

Assessment of the Health Status of Deep-Sea Fishermen Practicing the "Pa-aling" Method in Palawan

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Abstract

Deep-sea fishing operation has been practiced for decades in Southern Cebu, Central Visayas and Palawan. With the banning of the "muro-ami" method because of its destructiveness to the coral reefs, the displaced fisherfolks started to practice the modified fishing method termed "pa-aling". This technique aims to drive fish in the reefs towards a set-in net by scaring them with bubbles generated by air compressors. The divers who set the tubes (where the air passes) in place are constantly exposed to the hazards and risks of deep-sea diving. The present study was intended to assess the health and working conditions of the "pa-aling" fisherfolk in Palawan, Philippines.

Twenty (20) deep-sea fishermen who abandoned their posts as "pa-aling" divers participated in the study. Interviews were conducted to determine health-related complaints and obtain personal and occupational histories. Medical and laboratory examinations included blood tests (complete blood count and blood chemistry), urinalysis, chest x-ray, audiometry, and physical examination.

Of the 20 subjects, 4 were below 18 years of age and 16 were 18 years old and above. The occupational profile showed that the subjects were migrant workers and have been employed in the "pa-aling" operations for over month only. The most common job titles were swimmers, load catcher and divers. Work was performed 7 days in a week for an average of 12 hours in a day. Sixteen out of 20 respondents developed illnesses (diarrhea, dermatitis, cough, etc.) attributable to poor sanitation and poor working environment onboard the fishing boats. Among the chronic complaints of the subjects included musculoskeletal discomfort/pain, sleep disorder, easy fatigability, dizziness and poor appetite. Chest x-ray results were normal in all subjects. The audiometric tests revealed that 17 out of the 20 subjects have hearing

impairment. Analysis of laboratory results was based on the ages of the respondents. Four of the 8 adolescent workers (12-20 years old) had abnormal laboratory findings. The respondents also reported physical abuse from supervisors.

A comprehensive study of the health status and working conditions of all fisherfolks involved in "pa-aling" fishing should be done to provide basis for advocacy for more humane, safe and healthy working conditions. There is also a need to eliminate child labor in this type of occupation based on the adverse effect on health and safety.