

The Problem of Estrangement among OFW Children

When asked, “Why are you going abroad?”, OFW parents will almost always say that it is for their children. But many OFW parents are now finding out that their working abroad has seriously damaged their relationship with the very people whose interests they have gone abroad to serve.

Some stable families have weathered the separation of parents and children. Fr. Nilo Tanalega has attributed this to what he calls “enhancements in global parenting”, in which technology has encouraged parental presence, participation and engagement in the lives of children. Parents who express interest in the activities of their children and make a point to be available at set times more likely enjoy healthier relationships with their children.

But Fr. Tanelaga qualifies that communication mediated by technology cannot replace face to face interaction. Topics of long distance communication may go no deeper than grades and the day’s happenings at school. By contrast, face-to-face conversations allow parents to ask “How are your friends? What are your dreams? What is hurting you?” Long distance communication between parents and their children has produced superficial relationships. As one OFW child has said: *“My Mom tries to parent me when she is home. But I don’t feel she has the right anymore to do this because she does not know me at all.”* How heartbreaking it is for a parent who has made so many sacrifices to come home to estrangement. *“I miss my Mom,”* said another OFW child. *“We used to talk a lot, but now I do not know what to say to her.”*

OFW parents tend to overcompensate for their absence by indulging their children materially, giving them more than what is proper, more than they need. It is unsurprising that many of these children develop into materialistic, often rebellious, individuals with a well-entrenched sense of entitlement. Moreover, the child-centered goals of the OFW effort tend to foster narcissism in the children, instead of a healthy parental respect, other-centeredness, and love.

Before we say we are going abroad to work for the sake for our children, let us prayerfully consider the consequences and think twice.

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