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Well-being and service awareness of Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait: Basis for policy recommendations

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Abstract

This study assessed the well-being and service awareness of Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait City, Kuwait, using a mixed-methods research design to provide evidence-based insights for policy recommendations. The quantitative component involved surveys measuring levels of awareness, satisfaction, and perceived efficiency of Philippine government agencies responsible for migrant welfare, while the qualitative component explored migrant workers lived experiences and perceptions through open-ended responses. Results showed that migrant workers generally demonstrated moderate to high levels of emotional, mental, and social well-being. However, awareness of the mandates, accessibility, and efficiency of key government services was mostly moderate, with grand means ranging from 2.37 to 3.06. The Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) and the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) were perceived as the most efficient agencies, particularly in terms of accessibility, timeliness, and crisis support. In contrast, the Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) and the Philippine Embassy received lower ratings in perceived effectiveness and service delivery. Qualitative findings revealed recurring challenges such as socio-economic hardship, emotional stress, financial pressure, and lack of assistance from the Embassy. Emotional and social support from Filipino communities emerged as critical in maintaining migrant workers' mental well-being, although non-participation in community activities was also noted. The findings underscore the need for improved service coordination, targeted communication strategies, and expanded mental health and community engagement programs to better support Filipino migrant workers abroad.

Keywords: Government services; Filipino migrant workers; Well-being; Service awareness; Overseas Filipino workers

1. Introduction

The Philippines is a major contributor to the global labor market through its Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs), with Kuwait remaining a key destination, registering a 128.29% increase in deployments in January 2025 (DMW, 2025). Despite economic gains, OFWs face numerous challenges abroad, including long working hours, physical exhaustion, job insecurity, cultural barriers, and discrimination, all of which impact their well-being. Emotional stress, social isolation, and mental fatigue are common, often stemming from separation from family, cultural dislocation, and limited access to psychosocial services (PSA, 2023). Various studies have consistently documented adverse experiences among OFWs and other migrant workers. For example, Del Palacio González and Werner (2017) found that Filipino women in transnational roles face ongoing distress as a result of cultural adjustment and the obligation to remit income. Similarly, Loderer et al. (2018) noted that migrants are at a higher risk of occupational stress, which is exacerbated by isolation and precarious employment. Liem et al. (2022) showed that, while innovative tools like mental health apps can help alleviate distress, stigma and a lack of culturally responsive support remain formidable barriers.

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Meanwhile, a study by Mactal et al. (2024) discovered that sudden job loss during the COVID-19 crisis caused severe psychological distress, identity disruption, and economic insecurity among displaced Filipino workers. According to Hall, Garabiles, and Latkin (2019), work conditions, employer relationships, and restrictive policies all have a significant impact on both mental and physical health, with supportive peer networks providing additional protection. Wong et al. (2020) found that culturally appropriate, peer-led mental health training programs can significantly reduce depression and improve well-being in domestic workers. These findings show that precarious employment, social isolation, limited access to health services, and cultural stigma surrounding mental health all have an impact on Filipino migrants' well-being, emphasizing the importance of targeted, culturally responsive support systems and policy interventions to protect migrant workers' overall well-being.

Celero, Garabiles, and Katigbak-Montoya (2024) found that Filipino migrant domestic workers often lack awareness of health and social security programs due to fragmented communication and insufficient outreach from government agencies. They emphasized that many migrants are unaware of their entitlements to welfare services both in the Philippines and in host countries, making them more vulnerable during emergencies. Celero et al. (2023) discovered that Filipino workers in East Asia have only a basic understanding of health insurance, pensions, and legal assistance systems, limiting their ability to access benefits when necessary. The researchers suggested improving literacy initiatives and developing bilateral agreements to improve social protection portability.

In response, government agencies such as the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW), Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA), and Department of Foreign Affairs (DFA) offer consolidated welfare, legal, and crisis assistance (RA 11641, 2021) making this study necessary to examine the well-being, awareness, and perceived support among Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait City as a basis for future policy recommendations. Specifically, this study aimed to: (1) describe the demographic profile of the respondents; (2) describe the well-being of the migrant workers in terms of mental, psychological, and social well-being; (3) describe the level of awareness of migrant workers on key government services; (4) described the perceived efficiency of key government services offered; and (5) identify the support systems provided by Filipino Communities to migrant workers.

2. Methodology

The study employed a descriptive quantitative and qualitative research design and was conducted in Kuwait City, where approximately 180,000 Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) reside. Fourteen purposively selected Filipino migrant workers who had been in Kuwait for over six months, had availed of services from Philippine government agencies, and were aware of Filipino communities, served as respondents. Data were gathered using a researcher-made survey instrument composed of four parts, including open-ended questions to explore community support systems and their impact on well-being. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, ranking, and weighted mean were used to analyze quantitative data, while qualitative responses were subjected to content analysis to identify themes and patterns. This mixed-method approach ensured comprehensive insights into the well-being, awareness of government services, and support systems experienced by Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait.

To ensure ethical research standards, the researcher presented an oral and written letter to the respondents explaining the purpose of the study, including the boundaries of confidentiality in research and their right to refuse to participate in the research study. On the other hand, the respondents were asked to sign an Informed Consent Form as proof of their willingness to participate in the study. Meanwhile, pursuant to the Philippine Data Privacy Act, all information to be collected was safeguarded to ensure confidentiality and privacy. In addition, measures to safeguard the anonymity of the respondents were implemented, ensuring the commitment of the proponent in upholding the rights of the migrant workers. In addition, the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) was ethically used as part of grammar checking and sentence construction, improvement, and the readability and language of the study.

3. Results and Discussion

The majority of respondents are aged 28–37 years old, predominantly female, and mostly single. Most are college graduates and have been residing in Kuwait for more than nine years. In terms of occupation, domestic and professional workers are the most represented, followed by skilled workers. Income levels vary, with most earning less than PHP 55,000 monthly. A small number are newly arrived OFWs, while others have been in Kuwait long-term.

Table 1 Well-being of Filipino Migrant Workers

Well-being	Grand Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Mental Well-being	2.90	Good Well-being
Psychological Well-being	3.10	Good Well-being
Social Well-being	3.09	Good Well-being

The findings also indicate that Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait generally experience a high level of well-being across mental, psychological, and social dimensions. A mental well-being grand mean of 2.90 suggests they are capable of managing stress, controlling emotions, and staying optimistic. The psychological well-being means of 3.10 highlights their strong sense of identity, life satisfaction, and pursuit of long-term goals. Social well-being, with a mean of 3.09, reflects meaningful relationships with peers and family despite geographic separation. These results point to the migrant workers' resilience and ability to maintain a healthy and balanced emotional life while living abroad. Overseas Filipino Workers (OFWs) who possess strong personal identity and social integration tend to experience higher levels of well-being. Klokieters et al. (2014) discovered that, despite the demands of domestic work abroad, Filipino migrant workers maintain a relatively high sense of well-being, owing to their resilience, spiritual practice, and reliance on social networks. Teo et al. (2023) also stated that migrant workers' psychological well-being is influenced by hope, health literacy, and strong social support systems. Workers who have coping strategies and feel emotionally connected to their peers or communities report higher life satisfaction and a more defined sense of identity, which is consistent with the psychological stability and goal orientation reflected in your respondents' scores. According to Lee et al. (2022), peer-based support systems, which are often based on Filipino cultural practices like *bayanihan* (mutual help), foster meaningful relationships and emotional connection even when people are physically separated from family. Their psychological strength may be rooted in cultural values, emotional coping skills, and the significance they find in their overseas experiences. The ability to stay emotionally connected with family through digital platforms has also been shown to strengthen their sense of belonging and reduce feelings of isolation.

Table 2 Service Awareness on Mandates and Function of Government Agencies of Filipino Migrant Workers

Service Awareness	Grand Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Familiarity with Key Agencies	3.06	Aware
Knowledge of Agency Mandates	2.93	Aware
Access to Information	2.37	Slightly Aware
Frequency of Interaction	2.37	Slightly Aware
Perceived Understanding of Agency Role	2.46	Slightly Aware

The results indicate that Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait generally have a good level of awareness of key government agencies, with a grand mean of 3.06 for familiarity and 2.93 for knowledge of agency mandates. Respondents showed greater awareness of agencies such as the POEA, DFA, and the Philippine Embassy/Consulate, while awareness of DMW and OWWA was slightly lower. However, their access to information remains limited, as shown by a lower grand mean of 2.37, suggesting only slight awareness of how and where to obtain agency services. Interaction with these agencies was also infrequent, with a similar score of 2.37, indicating that migrant workers typically reach out only when urgently necessary. Moreover, their perceived understanding of the roles and responsibilities of these agencies was only moderate (2.46), highlighting a gap between general awareness and actual knowledge. Many OFWs are aware of government agencies in name but lack deeper understanding of their services or how to access them. According to Celero, Garabiles, and Katigbak-Montoya (2023), Filipino migrant workers recognize the names and functions of agencies like OWWA, POEA, and PhilHealth, but have limited knowledge of the procedures and entitlements. Similarly, Tabuga, Vargas, and Mondez (2021) discovered that, while many overseas Filipino workers are aware of government programs aimed at protecting their welfare, actual access remains limited, particularly among those with lower educational attainment or limited time to engage with formal channels. This disparity between familiarity and meaningful engagement implies that information dissemination efforts are insufficiently targeted, and that many migrant workers rely on these organizations only in emergency situations. International bodies such as OHCHR (2023) have also emphasized the need for improved outreach strategies among migrant-serving institutions. The particularly low understanding of the role of the Philippine Embassy/Consulate suggests a need for enhanced post-arrival

orientations and more accessible embassy services. Strengthening not just theoretical awareness but also practical knowledge is crucial for enabling migrant workers to fully benefit from the protections and support provided by Philippine government agencies (Department of Migrant Workers, 2023)

Table 3 Perceived Efficiency of Government Services

Perceived Efficiency	Grand Mean	Verbal Interpretation
Service Accessibility	2.50	Efficient
Timeliness	2.53	Efficient
Quality of Services	2.47	Inefficient
Effectiveness in Addressing Needs	2.46	Inefficient
Communication and Information	2.49	Inefficient
Support during Crises or Needs	2.56	Efficient
Satisfaction with Services	2.64	Efficient

The findings revealed that Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait generally perceive government services to be moderately efficient, with notable concerns in several key areas. While service accessibility, timeliness, and support during times of crisis were viewed as relatively satisfactory, respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the quality of services, clarity of communication, and the government's effectiveness in addressing their specific needs. Among the agencies assessed, the Department of Migrant Workers (DMW) was consistently rated more favorably, which may reflect its institutional efforts to streamline services as mandated by Republic Act No. 11641 (Philippine News Agency, 2022). However, other agencies were perceived less favorably, with concerns pointing to issues such as limited outreach, inconsistent service delivery, and bureaucratic inefficiencies. These challenges echo the structural fragmentation, poor digital integration, and coordination lapses reported in recent evaluations of migrant service systems. Celero, Garabiles, and Katigbak-Montoya (2023, 2024) discovered that Filipino migrants recognize agency names like POEA and OWWA but have limited knowledge of their mandates, leading to low confidence in service delivery. Similarly, Tabuga, Vargas, and Mondez (2021) observed that awareness of social protection programs does not always translate into actual participation, particularly among workers with limited education or resources to navigate bureaucratic processes. The perception of inconsistent and fragmented support is echoed by Lai et al. (2024), who found that even when migrant workers reported high awareness of benefits such as health insurance, they frequently struggled to understand the details of coverage and how to claim entitlements. Addressing these issues necessitates targeted reforms that increase outreach, simplify procedures, and foster long-term trust in government institutions tasked with protecting the rights and welfare of overseas Filipino workers.

Table 4 Challenges Encountered by Filipino Migrant Workers

Challenges Encountered	Frequency of Themes
Separation from Family	6
Emotional and Psychological Strain	3
Economic Motivation and Sacrifice	3
Adaptation and Situation-dependent Experiences	2
Unfair Labor Practices	1
Security and Safety Concerns	1
Financial Challenges	1

The challenges encountered by Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait are primarily emotional in nature, with separation from family, homesickness, and psychological strain identified as dominant stressors. Based on the qualitative data provided, the content analysis reveals that separation from family is the most frequently cited emotional stressor among Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait, followed by emotional and psychological strain, and economic sacrifices. Other responses highlight job-related exploitation, legal struggles, and limited support from embassy. A few responses suggest

variability in migrant experiences depending on occupation and mindset, with some viewing life in Kuwait as economically better than in the Philippines. These insights highlight the complex and multifaceted nature of OFW challenges abroad, shaped by emotional, economic, and institutional factors. Aguilera (2021) described how Filipino workers engage in a "emotional labor of persistence" as they deal with feelings of loss and longing while attempting to remain productive in demanding environments. The prevalence of homesickness and psychological distress also reflects findings that transnational family separation frequently causes profound guilt, sadness, and anxiety among Filipina migrants who manage caregiving responsibilities from afar (Del Palacio González and Werner (2017). Similarly, Liem et al. (2021) found that acculturative stress, which is rooted in cultural adjustment, legal uncertainties, and job-related exploitation, interacts with emotional strain to create a multifaceted burden on migrant well-being. While some respondents in your study recognized the relative economic benefits of working in Kuwait, these advantages are frequently accompanied by feelings of isolation and institutional shortcomings, such as limited embassy support.

Table 5 Support Provided by the Filipino Communities

Support Provided	Frequency of Themes
Emotional Support	3
Friendship and Social Connection	2
Practical Guidance or Advice	2
Passive Engagement	1
Monitoring or Check-ins	1
No Perceived Need for Support	1

The content analysis also reveals that emotional support is the most commonly recognized type of assistance provided by Filipino communities in Kuwait. This is followed by friendship, camaraderie, and practical assistance such as advice and news. While some people engage passively on social media, others appreciate the occasional check-in from the community. One respondent mentioned not requiring any assistance, demonstrating that perceived necessity varies by individual. Overall, OFWs benefit greatly from the support they receive in terms of emotional relief, coping mechanisms, and social bonding. The overarching theme emerged as support from Filipino communities, reflecting the enduring values of Filipino hospitality and camaraderie abroad. Filipino communities play a critical role in sustaining migrants' emotional well-being, as informal support networks often substitute for institutional help, which many find difficult to access due to cultural or systemic barriers (OFW Jobs, 2025; Daily Bread, 2020). Community-based efforts, such as those led by the Filipino Workers' Resource Center and embassy-organized cultural events, have shown to foster unity and emotional strength among OFWs in Kuwait. These findings affirm the crucial role of Filipino diaspora communities in not only addressing emotional needs but also enhancing the overall resilience and well-being of Filipino migrant workers abroad (DOST PCHR, 2022).

The proposed policy recommendations aim to address the gaps identified in the study by enhancing the accessibility, efficiency, and responsiveness of government services for Filipino migrant workers, while formalizing and strengthening the role of Filipino community-based support systems abroad. These include establishing a centralized digital platform for migrant services, launching culturally sensitive mental health programs, implementing regular service audits, providing grants to Filipino community organizations, and updating pre-departure and post-arrival orientation programs to increase awareness and resilience among OFWs.

4. Conclusions

Based on the results and discussion, this study concludes that while Filipino migrant workers in Kuwait generally report high levels of well-being and demonstrate emotional resilience, significant gaps remain in their access to and understanding of government services, which are widely perceived as inefficient. The findings highlight the crucial role of Filipino community-based support systems in addressing emotional, social, and practical needs, especially in the context of family separation, stress, and limited institutional assistance. However, limitations such as the study's focus on a single host country (Kuwait), reliance on self-reported data, and the absence of longitudinal tracking restrict the generalizability of these conclusions to other migrant contexts or over time. Nonetheless, the implications are clear: the Philippine government must improve the accessibility, communication, and responsiveness of its migrant-serving agencies while formally recognizing and supporting the contributions of diaspora communities. Future research should expand to other host countries, include longitudinal data to assess well-being changes over time, and explore the

intersection of digital access, gender, and occupation in shaping OFWs' experiences. It is also recommended that further studies examine how government-community partnerships can be optimized to institutionalize informal support and extend protective mechanisms to more vulnerable OFWs. These directions will deepen understanding and policy responsiveness to the evolving realities of Filipino migrant life abroad.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

Statement of informed consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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