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THE PLIGHT OF OVERSEAS EDUCATIONAL HEROES AMID FAMILY SEPARATION: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Separation anxiety is a global concern. This study explored the experiences of Filipino teachers teaching abroad who faced family separation anxiety. Using a qualitative-phenomenological approach, data were gathered by interviewing 10 participants, who were selected via snowball sampling. Findings revealed three major themes: threatening events, attachment figures that provide a sense of security, and proximity-seeking behaviors. Corresponding sub-themes included experiencing emotional distress, worrying their family succumbed to problems, and feeling homesickness; providing for the family's needs, personal growth and independence, communication as emotional support; family's strength inspires resilience, building a strong bond through genuine friendships, and prayer overcomes challenges; and handling one's emotions, getting agitated if calls are not responded, seeking ways to relieve mental strain, and adjusting to a new culture. Quantitative research will be conducted to test the mediating role of attachment figures in family separation stress and proximity-seeking behavior, and the identified themes will be used as indicators. Support programs for Filipino teachers abroad are recommended.

KEYWORDS: *The Plight of Overseas Educational Heroes, Family Separation, Phenomenological Study*

1. INTRODUCTION

Separation anxiety was something that I noticed was a significant concern and has received increased attention recently (Chi, 2024). The study by Rybinska et al. (2024) states that teachers separated from their loved ones experienced stress and loneliness. Upon further reading of various studies, Iannattone et al. (2024) supported that separation anxiety is not isolated to children; even adults are experiencing this. This concern raised significant questions about the impact of separation anxiety on the well-being and, at the same time, the families of these Filipino teachers teaching abroad. As I studied the global concern of family separation anxiety, I found out that in various countries, like Iran, separation anxiety is evident (Vossoughi et al., 2024). Further, in Romania, family separation of parents [teachers] working abroad is a significant problem (Matei & Ghenţa, 2024). Moreover, in Saudi Arabia, immigrants similarly experienced separation anxiety after living in the USA for many years (Elrefaay, 2024).

Additionally, in the USA, separation anxiety or fear of separation among parents and children is highlighted as an issue that is also related to the field of Social Studies as this may relate to the psychological aspect (Naseh et al., 2024). Further, in China, many expatriate teachers in the Chinese Internationalized Schools (CIS) encountered concerns about family separation (Bunnell & Poole, 2024). Additionally, in Ethiopia, family separation is a significant concern for teachers and their loved ones, especially children (Tesfaw & Minaye, 2022).

In the Philippines, I noticed that teachers who chose to shift their careers to teaching abroad encountered family separation anxiety. Gaspan and Sasot (2024) similarly added that separation anxiety is evident among overseas Filipino workers; part of it are teachers. Real and Flordeliz (2024) highlight that many Filipino teachers teaching abroad encountered negative concerns about family separation. Further, I read the study of Pacala (2024), which states that Filipino teachers who chose to teach overseas in Uzbekistan for greener pastures experienced family separation anxiety. The survey by Aranda (2023) adds that Filipino teachers in the United States of America experienced family separation anxiety, and leaving their families was the hardest decision.

With this, unpacking the experiences of family separation anxiety among Filipino teachers teaching abroad aligned with the Holy Cross of Davao College's Vision, Mission, and Core Values, as this was a great help to foster empathy, dialogue, and transformative support for all Filipino teachers teaching abroad. Moreover, this contributed to the regional research agenda as the Davao Region successfully conducted a Migration Development Forum, and part of it addressed the rights of Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) to promote social, economic, and political inclusion (Regional Development Center XI, 2024). Moreover, this also aligned with the national research agenda as the Philippines is trying to aid the problem of labor migration (Philippine Institute for Development Studies, 2024). Additionally, this study contributed to the international research agenda to maximize the benefits of labor migration for all those involved (International Labour Organization, 2024). This also addressed socioeconomic and psychological issues among Filipino teachers teaching abroad who experienced separation anxiety since this is also aligned with the United Nation's Sustainable Development Goals, specifically ensuring access to high quality of life and prosperity for all people (Mishra, 2024).

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As I gathered many scholarly published articles related to the said problem, family separation anxiety among Filipino teachers teaching abroad ultimately concerns the parents and children (Laltoog, 2024). Also, separation anxiety frequently happens in adults (American Psychiatric Association, 2022). Genovese et al. (2024) support that separation anxiety is evident and an obstacle. Ospina and Medina (2020) added that an increasing number of teachers who chose to teach abroad experienced separation anxiety from their families. If family separation anxiety is a primary concern of teachers related to societal problems as part of Social Studies, then unveiling their experiences is essential to understanding their lives. Thus, my research study was necessary and urgent to explore, as this was a societal concern related to psychology, sociology, economics, geography, and anthropology, which are branches of Social Sciences at the core of my field, teaching Social Studies. Undoubtedly, I read several studies concentrating on why Filipino teachers choose to work abroad. However, amidst this urgency, I noticed that there was a lack of information published on this issue that tackles the life of Filipino teachers after they decided to move abroad associated with family separation anxiety. Thus, I wanted this research to be pursued, as it served as an aid for policy-making and will address the educational sector, economic, and legislative offices for the improvement of the socioeconomic status of Filipino teachers.

2. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

1. What are the threatening events experienced by Filipino teachers teaching abroad that activated their memories, feelings, expectations, and actions?
2. What attachment figure is available that gives the sense of security experienced by Filipino teachers teaching abroad?
3. What are the proximity seeking as a means of coping experienced by Filipino teachers teaching abroad?

3. METHODOLOGY

My study used qualitative-phenomenological research to describe the lived experiences of individuals, specifically Filipino teachers teaching abroad, about their experiences with family separation in the context of attachment and emotional distress or separation anxiety and how these experiences influence their behavior (Mavhandu-Mudzusi et al., 2022). The phenomenological research design is suitable for my study because I am interested in exploring the experiences of an individual (Tenny et al., 2022). Moreover, the phenomenological method is suited to my interest because it focuses on exploring the individual's lived experiences and/or challenging problems (Neubauer et al., 2019). Using this method, I employed inquiry and observation techniques essential to understanding a phenomenon being studied (Cresswell, 2017).

4. SAMPLING DESIGN

In this study, I applied the snowball sampling technique. I searched for potential individuals who could provide relevant information through referrals (Adeoye, 2023). To find qualified participants using this technique, I directly contacted my sister-in-law, former teachers in college, friends, and colleagues through Facebook chat, who could provide me with potential study participants. I asked Filipino teachers who knew who taught abroad, and they could recommend me as my study participant. I informed them of my selection criteria, including teaching in private or public schools in the countries they are currently in, single or married, and teaching abroad for three years.

Furthermore, based on Creswell's (2013) contention that there must be between 3 to 25 study participants required for phenomenological research, I intentionally generated 10 participants. Consequently, I found one teacher from Japan, one from China, seven from the USA, and one from Thailand.

5. DATA ANALYSIS

In my study, data analysis was crucial in interpreting the raw data from my interview. The data gathering through my interview was the most basic and essential way to gather information that answered the objectives of my study. With this, the data collected from the interviews with experienced teachers abroad in Asia and North American countries will undergo thorough analysis. Through this, the findings of this investigation would be reliable. The research findings combined analysis and description because the interview transcripts underwent multiple analysis phases within and across my participant's responses. My initial step is to compile a list of significant statements related to my study, which are then grouped into more general themes or clusters (Creswell & Poth, 2018). My analysis was based on repeated themes observed in my interview data and the theoretical framework constructed during my research.

The data was thoroughly analyzed using Thematic Analysis, as outlined by Creswell (2013). This approach allowed for the identification of key themes and patterns within the qualitative data. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), the initial step in qualitative data analysis involves preparing and organizing the data, such as compiling text from transcripts or images from photographs. First, I gathered, read, organized, and compiled the data. The recorded interviews were either transcribed verbatim or utilized specific terms or sentences in order to create interview transcripts for each of my participants. Creswell (2013) states that the data will be read, analyzed, and reflected upon in the second step. This enabled the data collected from the participants to be meaningfully interpreted. Each transcript was thoroughly reviewed before being manually examined. Common themes and sub-themes were shown in charts or tables to facilitate the coding, labeling, and organizing process that aided in my study and discussion of the findings. Coding the data was the third phase in my analysis of qualitative theme data. In this instance, I classified the text before assigning terms to the categories to organize the data gathered. The fourth phase I followed was to describe the subjects, context, or analysis categories/themes using the coding technique. This stage was crucial because it aids in evaluating the appropriateness of the produced themes derived from the raw material. In the fifth stage, I will give each subject a clear name and description that conveys its main idea. This procedure will deliver a unique, well-written narrative for each theme. Writing the report was my sixth and last step in the theme analysis approach, according to Creswell (2013). I gave

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the analysis in a logical and organized way. Further, I gave a detailed examination of the data and supported each topic with quotations and examples as part of my reporting of the findings.

6. GEOGRAPHICAL AREA

The coverage of my study was wide and international. I considered the countries where my study participants were located as my study locale. I included individual teachers teaching in places within Asia and North America. Asia is considered the world's largest continent, located in the eastern part, and consists of 49 countries (UN, 2024). On the other hand, North America is located in the western part and is considered the third largest continent in the world. These two continents are places where many Filipino teachers are living and teaching.

My research aimed to describe the lived experiences of Filipino teachers who have been teaching on these continents for the past three years. I focused specifically on their experiences of family separation, particularly in the context of attachment and emotional distress or separation anxiety. The study also explored how these experiences influence their behavior. As educators teaching abroad, they face balancing their professional responsibilities and personal lives. Their insights could help better understand the emotional struggles of teaching overseas while separated from their families.

7. RESULTS

Threatening Events Experienced

The Adult Attachment Theory of Shaver and Mikulincer (2009) explains how the threatening events experienced by Filipino teachers teaching abroad activated their memories, feelings, expectations, and actions. *Dealing with homesickness* is an issue for the teachers since they are used to being with their loved ones. Also, they are *worrying about the challenges their family face*s. At the same time, they are away from them since the only way to get in touch with their family is through social media, and for them, it is not easy to monitor their family at all times, especially when the time difference is evident. Moreover, these overseas Filipino teachers experience *emotional distress* while working abroad, which affects their day-to-day lives.

Dealing with Homesickness

As I interviewed the study participants, I found that family separation strains relationships, which leads to emotional distress, especially when they are missing their children and spouses. This idea supports the study of De Jesus and Adducul (2024). Moreover, my study affirms the concept of Camendan et al. (2022), which states that the most significant difficulty for Filipinos abroad is the feeling of homesickness. Similarly, Walet et al. (2021) also noted that Filipino workers in South Korea experienced homesickness.

In one heartfelt interview, I found myself holding back tears as I also similarly experienced the same way to their experience of being separated from their family. I still recall how my parents asked me over the phone when I would come home. I was reminded of my quiet struggles with homesickness. I, too, felt the weight of being far from loved ones, of forcing a smile while hiding the ache inside since I am teaching far from my hometown. Listening to their stories was not just research; it was a mirror of my longing and a gentle reminder that behind every brave face abroad is a heart that misses home.

Worrying about the Challenges the Family Faced While Overseas

My study affirms the findings of Lopez and Sobrejuanite (2022) that Filipinos working abroad experienced loneliness and anxiety towards their family left in the Philippines. Furthermore, anxiety and relationship issues are commonly experienced by overseas workers due to family separation, which aligns with the idea of Lugay Jr. et al. (2024).

I remember one quiet night when I could not sleep, my mind consumed with worry. Was my family safe? Were they okay without me? That sense of helplessness of being so far away yet wanting to do everything for them was an ache I carried in silence. As I listened to my participants share the same fears, I realized how deeply that anxiety ties us all together, Filipinos working miles away, hearts always anchored to home.

Experiencing Emotional Distress

As I found out from the study participants, their narrative supports the study of Chua (2021), who stated that Filipino teachers in Texas, USA, experienced mental health crises due to their workplace and the longing for their families. My findings also affirm the study of Gregersen et al. (2020), which found that language teachers abroad significantly experienced much stress in their workplace. Additionally, Xu and Klassen (2023) share that teachers in Britain also encountered high-intensity anxiety due to their students.

There were days when the emotional weight of being an overseas teacher felt unbearable when the pressure from work and the longing for home all crashed down. I remember crying silently in my room, trying to stay strong for everyone; inside, I was drowning in exhaustion and loneliness since I was working in Panabo City and my family was residing in another municipality. When I graduated from college, I immediately sought a job; that was the first time I was separated from my family. Hearing my participants share the same silent battles reminded me that behind every committed teacher abroad is a soul fighting to stay whole amid distance and demands.

Attachment Figures That Gives Sense of Security

According to the theory of Shaver and Mikulincer (2009), the attachment figures available give the sense of security experienced by Filipino teachers teaching abroad. The teachers' source of strength came from their families since the *family's strength inspires resilience while working abroad.* Additionally, while working abroad, overseas Filipino teachers find a new family that helps them cope with homesickness and longing for comfort from their family. *Building a strong bond through genuine friendships is highly beneficial* to combat loneliness. When overseas Filipino teachers feel lonely and homesick, *communication with loved ones offers valuable emotional support.* One of the common reasons Filipino teachers choose to work abroad is to become financially stable, *receive a good salary, and provide for their family's needs, which* is the primary purpose of these overseas Filipino

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teachers. To combat emotional distress, for overseas Filipino teachers, *prayer strengthens mental resilience to overcome challenges* while they are working abroad alone and far from their families. Although they experience emotional distress, loneliness, and homesickness, *working abroad enhances personal growth and independence* and helps with self-improvement.

Family's Strength Inspires Resilience While Working Abroad

From this sub-theme, the study findings support the idea of Cahilog et al. (2023), which state that the family support system played a significant role in overseas Filipino teachers as an anchor for encouragement. It also affirms the idea of Laltoog (2024) that family support is essential and helpful. Dahl et al. (2022) add that family is where workers abroad help in times of loneliness and homesickness.

Furthermore, similar to the narratives of my study participants, there were moments when I felt like giving up, when the weight of distance, fatigue, and unfamiliarity seemed too heavy to carry. However, then, I would hear my family's voice on the phone, their laughter, their prayers, and their belief in me, and suddenly, I found the strength to keep going. I found my anchor in their love and support; I discovered the courage to rise above the hardest days.

Building a Strong Bond through Genuine Friendships Is Highly Beneficial

The narrative also from the study participants during the interview agreed with the study of Turner et al. (2022) that teachers abroad need social support since they experience loneliness, homesickness, and burnout. My study findings support the idea of Macapagong et al. (2023) that Filipino teachers in the US experienced homesickness and loneliness. Still, a support system from their colleagues helps them to lessen these feelings. Hack-Polay and Mahmoud (2021) also state that workers abroad, due to loneliness and homesickness, tend to join social gatherings and local involvement to ease their feelings.

From the narrative of my study participants, it is on the same page that in the silence of unfamiliar walls and long, exhausting days, the laughter and warmth of newfound friends brought color back into my world, my co-teachers, who turned into my second family. Sharing meals, stories, and tears with my co-teachers became my saving grace; each moment of connection stitched a patch into the loneliness I often felt. Through them, I found comfort and a second family that reminded me I was never truly alone.

Communication with Loved Ones Offers Valuable Emotional Support

The study by Martinez et al. (2022) supports my study findings that when Filipino workers in the United Kingdom experience emotional distress, they seek to contact their friends and family. Additionally, with the help of technology, overseas workers can still communicate with their loved ones and check them all the time since they are far from them (Cleofas et al., 2021). My study aligns with the study of Tan et al. (2024), which states that social media can help improve each worker's well-being abroad.

Similar to the experiences of my study participants, there were nights when the weight of being far from home felt unbearable, but the moment I heard my parents' voices through a video call, my tears would quietly fall, not from sadness, but from the comfort of knowing they were just a screen away. Each "I miss you" and "We're proud of you" breathed life into my weary heart and reminded me why I continue teaching far from them. In every message and every call, I found the strength to keep going because even miles apart, love still finds its way home.

Receiving a Good Salary and Providing for the Family's Needs

Pettersson Bustamante (2024) stated that Filipinos working in Sweden send money steadily to the Philippines, and their relationship becomes stronger due to stronger cities, which my study supports. Based on my findings, I confirm the study of Belida et al. (2024), which states that Filipino workers chose to work abroad for financial stability for their families in the Philippines. Similarly, Real and Flordeliz (2024) state that in the USA and other South Asian countries, Filipino teachers tend to work abroad for greener pastures to support their families and to provide financial stability.

As a teacher, when I heard all the narratives of my study participants, I could also feel what they felt. There are moments when I look at my bank account with quiet tears, not because of the numbers, but because I know that those digits mean food on the table, school supplies, and medicine for my family back home. Every long day at work, every moment of homesickness, becomes worth it when I remember the smiles on their faces each time I send support, even if it is not a significant amount. I may be far, but through every peso I send with love, I feel closer to them, and that is the valid reward of this sacrifice.

Prayer Strengthens Mental Resilience to Overcome Challenges

My study supports the study of Tome (2024), which states that Filipinos in South Korea often rely on prayer for all their experiences working abroad for resilience and comfort. My study also affirms the idea of Camendan et al. (2022) that in Riyadh, Filipino workers rely on prayer to overcome their challenges while working abroad. Furthermore, Capol et al. (2024) add that overseas Filipino teachers keep praying in times of challenges abroad.

I remember the voices of my study participants, who were full of hope even though they were miles away from their families. There were nights when the silence felt too loud, and the weight of being far from home almost crushed my spirit, but in those moments, I found myself on my knees, whispering prayers through my tears. Prayer became my refuge and strength, the only constant in a world full of uncertainty. In those quiet moments with God, I found the courage to rise again, hold on, and keep going for the ones I love.

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Working Abroad Enhances Personal Growth and Independence

Alicamen and Becamon (2022) report that Filipino early childhood teachers in Singapore achieved independence and personal growth while working there far from their families, affirming my study. Macapagong et al. (2023) add the idea of the authors mentioned above that in Arizona, USA, Filipino teachers experienced personal and professional growth and built a sense of independence while teaching abroad. Moreover, Lemana II (2022) shares that in UAE, Filipinos experienced challenges but acknowledged significant personal growth and improvement in their teaching skills, which affirms my study.

Based on the living testaments of my study participants, I also considered myself like them. Living and working away from my loved ones truly opened my eyes to who I am and what I am capable of. From learning how to manage my finances to standing alone in a place so far from home, I discovered a strength I never knew I had. Every challenge I faced helped me grow as a professional and as a person, learning how to thrive in independence while still carrying the love of home in my heart.

Proximity Seeking Behavior

Proximity-seeking behavior is a coping method experienced by Filipino teachers teaching abroad. The findings show they are *adjusting to a new culture* due to the new environment. Despite the homesickness, loneliness, and emotional distress caused by family separation anxiety, *seeking ways to relieve mental strain* helps them to address these issues. In times when they are compelled to communicate with their family, when their family is not available or unresponsive, *getting agitated if calls are not responded* to. It is a fact that overseas Filipino teachers are the ones who can help themselves in this emotional crisis; that is why *handling one's emotions while working abroad* really matters, so they can easily maintain their well-being.

Adjusting to a New Culture

My findings support the idea that Jesus and Adducul (2024) report that many Overseas Filipino Workers (OFW) experienced challenges adjusting to the culture, language, and customs of the people abroad. Moreover, my study also aligns with the idea of Yeh (2024) that Filipino teachers in Taiwan face challenges in terms of cultural differences and striving to adapt to the culture of Taiwan. Tantay et al. (2024) also state that Filipino teachers from DepEd who chose to teach abroad significantly experienced cultural barriers.

As I also experienced being in a different place due to my job, I felt like a stranger lost in a world so far from the one I knew. However, with every passing day, I learned to embrace the beauty of diversity, find strength in adapting, and slowly turn my fear of difference into a heart that understands and respects a new culture.

Seeking Way to Relieve Mental Strain

According to Martinez et al. (2022), in the United Kingdom, Filipino workers seek emotional support from their friends and their community in times of mental crisis, which affirmed my study's idea. De Jesus and Adducul (2024) added that in Kuwait, Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) also experienced mental stress due to family separation, and one of their coping strategies is to build connections and seek support from their fellow expatriates. Furthermore, Sicat (2020) states that in Hong Kong, Filipinos are also experiencing mental crises caused by separation from their family, and most of them have social support groups, one of them being the Filipino community.

About the experiences shared by my study participants, there were days when the silence of my room felt louder than any noise, when the weight of being away from my family drowned me in quiet tears I could not explain. However, in those moments of emotional heaviness, I found light in the presence of my co-teachers, who understood my pain without many words. Through shared meals, gatherings, and simple conversations, I slowly mended the cracks in my heart and realized I was never truly alone in this journey far from my family.

Getting Agitated if Calls are not Responded

Based on my study findings, the study of Cleofas et al. (2021) aligns with my research, which stated that OFWs feel worried about their family while they are away from them, and this is associated when the family is unresponsive intensifies their feeling of worry or distress. Moreover, family is the support system of Filipino teachers in the US, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia; they call them when they feel lonely, and when their family is not available, they get more stress (Atos et al., 2022).

Based on my experience, there were times when I stared endlessly at my phone, waiting for a simple reply, a missed call returned, or anything that would assure me my loved ones were okay. The silence on the other end would eat at me, turning my thoughts into storms of worry and helplessness, especially during the hardest days at work. In those moments, I realized how much I rely on their voices to calm my heart and how deeply distance can hurt when you all want to feel close to home.

Handling One's Emotions While Working Abroad

Sumalinog (2022) states that teachers abroad experienced homesickness and loneliness due to family separation. Still, they tried to cope with this crisis abroad, which aligns with my study idea. Moreover, Deguma and Deguma (2022) add that Filipino teachers in Thailand experience homesickness due to family separation. However, they strive hard to mitigate this feeling by seeking connections with other people and making friends. Arcillo (2023) supported that Filipino teachers encountered stress in the US Virgin Islands caused by being far from their home country and family; having a sound mindset or positive outlook as their coping strategy to handle their emotions, they gradually embrace and adapt to their new environment.

8. SUGGESTIONS

Implications for Practice

As a researcher and a social studies teacher, based on my research findings, I need to integrate emotional, cultural, and psychosocial understanding into the curriculum, especially

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when discussing themes such as migration, globalization, and the Filipino diaspora. Teachers should create a classroom environment that fosters empathy, critical reflection, and cultural awareness by sharing real-life narratives and emotional experiences of Filipino teachers teaching abroad, such as homesickness, family separation, emotional distress, and cultural adjustment. This approach can humanize migration issues and promote socio-emotional learning among students. Moreover, by acknowledging the psychological challenges and coping mechanisms like reliance on family support, prayer, and community connections, teachers can help students develop a deeper appreciation of the sacrifices made by Filipino teachers teaching abroad. This enhances civic understanding and helps foster a sense of national pride and responsibility, encouraging students to value emotional resilience and cultural identity in adversity.

Implication for Theory

Based on the findings of my study, it is evident that emerging sub-themes have surfaced, offering deeper insights and clarity into the phenomenon of the experiences of Filipino teachers teaching abroad. These sub-themes enrich the understanding of the central concept and contribute to the refinement of existing theoretical frameworks, such as the Adult Attachment Theory by Shaver and Mikulincer (2009). By unveiling nuanced patterns and perspectives, the study affirms the dynamic and evolving nature of the theory, paving the way for further exploration and theoretical development.

9. CONCLUSION

Filipino teachers teaching abroad encounter several threatening events that activate their memories, emotions, expectations, and actions, primarily rooted in the pain of family separation and the emotional burden it brings. Homesickness emerges as the most experienced challenge, causing emotional distress, strained relationships, and a deep longing for loved ones. These feelings are intensified by constant worry about their families' well-being back home, often leading to sleepless nights and silent battles with anxiety and helplessness. Furthermore, the pressure from demanding work environments, culture shock, and mental exhaustion contribute to their emotional distress. These threats do not just shape their emotional landscape; they influence how they cope, make decisions, and find strength, proving that behind every Filipino teacher teaching abroad is a story of resilience fueled by love, sacrifice, and hope.

Moreover, Filipino teachers teaching abroad find a sense of security and emotional grounding through various attachment figures and coping mechanisms. Their families remain their primary source of strength, supporting resilience and purpose amidst distance and homesickness. Genuine friendships formed abroad also play a crucial role, providing emotional support and becoming a "second family" that helps ease loneliness. Regular communication with loved ones through technology brings comfort and reassurance, keeping emotional bonds intact despite physical separation. The motivation to provide financial stability for their families strengthens their commitment to stay abroad, while prayer emerges as a spiritual refuge, offering mental resilience and hope in difficult moments. Ultimately, while they endure emotional distress, these experiences foster personal growth and independence, allowing them to discover inner strength and evolve personally and professionally.

Furthermore, Filipino teachers teaching abroad cope with emotional challenges through proximity-seeking behaviors, especially as they adjust to new cultural environments. These teachers often face homesickness, loneliness, and emotional strain due to family separation, prompting them to seek comfort in connections with others. When communication with family is delayed or unavailable, it heightens their anxiety, reflecting their deep need for emotional closeness. They turn to supportive relationships with fellow expatriates or co-teachers who offer companionship and understanding to relieve mental stress. Despite these difficulties, managing their emotions becomes essential, as a healthy emotional outlook helps them adapt and maintain well-being in a foreign land. Ultimately, seeking proximity through calls, friendships, or emotional regulation helps them navigate the hardships of living and working far from home.

Thus, Filipino teachers teaching abroad face emotional struggles rooted in homesickness, family separation, and cultural adjustment, all of which challenge their mental and emotional well-being. Despite these hardships, they display remarkable resilience through proximity-seeking behaviors, finding comfort in family connections, supportive friendships, and spiritual grounding. These coping strategies not only help them manage emotional distress but also sustain their sense of purpose and motivation while working far from home. Ultimately, their journey is one of quiet strength, where love for family and hope for a better future guide them through life's challenges overseas.

10. AREA FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Quantitative research will be conducted to test the mediating role of attachment figures in family separation stress and proximity-seeking behavior, and the identified themes will be used as indicators.

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