
Original Article

Mothering and acculturation: Experiences during pregnancy and childrearing of Filipina mothers married to Japanese

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Summary

This study aims to describe the lived experiences of Filipina mothers married to Japanese during pregnancy and childrearing. Eight focus group interviews (FGI) were conducted among 39 Filipino mothers who are currently residing in Japan to obtain significant information with regard to their pregnancy and childrearing experiences. Content analysis was used to extract relevant themes that will describe the experiences of this group of migrant mothers. The findings revealed three major themes: 1) cultural barriers during pregnancy and childrearing; 2) mothering at the different stages of childrearing; and 3) positive adjustments to a new role in a new environment. The establishment of means of communication with migrant mothers effectively enabling them to understand important information for promoting healthy pregnancy and childrearing is strongly recommended. Provision of school information in the English language and enhancing the resilient character of the Filipina are important strategies in promoting positive pregnancy and childrearing experiences among Filipina migrant mothers.

Keywords: Childrearing, Filipina mothers, pregnancy, lived experiences, intercultural marriages

1. Introduction

In 2006, the Commission on Filipinos Overseas (CFO), an agency of the Philippine Government that upholds the interests and well-being of migrant Filipinos, reported an increase of intermarriages between Filipinas and foreign men. Approximately 25,000 intermarriages were reported that year, thirty-one percent of which were marital unions with Japanese husbands (1). Also in 2006, the Ministry of Health, Labor and Welfare of

the Japanese government reported a dramatic increase in the number of children of mothers with Philippine nationality. Data further reveal that marriages among Japanese husbands with a Filipina wife reached 12,150, the highest among the recorded international marriages in Japan for that year (2). In 2007, there were recorded 1,417 live births of offspring of Japanese-Filipina couples (3).

Acculturation and mothering are significant life events for Filipina mothers who are married to Japanese. Filipina mothers of Japanese children are confronted with several issues related to cultural differences and childrearing. The adjustments related to cultural patterns and behaviors are part of the acculturation process that migrants experience when

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they move from country to country. Berry defines acculturation as a process of adjusting to a dominant culture resulting in a modification of one's individual behaviors and becoming imbued with the cultural behaviors of the new group or society (4). During this process, the migrant mother is plunged into a new culture and undergoes a complex process of assimilation, integration or marginalization. Hoang *et al.* mentioned that culture is strongly associated with a woman's reproductive health beliefs. How care is provided to the unborn and the expectant mother, methods of giving birth, and practices during the pre- and postnatal periods vary considerably with the cultural beliefs and practices of the woman (5). The mothering role assumed by a woman upon knowledge of her pregnancy is composed of a mixture of attitudes which she develops through interactions among biological and environmental variables throughout her lifetime. Mothering basically refers to giving birth or caring for someone like a mother, and although most women find this a fulfilling role, the impact of immigration and acculturation still tends to cause extraordinary problems. Studies reveal that a mother's orientation to motherhood changes with acculturation. The demands of transmitting traditional culture and integrating with the culture of the host country during the childrearing process results in unexpected cultural conflict and aggravates the psychological concerns of a migrant mother (6).

Several studies reveal that Japanese mothers themselves experience high levels of maternal parenting stress, which greatly influence their child's level of psychological functioning (7). A steady rise in the intensity of maternal anxiety about childrearing was reported in 1999. The normal mental and psychological development of a child is thought to be at great risk if there are continuous perturbing experiences during the childrearing stages of mothering. Akazawa stressed the importance of improving the childrearing environment of the Japanese mother to reduce her childrearing anxieties and facilitate nurturing of healthy children (8). In a study reporting the confidence of Asian mothers in childrearing, 48% of Japanese women included in the study reported that they were not confident in their ability to rear their child: they also reported degrees of unhappiness and inability to relax while interacting with their child (9). A lack of confidence in childrearing has a positive effect on the inability of the mother to adequately care for her child, which is closely related to self-efficacy. On the other hand, Japanese mothers who have more acceptable emotional interactions at home are viewed as having more secure pre-schoolers. Improving the childrearing environment, providing more information and guidance, and establishing support networks were some of the researchers' recommendations.

In February 2002, the Ministry of Health, Labor, and

Welfare introduced the Sukoyaka Family 21 Agenda. (The term "*sukoyaka*" means "healthy and happy" in Japanese.) This program was designed to promote a national campaign that would create an environment conducive to healthy birthing experiences and anxiety-free parenting, resulting in good and healthy children. Part 2 of the agenda states that it will assure safety and comfortable pregnancy and childbirth and support for infertility; Part 4 stipulates promotion of children's trouble-free mental development and alleviation of parents' anxiety about childrearing (10). Though these relevant programs exist to meet the need for healthy maternity and childrearing in Japan, they do not clearly specify whether or how the same agenda will be provided for pregnant migrant women who have their own special needs and at the same time seek and require positive pregnancy and childrearing experiences. It is the aim of this study to describe the lived experiences of Filipina migrant mothers during pregnancy and childrearing in Japan. The study underscores the roles, difficulties, and coping strategies they utilized to manage their mothering situation. Specifically, it explores the needs identified by these migrant women during pregnancy and childrearing. Furthermore it discusses how Filipina women evaluate their experiences as migrant mothers and provides valuable recommendations to alleviate the problems of migrant women during pregnancy and childrearing. These suggestions are necessary in order to contribute to healthy and happy Japanese families, the goal of the Sukoyaka Family 21 Agenda.

2. Methods

This is a qualitative descriptive study which utilizes content analysis to explore the experiences during pregnancy and childrearing of Filipina mothers married to Japanese. Filipina mothers were asked to participate in scheduled focus group interviews (FGI) using purposive sampling. Krueger defined a focus group interview as a carefully planned discussion designed to obtain perceptions in a defined area of interest in a permissive, non-threatening environment. FGIs are commonly used to obtain general background information about a topic of interest or to generate research hypotheses that can be submitted for further research and testing; they can also serve as new sources of stimulating ideas and creative concepts. In this study, FGIs generated real-life impressions of the participants' pregnancy and childrearing experiences (11).

There are also six essential questions that must be addressed when conducting the content analysis process. These questions include: which data are analyzed? how are they defined? what is the population from which they are drawn? what is the context relative to which the data are analyzed? what are the boundaries of the analysis? and what is the target of the inferences?

(12). Content analysis starts with word and keyword frequencies, but this process of analysis extends beyond word counts: some words must be analyzed in their specific context to be more comprehensible. This method assumes that the words and phrases that are most often mentioned are those that reflect the major important concerns of the participants in an opportune communication (13).

Interpretation and editing of the responses during the interviews were utilized to explore the difficulties, coping strategies, and support available to the Filipina mother as well as the roles that she assumed during pregnancy and childrearing periods. Relevant themes and patterns were identified during the process of data analysis.

2.1. Participants and recruitment process

The researcher requested the assistance of the Philippine Embassy in Tokyo to look for groups of Filipina migrant women residing in Japan. A list of organizations with their corresponding contact persons was provided by the embassy, and each group was subsequently contacted by the researchers. The participants were recruited with the help of the different group coordinators of Filipina women's organizations in various areas in Metropolitan Tokyo and nearby cities. There were groups that the embassy strongly recommended because of their active participation in varied embassy activities. The availability and willingness of the participant to take part in the focus group interviews was considered, and purposive sampling was utilized to get the needed number of participants for each interview session. The inclusion criteria for the study were: being a Filipina married to a Japanese husband, having a child from the said marriage, having lived in Japan for at least a year, and being willing to share honestly her experiences as a migrant mother. Participants were contacted by telephone or e-mail, after which initial meetings were scheduled. The researcher joined organizational meetings and church activities with the participants in order to establish rapport and get to know each participant prior to the interview. The schedule for each focus group interview was jointly decided by the researcher and participant to assure attendance at the scheduled FGI.

2.2. Interview and interview procedure

Participants who came during the scheduled interview were asked to fill out a consent form and information sheet before the interview. The consent form was translated into Filipino and was made available to those participants who had difficulty understanding the English language. The researcher used the information sheet to collect relevant demographic data about the participants. After ensuring that the participants

had read, understood, and signed the consent form, the interview begins. Permission to record the entire interview using an audio tape recorder was solicited before the interview. All interviews were recorded and lasted for about 90 to 120 min. They were conducted in Tagalog, the interviewees' mother language in the Philippines, in order to capture the essence of each of the responses, but participants were encouraged to answer in the language in which they were most comfortable in expressing their ideas. Thus we obtained responses in three languages: Tagalog, English, and Japanese. The following questions were asked during each interview:

- 1) How would you describe your maternal and childrearing experience?
- 2) What roles did you assume during childrearing?
- 3) How were you able to cope with childrearing?
- 4) What kinds of support did you receive during pregnancy and childrearing?
- 5) How would you evaluate your pregnancy and childrearing experience?

2.3. Data analysis

The researcher used content analysis to analyze the solicited information. The audio taped interviews from the 8 focus groups were transcribed verbatim, printed, and analyzed according to the frequency of similar words, phrases, and sentences to identify prevailing

Table 1. Demographic data on Filipina migrant mothers married to Japanese

Age of participants (years)*	
25-29	2 (5)
30-34	5 (13)
35-39	17 (44)
40-44	9 (23)
45-49	6 (15)
Length of stay in Japan (years)*	
1-4	2 (5)
5-9	9 (23)
10-14	10 (26)
15-19	15 (38)
20-more	3 (8)
Japanese proficiency*	
Good	15 (38)
Fair	23 (59)
Poor	1 (3)
Number of children per participant*	
1	19 (49)
2	11 (28)
3	9 (23)
Age of child (years)†	
> 1-3	8 (12)
4-6	8 (12)
7-12	25 (38)
13-17	21 (31)
18-above	5 (7)

* Total number of mothers is 39; † Total number of children is 67; Data are the n (%).

Table 2. Location, dates and number of participants per focus group interview (FGI) (n = 39)

Location	Date	No. of participants
#1 Ichikawa	6-Jun-05	8
#2 Yokosuka	30-Jul-05	5
#3 Akabane	3-Aug-05	5
#4 Tokyo	6-Aug-05	4
#5 Goi	15-Aug-05	4
#6 Hiratsuka	20-Aug-05	4
#7 Urawa	21-Aug-05	5
#8 Kasukabe	27-Aug-05	4

themes and sub-themes. Concurrent content analysis was continued until data reached the saturation level and the researchers were able to arrive at a meaningful description of the Filipina mothers' experiences during pregnancy and childrearing. Codes from raw data were formulated and were later categorized. Direct quotes of participant responses' were done to give integrity to the identified essences. Initial codings were provided to other members of the research team for validation and evaluation, after which the findings were confirmed to ensure that the researchers concurred with each other on the credibility of the findings.

The study was approved by the Institutional Review Board of The University of Tokyo and written informed consent was obtained from each participant.

3. Results

3.1. Demographic data

Table 1 shows the FGI participants' demographic data, and Table 2 shows the location, date, and number of participants for each FGI. A total of 39 Filipina migrants married to Japanese participated in 8 focus group interviews conducted from June to August 2005.

Forty-four percent (44%) of the respondents were 35 to 39 years of age and had stayed in Japan for 15 to 19 years. More than half (59%) of the participants rated themselves "fair" in Japanese language proficiency, and 38% of the Filipina migrants rated themselves "good" in their Japanese language skills, while 3% admitted that they have a "poor" ability to communicate in the Japanese language. The majority of the participants (49%) have 1 child, 28% have 2 children, and the remaining 23% of mothers have 3 children. Thirty-eight percent (38%) of the participants' children are 7 to 12 years of age and 31% are from 13 to 17 years old.

3.2. Themes and sub-themes

Table 3 summarizes the lived experiences of the Filipina migrant mothers during pregnancy and childrearing. We identified three main themes and 10 sub-themes: 1) cultural barriers during pregnancy and childrearing (sub-themes: communication problems, discrimination in the new Japanese family, and clash between

two cultures); 2) mothering at the different stages of childrearing (sub-themes: learning childrearing skills, managing children's schooling needs, assisting children's character development, and keeping a close and strong family); and 3) adjusting positively to a new role in a new environment (sub-themes: recourse to Filipinas' resilient character traits, securing significant support from family and friends, and enjoying the life of being a migrant wife and mother).

3.2.1. Cultural barriers during pregnancy and childrearing

Filipina migrant mothers in the study mentioned similar difficulties regarding adjustments to Japanese language and culture. These difficulties prevent them from experiencing healthy pregnancy and childrearing.

Communication problems: The lack of Japanese language skills on the part of Filipina migrant mothers and the lack of English skills among hospital personnel is the reason why health instructions that are important during pregnancy and childrearing are not well understood or followed by Filipina migrant mothers. Health classes were given only in Japanese without interpreters, which prevents Filipina mothers from participating in this program.

Mothers also experienced being humiliated when they made mistakes while speaking Japanese and felt frustration because they could not express their ideas accurately.

"I can not express my feelings accurately because of my limited Japanese skills and I can not understand the instructions and terminologies used in the hospital... they are different from the Japanese I hear at home"
G#1M4,G#2M3,G#3M5,G#5M3

"Lots of times I was laughed at because of my wrong Japanese...I would rather ask my husband to talk for me but when he is not around I am so frustrated,"
G#1M3,G#3M5

Discrimination in the new Japanese family: The majority of the mothers who participated in the study reported feeling discriminated against in their new Japanese family. There were incidents where the husband confined her away from her Japanese in-laws because of their imminent disapproval of the marriage. The Filipina wife also recalled times when she was not introduced as the wife or as the mother of their new grandchild. These situations gave her feelings of being unwanted and unloved.

"during the family's New Year's celebration I was told to stay inside the room and told not to mingle with the other guests; I was not introduced to the other family members, only my son was..." **G#4M1**

Clash between two cultures: In the Filipino and the Japanese cultures, the mother is the one in charge of taking care of the child. But the Filipina mother reported that the Japanese husband had a strong

Table 3. Summary of the lived experiences during pregnancy and childrearing of Filipina migrants married to Japanese

Codes	Sub themes	Themes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Lots of times, I was laughed at because of my wrong Japanese - The Japanese used inside the hospital is different from what we use at home - Cannot understand hospital terminology and doctors' instructions during pre-natal check-up - Cannot express my feelings accurately because of my limited Japanese skills - When my child got sick I could not explain my child's condition to the doctor because my Japanese is very poor - Nobody speaks to me because I cannot speak Japanese - Because I cannot talk in Japanese and read kanji¹⁾ my child calls me a "not good mama" - My child asks me something in Japanese and I can't explain it to her; I burst into tears - I cannot read and understand school documents of my child because it's all in kanji¹⁾, 	Communication problems	Cultural barriers during pregnancy and childrearing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My husband hid me from his parents when I arrived in Japan while I was pregnant - I was not introduced as the wife of my husband during family gatherings - During New Year's celebrations I was told to stay inside the room and not mix with the visitors - My in-laws are afraid that the neighbors will know I am a gai-jin²⁾ and Filipina - When we presented our child to my in-laws, I was asked to stay inside the car; I was left alone; I was never invited to go inside my in-laws' house 	Discrimination in the new Japanese family	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I am always looking for ways to balance the two cultures - Confused on how to discipline my child: the Philippine way? or the Japanese way? - I had conflict with my husband about how to raise our child, the Filipino way or the Japanese way - Different character of my child because of the many influences in and outside the house - My child always thinks that she is not "half-half" - having two different cultures 	Clash between two cultures	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I don't know about anything in baby care, I was afraid to touch my baby's umbilical cord - Ask help of the visiting nurse - I always make international call to my mother in the Philippines for guidance and advice - I cannot stop my kids when they play I feel tired my children makes the place I clean dirty again they are always playing. - Everything was really difficult in the beginning with my first child but with the second and third child I was able to handle it very well 	Learning childrearing skills	Mothering at the different stages of childrearing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Must attend PTA meeting all in Japanese - Need to prepare so many things for school requirements and daily "obento"³⁾ - Find ways to pay the very expensive school fees; it is very expensive to send children to school - Provide our child money, house, security, and companionship while they still need it - Watchful of the different influences around my child - Give guidance one step at a time to guide my child all the way - They rely on you during the early years in school but they gradually change because they are learning new things and start to become independent 	Managing child's schooling needs	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - I always give my children loving advice - Keeping communication open so that I will be able to know how my children feel - Discipline my child so that she will not hurt anybody - Teach my children good values like how to respect other people, especially the aged - Become friends with their children so that they will not lie to us - Watching my child patiently and continually 	Assisting child's character development	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Need to use teamwork and work together to solve any family problem - Need to solve problems together as a family: it builds my relationship with my husband - Need to keep our home whole and intact; this is very important 	Keeping a close and strong family	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Spend time sharing our feelings - When we talk with each other, our relationship becomes closer - Give and take is needed to understand the culture of each country - Make the first move in communicating with other people; start little by little - Use negative and difficult experiences to improve myself and my outlook in life becomes broader - It is a continuous process of adjustment: I have to continue adjusting to so many things in rearing my child and in living in Japan - Bringing up children is very hard work, so I keep fighting, telling myself "ganbare"⁴⁾, and I am able to rear them really well, I think - Even if my husband is always at work, I was able to bring up my child well by myself 	Using the Filipina's resilient character traits	Adjusting positively to new role in a new environment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - My husband spends time interpreting important terms - My husband pushed me to study Japanese - I get my strength from my husband, my primary source of support - At first my husband accompanied me to the hospital, but later he let me go by myself for my benefit to learn and be independent - My child went to grade school; he helped me with kanji¹⁾ I cannot understand - My Japanese friends and the parents of my child's classmates help me in understanding school work and activities - My Filipina friends encourage me to join Japanese class at the city office; we learn Japanese together; it is a lot of fun - My Filipina friends took care of me when I was in the hospital during delivery; they washed my clothes - Without my friends I would die: my friends relieve me from my stress - Learning with my friends, through my friends and my experiences with them, I was able to learn so many things - I made lots of friends, especially with the Japanese - I'm working hard to improve my Japanese skills by joining the language school at the City offices - I'm making more friends by joining the PTA, school, neighborhood cleaning meeting, community activities - Attending Catholic church and Philippine embassy social activities 	Securing significant support from family and friends	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - For me it is a life of happiness, being comfortable, experiencing closeness and love - I learned to be thankful for being here for my children for what we have now - The good things I taught her in Japan I was able to share with my family in the Philippines - I learned to trust and respect myself because I realized that when I trust and respect myself others start trusting and respecting you also - I was able to feel how it is to be a wife and mother; it is a very wonderful experience 	Enjoying life of being a migrant wife and mother	

¹⁾ A "kanji" is a Chinese character. But in the story of this Filipina mother, it includes both Chinese characters and the Japanese kana phonetic syllabary; ²⁾ A "gai-jin" is a foreigner in Japan. This word can have a discriminatory connotation; ³⁾ An "obento" is a Japanese homemade packed lunch or snack prepared for schoolchildren to bring from home to school; literally it means lunchbox; ⁴⁾ "ganbare" is a Japanese expression meaning something like "Never give up!"

influence in disciplining their child the Japanese way. *"there were lots of times when I tried to discipline my children and my husband would interrupt me and say to me that we are in Japan and we must follow the Japanese custom... I am confused about how to discipline my child the Japanese or the Filipino way... I am always looking for ways to balance the two cultures but it is difficult."* G#1M2,

3.2.2. Mothering at different stages of childrearing

All of the participants in the study agreed that their primary role is to be a mother to their child and that there are expected changes in this mothering role as they progress through the various stages of childrearing. The ability of the mother to provide care for her child from pregnancy to adolescence is influenced by many factors.

Learning childrearing skills: First-time mothers usually verbalized their lack of knowledge in newborn care. The nurses and midwives in the hospital taught her essential childrearing skills during the new mother's hospitalization. But upon coming home she still feels awkward in performing the newly learned infant care skills. At times, the migrant mother would engage in expensive international calls just to ask her mother in the Philippines for guidance on how to take care of her child:

"this is the first time for me: I don't know how to take care of my baby, especially my child's umbilical cord. The nurse comes to help me clean it." G#1M3, G#5M3
"if I don't know what to do with my child, I always make long distance calls to my mother in the Philippines for guidance and advice." G#1M2

Those who had toddlers and children of pre-school age spoke of their inability to control the restlessness of their child, which often interrupts her household activities:

"I wanted to finish all the household work but the children keep on making the things I clean dirty again; I don't know how to stop them; I feel so tired." G#1M5, G#4M3

Managing the child's schooling needs: The Filipina mother realizes that there are more difficult tasks that she needs to do as her child enters school. All of them mentioned that the compulsory schooling system in Japan is very different from the Philippines because it requires their active participation throughout the school year.

They all said that sending a child to school is very expensive because of the fees and requirements. They particularly mentioned that preparing the daily "obento" takes much of their time. An "obento" (literally it means lunchbox) is a Japanese homemade packed lunch or snack prepared for schoolchildren to bring from home to school. Mothers usually spend considerable time and energy producing an appealing

boxed lunch. They must balance the foods' nutritious content and its aesthetically pleasing arrangements in a partitioned box (14).

They feel pressured to assure that school requirements are based on standards and to attend PTA meetings and other school activities and festivals. The Filipina mother feels that her responsibilities change in varied stages of childrearing and that she must be watchful of the different influences surrounding her child; she must provide strong guidance and constant reminders until the time comes that they can manage themselves.

"they rely on you during the early years in school, but they gradually change because they learn new things and meet new friends; then they become independent." G#1, G#2, G#4, G#5

Assisting the child's character development: This theme summarizes the responses of the participants when they were asked about their role in childrearing. Most of them mentioned that their role fundamentally revolves around the character building of their child which includes giving necessary loving advice to their child, keeping communication open, disciplining and teaching them the meaning of respect, and providing good companionship to their child are their specific roles during childrearing.

"you are not only a mother: it is important to teach your child good values like respect for other people, especially the aged..." G#1M4, G#1M2, G#4M2

Keeping the family close and strong: Though most of the participants find it difficult, the majority of them still believe that they are in charge of keeping their family close and strong. The mother must serve her child and husband with dedication and must facilitate open channels of communication among family members. Teamwork and family consensus must be considered in dealing with domestic concerns.

"it is my role to keep our home whole by serving my child and husband, with dedication; I need to keep my family whole and intact; it is very important: I need to take care of the house." G#1M3, G#3M5, G#5M3

3.2.3. Adjusting positively to new roles in a new environment

Many participants felt that they were able to adjust to being a Filipina migrant mother in Japan because they had in them their natural Filipino character of being positive and cheerful and because they have a great deal of support coming from their family, husbands, and friends.

"the Filipina, even if she has problems, she's always happy and has a smile in her face: that's why she's able to handle her problems very well. That's the Filipina way." G#2M4

Using the Filipina's resilient character traits: It is remarkable how her innate attitude of having a

positive outlook in life and being cheerful helps her in dealing with her difficult migrant situation. She has this strong coping strategy to transform her negative and difficult experiences into opportunities to improve her childrearing skills. Her strong character helps her to succeed in childrearing.

"everything was really difficult in the beginning of childrearing, but I was able to handle everything very well." G#1M5

"bringing up my children was very hard, so I keep fighting: "ganbare!" (Japanese for "Never give up!")"

I am able to rear them really well, I think." G#1M4, G#6M3

Securing significant support from family and friends: All of the participants strongly agree that their husband and set of friends provided the needed support in order for them to adjust successfully to their new role and environment. The husband gives them the primary support and encouragement for them to study Japanese. *"first he (my husband) would accompany me to the hospital and other places, but later he pushed me to study Japanese and be independent for my benefit. He was right."* G#1M2, G#3M4

There are two sets of friends for the Filipina migrant women: the Filipino friends and the Japanese friends. The Filipina friends who themselves have Japanese husbands give her the needed advice and support during pregnancy, delivery, and all throughout the childrearing stages.

"my Filipina friends encouraged me to take the free Japanese classes at the city office; they washed my clothes and stayed with me during my delivery; without my friends, I would die." G#1M2, G#2M5M2M7, G#3M4, G#4M4

The Japanese friends are usually parents of her child's classmates, and this helps her to understand school-related activities. They provide a broader network where the Filipina mother can learn and understand meaningfully the Japanese language and culture.

"I make lots of friends, especially with the Japanese: this helps me improve my language skills and helps me understand my child's school activities, such as in the PTA." G#1M4

Enjoying the life of being a migrant wife and mother: All of the participants reported that their experience during pregnancy and childrearing in Japan was filled with difficulties and hardships. But when asked how they would evaluate their life now, the majority of them responded that they are happy and satisfied.

"it is a life of happiness, being comfortable and experiencing closeness and love of my family..." G#1,2,3,5,7,8

They feel that all the painful sacrifices they had were replaced by the joys and happiness of having a child and family.

"I was able to feel how it was to be a wife and mother: it was very wonderful. I never realized how wonderful this experience was: I am so thankful that I was able to survive the challenges of caring for my child and family." G#6M4

4. Discussion

We described the lived experiences of Filipina migrant mothers during pregnancy and childrearing in Japan based on the categories that emerged from the focus group interviews. The study revealed that the Filipina mothers of Japanese children experienced hardships during pregnancy and childrearing that were primarily associated with adjustments to Japanese culture. Their lack of Japanese language skills limits the migrant's capacity to receive the necessary health instructions in this vulnerable situation and to give full explanations of her child's condition during consultation or illness. A study conducted among Japanese mothers residing in the United Kingdom reported the same language problems. In that study, Japanese mothers experienced frustration from language difficulties, which caused stress, leading to a sense of dependence and lowered self-esteem (15). Another study showed that foreign-born mothers, especially those who could not speak the local language, had higher levels of depression and anxiety than native-born mothers (16). Evidence from several studies has revealed how communication influences the health provider's clinical decision making, and that patient-provider interactions have subsequent effects on health outcomes. In this case the perinatal and childrearing periods put the Filipina migrant mothers at great risk.

The discrimination among Filipina wives is related to the stigma attached to Filipina women's working in entertainment bars and women wanting to marry "rich" Japanese men to escape their poverty in the Philippines (17). Also, the "ie" system established during the Meiji period influenced this discriminatory practice toward women and foreigners. The Japanese word "ie" literally means "household" or "family" and it involves the residence, households, or a group of families according to the Japanese civil code and the family lineage (18). The "ie" is a patrilineal system where everything is generally decided by the senior male and women are considered inferior. Women are in vulnerable situations because they have to adjust themselves to the customs of their husbands' "ie" and work hard to satisfy their husbands' parents. They have to bear children; the inability to fulfill such obligations results in forced divorce or being sent away. More importantly, this system has two important principles: 1) it puts the family's before one's own needs and 2) it makes a distinction between those in and those outside of one's "ie" (19). The system was formally abolished with the revision of Japanese family law in 1947,

when Japanese society began a transition to a more Americanized nuclear family system. However, due to the Confucian principles underlying the *ie* concept, the practices are still informally followed to some degree by many Japanese people today (20). Japanese society is still influenced by the "*ie*" system as individuals and institutions still clearly discriminate against outsiders as well as sojourners (18).

Thus marrying someone outside the established social structure is a major threat to the family or society's homogenous and conservative cultural practices.

The confusion between two cultures experienced by the Filipina mother is due to the clash in the beliefs of the minority culture (Filipina) and the dominant culture (Japanese). Mothers are expected to transmit the cultural traditions and language of their country of origin to their children and to assist their child to adjust to expectations of both cultures. Attempts at integrating both cultures can prove problematic for immigrant women, leaving them vulnerable to misunderstandings and discrimination (6,21).

This study was able to elaborate two important features in the lived experiences of Filipina migrant mothers during pregnancy and childrearing. These salient aspects are related to mothering and acculturation.

4.1. Mothering

Mothering is a lifelong, multifaceted and vital process of nurturing, which primarily focuses on the growth and development of one's child (22). Women coming from different racial groups express their cultural values related to mothering through family roles and structures and through customs and beliefs about child protection and rearing (6).

In Japan, women were confined inside the home and their main function in marriage was to raise a son and demonstrate excellence in domestic domains as support for her hard-working husband. The mother is responsible for the child's growth and educational achievement (7).

In Filipino families, though the husband is evidently the head, the wife still manages the home and finances. It is the mother's responsibility to provide a cooperative, close, and highly personalized environment where children are brought up to be refined, helpful, humble, and religious (23).

Child discipline differs between the two cultures in various ways. Filipina mothers in general discipline their children to teach good values, to mold their child's character and personality, to correct misbehaviors according to the standards of society, and to equip their child with a moral sense of right and wrong. Furthermore Filipino mothers believe that discipline is important in order for their child to grow up healthy,

strong, intelligent, and respectful. Spanking (corporal punishment) and reducing school allowances are acceptable forms of punishment in order to discipline and correct the Filipino child's wrong behavior (24).

In Japanese society, parental discipline is regulated by the goal of the Japanese family value system. When children begin to show assertive behaviors and noncompliant attitudes in everyday life, mothers are advised not to control these behaviors too strongly, because these are expected to be normal. Japanese mothers seldom confront their child's noncompliance but they indirectly urge their child to comply by focusing on the consequences of their child's misdeeds. When children resist the mother's suggestions, the Japanese mother tones down her control attempts and sometimes gives in to their child's desires (25).

The focus of discipline among Filipino children is somewhat similar to Americans' disciplinary attitudes, which focus primarily on the "fear of being punished"; while Japanese children are made aware of the impact of their behaviors on others: they are brought up to be more concerned about how the other child would feel (26).

The Philippines' long history of Western colonization tends to strongly influence the behaviors of Filipina mothers in childrearing. To date, there are limited studies on child development of Filipino children, but there are studies that reveal Filipina mothers' great concern with values associated with their child's achievements, and they discipline their child strictly in order for them to excel in varied endeavors. They value qualities associated with being talented, smart, hard-working, goal-directed, and responsible. Filipina mothers believe that the achievements of their offspring will bring prestige and economic security to the family. In the case of Japanese, mothers utilize childrearing strategies that are adaptive to their children's signals and that allow children the freedom to learn with minimal interventions. Japanese mothers also encourage emotional autonomy, while Filipina mothers strive for instrumental autonomy (27).

Filipina migrant mothers bring with them these internalized roles and perform them as they assume their mothering roles in Japan. The Filipina mother's priority is to manage the home and child's growth and development. The sub-themes under mothering at the different stages of childrearing substantiate the impact of immigration on mothering that has been demonstrated in previous studies.

This study underscores the seven cornerstones involved in developing mothering skills identified by Flaherty (6,28). The seven caring functions are managing, caretaking, coaching, assessing, nurturing, assigning, and patrolling. Participants in this study were able to identify functions similar to Flaherty's as they performed childrearing roles. Managing the childrearing needs and keeping the home intact displays the firm commitment of the Filipina mother to the

safety, growth, and development of her child.

Mercer (1995) mentioned that women may struggle with issues related to self-concept/self-esteem, as well as mental and physical health, during these significant stages of childrearing, but most women develop a positive image of themselves over time (6). It is during this time that they need to get the necessary confidence and support primarily from the husband, as well as from the visiting nurse, Filipina friends, and even from the family in the Philippines; support from these sources helps her develop the competence to perform her role as a new mother (29).

The experience of gratification and joy during pregnancy and childrearing of the Filipina mother is the result of satisfaction, enjoyment, reward, and pleasure that a woman experiences in interactions with her infant and in fulfilling the tasks of the role (29). Gratification from mothering is a motivator to persevere in the role.

4.2. Acculturation

Filipina migrant mothers undergo a continuous process of adjustment from the moment they set foot in Japan. This demanding process of positively adapting to their new role as mothers in their new home in Japan can be attributed to acculturation: a term that is both a status and a process. Ryder (2000) describes acculturation as the changes in identity, attitudes, values, and behaviors that accompany an individual's movement from their original or "heritage" culture towards a new and different "mainstream" culture (30), while another author defined it as a process whereby immigrant groups adopt the cultural practices, traditions, and values of the host country (31). For the Filipina migrant, it is both: her successful adaptation in the Japanese culture is a result of a continuous process of adjustment. She believes that she needs to change for her child and family, and this positive attitude originates from the unique Filipino character of resiliency.

The various calamities and revolts that the Filipinos faced as a people were opportunities to assimilate any civilization and thrive in any climate. This allows the Filipino character to be sturdy and resilient. During difficult times, Filipinos demonstrate their ability to bend without breaking similar to a bamboo tree. It is this resilience that enables Filipina migrant mothers to adapt to any difficult situations while overseas and tolerate the loneliness of being far from their families; it is a very evident Filipino coping strategy (23,32).

Limitations of this study included the size and composition of the participants: the sample was very small compared with the total number of Filipina migrant mothers in Japan, and most surveyed mothers came predominantly from the middle class. This limits the applicability of the results of the study to a bigger population. There is a need to include a bigger number of participants and to use appropriate random sampling

to improve the generalizability of the findings. Though we have a considerable span of marital longevity and age range, we failed to focus on the experiences according to the migrant's length of stay in Japan, age upon migration, parity, and life stage, which may have influenced the lived experiences of the participants. Application of varied forms of data collection such as participatory observations might reveal significant findings. In addition, we have only considered healthy pregnancies and childrearing experiences; it is possible that mothers who had a complicated pregnancy and their children might have different experiences from the mothers studies here. Despite these limitations, we find this study helpful in improving health care advice and instructions given to foreign migrant women during pregnancy and childrearing. It also provides a better understanding of the unique coping strategies of Filipina migrant mothers.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, the lived experience of Filipina migrant mothers during pregnancy and childrearing is a life lived in a balance between mothering and acculturation. Exploring their experience in being new mothers in Japan is vital in order to elucidate and comprehend the difficulties and coping strategies they employ to adapt successfully to their new role in a new environment. The use of a qualitative approach provides participants with an opportunity to express their thoughts and ideas freely without the restrictions of a structured questionnaire. Findings from this study can directly impact health care during pregnancy and childrearing stages and will facilitate reviews of existing health programs to allow more migrant mothers to benefit from them.

This study would like to recommend: 1) having more health/school personnel conversant in English and health/school instruction materials available in a common language; 2) organizing a parent-partner or parent-tandem might be considered helpful in creating support networks for the migrant mothers; 3) and providing a counseling desk at the city office or school for international marriages to help limit confusion among couples in rearing a child having parents coming from two different cultures. Guidance sessions on culture clarification and appreciation can be beneficial to both parents as well as to their children, and it is necessary to enhance the innate cheerful and positive characteristics of Filipina mothers through social activities in hospitals and schools to increase migrant mothers' self-esteem.

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