intellectual functioning of the respondents, majority of the respondents only have an average level of intellectual functioning with 16 or 80%. Few of them have above average level with 3 or 15% and only 1 respondent or 5% has a below average level of the intellectual functioning. This implies that these left behind children by parents who are working abroad may develop only an average level of intelligence. It can be implied that due to the absence of the respondents' parents the intellectual development of the respondents could have been impeded because there might be no reinforcement given and no follow up encouragement were given to the respondents to their learning.

According to a study, researchers have found that children who have been left without direct parental care for extended periods of time show larger gray matter volumes in the brain, according to a new study [4]. The researchers found larger gray matter volumes in multiple brain regions, especially in emotional brain circuitry, in the left-behind children compared to children living with their parents. Since larger gray matter volume may reflect insufficient pruning and maturity of the brain, the negative correlation between the gray matter volume and IQ scores suggests that growing without parental care may delay brain development [4].

4.3 Emotional Status of the Respondents

Based from the Sacks Sentence Completion Test, the results show that most of the respondents have emotional conflict with their mothers, fathers, family unit, fear, guilt feelings and own abilities.

- As to attitude towards mother, many have mild disturbance with 8 or 40% which implies that they sees mother's fault but accept and tolerate their differences, few have severe disturbance with 6 or 30% of the respondents which implies that they completely reject and depreciate mother when they consider overdemanding.
- As to attitude towards father, many have severe disturbance with 9 or 45% of the respondents which implies that they feel extreme hostility and contempt with overt death wishes, few have mild disturbance with 5 or

25% which means that they admire their father but wishes that their relationships were closer.

- As to attitude towards family, few have mild disturbance with 5 or 25% of the respondents which implies they are aware that family does not recognize them as a mature people but feel no difficulty in identifying with them and severe disturbance with 4 or 20% which means they feel rejected by family which always lacks solidarity and which has constantly contented with difficulties.
- As to attitude towards fear, few have mild disturbance with 5 or 25% of the respondents which implies that there is fear of self-assertion which is fairly a common and not pervasive and severe disturbance with 5 or 25% which means that they are disturbed by an apparent fear of losing identity or consciousness and possibility to control their impulse.
- As to attitude toward guilt feelings, many have mild disturbance with 7 or 35% of the respondents which implies they have regret over past and seem mildly disturbed by their failures to control their trouble. Few have severe disturbance with 4 or 20% which means that they are concerned with spiritual feelings and physical sex drive.
- As to towards own abilities, few have mild disturbance with 5 or 25% of the respondents which implies they feel they have specific ability and existence but tend to fear difficulty.

5. PERSONAL MALADJUSTMENT OF THE RESPONDENTS

Using the Basic Personality Inventory, results show the respondents have high scores in the following scale: deviation, persecutory ideas, thinking disorder, and social introversion.

- As to deviation, majority of the respondents have high score with 13 or 65% which means they display behavior patterns very different from most people's and admit to unusual and pathological characteristics.
- As to persecutory ideas, majority of the respondents have high score with 12 or 60% which means they believe that certain people are hostile and are trying to make life difficult and unpleasant and are inclined to brood.
- As to thinking disorder, many of the respondents have high score with 9 or 45% which means that they are markedly confused, distractible and disorganized and cannot remember even simple things from day to day. They report feeling that life is dream-like, and that there is a marked difference between self and others.
- As to social introversion, some of the respondents have high score with 4 or 20% which means they avoid people generally and have few friends and do not say much even to them and seem to be uncomfortable when around others and prefer asocial activities.

6. SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROFILE AND EACH OF THE FOLLOWING VARIABLES

Table 1 presents the test correlation between profile of the respondents and their intellectual functioning. Factors such as age, gender, birth order, family monthly income and parent working abroad are significant which it can be implied that these factors affect the intellectual functioning of the respondents.

Table 1: Test of Relationship between Profile and Intellectual Functioning

Variable	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Age	0.568	0.00	Significant
Gender	0.290	0.03	Significant
Birth Order	0.282	0.02	Significant
Family Monthly Income	0.233	0.01	Significant
Parent Working Abroad	0.249	0.02	Significant
# of years abroad	0.049	0.09	Not Significant

According to a study in their study entitled *The Impact of Parents' Overseas Employment on Educational Outcomes of Filipino Children*, family structure, household resources, numbers of siblings competing for those resources, and parents' own educational attainment are often important predictors of children's education outcomes [5]. Overseas migration of parents from the Philippines has resulted in increasing numbers of long-term separations of parents from each other and from their children. Western-based analyses might predict negative education outcomes for children as a result of parental absence. They find that separations caused by overseas migration often are either neutral or can have positive effects on schooling outcomes, at least among older children. Girls fare better in terms of educational attainment than do boys overall. Boys are often more affected by background variables, including parents' international migration.

Table 2: Test of Relationship between Profile and Emotional Status

Variable	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Age	0.370	0.00	Significant
Gender	0.580	0.01	Significant
Birth Order	0.142	0.08	Not Significant
Family Monthly Income	0.140	0.10	Not Significant
Parent Working Abroad	0.229	0.03	Significant
# of years abroad	0.140	0.10	Not Significant

Table 2 shows the test correlation between profile of the respondents and their emotional status. Birth order, family monthly income and number of years parents working abroad are not significantly related to emotional status of the respondents which means that the emotional disturbance of the respondents are not affected by these factors. On the other hand, age, gender and parent working abroad are significant which means that the emotional disturbance of the respondents is affected by these factors.

According to a researcher in her study entitled *Consequences of parents' migration on children rearing and education*, the family is the institution that has suffered greatly due to migration, because the migration of one of the partners sometimes damaged the intra-family relationships severely [6]. Children were the most affected in the family, but also their

educational status, their public perception and more than that, their emotional state.

Also according to Hiew in his study entitled *Separated by their Work: Families with Fathers Living Apart*, results indicated that father absence which produced a loss of perceived social support by their wives was negatively correlated to behavioral adjustment and academic performance of their children [7]. Children reported the most stress during actual father absence and emotion-focused coping was most commonly used. Interestingly, children who also used more social support seeking to cope with father absence were observed to show less acting-out behaviors in the classroom. Implications of work-related father absence as mediated by family coping resources and cultural factors were discussed.

Table 3: Test of Relationship between Profile and Personal Maladjustment

Variable	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Age	0.285	0.02	Significant
Gender	0.239	0.01	Significant
Birth Order	0.042	0.07	Not Significant
Family Monthly Income	0.144	0.09	Not Significant
Parent Working Abroad	0.282	0.03	Significant
# of years abroad	0.023	0.10	Not Significant

Table 3 presents the test correlation between profile of the respondents and their personal maladjustment. Factors such as birth order, family monthly income and number of years parents working abroad are not significant which means that these factors do not influence the personal maladjustment of the respondents. Whereas factors such as age, gender, and parent working abroad are significant which it can be implied that these factors affect the personal maladjustment of the respondents.

According to Hiew in his study entitled *Separated by their Work: Families with Fathers Living Apart*, children reported the most stress during actual father absence and emotion-focused coping was most commonly used [7]. Interestingly, children who also used more social support seeking to cope with father absence were observed to show less acting-out behaviors in the classroom. Implications of work-related father absence as mediated by family coping resources and cultural factors were discussed.

7. SIGNIFICANT RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERSONAL MALADJUSTMENT AND EACH OF THE FOLLOWING VARIABLES

Table 4: Test of relationship between personal Maladjustment and each variable

Variable	r-value	p-value	Interpretation
Intellectual Functioning	0.494	0.02	Significant
Emotional Status	0.267	0.01	Significant

Table 4 presents the test correlation between personal maladjustment and intellectual functioning and emotional status of the respondents. Both variables are significantly related to personal maladjustment although both have weak relationship but then their relationship is significant which means that the intelligence and the emotional states of the respondents were influenced by their personal maladjustment. This implies that the respondents' occurrence of behavior such as deviation, persecutory ideas, thinking disorder and social introversion affected the respondents' average level of Intelligence quotient and the respondents' emotional disturbance.

According to Pescaru in her study entitled *Consequences of parents' migration on children rearing and education*, the family is the institution that has suffered greatly due to migration, because the migration of one of the partners sometimes damaged the intra-family relationships severely [8]. Children were the most affected in the family, but also their educational status, their public perception and more than that, their emotional state.

8. CONCLUSIONS

Based on the foregoing findings, the following conclusions were drawn:

- 1) Age, gender, birth order, family monthly income and parent working abroad are significantly related to intellectual functioning.
- 2) Age, gender and parent working abroad are significantly related to emotional status.

3) There is a significant relationship between personal maladjustment and age, gender, and parent working abroad.

4) Personal maladjustment is significantly related to intellectual functioning and emotional status.

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