A Brief Research Note: Some Issues on Japanese-Filipino Children

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Received: March 27, 2011 Accepted: April 27, 2011 doi:10.5539/ass.v7n9p73

Abstract

This qualitative case study aims to explore reasons that led to the absence of the Japanese father from the family, how it affects the present situation of Japanese-Filipino children (JFC), and to conceptualize socioemotional factors that influence JFC's life. The study covers current situations and socioemotional and socioeconomic problems of JFC and used standard qualitative techniques to gather field data.

This study has identified that JFC are shaped by sociocultural and socioeconomic differences between Japan and the Philippines that play in individuals' lives and decisions. The union of two people from different cultures and nationalities coupled with socioeconomic struggles and each individual's underlying reasons to unite (marriage/cohabitation) may also lead to their separation. Furthermore, the study identified several unique socioemotional factors of the JFC as well: perceived unique ethnicity, the retention of a degree of love to the father who abandons them, and the need to see their fathers instead of feeling hatred and anger. Despite their abandonment, the JFC feel proud of their Japanese culture. Finally, JFC feel they belong to two culture groups; they consider knowing and belonging to both cultures to be their destiny.

Keywords: Ethnicity, Filipino, Japanese, Children, Migration, Qualitative

1. Background

According to national statistics of the Philippines, about 1.6 million Filipinos work abroad (4.2 million according to estimates by international organizations) (Matsui, 1998). Approximately 50 percent of 50,000 Filipinos entering Japan annually between 1980 and 1990 were on entertainer visas. Others included engineers, teachers, scientists, government officials, businessmen, and students (Matsui, 1998).

The number of Filipinos holding entertainer visas touched 400,000 between 1985 and 1996, with the majority being women (Matsui, 1998). Most entertainers traveled to Japan for work to support their families. The economic conditions of the entertainer's family can be divided into three: those below the poverty line (approximately 60 percent), just below middle class (23 percent), and the middle class (17 percent). Younger than 23 years, most were elementary school graduates, high school graduates, college drop-outs, or college graduates (Matsui, 1998).

The high number of Filipinos entering Japan resulted in a rapid increase in marriages between Filipino women and Japanese men, touching a figure of 6645 in 1996 (Japanese Ministry of Health and Welfare, 2000). Matsui (1998) pointed out couples officially married in Japan is very small compared to those married in the Philippines. Some cases of bigamy among married Japanese males have been reported, increasing the realistic estimates of such couples to more than 100,000.

Japanese journalist S. Gunji described the typical life of the Filipino entertainers and the Japanese-Filipino children (JFC). The lives of Filipino entertainers working in Japan to support their families were challenged by Japanese gangs who exploited them. They were deceived by Japanese mafia and were forced to comply as sexual workers. The author also depicted entangled relationships between Japanese and Filipinos (Gunji, 1991, 1996).

The challenged Filipino women turned to Japanese men who offered support and some degree of safety—at least temporarily—in their relationships. However, Filipino women finding solace in marrying Japanese men soon faced another threat of being abandoned by their Japanese suitors (Nihon Kodomo Kenri Center, 1998). Psychiatrist N. Kuwayama (1995), who authored the book International Marriage and Stress: Brides from Asia and Changing Japanese Families, identifies numerous factors causing psychological stress on Filipino wives in

the Yamagata prefecture in Japan, which has the highest rate of three generations of families living together.

According to Kuwayama (1995), Filipino wives in Japan face psychological difficulties arising out of cultural conflicts, misunderstandings, homesickness, education for children, and worrying about parents left behind in the Philippines because it is a custom in the Philippines to provide care for one's own parents (Varona, Saito, Takahashi, & Kai, 2006).

Most of the tens of thousands of JFC born to these couples were abandoned by their Japanese fathers. JFC are not the product of one-nightstand affairs (Matsui, 1998) but born after a few years of relationship between a Filipino woman and a Japanese man. A majority of Filipino entertainers enter into relationships with Japanese men, as their work provides temptations to be alone with their customers (Takayama, 2001).

Often the pregnant Filipinos return to the Philippines to bear the child. Some Japanese men cut off all relations immediately on learning about their Filipino partner getting pregnant, while others taper off interactions and disappear after visiting the women at home in the Philippines, communicating by phone or letter, and sending money (Matsui, 1998; Gunji, 1996).

According to L. Takayama, a Filipino married to a Japanese man and a former intern of PETA, the penchant of Japanese for pinays is a result of changing cultural norms in Japan and stronger Japanese women: "the Japanese women are getting stronger economically and are choosy about their men. So the men go to the bars and everybody there, particularly the Filipino entertainers, are so sweet and nice." She added that, "it is not easy to be involved with a local in Japan. The culture barrier and pressures from their families usually break relationships of Japanese men and Filipina women." She further states, "if there are offspring, they usually receive support from their Japanese fathers only for the first three years, then the support stops, and the father disappears" (Jvida, 2000).

Japanese men cutting off their relationships with Filipino women also escape their responsibilities as fathers, by depriving financial and emotional support to their children. No statistical data exist about the number of JFC, although estimates suggest that hundreds of children living in Manila and throughout the Philippines "were deserted" by their Japanese fathers (Matsui, 1998; Nihon Kodomo Kenri Center, 1998).

Furthermore, not many published journal articles except newspaper reports and NGO research articles have identified living conditions of JFC. Although most JFC reside in the Philippines as fatherless children, other family members, such as uncles, aunts, or grandparents assist them, which is the norm in a Filipino family (Jocano, 2002).

The lifestyles of JFC have not yet been explored in-depth. In some cases, the mothers return to Japan to work, leaving the children with their family in the Philippines; thus, the children are supported materially while being taken care of by relatives. This research focuses on the need to acknowledge the state of a "fatherless" JFC and on the underlying emotional support that only a father's presence can provide. Therefore, this study aims to explore reasons that led to the absence of Japanese fathers and how it affects the JFC's current situation and to conceptualize socioemotional factors at play in the their life.

2. Methods

The study only covers the current situations and socioemotional and economic problems of the JFC. This study used standard qualitative techniques in gathering field data through interviews in 2002. JFCs as well as NGO staff members were also interviewed by the researcher for case studies. Original names are changed to protect the privacy of the respondents.

3. Results

Based on the responses of respondents, several concepts and factors were identified and categorized. Raw verbal data about the (a) socioeconomic description of Japanese men involved in a relationship with Filipinos; (b) reasons that led to the absence of the Japanese fathers, such as refusal to be acknowledged as the father; (c) factors that led to divorce and/or separation; (d) factors that affected the lives of the JFC.

Factors affecting the absence of the Japanese father

a. Japanese men do not want to recognize their children outside of marriage

According to the NGO respondents, some Japanese men do not want to recognize their children for two primary reasons: legal and social. Legally recognizing their children through a family registration process could impact a Japanese man's inheritances, both received from their parents and what they will leave behind. As discussed earlier, many of the already-married Japanese men involved with Filipinos view recognizing their children from these unions as a public acceptance of their extramarital affairs, which could lead to them getting socially

ostracized.

b. Factors that may lead to separation and divorce

In addition, NGO staff members identified two factors that could cause difficulties in the Japanese–Filipino relationships, leading to separation and divorce. The socioeconomical factor involves the Filipino women enhancing financial security through marriage, although they came to Japan to support their families.

The difference in family structures between the two cultures brings in the sociocultural factor into play, leading to separation or divorce. The Filipinos continuing to work after marriage and sending money to their families back in the Philippines could lead to a strife in the relationship.

JFC's current situation and socioemotional factors

The five factors—financial problems, emotional problems, social struggles, education problems, and socioemotional issues—were identified as playing a significant role in the life of the JFC.

Financial issues in the family were quite often cited as playing a primary role. Differences in the levels of salaries between the two countries often make it difficult for Filipinos to find similar paying job once they return to the Philippines, in addition to the trouble of finding positions outside the entertainment industry. Filipino mothers often turn to the fathers for financial support because they cannot afford to raise their children on their own. Older children also assume part of the burden.

Emotional problems also play a role in the situation, both from perspective of the mother and the child. Mothers often suffer from psychological difficulties and feelings of abandonment. Mothers who express their frustration or disappointment about the fathers are often overheard by their children, who then mimic their mothers or assume the same outlook on their fathers.

Children also suffer their own emotional duress. The lack of a father figure can have serious effects on the child emotionally. Some mothers remarry, leading to emotional problems for the children, particularly if they are left with other relatives. One JF child sums up family life: "Just a broken family....I feel frustrated, I am not mad...I am sad because people say that my father is irresponsible."

Mothers and the JFC also struggle socially. Mothers may continue to work in clubs. Their lack of education makes it difficult for them to find other work. The family network can feel the impact of such struggles. "I have a different father, my sister has a different father, and my soon-to-be sister/brother (mother is pregnant) has a different father who we are now living with," said a 9-year-old JF child.

Lack of education on the part of the mother was repeatedly mentioned. NGO staff members indicated that pride often led to enhanced education for children, even when it strained finances: "There are many people with pride. Since they are working overseas, they put their children in to private schools. Even if the mother is economically strapped, money is used on education." The JFC also had difficulties in having friends and belonging to a group.

Finally, some JFC face numerous socioemotional issues, including acceptance with regards to ethnicity and at times their relation to two cultures can create a stigma. The JFC often do not relate to others in their environment because they have a different look: "...I don't really look like...they say it's my eyes...but I think it is not." The JFC may have to overcompensate to fit in: "I am so friendly so I never felt excluded by Filipinos."

The JFC also have mixed feelings toward their Japanese fathers. Although they may not have ever met their fathers, they feel a need to connect. One JF child stated that, "I don't know my father that much....I always bring a picture of him....I am planning to see him, I don't know in what way...let's just see...come what may....I am not mad, I just want to talk to him formally."

The JFC must also come to terms with their mixed heritage. They often associate their Japanese heritage with technology and high standards of education. Finally, the JFC may have unattainable or unrealistic hopes and wishes, including seeing their father, education in Japan, and their mothers being happy.

Cases

Kazu (4th grade) and Hiro (2nd grade). Kazu and Hiro's father is Japanese and their mother is a Filipino entertainer. Kazu is Japanese and Hiro is Filipino. The children lived under a bridge, supporting themselves by peddling, after they were deserted by their father. Then their finances improved to move them to a squatter area at a rent of 2000 pesos a month. The children are now studying on a scholarship from an NGO.

Robert. Robert is 11 years old. His father and mother lived together but never legally married (cohabitation). He and his mother live with his grandmother. The mother secured a loan for starting a business using the money she earned as an entertainer in Japan as capital. The father has agreed to pay 1 million yen over 5 years.

Joanna is 9 years old and very responsible. She is also very intelligent. She can speak English well for her age. As her mother is pregnant, she is responsible for taking her younger half-sister to her play school. Joanna had a very secure childhood in the Philippines, which is evident in her positive response to being uprooted. Her only struggle is with her mother whom she wishes to be happy.

Mark. Mark is 15. He is the first of the four sons of a Japanese man and a Filipino, who is a singer in a Japanese club. His three brothers live in Japan. Mark was brought up in Philippines but moved to Japan (after a visit) as his father and mother decided that he should finish Japanese high school and then work in Japan. He does not enjoy Japan and does not have a good relationship with his family here. He does not know the Japanese language and culture and so communicates only with his mother at home. He is torn between two cultures. He likes dancing and was already dancing in TV programs in the Philippines. He verbalized that he wants to go home to his grandmother in the Philippines.

John. John is 12. He was adopted by his aunt, whom he refers to as his mother. His real mother is married to a Japanese man and has her own family. John said he likes school even if he does not understand most of it. John seems lonely, but in school he finds a lot to do and socializes with other children. He is intelligent, has strong memory, and follows directions by observing others. He seems to have had a secure childhood and attended a good school while in the Philippines.

4. Discussion and Recommendations

Children have simple dreams and are hopeful of what lies ahead. In the case of JFC, their innocence and youth are inevitably challenged by the circumstances that surround their birth, but such difficulties can be prevented if decisions are made by parents with the welfare of their child in mind.

This study has identified that JFC struggle as a result of sociocultural and economic differences between the two countries that influence individuals' lives and decisions. The union of two people from different cultures and nationalities, coupled with socioeconomic struggles and each individual's underlying reasons to unite (marriage/cohabitation), may also lead to their separation. Some economically struggling Japanese men in need of recognition and respect find them in Filipino entertainers working in Japanese clubs.

However, since the time frame for working as an entertainer is limited (Labor Attaché Atty. Reynaldo Regalado in "Straight from the shoulder," 2002), for financial security, getting married or having a child may be the only option for a Filipino woman to get a visa and gain freedom from the work agency.

The responses concerning factors that affect the JFC are quite remarkable. The study found that financial problems may affect the children, but they greatly affect mothers. Abandoned mothers often decide to return to Japan to work as an entertainer, leaving their children in the Philippines, to support not only their children but also their parents. This results in a weak mother–child relationship. Mothers staying back in Philippines are forced to take up job as an entertainer or get involved in a string of failing relationships, which leads to the child's social struggles.

Emotional problems affect both the mother and child greatly. Sadly, the mother's emotional problems, carried over to children, may persist in them well into their teens and beyond. Lack of father's love and having a broken family, which are two major stressors that can predispose a person to psychological illnesses or disorders, may also lead to undesirable behaviors in their children.

The responses of JFC also indicated mixed feelings of love and the need for their father—wanting to know him and feeling hurt that people say negative things about him.

Four socioemotional issues identified in this study are unique among JFC: ethnicity, mixed feelings, having a Japanese identity, and hopes and wishes.

Hatred of the father's abandonment is usually the normal reaction of children of any ethnicity, but in the case of JFC, it is the other way around. The child feels hurt if their father is portrayed badly. The JFC harbor the hope of seeing their fathers and reunite with them to embrace the Japanese culture and become a part of it. Limited number of respondents because of time constraint, the availability of respondents, and some sociocultural differences such as language barrier may have impacted the results of this study. Future research should include more number of respondents as well as a longitudinal study with JFC with further exploration of their socioemotional factors.

5. Conclusion

Children, regardless of race and nationality, have the same need for a whole and complete family. JFC's socioemotional factors identified in this study are quite unique, including their perception of having a different

ethnicity, retaining some degree of love, and the need to see their fathers instead harboring hatred and anger toward them. Despite the father's abandonment, JFC still feel proud of their Japanese culture, as it is associated with advanced technology and education standards in Japan. Finally, JFC feel that they belong to two cultural groups; they consider knowing and belonging to both to be their destiny.

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