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Yaya: Philippine Domestic Care Workers, the Children They Care for, and the Children They Leave Behind

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Abstract

The domestic and care labor sector is integral to the economic and social fabric of almost every nation. Although there has been increasing attention to the plight and experiences of international migrant workers within this field, less is known about the experiences of rural-to-urban migrants employed in this same sector. This study focuses on “yayas”—domestic workers caring for children in affluent families in the Philippines and draws from fieldwork and interviews conducted in Quezon City. Participants were female “yayas” caring for young children while they themselves were separated from their own offspring, most of whom were left behind in their rural communities. Interviews evoked themes reflecting a convergence of broad social and economic issues (e.g., rural poverty), gender norms and roles (e.g., the role of women in raising children), and traditional notions regarding family and parenting (e.g., the role of parents in children’s upbringing, obligations of extended family) all together resulting in a heavy personal burden and transformed parenting strategies in light of spatial distance (e.g., remittances, mediated contact). Interviews revealed themes specific to the experience of being a worker in the care sector, including the nature of the relationship between the “yaya” and her charge, and the “yaya” and her employer. Although findings reflect themes that are consistent with the larger body of work on the experiences of transnational parenting among overseas Filipino workers, the current data suggest some unique patterns that reflect access to fewer economic and social resources among internal migrants in this study.

Keywords: internal migration, domestic workers, care workers, Philippines

LABORERS who leave their families to take on jobs abroad have not only increased in number but have had the challenges in their lives revealed in recent studies (Baldassar, Kilkey, Merla, & Wilding, 2014; Sarti, 2008). A case in point is the rich body of research that looks at the lives of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs), many of whom fill jobs as laborers or other “nonskilled” labor in Asia, Europe, and North America (National Statistics Office, 2012). The Philippines has one of the highest out-migration rates in the world, and research on OFWs has shed light on numerous important issues including implications of immigration and labor policy on migrants’ rights and

well-being (Stenum, 2011), gender role dynamics and care structures within Filipino society (Parrenas, 2001, 2005), the transformation of family relations in light of spatial and temporal distance (Cabanés & Acedera, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011), and the socioemotional outcomes of children left behind (Asis, 2006). In contrast, less is known about issues faced by internal migrants who enter into domestic and care labor.

The present study focuses on *yayas*—domestic workers caring for children in affluent families in the Philippines, who themselves have left their own children in rural areas in the care of alternative guardians. The focus of this investigation is the complex experience of

separation from one's own child while working to care for children in more affluent families, as well as women's conceptualizations of their roles as mothers and caregivers in light of the broader context of poverty, migration, and transformed family contexts. This study takes on a hermeneutic phenomenological approach (van Manen, 1990) that aims to provide an in-depth account of the phenomenon from the perspective of those who are experiencing it as interpreted by the researcher.

Domestic Workers: Essential But Invisible

Domestic and care work play a critical role in the economic and social well-being of almost every country (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, UNEGEEW, 2013). Domestic labor is an important source of jobs that employs 52 million individuals and accounts for 3.6% of all salaried work worldwide (International Labor Organization, ILO, 2011). Those figures, however, likely underestimate true numbers, as countries do not typically count individuals below the legal working age and many domestic workers are employed without formal contracts. Some estimates put the actual number at 100 million. Domestic work is an especially important source of labor for women who fill 83% of domestic jobs worldwide, with this figure as high as 92% in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Additionally, domestic workers perform a multitude of duties that allow for the maintenance of households and for the care of individuals—allowing employers to enter into the workforce to fill higher skilled jobs or otherwise maintain or reach a desired lifestyle (Luebker, 2013). Several current and projected trends suggest growth in the need for domestic workers in the near future including the increased entry of women into the workforce paired with almost global gender norms for women to perform household duties, increases in segments of the population that need care (e.g., ageing populations in some countries), and simply an increasing demand to maintain or achieve a certain lifestyle that necessitates additional domestic assistance (UNEGEEW, 2013). Nonetheless, domestic and care laborers are often devalued within society and have limited access to legal protections or institutional supports.

The Philippine Context: Poverty, Migration, and Domestic Work Intertwined

The Philippine Department of Labor and Employment (DLE, 2011) reports that in 2010, there were 1.9 million individuals in the country employed as domestic workers. Consistent with global estimates, these figures likely underestimate the true number, which some suggest lies closer to 2.5 million (Gamlin, Camacho, Ong, Guichon, & Hesketh, 2013; Sayres, 2007). The DLE survey further indicates that approximately 30% of domestic workers live in their employers' homes, that most "live-in" jobs are populated by women (84.5%), that they average 66 hours of work per week, and earn an average daily wage of PhP (Philippine pesos) 133.20, which is approximately US\$3.

Migration, poverty, and domestic work are heavily intertwined. Many domestic workers in the Philippines, particularly those in urban areas, hail from far-flung provinces and migrate as a strategy for economic survival. Indeed, poverty is a pervasive problem in the country that affects almost 28% of the entire population (National Statistical Coordination Board, 2013)—with poverty thresholds defined as the minimum amount of income needed to secure food, calculated at PhP7821 (US\$179) per month for a family of five. Almost 80% of the population who are poor lives in rural areas (Rural Poverty Portal, RPP, 2013).

Although it is clear that paid domestic work in the Philippines is a gendered phenomenon, it is difficult to ascertain what percentage of domestic workers are mothers who have children left behind in rural areas. Approximately half of all domestic workers in the Philippines are married and 40% are below the age of 35 (DLE, 2011). Thus, like OFWs more often represented in the literature (e.g., Fresnoza-Flot, 2009; Parrenas, 2005), domestic care workers within the Philippines are predominantly young, of childbearing age, and likely, numerous undergo extended periods of family separation and disruptions in the typical family context.

The Filipino Family and Long-Distance Parenting

Philippine society has been characterized in research as highly collective, hierarchical, and family oriented

(Grimm, Church, Katigbak, & Reyes, 1999; Root, 2005). And although the country ranks quite high in gender equality by many measures (World Economic Forum, 2013), there are clear gender divides in the domestic and economic domains. Males are typically expected to be the breadwinner whereas wives contribute to economic decision making and manage the family budget. (In reality, this role is often constrained; see Eder, 2006 for discussion). Women are expected to carry out domestic duties, and mothers are expected to be the main caregiver responsible for the day-to-day maintenance and nurturance of children (Liwag, de la Cruz, & Macapagal, 1999). In light of the persistent traditional roles and the centrality of family in Philippine society and everyday life (Andres & Ilada-Andres, 1987; Root, 2005), maternal absence may pose an exceptional burden both on the mother who is unable to perform her parenting duties in the traditional sense and the children and family members left behind (Asis, Huang, & Yeoh, 2004; Parrenas, 2001).

Research on maternal absence among Filipino families as a result of internal migration is sparse. However, there is a significant body of work that documents the experiences of overseas Filipino migrants. For example, Parrenas (2001, 2005) has examined the experiences of OFWs in the United States, Italy, and other nations. Not surprisingly, mothers reported severe emotional distress and a sense of loss given the absence of direct involvement in their children's lives. Other researchers have similarly documented the severe emotional toll on the women who live apart from their children, negative socioemotional impacts on children left behind, and substantial burden on alternative caregivers who have to take over primary caregiving duties while the mother is away (Asis et al., 2004; Edillon, 2008; Pratt, 2009, 2012; Reyes, 2008). Other researchers have identified the transformed ways by which OFWs "parent" their children across distance, for instance, using remittances and electronically mediated communication such as cell phones, Skype, and social media (McKay, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011).

The case of rural-to-urban internal migrants working in the domestic sector is not as well understood. Although sharing many similarities, domestic migrants differ somewhat from their peers who migrate abroad. Internal migrants are typically younger and

have fewer resources than their international counterparts. Overall, they have less education, originate from poorer areas of the country, and have fewer years of work experience (ILO, 2013). Internal and international migrants each have unique challenges. There are Philippine laws specifically protecting overseas migrants (e.g., Republic of the Philippines Act 8042) and substantial institutional support for facilitating their employment abroad (Rodriguez, 2008). OFWs are celebrated within the current Philippine context and hailed as the *bagong bayani* (new heroes) in popular media. Nonetheless, OFWs face serious risks and individual- and institutional- level abuses (see Stenum, 2011), and many are burdened with legalities of international border crossing and issues of acculturation (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009). The experience of internal migrants and their status within Filipino society differ somewhat from OFWs. In particular, fewer institutional supports are available for internal migrants, and they typically earn less than OFWs. For example, although the official minimum wage for live-in domestic workers in Manila is US\$58 per month (Republic of the Philippines Act 10361), in Hong Kong it is set at US\$505 (Shadbolt, 2013). Thus, though there might be substantial overlap in the experiences of overseas workers and internal migrants working within the domestic field, their experiences of parenting from a distance may differ.

Study Goals and Theoretical Approach

Internal migrants working in the domestic and care sector merit scholarly attention for several reasons. First, domestic and care workers represent an integral component of the social and economic fabric of almost every nation, and this sector of the labor force is expected to grow substantially (ILO, 2013). In the Philippines, the employment of domestic workers is deeply embedded within society (Sayres, 2007), and almost 6% of households employ domestic workers (ILO, 2011). Yet, we know little about their experiences, their personal challenges, and the factors that impact on their well-being. Second, although there is substantial research on the sociopolitical underpinnings of international migration and the impact on individual and family well-being, we know less about

the experiences of internal migrants who represent a larger population and who typically have access to even fewer resources than international migrants (International Organization for Migration, IOM, 2012). Finally, our current understanding of family and parenting needs to incorporate social, demographic, and cultural change. As transitions within the caregiving context arise, for example, as a result of migration; significant shifts in human development and family functioning are likely to emerge (Greenfield, 2009; Kagitcibasi, 2007). Given that internal migration and family separation are becoming increasingly common, understanding family life and parenting in light of workrelated parental separation is important.

The goal of this study is to develop a close understanding of the lived experience of Filipina internal migrant workers employed as *yayas* or domestic workers employed to care for children. The study focuses on the experience of parent–child separation and the experience of caring for children while away from one’s own. A hermeneutic phenomenological (HP) approach (van Manen, 1990) is employed to develop a comprehensive and rich description and understanding of this experience. In HP, the goal is not to generate theory or generalizable trends. Instead, the phenomenon under study is closely examined from the subjective perspective of those who are undergoing the experience and as interpreted by the researcher. As there is paucity in research that examines the experiences of mothers employed as *yayas*, HP is especially helpful in that it can generate rich descriptions and preliminary understanding of the experience.

Methods

Participants

A purposive sample of 14 Filipina women was recruited for this study. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 54 years and all were employed as full-time, live-in, domestic workers. All the women had broad housekeeping duties (e.g., cleaning, washing clothes); however, their main responsibility was to take care of either a young child ($n = 12$), a teenager ($n = 1$), or a developmentally impaired young adult ($n = 1$). The two individuals who were not employed to care for young children

had substantial prior experience in caring for young children. Twelve of the women had one or more children living in their rural province of origin while they were working in the city. One woman had her family move to a nearby village that was accessible by 2-hr bus ride. One woman did not have a child herself but was acquainted with several of the other participants and related to two of the women whom she had recruited to work in the *barangay* (i.e., the smallest political unit in the Philippines, akin to a village). Monthly income ranged from PhP3,000 (US\$71) to PhP5,000 (US\$113), and all women were “on call” 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. One individual had completed 2 years of grade school whereas the rest had completed high school.

Procedures

Study procedures, including recruitment, were developed in consultation with local researchers and drew from earlier work regarding culturally appropriate research in the Philippines (Lynch & Makil, 1967; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000; Whiting et al., 1966).

Setting, sampling, and recruitment. The study was conducted primarily in an uppermiddle class *barangay* in Quezon City, and all participants had some tie to this community. For example, some women were live-in *yayas* in the community and some worked for employers in neighboring communities but whose children went to the local day care. This *barangay* is composed of 600 households with 3,000 residents. Snowball sampling technique was utilized to recruit participants. The investigator conducted fieldwork in 2011 and 2012, spending time in settings frequented by *yayas* in the *barangay* such as the village park and the waiting area outside the local day care. Recruitment was conducted until no new information was forthcoming and thus saturation was achieved. Respondents received US\$20 for their participation. These funds had originally been allocated in anticipation of some participants’ needing to take days off and/or travel to locations nearby or outside the village (e.g., for anonymity). Nonetheless, participants generally agreed to be interviewed before knowing about the compensation and indicated appreciation for being asked about their stories that few others had shown interest in, and several declined to be interviewed even after learning about the compensation.

Semistructured interviews. Semistructured interviews lasted from 45 min to 1.5 hr. The interview consisted of demographic items and open-ended questions regarding their experiences as mothers apart from their children (e.g., how they participated in their children's upbringing, the nature of their relationship with their children), as women caring for other children (e.g., their relationship to their charges and employers), and their experiences as domestic workers (e.g., their responsibilities). Interviews were conducted in Filipino, audio-recorded, and transcribed by two graduate students in the United States who are fluent in the language. Transcripts were coded in the original language.

Rapport and trust building. Several steps were taken to facilitate rapport and trust, which are of utmost importance in conducting research within the Philippine setting (Lynch & Makil, 1967) and are consistent with concepts within Indigenous Filipino Psychology (Pe-Pua, 2006; Pe-Pua & Protacio-Marcelino, 2000). First, a letter detailing the purpose and procedures involved in the study was sent to the *Barangay Captain* who is the highest locally elected official in the village who, in turn, sent back a letter of support. This step was taken to introduce the study to the community and to garner institutional support for the undertaking (Lynch & Makil, 1967). Second, recruitment was conducted in a manner that allowed participants to decline without directly having to say "no," consistent with indirect communication and maintenance of smooth relations considered important in Filipino culture (Mansukhani, 2005). The researcher provided potential participants her cell phone number and asked them to send her a text message if they decided to participate and whenever they had time to contact her. Asking participants to simply contact her "when they had time" allowed participants to "delay" or otherwise decline without having to directly do so and to avoid having participants consenting simply to save face.

Third, the researcher solicited input from participants both in choosing the time and setting of the interview and in providing feedback on the questions. Although the researcher had an interview protocol, she indicated that they could skip or modify questions, or add information that they thought would help her understand the experiences they were trying to relate. Fourth, the researcher answered questions

about herself when participants asked about personal details. For example, participants were curious about the researcher's own experiences as a working mother without a *yaya* in her employ or extended kin to take care of her child when she was at work. Finally, when invited, the researcher participated in social events, including partaking in *merienda* (mid-afternoon light meal) and *pag-papalamig* (hanging out with the participant and her friends during hot times of the day to cool down in the shade) while waiting for their charges at the local day care. These procedures reflect suggestions by Lynch and Makil (1967) on conducting culturally appropriate research in the Philippines and were designed to align with the guiding principles outlined in Indigenous Filipino Psychology (a.k.a. *Sikolohiyang Pilipino*). The researcher strove to engender a relationship with each participant that was as close to *hindi ibang tao* (loosely translated, "not different from us") as possible, to treat research participants as having equal status, to protect the welfare of participants, to employ research methods appropriate to the population, and to use the participants' language (Pe-Pua, 2006).

Data analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted in accordance with van Manen's (1990) three approaches for identifying aspects of a phenomenon. First, the researcher attended to the entire corpus of materials and noted emergent insights, themes, and patterns (holistic approach). Next, the researcher read the same materials to identify key statements and phrases that were especially reflective of the experience (selective approach). Finally, materials were read in detail (line-by-line approach) and for each line, asked the question, "what does this say about the experience of parenting from a distance and caring for another individual while being apart from one's own child?" A descriptive label was attached to each line or statement identified. To identify patterns and interconnections among the themes, a process of abstraction (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2013) was conducted. This step included grouping together similar and overlapping statements and developing broader themes that captured some aspect of the phenomenon. Finally, the process of "subsumption" (Smith et al., 2013) involved developing superordinate themes and interconnections that in turn reflect the experiences of the participants in the study.

The role of the researcher, trustworthiness, and procedures for verification. Scholars within the HP tradition generally do not assume that research free of bias or personal judgment is possible, nor that the researcher's presuppositions can be set aside (Koch, 1995; McConnell-Henry, Chapman, & Francis, 2009). Nonetheless, ensuring that interpretation is strongly oriented to the phenomenon and that there is adequate rigor in all aspects of the research process is valued both within HP and phenomenology in general (Cresswell, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). Several steps toward this end were taken.

First, the investigator incorporated reflexivity within the research process—engaging in continuous self-reflection and attempting to be conscious of her subjective responses throughout data collection and analysis (Finlay, 2002). For example, the researcher was aware of her role within the research process and the extent to which she was able to access and understand meanings communicated in the interviews. In a sense, the researcher had an insider perspective. She is a native of the Philippines but has lived in the United States for the last 15 years. She resided in the *barangay* where data were collected for 14 years prior to coming to the United States. Her ties to the local culture and fluency in Filipino allowed her to understand the local context—facilitating various aspects of recruitment, data collection, and processing. She was able to conduct interviews directly without a translator, which helped in building and maintaining rapport. Knowledge of the language also allowed her to understand locally used phrases and euphemisms that have culturally specific meanings and/or might not have literal translations in English. Given that indirect communication is characteristic of Filipino culture, an insider perspective was advantageous in that it allowed her to be sensitive to nonverbal cues and “unwritten” social rules ubiquitous in Filipino interactions (Mansukhani, 2005; Pe-Pua, 2006).

On the other hand, the researcher was also aware that this inside perspective was limited. The researcher had been living in the United States for almost 15 years, during which time many changes had already occurred in the *barangay*. More importantly, she had occupied a higher socioeconomic status compared to the women in the study—both during data collection and while she was growing up in the Philippines. She also had higher

educational attainment and had not undergone many of the key experiences the participants related such as extreme poverty and separation from one's children. She was aware of the economic and social privileges that she brought to the research process and how this limited the extent to which she could truly understand the experiences of the women in the study. For these reasons, she was careful not to presume to understand participants' experiences but instead consulted the data closely in generating themes.

Field notes were particularly important for maintaining reflexivity. The researcher generated three types of field notes throughout data collection (Bernard, 2005). These included *methodological* notes that included her reflections on data collection and recruitment; *descriptive* notes that captured her observations and reflections on all aspects of data collection (e.g., describing the setting for each interview); and *analytic notes*, where she documented emergent ideas, reflections, and apparent themes as the study progressed. The researcher noted down both objective details (e.g., location, time, date, setting) of each interview, as well as subjective impressions that allowed her to make explicit her impressions, reactions, and potential biases.

A second measure taken toward verification was an audit trail, which is a detailed documentation of all procedures (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This audit trail served to provide dependability, as it allows for scrutiny of the procedures (Finlay, 2006) and provided the researcher a clear record of the steps she followed in collecting and analyzing data. Key parts of the procedures from this audit trail are detailed in this article (e.g., methods of recruitment, coding, etc.).

As a third step, she conducted member checking by presenting themes to three of the participants in the study for verification and further explication. A fourth step was peer review which she conducted by presenting findings to a group of 30 Filipino psychology graduate students and two faculty members from the same city for discussion. This audience was able to provide feedback and additional insight regarding the themes based on their knowledge of the Philippine social, cultural, and economic context and current trends. For example, they provided insight regarding the contrast between the current findings and research on OFWs. Peer review was also conducted by sending the results

to the two Filipino graduate students based in the United States who had conducted the transcription of the audio recordings. The two students were familiar with the data but had not participated in the analysis. They considered the degree to which the themes reflected what was in the raw data and provided feedback and engaged in dialogue with the researcher regarding the accuracy of analysis. Feedback from these steps were considered and incorporated into final analysis.

Results

A total of 350 relevant statements were identified in the detailed line-by-line analysis, which were subsumed into 42 meaning units during abstraction (Smith et al., 2013). Those units were further collapsed into the following themes that emerged from the analysis. The themes are summarized below and the subthemes are listed in Table 1.

Theme 1: Rural-to-Urban Migration and “Yaya” Work in Response to Extreme Poverty

Working as a *yaya* entailed being away from one’s home and being separated from family. Participants described this situation as difficult but as their only economically viable option. Poverty is a pervasive problem in the Philippines that affects one third of the population, with this situation especially dire in the rural areas where 80% of the country’s poor reside (RPP, 2013). All participants came from rural provinces where agriculture is the main source of income. Small-scale farming is not a lucrative endeavor (RPP, 2013); the hardship was reflected in descriptions provided by participants. Rita, a 19-year-old respondent who left her 1-year-old son in the rural province of Bohol, noted, “Life is hard in the provinces . . . we were just farmers, that was it. We could plant only when it rained.” Andrea (23 years old, with a 2-year-old son) also from the same province similarly said, “It is very hard to be a farmer . . . often, there is no rain in Bohol and you rely on rain. Once, summer came and El

Nino struck, we could not plant at all. I’ve experienced that much hardship—when you have nothing to eat but bananas.”

For some respondents, nonfarming rural jobs had been available but did not yield enough income to sustain basic needs. Rita noted few other options in the provinces, “if I worked as a maid there, I would maybe make PhP1,000 (US\$24) per month.” Instead, she was making three times that amount at the time of the interview. Inna, who was 39 years old and with a 12-year-old daughter in the province of Bicol, described her attempt to make a living as a “promogirl” in Quezon City—responsible for handing out fliers during various companies’ promotional events. Her income was PhP78 (US\$1.85) for a 13-hr workday with just a 15-min break for lunch. In the provinces, the same job yielded PhP50 for the same workday. In addition, she had been responsible for the cost of her uniform, food, and transportation to work. In contrast, as a *yaya* in Quezon City, she was earning PhP5,000 monthly plus bonuses during holidays. Moreover, she had free board and lodging, free work uniforms, and few other living expenses. Nonetheless, her job as a *yaya* entailed leaving her daughter in the care of her mother-in-law in the province. Although her husband was taking on odd jobs, she was mainly responsible for her child’s financial support. Aurelia (29 years old, mother of three) reported previously working as a cashier and sales lady at a large department store in Manila. Because getting this type of job entailed going through an agency that took a portion of her income, her monthly earnings as a *yaya* were higher. Additionally, if items were lost (e.g., through shoplifting) or if accounts could not be reconciled with inventory, the sales ladies and cashiers on that floor were held responsible, and thus their wages were often garnished. Therefore, Aurelia had decided to move her family from the rural areas to a nearby province outside of Manila while she worked in the city. Her husband was caring for her children and she saw her family once a month.

The income of *yayas* is low compared with other domestic work. For example, in the barangay where this study was conducted, the prevailing salary rate for *yayas* ranged from PhP3,000 to PhP5,000 whereas drivers were hired for about PhP300–500 per day plus tips.

Table 1. Themes, Sub-Themes, and Sample Quotes

Themes	Sub-Themes	Sample quotes
Theme 1: Rural-to-urban migration and “Yaya” work in response to extreme poverty	Farming as difficult, uncertain, and does not provide enough income	It is very hard to be a farmer . . . often, there is no rain in Bohol and you rely on rain. Once, summer came and El Nino struck, we could not plant at all. I’ve experienced that much hardship—when you have nothing to eat but bananas.”
	For the same job, wages are lower in rural compared with urban areas	If I worked as a maid there, I would maybe make PhP1,000 (US\$24) per month.
	No other alternatives for income	It was all financial. I had nobody else to rely on.
	The need to choose between staying together as a family or survival	It would be difficult . . . we would be together but they would not have a good future, not even be able to study.
	Migrating for work to be provide for education	As long as they can finish college, then I can stop working . . . as long as they can finish.
Theme 2: The high emotional cost of long-distance parenting	Infrequent direct contact	For me, as a mother, of course I have to work hard. I don’t want, of course, for her to end up like me. Even if I ended up as just a yaya, I want her to be able to study—to finish (college), to find a good job, that is all.
	Separation is emotionally difficult, but necessary	But I just think . . . this is for their future. So I just fight the sadness.
	The moment of separation was especially difficult	I felt like I was floating the whole time, like my feet were not touching the ground. For a month, I didn’t even realize I was crying—while sweeping the floor, while eating
	High emotional toll brings respondent to question her decision to be separated	Sometimes, I see those beggars on the street and it makes me think . . . “they are poor but they are together. Maybe I should go back. We would all starve, but we would starve together”
	Difficulties during special occasions	Of course we remember our children when our charges have their birthdays. We wish we could have that, too, for our children.
Theme 3: “Alaga” as a consolation prize and surrogate child (9)	Caring for charge is a constant reminder of own child’s absence	When you become a yaya, you do everything. You feed the child, you put the food in his mouth, you bathe him, you put him to sleep (inaudible portion here, respondent starts crying). I remember my child that I am not with her. She will grow up in the care of another. My care—she will not experience. To another child, I am able to give what I am supposed to give to my child. My attention, my hours, my time. And to my own child, I cannot give this. It is difficult being a yaya.
	Pain of separation does not dissipate	I think about them eating when I’m eating . . . I think, “I wonder if they are eating, too? It doesn’t go away. Your children, you will really think about them.” (Interviewer asks if it gets easier)—it seems like it is still the same.
	Children use kinship terms to refer to yaya	“Tita” (aunt) is what they call me. Like we are just relatives.
	Treating the child as one’s own	It is like he is my own child. Our bonding, it wasn’t that hard.

Table 1. Themes, Sub-Themes, and Sample Quotes (continued)

Themes	Sub-themes	Sample Quotes	
Own children recognize that mother's affection are shared with charge	Charge shows affection to yaya	(Note, child is brought to employer's home to visit mother; but child and charge, both 4 years old, are vying for her attention. In the end, her own son accepts that his mother needs to attend to her charge). You know what my son did? He said, "Mama, I'll just go to your room." And he stayed there until he fell asleep.	
	Charge sometimes shows more affection to yaya than parents	He is affectionate. He even kisses me. Sometimes I say "no, just a hug for yaya." She says, until I grow old, she'd like me to be with her. It is funny because she even has plans for my future but not for her parents. She says that when she grows up, she'll work and she'll give me my own house . . . and two cars.	
	Charge is only pacified by yaya	It is tough when I take the day off. She is always looking for me. In less than a day, they text me . . . "Yaya, come back already because your alaga is having a tantrum".	
	Closeness to charge produces feelings of guilt/confusion	Sometimes, I miss him (charge) more than I miss my child. Maybe because I was able to take care of him.	
	Yaya is able to channel affection to charge	It's as if . . . even if I don't get to take care of my child, I get to take care of her (charge).	
	Employer accepts closeness of charge to yaya	It is okay with her (mother of charge) that she is closer to me. She (charge) is more often with me.	
	Theme 4: Caregivers and gatekeepers	Yaya's older children caring for younger children follow her orders regarding caregiving	My older daughter takes care of her younger siblings. She listens to me. What I ask her to do for her younger sibling, she does.
		Some caregivers provide financial support (i.e., income of yayas often is not sufficient to cover the children's necessities)	They (the caregivers) also help out (financially).
		Yaya's mother as a good caregiver	She (child's maternal grandmother) treats her like her own child. It's because she is my mother.
		Own child is sometimes closer to alternative caregiver	My youngest is closer to her (maternal grandmother) than to me.
Difficulties with in-laws as caregivers—hard to make demands or requests about own child's upbringing.		(My child) is with my husband's family. I'm a little embarrassed to ask (make requests about the child). There is no one for me to make requests to.	
Difficulties with in-laws as caregivers—sides with partner/former partner		When I visited, she (former partner's mother) says, "what are you doing here?" So I asked him (former partner), "what did you tell her?" and he said "nothing."	
Respondent is able to communicate expectations and make requests when caregiver is own mother		My child is with my mother. I'm able to ask her to sometimes buy a mop, or milk or vitamins, or clothes.	

Table 1. Themes, Sub-Themes, and Sample Quotes (continued)

Themes	Sub-themes	Sample Quotes
Theme 5: Parenting constrained, reconstituted, and mediated	Yaya's children miss her	When I see my youngest child (in person), he cries.
	Parenting through remittances and providing materials needs	I ask them what they need. When they tell me, they need this for school, I send them.
	Children express missing their mother and/or complain about her absence	For some (children), they have hurt feelings. We are taking care of some children, and then they are left alone. That is difficult to hear. I've experienced that.
	Children express a sense of missing their mother's caregiving	They look for my caring for them
	Loss of closeness with own child	When I come near her, she won't even bless (i.e. practice in Philippines to show respect—by taking the hand of an older person and touching it to one's forehead). That is very painful.
	Difficulty in contacting family as family in province does not have a cell phone	For us, it is difficult because they (family) don't have a cellphone. We just borrow (from neighbors)
	Parenting by others is not complete—the affection and care of a mother is different	Our child will grow up with a different mother. The love of a mother is different.
	Cell phones are used but communication is inadequate	When I call, my husband and my mother-in-law says "Mama is calling" and my child says (makes baby sounds). That is all.
	Cell phones calls can introduce difficulties—reminding child of mother's absence	He doesn't want to talk, he feels like crying. He wasn't speaking, then they (caregivers) told me he was crying.
	Theme 6: The role of men	Husband or partner has no/low income
Partner was unfaithful and left respondent		We were separated. He had . . . he started courting another woman. And then I just heard from my cousin that he had passed away.
Partner was irresponsible		I blame my husband. He used to gamble and drink, no job. So I had to work. I left him but his mother ran after me
Partner abandoned responsibilities to respondent and child		It was as if he was swallowed by a snake
Some partners remain present and provide support		(Note: these were several one-line answers indicating husband was providing support and/or was present and providing care)

Nonetheless, given no other viable options and extreme poverty, the respondents considered their income to be sufficient. Respondents indicated that they were sending most of their money home to sustain their families, and that they even set aside savings for their future or to set up small businesses. Beyond basic survival, respondents hoped that their work could lead to a better life for their children, particularly through higher education that none of them had attained. They all intended to work until their children could attain some higher education. Most planned to work until their children finished college, an accomplishment they saw as key for their children to escape from poverty.

Theme 2: The High Emotional Cost of Long-Distance Parenting

Working as a *yaya* in the city provided a steady, albeit low, income. However, this entailed separation from their families and an extremely high emotional cost. For each of the 13 mothers in the study, separation from their own children was a deeply difficult experience that they described as practically unbearable. Rita, who was 19, married, and whose child was in the care of her husband and mother-in-law, recounted her experience of separating from her child when he was just a few months old and not anticipating the extent of that difficulty:

When I miss my child, I just cry about it. When I was just 5 days into the job, the whole day, I was just crying. My boss was wondering why my eyes were so swollen. You see, when I was about to leave, we were just discussing it (with family)—as if it would be nothing and I wouldn't feel anything. But when I got on the motorcycle that would take me to the (bus) terminal, I started crying. I wanted to get off. Until I got to the terminal and the whole time on the bus, I was crying. But I had crossed the water (on the ferry) and I could not turn back. And when I arrived . . . I kept thinking, "at this time, he's doing this . . ." You see, he was closer to me (than the father). When I was still home, he would only go to his father when he had something for him. I just left him some of my unwashed clothes so he could hug that. It is hard to be a *yaya*, it is hard to be a mother.

Similarly, Malou, a 40-year-old mother, described her experiences eight years prior to the interview when she had to leave her son immediately after giving birth. With no job prospects in the provinces, she had decided

to go to the city to work. She had arranged for her brother to informally adopt her child as soon as she left the hospital after giving birth so that she could work and remit money to cover the costs of raising her child.

When I left the hospital, my brother was already waiting outside and I had to hand him the baby. I rode the bus to here because a job was waiting for me. It was odd, I felt like I was floating the whole time, like my feet were not touching the ground. For a month, I didn't even realize I was crying—while sweeping the floor, while eating . . .

Although they thought of their separation as necessary for survival, the emotional toll sometimes made them question their decisions. Rita described her internal debate, "Sometimes, I see those beggars on the street and it makes me think . . . 'they are poor but they are together. Maybe I should go back. We would all starve, but we would starve together.'" This statement captures what many of the women described as a constant choice they faced—to be together or to survive.

Theme 3: Alaga as a Consolation Prize and Surrogate Child

Work as a *yaya* involves carefully watching over a charge (i.e., *alaga*), and in most cases, being responsible for their most intimate care needs such as bathing, feeding, supervising school homework, and other matters that a primary caregiver or parent typically provides. In light of daily and intimate contact, most of the women reported developing feelings of closeness toward their charges. Often, this was evident not just in their descriptions, but also in their interactions and in the manner by which they talked about them. Some described their relationship with their charges as a "consolation prize"—a positive thing out of a negative situation. Cita, who is 24 years old, never married, and who has a 4-year-old son, is charged with caring for a 4-year-old girl. At the time of the interview, her son was living with his father's new wife, and Cita was sharing financial responsibility for his needs. She described how her charge serves as a surrogate for her absent son:

What I do is this—when I miss my son, I pretend that she is my child . . . after all, she is like my child. I hug her. It's like I am pouring my love to her . . . it makes it easier. And she always says that John (her son) is her brother. She's very good—very smart! When she sees that I am sad, she sings to me. Like this song, "Grow Old with You." She sings that to me. When I

was just here a month, I kept crying. I missed my son so much. And she would say, “you want me to sing to you? Grow Old With You?” And then she would hug me. And that would make me smile, and sometimes make me cry more.

Respondents noted the irony of the situation—caring for one child while separated from their own. The women reported sometimes feeling closer to their charges than their own children. Although closeness to their charges brought a sense of comfort, it introduced guilt and doubt about their jobs. Cita, already quoted above, was thinking out loud during the interview, “Sometimes I think, ‘do I love her (the 4-year-old charge) more than him (her 4-year-old son)?’ No, no . . . maybe not.” Inna’s case is especially reflective of this situation. She describes how she feels about Justin, a 4-year-old boy she had started taking care of since he was 13 months of age. Both his parents worked long hours at a multinational bank—often leaving at about 6 a.m. and returning past the boy’s bedtime. Thus, Inna spent more time with him than anybody else.

It is not just a job now. After a while, somehow, I am not just seeking a salary, but also the love of a child. You can’t be just a *yaya*, you have to love the child to do this. The truth is, I cannot imagine being separated from this child (referring to Justin), my heart hurts. Like when I went on vacation, I missed him so much. I have deeper feelings for him than my own child. Maybe it’s because I have taken care of him for so long. My own child, I didn’t take care of her at all. I just gave birth to her. It is a difficult situation. Sometimes, I regret that I did not get to raise her. Her heart is far from mine. So sometimes I’m happy, but it’s also hard. When I am away and return, this one (her charge) says “*Yaya*, miss you” and he says “Justin, cry!” and then he gives me a kiss. When he sleeps, he doesn’t want to sleep with his mom and dad, he wants to sleep with me. He makes all my exhaustion go away. My own daughter doesn’t even want to be with me when I visit her.

Soon after this interview, Inna decided to quit her job and find employment in her province. Although she realized that any employment back home would yield a lower salary, she wanted to try living closer to her daughter. After seven months of being home, she decided to leave the province and return to her employer in Quezon City who had agreed to hire her back. In the second year of data collection, the researcher met up with Inna who provided an update:

I left, I went home to try and be a mother to my daughter. But it was hard. She didn’t want to live with me and continued to live with her grandmother (Inna’s mother-in-law). When I would see her on the street, she wouldn’t even look at me—like she was ashamed of me because I was just a maid. She doesn’t even know that I am the one sending money for everything she has. In church, she refused to sit with me. It was hard. So I came back here. Luckily, they took me back. And when I came back, Justin was so happy—he told me he missed me. He kissed me, hugged me. It’s better here, I’m loved.

At the same time, the charges develop strong feelings for their *yayas*. Letty (age 29, married, 7-year-old daughter lives with her husband, mother-in-law, and brother-in-law) described how it was difficult to take days off because her employers say that she is the only one who is able to pacify her 3-year-old charge. On such days, they phone/text her and say “*Yaya*, come back already because your *alaga* is having a tantrum!” She further noted, “I don’t know what it is. It’s not that hard for me, and she is very affectionate. Yes, she cries a lot, but I’m able to soothe her.”

From the interviewees’ perspectives, employers looked favorably at the close relationship they had with their charges. For Letty, her employers appreciated this closeness and even relied on her heavily when the child is difficult to control. Cita indicated that seeing how close she was to her charge and how well she was taking care of her, her employers often promise her “anything . . . just promise not to leave,” and that the child’s parents sometimes said, “wow, we’ve never seen this before—she picks her *yaya* over us.” Nonetheless, other respondents worried about being too close to their charges for fear that their employers might find it inappropriate. For example, Inna noted that she was always reminding Justin to kiss her only on the cheek and that she would often tell him, “kiss on the lips is only for your mommy.” Further, she often urged him to sleep beside his parents, though he often snuck out of his parents’ room and found his way into Inna’s quarters.

Theme 4: Caregivers and Gatekeepers

In their absence, the mothers in the study were pressed to find alternative caregivers for their children. Although there was variability in the caregiving arrangement, participants expressed preference for

either their own parents or when possible, their older children to care for the younger ones. These preferences reflected two concerns. The first concern is the issue of who is able to care for their children. Gendered notions of caregiving emerged here, with participants considering their mothers, mothers-in-law, or other female relatives most capable. For three of the women, their children lived with their mothers-in-law, even though the fathers of the children lived nearby. In some cases, the fathers of the children were present but female relatives either moved into the household or the child was moved to households with adult females. For instance, Inna's daughter moved into her mother-in-law's home even though this child's own father was present. On some occasions, Inna noted that her husband might "borrow" their daughter if he wanted to spend time with her and then "returned her" to the mother-in-law.

The second issue of concern is that the caregiver served as a gatekeeper to their ability to continue parenting their child. Thus, there was a clear preference for direct kin who they could trust. Although mothers-in-law served as capable alternatives, respondents were not sure as to whether these women would facilitate their role as mothers or instead speak ill of them in their absence and usurp their role. Inna's mother-in-law felt very close to Inna's daughter; the child even called Inna's mother-in-law "mama," making Inna very uncomfortable. In fact, Inna partly blamed her mother-in-law for the distance between her and her own daughter and she suspected that her daughter was never told of the sacrifice she was making, or that she was paying for her daughter's upkeep. Cita, whose 4-year-old son was living with her former partner and his new wife, felt that when she asked about her son's well-being or made suggestions about him, her child's father and his new wife were offended. Thus, she felt the need to tread lightly even when she wanted to participate more. She was trying to convince her own brother to come to the city to care for her son so that she could have better contact with him. In contrast, Rosa's younger children have lived with her older children for quite a while and thus she felt completely comfortable asking about her children and weighing in on decisions about their upbringing.

Theme 5: Parenting Constrained, Reconstituted, and Mediated

With mothers living apart from their children, the traditional picture of family and parenting for the respondents had shifted. In contrast to traditional notions of motherhood involving the day-to-day nurturance and care of children, respondents indicated that being a mother first and foremost involved providing for their children's basic needs and providing for their future. This involved a difficult trade-off between traditional motherhood and close relations with their children versus some sense of financial survival and a chance for a better life for their children.

For 12 of the 13 mothers in the study, direct contact with their children occurred only once a year. For many, the trip home entailed long travel that involved a combination of long bus, tricycle, and boat rides. Only one interviewee was able to see her children once a month as they lived just 2 hours away from her place of work. For the rest, contact with children and alternate caregivers was through the use of cell phones, though even this bore a high financial cost and the women could only talk to their children when they could afford to purchase prepaid minutes. For two women, there was the additional challenge of their families not owning cell phones. Thus, respondents could only contact their children when neighbors in the province were able to lend their devices.

Respondents differed in the degree to which they felt that they were still close to their children. Some described a sense of distance from their children because of being absent from their day-to-day lives and lacking involvement in the daily and mundane aspects of parenting. Mothers missed not being able to help with homework, bathe, and feed their children, or sleep beside them. Malou left her daughter when she was 2 years old. Now eight years later, Malou indicated, "she calls me 'mama' or 'nanay' but it is different . . . because I'm not there every day, it is just different." Trina (28 years, single mother, never married and children's father is no longer in the picture, financially responsible for her child but her parents sometimes help out), who has 5- and 4-year-old children whom she left with her own parents three years prior said that her children call her "Tita" (aunt) because they could not even comprehend that she was their mother. Inna, as discussed earlier, has

a 12-year-old daughter who has no sense of closeness to her. In contrast, others felt that they maintained a close relationship. The youngest of Rosa's (age 54) five children was in his preteens when she was widowed and forced to seek work in Manila, prior to which she was a stay-at-home mother. Thus, by the time she left, she had already established close relationships and attachments to her children, which were easier to maintain across distance (note, at the time of the interview, her children were fending for themselves but in the beginning, her parents provided care, though she took over financial responsibility for their upkeep).

The degree to which mothers felt a role in the upbringing of their own children also varied. For some, there was a sense that somehow, they were still actively participating in the day-to-day decisions about the child and that they were fully informed about the details of their children's lives. For others, there was a feeling that they had completely lost all decision-making capacity.

Based on the women's accounts, several key factors influenced the quality of the mother-child relationship across distance. One important factor was who their child's caregiver was and their relationship with that person. As already described, the mothers saw the caregivers as a gatekeeper between themselves and their children. Caregivers could talk to their children fondly about their mothers, or they could "poison" the children against their mother and speak ill of her. When the mothers called home, the caregivers could give the phone to the child or they could make excuses to block contact. They could follow the mothers' suggestions about how to care for the child, or they could ignore her wishes. Finally, they could keep her informed of the child's daily life and overall wellbeing, or they could keep her out of the loop. For example, Cita, quoted above, whose son is in the care of her ex-boyfriend (i.e., her son's father) and his new wife, complained that whenever she called, they made her feel like she was being too nosy. She expressed concern about his wellbeing, "when I came home, I just noticed he had a new scar . . . where did that come from? When I was taking care of him, I really watched over him." In contrast, Rosa noted that she was able to call whenever she wanted and was able to ask about mundane daily issues like homework or what the children had for meals and thus felt connected, as if she "was just there."

Respondents' ability to make regular contact with their children also helped determine their levels of closeness. In part, this was related to the caregiver. However, this was also related to their ability to afford the financial cost of contact. For most, the issue was how much "load" (prepaid minutes) they could afford. For two participants, there was the additional issue of the caregivers not having their own phones and the need to borrow from neighbors. The age of the child also made a difference. In Rita's case, her daughter was 1 year old and thus could not really converse over the phone. Although Rita's mother-in-law would often hold the phone up to her child so that Rita could hear her cooing, there was very little interaction. In contrast, the women with older children said that they could call their children daily or weekly and discuss both big and mundane daily issues such as their homework or what they had eaten that day.

Theme 6: The Role of Fathers

Fathers were noticeably absent in the care of children for many of the interviewees. Five of the 13 mothers were either unmarried or separated, with three of these fathers having "disappeared" when the interviewee had gotten pregnant. As Rita (19 years) described her former partner's absence, "it was as if he was swallowed by a snake" on hearing of her pregnancy. Two of the men were separated from the interviewees but still provided some financial support of their children. Even among those who were married and involved with their husbands, the care of the child still fell primarily to women within the extended family. In some cases, the children continued to live with their fathers who were under the same roof as their paternal grandmothers. When asked why mothers or mothers-in-law would be better caregivers than their husbands, the women often could not articulate their reasons and indicated that this was "the way things are supposed to be."

In some cases, the fathers brought about additional challenges. Inna described her husband's role in her current situation of being absent from her daughter's life, "I blame my husband. He used to gamble and drink, no job. So I had to work. I left him but his mother ran after me." Although her husband has since given up his habits of gambling and drinking, they still needed a source

of income and Inna had to leave her family and migrate to the city for work.

Discussion

The goal of this study was to develop a close understanding of the lived experience of Filipina internal migrant workers employed as *yayas*. The study focused specifically on the experience of separation from one's own children due to work-related migration, as well as the experience of caring for other children while away from one's own. The interviews evoked themes reflecting a convergence of broad social and economic issues (e.g., rural poverty, the lack of economically viable jobs for women with limited education and training), gender norms and roles (e.g., the role of the women in raising children), and traditional notions regarding family and parenting (e.g., the role of parents in children's upbringing, obligations of extended family). Taken together, the consequences were a heavy personal burden and transformed parenting strategies in light of spatial distance. In addition, the interviews revealed themes specific to the experience of being a worker in the care sector, especially the presence of the *alaga* who sometimes served as a surrogate child to the women who were parenting their own children from a distance.

Parental absence contradicted respondents' notions regarding their roles as mothers who participate in the day-to-day care, upbringing, and discipline of their children. Ironically, the job that they were hired to do entailed these very same intimate types of interactions that they were unable to perform for their own children. The presence of a charge provided some sense of comfort because they were at least able to perform their "motherly" duties. As one participant put it, she was able to "pour" her affections and need to mother a child to someone. However, caregiving also amplified the painful reality that they were absent from their own children's lives and the fact that their children were deprived of the motherly care that they were giving their charges.

Respondents coped with the spatial distance by negotiating a shift in the parent-child relationship, for instance, utilizing electronically mediated communication and parenting through alternative caregivers. They performed their parenting in other indirect ways such

as sending gifts. They coped with the emotional toll by keeping their children's welfare in mind and considering their experience as a sacrifice so that their children would not suffer the same plight that they were going through.

This study is not intended to provide direct comparison with research on OFWs. However, given the paucity of scholarly investigations on parental separation among internal migrants, OFW research provides the nearest body of work to which the current findings can be compared. Several similarities can be found. First, like their OFW peers, the parents in this study experienced long periods of separation from their children. Although respondents were not burdened with legalities of migration such as obtaining a visa (Fresnoza-Flot, 2009), the long commute time and high transportation costs relative to their salaries greatly limited their ability to make frequent direct contact with their children. Second, like their OFW peers, respondents noted that face-to-face contact and "parenting" were replaced by remittances and mediated communication through texts and cell phones, which are ubiquitous in the Philippines (Madianou & Miller, 2011). Third, respondents indicated a sense of comfort in caring for others, but also guilt in depriving their own children of this experience (Parrenas, 2001).

Several differences can also be noted, most of which reflect the lower access to resources among domestic migrants (ILO, 2013). Current respondents did not report a wide range of ways by which they could contact their children. Unlike OFWs, respondents relied solely on cell phones and only when they could afford prepaid minutes. They had no access to other media that is increasingly playing a big role among transnational parents, for instance, Skype and social media (see McKay, 2012; Madianou & Miller, 2011). Unlike narratives given by their OFW counterparts (Asis, 2006; Asis et al., 2004), respondents' descriptions about their experience did not reflect themes of personal fulfillment or personal goals, though there were hints of pride in being able to do their jobs well. Instead, each respondent emphasized a sense of having no other practical "choice" given her dire economic situation and lack of any other source of support. In light of extreme poverty, respondents had to choose between fulfilling their traditional motherly duties versus providing basic necessities for their children

and the hope of helping them attain a future outside of poverty. Thus, there were significant overlaps in the experiences of OFWs and *yayas* in this study; nonetheless, findings revealed unique aspects of their experiences that highlight the need to examine this experience in its own right.

Implications

Several implications can be gleaned from this study. First, given current trends around globalization, urbanization, and persistent inequities in economic opportunities, work-related migration will continue to be a serious issue that families and communities will face. For this reason, it is important to understand the experiences of those affected by mobility and the factors that might impact on their well-being. These demographic shifts have important ramifications for family life and children's wellbeing. Consequently, our theories, conceptualizations, and understanding of these constructs must be dynamic and incorporate societal changes and diverse types of caregiving contexts (Greenfield, 2009; Kagitcibasi, 2007).

Second, mobility and family separation come in many forms and are undertaken for various reasons (e.g., migration for work, military deployment, child fosterage). Research on long-distance parenting needs to represent this diversity. Each type of long-distance parenting situation is different—bringing unique challenges, necessitating unique ways of navigating the distance, and resulting in diverse child and family outcomes. In this study, themes emerged that were unique from findings in OFW research. This highlights the need to go beyond studying parent–child separation as a result of overseas work migration and further examine experiences of long-distance parenting in other contexts.

Third, this study sought to examine and describe the experiences of internal migrant domestic workers who are parenting from a distance. This population is typically invisible and underserved and the experiences they related suggest substantial economic and emotional hardship. Further research is needed to more closely examine the experiences of these women and their families, and the factors that might help them cope with the difficult and sometimes unavoidable task of long-distance parenting.

Finally, practical and policy implications need to be discussed here. It should be noted that at the time of data collection, there were no laws specifically in place to protect domestic workers in the Philippines. However, approximately six months after data collection was completed, Republic Act 10361 was enacted. Also known as the “*Kasambahay Law*,” this act provides rules around wages, benefits, rights, and privileges of domestic workers. The law outlines sanctions that may be imposed on employers for their failure to adhere to these new rules. It is unclear to what extent RA 10361 will help alleviate the hardships of *yayas*. For example, the minimum monthly wage it imposes, PhP2500 in Manila, is below the salary reported by even the lowest paid respondent in the study. Some of the requirements also deviate so greatly from the benefits reported by participants (e.g., one day off per week, access to basic education) that it is difficult to predict whether employers will adhere to this law and if not, whether *yayas* will feel empowered enough to demand their new rights and to report abuses. Moreover, even if the provisions of this new law are fully adopted, how it might alleviate the hardships of long-distance parenting is unclear. The enactment of a law that protects the rights of *yayas* may be promising. Nonetheless, attention on this much neglected population is certainly needed to monitor the effects of this new law, if any, and to inform program developers, organizations, and local and national government agencies in protecting the rights of *yayas* and in providing appropriate supports for them and their families.

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