International Journal of Research on Multidisciplinary Studies
Online ISSN: 3116-4137 | Print ISSN: 3116-4145
Volume 1, Issue 10, pp. 622-630, November 2026
https://ijroms.com
Original Article

Away From Home: Exploring Experiences, Challenges, and Cultural Adaptation of Overseas Filipino Workers in a Foreign Land

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Article History:

Date Received: September 7, 2026
Date Revised: September 16, 2026
Date Accepted: November 11, 2026
Date Published: November 18, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.67903/ijroms0483

Document ID: *2026IJROMS0483*

Recommended Citation:
Aleman, H. R. R., Bancog, R. C. S., Dote, A. M. A., Laparan, E. J. & Roto, R. N. (2026). Away From Home: Exploring Experiences, Challenges, and Cultural Adaptation of Overseas Filipino Workers in a Foreign Land. International Journal of Research on Multidisciplinary Studies, 1(10), 622-630. https://doi.org/10.67903/ijroms0483

Abstract. This phenomenological qualitative study examines the transformative journey of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) across various destination countries and employment sectors. Drawing on the five participant narratives, the investigation illustrates the experiences, challenges and cultural adaption of OFWs in a foreign land. The five participants were selected via purposive sampling with inclusion criteria: nationality: must hold Filipino citizenship; occupational status: must be actively employed as an Overseas Filipino Worker; and length of stay: must have accumulated a minimum of three consecutive years of residency and employment in a foreign host country. The locale was conducted across various international host destinations, primarily focusing on major destination countries for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) utilizing semi-structured interview protocol through online communication utilizing video call, messenger and email. There are five themes emerged from the study, namely: transformative journey, pursuit of family livelihood, quest for belonging, the weight of sacrifice, and dual identity survival. Ultimately, the study reveals that the Overseas Filipino Workers experience transforms individuals from vulnerable newcomers into resilient, highly adaptable, and cross-culturally competent workers. Their lived realities showcase an enduring balance of personal sacrifice, strong cultural identity, and profound pride in securing a sustainable future for their families back home. To address emotional isolation, legal vulnerabilities, and financial strain among OFWs, partner agencies secure binding bilateral labor agreements that protect rights and end exploitative practices. Concurrently, concerned agencies should modernize pre-deployment language and legal literacy training while implementing joint financial education and career-matching programs for returning workers and their families to ensure sustainable economic reintegration.

Keywords: Challenges; Cultural Adaptation; Experiences; Overseas Filipino Workers; Phenomenology

Introduction

Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are often called “Modern-Day Heroes” around the globe. Driven by love and dedication, they endure the heartbreak of leaving their families and homeland to secure a brighter future. Their quiet sacrifices not only sustain their loved ones but also serve as the beating heart of the nation’s economy (Bautista and Tamayo, 2020).

Globally, over 150 million individuals are classified as international migrant workers, defined as persons employed outside their country of origin (Hargreaves et al., 2019). Within this broader demographic shift, the sustained escalation in the volume of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) underscores a critical imperative to examine the socio-structural dynamics driving labor migration. Primarily catalyzed by economic necessity and the pursuit of intergenerational socio-economic mobility, a significant proportion of Filipino parents migrate to secure enhanced opportunities for their households (De Jesus and Adducul, 2024). Nevertheless, this transnational labor movement generates complex systemic paradoxes, simultaneously mitigating material hardship while precipitating psychological distress and structural strain on familial cohesion.

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https://ijroms.com
Original Article

Life challenges are a universal phenomenon; however, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) represent a unique demographic exposed to acute psychosocial strain. The dual burdens of prolonged family separation and cultural acclimation predispose OFWs to heightened risks of depression (Atos et al., 2022). The life challenges of overseas Filipino workers can be tough. Being away from home, working in a foreign country, and adjusting to cultural differences is not easy. Many OFWs also struggle with money problems, workplace exploitation, and mental health issues.

The study by Lasin et al. (2023) investigated the reintegration experiences and challenges encountered by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) upon returning to the Philippines. The findings indicate that while economic drivers—such as seeking superior employment opportunities and higher compensation—primarily motivate outbound migration, the overseas experience is frequently characterized by familial separation and socio-cultural adaptation. Furthermore, returning migrants often experience psychological stressors, including isolation and depression, alongside ongoing financial instability. Nevertheless, former OFWs demonstrate considerable resilience and agency, frequently leveraging their international exposure and accumulated capital to launch micro-enterprises, supported by governmental reintegration initiatives. Sabay et al. (2025) investigated the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) employed in the manufacturing sector. Their findings indicate that the primary impetuses for overseas employment comprise the pursuit of competitive remuneration, the financial fortification of familial bonds, and the acquisition of superior career trajectory opportunities. Nevertheless, participants contended with pervasive socio-cultural and environmental adversities, including linguistic impediments, cultural disparities, disparate workplace paradigms, and severe climactic conditions. As the principal economic providers for their households, these individuals exhibited notable adaptive mechanisms, acclimating to shifting socio-cultural and environmental dynamics. Ultimately, the study underscores the profound resilience demonstrated by OFW parents within the global labor market.

While existing literature extensively documents the macroeconomic impacts, broad socio-cultural adjustments, and psychological tolls of labor migration among Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), a distinct research gap exists regarding how hyper-local, host-country-specific socio-cultural frameworks interact with the nuanced, daily lived experiences and adaptive mechanisms of migrant workers. Prior studies predominantly investigate OFWs' cross-cultural adaptation through high-level comparative models or focus isolated attention on economic remittances and structural labor exploitation. Consequently, there remains a critical dearth of granular research explicitly examining the dynamic, micro-level strategies OFWs employ to reconstruct cultural identity, preserve emotional well-being, and navigate localized social inclusion or marginalization across distinct, non-Western foreign environments. The present study bridges this gap by shifting the analytical lens from generalized, macro-structural descriptions of migration to a deeply contextualized, phenomenological exploration of how individual OFWs actively negotiate cultural dissonance and construct resilience in specific foreign socio-cultural landscape

Research Questions

To systematically address the central phenomenon, this study is guided by three scholarly research questions:

1. How do participants perceive and navigate their lived experiences in a foreign land?
2. What challenges do participants encounter during the transition?
3. How do participants adapt culture of a foreign land?

Scope and Delimitations

The scope is specifically limited to the self-reported post-migration experiences of active OFW parents, capturing granular, firsthand narratives of their daily lives abroad. To maintain a tightly contextualized micro-level focus, the study intentionally excludes macroeconomic remittance data, state-level policy evaluations, and the perspectives of non-migrant family members remaining in the Philippines. Ultimately, this targeted demarcation prioritizes individual human agency and localized psychological adaptation over broad structural generalizations in contemporary Filipino labor migration.

Literature Review

Often designated as modern-day heroes (*bagong bayani*), Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) represent a critical nexus of transnational labor migration and familial economic mobility. Motivated primarily by systemic domestic wage disparities, these workers endure prolonged socio-emotional separation from their families to secure abroad what the local economy often fails to provide—enhanced earning capacity to fund private education, acquire real estate, and build long-term financial security. While this economic sacrifice often translates into tangible upward socio-economic mobility, evidenced by improved housing, vehicle

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ownership, and expanded asset bases, this material capital is hard-won. It reflects a complex dynamic of structural endurance, requiring migrants to navigate precarious working conditions, severe psychological strain, and the systemic challenges of international labor regimes to achieve generational financial resilience for their households (Lasin et al., 2023).

Data shows that the number of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) or Filipino workers who worked abroad from April to September 2023 was estimated at 2.16 million, an increase of 9.8 percent from the previous year's estimated number of 1.96 million. Overseas Contract Workers (OCWs) or Filipino workers with existing work contracts, comprised majority or 98.1 percent of the total OFWs during the period (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024).

Driven by a constrained domestic labor market, a significant segment of the Philippine workforce—predominantly originating from socioeconomically marginalized backgrounds—is compelled to seek overseas employment. This study investigates the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), focusing specifically on the articulation and pursuit of their personal aspirations. The findings highlight pervasive psychosocial and institutional adversities, including pervasive loneliness and systemic workplace discrimination. To navigate these challenges, OFWs leverage digital communication channels—such as video calls—to maintain transnational kinship ties, while concurrently escalating work effort to mitigate occupational marginalization. Their primary trajectory-defining objectives center on achieving long-term financial stability, channeling remittances toward domestic entrepreneurial ventures, and securing permanent residency in host nations. Consequently, OFWs strategically deploy disciplined capital accumulation and maximized labor output as primary mechanisms to materialize these socioeconomic mobility goals (Atos et al., 2022).

Meanwhile De Jesus and Adducul (2024) conceptualize the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as a complex trajectory of resilience and sacrifice, delineated by systemic labor precarity, socio-cultural adaptation barriers, and prolonged familial transnationalism. Their empirical findings indicate that migrant workers routinely encounter compound stressors—including intense labor regimes, occupational insecurity, systemic discrimination, and linguistic disenfranchisement—which cumulatively induce significant physical and psycho-social strain. While adaptive socio-cultural strategies are imperative for integration, the resultant geographical isolation frequently strains kinship networks, precipitating relational dissonance and communication breakdowns. To mitigate these structural vulnerabilities, OFWs heavily rely on coping mechanisms such as digital transnational connectivity, informal peer networks, and community-based solidarity systems. Notably, sub-analysis of OFWs in destination contexts such as Kuwait reveals heightened structural precarity characterized by severe labor exploitation, wage depression, and physical exhaustion—outcomes that critically compromise migrant well-being, financial security, and occupational efficacy, thereby underscoring the imperative for targeted policy interventions and institutional protections.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopted a qualitative phenomenological research design to investigate the challenges, experiences, and cultural adaptation of Overseas Filipino Workers in a foreign land. Phenomenological inquiry aims to synthesize individual, subjective experiences of a specific phenomenon into a structural description of its underlying, universal essence (Creswell, 2007). By systematically interrogating both the textual dimensions of participant engagement, this methodology facilitates a rigorous investigation into the affective, professional, and personal life worlds of Overseas Filipino Workers operating within international working paradigms.

Research Locale

This research study was conducted across various international host destinations, primarily focusing on major destination countries for Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). The locale encompasses the specific foreign workplaces, residential environments, and broader host-country communities where these active Filipino workers reside, representing the diverse socioeconomic and cultural environments in which they navigate daily professional duties, face acculturation challenges, and adapt to living away from the Philippines.

Research Participants

The study sample comprised five Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) selected in accordance with predefined eligibility criteria designed to ensure contextual relevance and experiential depth. To qualify for inclusion, candidates were required to maintain active Filipino citizenship and hold verified status as currently employed contract workers abroad. Additionally, participants were required to possess a minimum cumulative duration of three consecutive years of residency and gainful employment within their respective host countries, ensuring that respondents possessed sufficient tenure to offer substantive insights into the prolonged socio-economic and psychological dimensions of transnational labor. Data saturation was successfully achieved

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Original Article

within this focused sample of five Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as the iterative thematic analysis yielded no new experiential codes, conceptual categories, or emerging socio-economic and psychological dimensions. Given the strict eligibility criteria—requiring active contract status and a minimum of three consecutive years of continuous host-country residency—the participants possessed homogeneous, highly relevant, and deep exposure to transnational labor. The depth and rich granularity of the qualitative data elicited from these key informants generated sufficient information power to thoroughly map the targeted phenomenon, confirming that further sampling would yield redundant insights and that theoretical saturation had been satisfied.

Research Instrument

To evaluate the challenges, experiences, and cultural adaptation of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), a qualitative, semi-structured interview protocol was developed as the primary research instrument. The instrument comprises two distinct sections: Part I systematically collects demographic variables—including age, gender, civil status, host country, length of overseas employment, and occupation—to establish contextual parameters for data analysis; Part II employs an open-ended narrative format categorized into three thematic domains: challenges, Experiences and cultural adaptation. Anchored in a semi-structured framework, the protocol establishes standard foundational inquiries across all subjects while providing the methodological flexibility required to pursue dynamic, probing follow-up questions, thereby eliciting rich, nuanced qualitative data grounded in the participants' authentic narratives.

Data Gathering Procedure

To ensure methodological rigor, data collection began by securing formal participant approval through official communications via email and instant messaging. Upon obtaining written consent, preliminary orientation sessions were conducted to build rapport and establish a mutually agreed-upon field schedule. Primary data were gathered through virtual, semi-structured in-depth interviews designed to capture nuanced qualitative perspectives while adhering strictly to ethical protocols, including participant anonymity, confidentiality, and voluntary audio recording for verbatim fidelity; participants were also offered the option to submit supplementary written reflections. To achieve data triangulation, relevant documentary evidence and reflective field journals were systematically collected and integrated alongside primary testimonials. Qualitative materials were then analyzed through an iterative thematic approach—transcribing, coding, and categorizing data into key thematic patterns—while all raw transcriptions, audio recordings, consent forms, and field notes were archived on an encrypted external drive to guarantee long-term data security and integrity.

Results and Discussion

Research Question 1: How do participants perceive and navigate their lived experiences in a foreign land?

The analyses and interpretation of the data gathered from the participants of the study are presented in this section. The data is provided in themes with implications and interpretation. The presentation is structured according to the order of the problems stated in the problem statement.

Table 1 presents the profile of the participants in terms of pseudonym, age, gender, civil status, host country, length of overseas employment, and occupation.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Civil Status	Host Country	Length of Overseas Employment	Occupation
1. Teacher J	35	Male	Single	Thailand	6	Teacher
2. Nanny Yna	38	Female	Single	Malaysia	10	Domestic Helper
3. Miss Compassionate	29	Female	Married	Saudi Arabia	4	Caregiver
4. Cattle Boss	33	Male	Married	New Zealand	3	Herd Manager
5. Nurse L	30	Male	Single	United Kingdom	5	Nurse

Themes on the Experiences, Challenges and Cultural Adaptation of Overseas Filipino Workers

Based on the data, the experiences, challenges, and cultural adaptation of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) were categorized into five main themes:

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Original Article

Theme 1: Transformative Journey

This theme centers on the Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who endure initial culture shock, language barriers, and emotional isolation by adapting to their host countries and drawing strength from community support. Ultimately, their personal sacrifices—marked by homesickness and long hours—are anchored by financial dedication to their families back home and result in profound professional pride, resilience, and personal growth.

Study participants narrated that being an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) they navigate a deeply transformative journey balancing professional dedication and cultural adaptation. It is a journey marked by immense resilience, cultural adaptation, and emotional growth. Nanny Yna said, ""*Adapting to the subtle humor and diverse cultures deepened my cultural awareness and expanded my perspective on life.* In the beginning, they experience severe culture shock and homesickness while adjusting to strict local customs, intense heat, and living in a brand-new environment far from their family. Teacher J said, *"I build meaningful bonds with locals. However, the role carries a heavy emotional burden. By the second and third years, I adapt their styles to honor local culture, embracing their values."* In their early months, they often struggled with homesickness, missing their family's laughter and the comfort of homemade Filipino meals. Communication poses an initial barrier, forcing them to quickly learn basic language of a foreign land to understand the needs of others and build trust with host families. Over time, they form deep, familial bonds with others, finding genuine purpose and warmth in bringing comfort to someone else's loved one. Nurse L said, *I develop stronger coping mechanisms, relying on online support groups and fellow Filipino workers for comfort and advice."* Professional growth also occurs as they sharpen their clinical and interpersonal skills under challenging domestic or healthcare conditions. Beyond the professional development, their stable income allowed them to build a new life in the in a foreign land while regularly sending remittances back home to support families left in the Philippines. Miss Compassionate said, "*Financial motivation remains the steady anchor, as monthly remittances sent back home pay for children's education, medical bills, and family savings."* Completing a contract ultimately leaves them with a profound sense of pride, having overcome hardship to secure a better future for my loved ones back in the Philippines. Cattle Boss said, "*Looking back on their journey, I feel immense pride in how I overcame initial cultural barriers to build a fulfilling, impactful career, proving that Filipino nursing excellence and compassionate care truly transcend borders."* They reflect on how significantly they have grown, feeling a profound sense of pride in shaping young minds across borders. Ultimately, their multi-year experience transforms them into resilient cultural ambassadors who carry a piece of foreign land in their hearts forever.

The result of this study is somewhat like De Jesus and Adducul (2024) conceptualize the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) as a complex trajectory of resilience and sacrifice, delineated by systemic labor precarity, socio-cultural adaptation barriers, and prolonged familial transnationalism.

Theme 2: Pursuit of Family Livelihood

The theme pursuit of family livelihood serves as the primary catalyst for migration, compelling workers to endure severe emotional isolation and grueling physical labor in exchange for economic stability. Despite starkly different work environments migrant workers continually adapt and build specialized skills to maintain their roles. Ultimately, their individual sacrifices and hard work translate into financial security for their loved ones, transforming personal hardship into a sustainable future for their families back home.

Study participants, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) often make immense personal sacrifices, leaving their families behind to pursue higher wages and better opportunities for their loved ones back home. Nanny Yna said, *"In Malaysia, I navigate the intimate space of a private household often faces intense emotional isolation, cultural adjustments, and strict work routines. I juggle round-the-clock domestic chores, meal preparation, and caregiving, which demands high emotional resilience despite the constant longing for her own children. Over time, I build strong communication skills, negotiates boundaries to protect my rights, and finds solace in sending my monthly remittances to secure my family's financial future."* Conversely, an OFW working as a herd manager on a New Zealand dairy farm experiences a visually striking and physically demanding transition to modern agricultural life. Cattle Boss said, *"My daily reality begins in the early hours before dawn, overseeing large livestock herds, managing milking schedules, and utilizing advanced machinery in unpredictable weather conditions. Despite the intense manual labor, I benefit from structured labor standards, clear health and safety protocols, and a culture that values teamwork and professional growth. I derive a strong sense of pride from scaling up his technical expertise while working in a supportive, scenic environment."* The pathways highlight the lived qualitative realities of adaptability, hard work, and deep commitment shared by migrant workers. Ultimately, whether navigating urban household duties in Malaysia or managing rural farm operations in New Zealand, these workers embody resilience as they sacrifice personal comfort for sustainable livelihoods.

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The result is in consonance in the study of Lasin et al. (2023) which mentioned that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) represent a critical nexus of transnational labor migration and familial economic mobility. Motivated primarily by systemic domestic wage disparities, these workers endure prolonged socio-emotional separation from their families to secure abroad what the local economy often fails to provide—enhanced earning capacity to fund private education, acquire real estate, and build long-term financial security. While this economic sacrifice often translates into tangible upward socio-economic mobility, evidenced by improved housing, vehicle ownership, and expanded asset bases, this material capital is hard-won. It reflects a complex dynamic of structural endurance, requiring migrants to navigate precarious working conditions, severe psychological strain, and the systemic challenges of international labor regimes to achieve generational financial resilience for their households.

Theme 3: Quest for Belonging

This theme highlights the deep emotional strain and resilience experienced by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). While working abroad offers financial stability and career growth, it frequently subjects individuals to profound feelings of displacement, language barriers, and social exclusion. The experience revolves around navigating two distinct realities: maintaining strong cultural ties to their home country while constantly adapting to survive, belong, and create a sense of community within a foreign environment.

Navigating life far from home, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) embark on a quiet quest for belonging as they attempt to weave their heritage into the unfamiliar fabric of a foreign land. Teacher J said, *"Every morning begins with the echoing stillness of a lonely apartment."* In the workplace, they adapt to sharp linguistic and cultural shifts, constantly translating not just their language, but their entire way of being to fit into environments that often view them solely through the lens of labor. Nurse L said, *"The moment I step onto the floor, my mind goes into overdrive. I'm not just translating medical terms in my head; I'm constantly recalibrating how I walk, how softly I speak, how I hold my body, so I don't come across as 'too loud' or 'too assertive."* True comfort is often found in small, improvised sanctuaries, a Sunday gathering at a local park, a shared pot of warm *sinigang*, or the familiar rhythm of Tagalog spoken among fellow Filipinos who share the exact same ache. Nanny Yna said, *"The longing for warm family breakfasts is met only by the hum of an unfamiliar city waking up."* These vibrant enclaves offer a temporary respite, validating an identity that frequently feels invisible to the host country's mainstream society. Yet, despite building these warm communities abroad, a persistent duality shadows their daily lives: they are often celebrated as heroes back home while remaining perpetual outsiders in the places where they toil. The continuous ache of missing major family milestones birthdays, graduations, and holidays reminds them that their physical presence is missing where their hearts reside most. Miss Compassionate said, *"Every time my phone screen lights up with a video call, my heart does a familiar, painful little flip."* Over time, their definition of home undergoes a subtle transformation, turning into an elusive space suspended between the life they sacrificed in the Philippines and the society that relies on their hard work without fully opening its arms. Cattle Boss said, *"When I first landed abroad, I told myself this new city was just a temporary pitstop, an engine to fund that house back home. But after a decade, something shifted quietly beneath my feet."* Ultimately, the OFW's search for belonging is a profound story of endurance, where hope and deep cultural pride serve as their strongest anchors against the currents of isolation.

The study of Bautista and Tamayo, (2020) support the findings which mentioned that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) are often called "Modern-Day Heroes" around the globe. Driven by love and dedication, they endure the heartbreak of leaving their families and homeland to secure a brighter future. Their quiet sacrifices not only sustain their loved ones but also serve as the beating heart of the nation's economy.

Research Question 2: What challenges do participants encounter during the transition?

Theme 4: The Weight of Sacrifice

This theme centers on the Overseas Filipino Workers who endure profound emotional isolation, severe economic pressure, and oppressive legal environments abroad, willingly bearing these personal hardships as a necessary sacrifice to secure the financial survival and future of the families they leave behind.

Leaving their families behind, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) venture to host countries where distinct cultural, economic, and legal realities present unique struggles. In Thailand, many OFWs employed as teachers struggle with language barriers, strict visa renewal requirements, and sudden shifts in employment regulations. Teacher J said, *"When I first arrived in Thailand, I thought my biggest challenge would be managing a classroom of forty enthusiastic students. I quickly realized the real test happens outside the classroom. The language barrier hits you immediately trying to navigate daily errands or explain an administrative issue at school in broken Thai and English is exhausting, and so much gets lost in translation."* Meanwhile, domestic work frequently copes with precarious legal statuses, low wages, and the constant threat

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of deportation or crackdown on undocumented labor. In Saudi Arabia, the strict conditions of the *kafala* sponsorship system historically tied workers directly to their employers, leaving domestic and blue-collar workers vulnerable to excessive hours, unpaid salaries, physical abuse, and passport confiscation with limited legal recourse. Miss Compassionate said, *"When I first arrived in Saudi Arabia, I thought I was just coming to do a job and send money back home to my family. But the moment I landed, my sponsor took my passport. From that day on, my life was completely out of my hands under the kafala system."* Across all three nations, extreme homesickness and severe mental health challenges weigh heavily on workers who bear the emotional burden of separation. Financial pressures add to this strain, as workers are expected to send home most of their earnings while managing high local living costs or unexpected recruitment debts. Workplace discrimination and a lack of adequate safety nets mean many suffer through poor living conditions in silence to protect their income. Nurse L said *"But whenever I feel like giving up, I look at the photos of my family taped to my bedside wall. I remind myself why I signed that contract. I am here so they don't ever have to be. I will carry the loneliness, the fear, and the exhaustion for as long as it takes, because my sacrifice is the only bridge leading them toward a better life. The pressure never really stops. Every peso I earn is already accounted for before it even hits my hand—tuition fees, groceries, utility bills, medical savings for my family."* Furthermore, female domestic caregivers face heightened risks of isolation and gender-based exploitation behind closed doors. Miss Compassionate said, *"You have no freedom, because once you are inside, you never go out. Behind those closed doors, you are entirely at their mercy."* Despite these severe trials, OFWs continue to endure personal distress and systemic hardships to secure a better financial future for the families they leave behind.

The result of the study is related to Atos et al. (2022 which mentioned that driven by a constrained domestic labor market, a significant segment of the Philippine workforce—predominantly originating from socioeconomically marginalized backgrounds—is compelled to seek overseas employment. This study investigates the lived experiences of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), focusing specifically on the articulation and pursuit of their personal aspirations. The findings highlight pervasive psychosocial and institutional adversities, including pervasive loneliness and systemic workplace discrimination. To navigate these challenges, OFWs leverage digital communication channels—such as video calls—to maintain transnational kinship ties, while concurrently escalating work effort to mitigate occupational marginalization. Their primary trajectory-defining objectives center on achieving long-term financial stability, channeling remittances toward domestic entrepreneurial ventures, and securing permanent residency in host nations. Consequently, OFWs strategically deploy disciplined capital accumulation and maximized labor output as primary mechanisms to materialize these socioeconomic mobility goals.

Research Question 3: How do participants adapt culture of a foreign land?

Theme 5: Dual Identity Survival

The theme of "Dual Identity Survival" highlights how Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) constantly navigate two distinct personas: adapting to the cultural, professional, and legal expectations of their host countries while maintaining their core identity and emotional ties back home. This psychological and cultural duality serves as a crucial coping mechanism, allowing them to remain resilient and protect their sense of self while enduring isolation, prejudice, and harsh working environments abroad. Ultimately, successfully balancing these double lives is key to their endurance, enabling them to fulfill their financial duties to their families while safeguarding their personal dignity and cultural roots.

Study participants, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) undergo a deeply transformative journey of cultural adaptation as they step onto foreign soil, balancing the necessity of economic survival with the sheer weight of personal sacrifice. Initial exposure to unfamiliar languages, societal norms, and rigid workplace expectations often induces a profound culture shock, compounding the heavy emotional toll of homesickness. Teacher J said, "*Stepping onto foreign soil meant facing a world of unfamiliar languages and overwhelming homesickness, but learning the local customs and leaning on my fellow Filipinos gave me the strength to survive.*" To navigate these alien environments, OFWs demonstrate exceptional resilience by gradually absorbing the local customs and daily routines of their host countries. They frequently overcome formidable communication barriers through determined language learning, ensuring they can function efficiently in their professional roles. Nurse L said, "*Adapting to a new culture while holding tight to our values of bayanihan and faith transformed the initial struggle into genuine growth.*" Crucially, they seek solace and solidarity within tight-knit diaspora communities, forming surrogate families that preserve their cherished cultural identity through shared meals, native dialects, and communal celebrations. This delicate balancing act enables them to respect and adhere to local laws and social etiquette while steadfastly retaining their core Filipino values, such as *bayanihan* and deep religious faith. Cattle Boss said, "*Through every sacrifice, I evolved from a vulnerable newcomer into someone who can proudly navigate both worlds without ever losing sight of who*

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I am." Over time, their continuous exposure to foreign lifestyles expands their worldviews, fostering a sophisticated intercultural competence that allows them to move seamlessly between two worlds. Through this grueling process, OFWs evolve from vulnerable newcomers into highly adaptable, multicultural individuals who command respect in their host societies. Ultimately, their adaptive strategy is not merely a mechanism for individual survival, but enduring testament to the flexibility, courage, and enduring spirit of the global Filipino worker.

The study of Atos et al. (2022) mentioned that Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) represent a unique demographic exposed to acute psychosocial strain. The dual burdens of prolonged family separation and cultural acclimation predispose OFWs to heightened risks of depression. The life challenges of overseas Filipino workers can be tough. Being away from home, working in a foreign country, and adjusting to cultural differences is not easy. Many OFWs also struggle with money problems, workplace exploitation, and mental health issues. It's even harder when facing language barriers, discrimination, or loneliness in the host country. But there are ways to make life better.

Ethical Considerations

The process of the conduct of the study was handled in an ethical manner. The researchers are teachers thereby asked permission from the the Schools Division of the Department of Education to conduct the study. Considering that the key participants belong to the vulnerable people the Overseas Filipino Workers, the researchers were sensitive to their needs. The respect for their person, understanding of behavior, and availability of time were observed. The researchers obtained appropriate consent from the participants by sending a written request for their participation through online mode via email and messenger. Before the inclusion of the participants, the researchers ensured to serve their interests and willingness. The key participants were informed that involvement in the research was voluntary. They were free to choose to participate or not. Information was indicated and ensured that there was no pressure on participants as they involved themselves in the study and could stop their participation even when they wanted to. The participants were given the option to answer or not the questions they felt uncomfortable with and would even withdraw from the study at any time without any negative repercussions. The decision to withdraw did not result in any penalties or loss of benefits to which the participant is otherwise entitled. The time of the interviews were at the convenience of the participants. Privacy and confidentiality were also stressed. Information was balanced and free of misleading emphasis. The researchers made sure that the participants used pseudonyms. Lastly, the audio coverage was listened many times for the analysis. The researchers also correctly typed, transcribed, and translated the data from the interviews into English when needed. After the data was translated, the researchers show it to the participants for approval. Since there were no corrections, the researchers used the presented data as the final transcription. All the information collected was put in one flash drive for safekeeping.

Conclusion

Overseas Filipino Workers regularly balance severe workplace constraints with personal resilience across various industries globally. Although early stages of migration bring deep isolation, culture shock, and systemic vulnerabilities, workers manage these challenges through community support networks and shared cultural values. Over time, this migration experience helps workers gain valuable skills while maintaining a strong connection to both their host and home countries. Financial remittances remain the central motivation for working abroad, directly reflecting their ongoing dedication to their families. Ultimately, overseas work is a complex personal journey marked by sacrifice and personal growth rather than a simple financial agreement. Recognizing these experiences highlights the need for stronger support systems to protect workers' rights and overall well-being.

Recommendations

Based on the empirical themes from the study, actionable, and policy-oriented recommendations framed for the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) and Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA): To directly mitigate culture shock, homesickness, and language barriers, must upgrade pre-departure programs with targeted cultural immersion and establish peer-mentorship networks in key host countries. To effectively support overseas workers sacrificing personal comfort for family security, government agencies should mandate structured financial literacy for vulnerable domestic workers to ensure remittances build long-term assets. Concurrently, the agencies should establish agricultural technology transfer pathways such as the OFW Enterprise Development and Loan Program enabling returning specialized managers to transform international expertise into high-yield, sustainable domestic agribusinesses. To address the psychological isolation and cultural alienation detailed by overseas workers, the agencies must establish

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International Journal of Research on Multidisciplinary Studies
Online ISSN: 3116-4137 | Print ISSN: 3116-4145
Volume 1, Issue 10, pp. 622-630, November 2026
https://ijroms.com
Original Article

dynamic "Community Belonging Hubs" across target post-destination embassies and Philippine Overseas Labor Offices (POLOs). Actionable initiatives must include expanding OWWA's mandate to subsidize physical, safe spaces for informal weekend gatherings and peer-support networks to directly mitigate the echoing stillness. To ease the profound weight of sacrifice borne by Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), agencies must establish host-country legal, administrative, and psychosocial safety nets. Specifically, agencies should partner with the host countries to implement institutional language transition assistance and streamline visa renewal compliance. Furthermore, agencies must expand 24/7 legal aid, employer contract enforcement, and emergency shelter accessibility to protect domestic workers from document confiscation and isolation, while deploying accessible tele-mental health services to relieve the financial anxiety and severe homesickness. To maintain and operationalize actionable support for the participants' dual identity survival, the agencies should provide interventions directly address the psychological tension experienced Overseas Filipino Workers embedding structural pathways for host-country cultural adaptation while actively reinforcing native support networks and cultural identity.

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