



## Yayas as Mothers from a Distance

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**Abstract** – This study explored the experience of Filipina yayas as migrant mothers to care for their own children. This focused on gaining a more in-depth understanding of their mothering strategies and their interaction with their children. The framework of this qualitative study was informed by hermeneutic phenomenology, focusing on the lived experience of participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of the coping strategies of yayas in the Philippines. The participants of this study included Filipina nannies currently working in Metro Manila whose origins were from rural areas in the province. The sample size was three yayas who are in charge of taking care of a child or children in a household in Metro Manila. Data collection involved conducting individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. Data analysis followed the four step IPA methodology developed by Smith et al. (2009), which is iterative in nature. The issues of the Filipina yayas can be described in terms of their emotional experiences, mothering behaviors and practices from a far, and adaptation to their current situation. These broader issues created a portrait of the lived experience of the mothering from a distance of yayas working in the city. The implication for practice is that access to mental health assistance should be made available to migrant mothers such as yayas, particularly during their first few years away from their families.

**Keywords** – Filipina yayas, migrant mothers, mothering, phenomenology

### INTRODUCTION

Migrant mothers working far away from home face the challenges of assuming the traditional mother role to their children from a distance. There is evidence that migrant mothers struggle to maintain the proper balance between conventional nurturing style and the unconventional method of mothering from a distance (Parreñas, 2001; Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014). Accounts of the *double belonging* dilemma is well documented, with migrant mothers often reporting “your body is here but your heart is there” (Boccagni, 2012).

Driven by poverty and a lack of opportunities back home, millions of migrant workers have crossed international and regional borders in search of a better life for their families, including the mothers who left their children behind to work in the domestic care industry (Chib, 2014). Given the physical and emotional struggle experienced by migrant mothers who work as domestic caregiver or yaya, this study intends to explore the lived experience of yayas as migrant mothers. More specifically, the purpose of this study is to gain a more in-depth understanding of their mothering strategies and interaction with their children at home.

### Characteristics of Yayas as Migrant Mothers

Domestic care work is an undervalued occupation, yet it is essential for the economy and the household to function (Blackett, 2011). According to the Department of Labor and Employment (DLE, 2011) there are 1.9 million domestic care workers in the Philippines, many of whom came from rural areas such as Visayas regions, Bicol, Southern Tagalog and Northern Mindanao (Rappler, 2012). This figure, however, does not account for those undocumented which some suggest are roughly around 600,000 (De Guzman, 2014).

Yayas or nannies are domestic care workers who are primarily dedicated in caring for a child in a household. Nannies are typically defined as a woman from a different socioeconomic background who is not the mother of the child but provides childcare assistance to families who have the resources to pay for such services (Scheftel, 2012). Aside from caring for the children, some nannies or yayas also engage in a wide range of household chores. These include, cooking of meals, doing the laundry, and cleaning of the house (Jianxin & Daming, 2009).

In the Philippine context, there are a few salient characteristics that are common to Filipino nannies. One common characteristic among Filipino nannies is the



background of internal migration that led many to their current jobs in the city. Majority of the yayas in the Philippines are predominantly women, who left their own children behind in the watch of alternative guardians, in search for economic opportunities that will enable them to provide for their families back in the province (De Guzman, 2014).

### **Mothering from a Distance: Challenges Face by Yayas as Migrant Mothers**

Concepts about mothering is evolving, especially when women assume new social roles in the modern world. The emergence and rise of migrant mothers create an alternate concept of mothering called “transnational mother” or “mothering from a distance”. This mode of mothering is applied to the realm of mother-child relationship physically divided by geography (Boccagni, 2012). It is evident that distance mothering creates a whole range of challenges particularly in fulfilling their role as mothers in the midst of their physical absence. Among the struggles they encounter is the apparent irony of caring for their employer’s children at the expense of caring for their own children (Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014).

De Guzman (2014) studied the lived experiences of yayas and 13 of the participants, who themselves were mother, described the separation from their own children as deeply difficult and practically unbearable. Essentially, the pain of being away from their own family and children creates feelings of helplessness, loneliness, regret, and guilt (Parreñas, 2001). They are constantly anxious about their children’s well-being. Yayas as migrant mothers worry about the health and studies of younger children and safety and moral upbringing of teenage children. Mothers from distance can only assume the nurturing and caring role through proxy caregivers (Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014).

Mothering from distance brings with it stresses related not only to mothering but to marital and familial relationships as well. Fathers left behind often play an arbitrary role in childcare, leaving the caretaking process to other family members. Furthermore, they often put pressure on the marital union. Family members who serve as caretakers requires financial obligations, often perceiving them as “walking ATM” (Chib, Malik, Aricat, & Kadir, 2014). In some cases, re-adjustment upon family reunification creates another source of stress. The long absence may require them to adapt to the changes once they go back home to their family and community (Grande & Kerr, 1998).

For migrant mothers who practice mothering from a distance the role entails frequent communication and sending remittances (Boccagni, 2012). Chib et. al (2014) identified types of mothering identity base from experience. The *reluctant obsessive* is typified by constant monitoring and supervising. The *diverted professional* is characterized by provision of financial responsibilities at the expense of caring for their own children. The role of mothers as diverted professionals is to provide material security instead of a nurturer, providing physical and emotional comfort. The *remote-control parent* shared mothering responsibilities with caregivers, usually relatives, who act as an alternative guardian to provide intensive mothering. The *incomplete union* is characterized by the internalization of both responsibility and burden of being the primary parent.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

The framework of this qualitative study was informed by hermeneutic phenomenology, which puts primacy in uncovering the meaning of text and language in order to understand the experiences of individuals (Laverty, 2003). The process of interpretation can only occur by immersing oneself with the words of the participants, which in this study are represented in the interview transcripts (Laverty, 2003). Framed by the framework of hermeneutic phenomenology through the methodology of IPA, the objective of this study is to explore the experience of Filipina yayas as migrant mothers to care for their own children. The study will specifically focus on gaining a more in-depth understanding of their mothering strategies and their interaction with their children.

The rationale for these objectives was informed by the current state of the literature and the gap in knowledge within the larger topic of migrant mothers and yayas. First, mothering from a distance is characterized by as difficulty and emotional distress (Parreñas, 2001; De Guzman, 2014). Second, previous research studies with regard to mothering from a distance have not been based on the experiences of Filipino yayas. The entire experiences of Filipino yayas as migrant mothers may not be completely the same with their counterparts who crossed international borders instead of regional border because of the differences in sociocultural contexts.

### **MATERIALS AND METHODS**



The research design that was used is phenomenological in nature, focusing on the lived experience of participants in order to gain a deeper understanding of the coping strategies of yayas in the Philippines. This approach was selected because phenomenology facilitates descriptions of phenomena based on the direct experiences of individuals' internal meaning and perceptions. Through the implementation of the IPA framework, the expectation is that this study will be able to provide an in-depth understanding and description of the mothering experience of Filipino yayas as migrant mothers.

### Participants

The participants of this study included Filipina nannies currently working in Metro Manila whose origins were from rural areas in the province. At least one year of experience as a yaya was necessary in order to be eligible to be part of this study. Domestic care workers who are not in charge with taking care of the children in the household were excluded from the sample.

The sample size was three yayas who are in charge of taking care of a child or children in a household in Metro Manila. The recruitment of potential participants was conducted through the personal contacts of the researchers. Invitation to participate to the research study may entail personal correspondence with personal contacts or social media advertisement. If data saturation is not achieved with the target three participants, more participants will be recruited in until data saturation becomes apparent.

### Procedure

Prior to data collection, informed consent of the participants was secured. A brief discussion of the informed consent was performed in order to clarify some of the important procedures of the study such as confidentiality and withdrawal. The interviewer also articulated the scope of the participation of the participants, including the member checking process that occurred several days after the interviews.

Data collection involved conducting individual face-to-face semi-structured interviews. The interviewer asked several pre-determined open-ended questions, but the flow of the discussion was dependent on the responses of each participant. The interview guide only served as a framework for a more purposive questioning, but enough flexibility was exercised in order to all participants to be as descriptive and in-depth with their

responses. The interview was audio-recorded in order to facilitate the transcription process in the latter phases of the study.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis followed the four step IPA methodology developed by Smith et al. (2009). IPA is iterative in nature, which means that certain aspects of the data analysis process will be repeated multiple times. The four-member team will have one primary coder who will be responsible for coding all three interview transcripts. As secondary coders who will facilitate triangulation, each of the three remaining members of the team will be assigned one transcript to verify or check the initial coding results conducted by the primary coder. Discrepancies were resolved by discussing the issue until a consensus can be reached between the primary and secondary coders.

The first step is data familiarization. This entailed reading and rereading the interview transcripts in order to gain an overview of the scope of the responses of each of the participants in the interview. Initial impressions and interpretations were recorded in order to become more familiar with the data and their possible contribution to the study (Larkin & Thompson, 2012).

The second step is the line by line coding of the transcripts. This coding was based on the identification of objects of concern (OC) and experiential claims (EC) (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). OC refers to a particular event or scenario that the participants broached during the interview, whereas EC is the meaning such as feelings or emotions attached to these identified OCs. The primary coder and the secondary coders coded independently. The independently derived codes were compared and contrasted. As noted earlier, discrepancies were resolved by discussing the differences until a consensus was reached.

The third step is the organization of the OCs and the ECs in a spreadsheet. Codes were assigned based on the essence of the participants words. For each thematic code, the primary and secondary coders worked independently to assign the clustered OCs and ECs with a code. Discrepancies in interpretations were again resolved by discussing the differences until a consensus is reached.

The fourth step only commenced once the first three steps for each transcript has been completed. The fourth step is the search of connection among the emergent themes (Smith et al., 2009). In this step, the five IPA elements are identified: (a) abstraction (i.e, the patterns



among emergent themes between participants), (b) polarization (i.e., differences between participants), (c) contextualization (i.e., description of the context where, when, or with whom the themes occurred), (d) function (e.g, the role of tone, silences, and word choice) and (e) numeration (i.e., frequency of themes occurred).

As an iterative process, the themes were revised multiple times in order to fit the thematic data structure that adequately answers the research question of this study (Larkin & Thompson, 2012). Consistent with IPA, data will be presented as super-ordinate (ie., broader category) and sub-ordinate themes (i.e, specific themes) in the findings section (Smith et al., 2009). These themes will be discussed in narrative format, supported by direct quotes from the participants and providing interpretations on how these themes are related with each other.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results follow the the four step IPA methodology developed by Smith et al. (2009) and outline the lived experiences of yayas in mothering their children from a distance.

### Demographic profile

Two of the subjects were in their mid-40s, while the third was only in her early 30s. Two of them were single mothers, while the other was married. One of the single mothers had only one child, while the others had four and five children. The eldest subject had mostly grown children, with the youngest at 15 years old. She also now has a grandchild from her married daughter. All subjects left their children primarily to the grandmother, the subject's mother.

Only one of the subjects experienced being an employee previous to working as a yaya, while only one had previous experience as a stay-in caregiver for an elderly person. One was a washerwoman on a daily wage, while the other also earned income from being an itinerant vendor.

Two of the subjects found work as yayas through friends, while the other was recruited by an agency. All of the subjects were hired to care for children younger than 10 years old.

### Physical separation from children

All of the yayas interviewed in this study have been working as local migrants for at least four years. Two of the subjects left their children in the island of Luzon, while the other left hers on an island province in the Visayas region. Although these mothers communicate

regularly with their children via mobile phone technology, they find it difficult to return home to visit their children on a regular basis, especially those whose children are in the Visayas as this would entail greater expense. Even the subject whose children lived in a nearby province would rather not spend her money on transportation expenses to go home for a visit.

"[M]insan nagtatanong (ang nanay ko) kailan ka ba uuwi? Eh sabi ko wala pa akong pera, paguwi ko, sayang pamasaha, padala ko na lang. Tsaka, 'layo, traffic pa."

As to be expected, the subjects whose children live in the Visayas region make it home for a visit once a year, but stays for a month. One of the other two subjects visit her children once a month, while the other visits once a week.

### Perspective of childcare as work

When asked how they liked their current work as yaya, the subjects noted that the work was more financially viable compared to being an employee. As yayas on the main live with their employer, they avoid expenses for transportation, accommodation, and food. In this way, they receive their salaries without any deduction and are able to send more to their families in the province. Also, they noted that from their work as yayas, they were able to save money.

"[Ayoko na yung empleyado,] kase walang naaiipon ... may pinsan kase akong saleslady, maganda siya pero pagdating niya sa probinsya, walang pera, mas may napundar pa ako sa kanya ... pupunta sya sa bahay makikicharge kase wala silang ilaw."

On the other hand, they noted that the job of being a yaya entailed sacrifice on their part to ensure the welfare of their children.

"Kasi trabaho nga naman e, kailangan trabaho. Wala naman madali sa trabaho. Kung ginusto mo, kailangan tiisin mo. Kung anuman problema mo, sakripisyo din yan sa pamilya e. Tiisin mo lang, ganoon talaga yun. Di mo rin masabi na ok lang, may mga times syemre na mahirap. Yun lang, mga ganun lang."

### First experience as yayas

The youngest described her first experience as yaya as difficult and tiring, as she had no prior experience of caring for young children. She also noted that it was more the heavy sense of being morally responsible for a young child not her own that was difficult to manage.

"Mahirap kase alam mo na bata, kung anong mangyari e sagutin ng yaya."



One subject remarked that her being susceptible of being misinterpreted or misjudged by her young ward's parents.

"[M]aldita yung bata ganun ... nagsusumbong ng mali sa magulang. Nagsisinungaling siya."

One of the subjects also noted that her being a *yaya* was something of an eye-opener for her, if not a shock, as it was definitely what she had in mind in the future for herself.

"(Naiyak ako kanina kasi) Syempre, hindi ko kase akalain na magiging *yaya* ako, di ba?"

This was probably because she was the youngest of the subjects and, as such, had more access to information through technology compared to the other two.

On the other hand, the eldest of the subjects remarked that the job was no different from raising her own children.

### **Yaya duties & relationship with ward**

As *yayas*, the subjects were expected to minister primarily to their wards. Since all the subjects' current wards were grade schoolers, they were tasked to prepare the child for school, from preparing the school uniforms for the next day to dressing the children and preparing their break time snacks. One of the subjects also stayed in school to wait for her ward who only had three hours of class time. Those whose wards were old enough to stay in school on their own did general housework while waiting for their wards to come home. One subject did the family's laundry.

When the children arrive home from school, the *yayas* took them out of their school uniforms, fed and bathed them, and prepared the children's school things for the next day. Come bed time, the *yayas* prepared them for bed and put them to sleep. During weekends and holidays or when school is out for the year, the *yayas* supervised their wards' playtime.

On the whole, the subjects noted that their relationship with their wards has stabilized over time, as the children had gotten used to their *yayas*. As the children grew older, the subjects noted that they no longer needed to be monitored so closely.

### **Relationship with own children**

Asked to describe their relationship with their own children, the subjects said that they were not emotionally close to them due to the long term separation from each other.

"Parang mahirap din kasi di ko nga sila – kahit pa sabihin mo na nagbibigay ako ng (pera) sa kanila, iba pa rin yung nakakasama ko sila, di ba. Iba pa rin yung

naarugaan ko, yung nababantayan ko, nagagabayan ko, napagsilbihan ko."

Given that all three subjects had left the grandmother (i.e., the subject's mother) in charge of the children, the latter had grown closer to their grandmother.

"Syempre, parang di naman din ako nagaano sa nanay ko kasi siya nagaalaga, pero may time na parang nagseselos ka. (dahil mas malapit sa lola)."

The eldest subject also remarked that since her children were mostly grown and had their own lives, it was no longer to get them to meet up with her at home.

"Ok lang naman ... mga binata na din. So ayun minsan nagkakatagpo, nagsabay ng kain. Minsan, di na. Kasi minsan, nasa mga barkada... Ang nadadatnan ko yung apo ko tsaka yung anak kong babae."

But she also noted that the relationship depended on the child's personality or position in the family.

"Sa panganay, ok naman. ... [M]eron din akong anak na malambing ,, Kunyare ihahatid ka, hahatid ka na hanggang kanto, kaya lang manghilingi pa rin ng pera (laughs)."

The subjects also noted that their children would rather have their mother home.

"Gusto na nila talaga akong pahintuin, sabi ko saka na pag tapos na pagaaral tsaka na lang ako hihinto."

"[M]insan nagtatampo (ang mga anak). Kailan (ka) uuwi, ka nila?"

Asked what they missed most while apart from their children, the subjects shared that they regret not being able to monitor their children, especially the younger ones, in either their schooling or day-to-day activities.

"[H]indi ko alam kung anong ginagawa nya kase nga andito ako sa Maynila. Hindi ko sya nagagabayan.... Hindi ko siya nagagabayan sa assignment niya or projects."

The subjects also shared that they regret not being able to serve their children as most mothers do.

"[H]indi mo na sila mapaglaba. Hindi kagaya yun nasa bahay ka, paguwi mo, kahit anong trabaho ... Mapagluto, kung may iluluto."

Overall, the subjects shared that they miss experiencing the family as one or being together as a family in general. They miss sharing activities as a family, such as family outings or simply sharing a meal together.

"[D]ati kais lagi kami umaalis e, nagba-bonding kami. Kasama ko sila, namamsyal. Nagsasalo-salo din kami."

The eldest of the subjects, though, shared that she missed sharing sweet moments with her children.

"Wala na eh... bihira na eh (ang mga heart-to-heart talk sa mga anak). ... Yun, sabay sabay na kumakain. Tapos yun ... o, sandok mo ko kanin, parang ganun lang. Nag-



aano naman sila. Ano mo ako tubig, parang ganun na lang. Yun, nabgigibay naman.”

### Communicating & monitoring from afar

The subjects use mobile cellphone technology to communicate and monitor their own children. They would call up or chat with their children and their grandmother. On average, the subjects would communicate with their families one to three times a week.

These conversations would cover a wide variety of topics, such as reminding the children to mind their grandmother, asking about each other's welfare (kumustahan), making plans for when the subject would come home for a visit, or the children asking for money. The youngest subject shared, however, that her son, the youngest among the subjects' children, would not stay long on the phone, handing it over to his grandmother, as he was “too busy playing.” It is interesting to note that these topics do not include any issues or problems that may need threshing out or resolution. It would seem that the subjects and their children deliberately avoid discussing problems over the phone.

Discipline is managed very carefully over the cellphone. The subjects said that they would use straight talk, not sugar-coating issues, with their own children. They shared that they would talk to their children as adults and not “baby” them. One subject said that she would resort to threats to come home to discipline her child.

“Sabi ko sa kanya sige, uuwi ako dyan kapag matigas ang ulo mo. Hayun, sinusunod niya, kasi ayaw nya na umuwi ako e. ... [K]asi kapag andun ako, istrikto ako e.”

As mentioned above, these mothers leave their children primarily to grandmother, but they also endorse, to the spouse or other relatives, problems that the children may encounter.

“[T]inatawagan ko siya everyday, pero yung Mama ko ang sumasagot. Tinatanong ko kung anong ginagawa ni John. Sinasabi ni Mama, andun, kumakain o naglalaro ganun, o kaya naghahanap siya ng friends na makakausap nya.”

“Tatawag ako sa kanila. Tapos iisa-isahin ko kung ano problema, sa pagaaral kung halimbawa, may patawag sa akin pero di ako makapunta, mga hipag ko pinapapunta ko dun pag kailangan ng teacher.”

The eldest subject, because her eldest child is now in his 20s, endorses the younger children to him.

“Minsan ka-chat ko (ang panganay na anak), ikaw na bahala diyan kung ano ginagawa nila.”

Her experience is somewhat different from the other subjects, given that her most of her children are now grown up. She finds it difficult to control her grown sons' relationship with each other. This is aggravated by the fact that the children feel closer to their grandmother.

“Minsan, halimbawa, may kasalanan, nagalit ako doon, kakampihan ng nanay (lola). So, yu,n magtatalo-talo na, kaya minsan, pag uuwi, ‘wag ka na lang iimik. Kaya minsan nga, pag nagpa-uwi nanay ko, pag may problema, di na kaya. Uwi ka na dito? Eh ano gagawin ko? Magsasayang ako pamasaha? Mag-aaway lang kami? O, e di, ‘wag na. Tama na yun minsan na lang (laughs). ... So, minsan, pag na-uwi Kuya Joel ko, ayun, pinagsasabihan sila.”

### Managing separation from own children

The subjects shared that it was difficult to manage the fact that they were separated from their own children. Loneliness was a real emotion for them. That they worry over the safety of their children, especially the younger ones, made the separation more difficult to live with.

“Yung parang nagwo-worry baka kung anong mangyari sa kanya kapag nakikipaglaro sa ibang bata. Kasi lumalabas yun ng bahay e, naghahanp ng mga kalaro kase walang bata sa bahay, sya lang e.”

The eldest of the subjects shared that it was difficult to deal with her fond memories of her children, especially at night.

“[M]ay time na — ah, minsan pagkatulog, di ba, parang ang — ang hirap na, di kagaya nung maliliit (yung mga bata).”

They shared the sense of being a failure as a mother. “Pero mahirap din kasi malayo ako, di ko na sila naasakaso, di ko na masyado nakikita, napapbayaan ko na lahat. Yung pagasiakso ng pagkain nila, damit nila, pagluluto ... Pinapasa-Diyos ko na lang kasi di ko naman talaga nababantayan. Sabihin na nating nagkulang din talaga ako.”

However, they did cite several coping strategies, such as reminding themselves that relatives, such as the children's grandmother, were present to care for the children. Also, they shared that their wards provided a welcome distraction from their loneliness and feelings of regret. More importantly, the subjects remind themselves of their priorities: the welfare of their children.

“Syempre, malungkot, pero kailangan e. Kailangan praktikal lang. Yun ngang iba dyan, sama-sama pero walang makain. Yung mga mapera nga, nagpupunta pa nga ng ibang bansa din ... [K]asama mo nga, di mo naman mabili yung gusto nya. Oo, makakakain nga kasi andun sa probinsya, pero yung mga gusto nya, hindi yun mabibili. ... [K]asi, syempre, wala sya sa tabi ko, pero kelangan e. Di pa time para magsama kami.”



“Mahirap kasi di mo kasama anak mo, sa una talaga, pero ngayon medyo matagal-tagal na, tanggap ko na din. At natitiis ko na rin, nakayanan ko na naman.”

In the end, the subjects learned that practicality trumps loneliness and other negative feelings brought about by separation from their own children.

### **Making it up to their own children**

The subjects shared that they see to it that they communicate with their children frequently and on a regular basis. During these calls, the subjects make sure to talk in a calm tone of voice.

“Kung mahal mo yung mga anak mo, kahit di mo mapano sa kanila, sinasabi lang na mag-ayos sila. Kahit ganito lang ako, mahal ko sila. ... kinakausap ko na sila ng mahinahon. Yung parang may pag mamahal din.”

They make promises over the phone to spend quality time with their children when they get home to make up for the inability to send more money.

“[M]jinsan, pag may pera ako, binibigyan ko ng pera. {Pero pag wala,} kinakausap ko, sabi ko anak pasensya ka na wala ako, di ko na kayo naanuhan. Sabi ko, paguwi ko babawi ako, pasyal tayo, kakain tayo, mga ganyan. Kinakausap ko din sila. Di mo rin naman sila mapagsabsabay bilihan kasi yung sahod mo, kaya paisa-isa lang din.”

They also remind their children of the reason why their mother is away from home.

“{Sinasabi ko} kaya ko ‘to ginagawang paghihirap ko, para sa inyo din, kaya magayos kayo.”

Once home, the subjects make sure to do motherly duties, such as going to the market to buy ingredients to cook the children’s favorite meals. They also bring home gifts or “pasalubong” for the children. One subject makes sure to give whatever extra money she has for the children’s spending money, although another says she goes shopping for the child’s needs, instead of giving money.

“Hindi (binibigyan ng pera), kasi masasanay sya e. ... [B]ibilhan ko na lang siya ng stock na biscuit or basta mga tinapay siya.”

The subjects also make sure to enjoy moments with all their children together, either by going on a family outing or simply enjoying a meal together.

“[P]inasyal ko siya, tapos nilulutuan ko sya ng mga gusto nyang pagkain. Parang bumabawi lang. Tapos magsi-swimming kami kasi maraming beach sa probinsya.”

The eldest subject shared that sometimes she tries to make sweet moments happen with her children, such as making them serve her in small ways.

“(Kapag nakauwi), yun magpapaluto, minsan nagsasabi na magluluto ako or either “oh ito iluto mo.” Yung panganay ko kasi ma-ano naman magluto eh ... Pag-uuwi ako ... o, sandok mo ‘ko kanin, parang ganun lang. Nag-aano naman sila. Ano mo ako tubig, parang ganun na lang yun.”

But she also shared that there were moments when she felt blessed having a son like her eldest.

“[Y]ung panganay ko kasi, medyo ipit sa pera eh. Pero pag lalambingin mo yun, “Uy, penge naman, wala na akong pamasaha!” Kahit may pera ka ... [M]ay time na nagbibigay, may time na hindi. Masarap na binigyan ka kahit di mo sabihan. Bibigyan ka. “Uy, buti naman binigyan mo ako, pinagpaguran mo!” Di ba, sarap na kahit di mo hingian. Pag inabutan ka, ang sarap ng pakiramdam ng ganun.”

### **Discussion**

The mothering of yayas working in the city is characterized by several interrelated experiences and perceptions. These issues can be described in terms of their emotional experiences, mothering behaviors and practices from a far, and adaptation to their current situation. These broader issues created a portrait of the lived experience of the mothering from a distance of yayas working in the city.

The emotional stress of being away from their children has been established as a common experience of yayas (De Guzman, 2014; Parrenas, 2001). Being away from their own family and children creates feelings of helplessness, loneliness, regret, and guilt (Parreñas, 2001). This current study supports these findings but further expounded on the emotional toll that migrant mothers experience as a result of being away from their children and families. For instance, there was a perception among the yayas that there is emotional distance between them and their children. This experience appears to be more salient if the children were still young because participants whose children were already older were less bothered by this observation of emotional distance.

Another core experience of yayas is that perception that their responsibilities at home have been neglected. Previous studies on migrant mothers indicated that mothers from a distance can only assume the nurturing and caring role through proxy caregivers (Chib et al., 2014; Peng & Wong, 2016). This study highlights the role of father and other family members in substituting the responsibilities of migrant mothers to their own children, which includes basic homecare, disciplining, and schooling. With the exception of their husbands, this



study also suggests that proxy caregivers tend to be women in the family such as sister in law or the older daughter. This could be reflective of the matriarchal nature of the Filipino society wherein women are expected to be more involved in the rearing of children.

The nature of the communication between yayas and their own children at home has been described as primarily safe, straightforward, and evasive, focusing less on deeper issues or problems. This study showed that migrant mothers do not have the time to engage in prolonged or protracted parenting, which meant that conversations tend to be less affectionate and more generic. For instance, common topics that are discussed by migrant mothers and their children include money, asking to take care of the elderly, and general questions about each other's welfare. This type of communication could be indicative of the emotional distance that has developed between migrant mothers and their children.

Another common experience of migrant mothers is trying to compensate for perceived shortcomings, which lead to various behaviors and decisions. It is common that migrant mothers experience regrets and guilt for being away from their families (Parreñas, 2001). This experience of regret and guilt could explain why participants were more likely to compensate by giving money through remittances, sending gifts, and giving in to the demands/requests of their children. Participants experienced reluctance to say no to their children because of the perception that fulfilling their children's wish would be their way to compensate for their absence.

Despite these challenges and problems, migrant mothers appear to eventually reach a state of adjustment and acceptance of their current situations. This experience highlights their resilience, which has been previously found to be a common quality among migrant workers who have left their families behind in order to earn money (To, So, & Kwok, 2018). This study, however, showed that this acceptance and adjustment take time to develop. As stated earlier, migrant mothers often experience various emotional challenges particularly during their first few years being away from their children (De Guzman, 2014; Parrenas, 2001).

The aforementioned themes and associated data led to the detailed description of the experiences of yayas on mothering from a distance. Being away from their children create various emotional struggles that could be particularly bothersome during the first few years as migrant workers. Participants were aware of the different aspects of their motherhood that they had to sacrifice in order to earn a living for their family.

However, demonstrating resilience and acceptance, migrant workers eventually learn how to cope and focus on the bigger picture on why they have chosen to be away from their families and children.

### Limitations

The present study was a qualitative study ( $N = 3$ ) and there are limits to the methodology we chose for this study (IPA), particularly in terms of the nature of how the data were interpreted, which can be influenced by subjectivity. This was addressed by having multiple coders in order to resolve discrepancies and possible biases. Additionally, the participants were given enough space to talk about what they wanted, which may have led to data that contained extraneous or non-relevant information. However, this facilitated the development of rapport and allowed the participants to be more in control of what they wanted to talk about. Finally, the sample may be considered a limitation in two ways. First, the sample was small and relatively homogenous, which may suggest that all central experiences with regard to mothering from a far have not been exhausted.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The implication for practice is that access to mental health assistance should be made available to migrant mothers such as yayas, particularly during their first few years away from their families. These migrant mothers are vulnerable to feelings of helplessness, loneliness, regret, and guilt (Parreñas, 2001). Local health services should be able to establish mechanisms that allow for the dissemination of not only education about mental health, but also the awareness that such services exist and available. If presented with an opportunity of helping migrant mothers, counselors and psychologists should also make an effort to view their experiences ideographically in order to truly capture their unique challenges and issues. However, background knowledge of the common struggles of migrant mothers and their psychological functioning could facilitate the process of understanding their individual challenges.

The experiences of yayas that capture the unique Filipino context remains under-researched. The implication for future research is that more studies should be undertaken that will extend some of the unique findings of the current study. More research may be useful on the process of how migrant mothers eventually transition from the more emotionally challenging first few years to the more adapted and accepting stance later on. Focusing on this topic could further unpack the





conceptual experiences of mothering from the perspectives of Filipino migrant mothers. Expanding the sample size could that considers other demographic variables could also lead to new information that could further enlighten the experiences of Filipino migrant workers and their mothering.

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