



Differences in Risk Behaviors of Male and Female Youth with Transnational Families

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Abstract: Studies on the impact of labor migration on Filipino children left behind show mixed findings. Living in transnational households was not found to be psychologically harmful to the Filipino youth compared to their counterparts in Southeast Asian countries. At the same time, Filipino adolescents were also found to have higher internalizing measures when separated from their migratory parents. Moreover, children of migrant mothers also tend to exhibit poorer social adjustment and social performance. The present research seeks to further explore the link between migratory separation from mother, father or both and the problem behaviors of youth left behind. A sample of 1,187 Filipino adolescents (489 male and 698 female; mean age 16.89 years) completed measures on various domains of risk behaviors. A 2 (sex of children: male or female) x 2 (migrant parent: intact, mother only, father only, or both) x 6 (risk type: academic, substance, technological, aggression, sexual, and internalizing) multivariate analysis of variance was conducted to investigate the influence of migrant parents on problem behaviors. Findings are clearly pointing to significantly higher frequency of substance use, sexual risk taking, academic difficulties, and violent behaviors among males whose fathers and mothers were both away as migrant workers. Social determination theory posits that individual well-being is fostered through the satisfaction of the basic psychological needs of autonomy, competence and relatedness. Playing an important role in the family structure in the absence of at least one parent, especially the mother, instills in the female adolescent a strong sense of self-efficacy which protects her from developing potential risk behaviors. The interrelation between autonomy, competence and relatedness, however, points to a more complex mix of factors that may explain the vulnerability of male adolescents to the negative effects of transnational families.

Key words: risk behaviors, transnational parenting, youth at risk