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Attitudes on Migration among Filipino Nursing Students: Comparison between the urban and rural areas

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Abstract

Many nurses from the Philippines work in other countries. The Japan Philippines Economic Partnership Agreement has opened the Japanese labor market to Filipino nurses, and with this agreement in act, Filipino nurses will begin coming to Japan in April 2009 at the earliest.

This study investigated the differences in the attitudes associated with migration among Filipino nursing students from the urban and rural areas using a quantitative and qualitative analysis. The aim of this study was to determine the differences in the attitudes towards migration of Filipino senior nursing students from urban and rural areas. The results of the study indicated that students from both Manila and Davao did not consider Japan to be their final destination, due to the language barrier, the difficulties of not having families in Japan and images of Filipino entertainers and Japanese people discriminating against the Filipinos.

On the other hand, the students from Davao were more likely to go abroad as caregivers if given the opportunity than their counterparts in Manila. The wages, employment rate of the nurses, and the amount of information regarding Japan and the general image of Japan may explain these differences.

Key words : nurse, migration, Philippines

1. Introduction

On September 9, 2006, the "Agreement between Japan and the Republic of the Philippines for an Economic Partnership Agreement (JPEPA)" was signed and this agreement provided an opportunity for the migration of professionals, including nurses and certified caregivers. Japan had literally opened its' doors to nurses and certified caregivers. With the agreement in action, Filipino nurses will be coming to Japan as trainees and may be working in Japan as nurses in the year 2009 at the earliest. In spite of this, there are few studies on the attitudes of Filipino nurses with regard to migration to Japan.

This study evaluated the attitudes of Filipino nursing students who were considering migrating to Japan. Many nurses from the Philippines tend to migrate to countries such as the USA, Canada and Saudi Arabia and so on. The aim of this study

was to determine the differences in the attitudes towards migration of Filipino senior nursing students from urban and rural areas. The comparison of the urban and rural area was done because a previous study by Nimura showed that the rural areas provided more Overseas Filipino Workers in the service industry than in Manila (Nimura 2005). This suggested that there may be a difference in the migration patterns for nurses in the urban and rural areas. These differences may elucidate the factors that accelerate or impede the migration to Japan.

2. Method

(1) Sample

This study evaluated 81 senior nursing students from 2 universities in Manila and 4 universities in Davao. Manila was chosen as the urban area whereas Davao was chosen as the rural area.

The universities were selected intentionally based on the passing rate of the licensure examination for nurses so there would be a variety in the characteristics of the schools. The senior nursing students were considered because they were in the last year of school and were at the point of deciding what they want to do with their future.

(2) Procedure and Data analysis

The research took place from September 10 to September 20, 2007. The aim of the study was explained to the heads of the schools and was approved before the research began. The students were notified about the research by the faculty members of the school and the students took part in the research voluntarily. The participants confirmed that the participation to the study was voluntary and the results would be kept anonymously and be used only for the purpose of the study. The study took place in a classroom of the school or the faculty room. The study consisted of a questionnaire and a focus group discussion.

(3) Questionnaire

A questionnaire was distributed to and collected from the participants before the focus group discussion began. The questionnaire contained 11 questions on the background of the participants, the demography of their family and family members living abroad, experiences at other universities, future plans and economic status. The questions for the questionnaire had been reviewed by a Filipino graduate student studying in Japan.

The data from the questionnaire was analyzed using the Statistical Package of Social Sciences, SPSS. The data was divided into the region of the residence and the chi-square test and *t*-test was used to analyze the data.

(4) Focus group discussion

The focus group discussion was a semi-structured interview focused on 3 questions.

- i) Why did you plan to study nursing?
 - What were the reactions of your family? (What did your parents say?)
 - Where do you plan to work after finishing the course? Do you plan to work as a nurse? What is your principle aim after finishing school?
 - Do you plan to work abroad as a nurse? If yes, which country and why? If not, why not?
- ii) If it is not possible to work abroad as a nurse and you only have the possibility to work as a caregiver, will you still consider the opportunity? What do you think of working as a caregiver, though you have a degree in nursing? Why do you think so?
- iii) Would you like to work in Japan? If so, why? If not, why not?

The questions were to be answered freely by the participants. The participants in each focus group discussion ranged from 6-21 students and the length of the interview was about an hour, with the maximum of 1 hour 6 minutes to the minimum of 40 minutes. The focus group discussion was recorded on an IC recorder. The FGDs were conducted in September, 2007.

A textual transcript was made by the data collected from the focus group discussion, and the data was divided into categories based on the statements and compared by the region. The similarities and differences were compared among groups.

One of the groups from Davao was eliminated from the analysis of the focus group discussion because the participants may not have been able to answer freely to the questions because they were observed by a professor.

(5) Ethical considerations

The aim of the study was explained to the participants before the study by the researcher and the data collected from the study was confirmed to be kept anonymously and used only for research. The participants confirmed that they

had agreed to take part in the study. The focus group discussion was recorded only after the participants gave their consent.

3. Results

(1) Demographic Characteristics

A total of 81 students, including 27 males and 54 females, participated in this study. The mean age of the participants was 21.1 years old. There were 30 students from Manila and 51 students from Davao. The mean age of the participants in Manila was 19.9 years old and that of Davao was 21.7 years old. The mean size of family was 5.3 people in Manila and 5.2 people per family in the Davao. There was a significant difference of the subjective economic status in Manila and Davao and the participants in Davao had answered that their life is more difficult. (Table 1)

(2) Reasons for studying nursing and the desire to migrate (Table 2)

i) Motivation of studying nursing

The students were asked what had motivated them to go into nursing as a way to find out the expectations of the nursing students. All of the groups had participants that answered that it was a way to go abroad, they think nursing is in demand; they think nursing is a way to take care of their family economically and to study nursing is a way to have a better life, in spite of the region the participants lived in.

In Manila, some students thought nursing was a safe fall back to study what they really wanted to study. In two groups, some students answered that they had studied nursing so that they can go abroad in the future and save money for future investments such as having a business or to learn what they really wanted to, such as medicine or becoming a pilot. (In the Philippines, to become a pilot you must graduate a 4 year course in any major at a university in order to thereafter go into pilot school.)

“I wanted to be a pilot, so you have to take any four year course. I just thought that if I take nursing, I can have a safe fall back if I ever fail.” (Manila)

In spite of this, none of the students from Davao said that they decided to study nursing as a back up for another course or as a way to have a business.

ii) The knowledge of the possibilities of working in Japan

The questionnaire revealed that 67.9% of all the participants had answered “Yes” to the question if they knew about the possibility of working as a nurse abroad in Japan. The percentage of the participants answering “Yes” was 50.0% in Manila, compared to 78.4% of that in Davao. There was a significant difference among the knowledge of the possibility of working as a nurse in Japan ($p < 0.01$).

Table 1. Demographic Characteristic of the Respondents

	Manila (n=30)	Davao (n=51)	p value
Percentage of female	70.0%	64.7%	n.s.
Mean age (SD)	19.9 (0.8)	21.7 (2.9)	$p < 0.001$
Mean size of Family (SD)	5.3 (1.5)	5.2 (1.5)	n.s.
Percentage of studying nurse for first course	83.3%	58.8%	$p < 0.05$
Economic Situation of the family: Very difficult to survive/ Difficult but able to survive	66.7%	86.3%	$p < 0.05$
Know about the possibility of working as a nurse in Japan	50.0%	78.4%	$p < 0.01$
Percentage of relatives living in the USA	90.0%	64.7%	$p < 0.05$
Percentage of relatives living in Japan	10.0%	23.5%	n.s.

Table 2. Reasons for studying nursing and the desire to migrate

	Manila				Davao			
	A(group 1)	A(group 2)	B(group 1)	B(group 2)	C	D	E(group 1)	E(group 2)
number of participants	8(6)	8(5)	7(3)	7(7)	6(4)	21(15)	7(5)	8(6)
average age	19.2	20.5	20.6	19.4	21.5	21.9	20.7	24.9
Reasons to study nursing								
to go abroad								
the choice of family members (parents and relatives)								
nursing is in demand								
to take care of family economically								
to have a better life/practicality								
childhood dream								
friends influence								
pre-med course								
to go into pilot school								
to have a business								
back up for another course								
to take care of the family using knowledge from nursing								
The willingness towards migration								
The willingness to work abroad as a nurse (Percentage of "Yes" from questionnaire)	87.5	100	100	100	100	100	100	100
Reasons for migration								
greener pasture/ to have a better future								
better compensation								
to support family								
"utang na loob" / to repay the family								
realization of true dreams								
to be a gateway for other family members								
unstable economic status of the Philippines								
poor working conditions in the Philippines								
family reunion								
experience in higher level of medicine								
to earn foreign accountancy								
no other choice than going abroad								
The possibility of being a caregiver to go abroad								
Yes, I would go as a caregiver.								
No, I wouldn't go as a caregiver.								
I don't know.								
The willingness towards working in Japan								
The knowledge of the possibility to work in Japan (Percentage of "Yes" from questionnaire.)	50	62.5	57.1	28.6	100	71.4	57.1	87.5
First impression of working in Japan.								
Yes, I want to work in Japan.								
No, I don't want to work in Japan.								
I don't know.								
Willingness to work in Japan after the explanation of the requirements.								
Yes, I want to work in Japan.								
No, I don't want to work in Japan.								
I don't know. / I can't decide now.								

In the focus group discussion, the moderator asked further more about what the participants knew about the possibility of working in Japan and where they had heard the news.

The responses seen in Manila and Davao were similar and the information the participants had was as the following.

“We only know that Japan is opening its doors.”

Some of the participants studying in Manila knew more details of why Japan had opened its doors to the Filipino nurses and some participants in Davao had the image of Filipino nurses being exchanged with Japanese trash.

“I heard that Japan is opening its’ doors since there is a need of nurses from other countries to work as nurses there. I heard also that Japan is lacking nurses especially for the elderly. That’s why I think they are opening its’ doors for nurses.” (Manila)

“Japan will dispose their waste in the Philippines and the Philippines will send nurses to Japan in exchange.” (Davao)

iii) Willingness to work in Japan

The participants were first asked whether they would like to work in Japan or not without any knowledge of the requirements to work in Japan. The reaction when asked the question in both regions was the same. There was a short pause after the question was asked and after the pause, the participants started to talk to each other in their language. The common response in both groups was as the following.

“If there is a chance, why not (go to Japan)?”

Some participants were not willing to work in Japan because of the language barrier, the image of *Japayuki* (*Japayuki* is the name used for foreign women who go to Japan to work as prostitutes), and from the stories the participants had been told by relatives such as discrimination against Filipino Overseas Workers. This was the same reaction between both regions.

“I’m afraid of what the others will think of me if I work in Japan. If I go to the airport, the

others will look at me and say, “Ah, she is a *japayuki*.” I don’t like that. And when I am in Japan, the Japanese will look at me like I am a *japayuki*. I really don’t like that. I have nothing against the *japayuki* because I know it is a way they do to support their family and life.... But still I don’t want to be seen as a *japayuki*.” (Davao)

After the requirements were explained to the participants, there was a difference in the way the participants reacted depending upon the region.

Though many of the participants living in Davao had answered yes but very passively, a participant in Manila had answered that she would like to come to work in Japan even when compared to other English speaking countries such as the U.S.A. because:

“I am interested in the Japanese culture. I would like to work in Japan thinking of the highly developed medical facilities and also I am interested in the Japanese culture such as anime and gadgets. Working in Japan means that I can live in the culture I am really interested in.” (Manila)

The participants were asked whether they would still go abroad if they were to work as a caregiver and not a nurse, the answers in Manila and Davao differed.

Some participants in Manila had answered that they would never go abroad as a caregiver whereas all the participants in Davao had answered that they would go abroad as a caregiver if they had a chance to go abroad.

“I am a nurse and not a caregiver. I think I wouldn’t have to hang on to the chance to go abroad as a caregiver. I would rather wait for the chance to go abroad as a nurse and work as a nurse in the Philippines while waiting for the chance.” (Manila)

“Chances don’t come in golden boxes. If there is a chance you have to grab it. You have to grab the chance that comes to you whether it is a nurse or a caregiver.” (Davao)

4 . Discussion

(1) The difference of attitudes towards migration for residents in Manila and Davao

There are several differences observed between Manila and Davao. First, the reasons to study nursing. The reason for studying nurse is more varied in Manila than in Davao. The respondents in Manila contains 12 items, whereas the respondents in Davao contains 8 items, when asked why the participants chose to study nursing. It seems that students from Manila chose to study nursing as a way to start a business or to establish a financial foundation for further develop their career, aside from working as a nurse as a profession. On the other hand, students in Davao chose to study nursing as a way to study nursing as a mean to go abroad. Second, the percentage of students who studies nursing for first course. More students in Manila takes nursing as a first course than in Davao ($p < 0.05$). This indicates that more students in Davao are likely to study nursing for the second course, than their counterparts in Manila. It is said in the Philippines that studying nursing is booming, because it is a key to the 'greener pasture'. In other words, taking nursing license is considered to be a 'passport' to work abroad (Choy 2003). For this reason, many people who did not pick up nurse for the first course enroll to nursing course as a second course, to get a nursing license to work abroad. The result of the statistical analysis suggests that such tendency is stronger in Davao than in Manila. Third, willingness to migrate as a caregiver. As shown in Table 2, a notable difference was seen between the attitudes in Manila and Davao when asked about the willingness to migrate as a caregiver or not. All four Manila groups has a participants who insists 'no' to go to Japan as a caregivers, while none of such participants were observed in Davao. The results indicated that the respondents in Davao may go to Japan, either willingly or reluctantly, depending on each person's individual needs.

Above mentioned differences between Manila and Davao could be due to several

reasons, such as the differences in the economic situation, in the amount of information available, in job opportunities and the wages as a nurse. The wages of the nurses in the urban area is twice as much as that in the rural area (Asia Times Online 2003) and the nurses employed in public hospitals in Manila is 32% in comparison to that of 3% in Davao (ILO 2005). In addition, the higher density of Japanese descendants in Davao than in Manila, which the author will describe later, may also lead to differences in the interest shown to work in Japan between the cities. These differences may explain why more of the participants in Davao wanted to or had the necessity to migrate to other countries in comparison to the participants in Manila.

(2) The possibilities of migrating to Japan

Both participants from Manila and Davao chose to study nursing and to migrate as a way to support their family or to fulfill the dreams of their family. Medina mentions that the Filipinos traditionally value the *utang na loob* (debt of gratitude) and also that the filial obligation of the children is to take care and love the parents as they have received (Medina 1991). This is consistent with the attitudes of the participants in both Manila and Davao and indicates that the Filipino nursing students may come to Japan as a mean to support their family. Though, the findings of this study showed that the majority of the nursing students in both Manila and Davao do not consider Japan as a final destination. The participants referred to the language barrier, the difficulties of not having families in Japan and the image of Filipino entertainers and Japanese people discriminating against the Filipinos. Tshweneagae noted that the nurses' destination countries are influenced by the language, colonial ties and a similar education system (Tshweneagae 2007). Therefore, it is understandable that many participants wanted to migrate to the United States or other English speaking countries. Ronquillo noted that the most preferable destination country of the health workers is the United States and

the reasons included better working conditions in terms of the professional development opportunities, availability of social support from relatives and friends and the high chances for the family migration and earning a citizenship (Ronquillo 2005). In this study, 74.1% of the participants had relatives in the United States whereas only 18.5% had relatives in Japan. Therefore, the participants would receive more social support from their family in the United States than in Japan. The “family” is a key factor to migration in the Filipino culture. Since more of the participants in both Manila and Davao had relatives in the United States rather than in Japan, the lack of the presence of relatives may have been an impediment in the decision to choose Japan. In addition, the image of Filipino entertainers in Japan may be another factor that may stop the Filipino nurses from migrating to Japan. The Filipino nurses in the United States are considered to be hard working and reliable. The long history of nurses migrating to the United States starting from the early twentieth century (Choy 2003) suggests that the Filipino nurses had attained this respectable social status. However, the Filipino nurses have no status yet in Japan and that may be a barrier for nurses to come to Japan due to the barriers they may confront. Therefore, the Japanese people must be taught that the Filipino nurses are skillful and have an excellent reputation in the United States and other countries.

Despite such impediments for Filipino nurses in choosing Japan as a destination of migration, the result of this study indicates several points of which Japan can attract more Filipino nurses. If the nurses are interested in Japanese culture and society, one can assume that they show more interested in working in Japan., especially if the nurse is a Japanese descendant. This was suggested by a participant from Davao, who happened to also have a Japanese heritage, who answered that “I am interested in working in Japan since my brother works in Japan and he is very satisfied with his present working conditions, and he thinks that being a Japanese

descendant is a privilege. I am also a Japanese descendent and I have studied Japanese a little bit.”

Even if he or she is not a Japanese descendant, Filipino nurses who are attracted by Japanese society and / or culture, may wish to go to Japan to work. This fact is proved by the following condition; In spite of the responses of the majority, some of the participants in Manila had wanted to migrate to Japan due to their interest in highly developed medical facilities and also in Japanese culture. Therefore, to encourage more Filipino nurse to come to Japan to work, Japanese society are suggested to provide Filipino nurses opportunities to experience managing a high developed medical facilities.

(3) Limitations of the Study

Some limitations must also be taken in consideration. The study took place in only 6 universities in Manila and Davao so different results may be obtained elsewhere and it is difficult to generalize the results to every Filipino nursing student. To generalize the study, focus group discussions must be implemented in other regions and more universities.

5. Conclusion

This study demonstrated that there are different attitudes towards migration in the urban and the rural areas among Filipino nurses. Though there were not enough data to make any general conclusions, the findings suggested that the Filipino nursing students in the rural area had a stronger desire to migrate in comparison to the students in the urban area and Japan did not seem to be an attractive enough country to either of the students. Since Japan must rely on nurses from other countries in the near future, it is necessary to reconsider the working conditions, including an assurance of professional development opportunities and sufficient salary to provide for the family also, to make Japan a more attractive alternative for Filipino nurses. This study also demonstrated that the image of *Japayuki* and female Filipino

Overseas Workers remains a negative factor. To change this image there is a need for the Japanese government to assure that the Filipino nurses will be treated as same as Japanese nurses and to build trust from the first group of Filipino nurses coming to Japan.

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