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The Other Side of the Mirror: An Analytic Journalistic Approach to the Subjective Well-Being of Filipino Women Migrant Workers in Japan

Stéphanie Paillard-Borg and David Hallberg

Abstract
In its political structural reform, the Japanese government presents the urgency to consider an increase in labor mobility that includes the issue of immigration to Japan. Women from Southeast Asia represent a large proportion of this immigration. The aim of this case study was to identify factors associated with subjective well-being (SWB) among Filipino women migrant workers in Tokyo, Japan. The study used an analytic journalistic approach. A focus group interview was conducted with three women and the data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. Communication, support network, faith, and sense of identity were identified as the main factors contributing to SWB among these women. In conclusion, the feminization of migration will continue; therefore, better understanding about the factors associated to SWB is needed to ease the impact of migration on home and host countries.

Keywords
analytic journalistic approach, female migration, focus group, subjective well-being, Japan

Introduction
More open and flexible immigration laws have been discussed at the highest levels of Japanese government for several years (“Japanese Women and Work”, 2014). In fact, the Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe, highlighted the urgency of increasing labor mobility in his political structural reform. This reform includes the revision of Japanese immigration law. Its objective is to raise the country’s gross domestic product (GDP) and to solve the emerging demographic crisis, which are both sensitive topics in Japan (Sanda, 2014).

Most migrants to Japan working in low-skilled occupations are women from Southeast Asia, more specifically the Philippines (Asis, 2002; Llewelyn & Hirano, 2009). These women often travel to the host country alone and find themselves in a vulnerable position. Despite the risks, an increasing number of Filipino women, married and unmarried, skilled and unskilled, are seeking work abroad (Asis, 2002). Strict immigration policy has made it historically difficult for these women to immigrate to Japan. For instance, time-limited working visas have traditionally been provided to women “entertainers,” while job-training schemes funnel migrants into low-paid jobs (Roberts, 2008). Many Filipino women work in Japan as hostesses or entertainers. However, there are many downsides to this occupation. As Rhacel Salazar Parreñas articulates in her book Illicit Flirtations, “Sexual harassment is the norm in hostess work” (Parreñas, 2011). Living conditions for migrant women are challenging in several aspects and not limited to work circumstances (Parreñas, 2015). The results of a recent systematic review of the physical, mental, social, and economic situation of migrant women in Japan in the perinatal period revealed important issues. It is not uncommon for these women to experience language barriers, problematic relationships with partners, illegal residency, emotional distress, physical distress, adjustment difficulties, lack of utilization of services, social isolation, lack of support, lack of information, low economic status, unsatisfactory health care, and discrimination (Kita et al., 2015). These results are supported by other studies describing the difficulties these women face trying to integrate into Japanese society either as wives or as workers (Cheng & Choo, 2015; Parreñas, 2010).

Human rights activists have raised legitimate alarm regarding the legal status, working conditions, undocumented overtime, salaries, and rights of migrants (Llewelyn & Hirano, 2009).
Human trafficking is one of the many dangers faced by these women, and Japan has been placed on a United Nations (UN) watch list in this regard (Noguchi, 2006). A clearer immigration policy might mitigate these issues, as long as it respects international labor law standards and human rights regulations (International Organization for Migration [IOM], 2013). By continuing without a well-defined and rigorous immigration law, the risk of abuse remains high (Noguchi, 2006). From a societal perspective, a relatively high degree of uneasiness regarding foreign immigration prevails in Japan. “Social costs” associated with education, lower wages due to competition, and deteriorating public safety caused by increasing criminality are among the main concerns (Llewelyn & Hirano, 2009). Furthermore, increased immigration would force Japan to move from a homogeneous and exclusionist society to a heterogeneous and inclusive one. Consequently, this development would threaten ancestral social organization. Historically, conservative political groups have widely exploited this fear (Komai, 1995). In accordance with the general concern regarding immigration, Japanese labor unions tend to refuse immigration of “skilled” workers, such as proficient nurses from Southeast Asia, even though demand for nurses is increasing in this aging society (The Japan Institute for Labor Policy and Training, 2004). Interestingly, statistics show that Japanese women, in general, tend to be more in favor of immigration than men, and “Generation Y” is more accepting than “Generation X” and previous generations (Llewelyn & Hirano, 2009).

Migration is a global phenomenon provoking social disruption in both home and host countries at various levels (Adanu & Johnson, 2009). The Filipino population since the 1970s has experienced this phenomenon (IOM, 2013). At an individual level, the process of migration is often associated with physical and mental illness and even severe trauma (Helgesson, Tinghög, Niederkrotenthaler, Saboonchi, & Wittendorfer-Rutz, 2016). The migratory conditions of the female population are complex in at least two regards. The first is mental stress related to the migration process, which can go undiagnosed or underdiagnosed by health professionals, as the presentation of symptoms may be unfamiliar due to cultural differences (Lassetter & Callister, 2009). Another issue is that many of these women work to the point of exhaustion, as they often accumulate multiple jobs (Lassetter & Callister, 2009; Simon, 2010).

The World Health Organization (WHO) definition of health is “A state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity.” It suggests that health is a continuum and extends the notion of health to include states of positive well-being (WHO, 1946). Health is still often presented in terms of its negative aspect (e.g., ill health), and the main concern of the “medical field” is the presence or absence of sickness, disease, injury, and disability. However, the situation is much more complex. Health is a concept that relates to and describes a person’s state of being. It is therefore highly subjective. Good health means different things to different people and varies according to individual and community expectations and context. Even though the WHO definition has frequently been criticized for its vagueness, it is relevant to this study of female migration. Indeed, the health of these vulnerable women is not based merely on the presence or absence of disease but also their well-being. Indeed, well-being is an aspect of health that individuals, public health professionals, and policymakers alike wish to improve. However, it is also an ambiguous concept lacking a universally acceptable definition and often subject to competing interpretations. Well-being is generally viewed as a description of the state of a person’s life situation (McGillivray, 2007, p. 3). Well-being is challenging to define and even harder to measure. In general, well-being measures can be classified into two broad categories: objective and subjective. Objective measures utilize observable facts, such as economic, social, and environmental statistics. In contrast, subjective measures capture people’s feelings or real experiences directly, assessing well-being through ordinal measures (McGillivray & Clarke, 2006).

Ed Diener, a leading researcher in positive psychology, coined the expression “subjective well-being” (SWB) as the aspect of happiness that can be empirically measured (Diener, 1984). He developed a theory “The tripartite model of subjective well-being,” which describes how individuals experience the quality of their lives by including both cognitive judgments and emotional reactions (Diener, 1984). The theory of SWB is built on the following three constructs: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction based on evaluations of one’s satisfaction with general and specific areas of one’s life (Diener, 1984; Diener, 2000; Diener, Suh, Lucas, & Smith, 1999). It has been argued that these three constructs must be understood separately, even though they are closely related. In the same study, Diener et al. (1999) claim that SWB tends to be stable over time and is strongly related to personality traits. Furthermore, there is evidence that health and SWB may reciprocally affect each other, as good health tends to be associated with greater happiness. Many studies have found that optimism and positive emotions can have a favorable impact on health (Diener & Chan, 2011).

As increasing concerns are raised about the working conditions and respect for the human rights of low-skilled foreign female workers, Japanese politicians and economists both see foreign immigration as an urgent necessity for boosting the economy and demographic growth (IOM, 2013; Senda, 2014). However, very little is known about the SWB of migrant women in general (Adanu & Johnson, 2009; Iglesias, Robertson, Johansson, Engfeldt, & Sundquist, 2003; Kita et al., 2015), and to our knowledge, no studies have looked at the SWB of Filipino women migrant workers in Japan.

**Aim**

An analogy sometimes used by migrants is that living as a migrant woman in Japan is living “on the other side of that society” or “the other side of the mirror.” The analogy
Illustrates their thoughts about living in a society where they might lead invisible, anonymous, and sometimes difficult lives. Therefore, the aim of this case study is to identify the domains in the lives of Filipino women migrant workers in Tokyo (Japan) associated with SWB. In doing so, this study seeks to reduce their anonymity.

**Method**

This case study is part of a larger project called “Women’s voices in a shifting global health landscape.” It was motivated by combined scientific and journalistic desire to hear the “voices” of women around the world regarding urgent modern issues in which they play central roles (Paillard-Borg & Holmgren, 2016; Paillard-Borg & Strömberg, 2014). The condition of migrant Filipino women in Japan is among these concerns.

The term migrant has become increasingly controversial, and a pertinent question is now being asked in academia and the media: What is the difference between “migrants,” “expats,” “guest workers,” etc.? According to Koutonin (2015), migration is a complex phenomenon, and its related terminology must be used correctly, especially in the media. The author further argues, “In the popular lexicon of human migration there are still hierarchical words, created with the purpose of putting white people above everyone else.” He comments that Arabs, Africans, and Asians are considered to be (im)migrants, whereas Europeans are treated as expats. He adds,

> It’s strange to hear some people in Hong Kong described as expats, but not others. Anyone with roots in a Western country is considered an expat...Filipino domestic helpers are just guest workers, even if they’ve been here for decades.

Adams and van de Vijver (2015) also support this argument, suggesting that an expatriate is a highly skilled individual who is most likely expected to be from a Western country and work for a multinational company. Ultimately, the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrants defines a migrant worker as a “person who is engaged or has been engaged in a remunerated activity in a State of which he or she is not a national” (UN, 1998). Therefore, for the purpose of this study, the term migrant is based on the UN definition. Consistent with this definition, Filipino women working outside the Philippines for a finite period mostly as low- or semi-skilled workers are referred to as Filipino women migrant workers (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women, 2017).

**Analytic Journalistic Approach**

The analytic journalistic approach, which is a field of journalism that combines aspects of investigative journalism and explanatory reporting, was used for this study. Analytic journalism seeks to make sense of complex reality to foster public understanding. It was developed as a response to the growing complexity of the globalized world and information overload. Its ambition is to generate evidence-based interpretations of reality or a specific phenomenon (Hunter, 2015).

Methods from social science research are often used in analytic journalism (Lindolf & Taylor, 2011). The primary goal of investigative journalism is to expose (though it may also be somewhat analytical). However, the central aim of analytic journalism is to contextualize the subject according to its background, historical, statistical, and qualitative data. The usefulness of analytic journalism is often found in the analysis and exploration of the facts rather than the mere facts themselves (John & Johnson, 2012). The use of qualitative data in analytic journalism allows the investigation of a given topic to begin with a preliminary idea before revealing more significant issues than were originally apparent. This then permits the research to capture the complexity of a phenomenon within its real-life context (Author, 2014; Iorio, 2004). The influence of language is of major importance for journalists and researchers, as they often meet people of diverse backgrounds. To understand how the choice of language influences an interview situation, the cultural background of the interviewee must be recognized as far as is possible, that is, cultural validity (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2013).

**Combining Journalism and Social Science**

A focus group interview with an analytic journalistic approach is an appropriate choice of method for describing social phenomena in a world of increasing complexity (Greenbaum, 2000; Iorio, 2004; McLafferty, 2004). The journalistic approach uncovers human values and lived experiences without making any claims of generalizability (Partlett & Hamilton, 1976).

The purpose of using a group was to encourage the participants to interact with one another during the session. According to Greenbaum (2000), there are no substantive differences regarding group size other than the absolute number of participants. Indeed, smaller groups are often more manageable than larger groups composed of strangers, which require more moderator intervention. A smaller group, as it was the case in the present study, requires a more intimate approach before commencing, which is often favored when the topic requires more in-depth analysis (McLafferty, 2004). The group including three women in the present study was rather homogeneous concerning demographic characteristics, which helped increase the internal validity of the study, as preexisting differences in knowledge, skill, ability, and attitudes were minimized. Therefore, the difference in data is less likely to be attributed to individual differences (Morgan, 1996). The major limitations of group interviews are fear of judgment, forced compliance, and conformity in relation to the group. In addition, in term of ethics, the issue of confidentiality is sensitive, as the participants knew each other (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 2005).
As described above, the participants had similar demographic characteristics, such as being in their 40s, being mothers and wives, and working in low-skilled jobs. However, they each had unique work experiences in Japan preceding their work at a preschool and abroad prior to their arrival. In addition, the length of the women’s stays in Japan varied. They are unique individuals with unique experiences; the homogeneity of their profiles along with the heterogeneity of their life experiences contributed to a lively discussion. The participants tended to agree and not contradict one another. This lack of divergent opinions might be interpreted as a lack of dynamism; however, the participants continuously reinforced one another’s views by giving examples from their personal experience. The women each spent approximately equal amounts of time discussing their opinions.

In addition, this study was intercultural in at least two ways. The setting in which the study was carried out was the native country of neither the moderator nor the interviewees. Although the interviewees were temporarily residing in Japan, it was obvious that none of them considered Japan their “home.”

The Participants

Three Filipino women aged 40, 43, and 44 years participated in this study. They were all married and mothers. One was a mother of two teenage boys, the second a mother of a 5-year-old girl, and the third a mother of a 10-year-old boy. Their respective husbands were taking care of the children in the Philippines. All three women had experiences of working abroad, away from their families for many years, as nannies, teachers’ aides, housekeepers, and caregivers. Before moving to Japan, they had worked primarily in Singapore and Hong Kong. Their stay in Japan ranged from 2 to 11 years. Each of the participants had a high school diploma, and one had a degree in agronomy from a university in the Philippines. They all had a certificate in caregiving, focusing on the care of young children and the elderly. The Filipino government following a training period issued the certificates. All three women had similar responsibilities in the present work. Their main responsibility was to assist the teachers with the children. They worked an average of 8 hr a day at the school. In addition, two of the women worked as personal home assistants for the elderly in private home setting four and five nights per week.

Data Collection

In January 2015, one of the authors (S.P.-B.) was visiting Tokyo for scientific research. A Japanese acquaintance assisted the first author in contacting an international preschool in central Tokyo where English was the working language for all employees. In that particular school, eight Filipino women worked as teachers’ aides. The selection of the three participants was semirandom as, after describing the study, three women were available and agreeable to participate. The inclusion criterion was to be a Filipino woman working legally in Japan but without permanent resident status. There were no criteria based on age, health condition, marital status, or number of years lived in Japan. A focus group interview was conducted in English after informed consent was obtained from all three women. The interview lasted approximately 115 min in a private space close to the preschool. An oral recording was made, transcribed verbatim, checked against the recording, and finally edited for accuracy. The interview session began by asking the women to introduce themselves and describe their marital and familial status, working situation, education, living conditions, and migration history. Next, a discussion was conducted regarding their migration experience and well-being. The types of questions were influenced by the SWB theory based on three main constructs: positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction. Supplementary questions were asked for clarifying some answers, such as the following: “Can you give me examples?” “What do you mean?” “Interesting, please could you expand?” “You are telling me that […] Is that right or would you like to add something that I missed?” All questions aimed to explore factors related to health and female immigration to a new country.

The terms discussion and interview are used synonymously in this study. The author was the moderator during the group discussion.

Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis. The data analysis is similarly reflexive and interactive, as researchers continuously modified their treatment of the data to accommodate new data and insights about existing data (Sandelowski, 2000). Inspired by Sandelowski’s qualitative description method, four themes and eight subthemes were identified (Table 1).

Table 1. The Themes and Subthemes Identified From the Data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
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<td>Communication</td>
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<td>Technology</td>
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<td>Support network</td>
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<td>Faith</td>
<td>Dreams and hopes</td>
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<td>Religion</td>
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<td>Sense of identity</td>
<td>Motherhood</td>
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Ethical Considerations

The data collection and presentation of the findings are subject to the principles of international ethical standards for
conducting interviews with an individual capable of providing informed consent to participate in a study with a descriptive design voluntarily. Swedish legal guidelines (The Swedish Code of Statutes, 2003) were followed. Relevant ethical guidelines were applied, such as autonomy, integrity, and confidentiality of the informant and her surroundings when describing the results, in accordance with the World Medical Association Declaration of Helsinki (The World Medical Association, 2013).

Results
In this study, four main themes and six subthemes (described below) were identified. The four main themes are communication, support network, faith, and sense of identity. Communication and support network are related to the need to actively connect with a group and the importance of being a part of that group. In other words, the significance of not being alone and having external comfort. In contrast, faith and sense of identity are associated with the deepest sense of self and personal values, or internal beliefs. All of these identified themes are associated with SWB.

Communication
Language. Difficulty in speaking and reading basic Japanese is described as stressful for the participants. They added that, at times, even after living in Japan for several years, it was a challenge to manage the basics, such as shopping at the supermarket: “... language barrier is difficult especially when going to the supermarket and not knowing what it is and what to buy...” The language barrier was the first factor reported by all three participants as having a negative impact on their everyday well-being. Furthermore, not mastering the Japanese language created a feeling of dependency: “Whenever I do not understand a document I ask one of my friends who married Japanese men to translate... or even their children.” The informants agreed that the feeling of having to bother somebody had an impact on their self-esteem. They commented that it was especially unpleasant because they considered themselves proud and strong women, so this powerlessness regarding language was particularly difficult. One woman even added that her lack of Japanese language skills created a sense of alienation: “We also have Japanese nationals in my church, so I get to see some Japanese, but I can’t talk to them.” The women agreed that they were continually trying to learn the language, but it was difficult. They also agreed that, although the option to join Japanese language courses had been offered to them, they could not find the time because of their workloads.

Technology. The participants unanimously praised progress in technology for allowing them to communicate daily with their families and thereby remain “part of their children’s lives.” One participant remembered the time when she was working in Singapore and her children were still very young. She recalled crying every night because she was unable to see them. She commented, “I do not know how I survived it, then came the application Messenger which allowed me to communicate with my family daily... now it is Skype, and I can see them... almost touch them.” Another participant added that the Internet and Skype make a big difference and that without such technology she might have returned to the Philippines. They agreed that progress in communication technology was allowing them to keep their spirits up when they felt depressed: “When I am sad and depressed I talk to my sister via Skype and talk about my feelings or my husband and my kid and then suddenly I feel well. That is where I get my strength from.”

Support Network
Family. The word family was recurrent throughout the interview. It was mentioned 34 times—more often than any other term. The absence of close family members, such as spouses and children, was a source of sadness to the interviewees, but at the same time, these relatives were an important personal and emotional support network. The participants agreed that it was very painful to be away from their families, but not having a family waiting and caring for them, even from a distance, would be even more difficult. Two of the women had family members living in Tokyo with whom they met regularly. One woman said, “I meet every Sunday with my sister-in-law and her family and it is nice because we talk about my family... it helps.” Another woman added that her in-laws had lived in Japan longer than she had and this was a source of reassurance in case something were to happen to her.

Church. The three women belonged to different congregations and church groups, but they all agreed that these groups provided them not only with emotional support but also with functional support: “I go to church twice a week, and I meet my ‘brother and sisters’ from the Philippines, it feels good.” They explained that this support from church members includes advice and practical solutions to problems. Such support was synonymous with security and belonging, was experienced as beneficial, and was associated with well-being. Furthermore, when asked what the best support network available to them outside of work was, they all agreed that it was the church network.

Faith
Dreams and hopes. The participants’ willingness to continue working away from their families was motivated by their hopes for a better future for their children. They wished for their children to go to university and have the possibility of a good job in the Philippines without needing to emigrate. One woman shared that her son wanted to become a pilot: “If it is
his dream then it is my job, as a mother, to help him... but it is extending my time in Japan even longer.” They agreed that their dreams gave them faith and helped them feel better. They all had a plan for their future in the Philippines. They dreamt of owning a store selling school supplies and rice, building a house, owning and managing an organic farm: “We share our dreams and talk about them... we feel better.”

Religion. Faith in God was a recurrent theme for all three participants. One woman described herself as a Catholic, and the others belonged to different Christian communities without naming them specifically. The agreed that they were God-fearing people and that they obeyed the Bible: “We get our trust from God... we pray when we have difficult days and get our strength from that.”

Sense of Identity

Motherhood. Their roles as mothers were central to the interview. Motherhood was described as the main reason for immigrating alone: “Being a woman immigrating away from her family... it is a sacrifice... I am a sacrifice.” Living in another country without being physically present for their children was reported to be emotionally painful. The women explained that they were willing to deal with the pain because they were doing it “Out of motherhood” and for the future of their children. “We do that for the future of our children because if we stay in our country, it is too difficult to find a very good job, so we had to... even though it is difficult to separate from your children... we had to do it...” The women expressed this common heartbreak, “hurting the heart, the body and the soul,” in different ways. One referred to bodily aches and headaches, another to constant sadness, heart, the body and the soul,” in different ways. One referred to bodily aches and headaches, another to constant sadness.

Honesty. The participants were asked how they saw themselves, identified themselves, and wished to be seen. They described themselves as honest workers: “I would like to show that Filipino people are hard workers. It is our identity, our pride. We are usually hard workers. Some are maybe not, but usually, we are.” They explained that, in Japan, the Filipino people are seen as “Hard workers who are ready to work extra.” One woman added that female Filipino workers were highly trusted in Japanese homes: “Japanese employers need to see us as good people, trustworthy, quality people.” Another woman explained that to have the reputation of being an honest worker was important, but not sufficient. For her, it was also important to be identified as an honest resident: “For me, it is important that I am a law-abiding citizen because I am a foreigner here and I have to follow the law of the country.” The participants agreed that it was a very positive feeling to be recognized as honest. One woman added that it gave her self-respect, helped her in hard times, and increased her SWB.

Discussion

Inadequate Language Ability

During the interview, the women showed the utmost respect for their host country and acknowledged that it was better to work in Japan compared with other Asian countries where they had previously worked. They said that the environment felt safe and the salaries were higher in Japan. The interviewing author observed that the women were guarded in their statements about Japan and did not want to risk revealing their thoughts and feelings about it too openly to a stranger. Their statements regarding salary and safety, for instance, were superficial. This attitude is common among migrants and women, as they tend to feel vulnerable and often do not wish to expose themselves more than necessary (Piquero-Ballescas, 2009). However, over the course of the interview, specific questions were asked regarding their well-being in the context of migration to Japan, and they became increasingly more outspoken. One participant even stated that it felt good to talk about feelings even in English. This comment raised the opportunity to discuss their poor ability to communicate in Japanese. None of the women spoke fluent Japanese, but just enough “To manage basic caretaking duties” as they described it. The women shared their lack of confidence in the Japanese social environment and the feeling of being excluded, in great part due to the language barrier. Beier and Kroneberg (2013) confirmed this statement with the results of their study of immigrants in a European context. The authors showed that the language boundaries drawn in different host societies affect the SWB of first- and second-generation immigrants. Similar results were found in an Israeli study of 50+ immigrants for whom the proficiency of language was highly correlated to their SWB (Amit & Litwin, 2010). The three participants admitted that it was up to them to learn the language of course, but Japanese is a difficult language, and they could not find the time to study and felt guilty about it. The ability to master a language is not only crucial for communication but also a necessity to express emotions. In turn, it affects how people are perceived in their social environment. It is directly linked to the three constructs of SWB, which are positive affect, negative affect, and life satisfaction (Diener, 1984).

Emotional and Psychological Aspects

During the interview, the emotional and psychological aspects of SWB were primarily disclosed, whereas the physical or somatic aspects were relatively downplayed. In fact, the mental health of migrants has become a major public health issue (Adanu & Johnson, 2009; Conrad & Pacquiao, 2005; Sigvardsdotter, Malm, Tinghög, Vaez, & Saboonchi, 2016). Physical distress, illness, and disease were only mentioned when the situations of some of their acquaintances were given as examples. The participants stated that they knew of “some Filipino women” who worked to the point of
exhaustion and ignored symptoms of serious illnesses. Examples of women dying from untreated cancers and heart disease were described. They clarified that the diseases went untreated because these women did not seek treatment for which they were eligible as legal migrants in Japan. They added that these cases were not due to distrust toward the Japanese system but rather self-neglect and “emotional pain.” Adanu and Johnson (2009) explained that it is common for women migrants to neglect their health due to fear of facing illness in a foreign country. This attitude can also be linked to other psychological aspects related to the trauma of migration. A recent study on Serbian immigrants in Canada showed that self-esteem and sense of control have a positive effect on mental health and all aspects of the SWB, whereas perceived discrimination and multiple discrepancies negatively affect SWB and mental health (Vukojević, Kuburić, & Damjanović, 2016).

Pragmatism, Self-Accomplishment, Faith, and Religion

The migrant women in this study appeared to display mental strength and relatively high satisfaction with life, one of the constructs of SWB, despite the hardship of their situation. Pragmatism and self-accomplishment appear as essential components in the lives of these women. Pragmatism is necessary for survival and the sense of self-accomplishment needed for life’s transcendences. In the context of this study, it seems like pragmatism and self-accomplishment are not contradictory concepts but are rather complementary. Indeed, they coexist and even reinforce one another in the lives of these women. The constructs of SWB, positive, negative affects, and life satisfaction are well-illustrated in this dynamic (Diener, 1984).

Two of the women defined their lives as a sacrifice for the sake of their families and more specifically their children. The third participant nodded in approbation. Communicating daily with their families, via Skype or other social media, was very important for their emotional well-being as they described it. It was foremost important for them to be able “to mother” their children even from a distance. These mothers were highly efficient and practical in this role. Uy-Tioco (2007) argues that the role of technology in the remote parent–child relationship is mostly positive, as it offers a new type of parenting and increases the well-being of the mothers and children. Being a mother was defined as the most important aspect of their lives, a source of joy, and sometimes pain. Motherhood was described as the reason for their actions and decisions. However, a study looking at the effects of transnational parenting on the subjective health and well-being of Ghanaian migrants in the Netherlands found that migrant parents who are separated from their children display worse outcomes than their counterparts who live with their children in the destination country. Importantly, however, these differences were mediated by these parents’ lower socioeconomic and undocumented status (Dito, Mazzucato, & Schans, 2017).

To some extent, self-sacrifice becomes bearable and almost the norm among migrant women. The women’s pragmatism was reflected by their use of the church as a practical support network equally as important as their spiritual faith in God, as expressed by one of the women. To this comment, another woman giggled and added, “Oh well . . . it is true; we need both . . . support and faith.” Indeed, self-accomplishment colored by religious faith and a strong sense of identity was central to SWB for these women even though the interviewees described their situation as very painful emotionally. However, they described themselves as strong women with a sense of purpose as well as being “God-fearing” women. As one woman said, “We never feel alone really . . . God is with us.” Another woman added that they did not belong to the same churches, but their faith in God was identical. Tay, Li, Myers, and Diener (2014) showed a pan-cultural positive relation between religiosity and SWB. More specifically, at the individual level, religiosity fulfills needs, and at the national level, collective religiosity can enhance prosocial behaviors. Furthermore, recent research also points to contextual effects of religiosity. National religiosity can serve as a buffer against difficult life circumstances, but it can also augment personal religiosity effects on SWB (Tay et al., 2014). In fact, the firm Christian faith of the Filipino women is also affecting Japanese society, as an increasing number of Christian free churches are being established in Japan (Tsuda, 2002).

Implications

Japan will soon need to make significant decisions about the immigration issue (Sanda, 2014). Independently of the decision made, the repercussions will likely have an impact on Japan and the countries’ sources of migrants. In the case of Japan, Filipino women migrant workers are at the center of this debate (IOM, 2013).

Women’s health and well-being are crucial factors in achieving sustainable positive health development globally (Kuruvilla et al., 2016). More specifically, the feminization of migration has become a major global health challenge for demographers, as women represent the majority of migrants worldwide (IOM, 2013). As the feminization of migration will probably intensify in the upcoming decades, a better understanding of the factors contributing to SWB is needed. Indeed, the migration process can have a direct impact on SWB, as shown by Nowok, van Ham, Findlay, and Gayle (2013) in a longitudinal study on migration and SWB. The authors argue that long-distance migrants have the potential to be at least as happy as short-distance migrants despite the higher social and psychological costs involved. In the case of international female migrants, migration can even provide new prospects to leave oppressive social relations, to improve their own lives and the lives of children and other family members in the home country (De Leon Siantz, 2013). However, women are, in the majority, vulnerable during the migration process due to their precarious legal status, often challenging working conditions, and health risks.
Migrant women are underprivileged by race/ethnicity, their status as nonnationals, and gender inequalities (Piper, 2005). Therefore, concerns relate to their well-being and its impact on their health.

The implication of female migrants’ SWB relates not only to themselves but also to their families in their home country. Indeed, Emigration often results in disruption for the families left behind (IOM, 2013). When a mother, sister, or daughter emigrates, it creates a void in the home country, and more specifically in her community. An adequate and supportive psychosocial environment in the host country might contribute to a more positive SWB and therefore mitigate the negative effects of migration in both the home and host countries (Parreñas, 2005). Knowing that family and community members have a decent life in the host country alleviates anxiety and worry in the home country (Parreñas, 2005).

**Conclusion**

The findings of this case study highlight the extraordinary capacity of migrant women to adapt. One can then wonder if this adaptability is a blessing or a curse. It is a blessing because of the power of resilience. It is also a curse, as miserable living conditions, affecting health and well-being, are endured by too many. The banalization of the situation and acceptance of such living conditions, which should be unacceptable, has become the norm in the context of female migration in too many places. More specifically, in this study, the women reported finding comfort or at least a source of well-being by being in contact with others, belonging to a group, and in experiencing a strong sense of self and personal values. The domains related to SWB identified herein belong to a larger global health perspective. Undeniably, the right to health is a fundamental human right, and attention for the impact of migration on women’s health and well-being must become a growing international concern, as it influences future generations globally. Governments worldwide must face the effect of migration on women’s health as a significant public health challenge. Current health promotion and disease prevention programs are not able to meet the needs related to the various and complex dimensions linked to female migration. Heterogeneity, volume, and rapidity of existing migration patterns make the task challenging. Acknowledging the diversity of female migration, its cultural diversity, and promoting gender health equity have to become a global health prerogative. Furthermore, monitoring the health and well-being of migrant females from a lifespan perspective should also be a public health priority. This approach would be ethical as well as have practical and economic perspectives. Nations’ health care systems and policies must rapidly adapt to the feminization of the migrant population, as healthy migrants contribute to the positive development of a community and its well-being. Indeed, by addressing the health needs of migrant women, including domains affecting well-being, their health status will improve, stigmatization will be prevented, long-term health and social costs will be reduced, and integration will be facilitated. These strategies can only contribute to the social and economic development of future generations. Accessibility to health care is at the center of such discussions, as failure to provide such access will continue to ostracize migrant women in society, interfere with their human rights, and sanction poor public health practices.

Finally, the civil society in host countries should take more responsibility by being informed about the actual living conditions of these migrant women. Greater understanding might potentially lead to more empathy, integration, and therefore a higher SWB.

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**ORCID iD**

Stéphanie Paillard-Borg https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1968-2326

**References**


Author Biographies

Stéphanie Paillard-Borg, PhD, is a senior lecturer and researcher at the Swedish Red Cross University College in Stockholm, Sweden. Issues related to migration, women, humanitarian interventions and global demographic transitions are at the core of her research.

David Hallberg, PhD, is an ICT educator, lecturer and researcher at the Swedish Red Cross University College in Stockholm, Sweden. He mainly researches on information systems for socio-economic development in lifelong learning and health contexts, with focus on the UN Global Goals for Sustainable Development.