

Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)

Volume 3 (2) 142 – 147, May 2022 | ISSN: 2720-9946 (Online) ISSN: 2723-3626 (Print)

The article is published with Open Access at: <http://e-journal.unipma.ac.id/index.php/SHE>

MEN AS MOTHERS: THE FILIPINO HOUSEHUSBANDS' EXPERIENCE

Apolo S. Francisco ✉; Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College, Philippines

Annabelle B. Francisco; Ilocos Sur Polytechnic State College Philippines

Abstract: This work provides a thick description of how Filipino househusbands take the role switch as mothers. The lived experiences came from fifteen (15) participants captured through face to face interviews and focus group discussion. Five themes emerged; enduring the role switch which covers the difficulties they must face as 'Moms' in order to respond to the needs of their children; stabilizing authority and control encompasses how they maintain the stability of their position as the "man" of the house; keeping marital relationship steady describes the struggles they have to endure just to make the marital relationship smooth sailing; withstanding the feelings of guilt, regret and worry illustrates their frustrations and anxiety towards the role switching; and surviving the stigma demonstrates how they handle negative remarks against their masculinity. Though people conclude that they have easy lives, they withstand the pain of being physically away from their wives, seize the abstractness of motherhood and keep their authority and control intact.

Keywords: Househusbands, Phenomenology, Social Stigma, Masculinity

✉ francisco.apolo@yahoo.com.ph

Citation: Francisco, A.S. & Francisco, A.B. (2022). Men as Mothers: The Filipino Househusbands' Experience *Social Sciences, Humanities and Education Journal (SHE Journal)*, 3(2), 142 – 147. DOI: 10.25273/she.v3i2.12680.



Published by Universitas PGRI Madiun. This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-ShareAlike 4.0 International License.

INTRODUCTION

The collection of narratives found in literatures provide various constructs on the househusband phenomenon, however, do men really mother? Sociologist Andrea Doucet posed this question when she explored the world of fathering in the context of Canadian stay-at-home dads. She asserts that stay-at-home fathers don't mother. According to her, these fathers perform mothering tasks but their wives return home and take over thus, parenting is a shared role of a mother and a father. The househusbands she further posits may exhibit mothering behaviors but still these men view themselves as fathers. In the Philippine context where old-style and conformist gender roles and rules still prevail, Filipino men are left in the Philippines to become househusbands deconstructing the stereotypical gender role narratives as thousands of female workers leave the country to become caregivers and domestic helpers overseas. Hence, the Filipino househusbands are plunged in a totally different context compared to the househusbands in the Western context. If we ask again, do Filipino men mother? Filipino househusbands' wives are physically miles away from their respective families. As opposed to the househusbands from the West where their partners [re] take and [re] perform the parenting and housekeeping roles at the end of the day, the Filipino househusbands are left to do the tasks all by themselves in full time basis and in a longer span of time. Indeed, Filipino men mother assuming a larger role in parenting duties as primary caregivers (Sagnit, 2020) and at the same time accepting the full-pledged role of housekeepers.

An issue actually faced by the Filipino househusbands, is how do they mother? The phenomenon renders a problematic situation for the Filipino househusbands since they are left on their own to brawl and to fill in the tasks typically labelled for their wives. Premised on this, this work describes, interprets, and understands the lived experiences to

discover meaning from Filipino househusbands' experiences and answer the question: what is the point of view of Filipino men as they take housework as their fulltime job?

METHODS

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding why Filipino fathers take housework as their fulltime job while their wives work as overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) thus, phenomenology was used to explore the day-to-day lived experiences of these men. In this study fifteen (15) participants were interviewed. The criteria for selection were: he should be a lawful husband of an OFW; he should not be employed in government or private agency/institution/; and he may be self-employed or have a small business. After the potential participants were referred and identified, two data gathering vehicles were utilized: phenomenological interviews and focus group discussion. While most phenomenological studies reviewed used the traditional one interviewer and one participant phenomenological interviews, in this study, the researchers drew on their experience and decided to combine the phenomenological interview with focus group discussion as the data gathering methods. It was observed that during the phenomenological interviews some of the participants seemed not relaxed and limited in their sharing. Thus, the researchers invited these househusbands to participate in an FGD. Four of them joined the discussion. The researchers found some repetitions in the responses from the phenomenological interviews and the FGD itself but the researchers recognize doing the latter constructive because the participants became more spontaneous and vocal which stimulated discussions and revealed fresh angles to the data. A consent to record and transcribe verbatim the interviews was requested from the participants including a discussion of the confidentiality of their identifications as participants of the study. The length of the face to face interviews lasted only for 25

minutes. The focused group discussion was also handled with spontaneity and lasted for less than an hour. The transcriptions were coded, categorized which led to the creation of themes.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This phenomenological study surfaces the taken-for-granted facets of taking housework as fulltime job in the point of view of Filipino men and attempts to understand such phenomenon in a different perspective since these men are driven home because their wives are overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). The lived experiences come from fifteen (15) participants who hail from the Northern part of the Philippines. They were captured through face to face interviews and focused group discussion where there emerged five (5) essential themes.

The following are the essential themes which surfaced the voice of the men who take housework as his fulltime job: enduring the role switch, stabilizing his authority and control, keeping marital relationship steady, withstanding the feelings of guilt, regret and worry, and surviving the stigma. Enduring the role switch covers the difficulties/challenges the househusbands must face in order to respond to the needs of their respective children as their 'Moms' and how they carry out the abstractness of motherhood to the family as a whole. Stabilizing authority and control encompasses how they maintain the stability of their position as the men of the house although they are not the family's breadwinner. Keeping marital relationship steady describes the struggles they have to endure just to make the marital relationship smooth sailing. Withstanding the feelings of guilt, regret and worry illustrates their frustrations, depression and anxiety towards the role switching. Surviving the stigma demonstrates how they handle negative remarks against their masculinity and what they do to keep their character solid despite their situation.

Direct quotes from interview transcriptions are offered to best represent the lived experiences of the participants and highlight, through their own voice, how they experience the phenomenon.

Enduring the role switch

When ask the grand question how is it to be a househusband, all the participants repeatedly uttered 'difficult' with their heads shaking during the interview.

Participant B believes that the responsibility of a mother like providing the needs of the kids (preparing the milk solution or budgeting the remittances) is easy but motherhood is much difficult. This abstractness he has to provide to his kids: to let his children feel their Mom through him.

Participant G affirms the confession of Participant B as he says: *'To do the house chores is easy but being a mother to my children is a never expected difficulty. I thought things would be easy since as a child I had the chance to take care of my siblings. To take the role of my wife is a different thing- I have to be motherly.'*

For Participant D he tries his best to take the role of his wife and eventually became successful with it. He shares, *'...so that my youngest won't cry, I would joined him in his sleep and I give my best so that he may not always remember his Mom. I tell him bedtime stories. With this bonding with my kids, it came to a point that when I am not around they can't play even if their playmates are there if I am not there because they will be looking for me, after sometime they were now looking for me instead of their Mom.'*

Participant C stresses that the physical absence of his wife also creates a great difficulty for him and his kids since they all depend on that figure for they are used to be with her but he has to accept the new role. The participant describes: *'It is really hard because the children are looking for their mother at night, it's really difficult... I know it but my youngest son is still young he was just three years old, she was always with him, so that he won't cry, I tried to entertain him, I brought him in the park in the plaza, we also went to Butir where my wife hails*

from if he wants he stays there, he stays there, then he would look for me afterwards so I'll just fetch him the following morning.'

Participant J discloses how he does the budgeting, *'In budgeting everything is given now by my wife, I prioritize what's for the Church, then what's for the kids then what's left I pay the bills then if there is still left, I safe keep it.'*

While other men see the phenomenon as a way to support their wives (Chesley, 2011); (Solomon, 2014) and the role switching as a product of changing gender ideology (Kramer & Kramer, 2016) the Filipino househusbands have to physically and psychologically respond to their arrangement. Unlike the househusbands in the previous works that their wives are career women who return home after their office works, the wives of the Filipino househusbands are overseas. Thus, they have to carry all the difficulties and challenges of being both a mother and a father to their children. Indeed, as human beings with wives miles away from them, they endure the role switch by concretizing the abstractness of motherhood, doing the role with open mind and acceptance complete the physical absence of their respective wives.

Stabilizing his authority and control

The participants describe that in their respective families they still have the last say in deciding for the welfare especially with regard to their children's' concerns since they are the ones left to them.

Participant E shares: *'If there are problems I decide, I decide because I am the one left here. If the children have concerns, I decide on what is the best for us to do.'*

Participant L confides he has difficulty in deciding for himself alone. Yet, he tries to make the major decisions by himself so as not to make his wife worry for he believes that if his wife would be upset this won't help her and the family as a whole.

Participant I however, is not afraid to divulge that he is the one who usually

withdraws during confrontations with his wife just not to make the argument more serious. He describes: *'There are times that the tone of her voice is high, sometimes we argue, I am the one who would calm down so that we won't argue anymore.'*

Participant A affirms Participant I's disclosure. He said that he chooses to 'surrender' from heated arguments because he pities his wife who is miles away from them. The arguments might affect her behavior or attitude towards her work/job.

The narratives compared to the father- participants in (Chesley, 2011) inquiry who feel the loss of their breadwinner role, the Filipino househusband participants still maintain the authority and control in their hands. Evidence of this is, they give the sole judgment on issues and concerns especially about the children and the family as a whole. They may not be their families' breadwinners but they still stand with pride of the new found role as they complement the switch by reciprocating through taking the household chores as their full time job. It is worthy to mention, that most of the participants consider 'yielding' in arguments as a way to stabilize control. While it is expected that the wives are the ones comforting the husbands during oral arguments or fights, in this context the husbands are the ones doing such.

Maintaining marital relationship steady

From among the participant's revelations, being physically away from their wives registered the most serious tone from them. They became emotional whenever they mentioned the words, *'nanay nila'* [their mother], *'asawa ko'* [my wife]. The burden of being away from their wives physically gave them the greatest pain they could ever have had.

Participant J describes: *'The first to two months were alright. But the following days seemed years. I miss her so much'. He further disclosed that the money from her wife's salary could not ease his pain, '...hardships/struggles are there we can't get*

away from them everywhere even if there is money because my wife is not here.'

Meanwhile, Participant B keeps the relationship steady as he usually takes the initiative to yield during conflicts just not to make things worse, he stated: *'There are times that we can't get rid of misunderstandings that is why I just show her my affection through Skype. Being apart is the most difficult for couples, that is the most difficult thing which happened to my life, being apart with each other.'*

Participant M shares that in order to keep his relationship with his wife smooth sailing, they seldom talk about negative stories or ill feelings. They refrain from discussing topics that might hurt them both.

For Participant C and Participant O, being open-minded and having open communication are the keys to smooth sailing relationship with their respective wives. *'I tell her everything. I believe if I tell her everything she will be honest to me too'*, Participant C shares. *'If she knows all the things I do here, she will also tell me all she is doing there while she is away from us'*, Participant O stresses.

Filipino househusbands have to endure the pain just to make the marital relationship smooth sailing. The Filipino house husbands take the housework as a fulltime job as a form of support to their wives though it hurts them a lot. This is a way for them to at least keep their marital relationship steady. Left with seemingly no choice, they have to endure the long distance love affair. The new arrangement, economically speaking, mutually benefits them as a couple and their families as a whole. However, the househusbands choose to be submissive and tame as they avoid heated arguments or confrontations with their wives. A form of moral support to the wives, the househusbands believe the fight is futile and would do no good to their relationship. The distant and seldom conversations are reserved for positive exchanges and not for fighting.

Withstanding the feelings of guilt, regret, and worry

As the participants shared their experiences they could not help but shake and scratch their heads or cry whenever they remembered how they also tried to seek for the opportunity abroad instead of their wives. They utter:

Participant F: *'It is really hard. When she left the children were young, we were heartbroken, the children were crying. I am supposed to be the one who will leave but she is the one given the opportunity to work abroad.'*

Participant J: *'There are times I always think of, her leaving, it is supposed to be me working/ earning a living so that my wife will be the one left with the kids yet I am the one left here, it's really difficult. She took the responsibility of being the head of the family, I should be the one but I tried to apply many times, I applied but I was not lucky.'*

He also shared his utmost desire to persuade his wife to finally go home and settle down with them. For being away with her makes him worry much (although he trusts her since day one) about her well-being especially with the other people surrounding her.

Participant J stated: *'...she might as well go home so that... sometimes I think of many things which I should not think of... I trust her since she left, I trust her since she left, but I am afraid for her... those people around her.'*

Similar with the circumstances of the American stay at home dads Filipino househusband participants also tried many times to apply for employment but were deprived of employment because they were not as 'lucky' as their wives. The Filipino househusbands are also at home unwillingly but because of economic wellbeing (living below the poverty line), they are pushed to stay at home. With this scenario, the impact of role reversals imprints feelings of guilt, regret and worry to the Filipino househusbands.

Surviving the stigma

The participants showed some signs of irritations reflected from their facial expressions but still laughed (with

bitterness) about the negative remarks they get from their wives' relatives. Yet, they also justified themselves as househusbands. They shared what they did to reciprocate the hardships of their wives: looking for part time jobs which added up to the family's earnings. They said:

Participant E: *'I hear of many things especially from my wife's relatives, our neighbours from my wife's place, in their stories say, "it's good for this somebody instead of him working it's this one who left", coming from my wife's cousins...'*

Participant G: *'I hate it when my wife's parents utter hurtful words towards my being a househusband. The exchange of hurtful words caused a stir to my relationship with them. I know this also affects my wife. Yet, I am doing everything here to give, support our children, at least there is something little... At first I worked as a carpenter then when the children grew older I looked for another job, any job where I could earn money so that we have something to use everyday.'*

Participant K: *'When the children are already in school, I do part time job as laborer or take any kind of work. The money I earn is what we use when my wife's remittance is delayed. It's not be as huge compared to what she sends us but it helps us in times of financial difficulty specially that I have nobody here to turn to.'*

Four participants find strength to keep on with their being househusbands by being steadfast in their faith. They said they find refuge from their religion and hold on to prayers whenever they need one. They tell:

Participant H: *'My faith as a member of the Church of Christ helped me a lot. It is where I get my strength every time I pray. Every time there is a problem I pray, every time I think of something, I just pray.'*

Participant I: *'When it seems that I can't hold on anymore, I just look above, pray and ask God for His help.'*

Participant B: *'I and my children keep ourselves busy with Church activities. I leave our fate to the Lord.'*

Participant C: *'It's God's will why this is happening to my family. I surrender our life to God. Let His will be done.'*

Househusbands are stigmatized for failing to live up to their obligations as breadwinners and a great deal of that pressure comes from the persistence of sexist norms. The decision to stay home earns a great disapproval from family and community members. To survive the stigma participants looked for part time jobs to keep their masculine character solid despite their situation. The Filipino househusbands did not mind the kind of job they take as long as they could earn any amount of money. This experience is different from American and Belgian househusbands since for these American and Belgian men, the kind of work they took were connected to macho work or jobs built on old-fashioned male interests (Doucet & Merla, 2007); (Merla, 2008)

Negative feedbacks from loved ones make the househusbands anxious but serve as push for them to take part-time jobs not necessarily masculine in nature. They are after the shift from their full time house work since the temporary alteration shells out their hidden masculine identity which makes them less guilty of the role switch and gives them at least some masculine pride. Above all, to keep being steadfast, Filipino househusbands take refuge not from their loved ones, relatives or friends but to their faith and hold on to the power of prayers.

CONCLUSION

As mothers, Filipino househusbands have to carry all the difficulties and challenges of being both a mother and a father to their children, maintain the authority and control in their hands, make the marital relationship smooth sailing, and endure the pressure coming from the persistence of chauvinist norms. To keep being steadfast, Filipino househusbands take refuge not from their loved ones, relatives or friends but to their faith and hold on to the power of prayers.

REFERENCES

- Chesley, N. (2011). Stay-at-Home Fathers and Breadwinning Mothers: Gender, Couple Dynamics, and Social Change. *Gender & Society*, 25(5), 642–664.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/089124321417433>
- Doucet, A. (2006). *Do Men Mother? Fatherhood, Care, and Domestic Responsibility*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Doucet, A., & Merla, L. (2007). Stay-at-home fathering. *Community, Work and Family*, 10(4), 455–473.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/13668800701575101>
- Kramer, K. Z., & Kramer, A. (2016). At-Home Father Families in the United States: Gender Ideology, Human Capital, and Unemployment. *Journal of Marriage and Family*, 78(5), 1315–1331.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/jomf.12327>
- Merla, L. (2008). Determinants, Costs, and Meanings of Belgian Stay-at-Home Fathers: An International Comparison. *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, and Practice about Men as Fathers*, 6(2), 113–132.
<https://doi.org/10.3149/ftth.0602.113>
- Sagnit, F. J. E. (2020). *Journeys of a Mr. Mom*. 9(11), 2019–2021.
<https://doi.org/10.21275/SR201124093108>
- Solomon, C. R. (2014). “You Just Want to Punch Someone..” “After Months of It, You Just Want to Punch Someone in the Face”: Stay-at-Home Fathers and Masculine Identities. *Michigan Family Review*, 18(1), 23–38.