

Solo On and Off Duty: Challenges of Selected Solo Parent Employees in Call Center Companies and the Implication of Republic Act 8972

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Abstract: The study aims to unravel the challenges that solo parent workers face in their workplace while simultaneously exploring their struggles beyond their career or profession. The implementation of Republic Act No. 8972, also known as the "Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000" Section 6 (Flexible Work Schedule) and Section 8 (Parental leave) were also assessed by the proponents on randomly selected BPO companies in the Philippines. The purpose of this study is to create a narrative based on the stories of solo parents and how the implementation of the stated legislation affects them.

This study revealed different narratives on how solo parents face challenges, how the people around them affect them, and the instances they consider as the most challenging as a solo parent. In addressing the challenges faced by solo parent employees, it was emphasized that both companies and the government has its role to play. In the perspective of the offices concerned with the mentioned sector, implementing the legislation for solo parents will be favorable for the company because it can improve their solo parent employees' productivity since they can exert more focus on their job. Moreover, it is conspicuous that most solo parent participants are not that knowledgeable regarding the other provisions of the law. Motions in the Congress about the amendments of the said law are mentioned as well. The study was completed with the intention to benefit solo parent workers, company's productivity together with its human resource department that exercises the legislation's virtue efficiently.

keywords: solo parent employees/ workers, challenges, legislation, call center companies

I. INTRODUCTION

Work is an essential part of our lives. Through work we can attain a vital part of our needs. For most people, it is impossible to imagine society without it. Sigmund Freud affirmed that work, like love, is a vital necessity to the development of the democratic society and of the individual. The term "work" is connected to the idea of "energy" as a labor resource stored in a body or a set of bodies. (Mrówka, 2014, p. 291) The concept of work has a lot of meaning created from different standpoint. Various sciences developed different ideas of work, even though they are all indicated with the same term (Quoted after: Oleksa, 2012).

Working life can be demanding and it can potentially affect parenthood in a wide range of ways. For many parents, there is no option but to work to support their families because either there is not enough income between partners or because they are single and must bring in enough money to buy food, pay the bills and rent etc.

Parenting by definition is the act or process of raising children. Solo parenting on the other hand is exactly the same yet with only one parent raising her child or children. Solo parents are those people who raise children without the help of the other biological parent; they can be either mother-only or father-only families. It can be unmarried parent, the parent is divorce, separate, widowhood and the adoptive parent, the parent who adopts child of a different race heterosexual or homosexual, because although they are not legally married, they will be co-parenting (Carole Klein, 1973). Societal perceptions often construct solo parents as young, female, unemployed parents with multiple children (Garner and Paterson 2014; Zartler 2014).

For many people in today's world, balancing job and family life is a difficult task (Kalliath and Brough 2008). This fight, however, is not the same for everyone. Solo parents had the lowest work-life balance when compared to their married, cohabiting, or childless peers (Van den Eynde et al. 2019). Today, striking a decent work-life balance between employment and family life is an increasing problem. There has been a lot of study done to understand the impact of a poor work-life balance on employee and family health and well-being. (Annink, 2011)

Solo Parent's Welfare Act or Republic Act No. 8972; an act in the Philippines providing additional benefits and privileges to solo parents and their children provided definition to who are to be considered as a Solo Parent. *A solo parent or single parent is any individual who falls under either one of the categories here, "a parent who was left alone with the responsibility of parenthood due to death of spouse" (paragraph 2 (a) Section 3, RA 8972) and "parent left solo or alone with the responsibility of parenthood due to abandonment of spouse for at least one year, " (paragraph 7*

(a) Section 3, RA 8972).

The number of solo parent households is increasing particularly in many developed countries like France, Sweden, the United Kingdom, United States and Japan between the years 1980 and 2005 with the reason of divorce, separation and abandonment as primary reasons causing the sole parenthood. (Chamie, 2016)

In 2015, the National Statistics Office (NSO) stated that there are about 14 million solo parents in the Philippines. Therefore, the national government took the initiative to pass Republic Act 8972 or the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000.

In line with the given statistics, this research sees the increasing number of solo parents not only in the Philippines but also around the world. The number of single parents is rapidly escalating in several ways, may be death of one parent, divorce, separation due to job or service condition of the spouse (Inatay, Lifestyle Domains of Single Parents, 2013) The growing numbers of solo-parent families are now so prominent in society that they become important subculture and need to be accepted as a legitimate and valid unit of society (Simbulan, 2008).

As per the legal side, Article XV of the Constitution recognizes the needs for protection of family as the basic unit of the nation. Just like any other kind of family, laws are put into place as safeguard and empowerment to them including families with solo parents, thus, the imposition of this important legislation that analyzed in this study– the Republic Act 8972 (RA 8972) or the Solo Parents Welfare Act of 2000 the centerpiece of this study alongside with the proponents' attempt to analyzed and give due recommendation to company's policies regarding their solo parent workers.

The Philippines implemented Republic Act No. 8972, Also known as the "Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000", an act providing expanded benefits to solo parents and their children, appropriating funds therefore, and for other purposes.

This study focuses on the Section 6 (Flexible Work Schedule) and Section 8 (Parental leave) of the said law. *Section 6- Flexible Work Schedule; The employer shall provide for a flexible working schedule for solo parents: Provided, That the same shall not affect individual and company productivity: Provided, further, that any employer may request exemption from the above requirements from the DOLE on certain meritorious grounds. Section 8 - Parental Leave; In addition to leave privileges under existing laws, parental leave of not more than seven (7) working days every year shall be granted to any solo parent employee who has rendered service of at least one (1) year.* The Republic Act No. 8972 was approved by the former President Joseph Ejercito Estrada on November 7, 2000 and took effect on November 28, 2000.

This paper also focuses on the challenges faced by solo parents in their workplace. The study aims to dig deeper

about the different challenges that solo parent workers encounter with their life. When discussing challenges, it may refer to a target to be reached by creating an applicable plan (Zorba, 2016). It could also mean difficulties faced while trying to reach a goal/target (Mhagama, 2018). Challenges refer to the actual situation of having difficulties toward accomplishment of goals.

In the literature for this study, the researchers discovered initial issues such as coping with loss, assuming additional roles and responsibilities, enabling and adjusting to the new role and circumstances, dealing and coping with own emotions and changed condition, battling societal prejudice and stigma of single-parent homes and care-giving, adequate treatment and fostering the needs of the children, maintaining self-confidence and low self-esteem, balancing effective parenting, and battling societal prejudice and stigma of single-parent homes and care-giving (Srivastava, 2017), psychological strain from multiplicity of roles (Goldrick-Rab & Sorenson, 2010, p. 180).

In addition to the aforementioned, the proponents assessed if the Republic Act No. 8972 Section 6 and 8 is properly implemented among the Solo Parent Employees on Randomly Selected BPO companies. The researchers chose BPO companies because as claimed by Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA), BPO industry employs 575,600 workers, with a majority (87.6%) in call centers. 12% work in computer or IT-related firms, 0.5% in medical transcription, and 0.3% in animated films and cartoon production. According to Jobstreet.com Job Outlook Report BPO jobs are the most in-demand in the Philippines, contributing to the country's 14% increase in job openings.

The researchers expect to complete a study that will benefit solo parent workers, company's productivity together with its human resource department that exercises the legislation's virtue efficiently.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study used the **Descriptive Qualitative method** of research. Proponents used the method of interviewing. The researchers' aim to obtain first-hand data from the participants to communicate sensible and good conclusions and recommendations for the study prompted proponents to employ this type of research.

Descriptive research obtains facts about current conditions in a phenomenon and describes and interprets them, revealing conditions or relationships that exist or do not exist, practices that prevail or do not, beliefs, points of view, or attitudes that are held or not, processing that is occurring or other effects that are being felt, or trends that are developing (Calderon, 2012).

The researchers used the interview guide questionnaires method in gathering data from the participants. This concentrates on fact finding, making known certain things, particularly about challenges of the solo parent

workers in BPO companies on the implementation of Republic Act No. 8972, Also Known as the "Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000, specifically section 6 and 8. This method of research is designed to gather information and to create a solo parent's perspective on their challenges based on their narrative.

The participants of the study are the following: the secretary-general of National Council of Solo Parents Inc., a legislator staff in the office of Senator Risa Hontiveros, and Programs Management Bureau of the DSWD Central Office representatives as the key informants and the solo parent workers who are currently employed in BPO companies as the focus group discussions.

The study is conducted within the selected BPO Companies in the Philippines. The selection of study area is purposely due to the mobility of the researchers during the pandemic. During lockdown, researchers are able to contact solo parent workers from different cities through the use of online platforms as indicated in the instrumentation.

This study focused on the randomly selected BPO companies, where the participants are the Solo Parent Workers. The participants for this research study came from different BPO companies. Participants are 19 in total, 1 male and 18 females.

In ensuring the relevance and accurate information from the sample of this study, the researchers made sure that the following are possessed by each person in order to qualify as secondary informants and group of people that composed the participants of this study:

The criteria used in selecting secondary informants for this study:

- At least 18 years old authorized enough to grant consent
- Must be a Filipino Citizen
- Only parent to a child or children
- Working and currently employed on the institution indicated in this study
- Workplace should be within the territorial jurisdiction of the Philippines.
- Married or unmarried
- Any individual who falls under the categories of being solo parent as stated in the legislation
- Willing to have his/her life as part of the study reference of this research

The key informants consisted of five (5) participants. The participants of this study came from three (3) different agencies that are concerned with the solo parent worker's sector. One from a non-governmental organization, one from a legislator's office, and three from a government department.

The primary informants came from the offices concerned with the solo parent workers' sectors. This helped the study in unfolding the primary informants' views and

perspectives in determining the effectiveness of implementing the sections 6 & 8 of the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000 to the workers' productivity as well as their acknowledgements of the challenges faced by the concerned sector as representatives of their respective institution.

The researchers collected relative and relevant information that supported the study in its previous chapters. This study primarily used interview guide questionnaires as an instrument in accumulating relevant data by serving as a guide for the interviews conducted on both participants, which are the people from offices concerned with the solo parent workers' sector and the solo parent workers of the randomly selected BPO companies.

Before moving to the testing proper, the researchers composed a request letter. Upon its approval, the researchers issued the request letters for conducting the study on randomly selected BPO companies and government and non-government offices.

In administering the questionnaire, the researchers allotted vigorous time, effort and cooperation in developing the questionnaire so as to serve its intended participants. The interview guide questionnaire is constructed using open-ended questions to not limit each participant's answers through their narrative. The instrument consists of questions related to the participant's perception regarding challenges of the solo parent workers.

In addition, the data are collected according to its relevance in the research as well as its effectiveness. For the researchers to successfully collect proper data, criteria are set for choosing the participants.

Most of the interviews are conducted using "Zoom" as an online platform. The platform has served as the medium for the exchange of conversation and obtaining each participant's response through their narrative. Two (2) participants chose to submit a written interview due to time constraints as they have busy schedules and are not able to attend the online meeting. Each of them referred to the research instrument sent to them via email.

This study, being qualitative in nature, does not have the common numerical statistics research has. With this, the researchers capitalized the points given by the participants on the focus interview that is the main source of raw information for this research.

The main method of treatment of data that the researchers used were the narrative reviews from the collected answers of the informants during the interviews conducted. These reviews are compiled through a thematic analysis by the proponents from the narrative review of the informants and other resources such as related studies and articles. By merging different sources of information, proponents are able to compose write-ups that are relevant and informative processed output that academically discuss the point of this study.

III. RESULTS

THEME 1: Clashing Trigger Points revolves around the discussion of why participants have ended up becoming solo parents. In this section, researchers presented the distribution of participants with the reason they revealed. The reasons were classified into four (4) main groups such as separation, solo parent's decision, desertion, and circumstance. Given that divorce is not legal in the country, although included in the study's literature, the result did not reveal anything about it at all. Among the reasons that were collected, separation is the most common cause why a parent is ending up on the path of single parenting. This separation is in the context that both of the parties have agreed that they should part ways with varying reasons as to what delivered them to that resolve. The second most frequent was the solo parent's decision wherein the one who took custody decided that he/ she should not live with his/ her partner anymore. Some of the reasons include unreadiness of their partner especially the male, drug usage of their partner, third parties in the relationship and more. The most interesting part in this reason is that there is one participant who chose to take the path of solo parenting not because of any reason mentioned above but because she does not see herself as someone who will marry. She just put it like she is ready to be a mother but not as a wife, opening another reason why there are solo parents. That personality, personal choice, and character matters whether a person will commit into a long-term relationship or not.

Another reason is desertion in which the other party is the one who decided to leave the solo parent and the participant had no choice but to keep on going with his/ her life. While the last reason is due to circumstance which is death. Although among the 19 participants, there is only one who fulfills this reason, this proves that death of the spouse is still a common reason why there are people who happen to be a solo parent.

THEME 2: Juggling Things in Between analyzes the different areas on which a solo parent is torn between. There are four (4) subsections this theme has, and these are the identified areas where a solo parent is left to balance out things. These are time management, mother and father roles, financial or monetary areas, and roles as a breadwinner and as a parent.

In time management, the majority of the solo parents admitted that this is one of the hardest areas of their life as a solo parent. In fact, one of them stated that the nature of their job sometimes adds to the challenges they have regarding managing time since they have a certain schedule mostly night until morning. But not all consider this area as a challenge since there are participants who cited that their family and relatives play a vital role for them to cross-out time management as one of the things they worry about. Their families or relatives help them in terms of taking care of their kids. That is why the burden is being lightened at some point.

The second thing they balance out is their role of being mother and father. Having the image of both parents plays a huge role in making sure that a child will develop and turn out well. Participants acknowledge this as well that is why they are doing everything they can to provide both parental images. One of the participants pointed out that she is struggling on how to join her kid in playing since the games are 'boy's games' and she resorted to learning everything about it to be able to join his kid in playing. Another participant shared the same struggle as she encountered once that her kids are developing upset feelings toward her since she failed to balance things out with the roles of becoming a mother and becoming a father.

On the other hand, when it comes to the financial aspect, it is the same thing with time management. Majority of the participants pointed out that as the sole provider for their family, the earnings they get is barely letting them survive for a short period of time. A participant shared that she is really budgeting it well since there are a lot of bills to pay even though she is the only one earning for their family. It is clear here that even though solo parents are also solo in earning for their family, the bills are the same level with families that have many income streams, another challenge to overcome by the participants and solo parents in general. The last area on which solo parents need to balance out things is their role as the provider or breadwinner and as a parent to their kids. Some related this to their finances, as well, while the unexpected things that participants revealed here is the connection of their mental health when it comes to balancing these roles. Participants mentioned how anxious they are when they think things like this, while some experienced breaking down. This is an important matter since the nature of their job deals with mental health, as well, since they are receiving mostly upset customers via call, a given factor in a contact center industry.

THEMES 3: Acknowledging the Challenges Faced by Solo Parent Workers discusses how the law and different institutions are seeing different challenges that solo parents have. Key informants that were composed of a non-government organization that is concerned about solo parents which is National Council for Solo Parents, a legislative staff of Sen. Risa Hontiveros which is the Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Women, Children, and Family Relations of 18th Congress, and some officials of Program Management Bureau of Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) Central Office, were asked about how the institution they represent view these challenges. The struggles mentioned were derived from related literature to counter-validate. These are time management, workload management, emotional stress, and absenteeism. Talking about time management, KI 1 pointed out that this is the most common problem that solo parents encounter due to what he called as 'balancing work and family life.' KI 3, however, stated that the law acknowledges it by allowing a 'flexible working schedule' on which a solo parent may demand provided that his/ her

productivity would not be affected. On the issue of workload management, KI 1 shared that it is the same with time management. Due to workload management and their role in parenting alone, work-life balance is being distracted, however, they are keeping on going since the job is what keeps their basic needs barely available for some at the expense of the next challenge— emotional stress.

Talking about the issue of emotional stress, a key informant revealed that if a non-solo parent employee experiences some work-related stress, it is even intensified when it comes to solo parent employees given that they are alone in their life and have no to limited option on who to vent out such work-related stress to. A key informant raised that as of now, what solo parents can do about this is to consume the parental leave that the law is providing not just to typical employees with their own family but also to solo parents, for them to have a mental health break, as she put it. On the other hand, absenteeism is regarded as the problem solo parents often encounter. An informant actually noted that solo parents are often seen as the type of employee who absents the most due to different issues relating to them as a single parent. But the thing is, if these unique dilemmas solo parents have been properly addressed, companies would not be seeing solo parents as employees who are absent frequently.

THEMES 4: Influence on Job Performance discusses the implication of a well-protected and well considered welfare of solo parent employees having to do with the companies' concerns. It is notable to see through the interviews among key informants that they are acknowledging that any cost being incurred in maintaining the well-being of solo parent employees is worth spending. KI 1 in fact stated that if solo parents are not torn between different things to deal about and can focus to their work without worrying a lot of things in relation to their children just like any other non-solo parent employees, they can actually be the company's greatest asset since solo parents are really devoted into work because they see their career as important thing since this is the one that provides them their basic needs. Aside from the passion for the work, if companies were to address solo parent employees' concern, they will be able to avoid the enormous amount that they will lose if a solo parent employee resigns.

THEMES 5: People Around Solo Parent Workers talks about the implication and/ or effects of different groups of people around the solo parents. As solo parents thrive to survive and provide a better life for their children, a certain group of people plays a vital role in this objective's success. Solo Parent's relationship was analyzed to the following people namely the company or their immediate superior, friends, family, co-workers, community or neighborhood, and former partner's relative. When it comes to the participants' immediate supervisor, a lot of them are saying that their team leaders are considerate to them acknowledging the fact that they are solo parents, most especially for the immediate supervisor that were solo parents, as well. They are even able to converse to their superior some life talks on which lighten

the burden they have in terms of handling their problems. However, not all of them have the same circumstance, so they revealed that it really depends on the kind of superior they are assigned to.

When it comes to friends, the majority of the participants shared that their circle of friends understands them well. Others have their own priority and tend not to socialize with anyone since they have a few friends only. This goes the same with the co-workers. Solo Parent employees have the instinct that regardless of their age, they should act like a parent already, they tend to minimize hanging out after their shift on work. However, it is a relief to them if they have a solo parent colleague since they were able to have some sharing of life experiences with them, exchange of suggestions regarding challenges and more that helps them to be motivated at some point of their life.

In terms of community or neighborhood, it is quite noticeable that almost all of the participants are not socializing with the community that much as some of them are introverted. Some of them, however, just avoid unnecessary issues about them to circulate to the community. This is some sort of defense mechanism instinctively embedded to solo parents especially about the Filipino society context. On the other hand, the factor about family is a different thing. Some of them are really thankful to their parents, siblings, and other relatives in helping them raise their child in a time where there is no one they could rely on. The help of their family decreases the pressure from the challenges they face on time management as well as finances which is a big thing for them.

Lastly, the former partner's relative, solo parents have varying situations regarding this. The common thing to them is that they have minimal to no participation while raising the child. However, some solo parents are not closing the door for their kids to get to know the other side of their relatives, proving how soft their heart is when it comes to their children.

THEMES 6: Legislation on the Grassroots View section talks about how the participant views the Republic Act 8972 or the Solo Parent Welfare Act of 2000. It comprises their initial understanding and the scope of their knowledge on the said legislation. It shows on the result that most of them have the surface-level awareness of the law or that they know that such law exists, but the underlying clauses are not clear to them. Meanwhile, among those who have ideas about it only see it as monetary where in fact, there is no clause on the law about such, but it is the local government ordinance that imposes such perks. On the other hand, some are not even aware that through the paid parental leave they are entitled to, they are already benefiting from the law. Flexible working hours happen to be the most uncommon benefits of the law that solo parent employees are experiencing.

THEMES 7: Experts View on Solo Parents revealed how the experts, the people from key informants, see what a solo parent is. This is to counter-validate how such institutions

view the sector. The resource persons verbalized how they understand what a solo parent is on which they have the similarity of citing RA 8972.

THEMES 8: Rough Road to Flatten discusses the different gaps and loopholes that both focus group discussion participants and key informants saw in the current legislative that we have. On the side of the NCSP, their Secretary-General revealed that there are a lot of gaps in the law since it is already a 20-year-old law. Some of those include the age of dependency of the child to solo parents. Since the implementation of Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 which gave birth to K-12 curriculum, the limit that a child must be dependent to the parents at the age of 17 years old is already obsolete as it takes now until 21 years old for a student to finish a typical 4-year degree in college with the new education curriculum. Another problem that he mentioned was the lack of a penalizing clause in RA 8972 for the company who violates the provisions for solo parents. This is somehow encouraging companies to just ignore the law. Another one is the lack of established and centralized data about the population of solo parents. This is also connected to how the data is fluid, meaning it varies rapidly, due to the sudden relationship a solo parent may enter that makes him/her unqualified for the benefits. Legislative staff of Sen. Risa Hontiveros reiterated, on the other hand, how these gaps are being addressed with a bill the senator is crafting to bridge the obsolescence of RA 8972. Another problem with this law is the one-year residency rule of the solo parent employee to the company as a requirement in availing provisions like parental leave and flexible working schedule, that automatically put employees in BPO companies at a great disadvantage since the tenure in such companies rarely marks a year and/or beyond due to the trend of BPO-hopping among BPO agents. On the other hand, solo parent participants requested if the law could include uniform discounts for toddler's necessities as they find it an impactful provision.

THEMES 9: Silent Voices to Amplify concluded the thematic analysis of this study collating the messages of solo parents to the government and to their fellow solo parents, as well.

IV. DISCUSSIONS

This study that particularly focused on solo parent workers in the business process outsourcing (BPO) companies managed to achieve its goal to create a narrative based on the stories of solo parents themselves and how the implementation of Republic Act 8972 or the Solo Parents Welfare Act of 2000 affects them.

There are a lot of discoveries found in the course of this study. The proponents were able to identify current reasons why solo parents chose the path of solo parenting. There are revelations wherein desertion is not the only drive that a parent goes solo; there are personal choices, agreement, and death as well. More to it, this study revealed how solo

parents juggle with many challenges in their life. The study also highlighted how people around them can affect or help them in their solo parent journey. The company where they belong is one of the important parts of their life, however, they are being distracted inevitably in the work by the effects of other challenges which also affects their performance. A non-government organization (NGO) about solo parent workers believe that if treated and addressed uniquely depending on their case, the company will benefit a lot from investing in the well-being of solo parents since they are hardworking for their kids.

This study revealed different narratives on how solo parents face challenges, how the people around them affect them, and the instances they consider as the most challenging as the solo parent. The study also gave space for different institutions to define solo parents in respect to what their organization believes and present the current challenges that the concerned sector is facing.

Moreover, the study was able to gauge the solo parent participants' knowledge on the legislation that mainly concerns them – Republic Act 8972 or the Solo Parent Welfare Act of 2000. It is noticeable that most of them are not that knowledgeable regarding the other provisions of the law. Upon explaining it to them, they were able to identify certain gaps present in the 20-year-old legislation and suggested it.

There are motions in the Congress about the amendments of the said law and the researchers are hoping that this study can provide an additional stepping stone towards a corporate world and a society that levels the moral of the solo parents just like any standard parents in the country.

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