

Filipino American women, work and family: an examination of factors affecting high labor force participation

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With great numbers of women entering the labor force, there has been an interest in research on the relationship between work and the family. Much of the research has focused on Caucasian women; comparatively little attention has been paid to women from other ethnic groups. One group conspicuously left out of the research literature is Filipino American women. The lack of empirical research in this area is especially noteworthy since Filipino Americans constitute the second largest Asian American subgroup in the United States today and are expected to become the largest during the next decade (Gardner et al., 1985). Most Filipinos are immigrants. The population of Filipino Americans in the United States increased by 8 percent between 1980 and 1990 (US Department of Commerce, 1990). This rapid growth rate has resulted in a corresponding increase in the number of Filipino Americans in the labor force.

Overall, both Filipino American men and women participate in the labor force at high rates: the 1980 participation rate for Filipino Americans aged 16 years and over was 72 percent. The numbers of Filipino American women in the labor force are increasing (Gardner et al., 1985; Mangiafico, 1988; Pido, 1986). Filipino American women have the highest level of participation in the labor force of any female group including Caucasian women: 68 percent compared to the national rate of 49 percent for all women (Gardner et al., 1985). This paper reports on a secondary data analysis of Caucasian and Filipino American women in Hawaii. The original survey's purpose was to investigate the community mental health

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and social service needs of all Asian Americans. This paper explores various explanations of why Filipino women are more likely to work and discusses implications for practice.

Review of the literature

Participation in paid work by women will differ by ethnicity because of historical and cultural sanctions (Almquist, 1984; Glen 1985; Zavella, 1984), for example, expectations about role performance that includes working; household division of labor which would facilitate women working; husband's attitudes toward working wife. The socioeconomic status of a group may also dictate as a matter of survival, the employment of two wage earners in family.

Employment may be beneficial for women. Moen (1982) asserts that work has become a validating activity for women as well as men. Current sex role norms define paid employment as appropriate and personally fulfilling for women. Work also provides a person with a source of social relationships which may in themselves provide a reservoir of social support (Coggins, 1991; Motta: 1986). Some studies suggest that employed women are in better health than non-employed women (Gore and Mangione, 1981; Hibbard and Pope, 1985; Kandel et al., 1985; Shaw, 1985); other studies (Gove and Geerkin, 1977; Radloff, 1975) found no difference in the psychosocial state of employed versus unemployed women.

The exceptionally high rate of labor force participation by Filipino American women is partially explained by economic necessity. Although census data show Filipino American households earning well above the median family income, individual workers earn less annually than Whites and most other Asian groups, and the above average household income represents two or more workers (Gardner et al., 1985). Economic survival may also necessitate that Filipino Americans take multiple jobs. Caces (1986-7) reported that it is so commonplace for Hawaiian Filipinos to take on a second job that one Filipino dialect, Ilocano, has linguistically adapted words to describe 'double work'. A wife's paycheck helps to protect the family's socioeconomic status (Levy, 1988).

A second factor in the high labor force participation by Filipino American women may be cultural. The research literature on White women has found that a working wife may conflict with her husband's wishes and sex role ideologies, which may be detrimental

to his mental health or reduce his supportiveness (Hoffman, 1989; Spitze, 1985; Staines et al., 1986). Contrary to these findings, Filipino cultural values and beliefs seem to indicate that women are not only encouraged but expected to work outside the home (Agbayani-Siewert and Revilla, 1995; Guthrie, 1968; Nydegger and Nydegger, 1966; Pido, 1986; Tagumpay-Castillo and Hilomen-Guerro, 1969; Yu and Liu, 1980).

The family environment can provide support and resources for work. Chusmir (1982) reports a strong tie between work involvement and the degree to which husbands and wives share household and family roles, with a particular emphasis on how large a part the husband plays in household work. Previous research indicates that employed women tend to receive more help with housework from husbands than do non-working wives. In fact, the psychosocial benefits received from work may be canceled out if the wife does not receive that help (Pleck, 1977; Rosenfield, 1989; Saez et al., 1989). Men still only perform a fraction of the domestic work that women do (Coggins, 1991; Coggins and Burden, 1987; Frone and Price, 1987; Spitze, 1985). Empirical evidence suggests that employed ethnic minority women are especially vulnerable to psychosocial risks of role strain due to role expectations (Hartzler and Franco-Juan, 1985; Lewis, 1988; Williams, 1988). There is hardly any empirical literature available that examines the potential psychosocial risks of employed Filipino American women. Research from The Philippines generally seems to indicate that employed Filipino women are expected to fulfill the dual demands of domestic and employment responsibilities.

The family's stage in the life cycle can also make work a liability. Single women with or without children are as likely to want paid employment as their male counterparts (Oppenheimer, 1982); however, the presence of small children may complicate labor force participation. A typical pattern is that work motivation drops for women after the birth of a child, and when children are young (Farmer and Fymans, 1983; Warr and Parry, 1982). A study conducted in The Philippines (cited in Tagumpay-Castillo and Hilomen-Guerro, 1969) found that having more children did not decrease women's participation in the labor force.

Women's disadvantaged place in the labor force means they have less access to interesting and well paid jobs. The condition itself, low pay, low job status, restricted opportunities and inflexible employment policies may make work damaging for women. For

ethnic minority women, racial discrimination is an additional burden.

In summary, employment may be beneficial or harmful for women depending on a woman's marital status, husband's contributions to home labor, the presence of children, his and her attitudes about employment, and the characteristics of a job. Overarching these factors is the variable effect of culture. These factors all influence a woman's decision to work outside the home.

Research aims

Filipino American women are more likely to be in the work force than women in the general population. This investigation sought to determine what factors might explain that increased labor force participation. Possible explanations are:

1. Certain family variables, such as marital status and the number and ages of children, may explain an increase in labor force participation.
2. Filipino American women work because of financial need. Work may be sought primarily as a way of maintaining or increasing family socioeconomic status.
3. There are other personal factors that might explain involvement in paid employment. Women with higher levels of education may be encouraged to seek work.
4. The conditions and context of the work available are likely to explain decisions to seek work and to stay in the job market.
5. There may be cultural explanations for increased labor force participation by Filipino American women. They may work because it is a cultural expectation, expressed through support from the family environment, that they do so.

Methodology

Sample and procedure

This paper reports on a secondary data analysis of a statewide survey of 2503 respondents in Hawaii during 1984. The sampling design was a two-stage probability cluster sample of census blocks and households within eight mental health catchment areas. A minimum of 300 households per catchment area were selected. One individual per household was interviewed. The original study surveyed male and female Caucasian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Korean, and Native Hawaiians. This paper reports on Filipino

($n = 110$) and Caucasian ($n = 280$) women. The original survey interview examined numerous variables which included substance abuse, mental health, social and medical service utilization, and family and work environments.

Selection criteria for inclusion *in this sample* were that males and females be 18 years of age and older. Several groups such as the homeless, military personnel, and immigrants with limited English skills were not included in the original survey.

Instrumentation

Work environment. It is assumed that women who like the context and conditions of their work are more likely to remain in the labor market. The Work Environment Scale (WES) developed by Moos et al. (1974) was used to assess respondents' perception of the conditions of their work unit. The WES comprises five subscales which measure (1) work involvement, (2) how cohesive and supportive peer employees are of one another, (3) how supportive women perceive their supervisor to be, (4) how much autonomy workers have in their work, and (5) how friendly were overall work relationships. Respondents were asked to describe how often a particular event occurred at their place of employment. A seven-point ordinal response set ranged from 1, indicating that the event never occurred, to 7, stating that the event always occurred. If Filipino American women enjoy working more than White women, this preference should be reflected by significantly higher scores on most of these subscales. Each subscale has acceptable internal consistencies (Cronbach's alpha range .69 to .86). This construct validity has been supported by a number of studies (Billings and Moos, 1982).

Family environment. The Moos, 1974 Family Environment Scale (FES) was used to assess the family climate for possible support for a working wife. As discussed earlier, cultural expectations to work may be expressed through support from the family environment. Three relationship subscales—cohesion, conflict and expressiveness—assessed the degree of commitment, help and support the respondent perceived that family members had for one another. Scores were computed for each of the subscales. Respondents were asked, on a seven-point item scale, to describe how often their family engaged in a particular type of behavior. As with the WES subscales, the response set ranged from never to always. These

subscales were used to investigate whether Filipino American women received more support from their families, which enabled them to participate in work in larger numbers than Caucasian women. The FES has a high degree of internal consistency (Cronbach alpha = .89).

Personal growth. One dimension of personal growth was also measured: Independence. This variable was measured in the same manner as the work and family environments. The independence scale assessed the extent to which family members are assertive, self-sufficient, and independent. This score on this scale is assumed to provide more information on how Filipino American and Caucasian women view work outside the home. For example, if Filipino American women are encouraged to work, they may score higher on the independence measure. A family that encouraged independence would be more likely to support work outside the home.

Demographic characteristics. Not enough data were available to address what personal characteristics might dictate a choice to work. However, the educational level of the respondent was available. It was assumed that higher levels of education would lead to higher levels of participation in the work force. The financial need to work was investigated by examining absolute differences in annual household income between Filipino American and Caucasian women. Marital status, age, and the number of children the respondent had were also available. All of these variables suggest alternate roles or demands that might influence a woman's choice to work. Respondent age was considered representative of the stage in the family life cycle (Moen and Dempster-McLain 1987). Young mothers would find it difficult to work because of the presence of small children. Older women with children are more likely to be in the work force.

Data analysis

Chi-square tests were performed for demographic variables, and *t*-tests were used to describe mean scaled scores and examine similarities and/or differences between Filipino and White women's family and work environment scales and personal growth scale scores. Logistic regression was performed to determine the effect of explanatory variables on the dependent variable employment status. Based on preliminary analysis, three models were formulated:

and tested to determine the most appropriate and parsimonious fit to the data: two models comparing groups and one model for Filipino Americans only.

To estimate the effects of sociodemographic variables on employment status, a logistic model was performed separately for each group. For model 1, demographic variables were included. Variables were entered in the following order: education (continuous), marital status (not married = 0, married/cohabiting = 1), presence of children in the household under the age of 18 (no = 0, yes = 1), and respondent age (continuous). Household income and number of persons dependent on that income were not included in the model. Prior examination of the data indicated that although data on total household income were collected, information on respondent and other household members' income was not. As a result, it was not possible to determine the respondents' contribution to the family income or what the household income would be without it. As expected, the data also showed that those women who worked generally had higher household incomes than those who did not. In addition, there was a significant correlation between household income and education for Filipino American ($r = .33, p \leq .01$) and White ($r = .31, p \leq .01$) women. The number of persons dependent on household income was also eliminated from model 1 since it also showed a significant correlation with the variable children in the household, indicating that the number of persons dependent on the household declined if no children were present ($\alpha = -.34, p \leq .01$ for Filipino Americans and $\alpha = -.54, p \leq .01$ for Whites).

A second model was tested to estimate the direct effects of demographic variables, controlling for the effect of family conflict. Cultural expectations beyond demographic factors may influence the decision to work. Since the family conflict scale was significantly correlated with all other family environment and personal growth subscales, a decision was made to include it alone. Moreover, the expected negative relationships were found between family conflict and family cohesion, expressiveness, and independence. Explanatory variables included the demographic variables entered in the same order as model 1 followed by the family variable conflict. Model 2 was performed for each ethnic group separately.

Model 3 was performed for Filipino Americans only and included demographic variables, controlling for expressiveness and personal growth (i.e. independence). Based on preliminary analysis

TABLE 1
Chi-square tests for differences in demographic characteristics by ethnic group
(percent)

	Filipino (n=110)	White (n=288)
<i>Employment</i>		
Employed ($p=.25$)	62.7	56.4
Full-time ($p=.000$)	56.4	36.8
Part-time ($p=.001$)	10.1	23.7
<i>Income (US\$) ($p=.000$)</i>		
0-9,999	17.6	17.8
10-19,999	38.2	22.0
20-29,999	19.6	25.4
30-39,999	17.6	13.6
40,000 or more	6.9	21.2
<i>No. of people on income ($p=.000$)</i>		
1-2	25.5	48.4
3-4	31.8	38.6
5 or more	42.7	13.0
<i>Education ($p=.000$)</i>		
Grammar or lower	15.6	1.8
Some High School	12.8	5.4
High School	51.4	58.3
College	20.2	34.4
<i>Marital status ($p=.010$)</i>		
Married	67.9	63.8
Single	25.7	17.2
Divorced	1.8	2.9
Separated	1.8	7.2
Widowed	2.8	9.0
<i>No. of children 18 yrs and under ($p=.006$)</i>		
0	-	3.3
1	21.9	43.5
2	28.1	33.7
3 or more	50.0	19.6
<i>Age ($p=.016$)</i>		
18-25	24.3	13.3
26-35	22.3	29.7
36-45	24.3	23.2
46-55	18.4	12.9
56-65	7.8	11.8
66 and over	2.9	9.1

conducted prior to the logistic analysis, collinearity was found between all of the family environment scales and the personal growth scale 'independence' for the White sample. For Filipino Americans, all family environment subscales showed a significant

TABLE 2
T-tests for mean differences in work and family environment scales by ethnic group

					<i>P</i>
					.229
					.005
					.005
					.000
					.002
<i>Family</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>P</i>
Cohesion	5.46	1.03	5.59	1.01	.278
Conflict	2.73	1.07	2.62	1.01	.336
Expressiveness	4.76	.94	5.05	1.00	.014
Independence	4.30	1.10	5.30	1.05	.000

relationship with one another, with the exception of the relationship between family expressiveness and independence. As in model 2, the purpose of controlling for family environment and personal growth variables is to estimate the effects of a cultural factor beyond demographic characteristics that may influence labor force participation.

Results

Chi-square analysis was performed to compare each group's socio-demographic characteristics (see Table 1). As expected, Filipino American women were more likely to be employed full-time than White women. They were also more likely to be married and living with a spouse, and to have more children. Filipino American women also report less household income and more persons dependent on that income. They also tend to be older and have less education.

Table 2 presents the work and family environment mean scores. On only one work environment scale – perceptions of peer relations (cohesion) – were no differences found. Filipino American women scored significantly lower across all other work scales.

On the family environment subscales the expressiveness and independence components revealed significant differences. Filipino American women's mean scaled scores indicated that they were less independent and their families less expressive, that is, less

Logistic regression estimates of the effect of demographics:

	environment				status by ethnic group			
	MODEL 1 effects of demographic variables		MODEL 2 Estimated effects of demographics controlling for family conflict		MODEL 3 Estimated effects of demographics controlling for independence and expressiveness			
	Filipino	White	Filipino	White	Filipino			
Education	1.15	.02	1.03	.50	1.15	.04	1.02	.71
Marital status	2.15	.16	.79	.40	2.20	.16	.58	.13
Children in household	3.60	.04	.95	.87	3.14	.08	.79	.51
Age	.96	.04	.96	.00	.95	.02	.97	.01
Conflict					.93	.24	.93	.05
Independence								1.02
Expressiveness								.97
χ^2 Goodness of fit	97.38		259.20		94.60		214.58	
Significance	.44		.38		.34		.36	

Note: The data coefficient is reported to ease interpretation of the data. For example, the coefficient of education in model 1 is 0.14. By taking 2.718 to the power of 0.14, the beta coefficient of 1.15 is calculated. This is the amount by which odds of working get multiplied each time education level goes up by one. Therefore, 1.15 is reported rather than 0.14.

encouraged to be assertive, self-sufficient, to make decisions, and think things out for themselves. No significant differences were found on the conflict and cohesion scales.

Table 3 displays the findings for the estimated effects of the sociodemographic variables (model 1) and their effects when controlling for family conflict (model 2) and independence and expressiveness (model 3). The data coefficient is reported to ease interpretation of the data. Column one shows that education, the presence of children in the household, and age have a significant effect on employment status for Filipino American women. Filipino women who are educated, have children and tend to be younger are more likely to be employed. Regarding White women, only age had a significant effect on employment status, indicating that employed White women also tend to be younger (refer to column two). Although not significant for White women, the direction of the coefficient for children in the household was negative while it was positive for Filipino American women, suggesting a difference in the effect of this variable on employment status. The data indicate that Filipino American women with children are more likely to be employed. Marital status was not significant for either group; however, the coefficient was positive for Filipino American women and negative for White women, suggesting that married or cohabiting Filipino American women may be more likely to be employed, while the reverse is found for White women. Model 1 passed the goodness of fit test of significance for both groups.

Column three shows that when controlling for family conflict, education and age remained significant for Filipino American women, while children in the household lost its significance. This suggests that the effect of having children on employment status is mediated through conflict. One possible explanation may be that Filipino American women with children may be less likely to experience family conflict if they are employed.

While the direction of the coefficient was negative, the direct effect of conflict on employment status was not significant for the Filipino American sample. Conversely, the White sample showed a significant effect of family conflict on employment status. The negative direction of the coefficient indicates that family conflict is less likely to occur when White women are employed. Although not significant, there was also an increase in the strength of marital status for White women when the family conflict variable was added. This might suggest that White women who are married and

employed experience less family conflict than if they are married and unemployed. As with the Filipino American sample, age continued to have a significant effect on employment status; younger women had a greater likelihood of being employed. Model 2 passed the goodness of fit test for both ethnic groups.

Model 3 displays the findings for Filipino American women only. Levels of expressiveness and independence showed no significant effect on employment status. As in model 2, the effect of children in the household lost its significance when family environment and personal growth scales were added.

Discussion

The chi-square findings showed that family and personal characteristics that generally deter women from labor force participation are not quite as strong a deterrent to the employment of Filipino American women. As discussed earlier, they tend to be married and have children, and are less educated and older than the White sample. Although Filipino American women tend to be employed full-time more often than White women in the sample, they report less household income and more people dependent on that income which may explain their greater work force participation. Two incomes may be necessary for the Filipino American family to maintain its economic status. While two incomes are increasingly important for all families, the relatively disadvantaged position of Filipino families compared to Whites may make a working wife more of a necessity.

Overall, the results on the Work Environment scales indicate Filipino American women are considerably less satisfied with their work than White women. They are clearly not working more because they enjoy the work environment any more than White women. These data suggest that Filipino American women would at least want different working conditions if not another job. Perhaps with sufficient income from other sources, most Filipino American women might not want to keep these same jobs. Filipino American women had less education than the White sample, and may therefore have less access to rewarding jobs. Prior literature also indicates that Filipinos tend to be underemployed (Caces, 1986-7). Zappert and Weinstein (1984) report that women who had lower levels of income and status also had more job stress, home and work conflict and health complaints. The overall comparatively lower satisfaction with job conditions of Filipino American women

is a cause for concern because of the assumption that a woman who is not comfortable with the content and context of her employment will be less likely to experience the health and psychosocial benefits of employment.

The Family Environment Scales suggest that Filipino American women are no more likely than their White counterparts to receive family support for working. The significantly lower expressiveness and independence scores indicate that they receive less support than White women. This lack of support has been noted as a major source of stress for working women. Family pressures can prevent some women from pursuing employment with as much commitment as they might wish, and thus can lead to lower job satisfaction. This lowered job satisfaction can lead to poorer satisfaction in other domains of one's life (Rudd and McKenry, 1986). Given the reports in the literature of lack of family support for working women, these findings could be interpreted as evidence that Filipino American women do not necessarily work because they are well supported by family for outside employment.

The analysis in model 1 shows that employed Filipino American and White women tend to be younger. In addition, younger Filipino American women with children are more likely to be participating in the labor force. Prior research describes these characteristics as generally working against a woman's labor force participation. Unlike the Filipino sample, having children or not having children had no effect on the White sample's employment status. Having children may indicate a greater financial need for Filipino American women to work and contribute to the household income.

Consistent with prior research on women's labor force participation, Filipino American women with higher education levels are more likely to be employed than Filipino women with lower education levels. Having an education does not always translate into access to better or better-paying jobs for Filipinos (Caces, 1986-7). Filipinos who gained professional degrees in The Philippines have found American professional licensing requirements in medicine, nursing, accounting and law to be barriers to employment commensurate with education. Conversely, although White women show significantly higher education levels, this variable had no significant effect on whether or not they worked.

Overall, model 2 suggests differences between the two samples in family conflict. For the White sample, there is less of a likelihood that a family will experience conflict if the woman is employed. The

personal, social and economic gains derived from participating in the labor force may influence the level of conflict experienced. For Filipino American women, family conflict had no significant effect on the likelihood of employment. One possible explanation may be that Filipino American women tend to work to contribute to the household income, and social and personal gains from employment are generally not a factor. Family environment and personal growth variables do not lead to increase Filipino American women's participation in the labor force beyond demographic characteristics.

The demographic data seem to support the contention that Filipino American women tend to differ from White women in explanations for labor force participation. The data suggest that Filipino American women work for economic survival. Only the variable age had a similar effect for both groups. Multivariate findings did not support a cultural explanation for Filipino Americans' higher rate of employment.

Implications for practice

Filipino American women are not necessarily satisfied with their work environments. This sample's low educational level suggests that these women are relegated to less satisfying and low paying occupations. Increasing Filipino American women's educational levels might provide them with access to more satisfying and economically rewarding jobs. The practitioner can assist the client in exploring job training opportunities, community college programs and higher education. The worker also needs to remain cognizant of discrimination and legal barriers that can prevent Filipino Americans from gaining access to employment commensurate with their education. In such instances, the worker may need to assume the role of policy advocate both outside and within places of employment.

Filipino American women are potentially at risk of health and psychosocial problems. They are expected to participate in the labor force as well as retaining primary responsibility for the household's domestic tasks and childcare. Job satisfaction might be increased and potential risk decreased by increasing family support for household responsibilities. The Filipino family is a large, complex network that binds family members to one another and provides support. Many immigrants may not have replaced that network in the US. This suggests that the practitioner should

identify the natural and existing resources available in the Filipino community, as well as exploring the development of new resources, such as after-school programs.

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