

# Health Experiences and Emotional Patterns of Adolescents with Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) Parents

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**Abstract:** The growing number of adolescents in Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) families has brought increased attention to how parental migration shapes both emotional well-being and health-related practices among those left behind. This inquiry focused on adolescents with OFW parents, examining how prolonged parental absence influenced their emotional conditions, family relationships, and daily management of health and responsibilities. A qualitative phenomenological design was applied, involving semi-structured interviews with eighteen adolescents aged 15–19 in Zamboanga City who had at least one parent working abroad. Data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify recurring patterns across lived experiences. Findings revealed that adolescents in OFW households experienced a dual condition of increasing independence alongside persistent emotional longing. While participants developed maturity and responsibility, these were accompanied by emotional restraint, trust difficulties, and internalized coping. Family relationships were maintained through communication, yet often lacked emotional depth, contributing to gradual emotional distance. Although closer ties with extended caregivers were formed, these did not fully replace parental presence, resulting in a continued sense of non-belonging. In terms of health and daily routines, adolescents managed their own well-being with limited supervision, leading to inconsistent discipline and irregular practices such as disrupted sleep and eating patterns. Emotional strain was also reflected in fatigue and reduced motivation. Coping strategies, including distraction, routine-building, and acceptance, supported daily functioning but often centered on managing immediate demands rather than addressing deeper emotional needs. Overall, adolescents with OFW parents demonstrated self-reliance while continuing to experience unresolved emotional gaps. The findings highlighted the importance of strengthening emotional support and structured guidance to promote balanced well-being among adolescents growing up in transnational family arrangements.

**Keywords:** Emotional and Health Experiences, Adolescents, Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) Parents.

## Introduction

The emotional and health consequences of prolonged parental absence among adolescents in the Philippines remain insufficiently theorized in relation to how coping practices intersect with evolving family relationships, despite extensive documentation of Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) migration and its socioeconomic contributions. A remittances, schooling outcomes, and general psychosocial adjustment, often positioning adolescents as passive recipients of transnational arrangements rather than individuals actively negotiating emotional strain and health behaviors. Such emphasis leaves a gap in explaining how Filipino adolescents, particularly those aged 15–19, interpret and manage the combined pressures of emotional distance and self-regulation in daily routines when a parent is employed abroad. In addition, prior discussions tend to treat emotional well-being and physical health

as separate concerns, overlooking how these are experienced simultaneously in everyday life where guidance, supervision, and emotional reassurance are inconsistently available..

Existing discussions remain limited in explaining how adolescents actively construct and sustain their daily functioning under prolonged parental absence, particularly in terms of how emotional strain, shifting family relationships, and health-related practices are continuously negotiated in everyday life. Prior studies often describe outcomes such as resilience, distress, or behavioral change, yet they do not sufficiently capture the ongoing process through which adolescents regulate emotions, manage responsibilities, and maintain routines in the absence of consistent parental guidance. This leaves a gap in understanding adolescent adjustment not merely as an outcome, but as a dynamic and lived process shaped by simultaneous emotional needs, relational limitations, and self-directed management of well-being. Parental support remains a central influence on adolescents' emotional development and behavioral patterns (Cutillas et al., 2025). Parental guidance remains a foundational factor in shaping adolescents' emotional regulation and behavioral development, particularly in environments where direct supervision is limited (Chavez et al., 2023).

Labor migration has long shaped Philippine family life, altering caregiving patterns and household structures across generations. Acedera and Yeoh (2022) explains that transnational parenting restructures intimacy, often replacing physical presence with mediated forms of connection. In these arrangements, adolescents navigate shifting attachments that may alternate between emotional closeness and perceived absence. Tan et al. (2025) further notes that while financial stability improves, the delegation of caregiving to extended family introduces variations in authority, discipline, and emotional support that are unevenly experienced among young individuals. Adolescence, characterized by heightened emotional sensitivity and identity formation, amplifies the effects of parental separation. Developmental stage involves a stronger need for stable attachment, indicating that disruptions in parental presence may intensify stress and behavioral changes. In the Philippine setting, May and Krishna (2026) reports that adolescents with OFW parents often express mixed emotional states appreciation for economic support alongside feelings of loneliness and detachment. These emotional tensions are rarely examined alongside health-related behaviors such as sleep patterns, eating habits, and self-care, which are equally influenced by reduced supervision and increased autonomy.

Digital communication has been recognized as a means of maintaining familial connection across distance, yet its capacity to fully address emotional needs remains uncertain. Kansal et al. (2025) describe how mediated interactions create a sense of ongoing presence, allowing families to remain virtually connected. However, such exchanges may lack the immediacy and depth necessary for emotional reassurance, particularly during periods of vulnerability. Adolescents may encounter difficulty expressing complex emotions through digital platforms, which may further complicate their coping processes. Coping patterns among adolescents with OFW parents have often been described in fragmented terms, focusing either on resilience or on risk-related behaviors without integrating both emotional and health dimensions. Steinhoff et al. (2024) indicate that while some adolescents develop adaptive independence, others exhibit withdrawal or maladaptive routines. Limited attention has been directed toward how these coping mechanisms simultaneously shape emotional well-being and physical health practices, particularly in Philippine communities where familial expectations and obligations remain deeply embedded.

Addressing these gaps requires closer attention to how adolescents aged 15–19 who have experienced prolonged parental absence interpret their emotional experiences, family relationships, and health-related practices. An integrated focus allows clearer insight into how daily routines, coping strategies, and interpersonal interactions are adjusted under conditions of distance. It also draws

attention to how adolescents manage responsibility and self-care in the absence of direct parental guidance, particularly when support is mediated through communication technologies or delegated caregivers. This orientation highlights how Filipino adolescents maintain continuity in their well-being while navigating the demands of transnational family life.

## LITERATURE

### *2.1 Emotional Strain and Attachment Gaps*

Adolescents experiencing prolonged parental absence often encounter disruptions in emotional security and attachment formation. Karhina et al. (2023) explains that consistent parental presence nurtures emotional stability, while separation may produce anxiety and uncertainty. This condition becomes more pronounced during adolescence, where emotional regulation is still developing. In the Philippine setting, Children of migrant parents frequently internalize feelings of abandonment despite understanding the economic intent of migration. Such emotional contradictions indicate that cognitive acceptance does not necessarily translate into emotional comfort. Molina et al. (2025) further reports that Filipino adolescents often experience simultaneous pride and emotional longing, reflecting a dual emotional orientation. This duality suggests that emotional responses are layered rather than singular. Marlie and Gina (2025) argues that reduced parental presence can weaken emotional bonding, which may lead to behavioral and psychological adjustments. It imply that attachment disruptions extend beyond temporary sadness and may influence long-term emotional patterns.

Sustained separation also reshapes how adolescents interpret affection and reassurance. Adolescents rely heavily on parental affirmation during identity formation, making absence particularly impactful. When such affirmation becomes inconsistent, adolescents may seek validation from peers or alternative figures. In Filipino households where extended family members assume caregiving, emotional support varies depending on the caregiver's capacity and relationship closeness (Joya et al., 2024). This variability can create uneven emotional experiences among adolescents in similar circumstances. Fauk et al. (2024) indicate that migration-related separation may heighten emotional distress, especially when communication lacks depth or regularity. This suggests that contact alone does not guarantee emotional fulfillment. Together, these accounts point to the need for examining how adolescents reconstruct emotional security under conditions of distance.

### *2.2 Shifting Family Bonds and Authority*

Parental migration alters traditional family arrangements, leading to redefined authority and relational patterns. Pan et al. (2021) explains that caregiving responsibilities often shift to remaining parents or extended relatives, creating layered authority structures. These arrangements may lead adolescents to experience inconsistent discipline and expectations. In many Filipino households, grandparents frequently assume caregiving duties, which may introduce generational differences in parenting approaches. Such arrangements can produce ambiguity in decision-making and emotional closeness (Uy et al., 2020). Challenges in parental capacity to provide consistent guidance may contribute to gaps in adolescents' support systems, particularly in situations of physical separation (Murro et al., 2023). According to the University of the Philippines Population Institute (2022), parental migration (45%) and marital separation (38%) are major drivers of family fragmentation among Filipino youth. In the Philippines, approximately 27% of children experience parental absence due to overseas migration. Studies further indicate that children left behind by migrant parents are at increased risk of psychological distress, including depression and anxiety. Family cohesion may weaken when physical presence is replaced with financial provision. This suggests that economic support alone cannot sustain

relational depth. A prolonged absence may lead to emotional distancing, even when communication is maintained. Also indicates that relational bonds require more than symbolic connection. Family interaction patterns also undergo gradual transformation as adolescents adapt to new household dynamics. Migration reshapes intergenerational relationships, often redefining expectations between parents and children. In Filipino families, respect and obedience remain deeply embedded, yet physical absence may complicate their expression.

### ***2.3 Health Practices and Daily Regulation***

Parental absence influences how adolescents manage their physical well-being and daily routines. Adolescents require structured guidance to maintain balanced health practices, including sleep, nutrition, and physical activity. When supervision decreases, adherence to such routines may become inconsistent. In Filipino households with OFW parents, caregiving substitutes may prioritize basic needs while overlooking routine health monitoring. Maia et al. (2025) reports that adolescents in transnational families may experience irregular eating patterns and disrupted sleep cycles. These disruptions reflect the absence of consistent parental oversight. Parajuli et al. (2025) emphasize that adolescence is a critical period for establishing lifelong health behaviors. Without stable guidance, adolescents may adopt habits that persist into adulthood. Parental involvement has been associated with strengthened discipline and adaptive learning behaviors among adolescents, even in constrained conditions (Chavez et al., 2025).

Health behaviors are also shaped through emotional states and coping tendencies. O'Neill et al. (2021) explain that emotional distress during adolescence can manifest in physical symptoms such as fatigue and weakened immunity. This connection suggests that emotional and physical well-being are closely intertwined. Alvero et al. (2026) notes that family cohesion traditionally supports regulated daily living, including shared meals and routines. When such cohesion is disrupted, daily structure may weaken. An insufficient sleep among adolescents is associated with reduced cognitive performance and emotional instability. These outcomes indicate that health practices cannot be separated from emotional experiences. Parental absence extends its effects into everyday bodily regulation.

### ***2.4 Coping Strategies and Support Systems***

Adolescents develop varied coping mechanisms to navigate the challenges of parental absence. Coping involves cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage stress, which may differ depending on available resources (Zimmer-Gembeck et al., 2021). Some adolescents engage in adaptive strategies such as seeking social support or maintaining structured routines. In Filipino communities, peer groups and extended family often serve as alternative support systems. Durcan (2025) observe that adolescents may develop resilience through increased responsibility and independence. Adaptation suggests that adversity can also foster growth. Effective coping is associated with better emotional adjustment, indicating that strategies matter as much as circumstances.

However, not all coping responses lead to positive outcomes. Resilience is shaped by access to supportive environments rather than individual strength alone. Adolescents lacking consistent support may turn to withdrawal or risk behaviors. In the Philippines, Roman et al. (2025) highlights that community ties can buffer emotional strain, yet access to such networks varies across households. Variation may lead to unequal coping capacities among adolescents. Xu (2026) describes resilience as an outcome of ordinary adaptive systems, suggesting that stable relationships and routines are

essential. When these systems are disrupted, coping becomes more complex. It underscores that coping is not a uniform process but a multifaceted response influenced by social and familial conditions.

## METHODOLOGY

### 3.1 Research Design

A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to capture the lived experiences of adolescents growing up with Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) parents. Phenomenology is appropriate as it seeks to describe how individuals interpret and make sense of shared experiences, particularly those involving emotional and relational dimensions. This design enables a deeper examination of how adolescents construct meaning around parental absence, rather than limiting the inquiry to observable behaviors or outcomes. A semi-structured interview process was utilized to allow flexibility in eliciting detailed narratives while maintaining alignment with the study objectives. This approach supports the exploration of personal accounts related to emotional well-being, family relationships, and health practices, while also allowing participants to introduce experiences not anticipated in the guide questions.

### 3.2 Participants and Sampling

The participants consisted of 18 adolescents aged 15–19 years residing in Zamboanga City who have at least one parent currently working abroad as an OFW. All participants have experienced a minimum of one year of parental absence to ensure sufficient exposure to the phenomenon. They were living either with the remaining parent, grandparents, or other relatives acting as primary caregivers. Purposive sampling was applied to select participants who can provide rich, relevant, and experience-based insights aligned with the objectives. Selection criteria included: (1) active enrollment in school or recent completion of secondary education, (2) ability to articulate personal experiences in either English or Filipino, and (3) willingness to share reflections related to emotional, relational, and health aspects of their daily lives. Participants were included based on their ability to provide detailed and meaningful accounts of their lived experiences, ensuring depth and relevance of the data gathered for the study.

### 3.3 Research Instrument

The primary instrument used was a semi-structured interview guide developed based on the study objectives. The guide contained open-ended questions focusing on emotional experiences, family relationship changes, and health-related practices, with follow-up prompts to deepen responses and clarify meanings. The interview guide underwent content validation through peer review to ensure clarity, relevance, and alignment with the intended focus. Minor refinements were applied to improve coherence and reduce ambiguity. The instrument was structured to encourage detailed narrative responses, allowing participants to fully express their lived experiences rather than provide limited or surface-level answers. Table 1 presents the alignment of the study objectives and corresponding interview questions.

Objectives	Interview questions
<b>To examine how prolonged parental absence due to overseas employment shapes the emotional experiences and family relationship dynamics of adolescents.</b>	Can you describe how your parent's work abroad has influenced your emotional experiences while growing up?  How has your relationship with your parent and other family members changed since your parent started working overseas?

	What situations or experiences have made you more aware of the emotional impact of having a parent working abroad?
<b>To explore how adolescents adapt to parental absence by managing their emotional well-being, health practices, and everyday responsibilities.</b>	<p>In what ways has your parent's absence influenced how you take care of your emotional or physical well-being?</p> <p>What challenges have you experienced in maintaining your health or daily routines while your parent is abroad?</p> <p>What strategies, habits, or sources of support help you cope with the challenges of growing up with a parent working overseas?</p>

### 3.4 Data Gathering Procedure

Prior to data collection, necessary permissions were secured from relevant school authorities and community representatives. Participants and their guardians were informed about the purpose, procedures, and voluntary nature of participation. Written informed consent and assent were obtained before proceeding. Interviews were conducted in a quiet and private setting, either within school premises or a mutually agreed location to ensure comfort and confidentiality. Each interview lasted approximately 30 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. The researcher maintained a neutral stance, allowing participants to express their experiences freely without interruption or judgment.

### 3.5 Data Analysis

Thematic analysis was employed to examine the collected data, following a systematic process of identifying patterns and meanings across participant narratives. Audio recordings were first transcribed verbatim to ensure accuracy. Transcripts were then read multiple times to achieve familiarity with the data. Initial coding was conducted through line-by-line examination of the transcripts, where significant statements related to emotional experiences, family relationships, and health practices were identified. Codes were then grouped into broader categories based on similarities and recurring patterns. From these categories, themes were generated to represent shared meanings across participants.

To ensure rigor, the analysis followed an iterative process, where themes were reviewed, refined, and validated against the raw data. Discrepancies were re-examined to maintain consistency and depth in interpretation. The final themes reflected both common experiences and variations among participants, providing a comprehensive account of the phenomenon.

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the process. Participants were fully informed about the purpose of the inquiry, their right to withdraw at any time, and the confidentiality of their responses. Pseudonyms were used in all transcripts and reports to protect participant identity. Given the sensitivity of discussing emotional experiences, particular attention was given to participant well-being. Interviews were conducted in a respectful and non-intrusive manner, and participants were not pressured to answer questions that caused discomfort. If signs of distress were observed, the

interview was paused or redirected. All collected data, including recordings and transcripts, were securely stored and accessible only to the researcher. The information was used solely for academic purposes and will be disposed of properly after the completion of the project.

## RESULTS

**Objective 1.** To examine how prolonged parental absence due to overseas employment shapes the emotional experiences and family relationship dynamics of adolescents

**Question 1.** *Can you describe how your parent's work abroad has influenced your emotional experiences while growing up?*

### **1.1 Duality of Strength and Longing**

Seven participants described a layered emotional experience where personal growth and emotional deprivation coexist. While parental absence fostered independence, confidence, and early maturity, it simultaneously created an unfulfilled need for emotional presence, particularly during meaningful or vulnerable moments. This duality reflects how adolescents cognitively accept the situation while still emotionally yearning for parental involvement. The development of strength, therefore, is not purely empowering but emerges alongside silent longing, indicating that resilience is often formed in response to absence rather than choice.

*"It grew many emotions... I feel happy, independent and confident when I achieve something, on the other hand I also feel sad because at some point I wanted them to be there for me... there are times I want to share my happy moments and struggles to them but I know that they are not here."*

*"Nakitira ako sa tita ko, and okay naman sila, maalaga, pero iba pa rin talaga kapag sariling magulang mo... may times na naiinggit ako sa iba na may parents na present like simpleng hatid-sundo or sabay kumain." "I stay with my aunt, they take care of me, but it's still different when it's your own parents... there are times I envy others who have present parents even in simple things like being fetched or eating together."*

### **1.2 Emotional Withdrawal and Silence**

Five participants shows a significant pattern across participants is the gradual shift toward emotional restraint and internalization. Over time, repeated experiences of absence led adolescents to limit emotional expression, not necessarily due to lack of feelings but due to perceived inefficiency or inability to be understood. This withdrawal becomes a learned coping mechanism, where silence replaces vulnerability. As a result, emotional processing becomes individualized, reinforcing self-reliance but also reducing opportunities for emotional validation and connection.

*"Parang naging tahimik na lang ako emotionally... hindi na ako ganun ka-open kahit kanino, kahit sa sarili kong parent... may mga times na may problema ako or may good news, pero pinipili ko na lang sarilinin." "I became emotionally quiet... I'm not that open anymore even to my own parent... there are times I have problems or good news, but I choose to keep it to myself."*

*"Hindi ako yung tipo na madaling mag-open kasi nasanay akong i-handle mag-isa yung nararamdaman ko... kaya instead na ilabas ko, kinikimkim ko na lang hanggang sa naging normal na lang." "I'm not the type to open up easily because I got used to handling my emotions alone... instead of expressing them, I just keep them until it became normal."*

### **1.3 Trust Barriers and Emotional Guarding**

Nine participants revealed that prolonged parental absence influenced how they perceive relationships, particularly in terms of trust and vulnerability. Emotional guarding emerged as a

protective response, shaped by the internalization of instability in primary attachments. The idea that significant figures can be physically or emotionally unavailable translated into difficulty forming secure emotional connections with others. This indicates that the effects of parental absence extend beyond family dynamics and influence broader interpersonal patterns.

*"Hindi ako madaling magtiwala, kahit kanino... parang nag-stick sa utak ko na people don't really stay... may silent resentment kahit naiintindihan ko sila logically." "I'm not easy to trust anyone... it stayed in my mind that people don't really stay... there's silent resentment even if I understand them logically."*

*"Minsan gusto ko maging vulnerable, pero automatic na may pumipigil sa akin... parang may boses sa utak ko na nagsasabi na wag ka masyado mag-open kasi at the end ikaw lang din maiwan mag-isa." "Sometimes I want to be vulnerable, but something automatically stops me... like a voice telling me not to open up because in the end I'll still be left alone."*

#### **1.4 Emotional Detachment and Resentment**

For three participants, emotional responses evolved into detachment and underlying resentment. Over time, unmet emotional expectations led to a redefinition of parental roles—from sources of emotional support to providers of financial assistance. This shift reflects a deeper emotional disengagement, where connection becomes transactional rather than relational. Such experiences indicate that prolonged absence may not only weaken bonds but fundamentally alter how adolescents perceive parental identity.

*"It didn't just make me sad, it made me numb, then eventually angry... I stopped seeing them as 'parents' in the emotional sense."*

*"It felt transactional as if I'm only after their money, when I needed their presence more... over time, I stopped opening up, now even if they ask, I just say I'm fine."*

**Question 2.** *How has your relationship with your parent and other family members changed since your parent started working overseas?*

#### **Communication Without Emotional Depth**

Six participants expressed that although there's a communication with their parents, its nature has shifted into routine and surface-level exchanges. Conversations are often limited to updates, responsibilities, and basic needs, lacking emotional depth and personal engagement. This indicates that while technology facilitates contact, it does not guarantee meaningful interaction. Over time, this pattern contributes to emotional distancing, where communication exists but connection weakens.

*"Nag-uusap kami minsan, pero usually update lang like school, gastos... hindi na kami nagkaka heart to heart talk tulad dati, minsan parang awkward pa mag-open ng serious topics." "We talk sometimes, but usually just updates like school and expenses... we no longer have heart-to-heart talks like before, and it even feels awkward to open serious topics."*

*"Parang scripted updates... paulit-ulit reminders... hindi ko na sila kinakausap tungkol sa tunay kong nararamdaman kasi feeling ko hindi nila maiintindihan." "It feels like scripted updates... repeated reminders... I no longer talk to them about what I truly feel because I think they won't understand."*

#### **2.2 Increased Closeness with Alternative Caregivers**

Five participants stated that due to physical proximity, adolescents naturally developed closer relationships with siblings and extended family members who assumed caregiving roles. These relationships provided daily support and interaction, filling practical gaps left by parents. However,

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despite increased closeness, participants still distinguished these bonds from parental relationships, suggesting that emotional roles within families are not entirely interchangeable.

*“My relationship with my siblings and with other people became more close than with my parents... that’s why there are many things I don’t know about them and they don’t know about me.”*

*“Naging close kami kasi sila yung kasama ko araw-araw... pero kahit close, may limit pa rin, hindi ko rin ma-share lahat kasi ayoko maging pabigat.” “We became close because they are with me every day... but even if we’re close, there are limits, I still can’t share everything because I don’t want to be a burden.”*

### **2.3 Persistent Sense of Non-Belonging**

Eleven Participants reveals that despite receiving care from relatives, participants reported an enduring feeling of displacement or partial belonging. Living in another household often required constant adjustment, reinforcing awareness that the space is not fully their own. This emotional condition reflects the limitations of substitute caregiving, where physical inclusion does not always translate to psychological security or a sense of home.

*“Parang may pakiramdam na ‘hindi ito yung sariling bahay ko,’ kaya kailangan marunong akong mag-adjust palagi... minsan kahit may problema ako, tahimik na lang ako sa kwarto ko.” “It feels like this is not my own home, so I always have to adjust... sometimes even if I have problems, I just stay quiet in my room.”*

*“I don’t feel at home... I follow rules, I help out, but I don’t feel like I belong... I exist in that space, but I’m not fully part of it.”*

### **2.4 Emotional Distance and Relationship Breakdown**

For eight participants, the relationship with their parents has gradually weakened, resulting in emotional detachment. Interaction is maintained out of obligation rather than genuine connection, and attempts at concern are sometimes perceived as insufficient or delayed. This indicates that prolonged absence can lead to relational fatigue, where emotional bonds are not only stretched but eventually diminished.

*“I wouldn’t even call it a close relationship anymore... we talk, but it doesn’t feel real... sometimes when they try to act concerned, it irritates me.”*

*“Parang may distance na hindi lang physical, pati emotional... kahit may kasama ka, mararamdaman mo pa rin na parang may kulang araw-araw.” “There’s a distance that’s not just physical but emotional... even if you’re with others, you still feel something missing every day.”*

**Question 3.** *What situations or experiences have made you more aware of the emotional impact of having a parent working abroad?*

### **3.1 Absence During Milestone Events**

Fifteen participants became most aware of parental absence during significant life events, where emotional presence is typically expected. These occasions amplify feelings of incompleteness, as achievements and celebrations lack shared parental acknowledgment. Such moments highlight the symbolic importance of presence beyond physical attendance, reinforcing emotional gaps within transnational family settings.

*“Everytime I celebrate my birthday... I sometimes feel empty knowing that my mother and father are the ones who brought me into this world... I deserve to celebrate my birthday with them.”*

*"Pag may events like graduation, birthday, or family day... minsan absent na lang ako... doon ko narerealize na iba pa rin yung presence." "During events like graduation or family day... sometimes I just don't attend... that's when I realize presence is still different." – Geuel*

### **3.2 Facing Problems Independently**

Situations involving academic or personal difficulties reinforced the reality of navigating challenges alone. Ten participants recognized the absence of parental guidance during critical decision-making moments, leading to forced independence. This awareness reflects how absence reshapes responsibility, where adolescents assume roles typically shared with or guided by parents.

*"Nagkaroon ako ng serious problem sa school... hindi ko alam gagawin ko... ang nangyari ako lang mag-isa nag-decide." "I had a serious problem in school... I didn't know what to do... in the end, I had to decide on my own."*

*"I had to face everything by myself... while other students had their parents... that's when it clicked no one's really coming for me."*

### **3.3 Limitations of Mediated Communication**

Although digital communication serves as a bridge, four participants highlighted its limitations during emotionally significant situations. Time differences, delayed responses, and lack of immediacy hinder meaningful interaction, often leading to unresolved misunderstandings and emotional distance. This underscores that virtual presence cannot fully substitute physical and emotional availability.

*"May misunderstanding sa chat... hindi agad naaayos... kaya parang mas lumalayo loob ko." "There are misunderstandings in chat... not resolved immediately... it makes me feel more distant."*

*"Gusto ko sana mag-open... pero dahil sa time difference at busy sila, hindi ko na lang tinutuloy... doon ko na-realize na kahit nandyan sila through chat, iba pa rin kapag physically present." "I wanted to open up... but because of time difference and they're busy, I didn't continue... that's when I realized that even if they're there through chat, it's still different when physically present."*

**Objective 2.** To explore how adolescents adapt to parental absence by managing their emotional well-being, health practices, and everyday responsibilities.

**Question 1.** *In what ways has your parent's absence influenced how you take care of your emotional or physical well-being?*

#### **1.1 Forced Independence and Early Responsibility**

Seven participants indicated that parental absence compelled adolescents to assume responsibilities typically managed by parents, shaping their approach to both physical and emotional self-care. Independence was not developed gradually but emerged as a necessity, influencing how participants manage daily routines, caregiving roles, and personal needs. This adaptation reflects a shift where adolescents take on adult-like responsibilities, often prioritizing function and survival over guided well-being.

*"I learned how to be independent... I even learned how to cook when I was grade 4 and preparing my own food for school... and most of all I am the one who took care of my siblings even when I am the youngest."*

*"Dahil wala sila, parang napilitan akong maging independent agad kahit ayoko... sometimes being independent is not a choice but a necessity sakin... parang ikaw na lang kasi bahala sa sarili mo." "Because they're not here, I was forced to be independent even if I didn't want to... independence became a necessity... it feels like you're the only one responsible for yourself."*

### **1.2 Emotional Suppression and Internal Coping**

In adapting to absence, five participants developed internal coping strategies characterized by emotional suppression and self-processing. Rather than seeking external support, adolescents relied on self-talk, distraction, or solitude to regulate emotions. This reflects an adaptive mechanism where emotional well-being is managed privately, often limiting opportunities for expression and support.

*“Sa emotional side, natuto akong kimkimin yung nararamdaman ko... hindi ako sanay mag-open kasi feeling ko kailangan kong maging strong.” “Emotionally, I learned to suppress what I feel... I’m not used to opening up because I feel like I need to be strong.”*

*“Emotionally naman hindi ako masyadong expressive... minsan kinakausap ko sarili ko, parang self-talk... pag mag-isa na lang ako, dun ko lang nafefeel lahat.” “Emotionally I’m not expressive... sometimes I talk to myself... when I’m alone, that’s when I feel everything.”*

### **1.3 Control-Based and Fluctuating Self-Management**

Three participants adapted by exerting control over routines and behaviors as a way to compensate for the absence of parental structure. However, this control is often unstable, fluctuating between periods of discipline and episodes of neglect. This pattern highlights how adaptation involves both attempts at regulation and struggles with consistency, shaped by emotional states such as anxiety or stress.

*“Mas naging defensive ako... may times na sobrang in control ako like inaayos ko own sched ko... pero may times din na bigla akong nawawala sa rhythm.” “I became more defensive... there are times when I’m very in control, like I organize my own schedule... but there are also times when I suddenly lose my rhythm.”*

*“I try to keep a routine... parang ayoko magkamali kasi wala akong fallback na magulang na tutulong agad... I try to stay composed kahit may pinagdadaanan.” “I try to keep a routine... it feels like I don’t want to make mistakes because I don’t have parents to immediately fall back on... I try to stay composed even when I’m going through something.”*

**Question 2.** *What challenges have you experienced in maintaining your health or daily routines while your parent is abroad?*

### **2.1 Lack of Supervision and Discipline Struggles**

Eight participants highlighted that the absence of parental monitoring created difficulties in maintaining discipline, particularly in sleep, eating, and daily routines. Without consistent guidance or reminders, adolescents struggled to regulate their habits, reflecting how parental presence plays a critical role in structuring everyday health behaviors.

*“Isa sa pinaka struggle ko is discipline talaga... walang nagre-remind or nagbabantay... minsan napupuyat ako kaka-phone or kakaisip.” “One of my biggest struggles is discipline... no one reminds or monitors me... sometimes I stay up late using my phone or overthinking.”*

*“Walang nagche-check kung okay pa ba ako... lahat self-driven, pero hindi naman araw-araw kaya mong i-push sarili mo.” “No one checks if I’m okay... everything is self-driven, but you can’t push yourself every day.”*

### **2.2 Emotional and Mental Exhaustion**

Four participants shared that maintaining routines while managing emotional strain resulted in mental fatigue among participants. Even when physical routines are followed, emotional exhaustion

persists, indicating that health challenges are not only behavioral but also psychological. This reflects the interconnected nature of emotional well-being and physical functioning.

*“Mentally drained na ako... okay ka physically, pero pagod ka na inside... may times na wala akong gana kumain kahit gutom ako.” “I’m mentally drained... physically you’re okay, but inside you’re tired... there are times I don’t feel like eating even if I’m hungry.”*

*“May mga araw na parang wala akong gana sa lahat... kahit simpleng bagay like maligo or kumain, parang ang bigat gawin.” “There are days I don’t feel like doing anything... even simple things like bathing or eating feel heavy.”*

### **2.3 Absence of Emotional Support System**

A key challenge identified by nine participants is the lack of immediate and meaningful emotional support from parents. While others may be present, participants emphasized that parental support remains distinct. This absence contributes to accumulated stress, emotional isolation, and reliance on self-management.

*“Kapag may problema, wala akong immediate na support system na parent... kahit may ibang kasama, iba pa rin kapag parent mo.” “When I have problems, I don’t have an immediate support system like a parent... even if others are there, it’s still different.”*

*“There’s no backup, I am the backup... even if I’m struggling physically or mentally, I just continue with my day.”*

**Question 3.** *What strategies, habits, or sources of support help you cope with the challenges of growing up with a parent working overseas?*

#### **3.1 Distraction and Engagement as Coping Mechanisms**

Five participants used activities such as schoolwork, media consumption, and hobbies to manage emotional stress. These strategies function as distractions that reduce overthinking and emotional burden. While effective in the short term, they often serve as avoidance rather than direct emotional processing.

*“Mahilig ako mag-music or manood ng series... parang escape ko siya kapag gusto ko muna iwasan yung stress.” “I like listening to music or watching series... it’s my escape when I want to avoid stress.”*

*“I distract myself a lot with schoolwork... social media... anything that keeps my mind occupied.”*

#### **3.2 Self-Regulation Through Routine and Acceptance**

Eight participants coped by establishing routines, practicing self-discipline, and gradually accepting their situation. This reflects an adaptive strategy where individuals attempt to regain control and stability despite emotional challenges. Acceptance serves as a cognitive coping mechanism that reduces resistance to their circumstances.

*“More on self-discipline... sinasali ko sarili ko sa school activities... parang doon ko binubuhos energy ko.” “More on self-discipline... I join school activities... that’s where I channel my energy.”*

*“Siguro pinaka coping ko talaga is acceptance... iniisip ko na temporary lang to... may hope pa rin ako na pag umuwi sila, maybe we can start again.” “My main coping is acceptance... I think this is temporary... I still hope that when they come back, we can start again.”*

## DISCUSSION

The findings clarify how prolonged parental absence reshapes adolescents' emotional conditions, relational patterns, and self-management practices. The data reveal that adolescents do not merely adjust to absence; rather, they reconstruct their emotional and relational frameworks in response to sustained distance. This addresses the primary inquiry by demonstrating that parental migration influences both internal emotional processes and external family interactions, while simultaneously shaping how adolescents manage their well-being and responsibilities.

Lyndon and Jenny (2023) asserts that transnational parenting alters intimacy through distance-mediated interaction. Reflected in the participants' experiences where communication persists but lacks emotional substance, indicating that relational continuity cannot be sustained through contact alone. It suggest that interaction without shared physical presence produces a form of connection that remains functionally intact yet emotionally insufficient. Muzingili (2025) notes that adolescents in migrant households experience simultaneous appreciation and emotional detachment. Findings extend this by showing that such duality is actively negotiated, where adolescents attempt to balance understanding with unmet emotional needs. This negotiation reflects an ongoing internal adjustment rather than a stable emotional condition. Fatima et al. (2021) explains that disrupted parental presence may result in protective emotional responses. Evident in the emergence of emotional guarding and reduced openness, suggesting that adolescents regulate vulnerability as a means of maintaining psychological stability. Such regulation indicates a shift from relational dependence toward self-contained emotional processing. Dawra (2025) state that emotional strain intensifies when communication lacks depth. Findings support this claim, as limited emotional exchange leads adolescents to perceive expression as ineffective, reinforcing withdrawal. This pattern suggests that absence does not only reduce interaction but also alters the perceived value of communication itself.

Langlais et al. (2024) argues that reduced parental presence weakens emotional attachment within families. This is reflected in participants' reported sense of non-belonging, even within supportive households, suggesting that emotional security is anchored in primary parental relationships. The persistence of this feeling indicates that structural support does not fully compensate for relational absence. Digital communication as sustaining a sense of connection across distance. Findings challenge this assumption by demonstrating that such communication becomes insufficient during emotionally demanding situations. This suggests that virtual interaction maintains continuity but does not fulfill the need for immediate emotional reassurance. Ruiz and Yabut (2024) observes that limited supervision accelerates adolescent autonomy. This is evident in participants' early assumption of responsibilities, including caregiving and self-management. However, the findings indicate that such autonomy develops under constraint, leading adolescents to prioritize functionality over balanced well-being.

The World Health Organization (2021) underscores the importance of supportive environments and guidance in shaping adolescents' mental health and behavioral routines. Consistent with this, the present findings reveal that participants exhibit irregular routines and inconsistent self-care in the absence of supervision, suggesting that limited guidance may contribute to fragmented health behaviors. This indicates that independence without guidance may result in fragmented health behaviors. Attia et al. (2022) explain that emotional strain can manifest in physical and behavioral patterns. Reflected in participants' experiences of fatigue, disrupted routines, and lack of motivation,

indicating that emotional conditions directly influence daily functioning. The interdependence of emotional and physical states highlights the complexity of adolescent well-being under parental absence. Coping as efforts to manage internal and external demands. Adolescents rely on distraction, routine-building, and self-dialogue as coping strategies, indicating attempts to maintain stability despite limited support. However, these strategies often prioritize endurance rather than emotional resolution, suggesting a form of adaptation that sustains functioning while leaving underlying strain unaddressed (Støre et al., 2025). Adolescence is widely recognized as a complex and multifaceted stage of development, typically spanning ages ten to nineteen, marked by significant and rapid transformations in biological, cognitive, emotional, and social domains (Favini et al., 2025). Resilience depends on access to supportive environments rather than individual capacity alone. It reinforces this by showing that adolescents develop coping mechanisms shaped by the availability and limitations of their surroundings. This indicates that resilience is constructed within constraints, rather than emerging purely from internal strength.

Drawing from these interpretations, the findings suggest a refinement of existing frameworks on adolescent adjustment under parental migration. Rather than categorizing outcomes as resilience or vulnerability, the results indicate a condition of adaptive self-reliance under relational limitation, where adolescents develop functional independence while navigating persistent emotional gaps. This formulation integrates both strength and constraint, offering a more comprehensive explanation of how adolescents sustain daily functioning in the absence of consistent parental presence. In response to the research questions, the findings demonstrate that prolonged parental absence reshapes emotional experiences through internal regulation and guardedness, alters family relationships through restructured interaction and partial substitution, and influences adaptation through self-reliant yet inconsistent management of well-being and responsibilities. These patterns indicate that adolescent adjustment within migrant households is best understood as an ongoing process of negotiation between absence, responsibility, and emotional need.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that prolonged parental absence due to overseas employment significantly reshapes the emotional experiences, family relationships, and health-related practices of adolescents. The findings show that adolescents do not simply experience isolated outcomes such as resilience or distress; rather, they undergo a complex and continuous adjustment process in which independence, emotional strain, and relational changes coexist. Adolescents develop maturity and responsibility, but these are accompanied by emotional restraint, trust difficulties, and a persistent sense of absence that influences how they perceive connection and belonging. Family relationships are maintained through communication, yet often lack emotional depth, while increased closeness with alternative caregivers does not fully compensate for parental presence, resulting in a sustained sense of partial belonging. In relation to their daily functioning, adolescents assume responsibility for managing their routines and well-being in the absence of consistent parental supervision. This self-reliance, however, develops without structured guidance, leading to fluctuating discipline, irregular health practices, and reliance on internalized coping strategies. Emotional strain is not separate from physical well-being, but is reflected in patterns such as fatigue, reduced motivation, and inconsistent self-care. Coping strategies such as distraction, routine-building, and acceptance enable adolescents to continue functioning, yet these often prioritize immediate stability rather than long-term emotional resolution.

Addressing the identified research gap, this study demonstrates that adolescents with OFW parents do not manage emotional experiences, family relationships, and health practices as separate domains; instead, these dimensions are continuously experienced and negotiated together in everyday

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life. The findings reveal that adolescent adjustment is not a fixed outcome but an ongoing, dynamic process in which emotions, relationships, and self-care are simultaneously regulated under conditions of limited guidance and parental absence. This integrated perspective clarifies how adolescents actively construct their daily functioning, thereby responding to the lack of existing explanations on how these interconnected aspects are lived and managed at the same time. Findings highlight the need for interventions that go beyond financial support, emphasizing the importance of strengthening emotional communication, structured guidance, and accessible psychosocial support systems for left-behind adolescents. Future research may further explore long-term developmental outcomes and the effectiveness of support mechanisms that address the interconnected nature of adolescents' emotional, relational, and health experiences.

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