

# Parenting Across Distance: An Exploration of OFW Parenting Style and the Young Adults' Perspective

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## ABSTRACT

This study explored how Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) parents practice parenting across distance and how their young adult children perceive these parenting efforts during long-term physical separation. Using a qualitative multiple case study design, the researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with ten OFW parent-child dyads and analyzed the data through Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis. Findings revealed that OFW parents sustain their parenting roles through consistent digital communication, emotional reassurance, and intentional guidance, despite physical absence. Parents viewed their own parenting style as caring, authoritative, and grounded in sacrifice, resilience, and effortful involvement, adapting their approaches to remain patient,

understanding, and emotionally available from afar. Young adult children generally perceived their parents as caring and authoritative, appreciating their sacrifices, though some reported experiences of permissiveness or emotional distance when communication was limited. Both groups emphasized that the quality of communication, more than its frequency, is central to maintaining emotional closeness. These findings highlight the importance of understanding parents' perspectives and fostering emotional communication in OFW families, informing programs that support strong and healthy parent-child relationships across distance.

**Keywords:** *overseas Filipino worker, OFW, transnational parenting, parenting across distance, parent-child relationship, digital communication, young adult children, qualitative research.*

## INTRODUCTION

Transnational parenting has become a common reality for many Filipino families as labor migration continues to rise. In the Philippines, millions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) leave the country in search of better economic opportunities, resulting in family arrangements where one or both parents are physically absent for extended periods. While the financial benefits of working abroad are undeniable, this situation also brings significant emotional and social challenges, particularly for children left behind. In such contexts, traditional parenting is transformed into transnational parenting, where parental roles are maintained through digital communication, financial support, and the involvement of substitute caregivers. This shift raises important questions about how parenting is practiced, sustained, and interpreted across distance, especially in relation to children's emotional and developmental outcomes.

Anchored in the framework of Diana Baumrind, this study examines how parenting styles—authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful—are manifested in transnational family settings.

Although physical presence is limited, OFW parents continue to influence their children's behavior and development through mediated forms of communication and control. However, the absence of day-to-day interaction may affect the balance between discipline and emotional responsiveness, which is essential in effective parenting. Furthermore, differences between the parenting approaches of OFW parents and substitute caregivers may create inconsistencies that influence children's understanding of rules, expectations, and emotional support. These dynamics are particularly significant for young adults, who are in a critical stage of identity formation and are capable of reflecting on their lived experiences within transnational family structures.

Despite the growing body of research on migration and family dynamics, several gaps remain evident. Existing studies often focus separately on either the experiences of OFW parents or the outcomes for children, limiting a comprehensive understanding of transnational parenting. There is also a lack of attention given to young adults aged 18 to 25, whose perspectives can provide deeper insights into the long-term effects of parental absence. Additionally, much of the literature emphasizes the economic advantages of migration while giving less attention to the emotional and psychological consequences experienced by families. Limited research has also examined the inconsistencies between OFW parents and substitute caregivers, as well as the effectiveness of digital communication in maintaining emotional connection and guidance.

In response to these gaps, this study aims to investigate the dynamics of transnational parenting by exploring how OFW parents understand and practice their parenting styles while working abroad, and how their young adult children perceive and interpret these efforts across distance. By integrating the perspectives of both parents and children, the study seeks to provide a more holistic understanding of transnational parenting as both an economic and emotional process. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more responsive parenting approaches, as well as to inform educators, mental health professionals, and policymakers in creating programs and support systems that address not only financial needs but also the emotional and developmental well-being of individuals in OFW families.

## **METHODS**

### **Research Design**

The researcher employed a multiple case study approach to explore the lived experiences of young Filipinos who grew up as children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). This qualitative approach was appropriate because it allowed for an in-depth investigation of subjective experiences, emotional insights, and personal meanings that could not be quantified. Multiple case study research enabled the examination of several individual cases, providing a holistic understanding of long-distance parenting and its impact on children, while capturing both commonalities and variations across cases. Unlike studies focused on quantitative outcomes, this research emphasized an inquisitive interest in the participants' self-reports, reflections, and unique experiences.

### **Research Locale**

For this study, the CALABARZON (Region IV-A) region was selected, which comprises the provinces of Cavite, Laguna, Batangas, Rizal, and Quezon. This region was known as having one of the highest numbers of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) in the country. With a population of approximately 16.1 million, the region provided a substantial population base for examining family processes and the socio-economic effects of labor migration (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2016). CALABARZON's unique blend of urban and rural contexts made it a relevant setting for studying family structures, the availability of coping support, and the policies and programs that affected OFW children in young adulthood.

This research focused on the province of Cavite, which was identified as one of the leading provinces in the country in terms of OFW deployment. Cavite held a favorable position in labor migration

at both the regional and national levels. According to a PSA (2020) report, Cavite accounted for 18.4% of the total deployed overseas Filipino workers, the largest share among provinces. This trend was attributed to its large working-age population, a strong cultural inclination toward migration, and its proximity to Metro Manila and recruitment agencies.

### **Sampling Technique**

Criterion sampling was utilized to ensure that all selected participants met the specific characteristics required for the study. The research was conducted in Region IV-A (CALABARZON), specifically in the province of Cavite, due to its high concentration of OFW households. A total of ten (10) parent-child dyads participated in the study. The young adult participants were aged between eighteen (18) and twenty-five (25) years. They had an OFW parent who had been employed abroad for at least seven (7) years and was still working overseas during the data collection period.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The results of this study show that transnational parenting among OFW families is a complex process shaped by emotional effort, communication, sacrifice, and adaptation from both parents and children. Despite physical separation, the findings consistently demonstrate that family relationships remain strong because both sides actively work to maintain emotional connection and understanding.

### **For OFW parents**

The results highlight that their parenting is primarily authoritative in nature, meaning they combine discipline with warmth and emotional support even while working abroad. This style is maintained through constant communication, which serves as their main tool for guidance and involvement in their children's lives. However, the data also reveal that this form of parenting comes with deep emotional sacrifices, including loneliness, homesickness, and guilt from being away during important family moments. Despite these challenges, parents show strong resilience, as they continue working abroad with the belief that their sacrifices are for their children's future. This shows that OFW parenting is not passive, but a continuous emotional and intentional effort to remain present despite distance.

### **Perspective of Young Adult Children**

The results show a mix of emotional experiences. Most participants perceive their parents as authoritative and caring, recognizing their efforts to provide guidance and support from afar. At the same time, they experience emotional longing and attachment challenges due to the absence of physical presence. They miss their parents, especially during important life events, which sometimes leads to feelings of emotional distance. However, as they mature, they develop gratitude and awareness, understanding that their parents' sacrifices are meant to provide them with a better life. This growing understanding helps them become more independent, responsible, and emotionally mature.

The results also emphasize the importance of communication and emotional support in sustaining family relationships. Both parents and children rely heavily on digital communication to express affection, provide reassurance, and maintain connection. However, the study highlights that it is not the frequency of communication that matters most, but the quality of interaction. Even with regular contact, some emotional gaps still exist, including feelings of loneliness, guilt, and emotional inconsistency. This shows that communication alone is not enough unless it is meaningful and emotionally supportive.

The findings of this study show that even though OFW parents are physically away from their children, they continue to play an active and meaningful role in parenting. Their parenting style is mostly authoritative, meaning they combine love, support, and discipline. They guide their children, set rules, and provide emotional support through constant communication such as calls, messages, and video chats. However, this type of parenting comes with a lot of sacrifice. Many OFW parents feel loneliness, guilt, and

sadness for missing important moments in their children's lives. Despite this, they continue working abroad because they want to provide a better future for their family. Their strength and ability to keep going show their resilience, which is driven by love, responsibility, and faith.

From the children's side, they see their parents in different ways. Most of them still recognize their parents as caring, supportive, and guiding, even from a distance. However, because their parents are not always physically present, some children sometimes feel emotionally distant or less connected. At the same time, they feel grateful for their parents' sacrifices and understand that working abroad is for their benefit. As they grow older, many children begin to understand and accept their situation better. They realize that their parents' absence is an act of love, which helps them become more mature, independent, and responsible. A very important finding of the study is that communication is the key to keeping OFW families strong. Regular messages, calls, and video chats help parents and children feel connected even when they are far apart. More than how often they communicate, what matters most is the quality of communication, especially when it includes love, support, and understanding. Through these interactions, children still feel their parents' presence, and parents stay involved in their children's lives. Both parents and children also learn to adjust and adapt to time differences, busy schedules, and distance, which helps them maintain their relationship.

The study also shows that OFW parents are very intentional in their parenting. Even if they are far away, they make sure they are still emotionally present, supportive, and involved in decision-making. This shows that parenting is not only about being physically together, but also about being emotionally available and consistent in care and guidance. Based on these findings, the study proposes a program called "Bridging Hearts Across Distance." This program aims to help OFW families improve communication, strengthen emotional bonds, and support each other's well-being. It includes activities like counseling, storytelling, peer support, and family bonding exercises. In conclusion, the study shows that even with physical separation, OFW families remain strong because of love, sacrifice, resilience, and faith. Although distance brings emotional challenges, strong communication and understanding help maintain close family relationships.

## CONCLUSION

The study concluded that within the Baumrind framework, the parenting styles of authoritative, authoritarian, permissive, and neglectful remain foundational in a child's development. However, in the context of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), the implementation of these parenting styles becomes constrained due to physical distance. The role of the parent becomes more complex in providing warmth, discipline, and responsiveness, while the shifting dynamics of power within the parent-child relationship often weaken because other caregivers and guardians assume parenting responsibilities within the household.

The findings further emphasized that emotional support and communication through virtual means serve as important pillars in maintaining family stability. Although adult children of OFWs expressed appreciation for their parents' sacrifices, many still experienced feelings of loneliness, emotional exhaustion, and difficulty maintaining emotional intimacy and closeness despite regular communication. The study identified communication as the central factor in sustaining familial ties across distance. Participants shared that trust and emotional closeness are preserved through consistent use of technology and regular communication. Nevertheless, the physical absence of family members continues to create emotional discontent that technology cannot fully replace. Filipino values such as *utang na loob*, respect, and gratitude also emerged as significant factors that strengthen family solidarity and motivate children to pursue their education and careers in recognition of their parents' sacrifices.

Overall, the study revealed that transnational parenting produces both positive and negative effects on family members. While the physical absence of parents creates emotional strain among children, it also contributes to the development of emotional resilience and independence. Despite migration realities, the

love, commitment, communication, emotional support, and understanding shown by OFW parents continue to shape the psychological development of their children and sustain family relationships across distance.

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