

# Assessing the Need for Preventive Action Against STD/HIV/AIDS Among Filipino Seafarers

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## **Abstract**

The Philippines has been acknowledged in the international maritime sector as one of the leading sources of manpower for seafarers. However, the working and social environment of seafarers make them vulnerable to psychosocial problems, diseases and injuries. The attraction and ease of resorting to activities which offer immediate relief such as drinking alcoholic beverages and seeking sex for hire increase their risks of possible exposure to STD/HIV/AIDS infections.

To determine the knowledge, attitude, behavior and practices of the seafarers, a study was conducted last August 1997-March 1998 in Metro Manila. A total of 300 seafarers and 58 seafarers' wives and representatives from manning agencies were the respondents of the study. Seafarers were interviewed using a structured questionnaire, while key informant interviews and focus group discussions were conducted among the seafarers' wives and the manning agencies' representatives.

The study revealed that majority of the seafarers were on their most productive ages with an average age 27. Seventy three percent of them are college graduates. With regards to the respondents' awareness on HIV/AIDS, 92.4% have general knowledge about the disease but many of them still have misconceptions. Asked on their sources of information, 62.19% of the respondents reported that they got information from print materials, while a negligible 1.0% reported that they were informed by their families. Pre-

departure orientation seminars (PDOS) were given to them by manning agencies but discussions on health aspects are very minimal. On their behavior, 51.8% of them had engaged in sexual activities with partners other than their wives because they were either drunk or pressured by their peers. However, 77.8% of the respondents have changed their sexual lifestyles by either abstaining, maintaining a regular partner or using condom.

While government and non-government organizations are undertaking programs to raise awareness of the populace in general, workplace programs to raise the level of awareness of workers specifically seafarers have to be undertaken. The existing programs particularly the pre-departure orientation seminars have to be revised to include discussions of occupational safety and health particularly the risks of getting STD/HIV/AIDS. Likewise the development and dissemination of information materials will lessen misconceptions and provide seafarers with relevant information