Growing Up with Temporarily Absent Parents: The Case of Southeast Asian Young Adults

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Abstract

This research aimed to gain insights into the growing-up experience of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, a phenomenon prevalent due to economic migration and employment opportunities abroad. Utilizing a case study approach and employing thematic analysis, the study is framed by five pivotal theoretical lenses on Attachment Theory; Psychosocial Development Theory (Erikson, 1950) ;Cognitive Stress Theory (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984); Ecological Systems Theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) that explores the interaction between cultural norms and family dynamics; and Self- Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2009). The study reveals key themes as Understanding Growing Up with Temporarily Absent-Parents, Understanding Independence, Shared Identity *(Pakikipagkapwa),* Relational Dynamics, Personal Responsibility, Self-Managing Emotions, Self-Management, and Support Networks. These themes collectively paint a comprehensive picture of the journey towards self- reliance, emotional resilience, and the vital role of support systems. The findings enrich developmental psychology and family studies, offering significant insights for the development of supportive policies and programs for families with temporarily absent parents in this culturally rich region.

Keywords: growing up experience; Southeast Asian young adults; temporarily absent-parents

Introduction

Transnational migration from the global south is giving rise to new family structures, with an increasing number of parents from economically challenged countries in Southeast Asia participating in the global labor movement to address workforce shortages in wealthier countries within and beyond the region. As more developed countries experience aging populations and a growing demand for service workers, a significant portion of these migrant parents, predominantly mothers, leave their families and children behind to undertake "temporary" employment, mainly providing domestic and care services to individuals in distant locations. This pattern results in the formation of transnational families, where children find themselves geographically separated from one or both parents for prolonged periods. Presently, it is estimated that several million children in the region are growing up without the physical presence of one or both parents, necessitating for a deeper understanding of the effects of family separation on the health and well-being of these children (Graham & Jordan, 2011).

In Southeast Asia, one of the foremost challenges confronting young adults revolves around the phenomenon of parental migration. Economic difficulties have compelled numerous parents in the region

to seek employment opportunities abroad, leaving their children in their home countries. This situation exerts both positive and negative influences on the lives of the affected children. On one hand, remittances sent by migrant parents contribute to improving the family's financial stability, and the children may experience increased independence and responsibility. On the other hand, parental migration significantly shapes the identity, relationships, and future aspirations of young adults in Southeast Asia. Research indicates that those who grow up with temporarily absent parents are more prone to feelings of loneliness, insecurity, and anxiety. They also encounter challenges in their relationships with both parents and siblings, and they often lack clear future aspirations (Battistella & Asis, 2013).While existing research has shed light on the experiences of young adults in migrant families, several gaps persist. Many studies predominantly focus on childhood experiences, leaving a notable void in our understanding of how these experiences mold young adulthood. Additionally, research tends to emphasize the adverse effects of parental absence, overlooking the resilience and resourcefulness demonstrated by many young adults in migrant families. Consequently, this research study aimed to intricately gain insights into the meaning of growing up with temporarily absent parents, particularly focusing on the understanding, experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of Southeast Asian young adults.

Review of Related Literature

The International Migration Literature

Studies of international labor migration have tended to view the temporary movement of migrants across borders as a family livelihood strategy that aims to improve the socioeconomic circumstances of both the migrant and those left behind. There is now an extensive literature on the impact of remittances sent back by migrants to family members in their countries of origin (e.g., Adams & Page, 2005; Leinbach & Watkins, 1998; Levitt, 2001; Vetrovec, 2004). Although there is some debate about whether labor migration helps reduce poverty at the macro scale and in the longer term, remittances have been found to improve economic circumstances at the household scale. Those left behind may, thus, benefit from increases in family income spent on improved nutrition, housing, access to health care, and schooling (Hadi, 1999; Jones & Kittisuksathit, 2003). The strategy is not always successful, however, and debts incurred to facilitate migration or the paucity of remittances may result in left-behind family members having less money than before (Smith-Estelle & Gruskin, 2003). The intricate tapestry of parental migration's impact on children's well-being is woven with threads of both vulnerability and resilience. Extensive research, particularly in the Philippines (De Leon Filoteo, 2011; Tantilela, 2011), paints a picture of heightened susceptibility to loneliness, anxiety, and depression among children left behind. This trend echoes across Southeast Asia, with studies in Vietnam (Dang et al., 2016) and Thailand (Wongpakaran et al., 2016) mirroring these emotional challenges. This underscores the crucial need for robust support systems specifically tailored to address the emotional well-being of young adults raised in migrant families.

Fewer studies have examined the social and psychological costs of living in a transnational family. The balance sheet of international labor migration typically involves a trade-off between economic well-being and family proximity. Families divided across national borders may reap economic benefits, but they also make sacrifices in terms of geographical and emotional closeness (Ehrenreich & Hochschild, 2002; Orellana, et al., 2001). Such costs may be especially high for mothers separated from their children. The continuing feminization of transnational migration has prompted studies of how gender identities are reworked when women migrate (Elmhirst, 2007; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994) and provoked popular

anxieties about a care crisis and the future of the family in sending countries such as the Philippines (Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004; Parreñas, 2003).

A small but growing body of qualitative work has started to explore emotions, belonging, and intimate relations within transnational families (McKay, 2007; Parreñas, 2001; Svasek, 2008), but with a focus on adults rather than children. The few studies that have examined emotional responses to parental migration among children left behind suggest that children of migrant mothers may be especially prone to anger, feelings of being abandoned or unloved, confusion, and worries (ECMI-CBCP/AOS – Manila, SMC, & OWWA, 2004; Parreñas, 2005). However, these studies have either relied on qualitative evidence or have been based on limited analysis of quantitative data, and have paid scant attention to the psychological literature on parent – child separation and child mental health.

Southeast Asian Psychological Perspectives

The rich tapestry of Filipino culture offers unique insights into how young adults experience parental migration. Through the lens of Sikolohiyang Pilipino, the indigenous psychology framework (Enriquez, 1992), one can understand their perspectives and motivations in the face of separation. "Kapwa tao", a central concept in Sikolohiyang Pilipino, emphasizes the interconnectedness and shared sense of self within Filipino communities (Enriquez, 1992). This concept can influence how young Filipino adults perceive parental absence. Studies suggest they may view migration as a sacrifice made for the collective well-being of the family, a testament to their sense of shared responsibility and duty (Enriquez, 1992). However, it is crucial to avoid essentializing "kapwa tao" as research by de Lima (2017) highlights the importance of considering individual and family contexts. Each person's experience and understanding of migration will be unique.Cultural values like "hiya" (shame) and "utang na loob" (debt of gratitude) also play a role in shaping responses to parental absence (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). These concepts may influence young adults' willingness to express emotions, seek support, and assert their needs. The fear of bringing shame to the family or incurring an unpayable debt can lead to internalized distress and a reluctance to seek help (Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000).

Fortunately, Filipino culture also offers strengths and resources to navigate these challenges. Recent research by Yacat (2013) highlights the positive potential of "pakikipagkapwa" (shared identity) to foster resilience and community support among Filipino youth experiencing parental migration. This concept emphasizes building

connections and seeking help within the community. This suggests the importance of community-based interventions that leverage the strengths of Filipino culture, such as peer support groups and culturally sensitive counseling approaches, to effectively support these young adults (Yacat, 2013). Moving beyond the Philippines, regional perspectives shed light on the experiences of young adults with migrant parents. In Vietnam, Tran and Le (2018) emphasize the "five cardinal relationships" (monarch-subject, parent-child, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, friend- friend) as crucial for understanding family dynamics and filial piety. This cultural context can shape how Vietnamese young adults respond to parental migration, potentially motivating them to take on increased family responsibilities (Tran & Le, 2018). Imagine a tapestry woven with five vibrant threads, each representing a "cardinal relationship" (monarch-subject, parent-child, husband-wife, elder brother-younger brother, friend- friend) at the heart of Vietnamese culture. As Tran and Le (2018) explain, these relationships form the framework for family dynamics and filial piety, a deep respect and sense of obligation towards one's parents. When parental migration occurs, Vietnamese young adults are often motivated to take on increased responsibilities within the family, honoring this intricate web of kinship and obligation.

In Indonesia, the concept of "gotong royong" (communal solidarity) as highlighted by Bowen (2011) suggests the potential for community support networks to mitigate the challenges faced by children of migrant parents. This points to the importance of leveraging existing community resources and fostering collaborative approaches to support these young adults (Bowen, 2011). Picture a village nestled amidst emerald rice fields, where the spirit of "gotong royong" (communal solidarity) flows like the lifeblood of the community. As Bowen (2011) describes, this concept emphasizes cooperation and mutual support, creating a safety net for those facing challenges. With parental migration, children in Indonesia can find solace and support in this web of interconnectedness, relying on neighbors, extended family, and community members to fill the void left by absent parents. Thailand presents a different picture, as Wongpakaran et al. (2016) found that children of migrant parents often experience "kwam-wang-jai" (a sense of longing and missing) and "kwam-ko-jai" (a sense of worry and concern). These unique emotional responses can impact their mental health and academic performance, highlighting the need for culturally sensitive interventions tailored to address their specific needs (Wongpakaran et al., 2016). Think of a young person standing on a sandy beach, gazing out at the vast ocean, their heart tugging with "kwam-wang-jai" (a deep sense of longing and missing) for their absent parents. Wongpakaran et al. (2016) reveal that this emotional tide is often accompanied by "kwam-ko-jai" (a constant worry and concern) about their parents' well-being. These powerful emotions can impact their mental health and academic performance, highlighting the need for interventions that acknowledge and address their unique emotional landscape.

Finally, research by Kaur and Kaur (2022) in Malaysia underscores the role of "agama" (religion) and "adat" (customs) in shaping family dynamics and coping strategies among young adults with migrant parents. This emphasizes the importance of culturally sensitive interventions that integrate religious and spiritual resources while respecting local customs and traditions to effectively support these young adults (Kaur and Kaur, 2022). Imagine a young woman kneeling in a sun-drenched mosque, finding solace and guidance in her "agama" (religion). Kaur and Kaur (2022) emphasizes the crucial role of religious and spiritual resources in shaping family dynamics and coping strategies for young adults in Malaysia. "Adat" (customs) also play a vital role, providing a sense of stability and belonging in the midst of parental absence. Culturally sensitive interventions that integrate these elements can empower young adults to navigate their challenges with increased resilience and hope.

Growing Up Stage Experiences

Understanding the developmental stage when parental migration occurs is crucial. Adolescence and emerging adulthood (ages 12-25) are periods of heightened identity formation, emotional exploration, and peer relationships (Arnett, 2015). Parental absence during these critical years can disrupt these processes, leading to challenges in identity development, emotional regulation, and establishing intimate relationships (Wong & Gung, 2015). Therefore, research and interventions should be tailored to address the specific needs of young adults based on their developmental stage and cultural context.

Intergenerational Relationships and Communication. Studies by De Leon Filoteo (2011) and Suryani (2012) highlight the potential for tensions and misunderstandings between children and grandparents or other caregivers who assume primary roles in their upbringing. Examining how young adults navigate these relationships and maintain connections with their migrant parents is crucial. Researches by Tantilela (2011) and Wong and Gung (2015) suggest that limited communication with migrant parents can further exacerbate feelings of abandonment and loneliness. Exploring effective communication strategies and technologies that can bridge the distance and strengthen family bonds is essential.

Social and Cultural Identity. Researches by Suryani (2012) and Wong and Gung (2015) reveal the challenges faced by second-generation Southeast Asian youth who navigate cultural differences between their parents' adopted country and their own cultural heritage. Examining how these young adults develop a sense of belonging and identity within multicultural contexts is crucial. Studies by Pe-Pua and Protacio-Marcelino (2000) and Yacat (2013) highlight the importance of cultural values like "pakikipagkapwa" in fostering social support and resilience among Filipino youth. Further research should explore how young adults in other Southeast Asian countries utilize their cultural resources and community networks to navigate the challenges of parental migration.

Theoretical Lenses

Attachment Theory. Attachment Theory suggests that the bonds one form with their first caretakers shape how they grow (Bowlby, 1969). For kids who have had parents gone for a while, this bonding might get disrupted. They could end up feeling lonely or empty, which might make it hard for them to build close relationships when they are older.

Psychosocial Development Theory. Erik Erikson's Psychosocial Development Theory explains that humans all go through different stages of life that challenge them in different ways (Erikson, 1950). When kids' parents are not around for a time, it might be tougher for these kids to get through these life challenges. They might struggle more with learning who they are and who they can trust.

Cognitive Stress Theory. The idea of Cognitive Stress Theory shows why kids might feel stressed when their parents are not around for a while. When a parent is away, it can really throw off how a kid thinks, feels, and acts (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Ecological Systems Theory. Moreover, the way one grow up can be influenced by where and how they live, as explained by Ecological Systems Theory made by Urie Bronfenbrenner. When a parent is missing, it changes the child's world right around them and the way different parts of their world interact. This can affect their growth in many ways (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

Self-Determination Theory. Lastly, Self-Determination Theory explains how one's need to feel in control, good at things, and close to others drives what they do (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Not having parents around for some time might touch on those needs and change how young people make choices for themselves and feel overall (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Statement of the Problem

This study aimed to gain insights on growing up with temporarily absent parents as experienced by Southeast Asian young adults. Specifically, this study answered the following questions:

1. How is growing up with temporarily absent parents understood by Southeast Asian young adults?
2. How is growing up with temporarily absent parents experienced by Southeast Asian young adults?
3. What are the challenges encountered on growing up with temporarily absent parents by Southeast Asian young adults?
4. What are the coping strategies in addressing the challenges on growing up with temporarily absent parents?

Propositions of the Study

Proposition 1. Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents have a similar understanding

of parental migration due to economic needs, in spite of their differences in family dynamics and cultural perspectives.

Proposition 2. Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents have similar emotional challenges like loneliness ('kwam-wang-jai') and anxiety ('kwam-ko-jai'), coupled with complex psychosocial responsibilities. These include delayed independence, heightened financial and caregiving responsibilities, intricate intergenerational relationships, and limited parental communication, all of which significantly shape their social and cultural identities.

Proposition 3. Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents face similar challenges including cultural identity issues, economic financial strains, and emotional struggles of anxiety, depression, and loneliness. Additionally, they deal with complex relationship and communication dynamics with their temporarily absent parents and their substitute caregivers.

Proposition 4. Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents utilize similar coping strategies to navigate their unique circumstances. They draw on cultural resources like 'Kapwa Tao', 'Gotong Royong', and the 'Five Cardinal Relationships' for communal support. Peer support is sought through practices like 'Pakikipagkapwa'. Religious and spiritual support, often embodied in 'Agama', provides solace and guidance. Additionally, they develop adaptive behaviors and resilience, cultivating independence and responsibility to effectively manage their situation.

Method

Design. In this research design, a qualitative holistic single-case study was conducted to gain insights of young adults in Southeast Asia who grew up with temporarily absent parents.

Locale of the Study. The study was conducted in the Philippines for Filipino Participants and for International participants coming from Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia who have been working and staying in Singapore, with a focus on young adults who grew up with parents who were temporarily absent.

Research Participants. The participants of this study were young adults between the ages of 18 and 25, and were pure natives from the countries belonging to Southeast Asian Region specifically the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, and Indonesia. These individuals have experienced growing up with temporarily absent parents, with both parents having working overseas for a period of 10 years or more. The selection of participants from these specific countries in Southeast Asia aimed at helping researchers gain insights about the diverse cultural, social, and economic contexts within the region. By including participants from these countries, the study gained insights about their own understanding, the unique experiences, challenges, and coping strategies of young adults who have undergone the prolonged absence of their parents due to overseas work. The inclusion of participants from various Southeast Asian countries allowed for a comprehensive examination of the psychosocial aspects of their development and shed light on the broader impact of labor migration on families and individuals in the region.

Research Instrument. In this study, the researchers conducted a process interview schedule as one of the primary data collection methods. A semi-structured interview allows for a combination of open-ended questions and predetermined themes or topics, providing a flexible yet guided framework for the interview process.

Data Gathering Procedure. Regarding the location for the face-to-face international interviews (Thai, Vietnamese, Malay, and Indonesian), the researchers chose Singapore due to its diverse cultural composition, which allows for a broader representation of experiences. One researcher conducted the

international face-to-face interviews for Thailand, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Indonesia, while two other researchers simultaneously interviewed participants from the Philippines via Zoom. For the participant in the Philippines, the two researchers conducted the face-to-face interview, while the other researcher based in Singapore also utilized Zoom. Collaboration was established with the International Leadership Institute, International Training Alliance, Asia Pacific Alliance-Emerging Leaders, Alliance Youth Philippines, and Aidha in Singapore was appreciates. All participants were already identified and the researchers used pseudonyms of their national dishes. Clear guidelines were established when partnering with agencies to identify participants. To protect the participants' rights and privacy, the researchers administered an Informed Consent Form. This form detailed the purpose of the study, the potential risks and benefits, and the participants' rights throughout the research process. The informed consent process was conducted in accordance with ethical guidelines and regulations. During the online platform interactions, such as Zoom interviews, researchers prioritized ethical considerations by maintaining a secure and confidential environment. All virtual interactions took place in private, password-protected rooms, and participants were encouraged to use pseudonyms to protect their identities. These practices underscored their commitment to respecting participants' privacy and maintaining the highest ethical standards in the online realm.

Data Analysis. The data gathered from the study's in-depth interviews were examined utilizing Robert Yin's Holistic Single-Case Study technique. Recorded interviews and zoom data were transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. These transcripts were carefully organized and labeled to maintain confidentiality and facilitate easy access during the analysis phase. Researchers employed an inductive coding approach to identify meaningful units of information within the data. Codes were assigned to specific segments of text that captured key understanding, experiences, challenges and coping strategies related to growing up with temporarily absent parents. The coding process were iterative, with codes continually refined and revised as new concepts until categories emerged. Once coding is complete, researchers identified commonalities, patterns, and connections among the codes to develop themes that represented overarching concepts and categories. These themes were reviewed and refined through discussions among the research team to ensure accuracy and comprehensiveness. The researchers then synthesized the identified themes and explored relationships between them, providing a holistic understanding of the participants' experiences. To interpret the synthesized data, researchers drew on relevant literature and theoretical frameworks. They analyzed the data in relation to the research objectives and the unique context of Southeast Asian young adults. The interpretation involved identifying similarities, differences, and significant findings, as well as exploring any unexpected or contradictory information.

Results and Discussion

This segment presents the results of the study on the experience of Southeast Asian young adults growing up with temporarily absent parents. In adherence to ethical guidelines, the researchers employed pseudonyms of the 'national dishes' associated with the participants to maintain their anonymity. The pseudonyms assigned to these young adults are as follows:

'Adobo,' a 21-year-old male college student from the City of Koronadal, Philippines. He is a pure Filipino, and both of his parents were temporarily absent for almost 17 years, working in Indonesia. 'Pad Thai' is a 23-year-old female graduate student of Fashion and Design in Singapore. Originally from Thailand, both of her parents were temporarily absent for 11 years, working in Australia. 'Pho' is a 26-year-old male

Registered Pharmacist working in Australia. A resident of Vietnam, his parents were temporarily absent for 18 years, working in Singapore. 'Nasi Lemak' is a 26-year- old male teacher working in Singapore. A resident of Malaysia, his parents were both temporarily absent for 19 years, working in Japan. 'Rendang' is a 26-year-old male law student in the UK, originally from Indonesia. Both of his parents were temporarily absent for 14 years, working in Dubai.

Comprehended Distant Parenting

In analyzing the understanding of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, a central theme that emerged is "Comprehending Distant Parenting." This theme encapsulates the understanding of the growing-up experience of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, highlighting how these individuals perceive and internalize the unique parenting dynamics shaped by physical distance. The term "temporarily absent parents" refers to parents who, though physically separated for a period, continue to play a significant role in their children's lives. As defined by Pryor and Rodgers (2001), these parents "maintain a parental role and provide support to their children through means of communication and emotional connection." This concept is reflected in the words of Adobo, who noted,

"*They're still either alive or will just come back after a short absence. Not that they are out of your life, but they are still there*" (Adobo).

"Comprehending Distant Parenting" involves recognizing the efforts of parents to sustain their influence and guidance from afar. This is evident in Adobo's experience, which reveals parents' attempts to instill an understanding of their circumstances and future expectations through intermittent communication, primarily via phone calls. While this method sometimes feels superficial, it remains crucial for parental guidance as Adobo recounts,

"*Well, at first they did take me with them so that when I would grow up, I understood what they were going through and what I will have to expect when I'm not there with them anymore*" (Adobo).

The adaptability of parents in maintaining their presence from a distance is further highlighted by Rendang's and Nasi Lemak's experiences:

"*They weren't away, like completely, definitely cause they did come back every now and then for holidays so, I would say they would try to keep in touch with me over like phone call*" (Rendang).

"*They would just call to ask how's school, what happened, and any, especially if there was something major that happened and my mom and my aunt would talk about it*" (Nasi Lemak).

The "Comprehending Distant Parenting" theme underscores the significant impact of temporarily absent parents on the development of Southeast Asian young adults. It reflects a family structure characterized by adaptability and resilience, where the nuances of absence and presence play a crucial role in the young adults' growth and development. Informed by participant experiences and scholarly research, this theme provides an insightful understanding of the multifaceted dynamics in transnational family relationships. understanding of their growing-up experience with temporarily absent parents, emphasizing their realization that maturation was an essential part of their journey.

"Anticipated Maturation" encapsulates a proactive approach to growing up, encompassing more than just the traditional rites of passage. It involves an early and intentional embrace of roles and responsibilities typically associated with later stages of life. Pad Thai's insights highlight this push towards autonomy and responsible decision- making as integral aspects of maturation as he said,

"*Maybe it is to become more independent…*" (Pad Thai), and "*...and like make the right decision for yourself*" (Pad Thai)

This theme also represents the expansion of perspectives and the acquisition of life skills critical for

navigating the complexities of adulthood. The participants perceived growing up as an opportunity to learn about the broader world and to manage life's diverse challenges. Pho narrated,

"Well, I suppose growing up is about learning about the world, you know, and having people show you new things and teach you how to become an adult. You know, learning how to cope with life and other challenges" (Pho).

The backdrop of temporarily absent parents added a distinctive dimension to this maturation process. Participants like Rendang described assuming autonomy and responsibility often associated with adult roles that necessitated adaptation and the early development of skills usually nurtured in later life.

"I did have my grandma over, she's my guardian, so she takes care of me. But besides that, she usually is just cooped up in her room. So it felt like she was a renter. And I was a landlord. I had the whole house to myself type of situation" (Rendang).

"Anticipated Maturation," therefore, is not just about chronological aging, but it involves a deliberate and expedited journey towards independence and understanding of adult life. This theme captures the essence of the proactive approach taken by these young adults in maturing and mastering life skills required for navigating its complexities.

Shared Identity with relatives

In the lives of Southeast Asian young adults who grew up with temporarily absent parents, the experience of developing a shared identity with relatives is a profound theme. This shared identity is distinct for each individual, reflecting a deep connection and mutual influence between the young adults and their extended family. For Nasi Lemak, living with his aunt represents more than a practical arrangement; it signifies the formation of a shared identity experience where his shared identity with his aunt was imperative in comprehending his parents' temporary absence:

"I feel it was very imperative because if I had to go to let's say a family friend or someone who is not blood related. I wouldn't, I would be far more detached and I wouldn't have been able to understand why my parents are not around." (Nasi Lemak)

Pho's experience with his aunt in Australia until adulthood also demonstrates this theme of shared identity where his shared identity with his aunt forged bonding with her, allowing him to learn crucial life skills in order for him to grow. He shared,

"Since my parents were not around, they couldn't physically show me things like how to cook, how to clean, you know, stuff like that. But yeah, I had my extended family. So my aunt showed me. He's kind of like a mother and a father figure to me in a sense." (Pho)

Conversely, Adobo's experience brings into focus the Filipino cultural concept of 'pakikipagkapwa,' which entails a deeper level of empathy and shared humanity. Adobo, transitioning from living alone to residing with relatives during the pandemic, experienced 'pakikipagkapwa' in a unique way showcasing how living with relatives fostered not just a shared identity, but a deeper, culturally-rooted connection that is central to 'pakikipagkapwa.

"Well, it is a feeling of being less close because they're not directly related to you as parents are, but they're still family and they are still people you can get along with," (Adobo)

Pad Thai's experience in Singapore also highlights the theme of shared identity. Spending significant time with her relatives speaks to a blending of her life with that of her relatives, forming a shared identity through these interactions. She revealed,

"Uh, I spend more time with my relatives in Singapore. My uncle, my dad's side. Yeah. I spend most of my time with them and also live with them like they're like my guardian here," (Pad Thai)

In summary, the development of a shared identity with relatives is a crucial aspect of the experiences of these Southeast Asian young adults, each narrative underscoring how living with relatives shaped their sense of self. For Adobo, this experience is deepened through the lens of 'pakikipagkapwa,' a cultural embodiment of empathy and shared humanity, while for others like Nasi Lemak.

Shifted Bonds

The dominant theme that emerged in the study was the "Shifted bonds" The narratives of the participants revealed varied relational dynamics, characterized by mixed feelings of closeness and isolation, and the influence of having temporarily absent parents during their upbringing.

Growing up with relatives brought about mixed emotions for these young adults. They experienced a sense of detachment due to the lack of direct familial ties, yet they also recognized the importance of these family connections. This emotional duality underscores the intricate nature of relationships within extended family networks. It reflects the participants' capacity to understand and balance their emotions, acknowledging the value of family ties despite the challenges posed by not being blood- related. Adobo's statement is a clear testament to this experience:

"Well, it is a feeling of being less close because they're not directly related to you as parents are, but they're still family and they are still people you can get along with, and well, it is also best to understand and respect their rules they might establish it because I am technically living under someone else's roof, and if it is not my parents, there could be a difference in how the attitude will be to take care of someone else's child." (Adobo)

The absence of parents affected the participants' childhood in various ways. It led to feelings of loneliness at times, prompting them to find connections with friends or other individuals. Additionally, the participants sought to connect with the parent who was present, indicating a proactive effort to maintain familial ties despite the physical absence of one or both parents. These experiences underscore the resilience and adaptability of the participants in seeking emotional connections and support, even in the absence of direct parental presence. Adobo recalled his experiences saying,

"I guess it made me quite lonely at times, but then I guess that meant I'd have to go find a friend or other people to connect to or it is trying to connect with the parent that is not absent during those times. So if it was my mom who was present, my dad is overseas. I will be spending more time with my mom taking care of the house." (Adobo) Pad Thai also expressed his experience, *"Yeah, there is. So I think an alternative way for us to still like to have the connection between my family members and just to call and FaceTime online, yeah." (Pad Thai)*

Furthermore, the participants' views of their relatives' support and the impact of temporarily absent parents on their childhood varied. Some, however, like Pad Thai, expressed acceptance and gratitude for the support received from relatives; others, like Nasi Lemak, had contrasting views, that is, they felt detached or learning to fend for themselves. These diverse perspectives highlight the nuanced nature of relational dynamics and the multifaceted impact of temporarily absent parents on the participants' upbringing.

Rendang's reliance on friends as a main pillar of support underscores the significance of external relationships in shaping the participants' experiences. This highlights the adaptive nature of individuals in seeking and forming meaningful connections beyond immediate family members, emphasizing the importance of social networks in providing support and stability.

In essence, the relational dynamics observed among Southeast Asian young adults reflect a spectrum of emotions, adaptive strategies, and varying perceptions of support and detachment. These experiences underscore the complex interplay between familial relationships, emotional resilience, and the impact of

temporarily absent parents on the participants' formative years.

Living Independently

This theme, "Living Independently," delves into the complex struggles of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, a topic well-documented in the literature. The personal experiences of participants resonate with findings from studies focusing on self-sufficiency and life skills development in children of migrant.

Adobo's narrative captures the essence of the challenge of managing everyday living independently, a key concern in the transition to self-sufficiency highlighted in the literature. This transition often involves mastering basic life skills, previously the domain of parents. He said,

"Well, you do have the freedom to do whatever you want, and that is one thing, but you also have to take care of yourself, whether it is making your own meals, doing dishes, laundry even. And I guess sometimes you have to decide whether to eat out or to save money by making your own food. That is honestly your own responsibility." (Adobo).

Studies by Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003) and Wong and Gung (2015) suggest that such practical aspects of self-care and financial decision-making are critical areas where young adults face challenges due to the absence of parental guidance and support.

Pad Thai's reflection on decision-making underscores a key theme in the literature: the significant impact of parental absence on the development of decision- making skills and long-term planning abilities. She narrated,

"I think I would say the decision I make again. Because it will impact my life." (Pad Thai).

This insight aligns with the findings of Parreñas (2001) and De Leon Filoteo (2011), which discuss the heightened responsibility and challenges in decision-making faced by young adults when parents are not present to guide or influence their choices.

Rendang's account further illustrates the depth of these challenges, encompassing not just immediate needs but also long-term life planning – a crucial area of development for young adults in the context of parental migration:

"As like in my situation, I think the only difference is my situation is a bit more permanent, so I need to think more into the long term like finding a job, finding a place to stay, all those places, all those things were a bit more important to me, but that aside, once everything is sorted." (Rendang).

This perspective reflects the research by Wong and Gung (2015), which highlights the need for young adults to develop strategic thinking and forward planning skills in the absence of parental support, a vital component of transitioning to adulthood.

The theme of "Living Independently", thus, encapsulates a range of difficulties faced by young adults growing up with temporarily absent parents. These narratives, grounded in the realities of the participants, echo the broader challenges documented in the literature, highlighting the dual nature of autonomy and responsibility in the path to self-sufficiency.

Emotional Navigation

In examining the experiences of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, the theme "Emotional Navigation" emerge as a poignant reflection of their journey through complex emotional terrains. This theme, aligning with literature on emotional responses and mental health impacts due to parental migration (ECMI- CBCP/AOS 2004; Parreñas, 2005), delves into how these individuals adapt to and cope with the emotional consequences of their parents' absence. Pho's experience encapsulates a key aspect of emotional navigation – the loneliness that persists despite the physical presence of extended

family. This loneliness is a manifestation of the emotional gap left by absent parents, which extended family cannot always bridge.

"Sometimes I feel lonely because they're not there. I mean, even like, you know, my extended family, like all of them, are here." (Pho)

This reflects findings from the literature (ECMI-CBCP/AOS A, 2004; Parreñas, 2005), which highlight the unique emotional challenges faced by children of migrant parents, where the presence of other family members may not be sufficient to alleviate feelings of isolation.

Nasi Lemak's narrative reveals the social and emotional navigation required when explaining the absence of parents to peers. This aspect of emotional management points to the broader impact of parental migration on a child's social identity and interactions.

"I did not know how to at times I did not know how to react to some of my friends asking me where my parents were." (Nasi Lemak)

This experience aligns with the literature's emphasis on the social discomfort and sense of otherness that young adults often feel in such scenarios (Parreñas, 2005). Pho's description of emotional distancing reflects a crucial coping mechanism in emotional navigation. The physical separation from parents often translates into an emotional withdrawal as a way to manage the pain of absence.

"Yeah. So obviously, I felt kind of disappointed that I couldn't do it in person, and then it also made me kind of draw away from wanting to share things with my parents. Yeah, because I was away from them." (Pho)

This behavior resonates with the findings of ECMI-CBCP/AOS – Manila, SMC, & OWWA (2004), which discuss the complexities of maintaining emotional connections across distances. The "Emotional Navigation" theme, thus, encapsulates the multifaceted emotional journey of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents. It highlights their strategies in managing the deep-seated feelings of loneliness, social discomfort, and emotional distancing. These insights demonstrate the adaptive and nuanced ways these young adults navigate their emotional worlds, shaped significantly by the absence of their parents, as echoed in the findings of the relevant literature.

Resilient Independence

In exploring the narratives of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, the theme of "Resilient Independence" emerges, illustrating their ability to adapt, overcome challenges, and thrive independently. This theme, grounded in the research on self-sufficiency and life skills development in children of migrant parents (Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003; Parreñas, 2001; De Leon Filoteo, 2011; Wong & Gung, 2015), reflects their journey towards autonomy with resilience and determination.

Pad Thai's story exemplifies resilient independence in decision-making. Their approach to carefully considering options before making choices demonstrates not only a high level of self-efficacy but also an adaptive resilience, enabling them to navigate through life's challenges with a thoughtful and proactive mindset. She narrated,

"I think it made me have become like a very resilient person with making thorough decisions as a process, like it makes me process all the possible alternatives that I can choose." (Pad Thai)

This reflection mirrors the findings of Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003) and Parreñas (2001), which emphasize the development of decision-making skills as a key aspect of resilience in the context of parental migration. Nasi Lemak's narrative around academic achievement highlights another facet of resilient independence. Their dedication to excelling academically in response to their challenging circumstances demonstrates a deep-rooted belief in their capability to shape their future. This reflects the

literature's focus on how young adults develop resilience through self-directed goals and achievements. He resented,

"One good coping mechanism was I studied my ass off because I just wanted to, at that point in time, I felt like OK, my parents are not going to come back to Malaysia for me right, I'm going to work my way up and then go to Japan to see them." (Nasi Lemak)

Their story aligns with Wong and Gung's (2015) discussion on the importance of academic resilience as a critical component of young adults' independent life management in the absence of parental support. Rendang's approach to living independently showcases his resilience in leveraging social networks for support and learning. His narrative is a testament to the importance of social skills and connections in building an independent and resilient life, as discussed in the literature by De Leon Filoteo (2011).

"I live quite independently in that sense, I just always learn. To, to find someone to help solve my issues I would say, I did learn a lot from each and every person. Don't get me wrong, but I think the main point is that having what I did, I got by in life, with the connections, that I've met through my circle of friends." (Rendang)

The theme "Resilient Independence" in these narratives underscores the young adults' capacity to effectively navigate through life with agency, control, and adaptability. Pad Thai's reflective decision-making, Nasi Lemak's academic pursuits, and Rendang's socially connected independence exemplify the varied dimensions of resilience. These stories collectively illustrate their strength in shaping their lives, confronting challenges, and achieving goals, offering a compelling view of resilient independence in the face of parental absence

Self-Management

The theme of "Self-Management" within the context of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents reflects a significant narrative of self-reliance and growth, resonating with findings from the literature on self-management skills in children of migrant parents (Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003; Parreñas, 2001; ECMI- CBCP/AOS, 2004). This theme explores their journey towards autonomy, characterized by developing personal responsibility and self-sufficiency in the absence of direct parental involvement. Adobo's narrative underscores the critical aspect of financial independence, a core component of self-management. This mirrors the discussions in the literature, which emphasize the importance of financial management skills for children of migrant parents, especially in transitioning from dependency to self-reliance. Adobo recalled,

"In terms of responsibility, finance is a big one, so making sure that you have your three meals a day, you have your finances taken care of." (Adobo)

Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003) and Parreñas (2001) highlight the need for children of migrant parents to develop skills for managing personal finances effectively, an essential part of their journey to independence. Pho's reflection on autonomy represents a process of self-discovery and growth, aligning with the literature's focus on the unexpected benefits of parental absence in fostering independent living skills. He said,

"So, I guess I'm a lot more independent than I would imagine I would be if my parents were around the whole time." (Pho)

This insight is echoed in studies by ECMI-CBCP/AOS (2004) which reveal how the absence of parents can accelerate the acquisition of life skills and self-reliance among young adults.

Rendang's approach to self-management through learning from others offers a unique perspective on autonomy. This aligns with the RRL's discussion on the role of social networks and community support

in the development of self-management skills. Rendang explained,

"I live quite independently in that sense, I just always learn. To, to find someone to help solve my issues I would say, I did learn a lot from each and every person. Don't get me wrong, but I think the main point is that having what I did, I got by in life, with the connections, that I've met through my circle of friends." *(Rendang)*

The literature recognizes that independence is not solely about living alone, but it also involves strategically building and utilizing social networks for personal development (Parreñas, 2001). Collectively, the narratives of Adobo, Pho, and Rendang present a dynamic and multifaceted view of "Self-Management". It encompasses not only practical aspects like financial management but also the emotional and social dimensions of self-governance. Their experiences illustrate a holistic approach to independent living, deeply rooted in the challenges and opportunities presented by the absence of parents, as reflected in the existing literature.

Support Networks

The theme of "Support Networks" plays a pivotal role in understanding the experiences of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, resonating deeply with insights from the literature on social and emotional support networks (ECMI- CBCP/AOS, 2004; Parreñas, 2005; Suárez-Orozco & Todorova, 2003; Yacat, 2013). This theme examines the crucial role played by friends, extended family, and social connections in offering support, guidance, and companionship in the absence of parental figures.

Adobo's narrative highlights the significant role of friends in providing emotional and practical support, a theme extensively discussed in the literature. His experience aligns with findings that underscore the complementary roles played by different members of a support network, filling the gaps that relatives might leave, particularly in emotional support. He explained,

"In the replacement of company I have to make friends of course, because even if there's relatives, there are also limits on how much they can care for you so what relatives also cannot do, friends might have to take their their

plate." *(Adobo)*

This insight resonates with the studies by Parreñas (2005) and ECMI-CBCP/AOS (2004), which highlight the diverse needs of young adults in the absence of parents and how support networks fulfill these varied needs. On the other hand, Pad Thai's approach to constructing a support network emphasizes the dual benefit of relying on extended family for their expertise and friends for emotional connections, particularly those with similar experiences. This strategy reflects the multifaceted nature of support networks, as documented in the literature, where different types of support are sought to cater to varying needs. She recounts,

"But of course like some things like I said, I wouldn't really like share with my relative that much. Maybe I will consult with my friends that probably also like you know their parents are not living here so they kind of Like in a sense, share through the same pain, yeah." *(Pad Thai)*

The research by Suárez-Orozco and Todorova (2003) and Yacat (2013) support this concept, demonstrating how young adults develop complex support systems combining emotional and informational support from various sources. Rendang's story underscores the importance of social learning and connections in building independence, a key aspect highlighted in the literature. His active approach to seeking help and learning from others within his social circle exemplifies how support networks are not merely about receiving support but engaging, learning, and growing through these interactions. He shared,

"I live quite independently in that sense, I just always learn. To, to find someone to help solve my issues I would say, I did learn a lot from each and every person. Don't get me wrong, but I think the main point is that having what I did, I got by in life, with the connections, that I've met through my circle of friends." (Rendang)

In summary, the "Support Networks" theme among Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents underscores the significance of varied support forms. Drawing from the literature, this theme showcases how young adults adeptly build and maintain these networks, critical for their emotional well-being and practical life management. The experiences of Adobo, Pad Thai, and Rendang illustrate the dynamic nature of these networks, revealing their adaptive strategies in seeking and utilizing diverse forms of support to navigate life's challenges.

The new ideas they shared were about their culture and how they managed money. They did not talk about being poor or how their culture helped them because their parents were away. Instead, they said the big changes were that their parents were far away and they had to grow up fast. This is related to how families work and when parents are away. When we looked at their experiences, we found that they did not have money problems because their parents were still helping them. They also did not have other responsibilities or big changes in who they are. But they did feel lonely, especially one person from Thailand. We also looked at the hard parts of their lives. We found that most of the things we thought would be hard for them weren't. They did not have money problems because their parents were still helping. Some felt lonely, but none of them felt really sad or worried all the time.

Regarding coping strategies, the cultural theories "Gotong Royong" and "Five Cardinal Relationships" were not mentioned by the respondents, with only "Kapwa Tao" utilized by one respondent of Filipino descent. Additionally, the theory of "Agama," which falls under religious and spiritual support, was not mentioned by any of the respondents.

Based on the data gathered from the respondents Adobo, Rendang, Nasi Lemak, Pad Thai, and Pho, the emergent conceptual framework was filtered into 9 categories, showcasing highly similar, partly similar, or no similarities in their experiences of growing up with temporarily absent parents. The image is like a young adult. At the top, we talk about how they understand things and how they grow up. On the left, we show what they feel and how they connect with others. On the right, we talk about the hard things they face. At the bottom, we talk about what they do to feel better. It is like the ground that keeps them strong that being supported with the three boxes to keep them strong.

Insights

This study provides a unique perspective on the experiences of Southeast Asian Young Adults with temporarily absent parents, a phenomenon that is incredibly common, particularly in Southeast Asia, yet remains underexplored. It presents a situation that falls in the middle of a spectrum: on one end, a child is consistently with their parents, and on the other, completely without them. This intermediate state reveals a set of dynamics and challenges that are unique but incredibly common in the region. The themes from this study shed light on the individual stories of the five participants, giving a clearer understanding of what it is like for Southeast Asian young adults to grow up with temporarily absent parents. This research adds valuable insights into this common yet complex experience, highlighting both the challenges and resilience of these young adults.

Implications

This study delved into the growing up experience of Southeast Asian young adults with temporarily absent parents, uncovering profound implications that extended beyond individual narratives. The narratives of these young adults were looked into in order to gain insights to their understanding, their emotional experiences, the challenges they faced, and their coping mechanisms.

Analysis of the narratives of the Southeast Asian young adults suggest that companies employing these parents need to facilitate better familial connections, as is the case of Nasi Lemak, where his parents were initially set to return to Malaysia to witness his school events; however, they were recalled back to work last minute and Nasi Lemak described it as "disappointing". This is similar in the case with Pad Thai, where her parents sometimes had reasons not to return to Singapore where she was studying and therefore her plans to spend time with them in Singapore were ruined. Companies could perhaps consider these situations with their employee parents, and in turn ensure and facilitate a smooth return of these temporarily absent parents back to their children.

Government support programs can also be a consideration in aiding these Southeast Asian young adults. As seen in the case of Adobo, he had to fork out a significant amount of his savings that he accumulated through the remittances of his parents for his hospitalization. Government support programs can help to act as a financial cushion for Southeast Asian young adults such us Adobo, who always had a difficult time receiving money especially in emergency situation. While it was good that Adobo had prior prepared finances for emergency situations, there may be instances in the future where the savings might not be enough, and government aid should be called to action.

Lastly, school support programs can be a great help in helping Southeast Asian young adults. School support programs such as counseling and academic help could have helped Rendang and Pho. Rendang mentioned that upon his parents' departure, he was in a crucial phase of his life transitioning from primary school to secondary school. His academics had, therefore, suffered, as he had taken advantage of his parents' temporary absence to "mess around". This in turn caused a dip in his academics, which was important for him in his family and the general Asian culture where academic excellence is of utmost importance. In the case of Pho, while his academics was not known to dip, he mentioned having a struggle connecting with his parents, and school support programs like counseling could have helped him in comprehending the situation as an addition to support from his aunt, and aided him in finding ways to properly maintain connections with his parents.

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