

The Filipino Domestic Helpers from Region I in Hongkong

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ABSTRACT

The study looked into various issues concerning Filipino domestic helpers (DH) from Region I in Hongkong. The exploratory method of research was used with the questionnaire as the main tool in data gathering.

The salient findings of the study are: majority of the respondents are from Ilocos Sur, married, Roman Catholics, completed masters degree, and have one or two children. The Luneta incident where seven Hongkong tourists died did not adversely affect the respondents' relationship with their employers.

The high salary attracted the respondents to Hongkong while lack of opportunities at home compelled them to seek employment overseas. Bank transfer is the common mode used by the respondents in remitting money to their families back home. Some employers keep the passport of their household helpers.

Based on the findings, the study recommends the following: women with college degree should be assisted by the government to find employment locally to minimize the problem of brain drain; pre-departure orientations must include topics about Hongkong laws and ordinances affecting DH; employers must fully implement all provisions stipulated in the employment contract; civic and religious organizations should organize capability enhancing seminars to help the DH learn how to manage better their finances and to cope with problems emanating from their overseas employment.

Keywords: Filipino domestic helpers, Region 1, Hongkong, China, overseas Filipino workers

INTRODUCTION

The headlines of broadsheets and newscasts in the television on the impending execution of three Filipino overseas workers convicted for drug trafficking in China, the arrival of hundreds of displaced workers from Egypt and Libya as an offshoot of the current political upheaval there, and the turmoil creeping into the other Middle East and North African countries brought to the fore the plight of overseas Filipino workers. Aside from those on death row in foreign jails pleading for assistance, Philippine government is also saddled with pleas of contract workers for immediate repatriation owing to the brewing tensions obtaining in their places of work. These are just some of the predicaments that overseas workers have to contain with, aside from other problems emanating from their physical separation from families and other loved ones.

Based on the latest estimates (NSO, 2010), there are about 8.5 to 9 million overseas Filipino workers throughout the world. This figure includes only the documented ones otherwise the number could easily increase to about 10 million if the undocumented were to be included. Among the top five countries with large number of Filipinos are the United States of America which accounts for about 3,100,000 followed by Saudi Arabia with about 1,066,401. Close to the heels of Saudi Arabia is the United Arab Emirate with about 529,114 followed by Canada and Australia which host about 462,963 and 270,347 overseas Filipinos, respectively.

Among the neighboring nations, Malaysia has about 244,967 followed by Singapore with 156,466. Hongkong, which was featured prominently in the recent past owing to the hostage taking at the Luneta where seven of its citizens died, accounts for about 130,537 Filipino workers, most of whom work as domestic helpers. Hongkong is located within the Southeast part of mainland China. Under British rule for more than two centuries before it reverted to China in 1997, Hongkong is far advanced in terms of development level. Under the "one nation two systems" policy of the central government in mainland China, Hongkong was allowed to maintain its economic system with some slight modification in its political system. Thus, most of the laws and other policies that protect foreign workers enunciated prior to the 1997 turnover are still in place. With the foregoing, it is not surprising why Hongkong remains to be the favorite destination of many people including Filipinos looking for employment opportunities.

Unlike Kuwait and other Middle East countries where abuses of DH by their employers are a common occurrence, very few isolated cases have been reported in Hongkong. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily imply that the DH there do not

encounter any problem. In a brief discussion with some Filipino workers who came home from Hongkong for vacation, it was surmised that they are more bothered by personal problems such as loneliness brought about by the physical separation with their loved ones, concerns about the welfare and safety of the people they left behind especially children, and such other problems as the possible unfaithfulness of the husbands left behind. Maltreatment, abuse and exploitation were not mentioned as among their concerns although they admitted that they sometimes hear of some isolated cases from friends.

The importance of this study can be seen in terms of the literature that this endeavor will generate about Filipino DH from Region I in Hongkong. The findings can serve as baseline data for policy makers in crafting appropriate policies to address the concerns of overseas workers.

This study sought to describe the socio-demographic profile of domestic helpers from Region I in Hongkong, determine their level of awareness on employment benefits, Hongkong immigration policies, laws and ordinances affecting DH, customs and traditions of the Hongkong people, rights and privileges of DH, and services of the Philippine Consulate Office in Hongkong. It, likewise, looked into other issues such as effect of the Luneta incident on the respondents' relationship with their employers, length of stay in Hongkong, violations in their employment contract, frequency and mode of money remittances, work status before going overseas, waiting period prior to deployment, and the factors that lured them to Hongkong. Furthermore, the reaction of the respondents were sought regarding their plans if ever offered a job back home, and the alleged confiscation of passports by some employers.

The term *Overseas Filipino* refers to any person of Philippine origin living outside the Philippines. It applies both to citizens or residents of other countries with Filipino ancestry and Filipinos living abroad on a more temporary status. The later is more synonymous with *Overseas Filipino Workers* (OFWs) or *Overseas Contract Workers* (OCWs) since these terms imply that work is the main reason why they are living outside the country (Aguilar, 1998). During the Ramos administration, the term *Overseas Filipino Worker* or OFW was officially adopted to honor the millions of Filipino men and women who are toiling hard in other countries out of their desire to have higher earnings (UnladKabayan Service Foundation, 2010).

The exodus of Filipinos to work overseas is not a modern phenomenon. It dates back to the early years of the 20th century when the first group of Filipinos known as *Sakadas* left the country in search of the proverbial greener pasture

overseas. The *Sakadas* were the first genuine Filipino workers overseas. *Sokodos* is an Ilocano term derived from the word *Sakasaka* which literally means "barefooted" (Alcantara, 1981). Composed of 15 barefooted males from Candon, Ilocos Sur, this first batch of *Sakadas* left for Hawaii on December 6, 1906 riding on the boat named SS Doric. Arriving in the island on December 20, these new recruits were deployed to work in sugarcane plantations. At that time, there was a dearth in human labor which prompted the Hawaii Sugarcane Planters Association to send representatives to the Philippines to recruit laborers. The Philippines then was the newest colony of the United States after it was formally ceded by Spain through the Treaty of Paris five years earlier.

In the ensuing years, more workers were recruited from other provinces of the country. The last batch of *Sakadas* left for Hawaii from *Salomague* port in Cabugao, Ilocos Sur in 1946 through the SS Maunawili (Alcantara, 1981). Labour export in the form of Overseas Filipino Workers intensified in the 1970s which was ignited by the poor performance of the economy and the implementation of the Labor Code in 1974. The government then encouraged labor export in respond to the escalating unemployment rate. It was, likewise, a strategy to raise dollar revenue for the government through the remittances of overseas Filipino workers. In the years that followed, the country's economy continued to depend on labour export. Subsequently, private recruitment agencies emerged to deal with the increasing number of people seeking employment overseas.

The increase in labour export coincided with the economic rise of Hongkong in the late 1970s and early 1980s. With the wide-reaching economic reforms initiated by the People's Republic of China, Hongkong became the largest investor of mainland China. Labour intensive industries in Hongkong were relocated to the mainland. To address the high demand for manpower, the female labour force was mobilized. Consequently, families with both parents working need someone to look after their children while they are at work. This scenario led to the increase in demand for household helpers, most of whom have to be recruited outside. Before 1990, foreign domestic helpers were recruited mostly from the Philippines. But starting in the early 1990s, Indonesians and Thais were also being recruited to fill the gap between demand and supply.

As of 2010, there are about 284,901 foreign DH in Hongkong with the Indonesians comprising the largest number (140,720) followed by the Philippines with 136,723, Thais (3,744), Sri Lankans (893), Nepalese (568), and 2,253 from other nationalities (Stock Estimates of Overseas Filipinos, 2010). Based on the National Statistics Office (NSO) survey in 2009, Filipino workers in Hongkong originated from

the different regions of the country. Region IV (CALABARZON) topped the list with 16.4 percent followed by Region III (Central Luzon, 14.7%), National Capital Region (13.9%), Region VI (Western Visayas, 9.2%), and Region I (Ilocos Region, 8.6%) (NSO, 2010).

Unlike their counterparts in the local market where most have low level of education, most DH in Hongkong have higher level of education either as degree holders or have reached college education. A DH salary is much higher than what many professionals receive from local employment. Thus, many professionals are enticed to work there even as household helpers. Others seek employment there as a jump off point to other destinations such as Canada, England, and the United States.

There are various policies, albeit perceived as discriminatory, that provide benefits to DH in Hongkong. Foremost of these is the law setting a minimum wage for DH which is considered too low by local standards. Free medical treatment, a day off per week, and a two-week stay limit at the end of the employment contract are also provided by law. Immigration policies, however, are more stringent against DH since they are disallowed to apply for permanent residency even after residing in Hongkong for many years.

In spite of all these predicaments, however, many foreigners including Filipinos still prefer to seek employment in this former British colony.

METHODOLOGY

The study made use of the exploratory method of research with the questionnaire as the main data gathering instrument. The respondents of the study were the DH from Region I in Hongkong. Purposive sampling was used. For two consecutive Sundays, the researcher visited the places in Hongkong frequented by Filipino DH during their off days. These were the Chater Garden, HSBC Bank Plaza, Admiralty, World Wide Plaza, and the International Finance Center (IFC) building which are all located in Central Wanchai. While at those places, the researcher looked for the areas occupied by the DH from Region I where all those present and willing to participate in the study were given questionnaires. About 400 copies of the questionnaire were distributed but only 331 were retrieved in spite of efforts to collect all during the final day of the visit.

Frequency count, percentage and ranking were the main statistical tools used in the interpretation of data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Profile of the Respondents

On Age. A great number of the respondents were within the age of 27 – 30 and 35–38 with 66 in each bracket or a combined percentage of 39.88. This tends to indicate that many of the DH are relatively mature to face the challenges of working abroad **away** from families and loved ones. This can be attributed to the policy which sets the minimum age of 23 for DH. The least are those within the age of 51–54, and 55 and above (12 each) with a combined percentage of 7.25. At this age, the dependents (children and siblings) of the DH should have finished their studies, thus, many of them must have gone home for good as the necessity to earn more money decreased. It is also possible that the older domestic helpers who have spent long years working have saved enough to go home for good and start a new life.

On Civil Status. Many (151 or 45.62%) of the respondents are married which tends to imply that many of the DH working in Hongkong have families to support. If both husband and wife are unemployed, it is usually easier for the woman to find employment overseas as a household helper to support her family. Thus, most of the OH are married women. It is noted that 79 (23.87%) are single indicating that even women who have no families of their own to support are in Hongkong to work either for themselves or for their parents, brothers, and sisters. Widowed (16.62%) also work as DH in Hongkong to support their families. After separation in their marriages, 40 (12.08%) single parents work as DH to finance their families after being abandoned by their husbands. Out of 331 respondents, six or 1.82 percent did not indicate their civil status.

On Number of Children. A great number (100 or 30.21%) of the respondents have 1 – 2 children followed by those with 3 -- 4 children (97 or 29.31%) or an aggregate of 59.52 percent. This tends to imply that majority of the respondents have children to support, and seeking employment overseas must have been their option to provide for the needs of their children. Incidentally, between both parents, it is usually the wife who has a greater chance to find employment abroad because of the high demand for DH in many countries. Moreover, the educational requirement for DH is very minimal (high school graduate).

On Educational Attainment. The data show that many (126 or 38.07%) of the respondents completed masters degree. This tends to contradict the common notion that those who work as household helpers usually have low level of education. With the limited job opportunities in the country which cannot accommodate the thousands of college graduates every year, even professionals seek jobs as DH in Hongkong. It should be noted that the monthly salary of a domestic helper in Hongkong is much higher than what many professionals receive in the Philippines.

On **Religion**. A great number (137 or 41.39%) of the respondents are Roman Catholics while the least are Protestants. This can be attributed to the fact that the place of origin of the DH is predominantly Roman Catholic since one of the first places where the Spaniards sowed the seeds of Catholicism was the northern part of the country.

On Province of Origin. The greatest number of respondents were from Ilocos Sur (97 or 29.31 %). This may be attributed to various reasons such as the limited job opportunities in the province coupled with the desire of many Ilocanos to work abroad. It should be noted that the original Filipino overseas contract workers were Ilocanos from Ilocos Sur. Dubbed as *Sakadas*, this group of Ilocanos were contracted to work in sugarcane farms in Hawaii during the early years of the 20th century. The least came from La Union (37 or 11.18%) implying that fewer women seek employment abroad apparently because of the availability of job opportunities in the place and in nearby places such as Baguio City, Dagupan City, and Manila. Moreover, Poro Point which is one of the more progressive ports in Northern Luzon is located in La Union thereby contributing to the creation of more employment opportunities.

On **Number of Years in Hongkong**. One-fourth (86 or 25.98%) of the respondents have been working in Hongkong for 1–2 years, implying that many of them are relatively new in the former British Colony. This may be attributed to the continuous recruitment and deployment of domestic helpers in Hongkong to meet the increasing demand for household helpers. It is followed by those who have been working in Hongkong for more than ten years (70 or 21.15%). This tends to imply that many of the DH preferred to renew their work contracts instead of transferring to other places which is indicative of their satisfaction with their work conditions there. This may be so because Hongkong is one of the places where foreign workers are protected and respected. Very few cases of abuses committed by employers against DH have been reported unlike in many Middle East countries such as Kuwait and Lebanon where abuses against DH by employers are rampant.

On Nationality of Employer. Majority (281 or 84.89%) of the DH employers are Chinese residents of Hongkong while the least (4 or 1.21%) are American employers. There is a marked increase in the number of Chinese households where both husband and wife are employed to meet the high costs of living as well as to meet the demand for local labor, thus, a lot of Chinese households have DH to look after their children and perform the household tasks. The few non-Chinese employers may be attributed to the departure of many foreigners unsure of the future when Hongkong was turned over by Great Britain to China in 1997.

On Nature of Accommodation. Majority (263 or 79.46%) of the respondents live with their employers. This arrangement is obviously beneficial and convenient to the employer since the household helper is practically at their disposal 24 hours a day except Sundays which is the legal holiday for DH. Only a few (26 or 7.85%) stay out in rented places with other DH sharing among themselves the monthly rental. Employers who cannot accommodate their DH for any reason are obliged to provide housing allowance. Thus, the "stay out" DH can save more from the allowance if they live with others and share the monthly rentals.

Problems Experienced. Loneliness was ranked number one among the problems experienced by the respondents. To be physically far and away from loved ones normally makes a person lonely. Concern about unsafe work environment is the least problem (ranked 6th or last) which tends to imply that the respondents are contented with their work conditions. This may be so because majority of the respondents are "stay in" with their employers in their homes, and the home is normally considered as a safe place.

On Coping Mechanisms. Based on the data gathered, the number one coping mechanism employed by the respondents to deal with personal problems is by maintaining regular communication with the people they left at home. This is made easy with the use of cell phones which is readily available to almost everyone. The least used coping mechanism is by having a boyfriend. This can be attributed to the respondents' limited time to mingle with the opposite sex since they only have one day off a week (Sunday). The day off is often spent with other female DH as the male counterparts are scarce. Moreover, most of them are married and entertaining another man is probably far from their thoughts.

Level of Awareness of the Respondents. Majority (207 or 62.54%) of the respondents are highly aware of the employment benefits implying that they are familiar with the entitlements due to them. This may be so because job seekers are usually interested to know first the benefits relative to the job they are applying for.

Moreover, recruitment agencies often emphasized the benefits attached to a certain job as a strategy to attract applicants. However, it is disturbing to note that a significant number of the DHs (37 or 11.1%) are not fully aware of their benefits. It was, likewise, noted that many (121 or 36.56%) of the DH are not aware of the customs and traditions of the people in Hongkong. Apparently, they have limited exposure yet on the customs and traditions of the people there since most of the DH are relatively new in place.

Impact of the Luneta Hostage Taking Incident on the Respondents' Relationship with their Employers. Majority (223 or 67.37%) of the respondents said that the hostage taking at the Luneta where seven tourists from Hongkong died did not adversely affect their relationship with the employers dispelling apprehensions that the people of Hongkong might vent their ire on the Filipino DHs. Although there were some people there who were asking for an apology from the Philippine government and compensation for the victim's families, the "eye for an eye" or "tooth for a tooth" mentality which is common among Filipinos is not evident among the Hongkong people. There were no reported assaults against any Filipino as a backlash of the Luneta incident. Only a few (27 or 8.16%) admitted that their relationship with the employers is affected. Probably, the employers of these DH are related to the victims of the Luneta incident.

Major Accomplishments of the Respondents from their Hongkong Employment. Sending their children or siblings to school was considered as the major accomplishment of the respondents. This tends to indicate that majority of the respondents sought employment abroad to be able to send their children or siblings to school. Education is perceived by many people as the means to a better future. Hence, many parents are ready to sacrifice for their children or siblings to complete a college degree. On the other hand, "saved enough money for my future" was ranked as the least accomplishment. This tends to be in consonance with their major accomplishment described above which apparently depleted their earnings. In some cases, many DH go home for good penniless after spending all their earnings for the education of their children or siblings. It is now their turn to wait for the assistance of the people whom they helped in the past.

Respondents' Length of Stay in Hongkong. Majority (203 or 61.33%) of the DH expressed their intention to continue working in Hongkong as long as their employers want their services. This finding tends to imply that a lot of the DH are prepared for a longer stay in Hongkong. Moreover, many (25 or 7.55%) of the respondents expressed their desire to continue working until they reach the mandatory retirement age of 65.

Responses of the Respondents on Whether there are Items in the Work Contract not Implemented. With respect to the implementation of the work contract, many of the DH (136 or 41.09%) admitted that some provisions in the work contract were not implemented implying that many employers do not comply with the terms and conditions stipulated in the employment contract. On the contrary, an equal number (136 or 41.09%) of respondents said that all the provisions of the work contract were fully implemented. It is noted that there were respondents who were afraid or hesitant to tell the truth out of fear that the employers might retaliate against them.

Items in the Work Contract not Implemented. Salary was ranked number one by many (67 or 20.24%) of the respondents among the items in the work contract which were not fully implemented. Evidently, this tends to indicate that some employers did not honor the agreed salary of the DH as stipulated in the work contract. One respondent explained that there are employers who indicated in the contract a salary higher than the legislated minimum wage for DH (3,750 Hongkong Dollars), but months later, it was lowered to the level of the minimum wage or sometimes higher. Although it is a clear violation of the work contract, the DH cannot complain because there was no infringement of the minimum wage law by the employer.

The second item that is usually not fulfilled by many employers is on incentives. This may be so because there are no clear policies governing it. The giving of incentives is basically dependent on the capacity and generosity of the employer. Based on feedback from the respondents, many employers give money or material gifts during special occasions such as Christmas and birthdays. Many female employers often pass on to their household helpers signature or branded bags every time they bought new ones. However, many admitted that they cannot remember receiving anything aside from those clearly stated in their work contract such as the monthly salary.

Respondents' Description of their Relationship with Employer. Almost half (162 or 48.94%) of the respondents described their relationship with their employer as "good", followed by those who said that it is "not good" (136 or 41.08%). The data tend to imply that most of the respondents, in general, enjoy good relationship with their employers. It is disturbing to note, however, that a significant number do not have good relationship with their employers. Only a few (25 or 7.55%) have "very good" employer-employee relationship.

Characteristics of Hongkong that attracted the Respondents (Pull Factors). When the respondents were asked to check at least three of several reasons listed that attracted them most to the place, high salary (269), presence of relatives/friends (147), and easily accessible (121) topped the list as among the main reasons identified by the respondents. This may be so because the legislated minimum salary of a domestic helper in Hongkong is 3,750 (increased recently to 3,900 Hongkong dollars) which when converted to Philippine currency is much higher than those received by ordinary wage earners in the country. The amount is about 500 US dollars which is higher than what DH in other countries receive. Moreover, Hongkong is easily accessible for those who have friends or relatives working there because they can help in locating employers and in the processing of papers. Furthermore, no visa is required for Filipino visitors to enter the place.

The 4th and 5th reasons cited are the peace and order situation and efficient public transport system, respectively. It should be noted that Hongkong is one of the places with low crime index and with a very efficient public transport system.

Factors that Compelled the Respondents to Work Abroad (Push Factors). If there are pull factors, there are also push factors that drove the respondents to seek employment outside the country. Ranked number 1, 2, and 3 are among the main reasons why the respondents sought employment abroad, low salary, lack of job opportunities, and difficulty to find employment, respectively. A household helper in the Philippines receives about P2,000 to P4,000 per month which is not adequate to support a family. Thus, it is much better to be a DH overseas where the salary is higher. Moreover, there are not enough job opportunities created to accommodate more than 200,000 college graduates annually and other job seekers.

Respondents' Level of Satisfaction on the Services of the Philippine Consulate Office in Hongkong. A Philippine Consulate Office (PCO) is available in Hongkong to serve overseas Filipino workers there. Household helpers who have problems with their employers may seek help from said office. A change in employer after the end of the work contract and the renewal of passport require the services of the PCO. When the respondents were asked to describe their level of satisfaction on the service of the PCO in Hongkong, majority (209 or 63.14%) said that they were uncertain and only 36 (10.88%) were very satisfied. Probably, those who were uncertain were the DH who have not yet availed of any of the services of the PCO. There were 37 (11.18%) who were not satisfied with the services of the PCO implying that there is much to be improved in the quality of service of the said office.

Responses of the Respondents on Whether They Receive Other Incentives on Top of Their Regular Salary During Special Occasions. Aside from the salary and benefits, employers have the option to give additional incentives to their household helpers especially during important occasions such as birthdays and Christmas. Majority (231 or 69.79%) of the respondents said that they receive financial or material gifts during special occasions. Only 97 or 29.31% mentioned that no such incentives were granted to them.

The giving of gifts is a prerogative of the employers. This, therefore, depends largely on the benevolence and capacity of the employer. One respondent mentioned that she is often the recipient of her employer's old cell phone whenever her master bought a new one. There was also an instance where the wife of an airline Chief Executive gave her household helper her Hermes bag worth about 150,000 Hongkong dollars.

Work Status of the Respondents Before They Moved to Hongkong. The perception that many of those who sought employment abroad are those who cannot be employed locally may be partially true. This is based on the findings that majority (194 or 58.61%) of the respondents were unemployed prior to their employment in Hongkong. On the other hand, 137 (41.39%) said that they were employed before they sought employment in Hongkong. Apparently, these were not contented with their former salary, hence, they sought the proverbial greener pasture abroad.

Respondents' Waiting Period from the Time of Application Before the Actual Flight to Hongkong. After complying with all the paper requirements, paying the fees, passing the interviews, and medical examinations, job applicants usually wait for the final call for deployment. This would last for weeks, months, or even longer. A great number of the respondents (138 or 41.69%) waited for about three months from the time they filed their application before they finally left for Hongkong while 78 (23.56%) waited for four or more months. Only 25 (7.55%) of the respondents were able to leave for Hongkong within a month upon application indicating that the **waiting** period varies among applicants. This may be so because some employment agencies recruit applicants for manpower pooling purposes and deploy them later when job orders are available. Maybe those who were deployed within a short period were applicants whose services were urgently needed by the employers.

Frequency and Mode of Sending Money by the Respondents to their Families Back Home. The respondents went abroad primarily to earn in order to support their families. As to how often they send money to their families, the

findings show that majority (249 or 75.23%) remit money once a month while only a few (23 or 6.95%) do it when the need arises. This tends to conform with the provisions of Article 22 of the Philippines labor laws mandating Filipino workers abroad to remit a portion of their foreign exchange earnings to their beneficiaries in the country. In the case of domestic helpers, they are mandated to remit at least 50% of their basic salary. Remittances are usually done through bank transfer (50.45%) or through ATM deposits (25.38%). The least used method is the use of mobile cell phones (7 or 2.11%) apparently because of the various hoax perpetrated through the use of communication gadgets such as cell phones.

Respondents' Response on Whether They are Willing to Go Home for Good, if Offered a Job, at the End of their Employment Contract. The findings show that majority (61.3%) of the respondents are willing to go home for good when their work contracts expire if they will be offered jobs at home. Maybe they are willing to settle for a lower salary as long as they will be with their loved ones. Only 13 (3.93%) have no intention of going home even if offered jobs at home.

On Whether the Respondents Keep their Passports During the Duration of their Employment. Majority (271 or 81.87%) of the DH keep their passports during the duration of their employment while 34 (10.27%) said that it is being kept by their employers. It was learned that some employers keep the passport of their house helper to avoid being disturbed by debt collectors. Many DH use their passports as collateral in obtaining loans from loan sharks or creditors. These creditors often visit the DH in their work place to collect the payments which many of the employers resent. Thus, some employers keep the passport of their household helpers to avoid these nuances.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, the researcher concluded that most of the respondents are professionals in their early and middle adulthood stage, married, have children, and mostly Roman Catholics from the Province of Ilocos Sur; loneliness is the main problem of the respondents and the common mechanism adopted to cope with it is by maintaining regular communication with their loved ones left in the Philippines; the respondents are very much aware of their employment benefits, Hongkong immigration policies, and services of the Philippine Consulate Office but a lot of them are not familiar with the customs, traditions, laws, and ordinances of Hongkong; the Luneta incident where seven Hongkong tourists died and many others hurt has minimal effect on the respondents' relationship with

their employers; there were provisions in the respondents' employment contract which were not implemented; the respondents, in general, are treated well by their employers; Hongkong is the top preference of DH because of the higher salary and good work environment; lack of job opportunities in the country is the main reason why the respondents sought employment overseas; the average waiting period from the time of application to final deployment of the DH to Hongkong is three months; the most preferred mode of remitting money to relatives back home by the respondents is through the banking system; majority of the respondents, if offered a job at home, are willing to go home for good and accept the job offer; and there were few reported cases of abuses committed by employers against the DH.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings and conclusions, the researcher recommends that women with college degrees seeking to become domestic helpers overseas should, instead, be assisted by the government to find employment in the country to help stem the problem of brain drain; the Philippine Consulate Office, the DFA, or the recruitment agencies should include in the pre-departure orientation topics about Hongkong customs and traditions including laws and ordinances especially those that affect migrant workers; and concerned government agencies and recruitment agencies should monitor if the terms and conditions stated in the work contracts of overseas Filipino workers are fully implemented. Violators should be reported to the proper authorities or banned from hiring household helpers; the respondents should be encouraged to assert their right to hold their passports at all time. Employers who keep the passport of their DH without any valid reason should be reported to the proper authorities; the Filipino civic and religious organizations in Hongkong should organize capacity building seminars to help the DH learn how to manage better their finances and enhance their coping mechanisms in dealing with personal problems emanating from their overseas employment; and a follow up study should be conducted to look into the self-concept and emotional status of overseas Filipino household helpers.

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