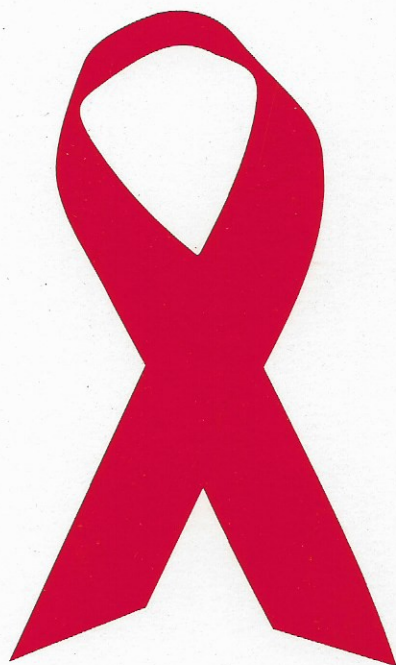


LIVING ON THE EDGE

Case Study on Filipino Seafarers



**Health
Action
Information
Network**



**National
Economic and
Development
Authority**



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Development
Programme**

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For more information contact:

DEV AIDS PROJECT SECRETARIAT/
HEALTH, NUTRITION AND FAMILY PLANNING DIVISION
SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT STAFF
NATIONAL ECONOMIC AND DEVELOPMENT AUTHORITY
4/F NEDA sa Pasig Building, 12 Amber Avenue, Ortigas, Pasig City
Telephone Nos. (632) 631-2189 and 631-3758

Research Team:

Michael L. Tan, DVM, PhD
Kathleen Y. Cheng
Jonathan R. Lamug

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I. INTRODUCTION

The adoption of labor migration as a government policy is now on its twenty-fifth year. The country's deployment of large numbers of Filipinos abroad has always been part of the attempt to respond to economic crises. Today, more than ever, the indispensable role of overseas Filipino workers (OFWs) in helping the local economy wade through one crisis after another cannot be ignored. No wonder, one Philippine President tagged them as "modern-day heroes" whose remittances kept the economy afloat even in the middle of the Asian crisis.

There is a wide range in the estimates of Filipinos living and working overseas, going from 4 to 6.5 million. It is difficult to have exact figures because so many Filipinos may be working overseas illegally.

Our use of the term "overseas Filipinos" includes permanent migrants as well as short-term contract workers (often referred to as overseas contract workers, OCWs, or overseas Filipino workers or OFWs.)

There are large numbers of Filipino permanent migrants. Between 1981 and 1999, there were 1,023,360 registered Filipinos who migrated permanently, mainly to the United States, Canada, Australia and Japan (Commission on Filipinos Overseas 2000).

These Filipino migrants are susceptible as well to HIV. Skeldon (2000) points out that international long-distance migration often involves the better educated and that this would minimize high-risk behavior. We would question this assumption. Our

overseas workers and permanent migrants are indeed often highly educated and literate but from our interviews with infected overseas workers, we find that they can still end up with high-risk behavior and eventually acquire HIV. In California alone, as of March 1998, there were 700 reported cases of Filipinos with AIDS, larger than the number reported for the entire Philippines (Filipino Task Force on AIDS website).

The situation of short-term OFWs may be different in the sense that they leave for shorter periods of time, and often keep to themselves. Nevertheless, the sheer numbers of OFWs means that even if a small percentage become infected, we could face a serious problem. Next to Mexico, the Philippines now is the second largest source of overseas contract workers (OCWs) in the world. On the average, some 2,000 OFWs per day leave for employment abroad.

In 1999, a total of 837,020 documented land-based and sea-based OFWs were deployed to some 174 destinations worldwide, the highest ever in the 25-year history of the government's labor export program (POEA Accomplishment Report, 1999).

Table 1. POEA Comparative Deployment

Key Indicators	COMPARATIVE DEPLOYMENT (as of December)		
	1998	1999	Rate of Change (%)
Workers Deployed	831,643	837,020	0.65
1. Land-based	638,343	640,331	0.31
1.1. New Hires	223,589	237,714	6.32
1.2. Rehires*	414,754	402,617	-2.93
2. Sea-based	193,300	196,689	1.75

*based on the POEA's Labor Assistance Center (LAC) on the actual number of OFWs at the international airports

**Table 2. Deployed Overseas Filipino Workers
(1988-1999)**

Year	Total	Land-based	Sea-based
1988	471,030	385,117	85,913
1989	458,626	355,346	103,280
1990	446,095	334,883	111,212
1991	615,019	489,260	125,759
1992	686,457	549,651	136,806
1993	696,630	550,872	145,758
1994	719,602	565,226	154,376
1995	654,022	488,621	165,401
1996	660,122	484,653	175,469
1997	747,696	559,227	188,469
1998	831,643	638,343	193,300
1999	837,020	640,331	196,689

Source: POEA

Of the 1,374 HIV-positive cases reported in the Philippines as of March 2000, 298 or 22 percent were former overseas Filipino workers (OFWs). Seafarers* account for 151 or 51 percent of the total number of HIV-positive OFW's. This does not include the wives of the seafarers who were infected by their husbands.

For a number of different reasons, OFWs are susceptible and vulnerable to HIV* with seafarers facing greater risks. This case

* Seafarer is a generic, non-sexist term referring to all highly skilled individuals, mostly men, working or employed in various types of national (e.g. inter-island ships/vessels, deep-sea fishing vessels) and international (e.g. commuter/passenger vessels, cargo vessels, navy ships) ocean-going vessels.

* Susceptibility and vulnerability, in this study, are used in the way Barnett and Whiteside (2000) define the terms. To be susceptible means the individual or a particular social unit, such as the family, is predisposed to infection, i.e., HIV/AIDS. It focuses on the degree to which the social, economic, cultural, and physical environment increases or decreases the rate at which the disease spreads. Meanwhile, to be vulnerable means that certain features of a social entity, e.g., dependence of a family on the income of an OFW member, open it to the adverse effects of HIV/AIDS, particularly grave illness and, ultimately, death.

study was prepared to help identify some of the reasons why seafarers are susceptible and vulnerable.

We chose to focus on seafarers because of several reasons. First, their numbers are quite high, with the Philippines being the world's largest supplier of seafarers. Filipinos account for 20 percent of the world's sea-based workers today (Fast Facts on Migration, 1999).

Second, the seafarers contribute significantly to the country's economy. Seafarers have very good pay, with a minimum of US\$385 per month or about P15,400, a salary that is equivalent to middle managers in government. Seafarers get rapid increases in their salaries each year as they upgrade their skills, and the salaries can go as high as \$3,000 or \$4,000 a month, salaries comparable to executives in Filipino corporations.

Many Filipino families now encourage their sons to go into maritime schools because overseas deployment is a route for social mobility, not just for the seafarer's immediate family but for many dependents, including aging parents and younger siblings. Each HIV infection in a seafarer can mean great losses for the individual and his family, if not the community.

II. Methodology

The study was conducted from February to May 2000. For this study, we conducted a review of the literature on OFWs and seafarers. We also conducted KAPB (knowledge, attitudes, practices and behavior) surveys, focus group discussions (FGDs) and personal in-depth interviews with members of the seafaring OFW sector, their wives and families and maritime students. We probed into their lives, the financial contributions to families, as well as their knowledge about HIV/AIDS and their risk behaviors. This was conducted in the Metro Manila/Cavite area (using secondary data) as well as Iloilo, Cebu and Bohol.

The KAP survey was administered to maritime students in Bohol, mainly in the town of Dimiao. The sample consisted of 42 respondents, aged 16 to 24 and in their first year at Philippine Maritime Institute (PMI) taking up B.S. Marine Transportation. In Iloilo City, we had a survey among 68 senior students at the John B. Lacson Colleges Foundation. These seniors included those who had been deployed on ships as part of their training.

These surveys were supplemented by FGDs. In Bohol, we conducted FGDs with nautical students. A land-based OFW in Saudi Arabia and an inter-island seafarer also took part. The ages of the participants range from 18-27 years. In Iloilo we conducted an FGD with ten students from the province of Iloilo as well as Antique, Capiz, Guimaras, Cebu, Leyte and Batangas. All were single, aged 20 to 22.

III. What puts seafarers' at risk?

3.1 Levels of Awareness and Knowledge about HIV

While our respondents were generally aware about HIV and AIDS, their levels of knowledge left much to be desired. In Bohol, a true-or-false test with 10 items yielded an average correct score of only 4.7 while in Iloilo, the average score was 4.9. Misconceptions about HIV/AIDS remain widespread, including beliefs that mosquitoes and saliva are sources of infection. The distinction between HIV and AIDS is still unclear, with about half of the Iloilo respondents still unaware that one can have HIV but still look and feel healthy. Many still do not understand what an HIV antibody test involves, and therefore do not know that such tests can still yield negative results even if a person is infected.

Media remains the most important source of information for the seafarers and maritime students, however, the impact of information campaigns seems to be very weak. In Bohol, not a single respondent could remember any of the messages they saw or heard in media in relation to HIV while in Iloilo, a few respondents recalled a Rosanna Roces ad but none could remember what her message was. The Rosanna Roces ad was not about HIV/AIDS in the first place.

Movies seem to have greater impact with people recalling the films about Dolzura Cortez and Sarah Jane Salazar but the movies do not seem to have educated them on HIV/AIDS.

Knowledge about preventive measures tend to be a mixture of myths, including the use of vitamins and antibiotics, withdrawal and washing the penis. Attitudes toward condoms are quite negative. Among Bohol maritime students, 88 percent said condoms decrease sexual pleasure while in Iloilo, 61 percent had a similar view.

3.2 Attitudes toward Sex and Sexual Behavior

In our research we found strong values of machismo that could place the seafarers at risk. One third of the maritime students in Bohol and half of the Iloilo students said it was natural for men to pursue sex at every opportunity.

We feel the difference might be due not to the region or ethnicity but to the age of the students. Bohol's respondents were first year students while those in Iloilo were seniors. Among the seniors, 80 percent have had sexual experiences, 11 percent of whom had their first intercourse with someone they paid.

The FGDs and interviews tended to reveal more of this machismo. It almost seems that part of the benefits of becoming a seafarer is to be able to "taste" women at every port. A study by Simbulan and others (1997) found that 60 percent of Metro Manila seafarers had affairs with other women. The percentage was lower for those from Cebu (25.3%) and General Santos (37.3%).

Young maritime students in Iloilo talked about pressures to have sex and to go through *binyag* (baptism). Sex is often unprotected and the risks for HIV and STD infections are increased because of the use of bolitas, metal balls inserted under the skin of the penis.

3.3 Seafarers' Perceptions of Risks: Living on the Edge

The seafarers acknowledge that they sometimes run risks for HIV/AIDS but point out that risks are unavoidable given their working and social environments. They talk of living on the edge, facing stress at work because of prolonged periods out at sea, as well as hazards faced at work, some of which are related to technical responsibilities although others seem to be in the sphere of interpersonal relations. They talk of loneliness and boredom. All this is used to justify a "good time" when they are off duty. The "temptations" are many since prostitutes are available in most of

the ports they visit, sometimes women are even brought up to their boats. In some places, like Singapore and Japan, some of the sex workers are even Filipinas.

3.4 Risks for Seafarers' Wives

We found that seafarers' wives tended to have low levels of knowledge as well in relation to HIV/AIDS. Even those who were nurses did not necessarily have higher levels of knowledge.

What puts the seafarers' wives at extra risk is the strong denial they have. Many say that seafarers are promiscuous but will quickly qualify that their own husbands are not like the others. Some wives believe that their husbands don't cheat on them, arguing that their relationship is built on trust. Many also say that a "fear of God" and a "fear of AIDS" would be enough to keep their husbands from activities that would put them at risk for such diseases.

Other wives rationalize that their husbands try hard to keep their family together, especially for those who come from broken families. Still other wives say their husbands married late and that this meant they were past the womanizing stage and that they would no longer have to worry about "queridas" and other families. There are wives who claim that their husbands are very open to them so they don't have to worry about clandestine affairs. They say they are spared of anxiety and depression over pondering whether or not their husbands had been unable to resist temptation since it will be their husbands themselves who, they believe, will let them know if they had engaged in sexual liaisons with other females, including sex workers.

On the other hand, there are wives who accept the fact that their husbands have extramarital affairs. They simply try to understand their husband's physical needs, which they know they are unable to satisfy because of their physical distance. They say

it's okay for their husbands to have other women as long as they remain discreet and they are not reminded of their husband's unfaithfulness with pictures and gifts from other women and other mementos from their affairs. They also just hope that every time their husbands sleep with other women, their husbands would be smart enough to use condoms to avoid the risk of getting inflicted with a disease and passing it on to their wives. These wives also understand the *pakikisama* attitude needed and since he is a seafarer, it sort of becomes a part of his life on a ship to have other women and he has to do what the others are doing in order to fit in. Some wives feel it is understandable that their husbands turn to other women out of loneliness.

The invisibility of HIV in the Philippines continues to be a major factor in bringing about denial. Asked about the possibilities of contracting HIV/AIDS from their husbands, some seafarers' wives say that they have not heard of anyone being infected.

IV. Why Seafarers Become Infected

We interviewed Mar, a former seafarer who has HIV, about how he became infected. He has clear and chilling memories about how he might have become infected:

May open wounds kasi ako, dahil sa pag-experiment namin sa barko. Nag-testing testing kami. Nagkabit ng mga foreign body, minsan insertion, nag-bolitas, ganoon. May nakasama ako na mahilig magkabit eh katulong niya ako sa pagkabit. Ako naman, ah ganoon pala yun, so... ginawa ko sa sarili ko. Nagkataon na paparating kami sa puerto. Sa ibabaw, nag-heal na yung sugat, pero sa ilalim, sariwa pa pala... *(I had open wounds because we were experimenting on the ship. We were doing some testing. I put on foreign bodies, sometimes inserted them – bolitas, things like that. I had a companion who liked to do that, and I was helping him to put them in. For me, 'ah, so that's how you do it...'* so I did it to myself. It so happened that we were approaching the port. On the surface, the wound was healed, but underneath, it was still fresh...)

But there is more to Mar's infection than *bolitas*. His recollections show that even HIV information campaigns may not be sufficient to prevent infections:

Kabit na alam mo ang tungkol sa HIV... Sa mga STD na lang eh. Alam mong makakakuba ka ng STD kung hindi ka gumagamit ng condom... Pero yung behavior na hindi ako magkakaroon niyan. Lalo na kung lasing. Kabit na may dala kang condom, hindi mo na gagamitin yun kasi lasing ka na. Sa susunod na lang ako gagamit. So gumamit ka sa susunod. Tapos sa susunod, hindi na naman. Eh kung nagka-baligtad – yung ginamitan mo wala, yung di

mo ginamitan yan yung meron. (Even if you are aware about HIV...even STDs — you know that you can get STDs if you don't use condoms, but your behavior of 'I won't get that.' Especially if you're drunk. Even if you bring condoms, you won't use them if you're drunk. 'I'll use the condoms next time.' So you do use it the next time. But then the time after that, you don't use it again. What if the reverse happens: when you use a condom, your partner doesn't have it (STDs) and when you don't use it, your partner has it.)

Attitudes toward condoms, toward sex, toward women — these are all part of a bigger picture of HIV risk for seafarers that goes beyond knowledge or awareness about HIV/AIDS.

V. Potential Impact of HIV on the Seafarers' Sector

OFW foreign exchange remittances have grown steadily through the years, reaching US\$6.7 billion in 1999 (Table 3).

Table 3. OFW Foreign Exchange Remittances (1989-1999)

Year	Remmittances (in Million US\$)	Percentage Growth
1989	973.02	13.56
1990	1,181.07	21.38
1991	1,628.27	37.86
1992	2,202.38	35.26
1993	2,229.58	1.24
1994	2,940.27	31.88
1995	4,877.51	65.89
1996	4,306.64	-11.70
1997	5,741.83	33.32
1998	4,925.99	-14.20
1999	6,794.55	37.95

Source: Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas

The total remittances of OFWs in 1999 is equivalent to 20% of total exports of the country during the same year (Kanlungan Center Foundation, International Labor Migration Statistics 2000). This has led some observers to note that if all OFWs were to decide to quit their jobs overseas and hence return to the Philippines penniless, the local economy would collapse. The indispensable role OFWs play in the Philippine economy which was especially felt at the height of the Asian economic crisis in 1997 led then President Ramos to hail them as the "new economic heroes" as the continuous inflow of their remittances assured the country of buffer sources for its foreign exchange reserves even as the rest of the Asia-Pacific region scampered for survival. For example, migrants' remittances in 1998 made up for the slight GDP contraction and aided in the achievement of a 0.8% growth

in the GNP which saved the economy from technical recession. Under the Estrada administration, the government sought the OFWs' help in attaining a higher growth rate for 1999 and decreasing the projected US\$2.29 billion trade deficit through the selling of treasury bonds worth US\$1,000 each to OFWs (Asian Migrant Yearbook, 1999).

Note that the figures given are those that come through official channels. Remittances through informal channels are not included. In the case of seafarers, there may be additional cash inflows made directly to unions like the Associated Marine Officers' and Seamens' Union of the Philippines (AMOSUP), which has a housing program.

Table 4. Overseas Filipinos' remittances and Gross National Product

Year	Remittances (US\$, 000)	GNP, Current Prices (Pesos, Millions)	Remittances as % of GNP
1997	5,741,835	2,528,321	9.1
1998	4,925,889	2,815,259	7.0
1999	6,794,550	3,155,635	8.6

Base Source: POEA, NEDA (Our calculations are based on a conversion rate of US\$1 to P40.)

For purposes of our study, we can do some crude projections on the possible impact of HIV/AIDS. The available figures from 1997 to 1999 show that remittances from overseas workers accounted for 7 to 9 percent of GNP. (See Table 4) We will make an admittedly unscientific projection that unofficial remittances would boost the figure to 12 percent. In a worst-case scenario, if 1 percent of the total number of OFWs are infected and if we assume they no longer contribute to the GNP in any way (an unrealistic assumption), then the GNP would drop by only 0.12%. Note that the projection of a 1% infection rate is already very high. Currently, it is more likely to be around 0.1%, and again using our crude estimates of a complete loss of their contributions, the GNP would be reduced by only 0.012%.

There has been concern about the impact on HIV on the demand for our overseas workers. Even if prevalence rates increase among these overseas workers, it is unlikely that the sector will be severely affected. One possible scenario is that if the Philippines is perceived as being of high HIV prevalence, countries might avoid recruiting Filipinos but this is probably not likely to happen. Using Thailand as an example, despite their high HIV prevalence, they are still able to export large numbers of overseas workers. The sad fact remains that there is a large reserve force of unemployed so even if more overseas Filipino workers are infected, there will always be more Filipinos waiting to be recruited. At the same time, one should not discount the losses caused in terms of training resources and finances put into development of each seafarer.

While macro indicators may not reflect the impact of HIV/AIDS, we do know from interviews with HIV-positive Filipinos that households are adversely affected. The impact is particularly great for families pinning their hopes on seafarers. Seafarers' wives talk about how their husband's earnings allow them to buy homes, jewelry, vehicles, and other things which would have been beyond their means if their husbands worked locally. Seafarers invest in their children, putting money into educational plans and putting up businesses.

There is also the opportunity for migration to other countries where job options can be more financially rewarding. One of our respondents said that seafarers sometimes jump ship abroad and marry foreigners. We heard, for example, of the story of one seafarer who jumped ship in the United States, married an American and is now petitioning his family to follow.

Overseas work allows families access to a better life. Social mobility is also a result of economic prosperity. With increased income, families of OFWs could enjoy a life of relative prosperity in a community where minimal affluence is the exception rather than the rule.

To give a clearer illustration of how the lives of ordinary people change with the relative prosperity brought about by a seafaring relative, there are some typical stories culled from surveys and focus-group discussions done in two locations – Dimiao, Bohol and Dasmariñas, Cavite – which are worth presenting to provide the context within which the lives of seafarers could be discussed. The minimum wage in Dimiao, Bohol and Dasmariñas, Cavite cannot even make families satisfy their minimum needs for food, clothing and shelter. In Bohol province, the daily minimum wage obtained from agricultural labor is P105.00 while in Dasmariñas, Cavite (which is situated in CALABARZON, a growth corridor area whose workforce gain wages from services rendered mainly in industrial factories) is pegged at P185.00 (Nominal and Real Minimum Wage Rates in the Agricultural and Non-Agricultural Sectors, By Region: Philippine Statistical Yearbook, 1998).

In contrast, seafarers' incomes range from P20,000 to P50,000 per month, depending on the skill (position/rank) of the seaman and other sources of income (e.g. if the wife is employed). This translates into opportunities to venture into other means of livelihood such as operation of a taxi business, buy-and-sell of food products, retail merchandise, among others.

The contributions of seafarers to their communities can be tremendous. In Dimiao, Bohol, OFWs or former OFWs own most of the business establishments. A former OFW who has worked as crew in an inter-island vessel before his stint in Abu Dhabi, United Arab Emirates for six years, for example, has since invested a part of his earnings in putting up a bakery and a gasoline station. Another seafarer contemplates on retiring in two years' time. A portion of his remittances to his family has been used in putting up a beauty parlor (managed by his wife) and a sari-sari store. Investments were likewise placed on a parcel of land and a piggery consisting of 23 heads for fattening and breeding purposes, which he tends when he is on vacation, and which he will eventually manage when he retires.

This seafarer talks about how he started as a seaman (AB) in 1989, with a basic salary of US\$260 per month for a nine-month contract. Now he earns US\$535 basic salary plus overtime pay and allowances. His overtime pay while the ship is docked at the port is US\$3.95/hour for 4-5 hours. When the ship is on navigation, overtime pay is much higher. For a guaranteed overtime of 2.5 hours/day he gets US\$8.50/hour, more than double the usual rate. On the average, his total pay is about US\$1,300/month.

Seafarers will support siblings, sometimes to join the profession. We interviewed one maritime student in Tagbilaran who was being supported by his brother, also a seafarer, who earns about US\$1,500 to US\$1,800 per month (basic + overtime). This student says that half of their monthly family income comes from this brother's regular monthly remittances.

The investments of seafarers in Tagbilaran are even more impressive than those of Dimiao. We found seafarers venturing into fruit farms, softdrink dealerships, stone crafts, fisheries and rice mills, and even hostels and apartments.

The potential losses can be significant, for the seafarer as well as for those who depend on him. Mar, a former seafarer, said he used to earn P20,000 a month. Had he not been infected, he would have earned even more, perhaps even reaching P40,000 or P50,000 if he got to higher positions. Today, he works for the NGO for about P6,000 a month. Just using Mar as an example, the difference between P20,000 a month as a seafarer and his current P6,000 monthly salary translates into P168,000 of lost income a year, a sizeable amount.

Note that the loss of income does not just apply to the HIV-positive individual. Eventually, when they develop AIDS, their partner or spouse will have to give up work as well to become a caregiver. This represents additional lost income.

As HIV infection moves on in an individual, the costs will increase tremendously, both in terms of expenses and in lost opportunities. Drawing on different cases in our study, we could present a hypothetical case involving a seafarer with and without infection. Table 5 shows what income could have come if a seafarer remained uninfected. Over the years, we presume an annual increase in monthly income of P5,000 which is quite reasonable given seafarers' rates. With the spouse working locally, we assume an annual increase of P500 for the monthly initially, to increase to P1,000 as extra income is used for small businesses, quite often the case with seafarers' spouses. Without HIV infection, the seafarer and his wife could earn up to P6,258,000 in 10 years.

If, however, the seafarer is infected and is diagnosed in year 2, he will no longer be deployed and has to work locally. If he is lucky and does get a job, we presume the annual increases in his monthly wage will be only about P500. If AIDS develops in year 8, he will have to stop working and we presume zero income. His wife, on the other hand, faces reduced income even before AIDS develops in the husband because she will have to depend on wages, without capital to start small businesses. Eventually, when her husband develops AIDS, she will have to stop working as well. In this hypothetical case, the combined income for this couple will only be P1,704,000 over 10 years instead of P6,258,000.

The lost income over the 10 years is P4,554,000, an amount that could have meant purchase of a small but comfortable house, plus enough left over to put at least two children through private schools. With HIV infection, however, the couple would not only be unable to afford the house or private education but would need to shoulder extra costs from HIV, which have been outlined earlier (for example, P360,000 a year for antiretrovirals, an unthinkable cost for most Filipinos).

Table 5: Opportunity Costs of HIV Infection in a Seafarer

Without HIV					
	Seafarer Monthly	Annual	Spouse Monthly	Annual	Total
Year 1	20,000	240000	6000	72000	312000
Year 2	25,000	300000	6500	78000	378000
Year 3	30,000	360000	7000	84000	444000
Year 4	35,000	420000	8000	96000	516000
Year 5	40,000	480000	9000	108000	588000
Year 6	45,000	540000	10000	120000	660000
Year 7	50,000	600000	11000	132000	732000
Year 8	55,000	660000	12000	144000	804000
Year 9	60,000	720000	13,000	156000	876000
Year 10	65,000	780000	14,000	168000	948000
Total					6258000

With HIV Diagnosis in Year 2, AIDS in Year 8					
	Sefarer Monthly	Annual	Spouse Monthly	Annual	Total
Year 1	20,000	240000	6000	72000	312000
Year 2	25,000	300000	6500	78000	378000
Year 3	6,000	72000	7000	84000	156000
Year 4	6,500	78000	7500	90000	168000
Year 5	7,000	84000	8000	96000	180000
Year 6	7,500	90000	8500	102000	192000
Year 7	8,000	96000	9000	108000	204000
Year 8	0	0	9500	114000	114000
Year 9	0	0	0	0	0
Year 10	0	0	0	0	0
Total					1704000

VI. CONCLUSION

Seafarers' risks for HIV are sometimes described in terms of their mobility, of being exposed to countries with higher HIV prevalence. But UNAIDS' Dr. Victor Mari Ortega points out it is not right to reduce the problem to this mobility. The problem is of risky situations. A person can remain uninfected even living in or visiting a high prevalence country, if that person has the knowledge about HIV and is willing to act on that knowledge. This action relates to sexuality, to the values a person has in relation to sex. Among seafarers, machismo values push them into risky situations – whether through the insertion of *bolitas* or from unprotected sex.

The potential losses incurred from each HIV-infected seafarer are greatest at the household level. Considering the high expectations families – immediate and extended – have of the seafarers, HIV destroys the dreams for many people, from different generations, including the seafarers' parents and children. Lost financial opportunities are tremendous, running into millions of pesos for each seafarer.

HIV impacts as well on communities that often depend on the seafarers' remittances to jump-start the local economy. Investments for new businesses, for construction of new homes dwindle with HIV infections. No study has yet been conducted on how seafarers sustain various business sectors, for example, those dealing with educational plans, but these horizontal linkages are important.

The existing responses to seafarers' needs are still limited to short pre-departure orientation seminars (PDOS) that include some discussion of HIV/AIDS. These "AIDS 101" modules will not be enough to protect the seafarers, as we have seen in their stories about what pushes them to risky activities. Discussing coping mechanisms, stress reduction, gender sensitivity – all these will be vital in preventing HIV/AIDS.

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