

LABOR MIGRATION & HIV/AIDS

VULNERABILITY OF FILIPINO MIGRANT WORKERS

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KALAYAAN INC. AND CARAM-ASIA




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& HIV/AIDS

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Foreword

Rapidly growing countries in South and South East Asia have been witnessing an accelerated rate of modernization including the changing of socioeconomic and political structures. These are among the important factors contributing to the increased mobility of people in the region, with globalization only intensifying its volume and pattern. The volume and patterns of migration acquire distinctive features given the unique socio-political, economic, cultural and demographic factors of countries receiving and sending migrants.

At the same time, the rapid spread of the HIV pandemic in the region is a cause concerned but quite often tend to be paralyzed in their actions. Attempts to combat the pandemic do not seem to perceive migrant workers as potentially at the risk of contracting STDs and HIV. The conditions of migration produce higher health risks for migrants. There is a need for special policies and interventions for migrants to help protect themselves against STDs and HIV infection. However, there is lack of data to understand this problem.

Confronted by these realities, seven countries in South and South East Asia,

with the Free University of Amsterdam, decided to respond, by undertaking an action-research which focuses on the conditions of mobility that create the potential risk for the even wider spread of the HIV/AIDS pandemic. This partnership is called CARAM-Asia or Coordination of Action Research on AIDS and Mobility. Our partners in the CARAM-Asia network are:

- Malaysia - Tenaganita
- Bangladesh - Christian Community for Development in Bangladesh (CCDB)
- Philippines - Katipunan ng Kababaihan para sa Kalayaan (KALAYAAN, Inc.)
- Vietnam - CARE Vietnam
- Cambodia - CARE Cambodia
- Thailand - CARE Thailand
- Indonesia - URM
- The Netherlands - Vrije Universiteit

The CARAM-Asia network is committed to generate data and policies towards empowering migrant workers and reducing the potential risk of contracting HIV/

AIDS in this community. CARAM-Asia plans to develop a comprehensive work plan to include the following:

- a migrant worker's perspective of the issue of mobility and AIDS with its related problems, with the use of participatory research methods;
- tools for NGOs and researchers who want to do grassroots level research using participatory research methods;
- effective, continuous intervention programs of consciousness, education and capacity building at the grassroots level, to strengthen the level of knowledge and confidence of migrants towards increasing their control over their health and potential HIV infection;
- facilities to give appropriate services to migrant workers and sex workers (e.g. health care facilities, STD care, HIV testing facilities);
- policy interventions at the national and regional levels to increase the protection of migrants and sex workers against the HIV infection;
- publication of research reports;
- a model data collection system for NGOs which addresses needs and interests of migrant workers and sex workers;
- modules for training and research that NGOs can use for intervention programs on HIV and STDs;

- Support for returning migrants who test HIV positive in the receiving country and are most often deported immediately to their home countries.

This publication is the result of a three-year research conducted in the Philippines by KALAYAAN. KALAYAAN, Inc. is a feminist membership organization founded in 1983. KALAYAAN's membership is made up of women from various socio-economic background and work areas who share KALAYAAN's vision for a long-term social, cultural, political and economic transformation of society.

KALAYAAN's work includes research, publications, education and training, as well as advocacy. At present, KALAYAAN is doing community-based preventive education on sex trafficking under the Philippine Network Against Trafficking in Women. It is also involved in a 3-year regional research on Migration and HIV/AIDS.

The Philippine research was focused on looking at the factors in the migration process that contribute to the vulnerability of Filipino migrant workers to HIV. KALAYAAN wanted to capture the realities of migrant workers prior to departure, while they are abroad and upon their return to the Philippines.

The initial step was to conduct a survey among first-time departing OFWs to come up with a profile of first time departing Filipino migrant workers as well as to determine their knowledge, attitudes, behavior and practices related to HIV/AIDS.

To complement the survey, it was also important to look at the domains of relationships, social networking and sexual practices of migrant workers abroad and how these impact on migrant workers' vulnerability to HIV. In-depth interviews were done among domestic workers in Hong Kong. A follow-up survey was also undertaken to complement the Hong Kong study.

Finally, in-depth interviews were conducted among returning migrant workers in several areas in the Philippines. The thrusts of these interviews were to validate the findings of the Hongkong study as well as to have a glimpse of how migration impacts on the families of migrants.

In the course of the research, CARAM-Asia began to explore the corollary vulnerability of the families of migrant workers. Given the organizational focus of women, KALAYAAN decided to look into the vulnerability of wives of migrant workers to STDs/HIV. In-depth interviews and FGDs were conducted among wives of seafarers in the Central Philippines to explore the factors that contribute to their HIV vulnerability.

The results of the research have served as basis for KALAYAAN's advocacy activities as well as for designing action programs gear towards helping to reduce the vulnerability of migrant workers and their families to STDs/HIV.

Acknowledgements

The authors and members of the Project Management Team would like to thank the following organizations and persons who gave their valuable support to this project:

KABALAKA Foundation and its members - Marian Virgie Gumayan, Geoffrey Leysa, Melba Capaspas and Nemalyn Abiog for their assistance in data collection in Iloilo and Bacolod, particularly the interviews and focus group discussions with wives of seafarers and returning overseas workers;

The Asian Domestic Worker's Union, a non-government organization based in Hongkong, for facilitating the data collection, particularly the key informant interviews, survey interviews and focus group discussions with Filipino domestic workers. The other members of the research group that joined Riza Faith Ybanez and Sahlee Bugna in Hongkong were Remy Borlongan and Nini Balaquiao;

The Project Team also requested a number of local NGOs and friends to help organise the presentation of the survey results and feedback sessions at the provincial level. They include the Malunita

Foundation at General Santos City, the Cordillera Task Force Against VAW at Baguio City and the La Union chapter of KANLUNGAN, Norma Ybanez, a feminist activist and former guidance counsellor of Silliman University, also helped organise the NGO research feedback forum at Dumaguete City.

Three faculty members from the University of the Philippines in Diliman served as consultants for the survey of knowledge, attitude, behaviour and perception (KABP) of first-time departing overseas contact workers. They helped develop the research design and provided valuable theoretical insights and recommendations on how to proceed with the study and analyze the data. They are Dr. Michael Tan and Professors Aurora Perez, as well as Marylou Alcid.

Finally, the Research Team wishes to extend its warm appreciation to all the overseas contract workers and their family members who participated in this study. They were extremely generous in sharing their time and life experiences. Without them, this study would not have been possible.

Maraming Salamat!

Survey of Knowledge, Attitude, Behavior, and Practice Related to HIV/AIDS among Filipino Migrant Workers

1

Sahlee C. Bugna & Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Introduction

The out-migration of Filipino laborers started as far back as the early 1900s when the Philippines was still an American colony. Filipinos migrated to the United States mainland and Hawaii to work in fruit plantations, canneries, and other factories.

During the 1950s Filipino migration shifted from the United States to Asian countries, where the migrants worked as barbers, artists, musicians, and contract personnel. Possibly the very first bilateral labor agreement negotiated by the Philippine Government was with the United Kingdom - for 25,000 Filipinos to work in British North Borneo (now Sabah and Sarawak) for five years.

In the early 1970s, bolstered by the oil crisis and the strength of its petrodollars, petroleum-rich Middle Eastern countries experienced an economic boom that necessitated the importation of labor. Filipino workers were a logical choice because of their availability and good skills. The Filipino labor force that went to the Middle East in the 1970s was predominantly male, and based in construction, manufacturing, and technical services. When the industrial construction phase declined, the labor demand shifted to

other skills, and so more and more women went to the Middle East as nurses, hairdressers, waitresses, and maids.

Today the Philippines exports workers to over 140 countries in the world. In 1996 alone, 660,122 workers were deployed, marking a slight increase from the 651,022 total in 1995. Taking into account the undocumented workers, the figures could still rise dramatically.

The main destination remains to be the Middle East. However, with the economic boom in Asia, more and more Filipino migrant workers (FMW) now have their eyes focused on Asia.

The category of workers include performing artists and entertainers who total 14,000 or 58% of the women in this category. Medical workers including nurses, midwives, and dental workers account for 23% of women in this same category.

The other significant category is that of service workers. Women compose the bulk of this category and they are mostly domestic helpers. A total of 60,237 women are classified as maids and related housekeeping service workers, and another 12,702 are labeled caretakers, building workers, cleaners and related

workers. These two classifications make up 95% of women in this category, or 65% of the total number of land based women new hires in 1996. Domestic helpers and caretakers account for about 35% of the total number of land based new hires. This figure is way above the number of male construction-related workers and laborers who account for only an estimated 21.5% of the total land based new hires.

The HIV/AIDS situation

Since the first case of HIV/AIDS in the Philippines was reported in 1984, the AIDS Registry of the Department of Health has recorded a cumulative total of 958 cases - 318 of these are AIDS cases and 169 deaths due to AIDS. Of those infected, 397 are female while 554 are male.

The main mode of transmission is sexual contact, which accounts for 74% of 709 cases. Of this number, heterosexual contact remains the primary mode of transmission (508 cases), followed by homosexual contact (152 cases), and bisexual contact (49 cases). The other modes of transmission are through blood/blood products (11 cases), injecting drugs (5 cases), needle prick injuries (2 cases), and parental transmission (12 cases).

Of the persons first diagnosed with AIDS in 1984, one was an overseas contract worker. As of June 1992, 39 (or 12%)

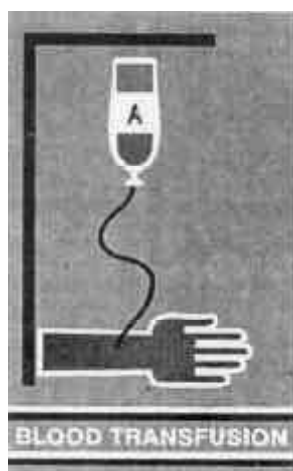
of the 335 reported HIV-positive persons indicated that they had been working abroad and believed they had contracted the disease there.

Migration and HIV/AIDS: Links and prospects

Migration is an independent risk factor for HIV infection. In the majority of cases, migrants leave the country alone. Male and female workers engage in short-term sexual relationships, often because of homesickness. In addition, they have no access to appropriate health facilities in the receiving countries, especially STD services.

Other factors like illegal recruitment, non-assimilation into a foreign culture and society, physical and social segregation, language barriers, as well as limited rights often lead migrant workers into risky situations or behaviors. For women, the risk is multiplied by their vulnerability to sexual abuse and exploitation, as well as sex trafficking. All these lead to the vulnerability of migrant workers to HIV/AIDS.

One mode of AIDS transmission is thru:



Unfortunately, there is little that governments - of both the sending and receiving countries - are doing about the situation. The Philippine government continues to adopt labor exportation as a policy and as a strategy to earn dollars and to reduce the unemployment and underemployment situ-

ation here. On the other hand, authorities from receiving countries tend to emphasize the control of migration and migrants.

It is largely the non-government organizations (NGOs) that come to the service of the migrants. They help empower migrants by providing (a) information to enable them to better protect themselves and (b) health service facilities. Migrants are also supported in making appropriate decisions and in taking control of their situation.

However, working with migrants is often difficult. There are many misconceptions about them and prejudicial attitudes by receiving countries. To find out the best ways of working with migrant populations, participatory action research is needed. Emphasis should be put on the study of conditions of migrants' lives that make them more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS. CARAM-Asia (Coordination for Action Research on AIDS and Mobility) is a non-governmental network in Southeast Asia that is doing research on the subject of Migration and HIV/AIDS. CARAM-Asia intends to develop new research tools, new interventions, and new health educational programs that can better protect migrant workers from being infected with STDs or HIV.

Objectives

The major objective of the study was to generate baseline data on Filipino migrant workers, which include: (a) socio-demographic characteristics; (b) job features and working conditions; (c) and knowledge, attitudes, beliefs, and prac-

tice (KABP) regarding sexuality and HIV/AIDS, and (d) policy recommendations geared towards the prevention of AIDS particularly among migrant workers.

Methodology

An interview guide was used for data collection. Most of the interviewers were students of the University of Philippines. Respondents were reached through the pre-departure orientation seminars conducted by the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), and various NGOs, like the Women in Development Foundation (WID) and KAIBIGAN (Friends of Overseas Migrant Workers).

Sampling

The survey used a proportionate stratified sampling design based on the 1996 data of the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration (POEA) on frequency of departing OFWs according to occupational categories. The stratifying variable included sex, occupation and status as first time departing migrant worker. Table 1 show the sample size divided according to sex and occupation.

TABLE 1 : Sampling Size

OCCUPATION	M (222)	49%	F (228)	50.7%	N=450	100%
Service workers	17	3.8	160	35.6	177	39.4
Production related workers	130	28.8	15	3.4	145	32.2
Professional & technical related workers	25	5.6	51	11.3	76	16.9
Seafarers	50	11.1	2	.4	52	11.5

Research Results
Profile of respondents

The majority of first time migrant workers were born in Luzon, particularly in the National Capital Region and in Regions 3 and 4 (see Table 2).

They were predominantly young, belonging to the 20-24 and 25-29 age

brackets (see Table 3). They were also slightly more females.

Many were Roman Catholics, highly educated, and single (see Table 4, 5 and, 6, respectively).

Thirty-one percent (31%) had children; more than half had small families with no more than two children.

TABLE 2. Place of birth by region

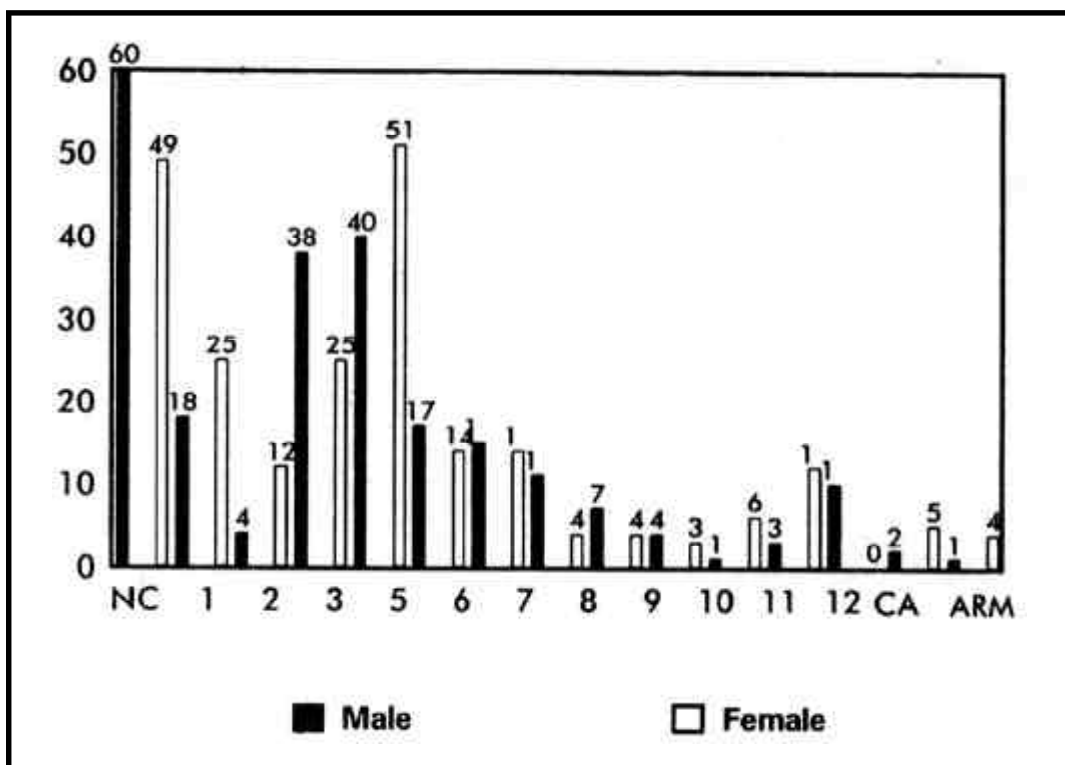


TABLE 3. Age of respondents by sex

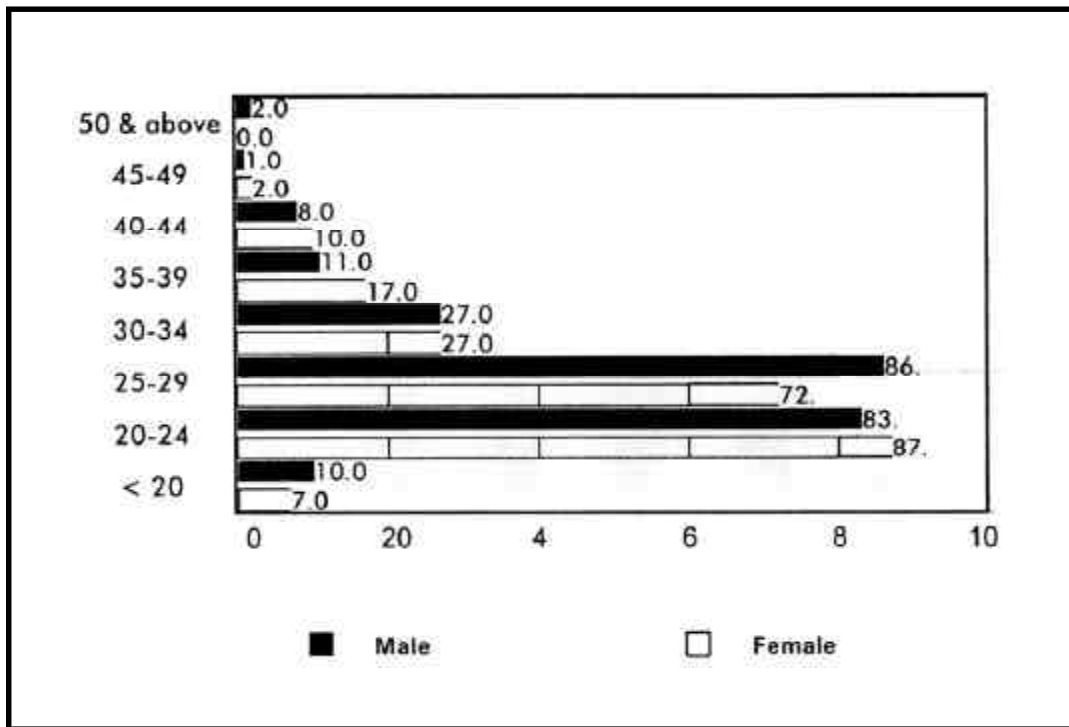


TABLE 4. Religious affiliation (N=450)

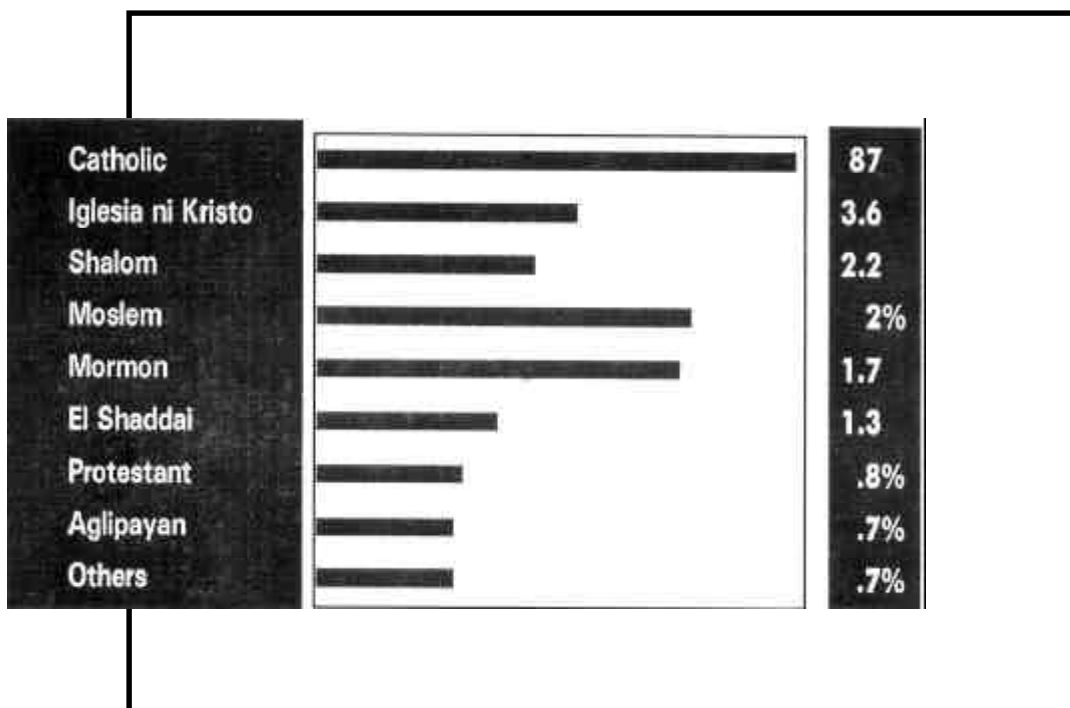


TABLE 5. Educational attainment (n=45)

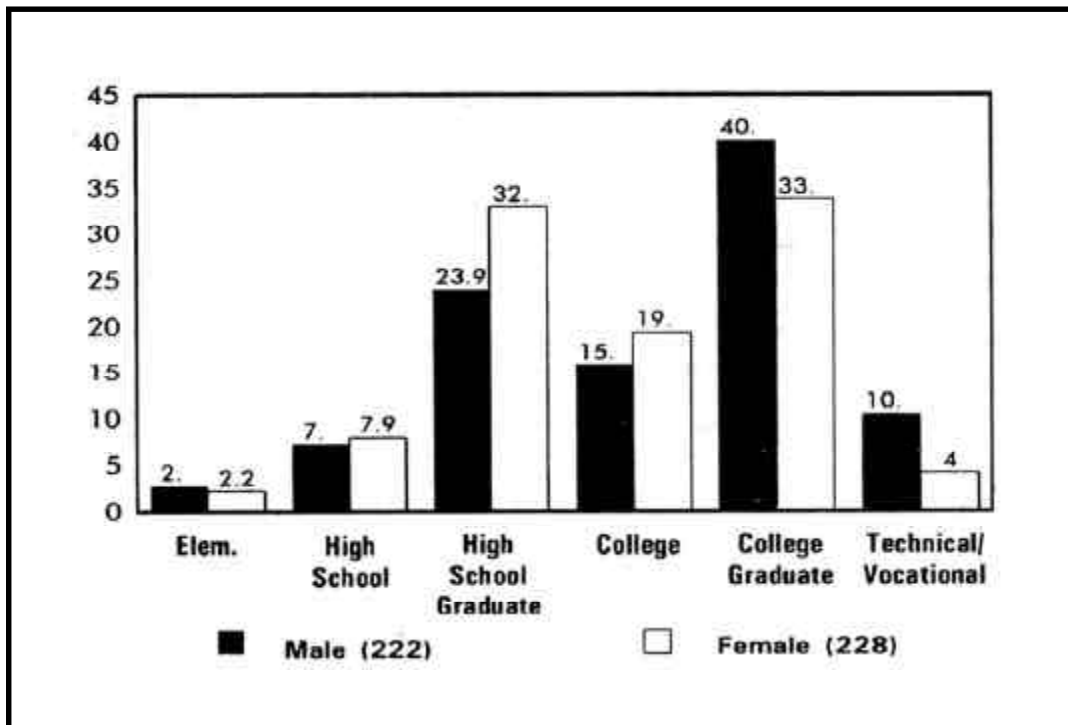
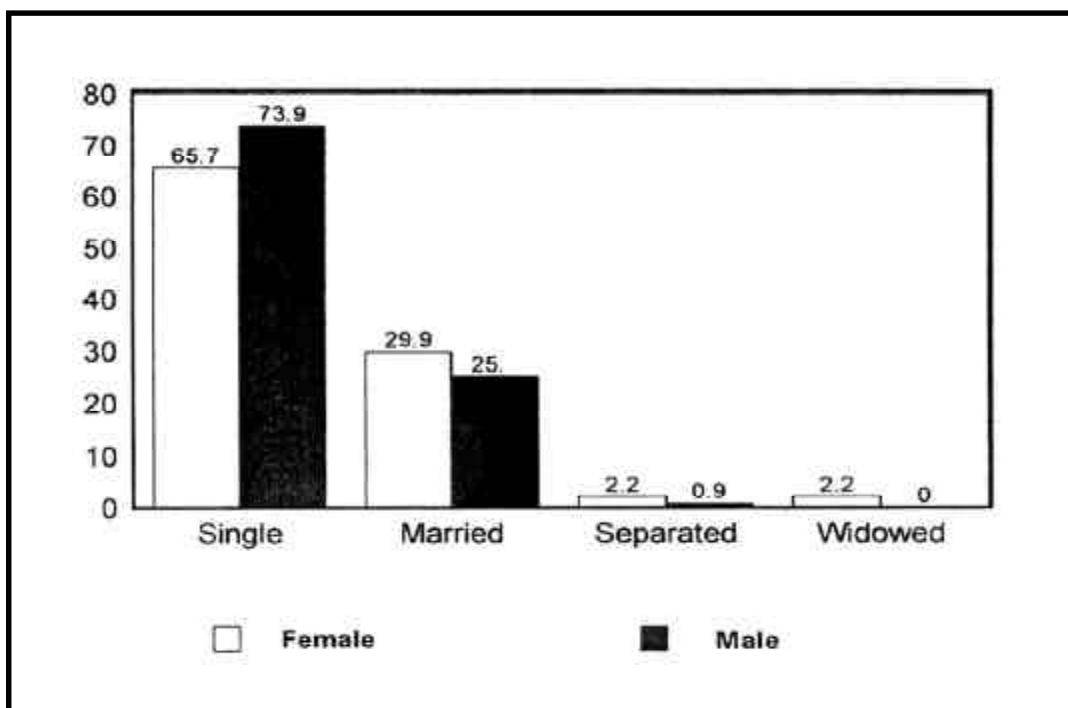


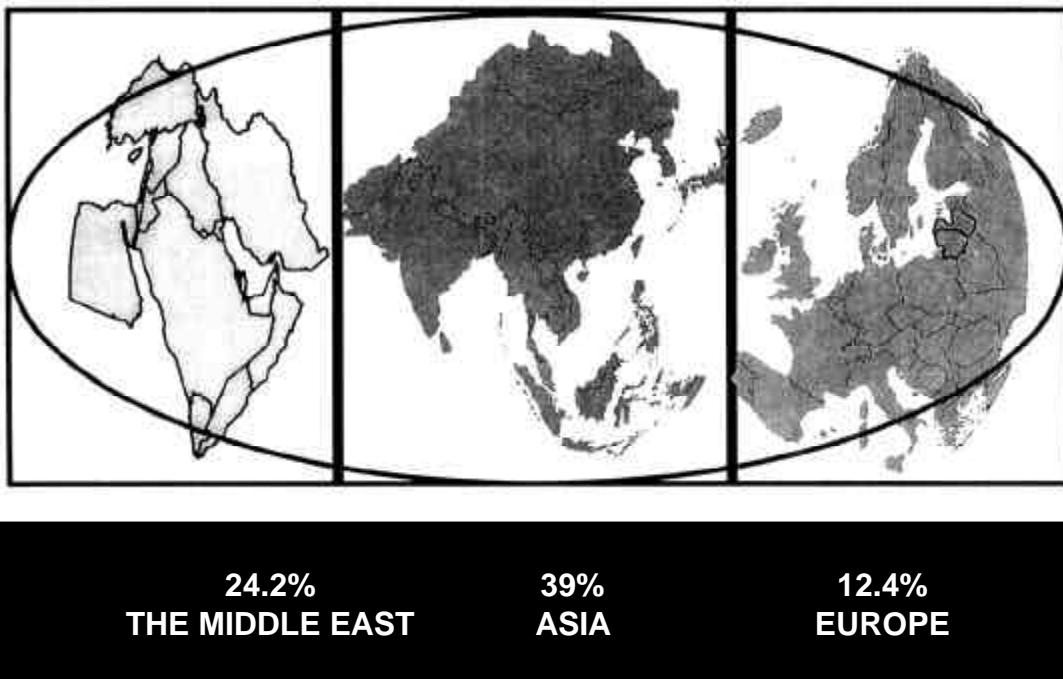
TABLE 6. Civil status (n=450)



More than one fourth of the respondents, mostly women, would be working for the first time.

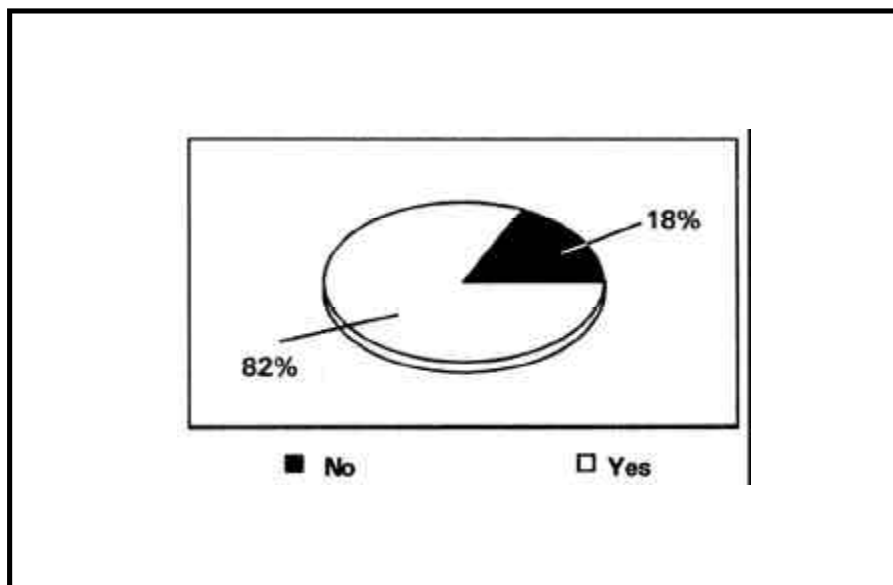
Characteristics of Work Abroad

Top regions of destination were the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.



Eighteen percent of the respondents had not read their contracts.

TABLE 7. Respondents who read their countracts



- Almost half had a two-year contract.
- More than half had contracts requiring eight hours of daily work. Two women were expected to work 13 hours a day. More than half (58.9%) had contracts stipulating four days off a month, while 19.3% said they were not informed about the number of allowed days-off. Six respondents stated that they would not be allowed any day off.
- More than one-third (38.2%) of the OFWs expected to receive salaries ranging from P10,000-P20,000 per month.
- Another one-third (33.3%) expected to have salary deductions.

Factors in Migration

- Nearly four-fifths (79.8%) stated that it was their personal decision to work abroad. No one encouraged them to do so (46%). The majority, however, sought the advice of family members prior to making the final step of signing the contract.
- More than half (59%) were either married or widows.
- Reasons for going abroad were primarily economic, to earn a better income and improve quality of life (55.4%).
- According to the respondents, the main advantages and disadvantage of overseas work were (see Table 8):

TABLE 8. Views about overseas work

ADVANTAGES		DISADVANTAGES	
Better income	(71.8%)	Homesickness	(49%)
Support for the family	(6.5%)	NONE	(39%)
More opportunities for learning	(4.8%)	Need to adjust to a new environment	(12.2%)

- More than a third (39.8%) had some anxieties about going abroad, including concern for one's safety (29.9%) and adjusting to a new environment, new employers, and co-workers (20.7% each).
- Increased income (29.5%) and better employment opportunities (28.3%) in the Philippines could convince some to stay. However, almost one-fourth (23%) said "nothing" would convince them to change their plans.

Views and Practices about Health and HIV/AIDS

Nearly four fifths (77.6%) of the departing OFWs underwent the required physical and medical examination. One-fifth (19.5%) went for HIV/AIDS testing.

- Almost half (45.4%) went to a medical facility, primarily a clinic (29.5%) referred by their recruiting agencies. About 8% did not bother to know the results of their physical and medical examinations.

- In terms of health-seeking behavior, first time departing OFWs said that they sought the advice of immediate family members (36%) or doctors (33.5%) whenever feeling ill.

A significant number also stated that they usually would not consult anyone when not feeling well (11.1%).

Awareness and knowledge of HIV/AIDS

The respondents were mainly asked to state their views about HIV/AIDS as a disease, the modes of transmission, as well as the availability of a cure for the disease.

- The three most serious diseases cited by the respondents were HIV/AIDS, cancer and hepatitis. Only five stated that they have not heard of HIV/AIDS.
- Perceived modes of transmission of HIV/AIDS are:
 - Sexual intercourse (53.9%)
 - Poor sanitation or hygiene (14.7%)
 - Sexual relations with prostituted men/women (7.6%)

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS is marred by stereotyping as well as general uncertainty about the amount of protection afforded by condom use against HIV/AIDS.

Unfortunately, many of the departing OFWs had some misconceptions about the cause of HIV/AIDS and how to protect one's self from infection.

- The respondents were also quick to

blame "high-risk" groups, including men and women engaged in prostitution, foreign tourists, gays, lesbians, and bisexuals for the spread of HIV/AIDS.

- They believe that people most likely to acquire HIV/AIDS are those who engage in risky sexual behavior (33.2%), and men and women in prostitution (31.5%). Those who seem or look sickly are said to also be at risk (4.5%)
- Generally, the respondents see HIV/AIDS mainly as a sexually transmitted disease and the way to avoid infection is to not engage in risky sexual behavior (66.2%).

Eleven percent believed that there is a cure for HIV/AIDS, including drinking *buko* juice (young coconut milk) (18.4%) and *ampalaya* (bitter melon) (4%).

Attitude regarding HIV/AIDS

The attitude towards HIV/AIDS and people with HIV/AIDS was largely negative. The responses indicated a preference for the segregation of people with HIV/AIDS as well as mandatory testing for perceived vulnerable groups.

- Most of the respondents (61.8%) said that they would not be at any risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS for the simple reason that they would refrain from risky sexual behavior or would not be sexually active. More than a third (38.2%) recognized the danger of acquiring the disease.
- Majority of the respondents (64.2%) would rather not be tested for HIV/AIDS.

TABLE 9. Views about HIV/AIDS

STATEMENT	RESPONSE	%
a. People with HIV/AIDS have no one to blame but themselves		
b. HIV/AIDS is a punishment from God	Disagree	51
c. People with HIV/AIDS should be isolated from others	Agree	71
d. All prostituted women should be tested for HIV/AIDS	Agree	93
e. All prostituted men should be tested for HIV/AIDS	Agree	94
f. Migrant workers are at risk of acquiring HIV/AIDS	Agree	57

Sexual Behavior and Condom Use

The respondents in this study were divided into four groups according to sexual orientation: (1) unsure, (2) homosexual, (3) bisexual, and (4) heterosexual. Majority of the respondents are heterosexuals (see Table 10 next page).

Of the 433 (96.4%) heterosexual respondents, 272 (63%) admitted being sexually active, and one third (33.8%) of whom are single.

Of these 433 respondents,

- 324 (75.5%) seldom or did not use condom at all times
- 316 (73.7%) condom users are single
- 368 (85%) are women who separated never used condoms
- 218 (50.5%) condom users did so mainly for contraception.

Reasons for not using condom include: (a) lack of opportunity to use it (47.8%) and (b) their dislike for it (17%).

- There was general ambivalence and uncertainty over the effectiveness of condom against HIV/AIDS. Some claimed that using it reduces a person's ability to enjoy a sexual act.
- Attitude towards condom use was largely uncertain, particularly in its ability to protect one from HIV/AIDS and its effect to enjoy sex.
- Among those not sexually experiences, 41.1% stated that they would not use condoms because their partners would not surely go for it.
- More than half (52.3%) admitted having their first sexual encounter between the ages 15 and 19.
- Majority (64.1%) had regular sexual partners; most believed that their partners had no other sexual partner.

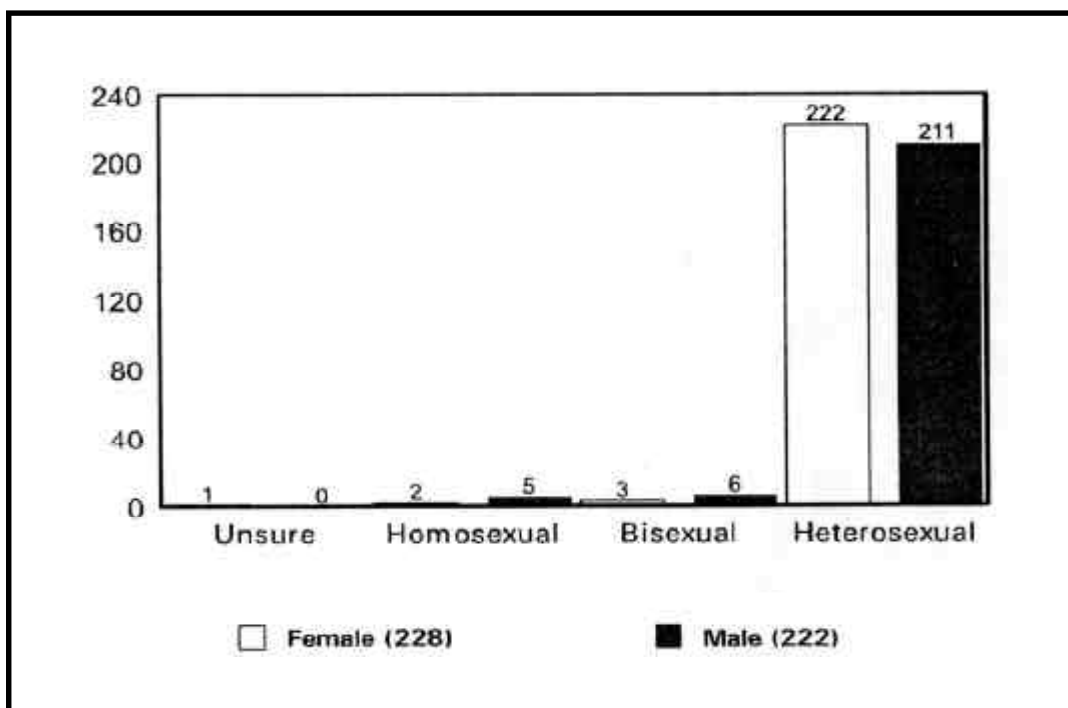
Behavior of those with regular sexual partners

- Those with regular sexual partners (43%) have had sex 10 times in the last three months prior to the interview.
- Majority (70.1%) of women never used condom, mainly because their male partners dislike it.
- Those who used condoms (75%) primarily did so to prevent pregnancy.
- Some 43% of the condom users (111 or 39% of the respondents) said that the choice of contraceptive was a joint decision with their partners.

Behavior of those who engage in casual sex

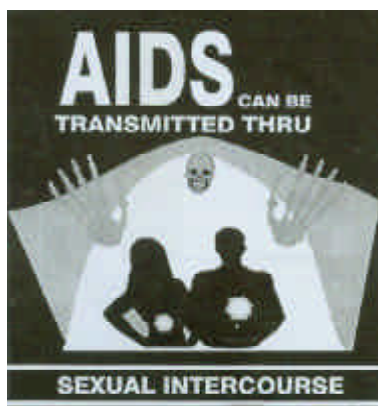
- 11.5% of the respondents, most of whom were men, admitted having engaged in casual sex.
- More than half averaged six casual sexual encounters a month.
- Most of them (59.4%) used a condom during these encounters to avoid STDs and HIV/AIDS.
- The respondents themselves decided the use of condoms.
- Still, more than half (54.6%) could not insist on condom use when having casual sex.

TABLE 10. Sexual Orientation



Women and safer sex negotiation

- Almost half (46.9%) stated that they could refuse to have sex with a man if he refused to wear a condom, mainly because they feared acquiring STDs (39.3%).
- 58.9% of women with no sexual experience said that it would be difficult to ask a man to wear a condom.
- Similarly, almost half (49.4%) of women with sexual experience never tried to ask a man to wear a condom during intercourse, primarily because they knew that their partners disliked condoms.
- Those who believe they could negotiate for condom use do so because they have “understanding” partners.
- More than a third (37.3%) said they could refuse to have sex if their partner won’t wear a condom.
- On the other hand, an almost equal number (36.3%) were not sure if they could do so because (a) they feared that their husbands might get angry, or (b) they saw it as part of their obligation to their husbands.



Summary

The study provides us with several insights about first time migrant workers as well as factors that make them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

- The first time departing OFWs are generally young, and single. In fact, their profile shows a trend of decreasing age. Majority of the respondents were between 20 and 29 years old. In 1992, statistics showed that our migrant workers were generally from 25-35 years old.
- They were educated and maybe more capable of making independent decisions;

Most had college education, and decided to work abroad on their own.

- Economic reasons are the primary motivating factors for working abroad;

The need to earn a better income as well as the desire to help the family remain the primary motivation for working abroad.

- While the majority have a strong determination to work abroad, some fear for their personal safety;

Women feared being raped or sexually abused, while the men were afraid of being incarcerated due to ignorance of local laws.

- One fourth of the respondents would be working for the first time, majority of whom were women;

A significant number of respondents would be working for the first time, and in an environment which may be totally different from the one they’re accus-

tomed to. They would not only have to adjust to the idea of working and having new employers, but will have the additional burden of adjusting to the culture of the country of destination, and the experience of working without the presence and support of family and friends.

- Some may be subjected to adverse working conditions;

These conditions may include long working hours, no days off, lack of benefits and others.

- Some migrant workers, particularly women, will be in occupations which make them inherently vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, and where there is not enough legal protection;

These occupations include domestic work and entertainment, where migrant workers are vulnerable to rape and sexual abuse from their employers and their clients.

- Health seeking behavior is dependent on family members, and there is a strong tendency to self-medicate, which may provide difficulty in detecting serious illnesses;

The lack of family members in the country of destination will likely encourage the migrant worker to self-medicate when feeling ill. Other factors may contribute to this tendency, such as the high cost of medicines abroad, as well as the risk of losing one's employment due illness. Either way, this tendency may be a deterrent to the early detection of illnesses among our migrant workers.

- There is a high awareness of HIV/AIDS, although many misconceptions about the mode of transmission and about its causes abound. Some, in fact, have very negative attitudes against those infected with the disease;

Being aware of the problem does not always mean having the right information. The respondents identified HIV/AIDS mainly as a sexually-transmitted disease and were not as aware of the other means of transmission of the disease. Attitude towards HIV/AIDS and people living with HIV/AIDS was largely negative, with a significant number favoring the isolation of people with HIV/AIDS, as well as mandatory testing for supposedly vulnerable groups. There is also a general perception that use of condom would provide complete protection against HIV/AIDS.

Most of the respondents stated that they were not likely to contract HIV/AIDS. They also have a tendency to blame the perceived vulnerable groups, such as gays, lesbians, and men and women in prostitution, for the spread of the disease.

- There is a low incidence of condom use among sexually active respondents.

Even though most respondents are young, single, and sexually active, very few prefer using condom as a method of contraception and ensuring safe sex.

- Many respondents who either have regular or casual partners do not insist on condom use;

The reasons for using condom vary according to the partner involved. Most respondents use condoms to prevent pregnancy if having sex with a regular

sexual partner. With casual sexual partners, however, the reason for using condom is for protection against STDs and HIV/AIDS. Still, most of the respondents generally said that they did not insist on condom use, whether sex was with a regular or casual partner.

- The women interviewed said they may be unable to negotiate condom use with their partners.

Most of the women interviewed said that they would not be able to refuse the advances of their partners even if they knew that he would not use a condom. The women believed that it is an obligation to satisfy the sexual needs of their partner.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey, the following recommendations can be considered:

Education and training

- Focus of advocacy

To create an impact, we must target younger audiences because OFWs are getting younger and migration work attracts younger people. This provides us with the opportunity to reach individuals at an age when they are still about to engage in sexual relations. At this stage we may influence them to accept safer sex practices, make them aware of their reproductive rights and needs, as well as provide adequate knowledge regarding the prevention of STDs and HIV/AIDS.

- **HIV/AIDS awareness program**

While the respondents were very much aware of the existence of HIV/AIDS they had many misconceptions and stereotyped ideas about its causes and modes of transmission. It is important to enhance HIV/AIDS awareness programs.

- **Consciousness raising on safer sex practices**

Targets for education on safer sex practices must include both men and women. This should be done to educate the public on safer sex options, correct misconceptions about condom use, and empower women to negotiate for safer sexual behavior.

- **Consciousness raising on migrant worker rights**

Results of the survey showed that 18% of migrant workers interviewed did not read their contracts. While this does not automatically indicate lack of knowledge about the terms or conditions of their work abroad, this raises concerns over the extent to which their rights could be protected and their working situation monitored. While most of those who did not read their contracts stated that their knowledge of their contract came from their agency, their spouses or their other relatives, the quality and accuracy of such information is a cause for concern. More consciousness raising efforts must be undertaken by both government and non-government organizations to appraise migrant workers of their rights under the law.

Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS)

The law provides that a Pre-Employment Orientation Seminar (PEOS) be given to those interested to work abroad. But this policy does not apply to those applying for migrant status. The PEOS is usually three-day training, and its administration is dependent on the available budget of the government. The PEOS should be strengthened to allow prospective migrant workers to make an informed decision about working abroad. More time can be used to cover issues such as cultural differences between the Philippines and the country of destination, the risks inherent in migration, migrant worker rights, psychological and emotional costs of migration, the expenses involved, safer sex behavior and how to protect one's self from STDs, and HIV/AIDS.

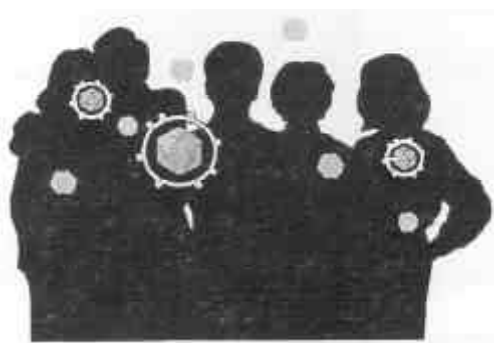
The PDOS usually concentrates on issues such as salary remittances and bank transfers, since these are the final requirements for departure.

Access to health services

The government must make the effort to ensure that our migrant workers have access to immediate and inexpensive medical treatment abroad. Medical treatment can be expensive and inaccessible abroad, that it has become a deterrent to the protection of the health of our migrant workers. In addition, migrant workers are at risk of losing their jobs in the event of illnesses. As such, there is a strong tendency to self-medicate, which may provide difficulty in determining and providing a cure for serious illnesses.

Integration of HIV/AIDS education and intervention programs in migrant worker organizations

There are conditions in migration work that contribute to the HIV vulnerability of migrant workers. It is time for organizations working for the interest of migrant workers to integrate HIV/AIDS education and intervention programs into their work. This will enhance the access of migrant workers to accurate information on HIV/AIDS, and better ensure their protection from HIV/AIDS.



Summary of Significant Research Results

A. Profile of Respondents

Regional origins	24.2%	NCR-based
Age	37.8%	20-24 bracket
	35.2%	25-29 bracket
Sex	63.0%	Women
Religion	87.0%	Roman Catholic
Civil Status	69.9%	Single
Any Children?	31.0%	With Children
Education	36.9%	College graduates
Work History	26.0%	No prior work experience

B. Job Characteristics

Region of destination	39.0%	Asia
	24.2%	the Middle East
	12.4%	Europe
Contracts	47.1%	Have two-year contracts
	18.0%	Have not read their contracts
Working hours	58.0	8-hour work day
	.4%	13-hour work day
Employment benefits	58.9%	4 days off/month
	19.3%	Unaware of any stipulated days off
	1.2%	No days off
Salaries	8.2%	With salaries fr. P10,000-20,000
	33.3%	With salary deductions

C. Factors in Migration

Encouragement from others	46.0%	None
	46.0%	From family members
Consulted others on decision to work abroad	93.5%	With family
	17.5%	With friends
Final decision	79.8%	Decisions made alone by informant
Reasons for working abroad	55.4%	To earn money to improve way of life
	14.6%	To help the family
		Scarcity of local employment

D. Perceived advantages and disadvantages of working abroad

Advantages of working abroad	71.8%	Better income
	6.5%	Can help the family
	12.4%	Desire to experience working
Disadvantages of working abroad	49.8%	Homesickness
	12.2%	Adjustment to new cultural environment
	10.4%	Adjustment to new social relationships
	3.9%	Work-related difficulties
	3.7%	Safety/health issues
	3.5%	Uncertainty of the future
	1.7%	Discrimination
	.6%	Undervaluation of skills
	8.4%	NONE whatsoever

E. Other views about working abroad and staying in the country

Fears and anxieties about working abroad	39.8%	Have fears and anxieties about
	29.9%	Including fear for their safety, and
	20.7%	Having to adjust to a new environment, new employers and new co-workers
Factors that would convince them to stay in the Philippines	29.5%	Increased income
	28.3%	Better employment opportunities
	23.0%	NOTHING

F. Health behavior and attitudes

Behavior and attitudes	77.6%	Already had medical check-ups
	19.5%	Were tested HIV/AIDS
	8.0%	Of those who had their medical check-ups do not know its results
	36.0%	Would rather consult family members first when feeling ill
	33.5%	Would prefer to see a doctor when feeling ill
	11.1%	Would rather not consult anyone when feeling ill

G. Awareness of and Knowledge of HIV/AIDS

Top 3 most serious diseases		HIV/AIDS, Cancer, and Hepatitis
Awareness of HIV/AIDS		Only five respondents state that they have never heard of HIV/AIDS
Modes of transmission	53.9%	Sexual Intercourse
	14.7%	Poor sanitation or hygiene
	7.6%	Sexual relations with prostituted men and women
Cure for HIV/AIDS	11.0%	Think there is a cure for HIV/AIDS
	18.4%	Think that the cure is buko (young coconut) juice, and
	4.0%	ampalaya (bitter gourd)

H. Perceptions about HIV/AIDS

People most likely to acquire HIV/AIDS	33.2%	Those who engage in risk sexual behaviour
	31.5%	Prostituted men and women
		Those who seem or look sickly
How can you avoid getting HIV/AIDS?	66.2%	By avoiding risky sexual behavior
Is there a possibility of you contracting HIV/AIDS?	61.8%	Said there is no possibility

I. Sexual Behavior and Condom Use

Sexual orientation	96.4%	Heterosexual
Sexual experience	63.8%	Have had previous sexual experience
Of those who have had sexual experience	52.3%	Had the first sexual intercourse between ages 15 and 19
	38.0%	Have used condoms
Among those who have tried using condoms, the purpose for use are :	Birth control	50.5%
	Protection against STDs	39.6%
64.1%	Have regular sexual partners	
Of those with regular sexual partners	43.0%	Had sex with their partners less than 10 times three months prior to the survey
	70.1%	Have never used condoms
	88.0%	Do not insist on condom use
11.5%	Engaged in casual sex at an average of six encounters/month	

Survey of KABP Related to HIV/AIDS Among Filipino Migrant Workers

Of those who engage in casual	91.0%	Are men
	59.4%	Used condoms as protection from sex STDs
	54.6%	Do not insist on condom use
Women and negotiation for safer sex	46.9%	Percentage of women respondents who say they can refuse sex without condoms
	39.3%	Percentage of women respondents who say they can refuse sex without condoms for fear of acquiring STDs
	58.9%	Percentage of women without sexual experience who express difficulty in asking a man to wear a condom during sex
	49.4%	Percentage of women with sexual experience who have never tried insisting on condom use
	26.4%	Percentage of sexually active women who could not refuse sex without condom use

Labor Migration and HIV Vulnerability
of Migrant Workers:
The Filipino Domestic Workers in Hongkong

2

Riza Faith C. Ybanez

Background

Migration has often been referred to as an independent risk factor in the transmission of STDs and HIV/AIDS. The danger of this link is to blame migrants for the introduction or spread of such diseases in host communities. In the context of labor migration, many host countries require mandatory HIV testing of migrant workers prior to their entry, or prior to the issuance or renewal of their work permits. Detection of HIV infection results in the summary deportation of the worker.

The advocacy to put mobility/migration in the HIV/AIDS agenda must therefore carry with it the responsibility of confronting the accompanying stigmatization that attaches to migrants. In this light, it is therefore more important to examine the factors in the migration process rather than to focus on the migrants themselves.

This paper discusses the conditions in labor migration that contribute to the HIV vulnerability of migrant workers. The data were taken from a study conducted by KALAYAAN, Inc. and CARAM-Asia among Filipino domestic workers in Hongkong.

Introduction to the Kalayan Study

The study, conducted in Hongkong, was done in two stages: the first, on January 15-18, 1998 and the second, on May 14-16, 1999. A total of sixty-two (62) domestic workers - sixty women and two men - were interviewed to look into the following domains: employment characteristics, social networks, relationships, health attitudes, awareness of HIV/AIDS, access to information on HIV, and condom use. Specifically, the study delved into two aspects of the migrants' realities: their work day lives and their relationships. The first concerned their working conditions and experiences as well as vital labor migration issues while the second encompassed their social and personal affairs with emphasis on their sexual activities and health attitudes while abroad.

Majority of the study-participants are aged from 20 to 40 years old and mostly single. Majority of them also reached the college level or successfully finished an undergraduate course. Their average length of stay in Hongkong is four years at the time of the interview.

The purpose of the study was to:

1. Find out what Filipino domestic workers in Hongkong undergo during the adjustment period, their coping mechanisms, and how their experiences affect their behavior while abroad;
2. Determine how Filipino domestic workers in Hongkong develop social networks while abroad and how these social networks influence/affect their behavior;
3. Find out how physical separation affects the relationships of the domestic workers with their husbands, partners, and family members who are left behind in the Philippines;
4. Learn more about the sexual behavior of domestic workers in Hongkong while abroad; and
5. Determine the knowledge and perceptions of domestic helpers in Hongkong on HIV/AIDS.

This paper focused on the following factors as contributory to the HIV vulnerability of Filipino domestic workers in Hongkong: privatization of recruitment, work history, job movements, working conditions, social networking and relationships, sexual behavior, and knowledge of HIV/AIDS.

Except for two (2) respondents of the in-depth interviews, all the participants in the study are women.

Majority of the respondents are aged from 20-40 years old. The mean age among the respondents for the in-depth

interviews is 32.2 years old, while that for the survey is 33.8 years old. The respondents are mostly single - 75% for the in-depth interviews and 54% for the survey.

Many of the respondents reached the college level or successfully finished an undergraduate course (50% for the in-depth interviews and 66% for the survey).

For the in-depth interviews, the average length of stay of the respondents in Hongkong is 3.6 years, while those who participated in the survey stayed longer with an average of 4.2 years.

Some issues in Labor Migration

The privatization of labor recruitment

One of the strategies of sending countries to manage increasing labor migration is the privatization of labor recruitment. This way, the sending government almost successfully abdicates its responsibility to answer for many attendant problems in recruitment. This strategy, however, has had dire consequences for the workers. Aside from uncurbed illegal recruitment and lack of transparency in its dealing with the migrants, private recruitment agencies impose exorbitant placement fees leading to the spiraling cost of labor migration, as well as to the incurrence of pre-departure debts among migrant workers.

Many of the study-participants say that they incurred pre-departure debts ranging from US250 to 1,250.

Among those who claim that they did not incur indebtedness, almost all left the Philippines six or less years ago. Perhaps before the private recruitment agencies had devised the scheme of collecting placement fees through salary deductions once the worker is abroad instead of out-right payment prior to departure.

The high cost of labor migration creates economic pressures on the workers. In addition, the economic motivations for working overseas tend to create high expectations of economic returns on the part of the workers and their families. A considerable number of the study-participants feel that their families have high economic expectations of them because they are looked upon as dollar earners or because the family has no one else to turn to.

Because of these pressures, some workers endure sub-standard and sometimes inhuman working conditions or enter into illegal work contracts. Others choose to stay in the host country at the risk of becoming irregular migrants despite their termination from employment. There are also allegations that some workers engage in prostitution to help ease their economic burdens.

Employment history

Most of the study-participants had been previously employed before going to Hongkong.

In addition, majority previously worked overseas also as domestic workers or caretakers. Some of the study-participants said they would like to continue working abroad after their contracts end. These data confirm a pattern of cyclical migration suggesting that labor migration may no longer be a temporary employment option but is increasingly resorted to as a continuing survival strategy for many workers and their families.

This development calls for more permanent mechanisms and uniform labor standards for the protection of migrant workers' rights, including social security benefits, security of tenure, as well as the right to organize.

There is also a concern for those workers who will be exposed to the working world for the first time and without the traditional support systems at home. On-the-job training make these workers vulnerable to abuse, maltreatment, and risk of premature contract termination due to unsatisfactory work.

(L)abor migration may no longer be a temporary employment option but is increasingly resorted to as a continuing survival strategy for many workers and their families.

Job movements

A standard employment contract for domestic workers usually lasts for two years. A significant number of workers, however, do not complete their contract period.

The domestic workers tend to transfer from one employer to another. The

primary reasons for this are contract violations by the employer and oppressive working conditions. Contract violations include the employer's refusal to grant holidays, arbitrary salary reduction, and subjecting the worker to work for more than one employer.

Some workers also complain of maltreatment including verbal or physical abuse, restrictions on personal mobility and interaction with fellow workers, long working hours, and inadequate food and accommodations.

Other reasons include disagreements on working style and expectations as well as diminished financial capacity of the employer to maintain the domestic worker, particularly in the light of the Asian economic crises.

In host countries where job mobility is restricted and protective mechanisms for migrant workers are inadequate, heightened job movements are a cause for concern. The transition period from one employer to another usually leaves the worker at a vulnerable position. She is given only two weeks to leave the country after which her stay becomes illegal. If she has a pending case against the employer, she can apply for extension of her stay by paying a fee. During the pendency of the case, she is not allowed to find employment elsewhere.

This situation poses risks for the migrant. In cases of summary dismissed workers, they usually have no money to support themselves and to pay for the extension fee. Knowing the scarcity of employment opportunities back home or perhaps entrenched in pre-departure

debts, some workers choose to stay. Some reportedly engage in prostitution to survive while others manage to find work at the risk of being discovered and deported.

Working conditions

A significant number of respondents registered complaints about their employment. These include:

- 1. Long and demanding working hours.** This is perhaps the most common complaint of the workers. Some sleep only for 3-4 hours, but have to work the whole day.
- 2. Eating arrangements.** Meals are irregular, late, and inadequate. One respondent said she was fed a piece of bread and coffee in the morning and the next meal came at 3 or 4 in the afternoon. Sometimes, the employer would take her and the other worker to a restaurant but they would not be given any food.

Others said they were fed porridge or noodles or a hamburger which was to last them for the whole day.

- 3 Poor accommodations.** Some slept on the floor, near the bathroom and were often wakened when the employers came home late or went to the bathroom. Some are unable to sleep well when their employers entertained guests until late in the night.

4. **Controlled mobility.** Some say their employers put up spy cameras or alarms or kept watch of their every move. They could not even throw out the garbage unless the employer was there to switch off the alarms. Some were not allowed to use the phone, to talk or interact with other workers. One said that even when she went to the bank to remit money to the Philippines, her employer would accompany her.

Another complained that her employer did not want her to take a bath, comb her hair or even wash her face in the morning because this was considered bad luck for the business.

She also said that her employer's mother kept tight watch over her so she had to be on the move all the time. She would try to get rest by going to the bathroom to sit on the bowl while crying over her situation.

5. **Sexual advances from the employer.** A male respondent actually got involved with his employer. Another female respondent almost got involve with her employer but was fired by the wife. She said though that because she was in a state of confusion, she felt she may have eventually given in to her employer's advances.

The study-participants confirmed that they have heard of domestic

workers getting romantically involved with their employers.

6. **Contract violations.** Some were not given days-off, some were underpaid, and another had to work for two households. A few were victims of sponsorship contracts.
7. **Lack of medical attention.** One complained that her finger was caught in the car door and swelled. She was given a band-aid and a pair of gloves and was still forced to wash clothes. Another could not tell her employer that she was sick for fear that her employer would fire her.
8. **Summary dismissal.** These are usually without justifiable causes. One was fired because she was fat and the employer thought that she would require a lot of food to feed. Another said he may have been fired because he was dark-skinned which was considered bad luck. Some of those summarily dismissed were locked out of the house or were forced to leave late in the night with nowhere to go. One experienced sleeping at a police station after she was locked out of the house.
9. **Negative release papers.** Some complained that when their employers fired them, they were given negative release papers which made it difficult for them to look for another employer.

In host countries where there are hardly any protective and remedial mechanisms available to migrant work-

ers, complaints about working conditions often leave migrant workers in a dead end. In case the migrant workers are given access to legal remedies, they are confronted with language problem and lack of financial resources. They also endure a long, tedious and unfriendly legal or administrative proceeding while their cases are heard in court. On top of that is the risk of hometown decision.

Racism and discrimination

There is a general sentiment that Filipinos suffer discrimination in Hongkong. There is a strong feeling that Chinese employers look down on Filipinos who are perceived to be poor, uneducated, and ignorant. Some said that rest rooms in certain malls are locked to prevent Filipinas from loitering in the mall.

Social networking

Social networks are facilitating channels for labor migration. Almost all the respondents either had relatives or friends in Hongkong prior to their departure from the Philippines.

Abroad, social networks also play an important role in the life of the worker. The first friends of a newly-arrived worker are usually her relatives, friends or neighbors/co-workers. This is understandable because family members and old friends are the first available support system abroad, while neighbors are convenient friends because of their proximity.

The big day for the workers occurs during their regular (one day-off a week) or statutory holidays. Some workers go out with the same group while others say they have more than one social group. Filipinas in Hongkong group together according to kinship ties or old friends, religious or organizational affiliation, geographical origins or proximity of workplace.

The type of group a worker goes out with normally affects her behavior. Those who go out only with family members, for example, approximate a social environment where kinship ties are retained to check their activities. Those who belong to religious aggrupations, on the other hand, spend most of their day in church or doing activities for the church. The rest are free to decide their social activities which include going to karaoke bars, discos, picnics, malling or sitting down at a park and chatting with friends.

Almost all of the respondents belong to a *barkada* or clique. As aptly articulated by one respondent, "When you are abroad, you're on your own; there's only yourself. You need to integrate [interact] with other people so you will not be alone. For example, if you have a problem, someone will be able help you."

The *barkada* or clique is both the center of social activities as well as the main support group. Several respondents, however, also complain of tensions or conflicts within the *barkada*. Backstabbing and backbiting are particularly highlighted. Likewise, some members envy each other over clothes and personal belongings, personal investments in the Philippines, and sometimes over men.

For workers with controlled mobility, the situation is different because they are usually not allowed any day off. For them, it is the neighbors who play a crucial role in their survival since the latter serve as their link to the outside world.

For example, one respondent narrates how she could no longer endure her employer's maltreatment. She could not get in touch with her relatives or friends because she was not allowed to use the phone or go out without her employer. She had to ask another Filipina domestic worker who worked in the same building to call up her relative. The neighbor did so and the worker was later rescued from her employer by her relative, members of the domestic union, and some police officers.

Another respondent who was not getting adequate food from her employer would request her neighbor's Filipino driver to buy food for her when he went out.

The "garbage area" and the parking area serve as strategic places where a migrant worker is often left on her own, i.e., when she disposes of the garbage, or when she cleans her employers' car. Thus, she has more freedom to interact with other fellow workers.

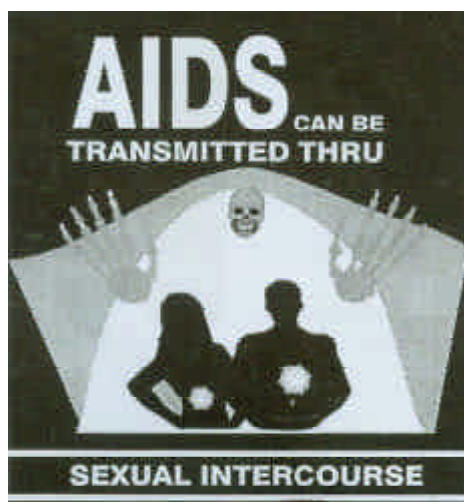
Relationships while abroad

Some of the study-participants, some of whom are married, developed relationship while abroad, mostly with other Filipino migrant workers. Others admitted thinking about doing it.

Majority claimed that they know of another Filipino domestic worker who developed relationships while in Hongkong. These relationships involved other Filipinos in Hongkong, Filipino seamen passing through Hongkong, and those of other nationalities or races including Chinese, Caucasians, Pakistanis, and Nepalese. One knew of another female worker involved in a same-sex relationship.

The in-depth interviewees who got involved with foreigners (Chinese) express preference for a relationship with Filipinos because they felt that Chinese men look down on Filipino women or that differences in culture are difficult to bridge. This seems to be a common sentiment.

These findings may pose problems in the context of a weak pre-departure HIV education program for Filipino migrant workers. More so, where the reality of HIV/AIDS has not sunk into the consciousness of majority of Filipinos and where the Filipino public remains generally averse to condom use.



According to the study-participants, both men and women initiate their expressed interest in having a relationship. These relationships involved either kissing, actual sex, or persuading the interviewee to have sex. Male interviewees were involved in multiple relationships, while the women claimed to be monogamous. The women, however, always suspect that the Filipino men they are involved with are married, but they are almost always told otherwise.

One interviewee confided that she got into an intimate relationship within two months after arrival in Hongkong.

The relationships tend to be short, ranging from two weeks to two years. In any case, when the partner returns to the Philippines, the relationship always ends. One respondent got married to a Filipino seaman she met in Hong Kong, but they broke up after four years when the husband met another Filipina working in Singapore.

Factors that push migrant workers to get involved in relationships

Data from the in-depth interviews show that there are both external and internal factors that push the respondents into relationships. These include:

- **Peer pressure.** For the respondents in the in-depth interviews, the *barkada* is a potent source of peer pressure to get involved in relationships. In fact, some respondents say they have been teased by their *barkada* to enter into relationships.

Some relationships started by teasing which later developed into something more serious. According to one respondent: "It was like teasing ... then it became true ... Then the guy ... he was also a playboy, he likes [women]. He would not spare anyone ..."

There seems to be an expectation for the men to have a girlfriend, particularly in a context where the women migrant workers clearly outnumber the men. As one male interviewee said "The group teased me ... 'You're the only one without a girlfriend, I have a spare room. You can bring whoever you like there.' I wanted to show off, so the following day, I said, 'You must be thinking I'm slow. Here, I have a girlfriend'."

Others also feel pressured to get into a relationship if their friends have existing relationships.

- **Economic necessity.** A female respondent narrated that her male employer made sexual advances at her, and when the wife got suspicious she was fired. The male employer continued seeing her and gave her money to help her out while she was trying to look for another job. She states "but if it continued, it was possible ... I would have fallen for him because I was confused then. Of course, I had no job, I had no money ... How would I feed myself?" Although this factor was not included in the follow-up survey, one respondent mentioned that some workers got involved in relationships for financial support.

- **Referral.** This happens when a friend introduces the worker to another friend or to a relative for the purpose of bringing the two together eventually into a relationship. This practice appears to be common among Filipinos as much as the concept of finding partners through pen-pals. Almost half of the study-participants said they had been referred to someone by a friend. Some said they had pen pals. In fact, it is common to see on weekends at the Central Park people distributing pamphlets that give out information on where to contact potential pen-pals of different nationalities.
- **Envy.** When members of the clique get into relationships, some members feel envious and get into their own relationships as well.
- **Sexual gratification.** Others get involved for mere sexual gratification. These are mostly casual sexual encounters.
- **Curiosity.** Others declare they got involved with foreigners out of curiosity. Still, they do not expect these relationships to last because of cultural differences.

Sexual behavior

The area of sexual behavior was covered only by the in-depth interviews. Almost all of the in-depth interview respondents claim to have had heterosexual sexual experience prior to working abroad.

Some of those who had relationships while abroad, admitted having had sexual

contact. The rest claim they only went as far as kissing, hugging or sleeping together but without going all the way.

Those who did not engage in sex (all women) disclose that they were pressured to have sex but they refused. The reasons for refusing include (a) fear of getting pregnant and (b) uncertainty about the man's marital status.

Having sex with partners is usually done during their days off. They usually go to a motel, although they say this may be expensive. Thus, engaging in sex is something they usually prepare for.

However, one respondent (male) reveals he had a casual sexual encounter with another Filipina in her employer's house when the employer was not home.

Condom use

Incidence of condom use is low. Data from the in-depth interviews show that among the respondents with sexual experience, only three out of 10 had ever tried using condoms, two of whom are males.

Likewise, in the in-depth interviews, among those who had had sexual contact while in Hongkong, the women said that they never used condoms, while the men said they sometimes used condoms. Data from the survey show otherwise. All of those who had relationships in Hongkong have tried using condoms and all have expressed interest in using condoms in the future.

Generally, condoms are viewed more as a means of contraception rather than

as a means to prevent STDs. Very few acknowledge condoms as protection against STDs and HIV/AIDS.

There seems to be a lot of misconceptions about condoms, even among those who have not tried it or those who have no sexual experience. Thus, many of the respondents have no intention of using condoms in the future.

The reasons for not using condoms include: (a) uncertainty about the protection that condoms can provide regarding contraception; (b) not a necessity because she is taking birth control pills; (c) partner does not like to use condoms; and (d) misconceptions that condoms are bad for the body.

Knowledge of HIV/AIDS

There is a high awareness of HIV/AIDS as a serious disease. All the study-participants claim to have heard of the disease. Knowledge of the disease, however, may not be as high.

Majority only know of sexual contact as the mode of transmission. A few said that HIV can also be contracted through blood transfusion.

There are also misconceptions and uncertainties about the modes of transmission, as well as stereotyping. For example:

- Some believe that HIV can be transmitted through kissing, use of drugs, and sharing of utensils.
- Some are uncertain if HIV can be transmitted through sharing of drinks or mosquito bites.

- Some are convinced that prostitutes and those obsessed with sex are likely to get HIV/AIDS.
- Some believe that they are unlikely to get HIV/AIDS either because they do not get involved with others or they do not engage in paid sex. One woman said that she trusts her husband (a seaman). In the survey, 90% of the women were confident that they will not get the disease.

While the study-respondents may be scared of HIV/AIDS, this fear has not always been translated into behavioral change.

One interviewee said that he always tells his friends to be careful, but his friends think that they do not have to worry because Filipinas are “clean.”

In addition, there is also a significant number who associate the possibility of contracting HIV only through their personal actions without connecting this to their partner’s behavior. They believe that they will not get HIV because their only sexual partner is their husband.

A. Sources of Information on HIV/AIDS

In the in-depth interviews, awareness or knowledge of HIV/AIDS came largely from sources in the Philippines. The respondents said they had no or had only limited access to HIV/AIDS information while abroad.

Sources of HIV/AIDS information in the Philippines mostly come from newspapers/magazines, TV, radio, and infor-

mal talks. Similarly, sources of HIV/AIDS in Hongkong are newspapers or magazines, informal talks, TV and radio.

A few remember having come across the term HIV/AIDS during the pre-departure orientation seminar (PDOS) in the Philippines.

B. Implications of the Findings

- Families play an important part in a worker's decision to go abroad, either because the migrant workers consult them in deciding to work abroad or they act as facilitating channels for migration.

While abroad, the family may either be a strong support mechanism for the workers or a source of additional stress because of their expectations. Thus, the families of migrants should also be targeted for advocacy to inform them of the realities of labor migration and the accompanying health risks, as well as to transform them into effective support systems for workers abroad.

- Some overseas workers are inclined to get involved in relationships abroad because of the following factors:
 - They are in their reproductive ages;
 - They are sexually active even prior to working abroad;
 - There are no social shackles to check their behavior;

- There is peer pressure to get involved in relationships;
- They have a need for sexual gratification;
- A relationship may be economically beneficial to them; and
- Unfriendly social conditions lead to their social isolation.
- Oppressive working conditions endanger our workers' health, lives and general well-being. More efforts should be exerted to work for better working conditions for the workers.
- In the context of cyclical migration and the prospects of continuing labor migration, migrant workers should be allowed more room for job mobility and security of tenure - including expansion of work options and choices of employers, and stronger protection against unjustified dismissal.
- Summary dismissal and strict immigration policies in host countries contribute to our migrant workers' vulnerability to:
 - Further abuses by agreeing to illegal work contracts or to working illegally with lower pay and higher risks; and
 - prostitution
- High cost of deployment leads to pre-departure debts which cause overseas workers to
 - Endure oppressive working conditions;
 - Remain in the host country despite their dismissal in the hope

Survey of KABP Related to HIV/AIDS Among Filipino Migrant Workers

<p>of finding another employer, making them more vulnerable in this transition phase;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Engage in part-time prostitution to earn more; and ➤ Agree to illegal contracts. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Overseas Filipino workers engage in social activities during their holidays. These activities may be the target of advocacy programs in host countries. ● Overseas Filipino workers may be vulnerable to HIV/AIDS because of the following factors: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ working conditions and anti-migrant labor policies restrict the options of workers and could lead to higher incidence of irregular 	<p>migrants;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ they tend to engage in relationships while abroad; ➤ even granting high awareness, knowledge of HIV/AIDS is low, and there has been little corresponding behavioral change to avoid HIV/AIDS; ➤ they have no (or limited) access to HIV/AIDS information or prevention programs in host countries; ➤ they have limited access to health services abroad; and ➤ Condom use is low among our mi-grant workers.
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Introduction

In 1998, the Philippine government reported the deployment of 193,300 sea-based workers, which figure accounts for 26% of the total overseas workers deployed in that year.

Before the onset of massive labor migration in the Philippines, seafarers were the “dollar-earners”; many of them making their careers off working overseas, coming home for vacations only one to three months in a year.

In the advent of the HIV/AIDS crisis, seafarers have emerged among the more vulnerable groups within the category of migrant workers. Faced with the daily risks of negotiating turbulent seas, sailing for days or weeks on end, and being in a typically male-dominated occupation, seafarers are known to indulge in social activities the moment they dock, including drinking binges and casual or paid sex.

The proposition was that if seafarers are vulnerable to STDs and HIV, they could pass on such vulnerability to their partners. It was in this context that KALAYAAN, Inc. wanted to study further the realities of the families of seafarers and factors that contribute to their HIV vulnerability.

Background of the Study

The study was conducted in two areas in Central Philippines through the help of a local partner, the KABALAKA Reproductive Health Center. For the purpose of the research, KALAYAAN conducted are-search training focused on HIV/AIDS and migration to build the capability of the local partners. Immediately after the training, data gathering was conducted from June to December 1998.

The study utilized the in-depth interview method and the focus groups discussion. A total of thirty-three (33) women who are all married to seafarers were involved in the study. Twenty women were individually interviewed and the rest participated in two (2) FGDs conducted in the two areas.

The objectives of the study are:

- 1 To determine the impact of separation on the families; and
- 2 To determine the factors that contributes to the HIV vulnerability of the wives of seafarers.

This paper focuses on the findings of the second objective.

Awareness of STDs, HIV/AIDS as Well as Husband's and Own Vulnerability

The wives are aware that seafarers generally engage in casual sex with other women while abroad. Friends or co-workers of their husbands have often been generous in relating experiences. Sometimes, even the husbands themselves tell the stories. While many of these stories refer to the exploits of co-workers or friends, some husbands do tell, or in some cases, confess to their wives their extra marital sexual activities abroad. In fact, some wives have personally witnessed how the women climb aboard the ship on occasions when they meet their husbands at the port or when they join their husbands in the voyage.

The study also shows that wives of seafarers are aware of sexually transmitted diseases (STDs) and HIV/AIDS. They say they have come across these terms through the media as well as through their profession.

Many of the respondents admit they can never be sure about their husband's activities abroad. In this context, they say they are vulnerable to STDs and HIV if their husbands indeed engage in extra-marital sexual activities abroad. Some express fear of contracting the disease from their husbands. They have heard stories from their husbands or friends of seafarer having contracted an STD. In some cases, the husband or the wife actually contracted an STD.

Despite this backdrop, many of the wives still have not taken proactive mea-

asures to protect themselves from their own vulnerabilities especially to HIV/AIDS. The most some have done is to send reading materials on HIV/AIDS to their husbands or remind them to always be careful lest they contract such diseases. A few insist that their husbands submit to medical examination before sexual contact with them. Generally, however, there is an apparent hesitancy to confront the issue.

In this regard, it is important therefore to analyze the factors that hinder wives of seafarers from protecting themselves against their own vulnerability to the disease.

Attitudes of wives toward their husband's vulnerability

Acceptance of husband's extra-marital activities

There seems to be a common tolerance for male promiscuity. Some respondents rationalize that it is normal for men to have sex with other women because it is part of their nature. They say that their husbands have sexual needs that must be satisfied and since they cannot be present to satisfy these needs, it is natural for men to look elsewhere for satisfaction.

There is also the view that sex with other women is part of a seafarer's life. This view is combined with the fact that many of the wives married their husbands when the latter were already seafarers and thus they feel they should already have accepted these realities.

Denial

Denial comes in several forms. First, there are wives who refuse to think about their husband's sexual activities abroad. They say they don't entertain these thoughts lest they die just thinking about them. Second, there are those who would like to believe their husbands are different. While they admit that seafarers do tend to engage in sexual encounters abroad, their husbands do not because they are shy, God-fearing, are not sexually aggressive or have not shown signs of being a womanizer.

Trust

Many of the wives say they trust their husbands. Often, it is the husband who assuages the wife by telling her he loves her or by asking her to trust him. Thus, many of the wives express confidence that their husbands do not engage in extra-marital sexual activities abroad because their husbands tell them so. This trust is also closely related to the idea that their husbands are different and that they know their husbands well enough to trust them.

Resignation

The feeling of resignation is best captured in the thinking that the wives cannot do anything once their husbands are away. They are helpless if their husbands decide to get involved with other women. Likewise, if their husbands feel sexual

urges, they are not available to satisfy these needs.

This sense of resignation adds texture to the idea of trust thus creating the concept of forced trust. They trust their husbands when they are outside the Philippines because they are helpless or because they do not see what the husbands are doing. Thus, unless they have proof of any wrongdoing, trust may be the best balm to soothe their doubting minds.

Expectations of husband's behavior

The wives' expectations though appear to be one-sided and have not been formally expressed to their husbands.

For example, there is a tendency to expect their husbands to behave like themselves. They expect that if women can control their urges or survive on abstinence, then the husband should be able to do so as well.

Some respondents rationalize that it is normal for men to have sex with other women because it is part of their nature.

There is also the expectation that because their husbands are aware of STDs and HIV, they will be more careful and, if they can't control their urges, they would choose the "clean" women. There is here almost a complete abdication of the wives' personal responsibility to take care of their own health and bodies.

Finally, there is an expectation that their husbands will not have sexual contact with their wives if the former know they are sick. This is ironic because in the same breath the wives also believe that their husbands will not likely disclose their sexual activities abroad - even when the signs are obvious. They also admit the possibility that the husbands themselves may not be aware that they have contracted a disease.

Arguing about it destroys the family harmony

Family harmony seems an important value among wives of seafarers. This is understandable considering that their husbands come home for only one to three months a year and so they have to make the most of their time together. Furthermore, arguments between the couple may have a negative impact on the children considering that they hardly see or know their father.

There is also the fear that being too argumentative would further drive their husbands to seek comfort in other women's arms. Instead, they think it is better to shower their husbands with love. Thus, they prefer not to seriously deal with their uncertainties or insecurities. According to one respondent, "It is not that you do not doubt him but you don't show him you doubt him."

Notwithstanding though the women have developed their own forms of resistance, albeit faint and often casual. The wives do confront their husbands or drop hints of their doubts but always jokingly. Some try to fish for signs in their conver-

sations. One woman found out that her husband was having a serious affair with another woman but she never confronted her husband. Instead, she wrote the other woman asking the latter to break up with her husband in consideration of their family.

Attitudes toward their own vulnerability

Willingness to take the risk

One of the more dangerous attitudes of some wives is the willingness to take the risk of contracting STDs or HIV/AIDS. They say that they miss their husbands so much that they are eager to sexually connect with them notwithstanding the risks. They say they think of the risks later so they accept that STDs or HIV may be the price to pay for their happiness.

Furthermore, sexual intimacy may be a form of affirmation for the wives who, aware of the many temptations their husbands face abroad, harbor feelings of insecurity about their husband's feelings for them.

Fear of finding out

While the wives may nurture suspicions of their husband's extra-marital affairs, some would rather not know about these things. There is a fear of how they will react and of the consequences to the family. This complacency again reflects the tendency to commit to their husband's decision making the fate of their own health.

Helplessness

While the wives are aware or even afraid of their vulnerability to STDs and HIV, some feel they cannot do anything about it. This helplessness springs from various factors. First, the family is usually dependent on the husband's income from abroad. Thus, if womanizing is considered part of a seafarer's life and work, then it has to be accepted as such. Second, constantly arguing about their husband's sexual infidelity could lead to dire consequences including family disharmony and, ultimately, separation.

Attitudes toward Condom Use Between married couple, condoms are used for birth control only

Consistent with the view of the general population, many of the wives consider condoms as essentially a form of birth control, especially in the context of marital consortium. Thus, condoms are considered unnecessary for those who wish to have children or use other birth control methods.

However, there seems to be an implicit admission that condoms may be used for sex outside of marriage. Some wives are aware that the ships provide condoms for seafarers and therefore expect that seafarers use condoms while abroad. This, however, remains an expectation because they remain uncertain if their husbands do use condoms when engaging in extra-marital sexual activities abroad.

Use of condoms is not natural

Some women express that condom use is not natural and so they feel embarrassed about using it. Others dislike the idea completely while some think condoms are inconvenient because they disrupt the lovemaking.

Volunteering the use of condoms is a sign of guilt or mistrust

Since condoms are acceptable only for protective sex outside of marriage, there is a perception that volunteering condom use within marital sex is an admission of guilt on the part of the husband. Conversely, it would seem that if wives suggest condom use to their husbands that would be an indication of mistrust in their husbands that runs counter to their avowed mutual trust.

In the trainings among seafarers' wives conducted by KALAYAAN as a follow-up to the research, the wives said that condom use for them is complicated. The couples are not accustomed to using condoms and changing habits mid-stream would disrupt the family dynamics. The wives expressed fear that their husbands may suspect that they have been unfaithful if they suggest condom use. In addition, their husband's sexual activity abroad is an issue they have to approach with caution because it brings out passionate and heated discussions.

Economic Dependency

A primary factor that affects the HIV vulnerability of seafarers' wives as well as their attitudes is their economic dependence upon their husbands. Many of the wives do not work outside the home. Some were convinced by their husbands to leave their work and stay home to take care of the children. As a result, some wives become cautious in managing their husband's income.

To illustrate, some wives account for every cent they spend, even keeping receipts of expenditures or asking permission before spending. This is to avoid quarrels over money matters when their husbands come home. Some also fear being blamed for spending too much.

This economic dependence creates a power imbalance between the couple. Since economic power is usually equated with decision-making power, this economic dependence partly results in the women's diminished power to negotiate for safer sex. Moreover, wives have little say over their husband's vices - drinking, gambling, or even womanizing because the perception is that he is spending his own money anyway. Some wives say it is all right for the husband to spend or may already be spending his overtime pay abroad for as long as they receive their monthly allotment.

Social Norms

Extant social and cultural norms like-wise affect the HIV vulnerability of women. Traditional and patriarchal societies expect women to stay home, take care of the children and attend to the husband's needs - providing sex to the husband being included in the list of responsibilities of a good wife. Furthermore, women are not supposed to be knowledgeable about sexual matters.

Neither are they expected to be sexually aggressive, or even sexually interested. These factors hinder women from discussing their sexual habits and STD risks because they find it awkward to talk about sex. Furthermore, since sex is viewed as a marital responsibility, wives must give in to their husbands despite uncertainties over their husband's or their own safety.

These views continue to prevail in many areas in Philippine society. The respondents

believe that their role as wives is to shower their husbands with love and care, and their failure to do so would push their husbands to find comfort in other. They also believe women have weaker sexual urges and thus are more modest when it comes to sex. Initiating sex for example, is embarrassing and talking about it is sinful.

This economic dependence creates a power imbalance between the couple. Since economic power is usually equated with decision-making power, this economic dependence partly results in the women's diminished power to negotiate for safer sex.

We have therefore a situation where, on the one hand, the seafarers are exposed to sexual adventures abroad and come home with a new worldview on sexual practices while, on the other hand, their wives remain sexually reserved back home.

Some women reported tensions when their husbands would insist on trying out new sexual practices like oral or anal sex. While some women do give in, others would rationalize their refusal by telling the husband: "If you love me enough you would not ask me to do it." For some of the women who decided to try to be more sexually adventurous, they experienced a seeming sexual liberation, which led to better communication and sexual relations between the couple.

This situation fires up our imaginations of what sexual adventures the seafarers may have while abroad. But more importantly, it gives an indication of the respondents' views on sex and how they manage changes in their husband's sexual attitudes. While women should not be forced to do away with their comfortable sexual habits or practices, it is possible that being more open about sex could lead them to take more proactive and personal measures to protect themselves from their own vulnerabilities. This becomes especially significant in the light of riskier sexual practices that their husbands introduce like anal sex.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Spouses of migrant workers also face risks of STD and HIV vulnerability. They share the same profile with the migrants in having low knowledge of HIV/AIDS, or high awareness of the diseases which does not translate into behavioral change. Furthermore, incidence of condom use remains low. Their lack of understanding of the realities of migration becomes an additional risk factor.

The research findings show the tendency of the wives of seafarers either to tolerate male promiscuity or to completely trust that their husbands remain faithful to them while abroad. This situation is, in part, forced upon them because they know that their husbands' activities abroad are completely out of their control. Their trust, thus, is marked by a resignation to accept their helplessness about the situation.

The research further indicates that despite awareness and even fear of their own vulnerabilities, the wives have not taken concrete steps to protect themselves. Worse, some have admitted a willingness to take the risks.

Female spouses and partners of migrant workers face greater risks. Aside from a higher biological risk of contracting STDs and HIV/AIDS compared to their male counterparts, these women have very little safer sex negotiating power. Social norms and traditions expect women not to know or talk about sexual matters. Moreover, these women view sex as a responsibility they have to their husbands and because they are often economically

dependent on their husbands, they are rendered powerless to demand for safer sex.

Condom use is likewise hardly an option. Aside from being culturally unpopular, it is viewed as insulting because it suggests guilt of or mistrust in their husbands. It is also considered a breach of the women's responsibility to provide sex. In some cases, the women fear that suggesting condom use may create suspicions that they have been unfaithful to their husbands while the latter were away.

At present, the few programs for migrant workers are inadequate to address their realities. Worse, families of the migrants have not been factored into these programs. However, policy makers and program implementors cannot and should no longer ignore the negative impacts of labor migration upon the families. In the context of a growing STD and HIV/AIDS crisis, we have to look at the health risks and situation not only of migrant workers but their families as well, especially the women.

Thus it is recommended that:

- 1 Wives of seafarers should be oriented on STDs, HIV/AIDS and the realities of labor migration to enable them to assess their health risks taking these matters into consideration.
- 2 Wives of seafarers should undergo empowerment and skills building training to enable them to develop safer sex negotiation skills.

- 3 STD and HIV prevention and control programs should include migrant workers as well as their families.

- 4 In mobility and STD/HIV concerns, gender should be given a special attention in the light of prevailing social and cultural norms that prevent women from taking positive measures to control their vulnerabilities.

The KALAYAAN Response

In the course of the research, KALAYAAN recognized the risks that the women were facing. Since action is an important component in the research framework of CARAM-Asia, the challenge for KALAYAAN was to follow-up the research with concrete interventions. The strategy was to empower the women through education and acquisition of skills to enable them to negotiate for safer sex and take positive measure to protect themselves against their HIV vulnerabilities.

Thus, a pilot community-based education and skills-building training for wives of migrant workers and women migrant workers was designed and implemented in three areas in the Philippines, including one of the research sites. This was considered a pioneering effort as no program of this kind has been implemented either by the government or private agencies.

The training sought to meet the following objectives: (a) to empower the women through education on STDs, HIV/AIDS and other health concerns as well

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as the realities of labor migration; (b) and to enable the women migrants and partners of migrants to acquire safer sex negotiation skills.

The contents of the education program include: gender sensitivity training, orientation on the comprehensive women's health framework, orientation on STDs, HIV/AIDS and safer sex negotiation, orientation on migration realities and STDs and HIV/AIDS, as well as an assertiveness training.

The women met the trainings with much enthusiasm. For the first time, they

were given a venue to discuss and air their views, fears, doubts and problems regarding their everyday lived realities. For some of them, it was through the sessions that they were formally oriented on STDs and HIV/AIDS, as well as on gender and women's health issues. For many of them, it was then that they realized the magnitude of their vulnerabilities.

As a result of the pilot trainings, KALAYAAN hopes to produce a training manual as well as to replicate the program to benefit more women in the Philippines.

Background of the Study

This research was conducted in Bacolod and Iloilo, two areas in Western Visayas where the most number of sea-farers come from. Data-gathering was facilitated through in-depth interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs). A total of thirty-three (33) women participated in the study. Twenty women were individually interviewed and the rest participated in two FGDs held in the two areas.

The objectives of the study were:

- 1 To determine the impact of separation on the families; and
- 2 To determine the factors that contribute to HIV/AIDS vulnerability of the wives of the seafarers.

This paper focuses on the findings of the first objective.

Marriages among Seafarers

Many marriages of Filipino seafarers are, in a manner of speaking, contracted for purely economic considerations. For one, more and more single seafarers think of settling down in order to have a deeper purpose in earning the dollar or "*para may papuntahan ang pent*" (so that the money

would be spent wisely) and this is to be able to raise a family of one's own. These men believe that there is fulfillment and satisfaction in providing for their own spouses and children compared to when they are simply helping support their parents and siblings.

Seemingly, there is a pattern in the process of courtship and marriage among seafarers. Usually the men are introduced to their future wives through common friends or their relatives. The latter then start teasing or setting up the couple as a pair. Courtship commences which eventually leads to marriage when both feel that they want to spend life together. While there are certainly instances of love at first sight among these pairs, there are also cases when love begins only or develops slowly within the marriage. Virgie frankly admits, "I only accepted my husband because of my parents. My husband was already a seaman before we got married." Most likely, one of the reasons why Virgie's parents urged their daughter to marry a seaman was economic in nature, too.

After the wedding, the couple would ordinarily be together for a month or two; then, the husband would have to go back to sea. The pressing economic consider-

ation that leaves the couple with no choice but to endure long periods of separation not only early in their marriage, but also throughout most of their married life, often results into a perpetually half-grown relationship which leaves many wives emotionally uncomfortable. The popular notion that marriage to a seafarer is like being always in a honeymoon stage (that is, being courted all over again every time the husband comes home for vacation) is actually just half the truth if we are to go by the revelations made by the wives in this study. While it is true that the men come home bearing gifts - a typical component of courtship - every time, such a gesture does not really completely set the stage for another "honeymoon." To the wives, the return of their husbands means that they now need to confront their emotional insecurities as well as to reconcile their ambivalent feelings toward their husbands. This is what Mayet experiences every time her husband comes back from abroad:

I'm happy when he comes home from abroad but, sometimes, I feel ambivalent. I feel shy when we talk and when we lie down together.

Mayet's reaction is quite understandable considering that the personal relationship between the couple is not given enough time to develop deeply because the husband is home for just two to three months in a year. The lack of confidence as a result of protracted togetherness also

makes the wives emotionally insecure in the relationship. Often, they wonder if their husbands' feelings for them have changed or diminished over the span of time that they had been apart. Hence, their need for constant assurance from their husbands:

We are not hypocrites. We have doubts. Sometimes, I would ask him, do you still love me? He would answer, yes, I do love you.

Despite emotional apprehensions concerning the more intimate aspects of their relationship with their husbands, the wives nevertheless still strive to attain the ideal family life in their own homes; the "ideal" means having a complete and happy family. The term "complete" of course means having children and, therefore, every couple even very early on in the marriage strives to have children.

If "completing a family" is not really that difficult, the realization of having a happy one is more complicated. For one, a happy family depends on its being complete: typically, having children is the paramount reason for a Filipino marriage.

But the notion of being complete is constantly challenged among the families of seafarers due to the nature of the husband's occupation. What makes this challenge more complicated is the fact that the happiness of the family is basically hinged on its members' enjoyment of life's comforts which then necessitates the

The wives strive to attain the ideal family life in their own homes; the "ideal" means having a complete and happy family.

husband's return to work abroad for lack of similar economic opportunities in our country. Seafarer's wives thus always have to reconcile the reality of having a perpetually absent husband/father and their desire for material prosperity. Wives are obliged to look at this arrangement as a "way of life," or as Jennifer declares, "we need to accept that as a wife of a seaman, we will always be 'abandoned'."

Clearly, Jennifer is not using the term "abandoned" in the dictionary sense (that is, total desertion) but rather to mean that these seafarers leave their families for un-usually long stretches of time for the sake of giving their own families economic stability. Having absent ex-husbands, the wives then need to deal with the burden of lone parenting, as well as, with loneliness resulting from being away from one's partner. They are nevertheless comforted by the thought of the economic trade off that such an absence brings to their families:

It is difficult to accept his coming and going but what can we do? The kids are growing too - we spend for their education, and we have projects too. So these are valid reasons for him to go. They say, we should not be too emotional because it is our way of life. He has to go because of financial reasons. -Joljie

The first time he left, although I felt sad, I put in mind our dream of having our own house. If he will stay here, his salary will not be enough. So I told myself that others might feel lonely but I might not. That is the reason why I'm putting his allotment to projects so that the pain of separation will be worth it. -Julie

Solo parenting by the seafarer wife

It is indeed ironic that in the efforts of seafarer couples to attain the "ideal" state of family life (that is, having a comfortable lifestyle), they also, at the same time, need to break a concomitant part of this "ideal," which is to maintain family togetherness for emotional support and proper guidance, on the part of the children. What heightens the irony is that in the process of achieving as well as breaking the "ideal" family life, the seafarer husband and his wife are inevitably pitted against each other, further endangering the survival of this ideal family life. Generally, it is the "economic ideal" that is given premium over the "emotional ideal." It is an almost universal orientation that the tangible are preferred over the intangible aspects of life. It is not then surprising if so much value is attributed to the income of the husband since directly tied to it are the tangible aspects of a so-called successful home life: sufficient education and care for children, and, of course, accumulated material possessions.

On the other hand; the wife's own contribution to attaining that ideal home life virtually goes unnoticed because she is made to operate in an already less than ideal circumstance; that is, her family is already incomplete due to the husband's absence. Aside from being solely in charge of overseeing the day-to-day operations of her household, the wife is also tasked with the bigger responsibility of rearing her children, of giving them emotional support and guidance as well as of ensuring family solidarity and

harmony. The last seems quite a tall order especially in circumstances when the children grow up not really knowing their own father.

This becomes the case when the wife gets pregnant while the husband is on home leave and she gives birth while he is out seafaring. Children in this situation virtually go through their young lives without the father's physical presence thereby making them, in turn, emotionally distant from their father. Being the constant parent, the mother is then burdened with the responsibility of building and, especially, maintaining a close relationship between the emotionally-distant children and the physically-distant father for the attainment of that ideal family life. She has to make extra efforts in trying to let her young children understand the irony of the father's situation. A similar experience happened to Nilda who was asked by her young children why their father takes so long to come home: "I told my children that their father is working and living in a far-away place for our sake."

Obviously, to young minds, the paradox of the father leaving them because he loves them is a difficult idea to fully grasp. Which then makes the mother's burden much heavier since the cultural expectation is for her to create and develop the emotional bonding between her husband and her children.

Power of money

Despite the fact that it is the mother who runs the everyday family operations, the husband, who is away, still manages to make his presence felt especially finan-

cially. The wife does have money in the form of a monthly allotment but the "power" attendant to having it remains in the hands of the seafarer husband.

A case in point is that of a wife who narrates that her 14 year-old son asked his father for a pair of Nike shoes as a birthday present. The husband, who probably felt he had to compensate for his absence, instructed her to buy the pair of shoes even if she felt that these are too expensive for their budget. She says further that if she were made to decide, she will not buy the pair for budget considerations however "it is the father who said to buy it for his son so I could not do otherwise (Remy)." It is certainly often the case that the wife feels obligated to give in to the husband's wishes since he happens to be the money-earner.

This realization makes wives extra prudent in managing the family's finances, ranging from the everyday expenses to the major expenditures such as "dream projects." Some wives even go to the extent of keeping a record of where her allotment goes should the husband question how she has been spending it. In addition, when something calls for spending a big amount, she solicits her husband's approval: "I always ask his permission before I spend or buy. I wait for his opinion" (Helen). This practice of the wife soliciting the husband's approval on money matters reinforces the idea that the wife does not take part in producing the money for she is "only" at home attending to the family. Thus, the power is in the hands of the husband since the money is his; she is only handling it on his behalf.

The power that the husband yields over his wife spills over onto his children. Aware of their father's financial advantage, children of seafarers try to please and show off to their father so he will get them the material things they want. The father, on the other hand, strengthens the concept of money as reward, and so, he dangles it over his children as a means of compelling the latter to do well in school. This is aptly illustrated by Nilda's own family experience:

Their father promised that if they (children) get grades of 90% and above, he would buy things that they like. So, their grades are 91% and 92%. At least they're striving because of the promised reward for them.

The earnings of seafarers clearly enable their families to live a comfortable life that, in turn, gives them a certain status in their respective communities. Reny observes that the "children of seamen are different - what they want, they get." This economic advantage over most others in the community has however made some of these seafarer children quite snobbish because "they love new clothes, money, and delicious food. They don't like old clothes (Mayet)."

Fear of blame

In the context of a patriarchal society, home management is given very minimal value so that there is rarely, if at all, recognition given to the wife who is traditionally responsible for it. In this kind of a society, the woman is made to believe that managing the home and rearing the children are the "only" things she does so she should do these well.

It is remarkable how this patriarchal ideal is reinforced in the way the seafarer's wife tackles problems besetting her family. She first looks for ways and means to attend to the problem on hand. If the problem is finally resolved, that is when she tells the husband about it. The wife braves all the problems that come her way while sparing the husband from worrying about these. Since she is not saddled with economic responsibilities but is left at home managing the family, she feels accountable in handling family issues

and more importantly, in solving them properly.

In times when maintaining the family gives her emotional trouble, she runs to friends and her own parents for moral support or practical advice because she considers prayers as the best weapon in dealing with her problems. Julie, is a typical Filipina wife in this regard for she maintains that in times of trials, she prays

As is the traditional practice, Filipino parents see their children's education as an "investment." They expect their children to eventually share their earnings with their parents and siblings when they become gainfully employed.

to God and “puts everything in His hands.”

But in such problematic situations, the wife ends up making the final decision: “You are alone in making decisions and when you make decisions, you are afraid of the consequences because you may be blamed for it (Julie).” Since she sees very little worth in her own contributions to the family well-being, she fears blame if, in case, she falls short of her husband’s expectations or of the society at large. She is afraid that if her decision turns out wrong or if anything bad happens to her children, then, she would be regarded as a big failure in carrying out her “simple” tasks.

The life, the money, the “in-law problem”

As is the traditional practice, Filipino parents see their children’s education as an “investment” in that they expect their children to eventually share their earnings with their parents and siblings when they become gainfully employed. Parents of seafarers are typical Filipino parents in this regard. And the seafarers also fully recognize their traditional obligation toward their parents and siblings so initially, there are no complications regarding the seafarer’s earnings. Problems arise when the seafarer decides to settle down and begins a family of his own because this means automatically that a bigger chunk of his money now goes to his wife and children with only a small amount, if not entirely stopped, regularly going to his parents and siblings. At this instance, his parents start feeling that his wife is “tak-

ing away” the seafarer’s money from them when they should rightfully gain from the son’s success. Some wives in this study reveal that this fact is a source of conflict between them and their family-in-law. According to Julie, her husband’s family resent the fact that she gets more money from her husband than they do. At times, the wife is looked on with distrust believing that she married their kin for purely financial considerations.

There are times when the in-laws openly demand for a share of the seafarer’s earnings as in the case of Jojie who says,

You’re considered bad if you could not give something. If they learn that my husband received a higher salary or occupied a higher position, they would ask for a bigger amount too.

In spite of the tension usually unspoken between her and her family-in-law due to the allotment issue, the wife is still obliged to maintain good relations with the former as dictated upon by cultural expectations. Jojie solves her “in-law problem” by being more generous toward her husband’s family:

The more envious they will become if they see that you’re improving (in life). They will demand more, so you’re forced to give so that they will not create problems.

Another issue arising from the seafarer’s earning is the tendency of in-laws to interfere in the way his wife spends the allotment sent to her. The study-participants say that they know of some in-laws who are too critical of how

their kin's wife spends her allotment. When the wife brings home a new piece of furniture or an appliance, she always gets adverse reactions from her parents-in-law because they think that she is not spending their son's money properly. Other in-laws rub in the idea that the wife should feel indebted to the husband for all the good things she is presently enjoying: "They say that you would not be able to acquire those things if not for their son. That you wouldn't enjoy this kind of lifestyle (Remy)."

Synthesis

The dynamics within the family of a seafarer is very much motivated, controlled, and maintained by economics. The seafarer seeks overseas employment in pursuit of better financial opportunities. He usually starts a family of his own to have a definite reason for earning the dollar. His wife endures the pain and hardship of solo parenting. What makes her life more difficult is the presence of in-laws who constantly interfere with how she manages her family. This uncommon interest on her financial management actually boils down to a desire by the in-laws to get a bigger share of the seafarer's money.

Though the importance of money to the family welfare cannot be discounted and that, credit should be given to the member, usually the father in the case of the seafarer family, who bears the economic burden, we should however reex-

amine the magnitude of the role and, hence, the value of the woman in the context of the family.

Earning a sufficient amount of money for the family is one big responsibility to fulfill but equally big a responsibility is holding the family together.

The wife addresses all the complex demands of rearing the children and managing the home with very little help from the husband. In the case of the seafarer's wife, she does all these with practically no assistance from the seafarer husband save for the generous financial resource he sends from

abroad. Ironically, her efforts in making the family emotionally bonded are not given due credit since the results of such efforts are not readily discernible compared to her husband's own efforts in gaining material wealth for the family.

The power in the family still resides in the husband mainly because he is the one bringing in the family money. Unaware of her equally important role in the family, the wife does not question this status; in fact she fortifies it by consulting with the husband for every major financial matter. Also, she feels accountable to her husband for every dollar sent her by the latter.

Her non-recognition of her true worth in the family is also shown by how she fears recrimination by the husband for possible "wrong" decisions she has made regarding family matters as well as for the

The power in the family still resides in the husband mainly because he is the one bringing in the family money.

imagined consequences of her family management. In view of all these, we could not really begin to imagine the enormity of the strain and pressure borne by the seafarer's wife. She is not only physically drained, but she is also clearly mentally and emotionally stressed.

We therefore see the need for the seafarer's wife to be fully aware of her own worth in the family. She needs to realize the importance of her contributions in

keeping the family intact. Too, she needs to feel empowered when performing her share of family responsibility.

Proper recognition should be accorded the seafarer's wife for she, like her husband working abroad, is performing an equally important role in achieving the "ideal" family life.

Introduction

The case studies on returning migrant workers represent Phase 2 of KALAYAAN's Action Research on Migration and HIV/ AIDS. These case studies examine the returning migrant workers' reflections on their individual lives abroad; specifically, on how they handled and reconciled the old and new relationships - both social and personal - in order to adjust to the demands of their new life.

Delving into these relationships and commitments not only provides us deeper insights into the experiences of the migrant workers but also helps us validate the results of the survey undertaken in Phase 1. Phase 1 of the action research primarily aimed to find out the general knowledge, attitude, belief, and practices of first time departing migrant workers regarding sexuality and HIV/ AIDS. In addition, the various dimensions of personal relationship and commitment in the lived realities of the returning migrant workers may guide us in identifying and at the same time, having a better understanding of the factors which make the migrant workers especially vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

This study is focused on the lived realities of the following returning migrant workers: male mostly single - seafarers from Bacolod and Iloilo whose ages range from 26 to 45 years old and whose length of overseas employment ranges from 7 to 26 years; female - mostly married - nurses, also all from Bacolod and Iloilo, whose ages range from 23 to 40 years old and who work in Saudi Arabia hospitals except for two who are US-based; female entertainers in Japan who all hail from Luzon; and female domestic workers in Italy who also come from Luzon.

Economic support as an expression of family commitment

For the overwhelming majority of Filipinos, the most compelling reason for working abroad is to achieve material prosperity. This fact, however, does not really distinguish Filipinos from other peoples in the world. What instead sets us apart is our willingness to assume economic responsibility for everyone in our own immediate families. Indeed, many of the migrant workers can easily identify with Mina who sought work as an entertainer in Japan, so she could help pay her

family's debt incurred when her mother got sick. Mina's sentiments are familiar:

May nabibigay ako sa magulang ko. Malaking tulong talaga iyon noon kasi nga nagkasakit ang nanay ko. Medyo magaling na naman ang nanay ko noong umalis ako Pero siyempre ang dam/ naming utang. Medyo nakatulong talaga iyon sa mga problema namin. Siguro kung hindi ako umalis, gumagapang pa rin kami sa utang [I am able to give (money) to my parents. This helped a great deal then because my mother got sick. Well, my mother was already recovering from her illness when I left for abroad but then we incurred many debts. My work-ing abroad has helped solve our problems. Perhaps if I did not leave, we will still be saddled with debts].

This automatic assumption of economic responsibility is also recognized by Marietta who went to Italy as a domestic worker because

Naaksidente kasi yung ama ko. Sa construction kasi siya nagtrabaho. Nabalian siya sa kamay at medyo hirap na siyang magtrabaho pagkatapos noon. Hindi na siya kinukuha para mangontrata. [My father who was a construction worker met an accident where he broke his arm. After that, he had difficulty getting work. He was no longer asked to do construction jobs].

From the Filipino perspective, such unquestioning assumption of economic accountability is simply a manifestation of the migrant workers' commitment to their own families. Cultural tradition demands that a dutiful son/daughter or mother/father should be willing to carry motley of burdens for the sake of the

family, foremost of which is economic re-sponsibility.

Aside from filling up the family coffer for survival needs, another pressing rea-son for migrant workers to earn the dol-lar is to be able to send either their sib-lings or their children to school because for Filipinos, success is not measured by material affluence alone but also by high educational attainment. In fact, the former is often regarded as the consequence of the latter; that is, education - specifically, college education is seen as one sure ticket to eventual material prosperity. Three of the study-participants confirm the prevalence of this notion among migrant workers when they maintain that they plan to continue working abroad only until their children (Lita and Girlie) and siblings (Marietta) finish their college education. The obvious implication being that those who have been sent to school should take over the economic burden for the family once they are gainfully employed.

Interestingly, this family commitment, often pinpointed as the push for most Filipinos to migrate, is at the same time seen as the pressing reason for the migrant workers to come home for good. It is usually the women who cut short their careers abroad so they can attend to their families back home.

Mel states "I gave up my career in favor of my family. I have been married to my husband for six years but we never lived together long enough. The most that we've stayed together in our house is for a month or two. I feel that my family is more important over anything else".

Like Mel, Grace no longer has plans of working abroad since she has vowed to “prioritize my child and my family.” Another study-participant, Babes, has also decided to stay for good lest she gets blamed for what might happen to her children: “I have a lot of money but my children are suffering.

I will be blamed if I continue to work and something happens to them.”

Despite recognizing the centrality of the family in Filipino lives, some of the men in this study seem not as ready as the women to come home permanently for the sake of the family. Many realize the burden placed on their wives when they are at sea:

It’s tough for a woman to have a seaman husband. She has to play both roles of a mother and a father. If she has to make a decision, she has to wait for her husband before making the decision.

They also say that a seaman’s wife is the highest paid prostitute. Simply send them money, get them pregnant, then, leave them again.

But such realization, together with a declaration of devotion to their families, is however not strong enough to pull them back home for good. An apt illustration is the study-participant who laments the fact that his children hardly know him; nevertheless, he exclaims (somewhat contradictorily) “I’d prefer to give up my job anytime but right now it’s still premature (Norwegian).” This am-

bivalent attitude seems ironic when considered against another pertinent observation - also coming from a male study participant - “(Missing the family) is the kind of illness we Filipinos mostly have. We always think of our families (Gelveson).”

Marginalization as a lived reality in the workplace

The stories narrated by the study-participants inform us that life abroad is fraught with difficulties. The initial difficulty is usually the language barrier

between them and their employers since, more often than not, the latter cannot speak English. Consequently, one of the earliest adjustments they have to make in the workplace is to learn the language of their employer/s. Georgia talks of this initial difficulty when she relates that she and her Filipino colleagues had to learn Arabic quickly in order to get around the work-

place. Gina, along with her fellow entertainers in Japan, had a similar experience:

Siguro yung naging problema ko pa ay yung salita, kasi bibihira naman ang Hapon na marunong mag-ingles. So, nag-aral kami ng konting Niponggo at medyo kahit barok na barok kaming magsalita ay nagka-kaintindihan na naman kaming mga Hapon [Perhaps, another problem I faced (at the start)

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was the language barrier because only a few Japanese know how to speak English. We had to learn a few words in Niponggo; and even if we spoke very crude Niponggo, at least, we were able to communicate with our Japanese customers].

That the communication problem eventually gets solved does not, however, mean the end of the migrant workers' travails. For one, majority of them are made to work unusually long hours. Some of the seafarers who reveal that oftentimes they get to rest for as little as four hours each day, only while on duty. Meanwhile, most of the entertainers need to adjust their body clocks to cope with their working hours-8 PM to 4 AM. They also have to learn to get used to wearing the flimsy costumes and heavy makeup that are staples of their work.

Elena declares "noong una asiwa ako doon sa mga cos-tume kasi puro makeup tapos kung anoanong borlolooy ang suot mo. Pero masasanay ka rin naman. Kailangan mo Lang sigurong tihayan ang loob mo" [at first I was uncomfortable with my costumes because I had to wear too much makeup and too many accessories but you get used to these afterwards. You just need to be more gutsy.]"

Indeed, the migrant workers are prepared to make the proverbial sacrifices to earn more. Some even endure constant insults to their dignity in order to have a smooth relationship with their employers. Marietta recounts her experience with her employer:

Ang stnkto niya. Dapat ganito, dapat ganyan. Kung mall ang ginaga wa mo, papagalitan ka niya. Pero hindi naman niya ako sinasaktan. Yung ... mabunganga fang siya talaga. Lagi fang niya akong pina-pagalitan ... Tiniis ko na lang. Tatal, hindi naman niya ako sinasaktan. [She was very strict - always pointing out that things should be done this way and that. If you were doing things incorrectly, she would get mad at you. But she had not hit me. She just nagged too much. She was always angry at me. I just endured. Any-way, she did not physically abuse me]

On the other hand, Gina, a nurse, had to deal with employers who "really make you feel that you have to work because they are paying you. You're only a servant that is why you really have to do your duty."

But these previously mentioned difficulties are nowhere as serious as the issue of discrimination, which confronts almost all migrant workers, particularly, those who work in settings that have formal work structures. Such formal work structures have an entrenched hierarchy that encourages bias against those found at the bottom of the ladder. When those on top pull rank, those below inevitably are made to feel inferior. In the case of the seafarers, discrimination against the Filipino crew members come in the forms of: not being treated equally by the officers; being asked to do most of the menial/dirty tasks on board; having their co-workers impose the latter's culture on them; and not being given the chance to have their opinions heard. Needless to say, these perceived biases against them also

cause them to be marginalized in their workplace.

On the part of the nurses, they recognize discrimination in instances when their white colleagues are given undue advantage over them: *“the white would always be the one superior;”* or when those carrying British passports are not required to adhere to hospital rules as strictly as the Filipinos. Also, British nurses are given their own individual rooms while the Filipinos have to share a room.

In Japan, many locals look down on the Filipinos because they believe that the latter are all prostituted women. Elena confides

A/am mo medyo masungit ang mga Haponesa. Hindi naman lahat pero marami. Tingin ni/aya mga pokpok kami. Alam mo naman ang mga entertainer madaling makilala, lalo na kung Pinay. Tatal, bihira tang naman ang Pinay sa Japan na hindi entertainer. Eh minsan, kung bibili sa tindahan, kahit na prutas tang ang bibilhin mo, medyo masungit ang tingin [You know, most Japanese women, with a few exceptions, are quite bad-tempered. They think we are all prostitutes. You know how entertainers are easily recognized especially if they are Pinay. Well, there are only a few Filipinas in Japan who are not entertainers, anyway ... Sometimes, when we go to grocery stores, even just to buy fruits, they seem to be cross at us].

Ande, too, says that because of her being an entertainer, her relationship with

her Japanese boyfriend is frowned upon by the locals: *“Japayuki ako, Hapon siya. Hindi nila kami tinitingnan ng maayos doon.”* However, Ande also recognizes the fact that Filipinos also attach a stigma to mixed relationships so she is quite honest in her assessment that her relationship with the Japanese boyfriend may not also be looked kindly on by Filipinos.

Sexual harassment is another major concern among migrant workers, particularly women. If discrimination seems particularly nurtured in structured work settings, sexual harassment, in turn, seems more evident or common in the more vulnerable occupations such as domestic work and entertainment. Certainly, many of us have heard - frequently through the media - different versions of what Janet narrates as her sad experience:

In Japan, many locals look down on the Filipinos because they believe that the latter are all prostituted women

Two years ang contract ko noon. Siguro naka 1 1/2 years ako noon. May kan ya-kan yang opisina yung mag-asawa. Parang Executive Secretary yata itong babae at ac-countant yung lalaki. Umuwi ng maaga yung lalaki at inabutan ako sa kusina na nagluluto.

Noong una nakipagkuwentuhan muna siya kasi ganoon sila. Wala akong problema sa kanila noon ha. Lagi naman silang mabait sa akin, nakikipagkuwentuhan. Pinapakain pa nila ako ng maayos, mabait magutos. Tapos nga nangyari iyon

Aba, habang nag-uusap pala kami ay palapit sa akin yung tao. Hindi ko naman namama/ayan kasi nga naghihiwa ako ng gu/ay. Tapos, naramdaman ko nalang yung kamay niya sa balikat ko.

Nagulat ako Pero hindi ko na naman pinansin. Ganyan kasi sila paminsan. Umaakbay, yumayakap. Pero walang malisya.

Aba, umakap na sa akin tapos hinipo ang dibdib ko. Iba na iyon ha!

Eh, di nerbyos na nerbyos na ako kasi nga Sabi ko parang iba na nga ang ginagawa niya. Sinasabihan ko siya ng, 'No, I don't like, ' ganyan ... Ayawniyang turn/gill.

I had a two-year contract then and the incident happened after I have served them about 1 1/2 years already. My couple-employers each had a job: the wife was an executive secretary while the husband was an accountant. The man came home early and he found me in the kitchen cooking.

At first, he conversed with me as he and his wife often did. I didn't have any problems with them then because they were always kind to me, often engaging me in conversations. They also fed me properly and asked me gently to do errands for them. And then that incident happened.

Well, I didn't know that while we were talking he was slowly coming near me. I was busy slicing vegetables then. I suddenly felt his hand on my shoulder. I was surprised but at first, I ignored it because both he and his wife sometimes put their arms on my shoulders or even embrace me with no malice at all.

But then he embraced me and touched my breasts. This was already a different matter.

I was so nervous because I felt what he was doing was no longer right. I kept telling him 'no I don't like' but he didn't want to stop!

Luckily, Janet's story did not have the grim endings as those of many other workers. A neighbor happened to come by and so the male employer broke away from her. Right there and then, she decided to resign from her job. But, more importantly, Janet was brave enough to stand up to her boss:

Sabi ko after two days aalis na ako noong bahay. Pero kallangan niya akong big yen ng huling suwe/do ko at pamasahe pauwi, kundi isusum-bong ko siya sa asawa niya. Butt na Lang at natakot at ibinigay niya ang hinihingi ko [I told him that I was leaving his house after two days and that he had to give me my salary for that last month in addition to my fare in going home or else I would tell his wife what he did to me. Luckily, he feared the consequences of his action so he gave me what I asked for].

Georgia tells the story of another Filipina nurse whose breast was touched by a patient from Bangladesh who was a friend of the hospital's owner. When the nurse reported the incident to the latter, she was assured of help. But the next day, the erring patient was untimely discharged and the hospital did nothing to pursue her case. In this instance, it is clear that the absence of protection from a legal support system increases the susceptibility of Itiigrant workers to sexual harassment.

Social networking as panacea to loneliness

One pertinent observation made by a study-participant is the pervasiveness of “missing-the-family illness” amongst migrant Filipinos. As another puts it, “*at saka yung homesickness siguro. Yun ang pinakamatindi mong kalaban*” (and home-sickness becomes your worst enemy). From the reflections of those included in this study, this “illness” is considered as the one responsible in driving practically all of the migrant workers to seek comfort in the company of other Filipinos in their specific parts of the world. It does not then come as a surprise if everyone in this study speaks of her/his own Pinoy group abroad. The group is usually composed of co-workers, neighbors or fellow Pinoys whom the migrant worker meets in public places such as the church, the market, the grocery store, the park or even the school premises while bringing a ward to and from school.

In many cases, the social network is already in place even before the migrant worker sets foot in the country of employment. After all, the Filipinos are the largest migrant populations in the world, and it is not unusual to find Filipino migrants in practically all parts of the world. This situation thus makes adjusting to a different culture easier. Janet confirms this

when in answer to the question of whether she had difficulty adjusting to her new life in Italy, she says

Ay hindi naman. Ang dami kasing mga Pilipino doon eh. Nandoon pa nga ang tiyahin ko kaya noong una, doon ako palagi sa bahay nila tuwing weekend. May apartment kasi silang pamilya doon. Kaya kahit malungkot ako, may mga nakakausap naman ako na *Pilipino*.

At pinakila/a pa ako sa mga kaibigan nila kaya hind/ ako nahirapan [Not really because there are so many Filipinos there; in fact, I even have an aunt who is with her family there. Initially, I was always in their apartment during weekends. That way, my homesickness was easier to bear. My aunt’s family also introduced me to their own friends so I did not really have a hard time adjusting to my new life.]

Among the seafarers, sticking together does not only mean lessening their homesickness but also avoiding conflicts with co-workers of other nationalities. They spend their free time together engaging in recreational activities available on ship such as playing basketball, tennis, chess, darts, billiards, computer games or working out in the gym as well as in having sing-alongs. Gelveson adds “sometimes we group together in a room then gamble, watch bold films and have a small drink. It’s better if we Filipinos group together. There are

If discrimination seems particularly nurtured in structured work settings, sexual harassment, in turn, seems more evident or common in the more vulnerable occupations such as domestic work and entertainment.

less hassles. You easily understand each other.”

As well, the circle of friends becomes a support system in times of need and loneliness. Mina confirms

Paminsan kung may mga problemang ganyan. Pero mas madalas ha parang karama y mo sila kasi sa Pilipinas pa lang magkakilala na kayo. Alam niyo na yang mga hinaing ng isa. Maganda naman ang samahan namin ‘ [At times, some problems arise (between and among us friends) but more often, they act as your support system because you have known each other back in the Philippines. You are already familiar with each other’s hardships/ problems. We do have a congenial relationship].

The vital role that the social network plays in the welfare of migrant workers cannot thus be overstated because it represents an anchor for every homesick, lonely, needy, or even lost Pinoy soul abroad.

Personal relationships as both cure and risk

Aside from maintaining communications back home and, at the same time, being a part of a Pinoy network, migrant workers also enter into personal relationships to assuage their loneliness and other needs. There are instances when personal relationships begin through letters (pen pal) as in the case of Cecille who, for three months, now had been writing to a man in Saudi “*Binigay Icing ng kaibigan ko doon sa Italy. Pinson daw niya. Sinubukan ko long*” [My friend in Italy introduced

us. She said he is her cousin. I only tried having a pen pal (for the experience).

Presently, the man is courting her through his letters but Cecille maintains “... *hindi ko naman siya sinasagot. Wala sa isip ko iyon. Gusto ko Icing na may sumusulat sa akin kasi nga malungkot doon*” [I have not said yes. It’s not in my mind to have a boyfriend just yet. I only want someone writing me always because it is lonely abroad].

If a long distance-relationship proves effective in warding off loneliness and boredom, it seems however that more of the migrant workers hanker for a more proximate one. There are various advantages of such proximity according to the study-participants. To the entertainers, having a boyfriend close by not only relieves loneliness more easily but also offers protection from aggressive clients:

Oo, naisip ko na bake kung ano ang mangyari sa akin. Mare-rape be ako doon o hindi? Pero kasi ayoko namang meg-OH, kasi ang bigatbiget naman ng trabaho mo ano? Medyo madali naman ang dancer, mas delikado nga lang. Medyo kailangan mo ng proteksyon [Indeed, I thought about what might happen to me; will I be raped there or not? But I also did not want to become a DH because of the hard work involved. Being a dancer is easier, only, there are more risks involved. Hence, the need for protection].

Marami kasing gago diyan. Kung may boyfriend ka, kahit papaano, medyo hindi ka naman nila kaagad gagalawin. Tapos customer ka pa. Kaya oks lang. “ There are quite many crazy men around. But if you have a boyfriend, these men

will hesitate to 'touch' you immediately. As well, having a boyfriend means a steady customer. That's why (having a boyfriend) is just okay]. -Ande

Or, it could mean more material gain: "*Yung iba ganoon-nakikipag-relasyon dahilsa pers. Yung iba malungkot. Gustong mag-boyfriend* [Others are like that - they enter into relationship for money. Others are lonely. They want to have a boyfriend] (Elena)." Gina is more expansive on the matter:

Siguro eh malungkot sila. Pansinin lang sila ng Hapon, malaking bagay na. Nakakapawi ng lungkot kasi ahirap rin ang buhay namin doon. Pero yung iba talaga, pera ang rason [Maybe, they are lonely. So to be noticed by the Japanese is already a big deal to them. This can help ease loneliness because we also have a difficult life there. But to others, money is the main reason for getting into relationships.]

Kung may boyfriend ka kasi na kliyente, para kang may regular customer lagi linggo-linggo. Maganda rin iyon. Tapos namimigay pa sila ng mga regalo - alahas, damit, ganoon [If you have a boyfriend who is at the same time a client, as if you already have a regular customer every week. This is also good. Then, they (boyfriends) even give gifts - jewelry, clothes and so on]

Others may be sincere but they also frequently do not view their personal relationships as a long-term commitment. For the seafarers in this study, "sexual en-counters" seems the more appropriate term to use for their brand of relationship since most were quite frank in admitting that their main purpose in seeking out women is plainly for sexual gratification. As one succinctly puts it, "Men always look for women."

It is also noteworthy that there is a general awareness among those interviewed of many married migrant workers having entered into extra-marital relationships abroad. The justification of this is that the extreme loneliness brought on by the long separation from the spouse creates an ideal situation for the migrant worker to seek solace in other partners. There is really no conscious attempt to cheat on the spouse back home but rather it is just "dala ng pangangailangan" [out of necessity]. As Lita explains

Siguro kasi malungkot sila, kasi magkalayo silang mag-asawa. At madali ngang magloko kasi ang layo-layo ninyo sa isa't-isa. Kung maingat ka naman hindi ka mahuhuli [Perhaps because they are lonely being away from their spouses. And it is quite easy to fool around because you are away from each other. If you are careful, then you will not be found out].

The vital role that the social network plays in the welfare of migrant workers cannot thus be overstated because it represents and anchor for every homesick, lonely, needy, or even lost Pinoy soul abroad.

Such relationships are then basically for temporary companionship and sexual gratification. Practically all eventually go back to their spouses once their stint abroad is over. They are not willing to exchange their families with their new lovers. However, there are those who end up deserting their families to be with their lovers despite initial intent of not staying in the extra-marital relationship permanently. Vicky, a nurse, comments

“Even if they are married in the Philippines, they tend to ease their loneliness by having an affair with somebody who is also married in the Philippines or sometimes single. That’s very common and that’s the problem because they sometimes leave their families.

The break-up of a family is not the only risk involved when migrant workers enter into extra-marital sexual encounters affairs. They also risk acquiring STDs, more particularly the dreaded HIV/AIDS, especially if either they or their partners are sexually involved with more than one partner. Further exposure to the outside world has not made the migrant workers more knowledgeable than the average Filipino regarding the specter of STDs in general, and HIV/AIDS in particular. It is noticeable that even the nurses in this study (except the two working in the US) claim virtually no access to health information on AIDS/HIV in Saudi Arabia even as they are already in the medical profession and are themselves possibly exposed to people with living with HIV/AIDS. Mel maintains that she has not come across nor heard about any AIDS information campaign while abroad. Grace said she received information regarding HIV/AIDS

but then “AIDS is not talked about there (Saudi Arabia).” In contrast, Marbie says that in the US, even the kids are being educated about the disease.

If the nurses who are already in the medical field still lack information on HIV/AIDS (though the study-participants all have a good understanding of the possible sources of contracting the disease), then more so the other migrant workers in non-medical occupations. The generally low knowledge on HIV/AIDS is evident in the way many of the study-participants answer the questions on condom use as well as in their admission of risky sexual practices.

While abroad, Arman admits to having participated in group-sex. He reveals “Yes, what you see on TV, you try to imitate. What I experienced is that there is a group of girls and a group of males then they had sex together. It is one whole house where girls are there then when you are doing it, your other companions are watching.

Nismal also comments that there are seafarer who engage in group sex, those “who are brave enough and are sexually active.”

The entertainers, meanwhile, put their health on the line when they decide to engage in sex for hire. This, however, is a matter of choice:

Merong iba diyan na hanggang sayaw tang talaga. Kung puwede tang na hindi na sila magte-table. Pero kasi lahat kami Boon obligadong mag-table, kaya sige, tinitiiis na hang niya. May iba naman diyan na talaga, nagbebenta, ewan

kung bakit. Baka marami siyang sinusupportahan sa pamilya, kulang pa ang kita niya.)yon ang mga nakakaawa [There are some who opt only to dance. If possible, they would not want to join customers at their tables. But in our case, we are obliged to entertain customers at their tables so some of us just endure the situation. However, there are others who really sell (themselves), I don't know why. Maybe they have many family members to support, and what they earn (as establishment entertainers) is not enough. These are the ones we feel sorry for). - Ande

Medyo disente naman. Siguro may ginagawa rin ang /bang babae sa mga customer, pero wala namang kabastusan. Kung gusto mo, di puwede. Kung ayaw, ayaw. [We are quite decent. Perhaps some of the girls do other things with the customers but nothing lascivious. If you like, okay; if not, then no.

hanggang table ang ako. Lalo na noong una, takot ka rin eh! Hindi mo a/am kung magiging gago ba o hindi yung kausap mo. Baka kung ano bigla ang gawin sa beauty mo. - Elena

On the matter of HIV/AIDS, it appears that the real issue is not the migrant workers' engaging in sexual affairs or encounters but it is instead their full recognition that once they become sexually active, they also become susceptible to the dis-

ease. Judging from the comments given by the study-participants on condom use, however, many migrant workers are yet to have such a realization, which, in turn, leaves them practically defenseless to the onslaught of the disease. Specifically, it is the migrant workers' notions on when to use or not to use condoms that make them vulnerable to HIV/AIDS.

Among the seafarers interviewed, there is the pervading view that the decision to use condom during sexual encounters with women in prostitution depends solely on the men:

I have heard that they (women) carry condoms in their pockets but if the customer does not want to use it; it leaves them no choice but to conform with the man. -Jimuel

A criterion used by the men in their decision not to use condoms is when they perceive the woman as "young and/or 'clean-looking'"

If she's young and looks clean with her body, I don't use condom because I'm sure that she's clean. Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't. - Gelveson

But I choose my mate. I prefer the younger ones and clean looking. - Gerry

The break-up of a family is not the only risk involved when migrant workers enter into extra-marital sexual encounters affairs. They also risk acquiring STDs, more particularly the dreaded HIV/AIDS, especially if one of them is sexually involved with more than one partner.

This criterion reveals a common mis-conception that young and “clean-looking” people (no matter if they are engaged in the sex trade) do not have STDs. In fact, they believe only those who are “pabaya sa sarili. Yung mahihilig sa goodtime [careless about oneself. Those who are fond of goodtime].”

Too, condom is not used when having sex with a steady partner like a girlfriend or a boyfriend despite the knowledge that either partner is sexually involved with others. For instance, the seafarers do not normally use condoms when they sleep with their steady partners. On the other hand, Ande, an entertainer, shared that she insists on using condom with her Japanese boyfriend every time she sleeps with him:

Eh, malay ko kung sino-sino ang kalantari niya ano? Tuwing gabi ko lang naman siya nakikita. Malay ko kung ano ang iba niyang ginagawa [Well, how should I know who else he flirts with? I only see him at night. I’m not really sure what else he does].

Fortunately, the boyfriend does not mind this at all. But Janet who also sleeps with her Filipino boyfriend in Italy does otherwise. She says:

Eh kasi hindi kami madalas magkita ng boyfriend ko. Wala rin kaming permanenteng lugar kasi nakikitira tang naman siya sa amo niya, at ganoon rin ako. Mahirap maghanap ng Lugar, eh [Well I don’t see my boyfriend that much. We don’t even have a permanent place to meet since he lives with his boss, and I live with mine. It’s really hard to look for a place]

Inisip ko rin pero kasi mabait naman siya. Hindi naman kami nagtalik kaagad, ganoon. Kin/la/a muna namin ang isa’t isa bago may nangyarisang anti? [It (to use condom) crossed my mind but I think he’s a good man. In fact, we didn’t have sex right away. We tried to get to know each other first before we engaged in sex].

Ay hindi. At saka maalaga naman siya sa katawan. Nag-iingat naman daw siya sa mga katalik niya. At hindi naman maraming--marami. Yung ibang girlfriend lang niya [Oh no (not insist co:’dom use). And he takes care of his body. He assures me that he is careful with the other women he sleeps with. Well, he claims he does not sleep with many women really. He only goes to bed with some of his girlfriends].

Conclusion

The lived realities of the migrant workers in this study demonstrate to us that the concepts of relationship and commitment take on different dimensions when examined in the context of labor migration. As mentioned, the migrant workers’ desire to gain economic stability is basically hinged on their avowal of love and devotion to their families. The quest for material prosperity is never merely for the sake of the “I” (self) but always for the “we” (family); frequently, priority is even given to the latter. This explains why many migrant workers are prepared to undergo painful family separations as well as take on various risks (sexual harassment, health hazards).

Be this as it may, the Filipino migrant workers have found ways to alleviate their loneliness, pain, and rage. Practically all

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have joined a Filipino network in their area of the world that answers their need for a sense of home and community. In addition, some have entered into romantic and/or sexual relationships (which may or may not be meaningful) to assuage a biological as well as an emotional need. Many who entered into such a personal relationship have, however, exposed themselves - often unknowingly - to fur-

ther risks. The most serious of which is their becoming susceptible to STDs, or HIV/AIDS. It is also quite ironic that in the process of easing the loneliness of being away from their own families, many married migrant workers who had sought temporary solace in other partners end up destroying the very home they set out to build and improve.

Epilogue: ACHIEVE and Phase II of the CARAM Project

The completion of the Philippine component of the three-year regional CARAM-Asia action research project on the HIV-vulnerability of mobile populations does not, by any means, end a productive and promising engagement and involvement in the issue. Following the completion of the first phase in 1999, a three-year action plan was developed. The second phase of the project necessitated some structural and organizational changes on the part of almost all country partners, and this included the Philippines. After considerable assessment and deliberation, the KALAYAAN project team deemed it judicious to spin off into a new organization that would implement Phase Two of the CARAM project. Thus, Action for Health Initiatives (ACHIEVE), Inc. was born.

Currently on board in the ACHIEVE, Inc. team are: Carol Sobritchea, Alexandrina Marcelo, Richie Ybanez, Robert Baytan, Lita Santos, and Malu S. Marin.

One of the main priorities of ACHIEVE, Inc. is the execution of a proactive advocacy programme that will put: (1) sexual and reproductive health issues and concerns of vulnerable sectors such

as migrant workers and their families,' women, and children, among others; and, 2) the human rights perspective on migration and health, on the agenda of both government and civil society. Such advocacy is envisaged to create an impact on the framework, policy and programs of concerned stakeholders and key players in the migration and HIV/AIDS arena.

Too, ACHIEVE, Inc. intends to embark on capacity building initiatives geared towards empowering and developing the various skills and capabilities of its target sectors. Further, ACHIEVE, Inc. aims to continue research and data-generation on sexual and reproductive health issues of aforementioned sectors, with particular focus on HIV/AIDS and mobility. The outputs of the research will guide and impel current and future programs and plans of the organization.

The forthcoming years do not spell a decline in the number of OFWs going abroad for presumably better economic options. Neither will there be any immediate solutions to the worsening HIV/ AIDS crisis. The work remains urgent as ever.

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SUMMARY

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