

Peña, M. N. (1998). *The Cordillera woman as overseas domestic worker*. (Unpublished master's thesis). Baguio City: Baguio Colleges Foundation.

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ABSTRACT

The rising trend in female overseas employment raises concerns and calls for a special attention because it continues to raise critical issues in evolving policies and programs for the country's participation in the international labor economy. To assess the gains of overseas employment, it is equally important to unearth and understand its contradictions particularly the crisis-ridden social character of the employment of women in marginalized job categories.

As a starting ground to comprehend the contradictions, this micro-study focused on the identification and analysis of the experiences of select Cordillera overseas domestic worker-returnees from several Gulf countries. It attempted to identify and measure beyond simple quantification the problems and conditions of these select subjects. Exploring the dynamics on how gender and class relation interact and affect the condition of woman as overseas workers, this study re-examined the marginalization and their subordination. The contemporary account of the select Cordillera women who worked in the domestic wage structure in the Gulf was studied within the perspective of gender and class relations, relations embedded in power and conflict of one's group dominance over another.

The main problem of the study was to unravel the contradictions present in the overseas employment of Cordillera women in the Gulf by finding out the forms and extent of their marginalization and subordination as domestic helpers (DHs).

Hence, the study explored to answer the following specific problems related to female overseas employment:

1. What are the social contexts that may identify and explain the supply-side push and demand-pull factors underlying the overseas employment of Cordillera women?
2. Given an understanding of these contexts, what are the forms and dynamics of facilitative mechanisms linking the supply-demand side of the overseas employment?
3. What is the nature of the gender division of labor in the Gulf domestic wage structure as to:
 1. the social character of work control and processes?
 2. the forms and extent of exploitation and abuse experienced by the worker>
4. What are the gender needs of the domestic helper (DH)-returnees?
5. What is the cultural-ideological basis of female labor in the Gulf?

The analysis in this study was undertaken within the theoretical context composing various schools of thought and concepts such as: (1) Sex and Political Economy; (2) Historical Materialism; (3) Gender Division of Labor; (4) Socialist Feminism; and (5) Overseas Labor Migration.

A qualitative mode of inquiry on select case studies was undertaken for descriptive and exploratory purpose. The study is a social science research covering mainly the disciplines of Political Economy and Sociology using multiple data collection strategies such as informal conversation interviews with the interview guide as an approach; summary observations and field notes; and content analysis of secondary sources which includes complaints or case files, institutional documents on statistical compendium, policy statements, memorandum circulars, laws and social legislations, accomplishment reports from the government and non-government institutions, artifacts and archival records.

The gathering of data was undertaken in three (3) phases for a period of two (2) years. Data obtained from oral interviews and secondary sources were examined through content analysis both within the gender perspectives.

The identity of the subjects including their case files are treated with utmost confidentiality.

Major Findings

The following are major findings and fresh insights culled from the study:

1. The rural and urban poverty that marginalize Cordillera families increase the desire of women to shift from reproductive (i.e. traditional roles) to amore regular full-time productive employment. The perceived high wage differential offered by the vulnerable and high-risk domestic wage structure in the Gulf explains in general terms, the push-pull factors of overseas employment of Cordillera women.
2. The employment standards set by the Philippine government could not effectively provide safety and protection valves to the female DHs in the Gulf. Employment facilitation and recruitment do not come within the territory of the private recruitment agencies and the government only. The neighborhood and kinship system in the locality facilitate information flows.
3. The domestic wage structure in the gulf is a case of multiple exploitation. The contradicting notions of rational-legal and traditional sources of authority characterize the gender division of labor making the DH subordinated and exploited both as a worker and as a woman.
4. The worker and her family did not substantially benefit from overseas employment. There is a social cost attendant to her employment.
5. The different set of socio-political-cultural orientation of the Cordillera woman put her in an opposition consciousness with the more traditional-theocratic consciousness of Gulf employers.

Conclusions

There are generalizations in the study that point to the crisis-ridden character of female labor migration, to wit:

1. The structural imbalances of the Cordillera Region that marginalize the agricultural, mining and urban communities explain the emigration pressures pushing Cordillera to low-skilled and equally marginalized job categories in the international labor market.

2. The equation on supply-demand of female overseas employment is facilitated by a triadic institution: The government, the private sector through the private recruitment agencies and the local community through the informal information network therein.

The availability of employment standards on overseas domestic services designed by the government including legally perfected employment contracts cannot fully guarantee the protection and promotion of the general welfare of the female worker in the Gulf work organization.

3. The domestic wage structure in the Gulf in relation to female labor is a unique typology of class relations in the international labor market. There is a multiplied exploitation wherein members of a wage-earning class exploit the same wage earner in that class. Hence, the following are fresh insights: a) the marginalization of the female worker is embedded within a contradictory worker-employer relation belonging to the same working class in the Gulf economic structure; b) the gross disparity between the volume of paid labor and the unpaid labor is the qualitative form of exploitation that determines the opposing character of the worker-employer relationship; c) the forms of the worker's exploitation and abuse are both reinforced by class relations (material base) and gender relations (cultural-ideological superstructure; i.e. patriarchal culture).

4. There are forms of exploitation and gender abuse experienced by the DHs in the Gulf work environment and these have serious and immeasurable consequences on the lives of the returnees and their families that call for specific solutions and interventions.

5. The political-religious context of the Gulf host country more or less defines the status and the condition of the female overseas worker. Its patriarchal culture produces expression of the totality of social relation- be it gender or class.

Recommendations

In the light of the findings and conclusions, several recommendations and challenges were posed in the areas of education, academic research, and mass communication. Policy and program inputs were also forwarded for consideration by the international community and the private and non-government sector and the Philippine government in the areas of executive-administrative and legislative measures, to wit:

1. Government programs on pre-departure, on-site and post-departure phases of overseas employment shall be gender-sensitive and responsive with emphasis on empowering the female worker to confront her problematic situations and effectively negotiate her needs as an overseas worker.
2. The academic community shall be more pro-active in coming up with more relevant studies in the aspect of female labor migration and other gender studies in the homefront and advocate for the utilization of these for policy reviews and modifications.
3. Both the government and non-government sector shall be more aggressive to pursue policy advocacy on overseas labor migration in the forms of legislative tracking and lobbying, media advocacy, strengthening overseas workers' organizations and participation and policy research.
4. There is a need to review the overseas employment policy and program of the government with focus on the promotion of labor standards affecting the household job categories and responding to the needs of women overseas

workers through national laws and international or bilateral arrangements with the labor-receiving countries.

5. Pre-deployment, on-site, and post-deployment measures to safeguard overseas workers and extend assistance to their families shall be underscored in the management of the overseas employment program both at jobsite and upon return to the country.
6. Improve the capability and skill of foreign personnel and other government personnel involved in overseas woman workers.
7. Development planners and implementers in the Region must attack the core of the problem: to improve the contextualization of development plans and programs with the object of correcting structural imbalance of the local economy and underscoring the roles of Cordillera woman in the development process.

