



The CHAMPSEA study: Preliminary report for Bulacan, PHILIPPINES

- A study of the health and well-being of children under 12 years of age
- A comparison of children whose parent/s work abroad and children who live with both parents
- Covering 4,000 households in Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam

OUT TO WORK: HOW ARE THE CHILDREN OF MIGRANTS DOING?

BACKGROUND

This research brief presents preliminary findings of the Child Health and Migrant Parents in Southeast Asia (CHAMPSEA) Study which was conducted in Bulacan Province, Philippines in 2008.

CHAMPSEA was a research project which examined the impacts of parental migration on the left-behind children in four Southeast Asian countries – Indonesia, the Philippines, Thailand and Vietnam. The research was carried out between 2008 and 2010.

In 2008, a survey of 1000 transnational and usually resident or non-migrant households was conducted in each participating country. Eligible households referred to two-parent households with children under 12 years of age. Migrant or transnational households (THs) were defined as those where one or both parents were working abroad for at least six

months and had not returned home during the same period. In this report, we are using the more familiar terms to Filipinos, i.e., OFW (overseas Filipino worker) households and non-OFW households instead of THs non-migrant households. In the surveyed households, the study focused on two groups of children: older children (9–11 years old) and young children (3–5 years old). Interviews were conducted with the older children while young children were invited to make a drawing of their family.

In 2009, in-depth interviews were conducted with selected households in Laguna. The final year of the project, 2010, was dedicated to data processing, editing and translation of data collected from various local languages into English.

The survey in 2008 was conducted in Bulacan and Laguna. The Scalabrini Migration Center cooperated with Bulacan State University in Bulacan and San Pablo

Colleges in Laguna in the conduct of the survey.

Of the 1000 Philippine households surveyed in 2008, 510 or 51 percent were OFW households and 490 or 49 percent were non-OFW households. By location, of the 1000 households, 491 were from Bulacan. In the Bulacan sample, OFW and non-OFW households were about evenly divided (49.7 percent and 50.3 percent, respectively). Among the OFW households, fathers were the usual migrants (206 or 84.6 percent). There were fewer cases of households where the mothers were migrants (31 or 12.7 percent) and both parents who were migrants (7 or 2.9 percent).

CARING ARRANGEMENTS: Mothers= carers!

Overall, mothers were the primary carers in 85 percent of the surveyed households. For the rest, the alternative carer consisted of fathers (6 percent), grandmothers (5 percent) and other relatives (4 percent), mostly female ones. Less than one percent of households had domestic workers or non-kin as the primary carer of the target child. In other words, the care of children continues to be the primary responsibility of mothers; in general, child care remains a family responsibility.

CHAMPSEA studied four types of households based on which parent was the OFW and who was the carer of the left-behind children. (1) non-OFW households (about 50 percent) wherein mothers were the typical carers; (2) father OFW-mother carer households (39 percent); (3) mother OFW-father carer

households (4 percent), and (4) mother OFW or both parents OFWs-other carer households (8 percent). Where mothers or both parents migrated to work abroad, fathers or grandmothers assumed the responsibility of child care.

HOUSEHOLD WEALTH: OFW households were better off than non-OFW households.

To have some idea about the wealth of households, data on household income were ranked and then households were divided into five groups or quintiles. Based on this measure, about 72 percent fell in the two lowest quintiles (i.e. poor groups); the remaining 28 percent were distributed in the three higher quintiles (i.e., rich groups).

More non-OFW households were poor compared to OFW households, and among the latter, mother-OFW households were the poorest; father-OFW households and those where both parents are OFWs were better off.

EDUCATION: OFWs' kids were doing well in school.

Eighty-five percent of the older children went to public schools. Of those attending private schools, a larger proportion consisted of children from OFW households.

In terms of the older children's school performance, majority of them were reported as "average" by their carers. About 24 percent were rated as "above average" and about 4 percent were considered by

their carers to be “below average.” Interestingly, more children from OFW households were reported as “above average” by their carers than were children from non-OFW households. Conversely, more children from non-OFW households were rated as “below average” by their carers than children from OFW households.

Carers were also asked whether they have received negative school reports about the children under their care. Only 13 percent of carers reported having received a negative school report, of which the highest proportion was for the children of non-OFWs and those in mother-carer households.

CHAMPSEA also looked into pace of schooling to know whether a child’s grade level is in keeping with his or her age. Overall, 25 percent of the children were considered “ahead” in their schooling; 56 percent were on pace; and 19 percent were lagging behind. Many of the children who were ahead in schooling were from mother-carer households (33 percent), followed by other-carer households (26 percent).

NUTRITION: OFWs’ kids had better nutritional status.

About 18 percent of the children had stunting problems; 12 percent were overweight; and 16 percent were considered thin.

Children from non-OFW households had the highest percentage among those with stunting (22 percent) and thinness problems (19 percent). In contrast, children in other-carer households were the least

likely to be stunted (5 percent) and to have thinness problems (5 percent).

Overweightness affected the children in father-carer households the most (28 percent) while children in non-OFW households were the least affected (10 percent).

PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH: OFWs’ kids were generally happy, but kids of OFW-mothers needed more support.

Around 80 percent of the children reported that they were happy/very happy (some 22 percent said they were very happy). Nine in ten children in other-carer households said they were happy/very happy; children in non-migrant households ranked next, where eight out of ten said they were happy/very happy.

In terms of family functioning, more children in non-OFW households claimed that they had someone to turn to should they need help than children in OFW households, in general.

More children in father-carer households reported they had no one to turn when they had problems and were the least to say they liked how their family talked things over, shared problems and responded to them when they were angry, sad or happy. On the other hand, children in father-carer households said they liked how their family shared activities together.

Different carers had different approaches to discipline when the children misbehaved. Father-carers disciplined through explanation; other carers resorted to verbal scolding; and mother carers in non-

OFW households used physical punishment.

From the children's reports, across all types of households, the majority – 74 percent – claimed that their carer almost always/always treated them fairly; 23.5 percent said this happens sometimes; and 2.8 percent said this hardly ever/never happens. Interestingly, children in father-carer households reported the highest percentage among those saying they were always treated fairly (69.2 percent) and also among those saying they were hardly ever treated fairly by their carer (7 percent).

CONCLUSION

Mothers continue to be the primary carers of children in Filipino families and households. Among OFW households, changes happen when mothers or both parents migrate to work abroad, with grandmothers and fathers filling in the carer role. CHAMPSEA underscores the fact that the care of children remains a family responsibility.

Households where one or both parents are OFWs definitely had an economic advantage over non-OFW households. This advantage also showed up in several indicators of children's well-being – comparable or better school performance and fewer stunting and thinness problems compared with children in non-OFW households. Most children reported being happy/very happy. As suggested in past studies, CHAMPSEA findings also indicate that children of OFW mothers showed some psychological disadvantages compared with other children. It appears that father-carer households need to improve communication and discussion of problems. Overall, children across all types of households reported that their carer almost always/always treats them well. Forthcoming reports will employ multivariate approaches to shed further light on these issues.

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For further information about the CHAMPSEA study, please visit:

<http://www.populationasia.org/CHAMPSEA.htm>

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