

ICTs and Connectedness in Families of Filipino Migrant Workers

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Abstract

While migrant work brings economic benefits to developing countries like the Philippines, the separation of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) from their children for long periods of time makes poor families vulnerable to negative social and developmental consequences. This study investigates whether and how children of OFWs in poor communities maintain their connectedness with their migrant parents via Internet use at home and in cybercafés.

Frequency of Internet use and use of online applications (e.g. chat, social networking, email) to communicate with their parents was determined from a sample of 308 adolescent and young adult participants from an urban and rural community. Connectedness was measured via the children's perceived knowledge of their parents' lives overseas, the children's perception of their parents' knowledge about them, and their perception of their parents' efforts to know more about them. Children whose primary Internet access was through cybercafés was compared with those who also had access at home, and those who accessed both at home and in cybercafés.

The study found that having access to the Internet at home makes a significant difference in the connectedness between the child and his or her migrant parent, as it allows for more frequent communication than public access. Children's reported knowledge of their parents, their

perception of their parents' knowledge about them, and their perception about their parents' efforts to know more about them were all significantly higher for those who used the Internet at home, compared with those who access only in cybercafés. When Internet access in cybercafés was disaggregated according to site, the difference in family connectedness was significant for the rural sample, where immediate physical access to cybercafés is more difficult. The impact of ICTs on the connectedness of OFW families has implications for the discourse on access and communication rights for families and migrant workers who have limited access to the Internet.

Keywords

Cybercafés, Connectedness, Migrant Workers, Internet Use

Introduction

This study investigates the use of the Internet at home and in cybercafés among adolescent and young adult children of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs). Specifically, it determines whether Internet use is related to familial connectedness, particularly the extent to which families monitor and communicate about each others' lives.

The OFW Phenomenon

At the end of 2009, there were more than 8.5 million Filipinos overseas, many for employment purposes, representing more than 9% of the population¹. In 2010, the National Statistics Office (NSO) reported that there were 2.04 million Overseas Filipino Workers, 95% of whom were contract workers. A little over half were male (52%), and a third were laborers and unskilled workers (32%). The occupation with the highest demand in terms of new hires in 2010 were household service workers, most of whom were women (98%)². The international transfer of caretaking is another dimension to the migrant labor chain (Parreñas 2000, 2002). As more women enter the labor market in the developed world, Filipino women have responded to fill the resulting care deficit. This has created new household configurations whereby one or both parents are separated from their children.

Overseas employment is meant to help sustain the families these workers often have to leave behind. In fact, as more Filipinos work overseas, the remittances they send back to the Philippines likewise increase. Between 2004 to 2011, remittances grew from US\$8.5B to US\$20.1B³. However, family separation is now recognized as one of the social costs of migration affecting the global south (Madianou & Miller 2011; Scalabrini Migration Center 2003). In a country such as the Philippines, where the family is considered "the center of their [Filipinos'] universe" (Jocano 1998, p.1), and where close-knit family relations are integral to Filipino culture and identity (Medina 2001), the separation of OFW parents from their children is a persistent concern. A

¹ This was based on stock estimates provided by the Commission on Filipino Overseas, POEA.

² Employment overseas statistics, POEA (2010). See <http://www.poea.gov.ph/html/statistics.html>

³ Statistics from the Philippine Central Bank <http://www.bsp.gov.ph/statistics/keystat/ofw.htm> accessed April 16, 2012.

number of studies have reported that 10-12 year-old children of migrant mothers had poorer academic and social adjustment outcomes (Battistella & Conaco, 1998, 1996); emotional hardships such as sadness and loneliness, and ambivalent feelings regarding parental migration, persist among children, even unto young adulthood (Parreñas 2006; Scalabrini Migration Center 2003). These same studies report that cellphone calls and texting (SMS) have allowed OFW parents to continue to provide input on family matters and childcare and discipline issues, thereby earning them the moniker “cellphone families” (Scalabrini Migration Center 2003). To the authors’ knowledge, however, Internet use among OFW parents and their children has yet to be fully investigated. The present study addresses this gap.

ICT Use in OFW Families

Programs have been developed to facilitate the long-distance communication between OFWs and their families by providing non-digital-literate OFWs and OFW dependents basic IT/ICT training (e.g., Word Processing, Internet use, etc.). Such programs assume that if Internet use is dominated by communication among members of OFW families, there is good reason to expect positive social impact (see Kraut, et. al, 2002). But whether such programs have indeed resulted in better connections among families that have to live apart has not been evaluated.

A recent survey found that in the Philippines, social networking is the most popular medium for connecting families, followed by SMS (MSN 2011). There are documented cases of economically better-off migrants who invest in broadband Internet service and web cameras in order to continue to be present and actively participate in household decision-making (Porio 2007). Often with mobile phone communication, the interaction is initiated by the migrant, and a regular schedule is set to facilitate coordination (Aguilar 2009). All in all, it is estimated that 10% of the income of Filipino overseas workers are spent on communications (Thomas & Lim 2011), and that Filipino families, on average, have 10 gadgets with which to communicate with their relatives in other parts of the world (MSN 2011).⁴

But even as the MSN survey reported that 28% of Filipinos families perceived technology as having a high impact in their family relationships, prevailing research on the impact of ICTs on keeping households connected has been mixed. Some report that communication technologies such as the mobile phone and the Internet have been instrumental in easing the anxiety due to separation (Porio 2007). In Madianou and Miller’s (2011) study of long-distance parenting among Filipina migrants in the UK, mothers felt empowered by the mobile phone as it has allowed them to partially reconstruct their role as parents. Other contend that ICT use can heighten feelings of anxiety because of increased awareness of how different their family situation is from the norm (Miller 2007). Children of OFWs, particularly of migrant mothers, are more ambivalent about the benefits of transnational communication. Parreñas (2006) describes young adult children’s feelings of abandonment and longings for deeper emotional intimacy with their mothers that cannot be appeased even by weekly calls over the mobile phone. Moreover, such conversations are typically “commodified”, in that the discourse is dominated by the

⁴ see <http://technology.inquirer.net/6155/ofws-make-philippines-asia%E2%80%99s-most-hi-tech/>

mothers' admonitions that the child achieve in school or behave appropriately in exchange for the mother's sacrifices and economic contributions. However, such negative feelings are diminished when children receive support from extended families and communities, enjoy open communication with their migrant parents, and clearly understand the limited financial options that led their parents to migrate in the first place (Parreñas 2006).

Parental Monitoring

A particular aspect of family life that is made more challenging by the overseas work of one or both parents is the monitoring and control of children's behavior. Certainly, OFW parents who are physically distant from the child would have diminished control in comparison to intact households. Indeed, a common public perception is that children of OFW parents are at risk for various negative outcomes such as juvenile delinquency, due to OFW parents' inability to monitor their children from a distance (Parreñas 2006; Scalabrini Migration Center 2003). Whereas this perception has yet to be established empirically, the psychology literature has confirmed that parental monitoring consistently predicts positive adjustment and well-being and lowers risk-taking and problem behavior in childhood and adolescence (Crouter & Head 2002; Fletcher, Steinberg, & Williams-Wheeler 2004). This is because effective monitoring allows the parent to be aware of and reduce the risks in the child's environments, implement appropriate rewards and punishments for children's behaviors, and adjust their parenting to suit their child's needs (Darling, Cumsille, Alampay & Coatsworth, 2009). Whether and how OFW parents are able to monitor their adolescent children are therefore worth investigating.

In the present study, parental monitoring is indicated via the constructs of a) parents' knowledge of their children's lives, and b) parents' active efforts to know about their children's lives, both from the perception of the child. Consistent with current studies on monitoring (Stattin & Kerr 2000; Darling, Cumsille, Alampay & Coatsworth, 2009), the distinction is made between parental knowledge and parental efforts to know, where the former may be due to the adolescents' voluntary disclosure and communication to their parents, and the latter attributed to parents' behaviors and active attempts to monitor their children. A third construct, the child's knowledge of their parents' lives (overseas), is also measured. All together, these variables indicate the extent of parental monitoring, and disclosure and communication, more generally.

Research Objectives

This paper asks whether the use of the Internet by adolescent and young adult children of OFWs, in terms of type of access (i.e. home, public/cybercafé, or both); kind of communication (i.e. text, voice, or video chats; social networking site; email); and frequency of use, is related to parents' and children's knowledge about each other's lives and parents' efforts to monitor their children's lives. It is hypothesized that more frequent use of the Internet to directly communicate with OFW parents positively influences perceptions of knowledge about each other's lives. Likewise, more frequent communication through the Internet is positively associated with perceptions of parents exerting more effort to monitor their children.

Secondarily, the study explores various descriptive data on Internet access and use in OFW families, particularly in public access venues (PAV, or cybercafés), differentiating between urban and rural contexts.

The paper then presents policy implications for accessing and using the Internet that can strengthen the ties between parents and children separated by migration.

Methodology

Surveys conducted on adolescent and young adult children left behind by Overseas Filipino Workers were the primary data source for this research.

Sample

The community where the surveys were conducted had a high concentration of OFWs. The identification of the community in which the study was conducted was done in consultation with *Kanlungan*, a non-governmental organization that directly works with migrant workers and their families. It was from this consultation that the urban poor communities in Quezon City, the most populous city in Metropolitan Manila, were identified. A provincial sample was added, again upon consultation an NGO working with OFWs, to provide a rural-urban comparison of Internet accessibility and impact on family connectedness. The provincial sample came from Calapan in Mindoro Province.

Drawing 158 respondents from Quezon City and 150 from Calapan, a total of 308 participants were administered surveys via oral interview. Surveys were conducted in the vernacular by a trained research assistant in participants' homes, as well as in 15 frequently visited cybercafés around the communities (7 cafes in Quezon City and 8 in Calapan). One hundred sixty eight respondents (54.5%) were female. The mean age of the sample was 19.13 (SD=6.85); 75% was between the ages of 13 to 21 (the 25% were technically adults, but still depended on the remittance of their parents). Similar to the national trend in international labour migration, 50% of the respondents had parents working in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), followed by other Asian countries. In terms of the their parents' occupations, 42% (n=128) were domestic workers, 27% (n=82) worked in the service sector, 14% (n=42) were laborers, and 7% (n=23) were seamen. The remainder were in various other occupations.

As part of the process of instrument development, separate focus group discussions (FGD) were held among OFW adolescent children and OFW parents who had just recently returned from their overseas work assignment. A subsequent FGD was also held with the adolescents after the survey results had been processed to probe into emerging findings.

Measures

Internet Use: Type of Access, Kind of Communication, and Frequency of Use

Respondents were asked to indicate on a 6-point scale (from 1=*Never* to 6=*Everyday*) where they accessed the Internet, i.e. from the home or public access

venues (cybercafés). Similarly, the kind of Internet communication used by the respondents when interacting with their OFW parent was considered, whether via text chats, voice chats, video chat, social networking sites, or email. Respondents indicated the frequency of each kind of communication on a 6-point scale ranging from never to everyday.

Parental Knowledge and Monitoring

As an indicator of parental knowledge, the adolescent and young adult respondents were asked about how well their parents knew about 11 aspects of their lives (e.g., who their friends are, how well they are doing in school/work, their problems), on a 3-point scale: 1=Knows Nothing, 2=Knows Some, 3=Knows A Lot. As a measure of parental monitoring or parent-initiated efforts to know, respondents were asked how much their parents exerted efforts to know about the same 11 aspects of their lives, also using a 3-point scale: 1=Not At All, 2=A Little, 3=A Lot. Mean scores were computed for each variable.

Knowledge of Parents' Lives

As a counterpoint to parental knowledge and monitoring of their children's lives, and to provide a more comprehensive picture of family connectedness, respondents were also asked about their knowledge of their parents' lives overseas. Respondents indicated whether they *knew nothing*, *knew some*, or *knew a lot* about 11 aspects of their parents' lives (e.g., their health, their work and work environment, their living arrangements overseas).

Results

The first part of this section is based on responses from all the Internet users in the sample to show differences in how they accessed the Internet, and their reasons for using cybercafés. The second part is focused mainly on the sub-sample that used the Internet to communicate with their parents. The final part then presents results from the sub-sample that used the Internet only through cybercafés, and were able to use it to communicate with their parents.

Internet Access

It is notable that only 24 respondents, or 8% of the sample, do not use the Internet. Among the 284 adolescent and young adult children of OFWs who do use the Internet, almost half (46.8%, n=133) had no access at home. Instead, they relied on public access venues or cybercafés to access the Internet. The other 53% or 151 respondents had computers and some form of Internet connection in their homes, although 68% or 103 of these respondents with home access also frequented cybercafés.

Use of the Internet to communicate with migrant parents

Of those respondents who use the Internet, 75% (n=213) use it to communicate with their migrant parents. A larger proportion of respondents in urban Quezon City communicated with their parents through the Internet compared with respondents from rural Calapan (Quezon City 74%; Calapan 66%).

The difference may be partially explained by the migrant parent's access to the Internet overseas (see Table 1). Overall, less than half of the respondents' parents had home Internet access (43%), but a slightly higher proportion of parents from Quezon City working abroad had home access to the Internet compared to those from Calapan.

However, a tenth of migrant parents were unable to access the Internet overseas. A larger proportion of the parents from Calapan were not able to use the Internet, either because of no access in their country of work, or they did not know how to use the Internet. Thus, the parents' capability to access and quality of access to the Internet is a crucial determinant of whether children left behind would use it to communicate with their parents in the first place.

Table 1: OFW Parents' Internet Access Overseas

	QC (n=158)	Calapan (n=146)	Total (n=304)
Home	45%	42%	43%
Work	8%	7%	7%
Friend	4%	7%	6%
Internet Cafe	8%	8%	8%
Multiple venues	10%	3%	6%
Internet Capable but unable to access	6%	14%	10%
Non-Internet user	19%	17%	18%

One mother who worked in Hongkong shared how she communicated with her children by going to Internet shops in Hongkong:

I used YM (Yahoo! Messenger). I always saw my children there. I also do voice chat on YM. Then, when I chat, I see them, and they also see and are able to talk to me. Eventually, after some time, they said, 'Why don't you use Facebook Mama? We can also chat there.' I said, I don't have an account. They said: Okay, we'll make you one. So they made me a *Facebook* account and gave me the password. Afterwards, I also did not know how to upload pictures on *Facebook*. So they still didn't see any of my pictures. So I asked for help. My pictures on *Facebook* were placed by someone in the computer shop. My children were happy (to see my pictures) even if it's only in Facebook. Every Sunday, we have pictures. They also have pictures. But, they (in the shop) charge me a fee, HK\$1 per picture.

Her case is typical of Filipino domestic helpers in Hongkong. Usually on Sundays many domestic helpers working in Hong Kong congregate in a particular plaza in the city center. Because of this, some shops cater specifically for Filipinos.

Some OFWs are more fortunate in that their employers provide them with computer and Internet access at home. One mother who worked in Israel related her experience:

I was able to access the Internet in my house. My boss allowed me to use a laptop. They gave me a laptop so that I could always see my family, because they noticed that if I don't see them, don't talk to them, I get cranky. My employer didn't want me to leave, so they did everything for me not to get lonely.

As mentioned previously, not all the children were able to use the Internet to communicate with their parents. How this influences their knowledge of each other's lives is reported next.

Impact of Internet Communication on Parental Knowledge and Monitoring

Overall, children who used the Internet to communicate with their parents via the Internet differed significantly from those who did not, in terms of their perceived knowledge of the parent, $t(302) = 2.82, p < .01$. Specifically, those who used the Internet reported knowing more about their parents' lives overseas, compared to those who do not use the Internet. Comparisons in parents' knowledge and parental monitoring of children's lives did not yield any significant differences, however. This is perhaps due to the ubiquitous use of mobile phones, which, as will be cited later, correlates more strongly than Internet use with parental knowledge and monitoring. However, it seems that children left behind learn more about their parents' lives through the Internet, given the more various modes of communication permitted online (e.g., sharing photos via social networking sites, video chats, etc.)

Next, respondents' family connectedness was compared for those who used particular forms of Internet communication versus those who did not. Tables 2, 3, and 4 present the data for child-reported knowledge of the parent, parental knowledge, and parental monitoring or efforts to know, respectively.

Table 2: Knowledge of the Parent Based on Applications used on the Internet

Activity	Yes	No	t	df
Chats w/ parents online	2.366	2.174	3.973**	306
Sends and receives messages from OFW parent	2.397	2.165	5.067**	306
Parent updates SNS/Facebook	2.343	2.211	2.694**	306
Child Sends email to Parent	2.393	2.196	4.284**	306
Receives' e-mail from Parent	2.370	2.222	3.193**	306

Table 2 shows that adolescent and young adult children who are able to communicate with their parents using various online options (chat, email, voice chat, social networking) report knowing their parents better. Only in video-chat were users and non-users not significantly different in their knowledge of their parents' lives.

Table 3: Parental Knowledge of the Child Based on Applications Used in the Internet

Activity	Yes	No	t	df
Chats w/ parents online	2.241	2.076	3.373**	306
Sends and receives messages from parent	2.255	2.086	3.579**	306
Receives email from OFW parent	2.227	2.137	1.903	306
Child Sends email to parents	2.225	2.137	1.852	306
Parent updates Facebook/SNS	2.212	2.128	1.673	306

However, with respect to their perception of how well their parents know them, only online chat and leaving/posting online messages made a significant difference. As Stattin and Kerr (2000) have noted, parental knowledge comes mainly from child disclosure. The findings suggest that chatting and posting messages to and from the parent are forms of communication that permit more self-disclosure.

Table 4: Parental Monitoring or Efforts to Know the Child Based on Applications Used in the Internet

Activity	Yes	No	t	df
Chats w/ parents online	2.326	2.166	2.862**	306
Sends/receives messages from OFW parent	2.325	2.195	2.401*	306
Child sends email to parent	2.322	2.212	2.050*	306
Receives email from parents	2.325	2.215	1.982*	306
Parents' updates SNS	2.295	2.220	1.311	306

Last, chatting, email (by parent and child) and exchanging messages yield significant differences as far as perceived efforts of the parent to know more about the child. As with the previous result, these modes of online communication permit the parent to exert more deliberate efforts to obtain information about their children's lives.

Type of Access and Impact on Child's Knowledge of the Parent, Parental Knowledge and Parental Monitoring

Table 5 presents the means and standard deviations of child-reported knowledge of parents, parental knowledge of child, and parental effort to know about the child, as well as the results of Analysis of Variance on the mean differences in these variables according to type of Internet access.

Table 5 Means and SD of Child-reported Knowledge of Parents, Parental Knowledge of the Child, and Parental Effort to Know the Child

	Access Type			F
	PAV access only	Home access only	Both PAV & Home	
Child-reported knowledge of parents	2.28 _a (.39)	2.50 _b (.41)	2.34 _{ab} (.44)	3.70*
Perceived parental knowledge of child	2.11 _a (.39)	2.36 _b (.44)	2.25 _{ab} (.40)	5.62**
Perceived parental effort to know about the child	2.20 _a (.43)	2.39 _a (.46)	2.34 _a (.48)	3.15*

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means. Means that do not share subscripts (a, b, ab) differ at $p < .05$ in Tukey HSD post-hoc comparisons.

Children who accessed the Internet at home reported significantly higher knowledge of their parents' lives than those who accessed the Internet in PAVs; those who accessed the Internet from both venues did not differ significantly from either of the two groups. The pattern of results is replicated for child-reported parental knowledge of the child.

Likewise, levels of parental monitoring or efforts to know the child differed significantly, depending on the type of Internet access. Children who accessed the Internet from their homes reported higher levels of parental monitoring, followed by children who used the Internet in both home and cybercafé and lastly by children who accessed only in cybercafés. However, based on Tukey's HSD post-hoc comparison, none of the pairwise differences were statistically significant.

Whether there were significant patterns between kinds of Internet communication and type of access was also determined. Table 6 indicates that use of all forms of communication, with the exception of email, was higher for those who are able to access the Internet in their homes.

Table 6: *Kind of Internet Communication with Parents by Type of Access*

Online Applications	Mean Rank			χ^2
	PAV access only	Home access only	Both PAV & Home	
Facebook	95.61	125.33	108.87	6.79*
Text Chat	86.79	128.33	116.01	16.55**
Voice Chat	94.72	119.21	112.32	5.87*
Video Chat	89.26	131.82	112.15	14.62**
Email	109.68	99.13	106.61	.83
Internet (in general)	89.71	130.39	112.33	14.12**

Note. * = $p \leq .05$. ** = $p \leq .001$

All together, the foregoing results suggest that home Internet access does make a significant difference in family connectedness, whether in terms of parental knowledge of the child, parental monitoring or efforts to know, or *child's knowledge of the parents' lives*. Home access allows for more frequent communication than public access. Moreover, coordination is easier, and the home environment provides the adolescent and young adult respondents more privacy and a less noisy environment as compared to public access venues. Indeed, many OFW parents have invested in buying personal computers and monthly Internet subscription for their homes in the Philippines. As related by Quezon City parents in their FGD:

“It is needed. For communication, so I can see them.”

“Aside from reducing telephone bills, you can see them...including the background of the house you can see, and this lessens the feeling of loneliness.”

These examples of investing in computers and Internet access at home explain why, relative to the Philippine population, home-Internet access among OFWs is higher.⁵ This also suggests that given a choice, cybercafés are not the preferred location for communicating between parent and child.

Internet Use in Public Access Venues (PAV)

Urban-Rural Differences in PAV Use

Cybercafés in the Philippines are generally found in urban locations. However, quality of broadband connections may vary. As such, one of the things this study looked at was whether differences in access, and quality of access, between an urban sample (Quezon City) and rural sample (Calapan, Mindoro Oriental) would yield differences in the use and impact of cybercafés on family connectedness.

⁵ Alampay, 2011. ICT sector performance review for the Philippines. LirneAsia.

Surveys were conducted in cybercafés that were reported in the user surveys as being most frequented by respondents. Seven (7) frequently visited cybercafés from Quezon City and eight (8) in Calapan were documented. It was noted that the cybercafés that the respondents frequented tend to have bandwidths that range between 1mbps to 5 mbps, with more than half having 3mbps or higher. The rental rates range between Php15 to 25 per hour use in Quezon City, and Php15 to 20 per hour⁶ in Calapan.

What sets the two locations apart was that the more popular Internet cafés in Quezon City were within walking distance from the respondents, whereas the ones in Calapan were farther, requiring public transportation for some to access. *When describing urban cybercafés as easily accessible, they may be literally 5 meters away from one’s front door, which was typical in urban slums in the capital. They are also informal operations that are not likely to be registered with the local government.* As a result, cybercafé users in Quezon City were able to use the Internet in communicating with their parents more frequently than cybercafé users in Calapan. They also used Facebook, video chat and email to connect with their parents more often (see Table 7).

Table 7: Kind of Internet Communication with Parents by Location

Online Applications	Mean Rank		U	Z
	QC PAV users	Calapan PAV users		
Facebook	48.61	34.59	581**	-2.70
Text Chat	46.98	37.03	664	-1.88
Voice Chat	45.82	38.76	723	-1.34
Video Chat	48.52	34.72	585.5**	-2.61
Email	50.15	32.28	502.5**	-3.38
Internet (in general)	48.08	35.38	608*	-2.47

Note. * $p < .05$. ** $p < .01$.

Hence, proximity to cybercafés allowed for more frequent parent-child communication among respondents in Quezon City. The impact of this easier access to cybercafés in Quezon City was that levels of family connectedness remained fairly the same whether the respondent used the Internet in cybercafés, at home or in both (see Table 8). This suggests that easily accessible cybercafés in Quezon City can be acceptable substitutes to private access in maintaining relationships between members of OFW families.

⁶ This is approximately between US\$0.35- US\$0.46.

Table 8: *Child-reported Knowledge of Parents, Parental Knowledge of the Child, and Parental Effort to Know the Child by Type of Access – Quezon City*

	Access Type			<i>F</i>
	PAV access only	Home access only	Both PAV & Home	
Child-reported knowledge of parents	2.29 (.44)	2.46 (.54)	2.28 (.45)	1.15
Perceived parental knowledge of child	2.09 (.42)	2.35 (.56)	2.20 (.44)	2.35
Perceived parental effort to know about the child	2.17 (.44)	2.49 (.52)	2.26 (.50)	2.82

Note. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means.

On the other hand, distance may have impeded the capability of cybercafé users in Calapan to communicate with their parents more regularly. Unlike in Quezon City, accessing a good cybercafé in Calapan requires the respondent to commute some distance. Hence, there were significant differences in parent-child connectedness, depending on the type of access. As seen in Table 9, children who used the Internet only in PAVs scored significantly lower in terms of parental knowledge and parental efforts to know the child, compared to respondents who accessed the Internet at home and those who accessed in both settings.

Table 9: *Child-reported Knowledge of Parents, Parental Knowledge of the Child, and Parental Effort to Know the Child by Type of Access – Calapan*

	Access Type			<i>F</i>
	PAV access only	Home access only	Both Home & PAV	
Child-reported knowledge of parents	2.27 _a (.34)	2.53 _b (.29)	2.41 _{ab} (.41)	4.72*
Perceived parental Knowledge of child	2.14 _a (.35)	2.37 _b (.33)	2.31 _b (.34)	3.34*
Perceived parental effort to know about the child	2.24 _a (.41)	2.37 _a (.41)	2.45 _a (.43)	2.22

Note. * $p < .05$. Standard deviations appear in parentheses below means. Means that do not share subscripts (a, b, ab) differ at $p < .05$ in the LSD post-hoc comparison.

Impact of Kind of Communication Used in PAVs on Child's Knowledge of the Parent, Parental Knowledge and Parental Monitoring

The succeeding set of analyses considers the relations between the kind of Internet communication and the three variables indicating family connectedness, for users of the Internet in PAVs. Differences were determined in family connectedness according to those who used the particular form of communication, versus those who did not use that form of communication.

Child-reported Knowledge of the Parent

Table 10: Knowledge of the Parent Based on Applications used on the Internet (PAV only)

	QC				Calapan			
	Yes	No	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Yes	No	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Facebook	2.28	2.12	1.51	70	2.24	2.23	.06	59
Text chat	2.34	2.09	2.63**	70	2.31	2.19	1.19	59
Voice chat	2.38	2.11	2.86**	70	2.32	2.19	1.34	59
Video chat	2.27	2.18	.94	70	2.32	2.19	1.34	59
Email	2.32	2.12	2.05*	70	2.25	2.23	.12	59

Note. * $p < .05$, ** $p \leq .01$

Survey results show that the adolescent and young adult child's knowledge of their OFW parent was significantly higher *only* in urban Quezon City for those who engage in text chat, voice chat, and send/receive email from their parents (see *Table 10*). However, there were no differences in knowledge of parents' lives between those who use video chat and social networking and those who do not. No significant differences in knowledge of parents by kind of communication were found in the rural Calapan sample.

Text chat and video chat are synchronous forms of communication, which requires that the interacting parties be online at the same time. As such, save for fortuitous or chance meetings online, this requires either scheduling communications or coordinative communication using other ICTs (such as cell phones). This coordination would be easier for cybercafés that are accessible, as they are in Quezon City. As some parents' related:

"I didn't have a computer in the house before. Hence, I used to text them so they can go to the computer shop. So they know what time or day I can talk to them."

"For over a year, I didn't know how to use (the Internet), and I was a little embarrassed to use. But, when I learned and I was online, I would text them to go online. Sometimes, I just leave the computer turned on (online)."

“Sometimes, when using YM (Yahoo! Messenger), my YM is already open and I am online, but they’re not online. I’ll call them (on the cellphone).”

Some parents, however, said that when they communicated with their children, they would prefer not to talk about their problems and hardships in their place of work, and would rather ask how their children were doing. As one father related:

“For me, personally, I do not want to talk about it. For instance, if I’m having a hard time with my boss. I would rather ask my children how they are, how they’re doing in school.”

Parental Knowledge of the Child

Parental knowledge about the child was only significantly higher among those who used *voice chat* among QC respondents (see Table 11). For Calapan respondents, parental knowledge was higher for users of social networking sites, chatting applications and email. However, none of the comparisons between those who used these applications and those who did not were statistically significant.

Table 11: Parental Knowledge of the Child Based on Applications used on the Internet (PAV only)

	QC				Calapan			
	Yes	No	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>	Yes	No	<i>t</i>	<i>df</i>
Facebook	2.08	2.05	.26	70	2.11	2.15	-.41	59
Text chat	2.15	1.97	1.79	70	2.23	2.06	1.75	59
Voice chat	2.17	1.99	1.92*	70	2.23	2.07	1.55	59
Video chat	2.06	2.09	-.37	70	2.23	2.07	1.69	59
Email	2.09	2.06	.29	70	2.10	2.14	-.41	59

Overall, respondents’ mean scores on child-reported knowledge of parents were generally higher than their perceptions of parental knowledge about them. This appears to indicate that the respondents think they know their parents better than their parents know them. As Stattin and Kerr (2000) have noted, parental knowledge comes mainly from child disclosure. As such, the frequency and kind of communication may not necessarily lead to increased parental knowledge if the child is not willing to share information.

How the child-parent communication proceeds, and what each party discloses, often depend on the kind of communication. As relayed by a parent:

“ Often, between me and my children, most especially my eldest, we get to communicate less personal (or indirect). I get to communicate with him on chat, because if we speak in person, we’re shy and guarded. With chat, he is able to tell me more of the personal things. Hence, he prefers that.”

Similarly, a daughter who participated in an FGD, explained how she chose the medium for telling her mother about problems:

”Sometimes, there are things I find difficult to tell over a chat. I message my mother instead. (Over chat) I tell her the happy events.”

Part of the reason why children and parents cannot always be open can be contextualized by how the communication plays out. As one child said:

“Sometimes, she’ll speak with one person at a time.”

As such, conversations are not private because the communication happens in the presence of the entire household. On the use of video-chat, for example, a father in the FGDs said that: “There’s a big difference with the cell phone. With the Internet, because there’s a webcam, it helps soften the loneliness of your home away from the country. Although in the cell phone, you are also able to talk with them. But it’s really nicer on the Internet. The difference is the camera. You see the environment.” But he also qualified that in the end, “there’s really no difference (in the sharing). It’s not like you have a heart-to-heart talk with them (on video).”

Parental Monitoring or Efforts to Know the Child

On parental effort to know, the disaggregated location data did not yield any statistically different scores between users and non-users of the different kinds of online communication. It is possible that parental knowledge and monitoring, at this stage in the lives of the adolescent and young adult children, rely more on the disclosure of the respondents to their parents, rather than deliberate efforts of parents to know about their children’s lives. This is especially the case for OFW parents who engage in delayed monitoring of behaviors distant from the parent in both time and space (Darling, Cumsille, Alampay & Coatsworth 2009). Other data from this study also suggest that mobile phone calls and texting may be more often used by parents for the purpose of more direct monitoring efforts.

This does not necessarily indicate, however, that parents are not using the Internet to know more about their children outside of their direct communication. As some parents in the FGDs mentioned:

I find out things about them because I see their pictures on *Facebook*. Then, I ask them about it. You could, at the very least, find out what’s happening to them. You know where they go, that you can find out. They will not text that to you, they don’t tell you that.

Hence, some parents’ do try to exert some control by being more active in their children’s social networks. Another mother related the following:

”I do comment (on their Facebook pages). I really post comments and I call them right away in those cases. I ask them, ‘What is this photo? Why do you have such photos?’... They will respond and explain themselves, ‘Mom, that’s my classmate or that’s just a friend’. That’s because they know that I will not stop (asking them), that I can always call.”

Discussion

The main finding of this paper can be summarized as follows: Access to the Internet is important for families with OFW parents, as seen in the data that adolescent and young adult children who use various forms of online communication (email, Skype, chat, messaging, Facebook) to communicate with their parents are significantly better connected with them, as indicated by higher knowledge of their parents' lives, higher parental knowledge of their children's lives, and higher efforts of parents to know their children.

Insights can also be derived from the location of Internet access. OFW families residing in urban poor communities are not the typical 'poor' because they derive a significant amount of regular income from remittances of relatives. They tend to be more exposed to media than the general population, and are more invested in communication technologies to keep in touch with relatives working abroad (Ho, 2011). This was supported by the survey where a larger proportion of the adolescent and young adult children had home access to the Internet. Nonetheless, cybercafés also provide access for many of them, since a significant number of households remain without home access.

Cybercafés were actually more common in the urban poor communities than expected, albeit many were 'informal'. These informal cybercafés were operated within houses, some with a couple of computer units side-by-side within their small convenience store. Hence, when disaggregating the data according to urban and provincial/rural samples, it shows that in urban poor communities, public access tend to approximate home access, since no significant differences in connectedness was seen in the two locations. On the other hand, with public access being more difficult in rural areas, there were significant differences seen in parent-child connectedness vis-à-vis home access, with the latter associated with higher connectedness.

For cybercafé only users, frequency of cybercafé-use to communicate with parents, was positively correlated only with the Children's perceived knowledge of their parents' lives, although weak ($R=1.95$, $p=.024$). Moreover, use of all the online communication media were found to have direct relationships with children's perceived knowledge of their parents' lives overseas except for video chat. Voice chat had the strongest relationship, followed by text chat, e-mail and Facebook. Although, more frequent video-based communication did not yield any statistical significance, FGDs conducted with former OFWs who were able to communicate with their children via the Internet, said they preferred video chat over other online communication tools.

Regardless of where they accessed Internet abroad, parents felt seeing and hearing their children through video calls helped relieve their yearning to be with their families back home a lot more compared with other communication forms. However, in the FGD conducted with the children, many of the participants revealed that they were not that comfortable engaging in video chats at cybercafés primarily due to the lack of privacy in public venues. Likewise, the lack of privacy in using some applications can also lead the parent and child to use other means of communication, especially when sharing more sensitive topics. Consequently, only 47% of the respondents who

used the Internet primarily in cybercafés, used video chat to keep in touch with their parents overseas. This could also be attributed in part, to the limited video capabilities of cybercafés respondents visited most often.

Furthermore, access to online communication did not necessarily reduce the costs or monthly expenses for communication. Instead, as explained by parents in an FGD, 'cheaper' communication was instead transformed into lengthier or more frequent communication between the OFW and the family left behind.

More frequent synchronous communication appears to generate more perceived knowledge of their parents' lives abroad in children. Those who performed other online communication activities with parents such as chatting, sending/receiving email, getting updates from Facebook, also possessed more knowledge about their parents' lives than those who did not; however the differences were not significant. To some extent, this could be a product of the children's communication preferences. The children who participated in follow-up focused group discussions all agreed that the online communication application they used depended on the type of conversation they'd like to have with their parents. They opted to chat with their parents to say hello and have light conversation but any serious topics is channeled to their parents by leaving them Facebook or YM messages. According to them, leaving messages give their parents ample time to consider the situation while sparing the children from initial emotional outbursts.

Implications and Conclusions

More frequent synchronous forms of communication are more effective in bridging geographically separated OFW families. This form of communication requires coordination, given the differences in time zones and opportunity to access the Internet for both the parent and the child.

Home versus Cybercafés

Overall, the maintenance of family cohesion appears to be an impact area where cyber cafes are poor substitutes for private access. The reasons for this are varied, although timely availability (for easier coordination) and the need for privacy were noted as important concerns.

On the otherhand, home access to the Internet allows for significantly more frequent online communication between the parent and child. More frequent communication using the Internet in turn leads to better knowledge between them, and the capability for parents to learn about the lives of their children.

Nonetheless, cybercafés still provide a viable alternative for many households who remain without home access (47% of those surveyed). Whether these make a difference in keeping migrant worker families connected is also influenced by the frequency, quality and use of applications by children in these venues. Perceived parental knowledge, perceived child knowledge and perceived parental efforts to know them were generally higher for users of particular communication applications, even though the differences were mostly non-significant, especially in comparison to cell phones.

Some differences were noted between the urban and rural samples of cybercafé only users, as the urban sample had 'more frequent communication' with their parents due to their closer proximity to cybercafés. Informal operators within the communities can also operate in more flexible hours. This ease in getting to a venue and flexible operating hours, is critical, because as mentioned previously, the synchronous communication between parent and child is complicated by differences in time zones, availability, and access, and this requires complex coordination.

As such, the need to quickly get to a place with the right facilities highlights a key advantage of ubiquitous cybercafés in urban poor communities that are in close proximity to where people live.

Mobiles as Complements

Mobile phones and Internet use also have complementary uses. Mobile phones help in coordination, allowing children/parents to know when the other is available online. Also, online communication helps reduce the cost of communication, and can translate to longer and more frequent communication between them.

Challenges

However, home Internet access and frequency of cybercafé visits, does not always translate to more communication with parents, as some use it for other purposes. Likewise, the noise and publicness of cybercafés, or group communication when at home can also discourage the use of 'more personal' communication through video-communication and voice-communication that is possible in some venues. Hence, this may also limit a child's willingness to share personal information, and lessens the parents' knowledge about them.

Considering time zone differences between parents and children, venues could also consider operating more flexible times, and 'dedicated hours' for migrant family communication.

Finally, because communication is bidirectional, then the kind of access parents have overseas and their ability to maximize them are equally important. As such, exposure and training of migrant workers on how to use online communication would be beneficial for them prior to their departure. This is a service that can be offered by government agencies and non-governmental organizations that work for the welfare of migrant families. They could also provide soft loans to fund computer and Internet access for the homes of OFW families. But more important, the migrant workers' ability to communicate online, when working in another country, should be among the rights that governments of labor exporting countries should push for, especially with destination countries that accept a large number of blue-collar and domestic laborers, like Saudi Arabia and Hongkong.

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