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## Exploitation and the Decision to Migrate: The Role of Abuse and Unfavorable Working Conditions in Filipina Domestic Workers' Desire to Return Abroad

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## ABSTRACT

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# **Exploitation and the Decision to Migrate: The Role of Abuse and Unfavorable Working Conditions in Filipina Domestic Workers' Desire to Return Abroad**

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries host at least 2.4 million foreign domestic workers, who are legally excluded from national labor laws and regulations, thus placing them in precarious social, legal, and economic conditions in the GCC labor markets. Despite the recent growth of academic scholarship on domestic work in the GCC and beyond, little attention has been paid to absconding foreign domestic workers and the complex role abuse plays in determining their future decision to migrate. This paper examines the likelihood that Filipina domestic workers will migrate after absconding from their previous employer. Applying a unique dataset of absconding Filipina domestic workers collected at the Philippine Labor Office (POLO) in Qatar between 2013 - 2015, we find that abuse and poor working conditions do not act as deterrents for future migration. Paradoxically, absconding domestic workers who have been financially abused are more likely to want to return and seek employment abroad. This study offers empirical and theoretical insights into the connection between migrant exploitation and domestic workers' desire to migrate once again.

**JEL Classification:** J61, J68, O15

**Keywords:** migration, absconding, domestic workers, GCC countries, abuse, mobility

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## Introduction

Contemporary scholarship on domestic work has grown in recent decades, examining the transnational lives and conditions of foreign domestic workers operating in a dynamic, globalized world (Hochschild, 2000; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2002; Anderson, 2000; Parennas, 2001; Gamburd, 2000; and Abu-Habib, 2008; Fernandez and de Regt, 2014; Jureidini, 2017; Paul, 2017). In the context of the Gulf countries, researchers examine the domestic work sector through the *Kafala* sponsorship system in the context of labor exploitations and human rights (Jureidini, 2004; Najjar, 2002; Sabban, 2002; Shah, 2002, 2004; Fernandez, 2014), human trafficking (Parennas and Silvey, 2016; Mahdavi, 2014; Vlieger, 2012), slavery (Halabi, 2008), conflicts and power asymmetry (Vlieger, 2011; Malit and Naufal, 2016). Other researchers have emphasized the role of transnational recruitment practices, which often reinforce ongoing legal vulnerabilities and exploitations in the labor market (Agunias, 2012; Jureidini, 2016). While current literature provides insight into the complex and structural vulnerabilities of *live-in* foreign domestic workers in the Gulf countries and beyond, further empirical investigation is necessary to explore the transnational lives and conditions of *absconding* foreign domestic workers in the Gulf countries.<sup>1</sup> Though many scholars have already provided insight as to why foreign domestic workers migrate to the Gulf countries — often through qualitative studies (Anbesse et al, 2009; Fernandez, 2010; Mildner and Matsuda, 2013; Malit and Naufal, 2016) — they have largely ignored the unique and complex lives of absconding foreign domestic workers, and no empirical studies have interrogated the complex relationship between migrant exploitation and future migration decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> Absconding domestic workers are considered illegal domestic workers who breach the labor and employment contracts with their sponsors by running away from their employers' workplace facility (i.e. home/villa). These absconding domestic workers are different from the regular live-in domestic workers because they have an invalid immigration status or have ongoing labor/immigration cases filed against them by their employer. Therefore, absconding domestic workers are not only legally vulnerable but also are criminalized in the GCC countries.

In this paper, we apply a unique data set of absconding Filipina domestic workers collected at the Philippine Labor Office (POLO) in Qatar between 2013-2015 to examine the role abuse (i.e. financial, physical, social, psychological etc.) plays in domestic workers' future migration decision. This particular study is relevant for various empirical and theoretical reasons. First, among the nearly 25 million migrants in the GCC labor market, absconding domestic workers comprise the most hidden and legally vulnerable population due to their immigration status. Absconding domestic workers who are illegally employed are particularly vulnerable to the abuse of their employer. For example, employers who hire absconding domestic workers are able to limit or eliminate the day off of their employees or prohibit their phone usage. Absconding domestic workers are also often forced to work numerous hours with limited social interaction, and, because they are not part of formal employment, they lack clear job descriptions, paystubs, and work records<sup>2</sup> (Shah et al, 2002; International Labour Organization (ILO), 2013). Because of their immigration status, absconding workers are also often confined to their employer's household as they are heavily monitored by local police and immigration authorities. Thus, it is difficult to collect data on absconding domestic workers because they fear exposing their identities and risking potential deportation. They are also often restricted by governments for national security purposes.<sup>3</sup>

Second, foreign domestic workers (specifically absconding populations) often face institutional, regulatory, and policy exclusions from the receiving state's governing labor laws and

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<sup>2</sup> It is not uncommon to find multiple domestic workers within the same household. Often those workers are related (a mother and her daughter; sisters or even cousins). If not related, workers are actually wary of each other and prefer to limit daily interaction.

<sup>3</sup> In Qatar, the vast majority of Filipina domestic workers do not have a reported day off from their sponsor, thus preventing them from interacting in public spaces. There are some cases, however, where Filipina domestic workers obtain a day-off from their employers, and they typically can be seen in Catholic churches, malls, Filipino-dominated supermarkets and other public spaces where most Filipinos collectively spend their time in Qatar.

services (Shah 2002, 2004; Fernandez, 2014; Malit, Jr. and Ghafoor, 2014).<sup>4</sup> Unlike workers in the private sector, foreign domestic workers find it difficult to access legal mediation, dispute or conciliation services available within the host country government services because they are excluded from the national labor laws. Alternatively, foreign domestic workers often rely on their sending governments' services, such as their labor mediation processes or pro bono legal services, which help them claim some labor rights in the host country.

Absconding migrants have three choices when they leave their employers. They can stay in the GCC country undetected, working and living illegally; they can report to local law enforcement; or find temporary refuge in the worker's embassy or consulate. No matter which path they choose, however, absconding domestic workers in the GCC countries are categorized as illegal migrants and are subjected to fines, jail time, and immediate deportation, further contributing to their precarious social, economic, and legal status in the GCC.

This paper's contributions to migration literature are twofold. First, the case study adds academic rigor to previous scholarship on domestic work in the Gulf countries by providing empirical evidence from the largest sample size ever collected on absconding domestic workers in Qatar. Second, the study appears to be the first case study that examines the relationship between migrant exploitation and future migration in the context of the GCC domestic work sector. Therefore, the study has the potential to provide a more complete picture of the complex roles and implications of abuse on migrants' willingness to migrate again. These empirical findings are important for both scholars and policymakers as they attempt to address the many consequences of migrant exploitation and future migration decision-making logic. The study is divided into four sections. The first section explores the concept of contract servitude and the Kafala Sponsorship

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<sup>4</sup> Though there are no specific statistics on domestic workers in the Gulf region, news sources estimate the number of domestic workers to be at least 3 million in the GCC region.

System, situating the case of Filipina absconding domestic workers in Qatar. The second section highlights the migration context in Qatar and the field challenges encountered when conducting data collection on absconding domestic workers. Next, we present data, analysis and results. The concluding section offers empirical, theoretical and policy implications on the existing migration literature.

### **Theorizing Contract Servitude and the *Kafala* Sponsorship System**

In the GCC countries, the *Kafala* Sponsorship System is a government policy which regulates, manages, and monitors the employment, residency, and mobility of migrant populations in the domestic labor market (Gardner, 2010). Bales (1999) argues that the concept of contract servitude is fundamentally based on “the complete control of a person, for economic exploitation, by violence, or the threat of violence.” These forms of control—as executed through legal, institutional, and administrative means—play a critical role in the daily power struggles and vulnerabilities migrant workers face in the global economy. Jureidini and Moukarbel (2004) further add that contract servitude is “where contracts are ‘legal fictions’ rather than legally binding employment agreements, and thus conceal what are in reality conditions of servitude.” Parallel to Bales’ theoretical notion of contract servitude, Miller (2006) expounds that “desperation is seen as a primary factor in leading people to be tricked or forced into servitude,” and therefore it becomes a source of power for employers to control the domestic worker either through violence or threat in order to achieve his/her economic objectives. Thus, domestic workers become legally vulnerable as employers essentially “own” them—specifically through contractual agreement—legitimized through “control and the use of violence to sustain control” (Bales 1999; Jureidini and Moukarbel 2004).



Bale's (1999) theoretical framework on contract servitude illuminates the problematic nature of the *Kafala* Sponsorship System in GCC countries and other countries in the Middle East and the North Africa (MENA) region (Jureidini 2003, 2004; Jureidini and Mourkabel 2004). The restrictive conditions embedded in the *Kafala* Sponsorship System, combined with the prevailing power asymmetry between employers and migrants that often lead to violence (or the threat of violence), have become the foundation for contract servitude. In a cross-national comparison of Sri Lankan domestic workers' experiences (before their departure and after they return to Sri Lanka), Munira (1999) concludes that "contractual bondage often leads to exploitation" because employers and agents often violate contractual terms and obligations offered to workers, while the labor rights (i.e. working conditions, minimum wage, ability to switch jobs) of domestic workers were often restricted or absent.. Though these conclusions come from one particular case study, other research indicates that foreign domestic workers' in the GCC countries, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Saudi Arabia, and Qatar experience similar worker oppression (Sabban 2001; Mowbray 2003; Sherry 2004; Wickramesekara, 2004; Degorge 2006; US State Department 2007; Halabi 2009). The Kafala system combined with the exclusion from the governing labor laws, particularly on mediation, arbitration and conciliation services, deepen domestic workers' precarious status in the domestic market.

Contractual bondage has the strongest potential to exploit foreign migrant workers and empower employers through the use of legal and administrative methods: passport confiscation, contract substitution, and the denial of fundamental labor and human rights. In a fieldwork assessment in the GCC countries, Gardner (2014) examines the normalization of passport confiscation in Qatar and its prevalence among migrant domestic workers. The confiscation of legal documents is intended to control the mobility rights of domestic workers; however, it also

has the secondary consequence of facilitating the loss of workers' identity and status. This administrative control is consistent with Bales's (1999) conception of contract servitude, and it highlights how the sponsor or employer (acting through the agency of an owner-holder) violates host countries' laws that restrict the mobility and labor rights of foreign migrant workers, while sustaining long-term exploitation.

Existing scholarship clearly identifies foreign domestic workers' vulnerabilities, legal and cultural exclusion in host countries, and the impact of labor rights exclusions on the well-being of migrant domestic workers (Chammartin 2004; Human Rights Watch 2010; ILO 2013). It also examines the brokers/agents role in sustaining exploitation (Shah 2004; Jureidni 2003, 2014; Fernandez 2011, 2014). Although Bales's (1999) notion of contract servitude has been linked with the GCC countries' *Kafala* system, academic scholarship has paid attention to why foreign domestic workers continue to return to the GCC region. With the rise of social media and the declining cost of communication, migrants all over the world have continued to strengthen their connections with families and friends in their countries of origin and pass on information about working conditions in the host country. Current literature has examined only small samples of ethnographic accounts of absconding domestic workers abuse, making it difficult to draw inferences. By analyzing a large sample of absconding Filipina domestic workers in Qatar, this paper fills an important empirical gap, providing insights about the empirical determinants of domestic work migration in the GCC and other destination countries.

### **Research Context and Data Constraints in Analyzing Absconding Filipina Domestic Workers in Qatar and other GCC countries**

Since gaining independence in 1971, Qatar has become a key migrant destination – especially for overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) – in the GCC and the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

region (Philippine Overseas Employment Agency 2016). Of the 2.4 million foreign migrants in 2015, OFWs in Qatar totaled more than 200,000 representing nearly 10% of the total Qatar migrant population, excluding tourists and undocumented migrants. In 2015, the Philippine Overseas Labor Office (POLO) reported the number of legal Filipina domestic workers to be above 30,000, representing 18% of the total OFW population in Qatar. Private sector workers comprised the vast majority of OFWs: 13% professionals, 50% skilled workers, 17% semi-skilled workers, and 2% low-skilled workers.<sup>5</sup> Thus, Filipina domestic workers represent one of the largest migrant populations not only among OFW populations but also in the overall labor market in Qatar, the GCC and the MENA Region.

[INSERT FIGURE 1: ABOUT HERE]

As the number of absconding Filipina domestic workers continues to increase, they have become a critical policy concern, posing both regulatory and political challenges for the Philippine and Qatari governments. Between 2010 and 2015, 9,059 absconding Filipina domestic workers ran away from their local employers/sponsors and reported to the Philippine embassy/POLO office in Doha, Qatar, constituting a large share of absconding Filipina domestic work population in the GCC. Between 2011 and 2013, absconding Filipina domestic workers in Qatar represented 19.43% of the total number of absconding Filipina workers in the GCC region alone.<sup>6</sup> From the perspective of the GCC and MENA, the significance of the absconding domestic work population is even more critically relevant. As Figure 1 highlights, between 2010 and 2013, GCC-based absconding Filipina domestic workers represented an average of 74.5% of the total absconding Filipina

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<sup>5</sup> These skill breakdowns represent all OFWs working in the fields of construction, retail, administration, medical and engineering related fields.

<sup>6</sup> Due to lack of government data collection and transparency, we were only able to obtain data on absconding OFW populations between 2010 and 2015 for Qatar, and 2010-2013 for other GCC and MENA countries.

domestic workers globally, while on a MENA-based calculation scale, 90.75% of MENA-based absconding Filipina domestic workers were reported. Therefore, the study of the absconding Filipina domestic worker population in Qatar and the MENA region is significant and offers newer empirical perspectives on the motivations and future migration decisions of absconding migrant domestic workers.

## **Data and Analysis**

This paper uses a unique data set that was collected between June and August in 2013 from the POLO Office in Doha, Qatar. The original data set includes a total of 303 absconding Filipina domestic workers who took refuge in the POLO Office in Doha for a variety of reasons. The survey includes questions on demographics, work experience, reasons for running away from their last employer, and future migration plans.<sup>7</sup> The authors conducted the data collection with face-to-face interviews (mostly in Tagalog) with domestic workers. Each domestic worker was asked to complete a hard copy of the survey and was also given a blue book to write down personal narratives of their work experience and decisions to leave their employer's household. One of the authors was present during the entire data collection process and was able to answer questions. This paper presents the findings from the quantitative section of the survey with additional insights from the qualitative blue book discussion. The findings in this paper are specific to the sample group that was interviewed between June and August of 2013, which is not necessarily representative of the Filipina domestic worker population in Qatar, the Gulf, or even domestic workers in the region as a whole. Furthermore, during the course of the data collection, the holy

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<sup>7</sup> Absconding and illegal workers in Qatar are deported back to their countries and are often banned from re-entering. It is unclear whether this ban is permanent or temporary (a one year ban) and whether it also applies to other GCC countries. From our findings, none of the absconding domestic workers we sampled were aware of this potential ban, hence their response about future migration plans is unrestricted.

month of Ramadan occurred between July 8th and August 7th of 2013. Anecdotal evidence suggests that the absconding rate of domestic workers is even higher during Ramadan because of the extra work given to domestic workers during the month. That said, the results in this paper offer new insights about the composition of Filipina domestic workers in Doha and also on migration determinants for absconding domestic workers.

Our paper begins with descriptive statistics to familiarize our readers with the data set. Table 1 presents a summary of demographics from the sample. All of the people interviewed were female domestic workers. One observation was dropped because of an age outlier of 63, leaving us with 302 observations and the oldest worker being 50 years old. The average worker's age is around 32 and the youngest domestic worker is 20 years old. Most workers (66.9 percent) have a high school degree with a quarter of them having obtained some college education. The sample is divided fairly evenly between single women (38.4 percent), married women (31.8 percent) and separated women (29.8 percent). Around 76.8 percent of the women have at least one child and 33.8 percent have more than two children in the Philippines. More than half of the domestic workers in the sample have previous work experience abroad; on average, they have worked 26.4 months of work experience abroad before moving to Qatar. The mean monthly salary is 238.4 USD with a high of 467.0 and a low of 137.4 USD. Although not reported in Table 1, the median monthly salary in the sample is 233.5 USD. Both the mean and median monthly salaries are significantly below the 400 USD minimum salary, which is legally mandated by the Philippines government for Filipina domestic workers in the Gulf (Doha News Team, 2012).<sup>8</sup> In our sample, only 5 out of the 302 absconding domestic workers earned more than the 400 USD threshold.

[INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

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<sup>8</sup> Interestingly, labor agencies suggest that in 2012 Filipina domestic workers earned on average 247 USD a month, a value almost identical to our sample (Doha News Team, 2012).

[INSERT TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Table 2 illustrates previous work experience in more detail. For instance, only 10.6 percent have worked in multiple countries before moving to the GCC region. Around 31.8 percent of the sample has worked in the GCC region before, while 16.2 percent has no GCC experience before moving to Qatar (their main destinations includes Asian countries, such as Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia). Domestic workers who have previously worked in the GCC have direct personal experience with, and of knowledge of the *Kafala* system, which could play a fundamental role in their future decision to return to the GCC for employment purposes.

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Table 3 depicts the demographics of the employer and/or sponsor. We further assume that the employer is also the sponsor and therefore interchangeably use both terms throughout the paper. The large majority of employers are Arabs (92.0 percent), of which Qatari families constitute 64.9 percent. Around 24.8 percent of the employers are females. These figures should be interpreted with caution since domestic workers might assume that the actual employer is the person with whom they interact on a daily basis. In addition, more than 62.6 percent of domestic workers reported the education level of their sponsor, which indicates a proxy for some level of communication between the employer and the domestic worker. On average, employers have three children, and, as expected, a large majority (79.1 percent) of households in the sample include more than one child.

[INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

Table 4 summarizes the domestic workers' main reasons for migrating to Qatar. The vast majority of domestic workers migrated to support families back home (77.2 percent) while almost

one third are working to pay debt. Some (16.0 percent) have moved away to avoid family problems and others (11.9 percent) moved because they perceive working in Doha as a means to increase their long-term professional training. Reported migration reasons are not mutually exclusive; most of the workers in the sample have moved away not only to support family but also to pay debt from recruitment or placement fees, most likely incurred during the migration process. None of these reasons are specific to Qatar and therefore likely apply to any other labor migrant destination, particularly in the GCC context. Nearly all domestic workers in the sample migrated to Doha on an employment visa through a labor manpower agency (95.7 percent); the remaining migrants either entered Qatar on a tourist/visit visa or were directly hired by their sponsor. This migration outcome is expected since securing a visit visa to Qatar (or any GCC country) can be extremely difficult and requires income-based sponsorship from someone earning a monthly income above a certain threshold. On average, the cost of the visa is 266.5 USD, which is slightly above the average monthly salary in our sample.

[INSERT TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE]

The main objective of the paper is to examine the likelihood that a migrant will want to return abroad for work after absconding from their employer and reporting abuse by them. The first four tables summarize the characteristics of absconding domestic workers in Qatar. To better understand the sample and their reasons for absconding, we look at the working conditions of their previous employer (Table 5). Almost 90 percent (89.1 percent) of the absconding domestic workers surrendered their passport to their employer, which is consistent with various international media and rights-based reports. This is a common practice in the GCC region where employers often retain domestic workers' passports (Auwal, 2010). Less than 3 percent of the sample migrants reported having a weekly day off. Domestic workers are regularly expected to work

seven days a week with a daily average of 17.3 work hours per day. Some absconding domestic workers in our sample reported working around the clock, particularly during special holidays like Ramadan or special events such as the birth of a child. The next table examines the reasons for absconding.

[INSERT TABLE 5 ABOUT HERE]

During field data collection, absconding domestic workers were asked about the reasons why they decided to leave their most recent employer. Table 6 places the recorded reasons into four main categories: financial abuse, physical abuse, working conditions and other reasons. The financial abuse category includes non-payment, salary deduction and salary underpayment (from initial contract agreement). The physical abuse group encompasses maltreatment, rape (or attempted rape) and sexual harassment. Working conditions include lack of food, working long hours, job or contract substitution (their job was different from the provided description). Finally, the data reveal that domestic workers also abscond due to other reasons: transfer of employer, end of contract, promise of a higher salary at another employment opportunity, and other personal reasons (such as pregnancy). Table 6 shows the percentages of absconding domestic workers who have listed one of the four main reasons to leave their last employer, hence the percentages do not add up to one. From the data, we conclude that poor working conditions are present in 77.8% of the workers' reasons to abscond while leaving for other reasons appears the least often.

In Table 7, we disaggregate the findings in Table 6 to identify single and varied combinations of reasons for absconding. The majority of our sample (77.4 percent) lists more than one reason (Table 7) that influenced their decision to abscond, and among the most prevalent combinations includes financial reasons and physical and working conditions. More than 22.2 percent of the sample listed these reasons together. Other combinations include financial and



working condition (12.3 percent), physical and working conditions (10.3 percent) and just one reason as other (10.6 percent). In general, domestic workers mainly leave due to multiple reasons (33.0 and 36.1 for two and three reasons) and not just one particular reason (22.6 percent). Most importantly, however, only 10.6 percent of absconding domestic workers left for reasons unrelated to difficult working conditions or work abuse (financial or physical).

Because migrants listed different reasons for absconding, it was difficult to identify a dominant motive. To better understand the complexity of their motives, we ranked the categories in Table 8 by the severity of the reported reasons. In the financial column, we assume if a domestic worker has listed a financial reason among her lists, then financial reasons overcome all other reasons. For the same column, a physical reason is recorded, only if the domestic worker listed a physical abuse reason to abscond but at the same time did not mention a financial abuse irrespective of the other remaining reasons. For working conditions as reasons to be recorded, the domestic worker would have had to list it as a reason to abscond, while neither mentioning financial nor physical abuse reasons regardless of the other potential reasons. The same reasoning applies to the remaining columns. This ranking allows us to build a distribution of reasons that add up to one within each ranking. The ranking is based on the assumption of the existence of contributing factors and a direct reason to the decision to abscond.<sup>9</sup> Table 8 shows that almost 60 percent (59.9 percent) of our sample has listed financial abuse as one of the factors in their decision to leave the sponsor's household. If we assume that physical abuse overcomes financial abuse, then one of every four domestic workers believes that physical abuse was the main trigger for their

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<sup>9</sup> We implicitly assume throughout that domestic workers rank reasons to abscond in terms of severity the following way: financial, physical, working conditions and other. We relax this assumption in the remaining columns in Table 8 while still assuming that any type of abuse is worse than tough working conditions and personal reasons to abscond. This assumption is based on the qualitative dimension of the sample and also on our conversation with the absconding domestic workers during the data collection. We further list every ranking combination for all four absconding reasons in Table A1 in the appendix.

decision to leave. Together, financial and physical abuse form 77.8 percent of our sample. Only 10.6 percent of domestic workers left their job for personal and other reasons.

[INSERT TABLE 6 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 7 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 8 ABOUT HERE]

[INSERT TABLE 9 ABOUT HERE]

Finally, the survey asks absconding domestic workers whether they plan to return abroad for work. About 60.9 percent plan to migrate again for work in the future (Table 9). Half of the sample would consider going back to the GCC and a relatively smaller share (26.8 percent) of the sample sees the GCC as their next work destination. Other non-GCC destinations, which mainly include Asian countries, such as Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore, were also identified as possible locations for future employment. Given that 77.8 percent of the sample (Table 8) experienced some type of abuse, we questioned the determinants of migrants' desire to return abroad and whether being abused or the type of abuse they experienced impacted their desire to migrate again. The next section presents the results.

## **Results**

Table 10 presents the results from a Probit regression model that takes into consideration the binary nature of the dependent variable: one, if the domestic worker answered yes to the plan to return abroad for work after exiting Qatar and zero, otherwise. Table 10 also includes regressions that reflect six different rankings of the reasons to abscond. Since domestic workers have absconded due to a variety of reasons, it is difficult to identify the most salient reason prompting their decision to leave. To help us better understand their main motivation for leaving,

we merge financial and physical reasons under abuse and keep working conditions and other reasons as separate. In Table 10, the first column, Ranking 1, ranks abuse first, working conditions second, and other reasons third. Ranking 2 ranks working conditions, abuse, and other reasons. Ranking 3 ranks other reasons, abuse, and working conditions. Ranking 4 ranks abuse, other reasons, and working conditions. Ranking 5 ranks working conditions, other, and abuse. Ranking 6 ranks other, working conditions, and abuse.<sup>10</sup> The Probit model fits a regression of the likelihood to return abroad for work on a set of control variables from the survey. We control for age, education level, marital status, children status and previous work abroad experience for the domestic worker. We also include the cost of the visa and monthly salary as a way to proxy for the domestic workers' financial capabilities. The regression includes two characteristics of the employer: whether the employer is from the GCC, the number of children living at the employer's household (we also square this to capture non-linearity in the effect of the size of the family). Lastly, we also include regional dummies to account for potential differences in the region of origin in the Philippines (local unemployment, poverty rates, size, location, etc.). The variable of interest is abuse, which takes on the value of one if the domestic worker has absconded due to financial or physical abuse rather than unfavorable working conditions or other (personal) issues.

[INSERT TABLE 10 ABOUT HERE]

The results suggest that age and last monthly salary have negative effects on the likelihood of returning abroad for all specifications (except Ranking 2 and Ranking 4 for salary). The marginal effects at the mean say that runaway domestic workers who are one year older are about

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<sup>10</sup> The dependent variable is constructed from the answer to the following question: "Do you plan to work in other countries after exiting from Qatar?" Therefore, the variable actually measures the intention for future migration to work for those in our sample. Often, absconding domestic workers from the Gulf are banned from the country where the immigration offense occurred. It is not clear if the ban is applicable to other GCC countries and whether workers will actually be able to come back to the Gulf.

2.2 percent less likely to return abroad for work. A \$100 USD increase in monthly salary lowers the likelihood of returning abroad by around 20 percent. Both results are reasonable given that domestic work is physically demanding and also given that salaries help workers meet debt needs while supporting their families back home. If a domestic worker had a higher salary at the time they absconded, it is more likely that they have less debt or more savings and therefore are less motivated to return to Qatar to seek work.

When migrants had work experience abroad previous to their employment when they absconded, there was an increase of about 28 percent that they would want to leave the Philippines. The level of education, marital status, and parental status did not seem to be associated with an increased likelihood that a migrant would want to return to work abroad. In terms of the migrants' personal determinants, only age, previous work abroad experience, and salary were linked to the decision to migrate again.

The number of children an employer has is actually linked to a higher likelihood of returning abroad. This is not surprising since domestic workers often form a special bond with the children of the employer, but more children also results in more work. We tested the connection between number of children and likelihood to return by including the squared value of the number of children. The coefficient on the squared variable is negative, highlighting the presence of non-linearity in the relationship between the likelihood of returning and the size of the family of the employer.

The variable of interest is the reason for absconding. Abuse is a dummy that takes on the value of one if the runaway domestic worker has indicated financial or physical abuse as one of their reasons for absconding. Abuse takes on the value of zero if unfavorable working conditions or other reasons were behind the decision to leave their most recent employer. Being abused

increases the probability of returning abroad for work by a range of 26 to 38 percent relative to leaving for personal problems. This effect of abuse is smaller (around 21 percent) relative to leaving for unfavorable working conditions. While this result initially seems counter intuitive, one could argue that domestic workers who have left due to abuse have had their trip to the Middle East unexpectedly cut short, for reasons that are not initiated by the worker. The coefficient on leaving for unfavorable working conditions is also positive and significant relative to leaving for personal reasons (the marginal effect ranges from 28 to 40 percent) depending on the ranking of the reasons to leave. When we ranked leaving for personal reasons as the main motivation behind absconding, (Rankings 5 and 6) the significance level of working conditions disappears. Table 10 suggests that domestic workers are more likely to want to migrate again if they have left their previous employer due to abuse or very hard working conditions than for personal reasons.

In the last Table, we disaggregate abuse into financial and physical abuse. Table 11 presents the four different specifications. Each specification uses a dummy for the reason to abscond setting the dummy variable to 1 if the person listed that specific reason for leaving, otherwise the dummy is 0. The findings in Table 11 confirm the results of Table 10; abuse (whether financial or physical) is associated with about 13 (physical abuse) to 18 percent (financial abuse) increase in the likelihood of wanting to return relative to everything else. Unfavorable working conditions are associated with about 23 percent increase (relative to all other reasons) in the likelihood that a domestic worker will want to migrate again.<sup>11</sup>

[INSERT TABLE 11 ABOUT HERE]

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<sup>11</sup> We also ran Probit regressions with each possible combination of ranking for reasons to abscond (24 in total) and the results are consistent. Abuse and bad working conditions are more likely to increase future migration relative to absconding due to personal reasons. The results are available from the authors upon request.

## Conclusion

This paper examines the likelihood that absconding Filipina domestic workers in Qatar will migrate again for work after absconding and contributes to the literature on the determinants of migration and the debate on contract servitude in the GCC region by introducing empirical evidence on absconding domestic workers in Qatar. Using a unique dataset from the Philippine government's POLO unit, we found that abuse (financial and physical) and unfavorable working conditions are positively related to wanting to migrate again relative to other reasons for absconding (transfer of employer, end of contract, or personal reasons such as pregnancy). In addition, absconding domestic workers who have been financially abused are more likely to return and seek employment abroad relative to those who have been physically abused. The empirical results provide perspective on the diverse types and effects of abuses on absconding domestic work populations in Qatar and other GCC countries. Absconding domestic workers view financial abuse as the worst type of abuse because it directly prevents them from earning and supporting their family in the country of origin. Age and monthly salary variables are negatively associated with the likelihood of returning abroad for work, while previous experience working abroad increases the chances of future migration. The empirical findings have important policy implications as they shed light on a vulnerable migrant group that academic scholars, government and international organization policymakers have paid little attention to in recent decades in the Gulf region.<sup>12</sup> The aforementioned empirical findings further suggest that abuse and poor working conditions do not deter workers from future migration and in fact be positively linked to future migration movements. The willingness of workers to accept abuse shifts the bargaining power to destination

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<sup>12</sup> Calzado (2007) acknowledges that the Philippine government has developed various protective mechanisms by imposing minimum wage laws in destination countries and bans on receiving governments that fail to comply with domestic and international labor standards.

countries and weakens the negotiating position of countries of origin in the international labor market.

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Figure 1

% of Total Runaways from the Philippines in GCC and MENA

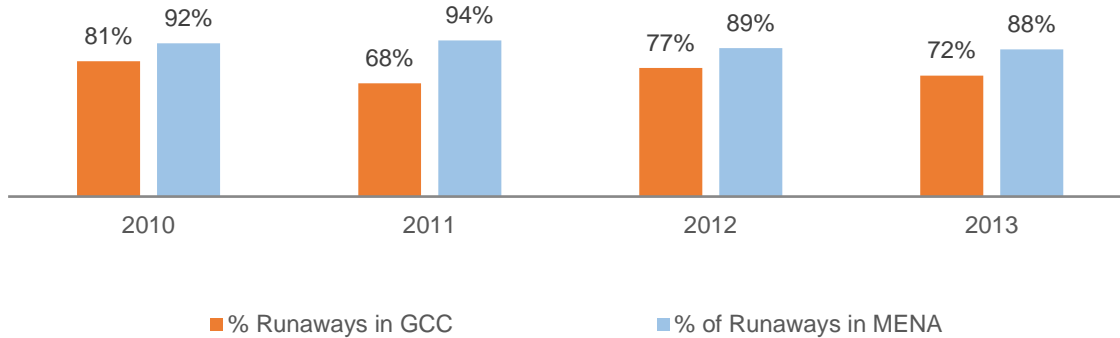


Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Absconding Domestic Workers' Data Set

Age	Mean	32.5	Min	20	Max	50
Monthly Salary (\$)	Mean	238.4	Min	137.4	Max	467.0
Education	Elementary	8.6%	High School	66.9%	College Level	24.5%
Marital Status	Single	38.4%	Married	31.8%	Separated	29.8%
At least 1 Child	76.8%		Previous Work Abroad	53.6%		
At least 2 Children	59.6%		Mean # of Month if Work Abroad	26.4		
			Sample	302		

Notes: 1. Being separated also includes being divorced and widowed. 2. Data on the monthly salary in USD was calculated from Qatari Riyal (QAR) which has a fixed exchange rate to the US Dollar: 1 QAR is equal to 0.27 USD so 871.8 QAR is around 235 USD.

Table 2: Previous Work Experience (%)

Previous Work Abroad Experience	53.6
Multiple Country Work Abroad Experience	10.6
Previous GCC Work Experience	37.4
Previous Exclusive GCC Work Experience	31.8
Previous non-GCC Work Experience	21.9
Previous Exclusive non-GCC Work Experience	16.2

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of the Employer

Country of Origin (%)		Education Level (%)	
GCC	64.9	Worker Knows	62.6
Non-GCC Arab	27.1		
South Asian	3.6		
Western	2.0	Employer's Gender	
Other	2.3	Female	24.8
		Employer's # of Children	
Mean	3.1	% with 0 Children	16.2
Min	0	% with 1 Child	4.6
Max	7	% with more than 1 Child	79.1

Notes: 1. While the GCC category includes all six countries of the Gulf region (Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates), almost all employers are from Qatar. Non-GCC Arab states include Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan, Iraq, Palestine and Syria. Western category includes employers from Australia, UK and US. Other includes Iran and African countries.

Table 4: Migration Experience

Why Work in Qatar (%)		Visa to Qatar (%)			
Support Family	77.2	Through Agency			95.7
Pay Debt	30.1	Other			4.3
Avoid Family Problems	16.0				
Professional Training	11.9				
		Mean	Min	Max	
		Visa Cost (USD)	266.5	23.6	942.3

Notes: 1. Under visa to Qatar, other includes those who came to Qatar on a tourist/visit visa and those who were moved to Qatar through a direct hire.

Table 5: Working Conditions

Surrendered Passport (%)	89.1	Mean	Min	Max	
		Number of Working Hours	17.3	8	24
Have a Day Off (%)	2.9				

Table 6: Recorded Reasons to Absconding

Financial	Salary not paid, deduction in salary, and / or underpayment	59.9%
Physical	Maltreatment, rape, and / or sexual harassment (verbal / physical)	52.9%
Working Conditions	Long working hours, lack of medical assistance, lack of food, and / or job substitution (from the advertised)	77.8%
Other	Personal (getting pregnant, etc.), transfer of employer, nearing end of contract, or promise of higher salary (at a different work opportunity)	39.4%

Table 7: Distribution of Reasons to Absconding (%)

1 reason		2 reasons		3 reasons		4 reasons	
Financial	1.7	Financial / Physical	3.9	Financial / Physical / Working Conditions	22.2	Financial / Physical / Working Conditions / Other	8.3
Physical	2.0	Financial / Working Conditions	12.3	Financial / Physical / Other	0.7		
Working Conditions	8.3	Financial / Other	2.3	Financial / Working Conditions / Other	8.6		
Other	10.6	Physical / Working Conditions	10.3	Physical / Working Conditions / Other	4.6		
		Physical / Other	0.9				
		Working Conditions / Other	3.3				
Total	22.6		33.0		36.1		8.3

Table 8: Ranking of Reasons to Abscond

Reasons	Financial 1 <sup>st</sup>	Physical 1 <sup>st</sup>	Working Conditions 1 <sup>st</sup>	Other 1 <sup>st</sup>	Abuse 1 <sup>st</sup>
Financial	59.9	24.8	8.6	40.1	77.8
Physical	17.9	53.0	3.0	12.2	
Working Conditions	11.6	11.6	77.8	8.3	11.6
Other	10.6	10.6	10.6	39.4	10.6

Notes: The 1<sup>st</sup> is a ranking of the reason to abscond. In the first column for instance, if a domestic worker has listed 3 different reasons which includes financial, then financial was assumed to be the decision trigger and therefore ranked 1<sup>st</sup>, followed by physical, working conditions and other reasons. Abuse includes both financial and physical as one category. All percentages add to a 100.

Table 9: Plans to Return

	Plans to Return
Abroad	60.9%
Abroad including Gulf	50.0%
Abroad to non-Gulf	34.1%
Abroad with no Specific Preference for Location	23.2%



Table 10: Determinants for Returning Abroad for Work

	Ranking 1	Ranking 2	Ranking 3	Ranking 4	Ranking 5	Ranking 6
Age	-0.058*** (0.0163) [-0.022]	-0.060*** (0.0163) [-0.023]	-0.056*** (0.0165) [-0.021]	-0.058*** (0.0165) [-0.022]	-0.062*** (0.0164) [-0.023]	-0.055*** (0.0161) [-0.020]
College	0.162 (0.2091) [0.062]	0.149 (0.2096) [0.056]	0.120 (0.2085) [0.045]	0.137 (0.2086) [0.052]	0.123 (0.2084) [0.046]	0.131 (0.2077) [0.049]
Single	0.094 (0.2158) [0.035]	0.072 (0.2157) [0.027]	0.117 (0.2181) [0.044]	0.125 (0.2152) [0.047]	0.044 (0.2186) [0.016]	0.096 (0.2136) [0.036]
Child Dummy	0.226 (0.2341) [0.085]	0.212 (0.2377) [0.080]	0.260 (0.2341) [0.098]	0.259 (0.2332) [0.097]	0.223 (0.2400) [0.084]	0.238 (0.2330) [0.089]
Previous Work Abroad	0.725*** (0.1951) [0.275]	0.745*** (0.1969) [0.281]	0.745*** (0.1927) [0.280]	0.731*** (0.1930) [0.276]	0.757*** (0.1963) [0.285]	0.766*** (0.1930) [0.288]
Visa Cost	0.001 (0.0005) [0.000]	0.001 (0.0006) [0.000]	0.001 (0.0005) [0.000]	0.001 (0.0005) [0.000]	0.001 (0.0006) [0.000]	0.001 (0.0006) [0.000]

Salary	-0.005 <sup>*</sup>	-0.004	-0.006 <sup>**</sup>	-0.006 <sup>**</sup>	-0.004	-0.006 <sup>**</sup>
	(0.0028)	(0.0028)	(0.0026)	(0.0027)	(0.0028)	(0.0026)
	[-0.002]	[-0.002]	[-0.002]	[-0.002]	[-0.001]	[-0.002]
GCC Employer	0.053	0.040	0.089	0.055	0.050	0.072
	(0.1753)	(0.1780)	(0.1747)	(0.1748)	(0.1785)	(0.1758)
	[0.020]	[0.015]	[0.033]	[0.020]	[0.018]	[0.027]
Employer's Children	0.664 <sup>***</sup>	0.674 <sup>***</sup>	0.737 <sup>***</sup>	0.688 <sup>***</sup>	0.690 <sup>***</sup>	0.751 <sup>***</sup>
	(0.1379)	(0.1367)	(0.1339)	(0.1370)	(0.1362)	(0.1330)
	[0.252]	[0.255]	[0.277]	[0.259]	[0.260]	[0.282]
(Employer's Children) <sup>2</sup>	-0.080 <sup>***</sup>	-0.082 <sup>***</sup>	-0.088 <sup>***</sup>	-0.082 <sup>***</sup>	-0.084 <sup>***</sup>	-0.089 <sup>***</sup>
	(0.0192)	(0.0190)	(0.0189)	(0.0192)	(0.0190)	(0.0187)
	[-0.030]	[-0.031]	[-0.033]	[-0.031]	[-0.031]	[-0.035]
Abuse	1.001 <sup>***</sup>	0.690 <sup>*</sup>	0.569 <sup>*</sup>	0.553 <sup>*</sup>	.	.
	(0.3189)	(0.3934)	(0.3178)	(0.3066)		
	[0.379]	[0.261]	[0.214]	[0.209]		
Working Conditions	0.737 <sup>*</sup>	1.049 <sup>***</sup>	.	.	0.221	0.146
	(0.3938)	(0.3137)			(0.3327)	(0.3450)
	[0.279]	[0.397]			[0.083]	[0.054]

Other Reasons	.	.	0.326	-0.001	-0.672*	-0.035
			(0.3267)	(0.3775)	(0.3919)	(0.3499)
			[0.122]	[-0.000]	[-0.254]	[-0.013]
Constant	0.610	0.596	1.007	1.132	1.313	1.352
	(0.8963)	(0.8802)	(0.8899)	(0.9094)	(0.9229)	(0.8863)
Regional Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	302	302	302	302	302	302

Notes: 1. Each ranking column determines the ranking of the first reason behind absconding. Ranking 1 ranks abuse first, working conditions second, and other reasons third. Ranking 2 ranks working conditions, abuse, and other reasons. Ranking 3 ranks other reasons, abuse, and working conditions. Ranking 4 ranks abuse, other reasons, and working conditions. Ranking 5 ranks working conditions, other, and abuse. Ranking 6 ranks other, working conditions, and abuse. The missing variable represents the category of reference. 2. Dependent variable is planning to return abroad for work regardless of the destination. 3. Coefficients are shown and robust standard errors are in parentheses. 4. Marginal effects in brackets are calculated at the mean. 5. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

Table 11: Determinants of Returning Abroad for Work by Reason of Absconding

	Financial	Physical	Working Conditions	Other
Reason to Abscond	0.479***	0.351***	0.608***	-0.163
	(0.1798)	(0.1677)	(0.2118)	(0.1703)
	[0.181]	[0.132]	[0.228]	[-0.061]
Regional Dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>N</i>	302	302	302	302

Notes: 1. Coefficients are shown and robust standard errors are in parentheses. 2. Marginal effects in brackets are calculated at the mean. 3. The dependent variable is for returning abroad for work regardless of the destination. 4. In each column, the reason to abscond was set to 1 and all other reasons set to zero. 5. The regression also controls for age, education, marital status, child status, previous work experience, visa cost and monthly salary as in Table 10. 6. \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$

## Appendix

Table A1: All Possible Ranking Combinations of Reasons to Abscond

	1 <sup>st</sup>	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3 <sup>rd</sup>	4 <sup>th</sup>
1	Financial 59.9%	Physical 17.8%	Working Conditions 11.6%	Other 10.6%
2	Financial 59.9%	Physical 17.8%	Other 13.9%	Working Conditions 8.3%
3	Financial 59.9%	Working Conditions 26.5%	Physical 2.9%	Other 10.6%
4	Financial 59.9%	Working Conditions 26.5%	Other 11.6%	Physical 1.9%
5	Financial 59.9%	Other 19.2%	Physical 12.2%	Working Conditions 8.3%
6	Financial 59.9%	Other 19.2%	Working Conditions 18.5%	Physical 1.9%
1	Physical 52.9%	Financial 24.8%	Working Conditions 11.6%	Other 10.6%
2	Physical 52.9%	Financial 24.8%	Other 13.9%	Working Conditions 8.3%
3	Physical 52.9%	Working Conditions 32.4%	Financial 3.9%	Other 10.6%
4	Physical 52.9%	Working Conditions 32.4%	Other 12.9%	Financial 1.6%
5	Physical 52.9%	Other 24.8%	Financial 13.9%	Working Conditions 10.6%
6	Physical 52.9%	Other 24.8%	Working Conditions 20.5%	Financial 1.6%
1	Working Conditions 77.8%	Financial 8.6%	Physical 2.9%	Other 10.6%
2	Working Conditions	Financial	Other	Physical

	77.8%	8.6%	11.5%	1.9%
3	Working Conditions	Physical	Financial	Other
	77.8%	7.6%	3.9%	10.6%
4	Working Conditions	Physical	Other	Financial
	77.8%	7.6%	12.9%	1.6%
5	Working Conditions	Other	Financial	Physical
	77.8%	14.5%	5.6%	1.9%
6	Working Conditions	Other	Physical	Financial
	77.8%	14.5%	5.9%	1.6%
1	Other	Financial	Physical	Working Conditions
	39.4%	40.1%	12.2%	8.3%
2	Other	Financial	Working Conditions	Physical
	39.4%	40.1%	18.5%	1.9%
3	Other	Physical	Financial	Working Conditions
	39.4%	38.4%	13.9%	8.3%
4	Other	Physical	Working Conditions	Financial
	39.4%	38.4%	20.5%	1.6%
5	Other	Working Conditions	Physical	Financial
	39.4%	52.9%	5.9%	1.6%
6	Other	Working Conditions	Financial	Physical
	39.4%	52.9%	5.6%	1.9%