

立正大学心理学研究所紀要 第 8 号 (2010)

## The Characteristics and Skills of Filipino Caregivers: FOW as human resources for work life balance in Japan (2)

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**Abstract:** This study is a part of a social psychology research to compare work/life balance on an international basis, and to consider international mutual dependence of social support. Filipinos work all over the world as caregivers and behind the success of the Filipinos in the field of care service are the unique aspects of some skills and traits they bring along with them to foreign lands. Data was gathered to define the traits and cultural values most associated with Filipinos. The following are described in detail: deep respect for the elderly, close family ties, flexibility and creativity, hard work, pakikisama (getting along with others), and proficiency in the English language.

**Keywords:**FOW, Filipino personal caregivers, work life balance

### Introduction

Many employers continue to prefer Filipinos in their multi-racial workforce given their proficiency in the English language, adaptability and their skill competence. The Filipino nurses, for instance, are preferred among other nationalities because they are well known to be very caring of the sick, the young and the elderly. (Villegas, 2001).

This study is a part of a social psychology research to compare work/life balance on an international basis, and to consider international mutual dependence of social support. In Japan, where the birthrate is decreasing and the population is aging rapidly, the care for the elderly is an extremely urgent social issue. One of the greatest issues of nursing care is, who is to be the caregiver and acceptance of caregivers from foreign countries.

The purpose of this paper is to contribute to the efforts concerning work life balance, nursing care problems in Japan by studying the personality traits, values and interpersonal psychological

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traits of the Filipino people, who are widely accepted worldwide as human resources for social support, from a social psychological viewpoint.

Filipinos can be found anywhere in the world and they flourish in their endeavor and respective field of professions. One of these is the phenomenon of exodus of Filipinos to foreign lands to work as caregivers, nurses and doctors. This has made the Filipinos renowned, along with neighboring overseas workers and professionals of other countries. Aside from the lucrative compensation that attracts the Filipinos, the most reasonable aspect of these professions is associated with the cultural traits and characteristics of the Filipinos as to why they survive and tend to like their work. In effect, it contributes to the wellness of their clients and upholds the traditional and cultural values of the Filipinos.

It is in this context that the researcher focuses with profound consideration the underlying values and characteristics of the Filipinos, who are preferred by foreign clients who are under treatment. Thus, some aspects of Filipino cultural values are worth studying. This is the main issue of this paper. Pertaining to this idea, the Filipino value of high respect towards the elderly, close family ties, adaptability, hard work, "*pakikisama*" (getting along with others; cooperation) and proficiency in the English language are the key factors that make the Filipinos unique and capable.

Much of the research sources do not necessarily aim to as the major cause or tools for faster rehabilitation and recovery of clients who are under treatment in nursery or shelter homes. Also, this does not directly identify the positive connotation of Filipino traits. However, behind the success of the Filipinos in the field of care service are the unique aspects of some skills and traits they bring along with them. These values and positive personality traits mentioned above are what make the Filipinos what they are. Moreover, the researcher also tries to determine the share of every trait referred to according to the the books and materials gathered in this research, and the English proficiency of the Filipinos as well.

## Method

The following are the materials/books used in the research with the corresponding year of publication and dates of retrieval in the internet.

Andres (1989), Andres (1996), Avelino,etal. (1996), Bauzon (2002), Clemente (1996), DeTorres (2002), Dizon,etal. (2003), Feliciano (1990) Garrote-Trinidad (1999), Jocano (2000), Kang (1996) Leonano,etal. (2003) Lupdag (1984) Mangahas (1994) McBride (2001) Palispis (1995) Panopio,etal. (1994) Sevilla, et al. (1997).Villegas (2001) Yuchengco, et al (2000) Villegas (1998) the Corespondence (2004).

## Results:

Based on the data gathered, it was found that among the traits and skills like close family ties, flexibility, hard work, respect for the elders, pakikisama or getting along with others and English

proficiency, the majority of the authors and materials have been determined to have reached the conclusion:

First, pakikisama or getting along with others has a total of 12 corresponding figures of responses among the 21 materials used. This is equivalent to 55%. Next to this trait is close family ties which is 45% or 10 out of 21 materials. After which, 41% is for flexibility, adaptability and creativity, or 9 out of 21 materials. Then, hard work and industriousness have 36% or 8 out of 21 materials. Fifth place is English proficiency, which is 27% or 6 out of 21 materials. Lastly, respect for elders has a total figure of 5 out of 21 materials and this is equivalent to 23%.

On the other hand, the data has found out that among the 21 materials, Palispis (1995) has the highest percentage which is 83%, or 5 out of 6 traits and skills. That is, among the 6 traits and skill, he has referred to almost all of them. Next, McBride (2001), Sevilla, et al (1997) and De Torres (2002) have mentioned 67%, or 4 out of 6 traits and skills. Then, The Correspondents (2004), Dizon, et al (2003), Jocano (2000), Garrote-Trinidad (1999), and Lupdag (1984) have mentioned 50% or 3 out of 6 traits and skills. Then, Andres (1996), Kang (1996), Panopio, et al (1994), Mangahas (1994) and Andres (1989) have similar percentage of 33% or 2 out of 6 traits and skills. Lastly, Leonano, et al (2003), Bauzon (2002), Villegas (2001), Yuchengco, et al (2000), Villegas (1998), Avelino, et al (1996), Clemente (1996), and Feliciano (1990) have 17%, or each of them has only mentioned 1 out of the 6 traits and skills.

It follows that the trait with the highest percentage is the one that is generally considered and affirmed by the authors, while the ones with lesser percentage are only affirmed by a few authors and materials. Also, the author with the highest percentage means that the author has considered and affirmed almost all six traits and skills.

## Discussion

The first value to consider that make the Filipinos exceptional as caregivers is the deep and high respect of the Filipinos towards the elderly. This is not to discriminate the elderly, but care service is usually, if not generally, associated with people of old age. Though care service is also extended to nursery and middle-aged clients or patients, mostly the elderly are being cared of.

The investigative feature by *The Correspondents*, a TV news program of ABS-CBN (Nov. 22, 2004), brought into public attention the experiences of the Filipinos in London, England. These Filipinos are working as nurses and caregivers to the Britons. There, Filipinos are said to have gained respect from the English people. In Collingwood, a Filipino is the chief caregiver in a nursing home.

It is but proper then to take into consideration the Filipino trait of high and deep respect towards the elderly which underlies the exemplary work of the Filipinos in care service. According to Palispis (1995), this trait is accorded to the people in authority and elders. That is, this trait is particularly shown by caring for elders in old age. Children and grandchildren alike are expected to kiss the hands of their parents and grandparents respectively.

Younger people must address elders like “*Tiyo*” (Uncle), “*Tiya*” (Aunt), “*Aling*” (Older female), “*Mang*” (Older Male), Ma’am or Sir is also a proper address by a Filipino to someone he or she does not know (Garrote-Trinidad (1999).

However, behind the proper address, there lies beneath the utmost respect by Filipinos towards the elderly. This is shown especially when Filipinos care for their elderly in their homes when growing old. This is very contradictory to the western culture where elders can be found generally at homes-for-the-aged and care service centers (Dizon, et al, 2003). It may be that orientation towards one’s own career and security of the future is one explanation why in western cultures old people are left to nursing homes and shelters.

As such, this typical Filipino trait is a vital aspect in the capability of the Filipinos to work as caregivers in foreign lands for clients under treatment, as they themselves are foreigners who have distinct cultures of their own. There is relevance to the Filipino culture. Filipinos can be considered as exceptional in this respect since being a caregiver is not only a matter of profession and thereby getting good compensation but this is something about deep love, respect and care to someone of old age or anybody else who needs treatment, be it physical or emotional disability. This is something rooted in Filipino culture and an identity as a Filipino.

Pertaining to this culture is also the common practice among the majority of the Filipino families wherein adult children are expected to support and care for their parents, even if one already has a family of his own.

Related to this trait of the Filipinos is the value concerning family. This is about close family ties. Dizon, et al (2003) affirms by saying, “it is very evident in the Filipinos that close-knit families demonstrate their deep love for every member such as a spouse, children, parents, siblings, grandparents and other relatives. One’s family is the source of personal identity, emotional and material support, and one’s main commitment and responsibility. Genuine concern for the family is manifested in the honor and respect given to parents and elders, in the support and care extended to children and in the great sacrifices one endures for the welfare of the family.”

This is a significant factor that contributes to the expertise of the Filipinos. That is, relationship among Filipinos families extends to something of higher importance and a great value. Close-bonding within family has helped to mold genuine concern for each member. Thus, children are expected to care for their aging parents. At times, every member of the family is asked to contribute some money for food, medicines and even allowances of the aging parents. According to Andres (1996), family ties are deeply held.

Close family ties is always associated with Asian or oriental people. In the words of Bauzon (2002), “Family is the cement of oriental society.” In this regard, Filipino caregivers have the edge of offering good services in a foreign land since in this context the patient or client badly needs the utmost attention, understanding and care of the immediate family. Thus, the patient or elderly can cope with stress when he feels he can rely upon his or her family’s concern. A Filipino can be in fact

a channel between the patient and family in this regard. Close- family ties can really help.

Garrote-Trinidad (1999) puts this into proper perspective by explaining, "Filipinos value family highly and rely on family relations - whether real or fictive - to define and seek help for problems or disorders. The well being of the family is valued more highly than that of the individual. The following values bind the individual to the family, making him/her consider how a decision will impact the family." She further says, "family-centered therapy is more effective than individual-centered therapy when serving this population (referring to the Filipinos). The role of the family is taken into account in reaching the client and guiding him/her to recovery."

On the other hand, flexibility, adaptability and creativity are also big factors. Dizon, et al, (2003) say that, "it is very evident among Filipinos to adjust and to adapt to circumstances and any eventualities." They further continue to say that this trait is manifested in the presence of the Filipinos in many parts of the globe. Meaning, Filipinos can go to any corner of the world and there is always a Filipino. Also, Sevilla, et al, (1997) affirm that Filipinos are flexible and adjust to whatever happens and that the Filipinos are creative, resourceful, and quick learners. This is particularly shown in the ability of the Filipinos to create and produce something. Moreover, flexibility is one's ability to recognize when there is a need to change one's ways of addressing obstacles and difficulties (Jocano, 2000).

Thus, it would be right to presume that Filipino caregivers in foreign lands have this kind of trait and engaging in such kind of profession is most natural and this is a manifestation of flexibility, adaptability and creativity. There are many points to discuss here.

Villegas (2001), quoting a P.O.E.A. or Philippine Overseas Employment Administration report, says that, "the prospects of the demand of our workers in the European market are expected to be bright in the coming years. Many employers continue to prefer Filipinos in their multi-racial workforce given their proficiency in the English language, adaptability and their skill competence. The Filipino nurses, for instance, are preferred among other nationalities because they are well known to be very caring of the sick, the young and the elderly."

Caring for a foreigner would not be that difficult for a Filipino since he/she is oriented already to that situation. This is best displayed or portrayed in the Philippine history of being under colonial rule, especially during the time of Spanish and American colonization. In the words of Yuchengco and Ciria-Cruz (2000), "the Philippines is a very young nation, originally a collection of archipelagic settlements administratively consolidated by Spanish colonialism."

Spanish and American cultures compose the Filipinos' Occidentalism (Panopio, et al, 1994). These have influenced the Filipinos' religious, political, economic, and educational life. Also, the Spanish and American language has penetrated the Filipino culture.

Although Filipinos were at one time under Japanese occupation, Filipinos are much more oriented with western-kind cultures and American ways or lifestyles. It is not surprising to denote that Filipinos think like or admire Americans and in some way aspire like westerners themselves.

In this way, Filipinos are familiar with western cultures and how foreigners think and behave. They easily adapt to climate and environment foreign to them. The attitude of foreigners and Filipinos would in a way be in agreement and there is a common mutual understanding. In relation, therefore, to being caregivers, Filipinos have greater possibility of development in their field and they are much at home with what they do.

The Filipino goes along with things and has the qualities of flexibility and endurance (Andres, 1989). In addition, smooth interpersonal relationship beyond the profession itself exists. It extends to something of paramount importance which requires cooperation from the client or patient and caregiver, in order to become familiar with each other's culture and backgrounds. Accordingly, Leonano, et al (2003) assert that, "Filipino personality can be traced from Malayan blood of being easy to adjust to different situations and being hospitable. It is determined by the situation - where one is and what one is doing. A Filipino tends to be more situation-oriented rather than principle-oriented. He/she tends to get along well with others; is alert to opportunities; is flexible and "*lumulusot*" (literally able to get out from the trap; prudence).

This holds much importance in a situation like being a caregiver. This is important since the caregiver better knows the needs of the client, elderly or patient. The primary responsibility or obligation of the caregiver is the welfare and well being of the client or elderly. So it is necessary that the caregiver must be able to cope with the demand of the changing situations, especially the different cultures confronting him/her. In this context, the caregiver has the edge to understand what the client feels if the caregiver has enough knowledge to grasp the background and cultures of that particular place where the patient or client belongs. It is very crucial in a situation like this because the welfare of the patient or elderly is at stake. The client needs paramount attention and this lies upon the competency of the caregiver.

Therefore, a need for a Filipino caregiver is somewhat a good investment. Besides, proper dispensation of the medicines is not only enough but a caregiver also has the task to listen to the problems and innermost frustrations of the client if necessary, so as to pave the way for faster recovery and rehabilitation. The idea is to become one with the client who is under treatment.

Furthermore, Sevilla, et al (1997) say that Filipinos have a great capacity to adjust and to adapt to circumstances and the surrounding environment, both physically and socially. Unplanned or unanticipated events are never overly disturbing or disorienting as the flexible Filipino adjusts to whatever happens.

Another factor that may contribute to the expertise of the Filipinos in this field are the characteristics of hard work and industriousness. That is, "Filipinos have a great capacity for hard work given proper conditions. The desire to raise one's standard of living and to possess the essentials of a decent life for one's family, combined with the right opportunities and incentives, makes the Filipino work very hard. This is manifested most noticeably in the willingness to take risks with jobs abroad and while there, to work two or three jobs. The result is productivity and

entrepreneurship for some, and survival despite poverty for others” (Sevilla, et al, 1997).

It is very interesting to elaborate about this point since Filipinos are often misconstrued and branded as lazy, drunkards and the like. This misconception is unfounded since this can be proven through the image of the Filipinos abroad. Even in homeland one can notice the creativity, resourcefulness and ability of Filipinos to work just to survive and live decently. Given the economic backwardness of the Philippines where only a few are able to make it to the top ladder of economic prosperity, the majority of Filipinos have managed to persevere from abject poverty. Filipinos are in fact patient. They persevere through hard work even in risky conditions.

Mangahas (1994), citing the 1993 SWS or Social Weather Station survey of the impressions of Americans about Filipinos, says that 73% of Americans think that Filipinos are hardworking while 21% say that Filipinos are lazy.

Villegas (1998), in his book “The Filipino phenomenon”, says, “I couldn’t believe my ears! A Canadian friend from Vancouver was actually telling me that the Filipino immigrants in that city were exemplary for their industriousness and strong motivation to work. It seems that of these Filipinos, some even have three jobs, working fifteen to eighteen hours a day. They are putting to shame some of the “natives” who seem to increasingly loathe hard work.” In the United States of America, the survey found out that the most distinctive characteristic of the Filipinos is being hard working which Filipinos themselves also think they are, which is 37%, next to strong family ties which is 14% (Kang, 1996).

In Filipino jargon it’s “*kasipagan*” or industriousness. This would also mean “diligence, hard work, steady effort, being zealous in working out ways to accomplish a task (Jocano, 2000). Being a caregiver entails a responsibility that warrants patience and hard work. Caring for other people would not be easy and smooth. Caring for other people instead of one’s own parents and family is kind of strange, but the Filipinos are in any way motivated to earn for their family and siblings back home. Thus, the Filipinos muster enough strength and energy for such kind of work. Only one may be able to survive through hard work and diligence.

Alongside with industriousness, Filipinos do not forget to get along with others. He/she cooperates with others and this is what is commonly dubbed as the typical Filipino trait of “*pakikisama*.” This term is derived from the root word “*sama*” which means, “being together.” This also indicates one’s ability to get along with people, which is Filipino tactfulness. That is, to be tactful is to exercise this *pakikisama* trait in time of need. In general, this trait is a Filipino principle of public relations or smooth interpersonal relationship (Jocano, 2000).

Interestingly, this trait of *pakikisama* or getting along with others is not something like a camaraderie only with other people, but is also a serving as a useful tool in building a good relationship with others by extending help. This is doing something good for others (Avelino & Sanchez, 1996). Furthermore, it is an intrinsic Filipino value according to Feliciano (1990). In connection thereof, a caregiver must in a way develop good harmony with a client and this is to show that the former

is doing good for the well being of the latter. No wonder then that the Filipinos are much atone to this kind of service since it is within one's value of a Filipino.

Thus, it is proper and right to consider that working abroad as caregivers is a challenge to prove the capacity of the Filipinos. This popularity has helped to make the Filipinos excellent in this field abroad.

Filipinos are not behind in any way. They are remarkable abroad as caregivers because of their proficiency in English language. This is very important and crucial since good communication and day-to-day interaction is of vital necessity. Thus, a Filipino will be able to deliver or render proper care service to the client, particularly an elderly.

Historically, the English language had been introduced by the Americans when the Philippines was still a colony under American rule. In the book *General Sociology - focus in the Philippines* by Panopio, et al (1994) it says, "the Americans also popularized education as the most essential channel for social mobility and introduced the English language as the medium of instruction in the school system which they established in the Philippines. This intensified the Filipino's preference for the academic white-collar occupations and encouraged the use of honorific titles. The English language and the diploma system also served to further the stratification of Philippine society because the primary beneficiaries of American-sponsored education were the Filipino elite." It is no wonder then that the English language is no longer foreign to the Filipino people. It is already a part of the education system of the Philippines and daily life of the Filipinos. Mostly, even ordinary Filipinos converse with their fellows in the English language.

In a study conducted by McBride (2001), it confirms the proficiency of the Filipinos elders in English language abroad, particularly in the United States of America. Accordingly, there are 1.8 million Filipino individuals in the USA in the year 2000 census. It says, "many Filipino elders are proud of their ability to read, write, and speak English; consequently, they may feel insulted when asked if they need an interpreter." This might also hold true for the majority of the Filipinos since from the very start of school formation in the Philippines, English language has always been the medium of instruction in the classroom.

Primarily, the English language is what enables the Filipino to have smooth if not easy access to working abroad and mostly, Filipinos are in demand by international shipping companies, and in households as domestic helpers since Filipinos can understand English well and they are very fluent. This is a fact and one cannot deny the importance of the English language as the international language that is dominant in many parts of the world. In this way Filipinos are not in a way behind in terms of competency and capability in international communities.

Clemente (1996) says, "Everyone needs to know English. This universal language is needed not only to converse with the rest of the world, but to also understand many of the literature of science and technology which are published usually in this language. Having mastered the English language, any additional language or dialect is a bonus. It is easier to break barriers when other



nationalities perceive that you can speak or at least are making an effort to understand their language.” This would only support the idea as regards to the importance of English language.

In the investigative report by ABS-CBN news channel in *The Correspondents* (2004, November) program, it confirms the capability of the Filipino’s fluency in the English language is at par with English people. As such, Filipino nurses and caregivers in London gain respect from clients there.

In the United States of America, Yuchengco and Ciria-Cruz (2000) also noticed in their survey that Filipino immigrants are virtually English-proficient and that they do not have to rely on community media to translate news and information. Besides, another survey cited by Kang (1996) from L.A. Times Poll says that 85% of Filipinos think they speak English well. In connection to this, Kang traced this observation from Philippine history by saying, “Coming from an archipelago of 7,000 islands with more than 80 dialects, Filipinos have fierce regional loyalties. The United States acquired the Philippines in 1898 when it won the Spanish American war and ruled there until 1946. During that period, the American education system was adopted and English was made the official language.”

#### The Influence of Filipino Traits in Caregiving

However, the exemplary expertise of the Filipinos as caregivers has varying degrees of development and connotation. A Filipino caregiver might be a preference by foreigners who are seeking better treatment, care or rehabilitation since Filipinos exercise some kind of influence and charisma, which can be an advantage to an elderly client or patient in general.

De Torres (2002) says that “Filipinos flock to rehabilitation service providers who truly listen to them because Filipinos value relationships. They are accustomed to having a supportive network of family and friends, especially during difficult situations. Many Filipinos may be poor but most have a steady supply of relatives and friends who help them cope with their problems. Sometimes, Filipinos simply survive through their family and friendship network.”

Now, relevant to this characteristic of the Filipinos, there is greater possibility of a Filipino caregiver to inspire foreign clients as for the strong sense of relationship and a need for family and network of friendship, which emanates from his or her being a Filipino. In this regard, a common ground of cooperation, trust and understanding can be developed. In addition, De Torres (2002) further states that, “Filipinos may be generous and hospitable to their extended family, but it is the welfare and wishes of their basic family, not the whole clan, that drives them to work, sacrifice and achieve.” This is perhaps very relevant concerning the efficiency of the Filipinos to work abroad and be in demand. This is one form of driving force, and affects the enthusiasm, energy and potentials of the Filipinos which support the strong will and purpose when engaging in social service and work. Care service is a condition that needs “utmost family concern” and this can contribute to the speedy recovery of the patient or client. This can in effect have vital development in the long run of relationship between the caregiver and the client.

Note: This study was conducted with the cooperation of Mindanao International University (MDK). I wish to convey my thanks to Mr. Masataka Ajiro, Chairman of the Japan Philippines Volunteers Association

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(This research was funded by Institute of Psychology Risho University.)