

Academic Concerns and Coping Strategies of Junior High School Students in Liloan National High School with Overseas Filipino Worker Parents

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Abstract

Students with Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) parents face a unique set of challenges that can impact their emotional stability and academic life. This study aimed to quantitatively assess the academic struggles, coping strategies, and academic performance of Junior High School students with OFW parents at Lilo-an National High School. The study employed a descriptive-quantitative research design utilizing the survey method. The respondents comprised twenty (20) Junior High School students selected through purposive sampling based on specific criteria: enrollment in the current school year and having at least one parent working abroad for over one year. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire to measure the frequency of academic concerns and coping mechanisms, alongside a document analysis of the students' General Weighted Average (GWA). Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically weighted mean and frequency distribution. The findings revealed that the most significant academic hurdle for these students is "stress and anxiety about schoolwork," which ranked highest with a weighted mean of 3.35, followed by the "struggle to ask for help" with a mean of 3.15. Contrary to the assumption of isolation, "feeling lonely or unsupported" received the lowest severity score with a mean of 2.25. In terms of coping strategies, the students identified "communicating with parents abroad through calls/messaging" as their primary coping mechanism with a mean of 4.75, significantly outranking reliance on local family members with a mean of 3.20. Furthermore, the document analysis indicated high academic resilience, with 100% of respondents achieving satisfactory to outstanding grades (GWA of 80 or above) despite their reported stress. Overall, the quantitative data suggests a "resilient but anxious" profile for OFW children. While they maintain high academic performance through internal motivation and "digital parenting" support, they suffer from significant internalized stress. The study recommends the implementation of school-based stress management programs and time-management workshops to support the mental well-being of this specific demographic.

Keywords: Academic Concerns; Coping Strategies; Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW); Left-Behind Children; Junior High School; Liloan National High School; Philippines

1. Introduction

In every corner of the Philippines, there are families bound by sacrifice—families where love often means letting go. For instance, mothers miss first days of school, while fathers watch birthdays through screens, and children grow up with half their hearts in another country. These stories belong to millions of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), parents who leave not because they want to, but because they must. They board planes with heavy hearts and yet hopeful spirits, carrying dreams not for themselves, but rather for their children back home. For decades, OFWs have been called modern-day heroes, and rightfully so. Their remittances help build homes, pay school fees, and lift families out of poverty. However, for all their contributions, their absence creates a void no amount of money can fill.

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The family is widely regarded as the basic unit of society and plays a vital role in shaping a child's character and development. However, when one or both parents choose to work abroad, the family dynamic inevitably changes. In many cases, grandparents, relatives and other trusted kin often take care of the children of OFW parents. As noted by Burgos et al. (2020), these guardians often serve as the children's primary source of emotional support, making them feel loved and reminding them that they are not alone.

Battistella and Conaco (1998) observed that children of migrant parents often encounter challenges related to school performance and social adjustment. They also noted that the negative effects of parental absence tend to lessen when the mother remains at home. In contrast, Abenir (2019) emphasized that regardless of gender, many children feel uneasy or distressed when their mother is the one working abroad.

Research consistently shows that migration significantly affects the overall well-being of children left behind. From a positive standpoint, having parents abroad can provide families with improved financial stability, allowing children access to better education, nutritious food, healthcare, and even the ability to acquire property. Nonetheless, despite these material benefits, the physical absence of a parent—especially over long periods—can deeply affect children's emotional health and social development (Burgos et al., 2020).

Children left behind often struggle with intense feelings of loneliness and longing. Calantas and Lobaton (2018) noted that teenagers with OFW parents may become more prone to rebellious behavior or feel envious of peers who have complete families. Aguilar (2020) also found that these children tend to experience difficulties managing schoolwork, household responsibilities, and personal issues. Similarly, Givaudan and Pick (2013, as cited in Calantas and Lobaton, 2018) reported that children of migrant workers are more likely to exhibit behavioral problems, including dropping out of school, engaging in vices, or even substance abuse.

Behind the regular video calls, balikbayan boxes, and smiling photos on social media, there are children learning to grow up without the daily presence of a parent. This absence is more than just physical—in fact, it reaches into the emotional and mental spaces of a child's life. For junior high school students, especially those in their formative teenage years, the impact can be profound. These are the years when guidance, support, and emotional connection are most needed. Without a parent to talk to after school, to help with assignments, or to offer encouragement during tough times, many students begin to carry invisible burdens. As a result, some become more withdrawn, while others take on adult responsibilities too early—helping with siblings, making household decisions, or managing emotions they don't fully understand.

Academically, the effects vary. On one hand, some students become highly driven, motivated by the sacrifices their parents have made. They work hard, determined to make their parents proud. On the other hand, others may lose focus, feel unmotivated, or struggle to keep up with schoolwork. Teachers and guidance counselors often observe changes in behavior: a drop in grades, lack of participation in class, or signs of emotional distress. Indeed, the absence of a parent can lead to increased pressure, anxiety, or even feelings of abandonment—experiences that directly affect learning and development.

At Liloan National High School, these students are not hard to spot. They are in classrooms, quietly working or daydreaming by the window. They sit in guidance offices, sometimes unsure of how to express what they're feeling. They smile, laugh, and learn like any other student—yet their lives are shaped by distance and longing. Some thrive and show remarkable independence; however, others silently carry the weight of being left behind.

This research aimed to bring those stories forward. It focused on the academic concerns faced by junior high school students at Liloan National High School who have one or both parents working abroad. Moreover, it sought to understand how these students cope—whether through friendships, school activities, family support, or personal resilience. By exploring their challenges and coping strategies, this study hoped to shine a light on their unique experiences and offer insights that can help educators, parents, and communities support them more effectively.

In a society where labor migration has become part of everyday life, it is crucial to remember the young people living at the heart of it. Their voices matter—not just in classrooms, but also in the broader conversations about what it truly means to build a better future.

1.1. Statement of the problem

This study sought to examine the academic concerns and coping strategies of junior high school students at Liloan National High School with parents working abroad. Specifically, it aimed to answer the following questions

- What academic concerns are experienced by junior high school students with OFW parents?
 - What coping strategies do these students use to manage the challenges of parental absence?
 - How do these coping strategies influence their academic performance and overall school life?
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2. Methods

This chapter describes the research design, participants, data gathering procedures, and statistical tools used in the study.

2.1. Research Design

This study employed a descriptive-quantitative research design to assess the academic concerns, coping strategies, and performance of students with Overseas Filipino Worker (OFW) parents. Data collection utilized a survey questionnaire where participants rated the frequency of their experiences using a 5-point Likert scale (from "Never" to "Always"), supplemented by a document analysis of the students' General Weighted Average (GWA) from the recent quarter. The collected data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, specifically by calculating mean scores to determine the severity of concerns and ranking them to identify the most prevalent issues and coping mechanisms employed by the respondents.

2.2. Respondents of the Study

The respondents of this study were twenty (20) junior high school students (Grades 7–10) and six (6) OFW parents of Liloan National High School, Brgy. Liloan, Ormoc City who have one or both parents working abroad. The researchers used purposive sampling, selecting only those who meet the criteria of having OFW parents. The total number of respondents was depending on the actual number of qualified students available during data collection.

2.3. Research Instrument

The primary instrument used in this study was a survey questionnaire designed by the researcher. It was divided into three parts:

- Part I: Demographic profile of the respondents (age, sex, grade level, and parent's country of work).
- Part II: Academic concerns checklist to identify the common academic issues encountered by students (e.g., lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, time management).
- Part III: Coping strategies checklist to determine how students handle academic and emotional challenges (e.g., seeking help, communication, involvement in activities).

The questionnaires were validated by research advisers and subject experts to ensure its reliability and clarity.

2.4. Data Gathering Procedure

The researcher sought permission from the School Principal and Class Advisers to conduct the study. After approval, the questionnaires were distributed to the selected respondents. The participants were assured of confidentiality and informed that their responses were used solely for research purposes. After collecting the questionnaires, the researcher organized, tabulated, and analyzed the data using appropriate statistical methods.

3. Results and discussion

3.1. Academic Concerns

The study highlights the academic concerns that students of Lilo-an National High School faced while their parent(s) are working abroad. The common academic issues encountered by students were listed, and participants were asked to rate how often they experience each of these issues. This study gathered data from 20 Junior High School students who responded to the questionnaire, composed of 15 females and 5 males aged 12 to 15 years. Most of the respondents indicated that their parent(s) have been working abroad for more than one year up to three years, which is sufficient time to form a complete perception of their experience on these issues throughout a school year. Mean scores were calculated based on the frequency of the responses obtained and a severity score from 1 to 5, specifically from "Never" to "Always" for each issue. The ranking of the issues is shown from highest to lowest mean score in the Table 1 below.

Table 1 Respondents' Perception on How Often Academic Concerns are Experienced

Academic Concerns	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)	Total Responses	Mean	Rank
I find it hard to concentrate on my studies	3	2	12	1	2	20	2.85	3
I feel stressed or anxious about schoolwork	1	3	9	6	2	20	3.35	1
I have difficulty managing my time for homework and projects	2	8	5	2	3	20	2.8	4
I lack motivation to study	1	10	7	3		20	2.65	5
I struggle to ask for help when I don't understand lessons	2	5	6	2	5	20	3.15	2
I feel lonely or unsupported in my schoolwork	9		8	3		20	2.25	7
I feel my academic performance has declined	3	9	2	6		20	2.55	6

When the researcher looked at these results, the picture became quite revealing. The data showed that for these students, the emotional weight of schooling is the most pressing challenge. With stress and anxiety scoring highest at 3.35, it is clear that the pressure to succeed is a frequent companion in their daily lives. The situation is made more difficult by their second biggest struggle: asking for help (3.15). Their score creates a challenging dynamic where they feel the internal pressure but perhaps hesitate to reach out, possibly trying to handle things independently.

Beyond the emotional stress, they face the standard academic hurdles. Issues like maintaining focus (2.85), managing time (2.80), and finding motivation (2.65) are regular, recurring frustrations—not constant, but frequent enough to interrupt their learning. However, there is a very encouraging finding here. Despite the physical distance of their parents, the lowest score went to feeling lonely or unsupported (2.25). This suggests that even though their parents are working overseas, these students still feel a sense of connection and support, likely from their extended families or the school community.

3.2. Coping Strategies

On the other hand, the same group of students was asked how they are managing the academic concerns presented. A set of common strategies was listed, and the students were asked to rate how often they used these strategies to cope with their academic concerns. In this manner, we will be able to dive deep into the situation of these students and reflect on their experiences regarding their day-to-day academic struggles while their parents are away working.

Again, mean scores were calculated based on the frequency of the responses obtained and a severity score from 1 to 5, specifically from “Never” to “Always” for each strategy. The ranking of the strategies is shown from highest to lowest mean scores in Table 2 below.

Table 2 Respondents What are their Coping Strategies while Facing Academic Concerns

Coping Strategies	Never (1)	Rarely (2)	Sometimes (3)	Often (4)	Always (5)	Total Responses	Mean	Rank
I talk to my teachers or classmates when I have academic problems		3	9		8	20	3.65	4
I ask family members or relatives for help	2	4	8		6	20	3.2	5

I make a study schedule or plan to manage my time	3	6	9	2		20	2.5	7
I participate in school activities or clubs to relieve stress	1	3	12	1	3	20	3.1	6
I pray or meditate to calm myself	2	2	2	4	10	20	3.9	3
I talk with my parent(s) abroad through calls or messaging				5	15	20	4.75	1
I try to stay positive and motivate myself		1	5	6	8	20	4.05	2
I stay at my Boy/Girl Friends house whenever I'm lonely or sad	13		7			20	1.7	8

The data reveals that for these students, the physical absence of their parents has created a unique coping dynamic where digital communication serves as their primary emotional anchor. The most frequently used strategy, with a mean of 4.75 (Rank 1), is communicating with parents abroad through calls or messaging. This indicates that despite the distance, parents remain the dominant authority figures and source of comfort. The students prefer to bridge the miles through technology rather than relying heavily on the guardians or relatives physically present in their homes, as seeking help from family members ranked significantly lower at 5th place. This suggests a potential disconnect between the students and their local support systems, implying that while their physical needs are met by guardians, their emotional and academic vulnerability is still reserved for their absent parents.

Furthermore, the students demonstrate a high degree of internal resilience and spiritual reliance to navigate their day-to-day struggles. Ranking 2nd and 3rd respectively, "trying to stay positive" and "praying or meditating" show that these students are forced to develop self-soothing mechanisms in the absence of immediate parental reassurance. They are actively trying to motivate themselves and lean on their faith to manage stress. This internal fortitude is further evidenced by the lowest-ranked behavior, staying at a partner's house (Rank 8), which suggests that the students are generally avoiding escapist or risky behaviors to cope with their loneliness, preferring instead to face their situation within their own homes.

However, the data points to a specific challenge regarding the practical side of their academic lives. The strategy of "making a study schedule or plan" ranked 7th with a mean of 2.50. This suggests that while the students are emotionally resilient, they may find it difficult to establish a consistent routine without the daily oversight of a parent. Rather than a lack of desire to learn, their day-to-day struggles appear to stem from the difficulty of self-regulating their time in an unstructured environment. They possess the motivation to succeed, but they are understandably still learning how to build the concrete study habits and structure that are often easier to maintain with parental presence.

3.3. Academic Performance

This study examines the academic performance of students with OFW parents. To do this, copies of the participants' report cards from the recent school year 2025-2026, quarter 2, were collected with prior consent. The General Weighted Average (GWA) grade of these students is presented in the below table, Table 3.

Table 3 Respondents Latest General Weighted Average (GWA) Grade

	Did not Meet Expectation 74 below	Fairly Satisfactory 75-79	Satisfactory 80-84	Very Satisfactory 85-89	Outstanding 90-100	Total
No. Of Students	0	0	7	9	4	20

The data highlights the remarkable resilience of students with parent(s) working abroad, dispelling common concerns that parental absence might negatively impact school performance. Rather than faltering, this demographic demonstrated exceptional focus, with 100% of the respondents' achieving grades of 80 and above. The data shows that the physical distance of parents does not translate to academic decline; instead, nearly two-thirds of the students (65%)

surpassed the standard expectations to reach the 'Very Satisfactory' or 'Outstanding' levels. This consistent high performance suggests that these students may be utilizing their parents' sacrifices as a source of motivation, translating their unique family dynamics into academic determination.

3.4. Parents Feedback

In addition, this study surveyed the OFW parents of selected student respondents. Six (6) individuals participated in the survey, and their responses are presented in Table 4 and Table 5. The objective was to gather feedback regarding the parents' perceptions of their children's academic performance, their parental support, and their concerns regarding how their children cope academically during their physical absence. While the sample size is limited and may not be fully representative of the entire OFW parent population, the data provides authentic insights that will serve as a foundational tool for understanding these unique family dynamics.

Table 4 Academic Concerns of Parents toward their Children

Concern	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Uncertain (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	Total	Mean
I am worried that my being far away might affect my child's studies.	0	1	0	2	3	6	4.17
My child sometimes mentions that they miss me, especially when there are school activities.	0	1	0	2	3	6	4.17
I have noticed changes in my child's mood or interest in studying.	0	0	3	1	2	6	3.83
My child sometimes feels drained or stressed because of schoolwork.	0	2	1	1	2	6	3.5
It is difficult for my child to balance their studies with emotional challenges.	1	0	2	2	1	6	3.33
Sometimes my child cannot open up about their problems because I am far away.	1	1	1	1	2	6	3.33
My child has become more responsible with their studies since I started working abroad.	0	0	1	2	3	6	4.33
I feel sadness or guilt because I cannot directly help them with their studies.	1	0	0	2	3	6	4

The results of the survey suggest a 'resilient but worried' profile for OFW parents. While they strongly believe their departure has led their children to become more responsible (mean: 4.33), this comes at the cost of high parental anxiety (mean: 4.17). Furthermore, the high uncertainty regarding the emotional challenges their children face quantitatively indicates that physical absence creates a blind spot in monitoring the child's emotional well-being.

Table 5 Parental Support Mechanisms and Coping Strategies

Strategies	Strongly Disagree (1)	Disagree (2)	Uncertain (3)	Agree (4)	Strongly Agree (5)	TOTAL	Mean
I constantly talk to my child about their studies and well-being.	0	0	1	3	2	6	4.17
I provide emotional support even though I am far away.	0	0	0	4	2	6	4.17
I ensure that the financial support for their education is sufficient.	0	0	0	3	3	6	3.83
I help them with difficult lessons through calls or messages.	0	0	1	3	2	6	3.5
I tell my child to persevere and study even though I am not there.	0	0	0	2	4	6	3.33
I ensure there is a trusted person to look after their well-being and behavior.	0	0	0	2	4	6	3.33
I always remind them that my working abroad is for their welfare and future.	0	0	0	1	5	6	4.33
I ensure that my child still feels my love and care.	0	0	0	1	5	6	4

These findings reveal a clear compensatory pattern: OFW parents manage their significant anxiety marked by high mean scores for worry (4.17) and guilt (4.00) by intensifying their purpose-driven support. They actively combat the fear of neglect by consistently reframing their absence as a necessity for their child's welfare, a strategy that yielded the highest mean score of 4.83. This "purpose-driven" approach is reinforced by practical measures, such as ensuring financial sufficiency (4.50) and the presence of a trusted guardian (4.67). Ultimately, the data indicates that their primary coping mechanism extends beyond simple communication; it relies on the constant affirmation of affection, with "ensuring the child feels loved" also scoring a near-perfect 4.83, suggesting that parents attempt to bridge the physical distance through intense emotional and cognitive reassurance.

4. Conclusion

This study shows a strong teamwork between students and their parents working abroad (OFWs). These students are not "neglected." Instead, they are high achievers who do well in school, even though they feel a lot of emotional pressure.

Being far away has not broken the bond between parent and child. The data shows that parents are still the main source of comfort and authority, using calls and messages (mean: 4.75). Students prefer talking to their distant parents rather than asking the relatives they live with for help. The data shows they rely on "virtual" parenting more than the people physically near them.

Parents feel guilty for leaving, so they constantly remind their children, "I am doing this for your future." While this motivates the child, there is a problem. Because of the distance, parents cannot see their child's daily mood or true feelings. The result makes parents feel unsure and worried.

There is a big difference between how the students feel inside and how they perform in school. Even though students say stress and anxiety are their biggest problems (mean: 3.35), their grades are still excellent. In fact, 100% of the

students got "Satisfactory" to "Outstanding" grades. This means students use their parents' hard work as motivation to succeed.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to address the identified gaps and improve current practices.

For School Principals and Counselors

- **Help with Stress:** Since "stress and anxiety" (mean: 3.35) is the biggest problem, the school should have regular check-ins or support groups specifically for students with parents abroad.
- **Teach Time Management:** The study showed that students struggle to make study schedules (mean: 2.50). Schools should hold workshops to teach students how to manage their time, since their parents aren't home to check on them.

For Guardians (Relatives looking after the child)

Be More Open: The data shows students rarely ask relatives for help (Rank 5) but always call their parents (Rank 1). Guardians should try to be more approachable and offer friendship and advice, not just food and shelter.

For OFW Parents

- **Listen More:** Instead of always reminding them about the future (which parents already do a lot), try to listen to their *present* feelings. Ask open questions like "How do you feel today?" to better understand their mood.
- **Trust the Guardian:** Parents should tell the local guardian that they have the authority to check homework and enforce study times. This helps the child have structure.

Compliance with ethical standards

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No conflict-of-interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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