

## **Filipino Migrant Workers, a Historical Perspective (1970-2010)**

**Delilah R. LABAJO**

School of Arts and Sciences

University of San Carlos

Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) or Migrant Workers are the resident Filipinos who are presently and temporarily out of the country to fulfil an overseas contract for a specific length of time or who are presently at home on vacation but still has an existing contract to work abroad. There are two main types of OFWs. First is the land based workers. They are the OFWs hired directly by an employer abroad through the assistance of the Philippine Overseas Employment Association or through a private and licensed recruitment agency. Second, is the sea based workers – OFWs who worked or are working in any international fishing/passenger/cargo vessels. It includes OFWs who worked or are working for a shipping company abroad. And, it refers to a person who to be engaged, is engaged in a remunerated act in a state of which he or she is not a legal resident of (Sec.2B, Part II, Omnibus Rules of Regulations Implementing the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995).

### **A. Historical Background**

It has been noted that it was in 1506 to 1650 when migration started to happen when under half a million persons migrated from Spain to the Caribbean and to Central and South America and Mexico. In 1815, one (1) million settled on North America from United Kingdom and Ireland. And, 19<sup>th</sup> century, witnessed the expansion and acceleration of voluntary migratory movements with the following factors: Industrial Revolution, demographic and economic situation of Europe, attraction of spaces to be settled and developed in the New World, technical advances in transportation and relaxation of government controls on movements of people (Custodio, 2012).

In 1815 to 1914, intercontinental movements was noted. For instance, sixty million (60M) migrated from Europe to Americas, Oceania, South and East Africa. Ten million (10M) from Russia to Siberia and Central Asia. Twelve million (12M) Chinese and six million (6M) Japanese to Eastern and Southern Asia. Noted also was the one and a half million (1.5M) from India to Southeast Asia and South and East Africa. It also saw the development of migration for paid employment (Custodio, 2012).

The end of World War II brought a significant increase in migration, many flocked to Western Europe. In 1973 to 1974, labour migration to Europe declined as a result of the recession which

followed the oil crisis, as an aftermath of the Second World War. As a result, these incidents became the source of human rights and international tensions today. Industrialization created a demand for labour which was initially met by internal resettlement from rural to urban areas (Vera Cruz, 2002).

In the Philippines, the history of migration can be traced during the American period wherein Filipinos were deployed for two reasons: to work in the pineapple field in Hawaii and to enrich their knowledge as graduate students and work on their field of specialization.

The Labour Export Program began in 1974, under the presidency of Ferdinand Marcos. It was prompted by the double effects of the oil crisis in the 1970s where Philippines was badly affected by the oil price increases and the economies of the oil-producing countries were out with money available for projects for which mass labour migration was needed. He encouraged Filipinos to migrate to reduce unemployment and to increase foreign currency earnings (Baluyot, 2007).

With this, the Philippines became the fifth largest remittance-receiving country after India, China, Mexico and France. Middle Eastern countries were the earliest and by far the biggest market for Filipino workers. Its boom in construction activities during the early 1970s opened a door of opportunities for the Overseas Filipino Workers.

The next Philippine Presidents used different terms that projects positive positioning of the Overseas Filipino workers in the society. Corazon Aquino called them “modern day national heroes” or “bagong bayani”. Fidel Ramos called them “internationally shared human resources”. And Gloria Arroyo coined “Overseas Filipino investors”, “new investors”, “new aristocrats” and “the ambassador of goodwill”. During her presidency, she would repeatedly flaunt that the Philippines is the “Home of Great Filipino Workers”.

Basically, there are three main types of Filipino migrant population. One is the Permanent. They are the Filipino immigrants who hold permanent residence or landed immigrant status in a foreign country, and whose stay does not depend on work contracts, includes even those who already acquired foreign citizenship. Second is the Temporary which includes Filipinos whose stay overseas is based or determined by a formal contract of employment. This includes land based or sea based, they are collectively called Overseas Filipino Worker. And lastly, there is the Irregular who are the Filipino residence or OFWs who do not possess valid passports or documents. Or even if properly documented, they lack valid residency or work permits or have overstayed in a certain country.

The phenomenon of massive migration can be explained in two different views. In a macro perspective, this is seen as a result of asymmetric structural between highly industrialized countries and poor developing countries. Since developed countries are characterized by stable market conditions, high level of wages, low population growth and high educational profile brought about by rapid economic

growth and technological expansion of workers within the local population, the locales are now reluctant to accept what is referred to as 3D jobs: dirty, dangerous and demanding. Thus, workers in the poor countries were forced to take because of the limited economic opportunities and low wages within their country of origin. Then, there is the Micro perspective which involves the decision to migrate due to man's rational behaviour, considering the human capital is a by-product of investment in the acquisition of knowledge (Flores, 2007).

There two categories for the causes of migration, First is the Push Factors which refers to the deterioration of condition in rural areas, including increasing population, lower incomes and displacement. This may also be caused by widespread unemployment, population pressure, shortage of land, famine and war. Second is the Pull Factors that which attracts the migrants may include free agricultural land, the bright lights of a third world primate city or a booming economy, availability of well-paid work, demand for (cheap) labour, scientific and technical improvements in communication systems and readily available transportation, migration network, and a dynamic process. The later is usually taking place between countries with close historic, colonial, economic and cultural ties which can be considered as the "migration system" (Flores, 2007).

But in this migration process, there are disadvantages experienced by both the receiving and sending countries. For the receiving countries, as long as migrant workers are in the worst jobs, there is less cause for national workers to complain about work and employment conditions. Few migrant workers are unionized and therefore less in position to protest. This may resort to foreign labour initially going the upward wage spiral and should facilitate future salary increases to national workers. For domestic consumers, lower labour costs also translate into cheaper goods and services. Migrant workers also cost nothing to receiving countries in social terms, nor in terms of education and training prior to their employment. This may also lead to the existence of a 2<sup>nd</sup> class economically and socially vulnerable and culturally distinct population (Carungay, 2008).

From the sending countries, the supposedly poverty alleviation is only short-term. In long-term it represents a threat to the political stability of those states. It may result in massive return migration to the countries of origin at times when they can least afford to re-integrate returning nationals. Remittances benefit economically individual migrant workers and their families in number of ways. But it is difficult to gauge precisely the extent to which remittances contribute to a country's development. On international trade, the economic development is likely to be assisted by among other else, the greater demand for the transport, banking and communication services, the increase in business and tourist travel and the promotion of the export of particular goods and products from the sending country. Skills and other contributions that migrant workers will contribute to the development of their

own country on their return is seldom realized. Since they are hired mainly for mundane and repetitive tasks, they do not acquire opportunities to develop new skills or to participate in vocational training.

More than anything else, this migration process causes strains on family structure. Family bonds and solidarity erodes and society follows. Once in the receiving country, they acquire new lifestyles, different consumption habits and new forms of behaviour which when introduced into the countries of origin, many threaten and disturb social harmony. Lastly, this can cause brain drain where human capital characterizes that serves them well abroad. Opportunity cost of their lost talent is incalculable but significant. Also to be included is that which concerns of national pride, of domestic scientific and technological capabilities, of malaise among those who stay behind, of setbacks to local university and research centres (Carungay, 2008).

With this, below is the result of a survey or study conducted by the Migrant Ministry of the Archdiocese of Cebu. Respondents were from selected schools and universities in Cebu City whose parent/s are OFWs. These schools includes: Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepcion, University of San Carlos, Boys High School and Talamban Campus, University of Cebu, Lapulapu Campus and St. Theresa's College. The author of this article conducted and recorded this survey analysis in the year 2013.

## SURVEY ANALYSIS

### A. PATTERN OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIP

Majority of the respondents said they have good & harmonious relationship with their family. They are happy. This was made possible through constant and open-communication line, spending quality time together, understanding and cooperation in times of adversities and strong faith in God. A number of the respondents already see the complications it can give to a family. (i.e. indifferent brother, irresponsible father, existence of a special child in the family). Many are not relating with neighbours but, majority still maintains the Filipino sense of community, friendship and sharing.

#### **MEMBERSHIP IN ORGANIZATIONS:** (usual organizations they are joining)

- 1.) Youth for Christ
- 2.) Facilitator in school organizations
- 3.) Church choir
- 4.) Home owners Association
- 5.) Chapel organizations
- 6.) Political Science Society Philippine Nurses Association
- 7.) School organizations

- 8.) Filipino Private Duty Nurses Association
- 9.) Church Organizations
- 10.) Bogo Redeemers Society
- 11.) Community Organization
- 12.) Solid Waste Association of the Philippines

**DIFFERENCE IN CURRENT SITUATION** (child rearing, household management & recreation)

Most of the respondents said that they find difficulty in raising family without the presence of a husband/wife. Most of the time, household management is left to the eldest member of the family who are left at home. As expressed, it becomes a burden, to them, to some extent. Also should be noted is their difficulty to have and maintain long distance rearing and relationship.

**B. PARENT-CHILD AND PEER RELATIONSHIP**

Most of the children become closer to the parent left with them. Respondent/s pointed out, that there children has the tendency to be strangers with the OFW family member and that OFW parent/s can only provide financial support but not emotional. For the mothers left behind, they have to play the role of a mother and a father. A respondent stated, "I should know everything, from plumbing, to cooking and counselling children. Some children learned independence others tend to show indifference in attitude.

**C. ECONOMIC CONDITION**

Majority of the respondents are relying on OFW's salary only. Very few are engaging in small scale business (i.e. sari-sari store, farm). Majority pointed out that there status in life changed for the reasons that they can send their children to better/schools, their standard of living improved, more luxurious way of life and that they can save money for the future. Some said nothing changed since the OFW's salary is just enough to pay children's tuition fees, for daily needs and to pay debts. Positively, it was pointed out that being as such, improves their skills, job experiences and so will enhance their self-confidence and self-worth.

**D. CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS BELIEFS AND PRACTICES**

- 1.) Majority of the respondents are Catholic who are observing the following:
  - 1.1) Attending Sunday mass
  - 1.2) Praying/rosary together

- 1.3) Believe in one God
- 1.4) Christmas celebration
- 1.5) Visiting grandparents on weekends
- 1.6) Celebrate occasions together
- 1.7) Believe in God & God- centred relationship
- 1.8) Family day
- 1.9) Eat together
- 1.10) Misa de Gallo
- 1.11) Kissing the hands of parents and elders

#### E. GOVERNMENT PROGRAMS:

##### **EXISTING PROGRAMS:**

- 1.) Pag-ibig
- 2.) Social Security System
- 3.) Philhealth
- 5.) Overseas Workers Welfare Administration
- 6.) Educational training
- 7.) Associated Marine Officers' and Seamen's Union of the Philippines
- 9.) Free medical assistance
- 10.) Workers Welfare Assistance Program
- 11.) Repatriation Programs
- 12.) Reintegration Program
- 13.) Department of Social Welfare and Development – Solo Parent Program
- 14.) Short term courses
- 15.) Education and training programs

##### **SUGGESTED PROGRAMS:**

- 1.) Anti human trafficking intensification
- 2.) Scholarship Programs to OFW children
- 3.) Protecting rights of OFWs and family
- 4.) Health Insurance to OFWs and family
- 5.) Cash advance in case of emergency
- 7.) Business/livelihood for employment
- 8.) Business/livelihood for OFW retirees

- 9.) More recreation activities
- 10.) Counselling services for OFW families
- 11.) Tax subsidies for dependents
- 12.) Seminars for financial budgeting

## F. ASSESMENT OF HAVING AN OFW IN A FAMILY

### **POSITIVE:**

- Very helpful to support family needs
- Better school for children
- Gives more comfort in life
- Makes us proud of them especially if they have good jobs
- Self-worth and self-confidence
- Rewarding personally and professionally
- Travel and experience abroad
- Prestige and recognition
- Endurance in the face of adverse condition
- Determination to try risks into opportunities

### **NEGATIVE:**

- The family really need the presence of both father/mother for strength and protection
- It may create a troublesome family or a dysfunctional family
- Family is always worried for each other
- Really hard to deal with Arabs
- Money can never pay loneliness
- Risky and difficult
- Learned to accept things and be used to it.
- Hard for the family when someone leaves for a long time though it helps to have a beautiful life.
- They realize how important a person is in your life.
- An OFW in a family works hard for the family, not for herself, OFWs seldom have time for their selves.
- Homesickness and loneliness
- Brain drain
- Culture shock
- Spending hard earned money recklessly

- No father image

**And, to end this article, it would be good to present some responses as quoted. These will hopefully send a message as reality unfolds in the life of a Filipino Overseas Worker.**

“I don’t like this situation because it’s not easy to miss them and not easy to feel anxious about everything”.

“To have an OFW in a family is rewarding and at the same time not. I’ve gotten used to it but it is sometimes hard to think about when activities or events occur where I need my parents and they are both away. I don’t get to see them or talk to them always and with the family situation, I’m a bit pressured to grow up and mature to become more at least, a bit independent since my grandmother is already old. Yet, more or less it’s okay, they had to do it to support me and they did what they had according to them”.

“It is such a big help to us and a blessing that my OFW husband bring to our family. He provides us everything we need and for the children as well. But every day we face different challenges that his work brought as well. Like the feeling of not knowing what danger he face every day. Time, we don’t have that, but as a family we pray and tried to be strong for each other and support each other emotionally and a lot of prayers”.

“For the OFWs out there, please don’t forget about your family in your country. For the families, please don’t forget your family member outside the country”.

“It is difficult to have an OFW in the family because it’s not only who’s having a hard time in adjusting but the family left behind especially the children. Raising family alone is very difficult but you have to sacrifice and be away from each other in order to give them good life and better future”.

“Can sleep in peace and be controlled if my husband is with us. But should sacrifice to save for children’s future and for retirement”.

“Improve condition in life but the cost to pay is they can’t be with them in the saddest moments of their lives”.

“To have an OFW in a family is such a heartache and in some way a relief. It is really hard to think when someone is 1,000 miles away from you just to keep you alive. You can't be able to spend every minute with them but when you do have the time to spend, it would always be just for a short time and that thought just saddens my heart”.

“May either make or break the family bond. Ours is not the best but, we try our best to cope up with the distance. It is financially rewarding but may have adverse effects emotionally. Thus, it depends on how strong and focused the other half is, to be able to manage home and care for kids alone while maintaining a close relationship with the absentee-parent at the same time”.

“When relationship is not nurtured, it has the possibility to fall apart. Values inculcated become a thing of the past, people spend less time with family members, they don't even bother to strengthen their faith and to feel their soul (by praying). Thus, sometimes, what one has kept for the rainy days is down in the drain”.

**“A complete family is still the best”.**

## References

### PRIMARY SOURCE

Interviews of OFW family members in selected schools in Cebu City (Colegio de la Inmaculada Concepcion, University of Cebu-Lapulapu City, University of San Carlos-North & Talamban Campus & St. Theresa's College.

### SECONDARY SOURCES

#### Thesis/Dissertation:

Aguilar, Josephine. *The Socio-Economic and Cultural Impact of Worker Migration on the Families of Brgy. Ablang-Sapang, Moncada, Tarlac*. March 2009

Alarilla, Elizabeth. *Migrant Workers' Remittances, Savings and Economic Growth*; December 2006

Baluyot, Emily. *The Effects of Foreign Labour Migration on the Economy of the Philippines*. March 2007

Carungay-Sevillano, Ma. Celina. *A Critical Analysis of Relevant Provisions of RA 8042 or the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino /act of 1995 on Illegal Recruitment and Recruitment Violations*. October 2008

Cuñada, Alvin. *An Analytical Study of the Rights of Women Under Philippine and International Law*.

March 2011

Custodio, Alfie. Overseas Work and Global Financial Crisis: Economic Impacts to Families-left-behind in the Philippines. February 2012

Flores, Miguel. The Determinants of Philippine Labour Migration to Selected Countries: An Economic Analysis. March 2007

Pascasio, Catherine. The Effects of Empowerment Intervention Program on the Adjustment of Children of Mothers Working Abroad. September 2010

**Books:**

Cholewinski, Ryszard. Migrant Workers in International Human Rights Law; Oxford, Clarendon Press; c1997

Vera Cruz, Philip. A Personal Hisotry of Filipino Immigrants and the Farmworkers Movement. Manila; Anvil Publishing, Inc., c2002

## **Filipino Migrant Workers, a Historical Perspective (1970-2010)**

Delilah R. LABAJO

海外フィリピン人労働者 (Overseas Filipino Worker: OFW) とは移住労働者であり、海外での一定期間の契約を満たすために現時点で一時的に国外にいるフィリピン居住者、あるいは、現時点では休暇のために帰国しているものの海外での労働契約を維持している者を指す。OFW には主に2種類ある。ひとつは陸上労働者であり、彼らは POEA の支援や個人エージェントまたは認可募集機関を通じて、海外の雇用主によって直接雇用された OFW である。もうひとつは海上労働者であり、彼らは国境を超えて活動する漁船や旅客船や貨物船で勤務する OFW である (Sec. 2 B, Part II, Omnibus Rules of Regulations Implementing the Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipino Act of 1995)。

本研究では1970年から2010年までを範囲として、フィリピン人移住労働者に関する歴史的な展望を試みる。文書館や現地での調査といった歴史研究の成果のみならず、書籍や雑誌記事、学術論文や博士論文なども、重要な情報源となろう。また、口頭インタビューの成果も用いるが、これは OFW 家族の経験が OFW 本人のみならず、その家族の移住についても深く理解するための、必須の要素だからである。本研究を通じて、海外フィリピン人労働者の社会的役割と意義を考察したい。

キーワード：フィリピン人、移住労働者、歴史的視点

