

Spatially Separated - Challenges of transnational families

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Transnational families

- Defined by the dispersion of the family across international borders
- With separate living arrangement in two or more countries but maintain links with homeland.



Transnational families spatially separated for various reasons

- Families separated for political reasons
- Families separated for economic reasons
- Families separated for educational pursuit reasons



- Globalization also leads to new patterns of transnational mobility & migration
 - Minority rich world: travel & professional global elites' mobility
 - Majority poor world : Asylum seekers/ illegal migrants / labour migrants



The emergence of transnational families is also facilitated by:

- Advancement of communication/ information technologies & transportation technologies
- Economic transformation in one's own country of origin



Challenges of transnational families

- The need to adapt to new culture & adjust to different societal circumstances and norms from their country/society of origin
- At the same time have to deal with family separation & the desire to maintain family ties
- Negotiating the national identities and transnational identities
- Struggle in the involvement in family matters, eg. children's education & well-being, but somehow difficult because of geographic distance, limited resources...
- Challenges in maintaining intimate relationship



Challenges of transnational families – cont'd

- Shifting gender boundaries
 - Trend of circularity of migration and feminization of migration
 - Breadwinning of wives as labour migrants and staying behind husband doing domestic work
 - Traditional gender boundary between public and domestic spheres to be renegotiated
 - A challenge to the masculinity of male as productive work is the most fundamental foundation of masculinity identity
 - Women with better knowledge, income => stronger voice in family => pushing traditional gender boundaries
 - Men do domestic work but it's often considered as "helping out".



Challenges of transnational families – cont'd

- Children left behind
 - Children with greater workload since mother's labour migration, having to take care of younger siblings and domestic work
 - Children being taken care of by other family members /other mothers



Challenges of transnational families – cont'd

- Transnational mobility of the “invisible” grandparents
 - Move to provide care works to immigrant children in terms of post-natal care, child care, housework & not to burden children’s finance by returning to homeland when suffering from major illness
 - Challenges in daily living (language, social network...)
 - 3 NOTs in relationship with children
 - Not a master (they can’t make decisions for families here)
 - Not a guest (they have to do housework and childcare)
 - Not a servant (they are not paid)



Global care chain - transfer of care

- a series of personal links between people across the globe based on the paid and unpaid work of caring (Hochschild, 2000)
- Migrants moving from poor to affluent countries to care for the young, the old and the sick while leaving those young, old and sick to whom they normally provide care.
- female is often central to global care chain
- Women supplying care labour while consuming other women's paid and unpaid care labour including their older daughters/parents
- Commodification of care



Facilitating connection in transnational families

- Information-communication technologies
eg. e-mail, msn, mobile phone, facebook, skype...=> preserve family relationship/
communication across space



Reflections

- For those 'astronaut families', new immigrants from Mainland and those with two-way entry permits, to what extent are they experiencing similar challenges of transnational families?
- How do we as social workers view those at the lower node down the global care chain? What is the implication behind the notion of global care chain on families?



Thank you!

