



Article

Family Functioning, Attitude Towards Parents' Overseas Employment, Well-being, and Career Aspirations of Left Behind Children of Overseas Filipino Workers

Maria Virginia G. Aguilar^{id} and Jeannie A. Perez^{id}

De La Salle University-Dasmarinas

Correspondence: mgaguilar@dlsud.edu.ph

Abstract

This study investigates the mediating role of family functioning in the relationship between Filipino college students' attitudes toward parental overseas employment and two key outcomes: psychological well-being and aspirations to pursue overseas work. Anchored in Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Family Systems Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior, the research addresses a notable gap in the literature by quantitatively exploring the experiences of an underexamined group—emerging adult students raised in transnational households. Utilizing data from 105 left-behind children (LBC) of Overseas Filipino Workers, the study employed Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM) to evaluate the proposed mediation model. Results reveal that favorable perceptions of parental migration are positively associated with enhanced family functioning, elevated well-being, and increased career aspirations abroad. Family functioning emerged as a significant partial mediator, underscoring its pivotal role in shaping emotional resilience and future-oriented motivation among LBCs. The findings suggest that despite the physical absence of parents, many students demonstrate robust well-being and adaptive career goals, reflecting a form of transnational resilience. These insights contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of how family dynamics within transnational contexts shape youth development and mobility aspirations. Furthermore, the study offers practical implications for policy and intervention design, particularly in addressing the psychosocial dimensions of labor migration and mitigating long-term brain drain by fostering supportive family environments.

Keywords: *left-behind children, overseas Filipino workers, family functioning, well-being*

Suggested citation:

Aguilar, M.V., and Perez, J. (2025). Family Functioning, Attitude Towards Parents' Overseas Employment, Well-being, and Career Aspirations of Left Behind Children of Overseas Filipino Workers. *International Journal on Culture, History, and Religion*, 7(SI3), 583-604 <https://doi.org/10.63931/ijchr.v7iSI3.423>



Introduction

The Filipino left-behind children's (LBC) attitude towards the work of their parents abroad is a complex interplay of emotional and psychological responses that significantly impact family functioning. Many LBC of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) initially perceive their parents' decision to work abroad as a necessary sacrifice for the family's financial stability and overall well-being. However, this separation often leads to a reconfiguration of family roles, with extended family members or older siblings stepping into parental roles (Aguilar, 2020). This adjustment can foster resilience and independence in the child (Asis, 2006), yet it may also strain familial bonds and alter the traditional dynamics within the family unit. The absence of a parent can lead to feelings of abandonment and emotional distress, which can adversely affect family cohesion and the overall functioning of the household (Antia et al, 2020; Dominguez et al, 2022; Chu et al, 2025).

The attitude of Filipino LBC towards their parents' work abroad also has profound implications for their own well-being. While the financial benefits provided by OFW parents can enhance the child's educational opportunities and material comforts, the emotional cost can be significant (Parrenas 2005; Reyes 2007; Dominguez et al 2022; Yang 2022). The lack of daily parental presence can lead to feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and stress. Children may struggle with maintaining a sense of normalcy and emotional stability without the constant support of their parents. Despite these challenges, some children develop coping mechanisms, such as relying on friends and extended family or immersing themselves in academic or extracurricular activities. The duality of financial security and emotional challenges underscores the nuanced impact of parental migration on the child's well-being.

Interestingly, the children's attitude towards their parents' work abroad can also influence their desire to work abroad in the future (Chu et al., 2025). Exposure to the benefits and challenges of overseas employment may inspire some to pursue similar opportunities, motivated by the desire to achieve financial stability and provide for their future families. However, the psychological impact of parental absence and the strains on family functioning may deter others from seeking employment abroad, preferring to prioritize familial closeness and emotional well-being over economic gains (Parrenas 2005; Reyes 2007). Ultimately, the interplay between family functioning, well-being, and the aspirations to work abroad highlights the multifaceted and deeply personal nature of migration decisions within Filipino families. It underscores the importance of comprehensive support systems and policies that address the economic and emotional needs of OFW families.

While previous studies have examined the impact of parental migration on the well-being and career aspirations of Filipino LBC, most rely on qualitative research methods, which are inherently limited by study design constraints (Campos & Distor, 2020; Chu et al., 2025; Faulk et al., 2024). In contrast, there has been relatively little quantitative research that systematically measures the well-being and aspirations of LBC (Graham & Jordan, 2011). The present study addresses this gap by employing quantitative tools to assess the extent of well-being and aspirations among LBC.

Additionally, although previous studies on Filipino LBC have explored their career aspirations (Distor & Campos, 2020; Chu et al., 2025) and primarily identified their general career goals as shaped by their parents' overseas employment, they have not examined whether LBC themselves aspire to seek employment abroad despite their lived experience of the emotional and social challenges of family separation. This study bridges that gap by quantifying the extent to which LBC express a desire to work overseas, offering more profound insight into their aspirations.

Furthermore, this study contributes to existing literature by exploring the intricate relationship between attitude toward parents' overseas employment and family, which shapes both the career aspirations and well-being of LBC. This aspect has remained largely unexamined in previous research.

This research may help inform policies on overseas employment, education, and social welfare, enabling policymakers to address the specific needs of migrant families with targeted interventions. Additionally, this may help anticipate the potential impact on the future Philippine workforce and provide insights into mitigating brain drain concerns.

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in three key theoretical frameworks: Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory, Family Systems Theory, and the Theory of Planned Behavior.

Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory (Crawford, 2020) emphasizes that ongoing interactions within a structured set of environmental systems profoundly influence a child's development. These systems, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, macrosystem, and chronosystem, are nested and interrelated, each playing a unique role in shaping behavior, thoughts, and emotions based on how the child perceives and interprets experiences.

The microsystem encompasses the child's immediate surroundings, such as the family, directly affecting their daily lives. The mesosystem involves interactions between different microsystems, such as the relationship between home and school.

The exosystem includes external environments that indirectly impact the child, such as a parent's workplace. The macrosystem reflects the broader cultural and societal influences, including values, traditions, and social norms. Lastly, the chronosystem captures changes, including life transitions and shifts in family structure or societal conditions. These interconnected systems collectively influence a child's development, social relationships, and overall well-being. In the context of this study, the attitudes of left-behind children toward their parents' overseas employment are shaped within these systems. They may significantly affect their psychological well-being, perceived family functioning, and aspirations to work abroad.

In addition, the study draws on Family Systems Theory (Bowen, 1978), which emphasizes that family members are emotionally interdependent and that individual development is shaped by patterns of interaction within the family unit. From this perspective, the study explores how the attitudes of left-behind college students toward their parents' overseas employment are linked to family dynamics, personal well-being, and career aspirations, particularly regarding the possibility of working abroad.

Moreover, Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen 2020) explains that human behavior is primarily influenced by three key components: attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. According to TPB, a child with a positive attitude toward their parents' overseas employment is more likely to develop a stronger intention and aspiration to work abroad, particularly when this attitude is reinforced by perceived social support and a belief in their ability to succeed. The theory emphasizes how an individual's environment and experiences shape their beliefs and values, influencing their future goals and career choices.

The conceptual diagram shows that the children's attitudes toward their parents' overseas employment are conceptualized as the exogenous variable, while student well-being and aspiration to work abroad function as the endogenous (outcome) variables. The study also examines the role of mediating family functioning in the relationship between these attitudes and the two outcome variables (See Figure 1)

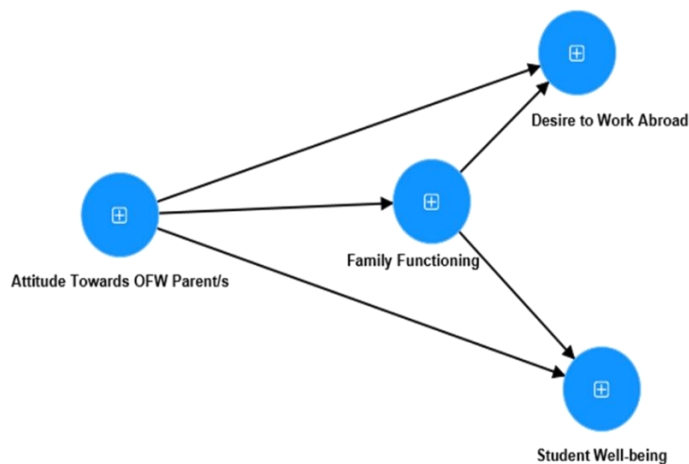


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The framework illustrates that the students' attitudes toward their parents' overseas employment significantly influence family functioning, affecting their well-being. Similarly, their attitudes shape students' aspirations to work abroad, mediated through family functioning.

Family functions are how families engage in regular routines, demonstrate effective communication and problem-solving, exhibit cohesion, and maintain harmonious relationships. Student well-being refers to the overall quality of life experienced by the student, encompassing physical, emotional, mental, eudaemonic, and social dimensions.

Strong and supportive family dynamics can mitigate the adverse effects of physical separation, providing a sense of security and support through frequent communication and emotional closeness. Active parental involvement in the child's life, even from a distance, fosters stability and guidance, reinforcing a reliable support system. The age and gender of children further influence how they perceive and cope with their parents' absence, with adolescents facing additional pressures related to academic performance and career planning, and boys and girls processing emotions differently. Adolescents, particularly those in college, face additional academic performance and career planning pressures, making parental support even more crucial. Adolescents at this stage seek independence but still need parental guidance and support. Now in their emerging adult stage, college students face very complicated challenges. Beyond academic and social demands, they must cope with the disintegration of once-strong social institutions that used to offer support (Arnett, 2014). Parental involvement is particularly critical at this stage. As emerging adults gain autonomy and develop, they often look to their parents for support, comfort, and advice (Manizia & Mishra, 2021). However, this can be challenging for children whose

parents are working abroad, which can adversely affect family dynamics. For example, parents' work-family balance can impact the parent-child relationship and influence children's behavior problems (Vieira et al., 2016).

Challenges distinct to families with absentee parents, such as rebellion, depression, and poor school performance, have been reported (Yang et al., 2022; Mao et al., 2020). It is often true among families with OFW parents. Given these concerns, understanding the views of the next generation of workers on their parents' employment abroad and how it influences family functioning is valuable. Children who positively view their parents' overseas work often develop higher resilience, motivation, self-esteem, and future orientation. At the same time, negative feelings can lead to psychological issues such as anxiety and depression, adversely affecting their academic and career prospects. Emotional stability nurtured by a supportive family environment equips children to handle the challenges of moving and working abroad, enhancing their academic performance and career readiness. Consequently, positive student well-being fosters traits like adaptability and resilience, which are essential for overseas success. Strong family relationships and positive attitudes towards parents' overseas employment are thus crucial for the child's long-term well-being and career success, highlighting the importance of cohesive family functioning in fostering resilience and preparedness for future employment opportunities abroad. Enhanced well-being, bolstered by supportive family dynamics and positive perceptions of parental employment, is directly linked to greater adaptability, resilience, and preparedness for employment opportunities abroad.

Problem and Hypothesis

This study examines the mediating role of family functioning in the relationship between attitudes toward parents' overseas work and student well-being and aspiration to work abroad. Specifically, this study aimed to answer the following research questions:

- 1) What is the relationship between the left-behind children's attitude toward their parents' overseas work and
 - a) their well-being and
 - b) Aspirations to work abroad?
- 2) Does family functioning mediate these relationships?

As for the hypotheses, these are the following:

- H1. A favorable attitude towards parents' overseas employment is associated with better family functioning.
- H2. A favorable attitude towards parents' overseas employment is associated with higher aspirations to work abroad.
- H3. A favorable attitude towards parents' overseas employment is associated with better well-being.
- H4. Better family functioning is associated with higher aspirations to work abroad.
- H5. Better family functioning is associated with better student well-being.
- H6. Better family functioning mediates the association between attitude towards parents' overseas employment and aspiration to work abroad.
- H7. Better family functioning mediates the association between attitude towards parents' overseas employment and student well-being.

Methodology

Participants

The participants in the study were purposively selected to ensure the inclusion of key informants, specifically, children currently enrolled in tertiary education whose parents are actively employed overseas. The sample comprised 105 left-behind children, with a mean age of 19.7 years. Of these, 32 were male (30.5%) and 73 were female (69.5%).

In terms of living arrangements, 62 participants (59%) resided with their nuclear families or with a parent and/or siblings; 29 (27.6%) lived with both nuclear and extended family members, such as grandparents or relatives; and 24 (22.9%) lived exclusively with extended family members.

Regarding parental employment abroad, 62 participants (59%) reported that their father is an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW), 28 (26.7%) indicated that their mother is an OFW, and 15 (14.3%) stated that both parents work overseas. On average, OFW parents had been employed abroad for 12 years.

A post hoc analysis revealed that the study achieved a statistical power of .95, with an effect size of .15 and an alpha level of .05, confirming the adequacy of the sample size for statistical analysis.

Materials

The Five-Factor Student Well-being Scale (FFSWS). This scale measures the five student well-being factors: positive and negative effects, life satisfaction, school satisfaction, and eudaemonia. The original scale had 35 items; however, Courtney et

al (2023) shortened it to 20. In the present study, the scale exhibited good psychometric properties with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from .80 to .91 for the scale factors and .94 for the overall scale. The scale has been administered worldwide and exhibited good psychometric properties. The items were rated on a 4-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). The scale was also used among Filipino undergraduate samples, yielding good psychometric properties (Perez et al., in press). The total score, derived from the sum of the 20 items, is interpreted using the following guidelines:

- Below 35: Very low level of student well-being
- 36 to 50: Low
- 51 to 65: High
- 66 to 80: Very high

The McMaster Family Functioning Scale (MFFS). This study uses the shortened version of the McMaster Family Functioning Scale (MFFS), consisting of 12 items. Initially developed by Epstein in 1984, the scale measures the overall health of the family system across six dimensions: problem-solving, communication, roles, affective responsiveness, affective involvement, and behavior control. The original scale included 60 items, but this study follows the modified approach by Cong et al. (2022), where higher scores indicate healthier family functioning.

The shortened scale is designed as a single-index measure, with responses ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree). Higher scores reflect healthier family functioning, while lower scores indicate less healthy functioning. Previous studies reported adequate test-retest reliability (Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.66 to 0.76) and concurrent validity (de Haan et al., 2015). Among Filipino undergraduates, the scale demonstrated adequate reliability with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.752 and a McDonald's omega (ω) of 0.756 (Penero et al., 2024).

In this study, the MFFS showed good reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of .86 and composite reliability (α) of .88. However, the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) was .33. The total score, derived from the sum of the 12 items, is interpreted using the following guidelines:

- Below 21: Very low level of family functioning
- 22 to 30: Low
- 31 to 39: High
- 40 to 48: Very high

The Attitude Towards Parents Working Abroad Scale is a researcher-developed instrument designed to assess students' attitudes toward their parents' employment overseas. It captures their beliefs, feelings, and perceptions related to this experience.

The scale uses a 4-point Likert format, with response options ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (4). Higher scores reflect a more favorable attitude toward parents working abroad. An example item from the scale is: *"I feel proud of my parent(s) for working overseas to provide a better life for our family."*

To ensure content validity and clarity, the scale was reviewed by four college counselors and one child of an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). The overall content validity index (S-CVI) was high at 0.90, with item-level CVIs (I-CVI) ranging from 0.80 to 1.00.

Originally comprising eight items, the scale was refined to six items following item-loading analysis. The final version demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.88$; composite reliability $\alpha = 0.89$) and good construct validity, as evidenced by an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.62. The total score, derived from the sum of the six items, is interpreted using the following guidelines:

- Below 10.5: Very unfavorable attitude towards parents' overseas employment
- 10.6 to 15: Unfavorable
- 15.5 to 19.5: Favorable
- 19.6 to 24: Very favorable

The Aspiration to Work Abroad Scale is a researcher-developed instrument to assess students' inclination to seek overseas employment opportunities. It captures the emotional, cognitive, and attitudinal dimensions of this aspiration. The scale utilizes a 4-point Likert response format, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 4 (strongly agree), with higher scores indicating a stronger desire to work abroad. An example item from the scale is: *"I dream of working abroad despite the potential negative impact on my family life."*

Content validity and item clarity were evaluated by a panel comprising four college counselors and one individual with lived experience as the child of an Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW). The initial version of the scale demonstrated strong content validity, with a scale-level content validity index (S-CVI) of 0.87 and item-level CVIs (I-CVI) ranging from 0.80 to 1.00.

Following item-loading analysis, the original six-item version was refined to a four-item scale. The final version exhibited satisfactory internal consistency, with a Cronbach's α of 0.76 and a composite reliability coefficient of 0.80. Construct validity was supported by an Average Variance Extracted (AVE) of 0.57. The total score, computed as the sum of the four items, serves as an index of the respondent's aspiration to work abroad and is interpreted according to the following guidelines:

- Equal to or below 7: Very weak aspiration to work abroad

- 8-10: Weak
- 11- 13: Strong
- 14-16: Very strong

Procedure

This quantitative study commenced with obtaining ethical clearance from the University Ethics Committee. Following approval, participants were recruited online through various social media platforms and referral networks. A link to the online survey was then distributed to prospective participants interested in joining the study.

The survey began with an introductory section that outlined the study's objectives and emphasized participants' privacy and rights. Respondents were assured that all information would be kept strictly confidential and that no personally identifiable data would be collected. They were also informed of their right to withdraw from study without consequence.

After data collection, responses were downloaded and screened for completeness and accuracy. The cleaned dataset was then imported into Jamovi Program to compute descriptive statistics, conduct non-parametric tests of difference, and analyze correlations.

For the primary analysis, path analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression approach via the SmartPLS software to examine the relationships among the study variables.

Data Analyses

Several data analytic techniques were used for quantitative data, including descriptive statistics, correlation analysis, and path analysis with partial least squares (PLS) approximation.

Descriptive Statistics. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the collected data. It includes examining frequency distributions, skewness, and kurtosis to gain an overview of the initial characteristics of the dataset. Normality of the distributions was also tested using the Shapiro-Wilk test. These analyses were performed using Jamovi software (The Jamovi Project, 2023).

Non-Parametric Tests of Difference. As part of the preliminary data analysis, statistical tests were conducted to identify potential confounding variables that would be controlled in the subsequent path analysis, following the procedure employed by Wang and Wang (2022). Specifically, group differences were tested on the key endogenous variables, family functioning, student well-being, and aspiration to work

abroad, across various demographic factors, including gender, living arrangement, and the Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) status of parents.

When a significant difference was observed in any focal variables across a demographic category, that demographic variable was included as a control in the subsequent structural model. Welch's *t*-tests examined differences in attitudes, aspirations, family functioning, and well-being between male and female participants. The Kruskal-Wallis test assessed group differences based on living arrangements (i.e., living with nuclear family only, nuclear and extended family, or extended family). This non-parametric test was also used to evaluate differences across categories of parental OFW status (i.e., father only, mother only, or both parents working abroad).

Correlation Analysis. Correlation analyses were conducted using Pearson's *r* and Spearman's *rho*, as appropriate, based on the level of measurement and distribution of the data to explore the relationships among the study variables. These analyses provided an initial understanding of the associations among variables, serving as a foundation for subsequent modeling procedures. Correlation analyses were performed using Jamovi software. In addition, correlations between participants' age and the key endogenous variables were examined to assess whether age functioned as a potential confounding variable. Age was included as a control variable in the later path analysis if significant associations were found.

Path Analysis Using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) Regression Approach. For the primary quantitative analysis, path analysis was conducted using the Partial Least Squares (PLS) regression approach to evaluate the structural relationships among the study variables. The PLS method was selected over the traditional covariance-based structural equation modeling due to its advantages in handling complex models and small sample sizes (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2021; Wang & Wang, 2022). The research model in this study comprises a relatively complex structure, including one exogenous variable, one mediating variable, and two endogenous variables. Moreover, the limited sample size, attributable to the specificity of the study population, further justified the use of the PLS approach (Hair et al., 2019; Hair et al., 2022). Unlike covariance-based methods, the PLS approach does not require the normality assumption in the data distribution. It relies on non-parametric bootstrap resampling to assess the statistical significance of model parameters. This study used bootstrap resampling with 5,000 iterations to determine the robustness and significance of the model estimates. Path analysis was carried out using the SMART-PLS software (Ringle et al., 2022).

Results

Preliminary Analyses of Data

Preliminary data analyses were conducted before performing the main statistical analyses. The patterns and distribution of scores were examined and recorded. No missing values were observed in the dataset. As shown in Table 1, the variables' attitude towards parents' overseas employment and aspiration to work abroad are generally not distributed and are slightly negatively skewed. However, non-normality is not an issue for the Partial Least Squares approach, as it provides robust estimations for both normal and non-normal data (Hair et al., 2021). Additionally, the FF and SWB variables follow a normal distribution.

Table 1. Descriptive Statistics of the Variables

	Attitude Towards Parents Overseas Employment	Family Functioning	Student Well-being	Aspiration To Work Abroad
Mean	21.9	34.1	61.5	13
Median	23	34	63	13
Standard deviation	2.8	6.58	9.88	2.52
Minimum	11	13	37	6
Maximum	24	48	82	16
Skewness	-1.74	-0.123	-0.273	-0.541
Kurtosis	2.94	0.586	-0.285	-0.506
Shapiro-Wilk W	0.765	0.977	0.986	0.923
Shapiro-Wilk p	< .001	0.064	0.34	< .001

Bivariate correlation analyses were also conducted (see Table 2), revealing significant positive correlations among all variables. Furthermore, analyses were conducted to determine whether students' well-being and aspiration to work abroad varied across demographic classifications such as gender, OFW parent status, and living arrangement. No statistically significant differences were observed in the outcome variables (student well-being and aspiration). Given the lack of significant demographic differences, demographic variables were not included as control variables in the subsequent PLS path analysis.

Table 2. Correlation Matrix of the Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1 Attitude Towards OFW Parents	-			
2 Aspiration to Work Abroad	0.371***	-		
3 Family Functioning	0.408***	0.377***		
4 Student Well-being	0.379**	0.326***	0.542***	-

Characteristics of the Left-Behind Children in terms of the Variables

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics for the key study variables. Overall, left-behind children of Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) parents reported favorable attitudes toward their parents' overseas employment and strong aspirations to work abroad. They also demonstrated high levels of student well-being and positive perceptions of family functioning, indicating a generally adaptive and resilient outlook despite the physical absence of one or both parents. Furthermore, participants reported high levels of life satisfaction, school satisfaction, positive affect, and eudaemonic well-being, alongside low levels of negative affect. These findings collectively suggest that many left-behind children are coping well emotionally and psychologically in the context of parental migration.

Table 3. Characteristics of the Left-Behind Children in terms of the Variables

Variables	Mean	SD	Median	Interpretation
1 Attitude towards parents' work abroad	21.9	2.8	23	Very Favorable
2 Aspiration to work abroad	13	2.5	13	Strong
3 Family functioning	34.1	6.58	34	High
4 Student Well-being	61.5	9.88	63	High
-Life satisfaction	21.5	3.6	22	High
-School satisfaction	9.05	1.97	9.0	High
-Positive affect	12.4	2.48	12.0	High
-Negative affect (reverse)	9.55	2.72	10	Low
-Eudaemonia	8.95	2.29	9.0	High

Assessment of the Structural Model

Figure 2 illustrates that participants' attitudes toward their overseas Filipino worker (OFW) parents have a significant positive direct effect on family functioning ($\beta = 0.410$, $t = 5.933$, $p < .001$), well-being ($\beta = 0.210$, $t = 2.619$, $p = .009$), and aspirations to work abroad ($\beta = 0.278$, $t = 2.832$, $p = .005$). These findings suggest that a more favorable attitude toward their parents' overseas employment is associated with higher levels of perceived family functioning, enhanced well-being, and stronger aspirations to work abroad. Thus, hypotheses H1, H2, and H3 are supported. The findings underscore the complex ways in which transnational family life is being

redefined for Gen Z students. While favorable attitudes toward parents' overseas work are positively linked to family functioning, well-being, and aspirations to work abroad, these associations may also reflect a broader cultural shift in how young people conceptualize parental roles. For many, physical presence is no longer regarded as central to effective parenting, as ubiquitous digital tools provide continuous emotional contact and involvement. This “digital parenting” dynamic, though insidious and gradual, is reshaping intergenerational expectations: parents are often perceived less as primary sources of moral guidance and more as providers of economic stability, with values and life orientation increasingly shaped by peers, media, and digital communities.

In addition, the children's reported family functioning demonstrated significant positive direct effects on both their aspiration to work abroad ($\beta = 0.241$, $t = 2.341$, $p = .019$) and their well-being ($\beta = 0.420$, $t = 7.008$, $p < .001$), thereby supporting H4 and H5, respectively. It implies that improvements in family functioning are linked to increased well-being and a greater desire to pursue work abroad. Filipino family values are shifting, emphasizing present needs and immediate circumstances over long-held traditions, with the possibility of further transformation in the future. It highlights a growing prioritization of the “*here and now*” in how families adapt to migration and changing social realities.

Furthermore, family functioning was a significant moderate mediator between children's attitudes toward their parents' work abroad and their aspiration to work abroad ($\beta = 0.101$, $t = 2.141$, $p = .032$), thereby supporting H6. Similarly, family functioning significantly and moderately mediated the relationship between children's attitudes and well-being ($\beta = 0.193$, $t = 4.396$, $p < .001$), supporting H7.

Table 4. Statistical Result of the Structural Model

Outcome	Predictor	Path Coefficient	<i>t</i> -statistics	Effect Size f^2
Asp	Attitude	0.278	2.832**	0.080
SWB	Attitude	0.210	2.619**	0.052
FF	Attitude	0.410	5.933***	0.202
SWB	FF	0.420	7.008***	0.207
ASP	FF	0.241	2.341*	0.060

Note: $R^2 = 0.02$ (small); $R^2 = 0.13$ (moderate); $R^2 = 0.26$ (substantial) 1. $f^2 = 0.02$ (small); $f^2 = 0.15$ (moderate); $f^2 = 0.35$ (large); 2. * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test)

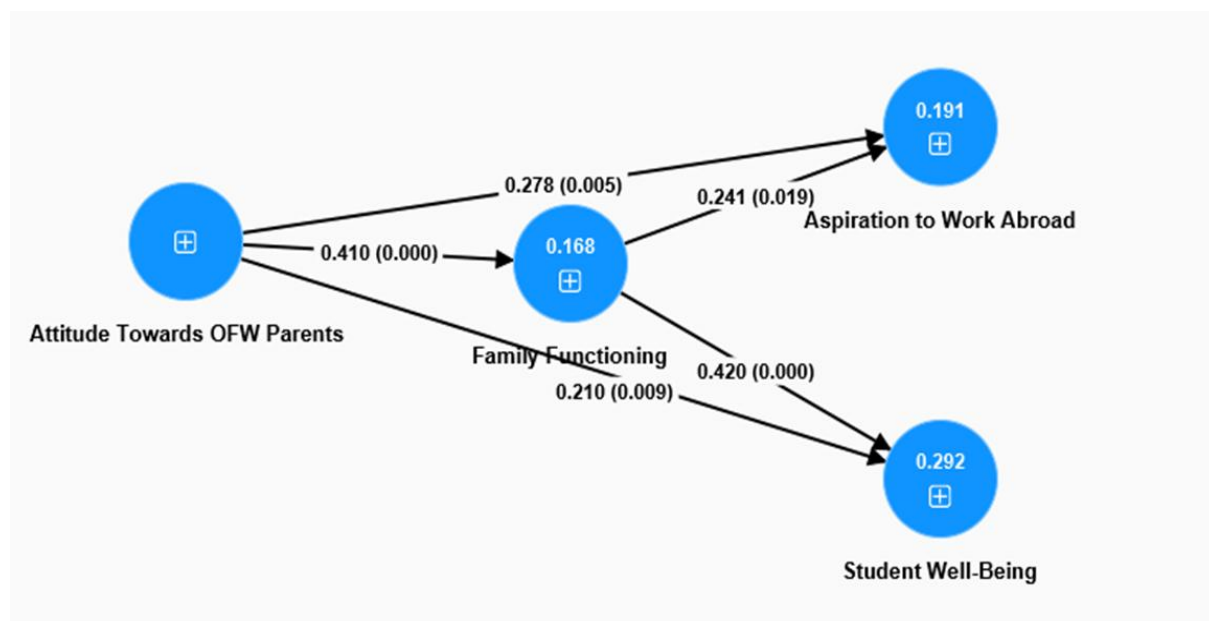


Figure 2. The Tested Mediation Model

The coefficient of determination (R^2) values was examined to evaluate the extent to which the exogenous variables, children's attitudes toward their parents' overseas employment and family functioning, explain the variance in the endogenous variables. The findings reveal that these predictors account for approximately 19% of the variance in left-behind children's aspiration to work abroad, indicating a moderate degree of explanatory power. Similarly, attitude and family functioning explain 30% of the variance in student well-being, reflecting a substantial influence. In contrast, 17% of the variance in reported family functioning is attributed to children's attitudes toward their parents' overseas work, again representing a moderate explanation (see Figure 2).

Further analysis of individual path effect sizes (f^2) was conducted to assess the magnitude of each relationship (see Table 4 above). According to Cohen's (1988) guidelines, f^2 values of .01 (small), .09 (medium), and .25 (large), the results show that children's attitudes toward their parents' overseas work exert minor effects on both aspirations to work abroad and student well-being. However, their attitude shows a moderate to strong effect on family functioning, indicating that while attitude has limited direct influence on aspirations and well-being, it plays a more substantial role in shaping family dynamics. In addition, family functioning exhibits a moderate to strong effect on well-being, but only a small to moderate effect on aspiration to work abroad.

The indirect (mediated) effects of attitude on student well-being and aspiration to work abroad via family functioning were also assessed. The Variance Accounted

For (VAF) in the mediation pathway from attitude to well-being through family functioning was 45%, indicating partial mediation. According to Hair et al. (2019), a VAF less than 20% suggests no mediation; between 20% and 80%, partial mediation; and above 80%, complete mediation. In comparison, the VAF for the mediation pathway from attitude to aspiration to work abroad was 24%, indicating partial mediation, though with a weaker influence relative to the well-being pathway.

Discussion

This study examined the mediating role of family functioning in the relationship between left-behind children's (LBC) attitudes toward their parents' overseas employment and two key outcomes: their well-being as college students and their aspirations to work abroad.

The findings reveal that the present study's participants generally held favorable attitudes toward their parents' overseas work, reported high levels of family functioning, demonstrated strong psychological well-being, and expressed clear aspirations to work abroad. These results contrast with many recent studies, which have often highlighted negative impacts of parental migration on left-behind children (Jiang et al. 2023; Antia et al., 2020; Mao et al., 2020; Faulk et al., 2024). However, they are aligned with earlier studies (Arguillas & Williams, 2010; Asis, 2006; Graham & Jordan, 2011), which suggest that parental migration has a neutral or positive effect on the well-being of at least older LBC.

Positive attitudes toward parental overseas employment were significantly associated with better family functioning, greater well-being, and stronger aspirations. Furthermore, family functioning emerged as a key mediator, partially explaining how these positive attitudes influence students' emotional health and motivation to seek overseas employment.

The generally positive profiles observed among participants, across attitudes, family functioning, well-being, and aspirations, differ from patterns reported in earlier studies. One plausible explanation lies in the age and maturity level of the participants. Unlike younger children in primary or secondary school, who are more emotionally dependent on parental presence, college students may be more resilient and capable of adapting to the absence of a parent. Digital presence may be strong enough to partially fulfill, or even substitute for, traditional parenting roles.

Previous research (Mao et al., 2020; Jiang et al., 2023) has primarily focused on younger populations who may struggle more with separation due to their developmental stage. In contrast, college students in this study are on the cusp of adulthood and are likely already thinking seriously about their future careers. Their

greater emotional independence and broader support networks, such as friendships and peer groups, may buffer the impact of parental absence, which resonates with a previous study revealing that parental absence varies in impact across children's developmental stages (Jiang et al. 2023). In this context, the findings suggest that individual maturity and the developmental stage of LBC are important factors that may shape how they experience and interpret parental migration. For college students, the absence of a parent working abroad may no longer be perceived as a significant emotional deficit, but rather as a practical and even aspirational model for their own future. Moreover, the current findings imply that LBC of OFW parents, now in young adulthood, may be more accepting of non-traditional family structures and digital parenting, both of which are prevalent among Generation Z (Hameed et al., 2025). As a result, parental absence has a relatively weak impact on their overall well-being.

These findings align with the theoretical frameworks applied in this study. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) suggests that subjective norms influence an individual's career aspirations. Left-behind children may perceive their parents' success in overseas employment as a model for their career paths, motivating them to pursue work abroad.

Similarly, the family systems theory and ecological systems theory emphasize the interconnectedness of family members. The attitudes of left-behind children toward their parents' overseas employment play a crucial role in shaping their career aspirations and overall well-being as students. A positive outlook on parental migration can contribute to a healthier perception of family dynamics, foster emotional stability, and reinforce aspirations to work overseas.

Aligned with ecological systems theory, these findings point out that several factors may mitigate the potential adverse effects of parental absence. Online parenting, substitute caregivers, developmental maturity, school environment, and economic pressures are among the influences that contribute to this phenomenon. Moreover, parental migration has become a normalized experience in the Philippines, which may serve as a buffering effect on the well-being of left-behind children. The shared experience of parental separation within communities may help ease its emotional impact, fostering solidarity and mutual understanding among neighboring children (Suarez-Orosco et al., 2002).

The present study focused solely on the well-being, family dynamics, and career aspirations of left-behind children (LBC) as influenced by their attitudes toward their parents' overseas employment. While the findings present a generally positive picture of LBC in relation to these variables, the scope of the study remains limited. It would be valuable to explore how these children are faring in terms of flourishing, a

broader construction that encompasses well-being and aspects such as spirituality, character, and virtues. Gaining a deeper understanding of how character development, virtuous behavior, and spiritual maturity emerge in the context of parental absence could inform the design of future support programs for this group of Filipino youth. It is imperative, given that parent-child relationships have been identified as a significant contributing factor to problematic behavior among youth (Annor et al., 2024; Langlais et al., 2024; Zhou et al., 2024).

The findings of this study offer valuable implications for school and family counselors. Counselors working with college students who are left-behind children (LBC) may emphasize the potential positive impact of their parents' overseas employment. Helping students develop a more positive perspective toward their parents' absence may, in turn, promote greater well-being and healthier family dynamics.

While many LBC view their parents' overseas employment as inspiring—motivating them to pursue similar opportunities abroad, this trend may contribute to long-term challenges such as brain drain and the depletion of the country's skilled labor force. Although overseas employment is often celebrated as a heroic contribution to the nation, policymakers may need to devise strategies that encourage the next generation to stay and contribute to national development and nation-building efforts.

This study is limited to the experiences of LBC. Future research could build upon these findings by examining the perspectives of the overseas Filipino worker (OFW) parents. Additionally, although this study employed a multivariate design, a longitudinal approach that tracks individuals from childhood into adulthood could yield richer and more comprehensive insights into the long-term effects of parental migration.

Likewise, the study is limited by sampling representation, as purposive-convenience sampling was employed due to the specific characteristics required of the participants. The use of self-report survey questionnaires may also pose limitations, particularly in capturing the depth and nuance of participants' experiences. Nonetheless, the study offers valuable insights and a deeper understanding of a unique and increasingly growing group of children in economically challenged countries such as the Philippines.

The findings of this study highlight the significance of understanding the feelings and attitudes of left-behind children toward their parents' migration. Their perceptions are crucial in shaping their view of family dynamics, influencing their well-being as students and their aspirations for future careers.

References

- [1] 2022 Survey on Overseas Filipinos (Final Result). (2023, October 11). Reference Number: 2023-321. <https://psa.gov.ph/statistics/survey/labor-and-employment/survey-overseas-filipinos>
- [2] Aguilar, M. V. (2020). Technology-mediated parenting: Narratives of left behind adolescent children of Overseas Filipino Workers. *Journal of Asian Review of Public Affairs and Policy*, 5(1), 61–79.
- [3] Ajzen, I. (2020). The theory of planned behavior: Frequently asked questions. *Human Behavior and Emerging Technologies*, 2(4), 314–324. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hbe2.195>
- [4] Annor, F. B., Amene, E. W., Zhu, L., Stamatakis, C., Picchetti, V., Matthews, S., Miedema, S. S., Brown, C., Thorsen, V. C., Manuel, P., Gilbert, L. K., Kambona, C., Coomer, R., Trika, J., Kamuingona, R., Dube, S. R., & Massetti, G. M. (2024, April). Parental absence as an adverse childhood experience among young adults in sub-Saharan Africa. *Child Abuse & Neglect*, 150, 106556. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.chiabu.2023.106556>
- [5] Antia, K., Boucsein, J., Deckert, A., Dambach, P., Račaitė, J., Šurkienė, G., Jaenisch, T., Horstick, O., & Winkler, V. (2020). Effects of international labour migration on the mental health and well-being of left-behind children: A systematic literature review. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(12), 4335. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17124335>
- [6] Arguillas, M. J. B., & Williams, L. (2010). The impact of parents' overseas employment on the educational outcomes of Filipino children. *International Migration Review*, 44(2), 300–319. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1747-7379.2010.00807.x>
- [7] Arnett, J. J., Žukauskienė, R., & Sugimura, K. (2014). The new life stage of emerging adulthood at ages 18–29: Implications for mental health. *The Lancet Psychiatry*, 1(7), 569–576.
- [8] Asis, M. M. B. (2006). Living with migration: Experiences of left-behind children in the Philippines. *Asian Population Studies*, 2(1), 45–67. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17441730600700556>
- [9] Bowen, M. (1978). *Family therapy in clinical practice*. New York, NY: Aronson.
- [10] Campos, R., & Distor, J. (2020). The perspectives of senior high school students with overseas Filipino worker parents. *Psychology and Education*, 58(4), 1639–1644.
- [11] Chu, S., Miranda, J., Tapang, A., Balagtas, P. A. S., Credo, C. G., & Pineda, M. S. (2025). Tomorrow's dreams: Left-behind children and migration effects on their

- future aspirations. *International Journal of Multidisciplinary: Applied Business and Education Research*, 6(4). <https://doi.org/10.11594/ijmaber.06.04.31>
- [12] Cong, C. W., Tan, S. A., Nainee, S., & Tan, C. S. (2022). Psychometric qualities of the McMaster Family Assessment Device-General Functioning Subscale for Malaysian samples. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 19(4), 2440. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19042440>
- [13] Courtney, M. G., Hernández-Torrano, D., Karakus, M., & Singh, N. (2023). Measuring student well-being in adolescence: Proposal of a five-factor integrative model based on PISA 2018 survey data. *Large-scale Assessments in Education*, 11(1). <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40536-023-00170-y>
- [14] Crawford, M. (2020). Ecological systems theory: Exploring the development of the theoretical framework as conceived by Bronfenbrenner. *Journal of Public Health Issues and Practices*, 4(2), 170. <https://doi.org/10.33790/jphip1100170>
- [15] Dominguez, G. B., & Hall, B. J. (2022). The health status and related interventions for children left behind due to parental migration in the Philippines: A scoping review. *The Lancet Regional Health–Western Pacific*, 28, 100566.
- [16] Epstein, N. B., Baldwin, L. M., & Bishop, D. S. (1984). McMaster Family Assessment Device (FAD) [Database record]. APA PsycTests. <https://doi.org/10.1037/t06314-000>
- [17] Fauk, N. K., Seran, A. L., Aylward, P., Mwanri, L., & Ward, P. R. (2024). Parental migration and the social and mental well-being challenges among Indonesian left-behind children: A qualitative study. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 21(6), 793. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21060793>
- [18] Graham, E., & Jordan, L. P. (2011). Migrant parents and the psychological well-being of left-behind children in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, 73(4), 763–787. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1741-3737.2011.00844.x>
- [19] Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., & Sarstedt, M. (2022). A primer on partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.
- [20] Hair, J. F., Risher, J. J., Sarstedt, M., & Ringle, C. M. (2019). When to use and how to report the results of PLS-SEM. *European Business Review*, 31(1), 2–24. <https://doi.org/10.1108/EBR-11-2018-0203>
- [21] Hair, J. F., Hult, G. T. M., Ringle, C. M., Sarstedt, M., Danks, N. P., & Ray, S. (2021). An introduction to structural equation modeling. In *Partial least squares structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) using R* (pp. 1–18). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-80519-7_1

- [22] Hameed, R., Ahmad, T., Kanwal, S., & Imran, H. (2025). Modern family dynamics: How Millennials and Gen Z are changing relationship norms. *Research Journal of Psychology*, 3(1), 449–460. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jad.2022.09.113>
- [23] Jiang, Y., Xiao, H., & Yang, F. (2023). Accompanying your children: Living without parents at different stages of pre-adulthood and individual physical and mental health in adulthood. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 11, 992539. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2023.992539>
- [24] Langlais, M. R., Chacón, V., & Brazier, J. H. (2024). Growing up with an absent parent: A mixed-methods approach on parental absence, well-being, and romantic relationship processes. *The Family Journal*. Advance online publication. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10664807241290515>
- [25] Manizia, L., & Mishra, R. (2021). A research study on adolescents' attitudes towards parental involvement in everyday life. *The Pharma Innovation Journal*, 10(12S), 1934–1939.
- [26] Mao, M., Zang, L., & Zhang, H. (2020). The effects of parental absence on children's development: Evidence from left-behind children in China. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, 17(18), 6770. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph17186770>
- [27] Parreñas, R. S. (2005). Migrant Filipina domestic workers and the international division of reproductive labor. In *Pinay Power* (pp. 85–101). Routledge.
- [28] Penero, R., Asilom, I. M., Bautista, I. J., Burgos, S., Clemente, J., Rodriguez, R. M., & Perez, J. (2024). Academic entitlement among Filipino college students: Exploring the influence of narcissism, locus of control, and family functioning. *Academia Lasalliana Journal of Education and Humanities*.
- [29] Perez, J., Taay, J., Pitogo, E., & Ynalvez, C. (2024). The association between family rituals, family functioning, and student well-being among Filipino undergraduates. *Research Square*. <https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-5041647/v1>
- [30] Reyes, M. M. (2007). Migration and Filipino children left behind: A literature review. Development (DFID).
- [31] Ringle, C. M., Wende, S., & Becker, J.-M. (2022). SmartPLS 4 [Computer software]. Oststeinbek: SmartPLS GmbH. <http://www.smartpls.com>
- [32] Suárez-Orozco, C., Todorova, I. L. G., & Louie, J. (2002). Making up for lost time: The experience of separation and reunification among immigrant families. *Family Process*, 41, 625–643. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1545-5300.2002.00625.x>
- [33] The Jamovi Project. (2023). jamovi (Version 2.4) [Computer software]. <https://www.jamovi.org>

- [34] Vieira, J. M., Matias, M., Ferreira, T., Lopez, F. G., & Matos, P. M. (2016). Parents' work-family experiences and children's problem behaviors: The mediating role of the parent-child relationship. *Journal of Family Psychology*, 30(4), 419.
- [35] Wang, Y.-Y., Wang, Y.-S., & Wang, Y.-M. (2022). What drives students' internet ethical behaviour: An integrated model of the theory of planned behaviour, personality, and internet ethics education. *Behaviour & Information Technology*, 41(3), 588–610. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144929X.2020.1829053>
- [36] Yang, J., Zhang, Q., Li, J., Guan, S., Wang, K., Xu, H., & Liu, Z. (2022). Effect of parental absence during infancy and early childhood on cognition and depression in later life: A national household longitudinal study. *Journal of Affective Disorders*, 319, 562–569.
- [37] Zhou, Y., Chen, Y., Liu, W., Li, Y., Qin, Y., Li, R. J., et al. (2019). Health and nutrition status and relevant intervention research among left-behind children in rural China: A review. *Chinese Journal of Public Health*. <https://doi.org/10.11847/zgggws1123691>
- [38] Zhou, K., Zhu, X., & Chen, B. B. (2024). Understanding the link between social relationships and adolescent internet addiction: Perspectives from two approaches to well-being. *Computers in Human Behavior*, 151, 107995.