

**EAT, PRAY, LOVE (THE GOOD LIFE):
FILIPINO SEAFARER HEALTH ISSUES**

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What this presentation is all about:

A quick look at what Filipinos love to eat and in extension, what Filipino seafarers usually eat on-board

Implications for their health and well-being

Filipino cuisine is predominantly a fusion of local, Spanish and American influences (and some others thrown in between)

- **Sisig**



Adobo



Caldereta



Dinuguan



Bopis



Lechon



Crispy Pata



Pata Tim



Longganisa



Ginataang alimango at hipon



When on-board seafarers' diet is very much determined by what is on offer and when on vacation, given their short time ashore and higher disposable income, they tend to indulge

- If the cook is not imaginative and innovative enough, he tends to repeatedly offer the dishes that he is familiar with and (in the case of Filipino cook) there would always be some of the food that I mentioned (subject to availability of ingredients)
- Food on offer tend to be salty, oily (fried food) and meaty; most Filipinos are also sweet tooth
- When on long voyages, serving canned food becomes the norm (sausages, meat loaf, sardines, etc) and very limited serving (if any) of fresh fruits and vegetables

Filipino health and well-being: Some available data

- The Sun Life Financial Asia Health Index (2014), a regional report that covered the Philippines, China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Singapore and Thailand, showed that Filipinos had the highest levels of family history of chronic illness (19 percent versus the average of 13 percent).
- Filipinos also scored highest in terms of largely preventable health conditions experienced by family members, such as diabetes (47 percent versus the region's average of 32 percent) and heart disease (43 percent compared to 23 percent for the region).

Main causes of death in the Philippines according to the Dept of Health (2015)

- Acute respiratory infection
- ALRTI (Acute Lower Respiratory Tract Infection) and Pneumonia
- Hypertension
- Bronchitis
- Urinary Track Infection
- Influenza

How about Filipino seafarers?

- In a study on the repatriation of 6,759 Filipino seafarers covering January 2010 – December 2014, involving 12 manning agencies in Manila, by Abaya et al (2015) the top five medical causes are injury (21.4), musculoskeletal (19.1), gastrointestinal (17.1), genitourinary (8.9) and cardiovascular (8.1).
- The rate of 1.7 repatriation case is low which signals good tidings with regard to the health conditions of Filipino seafarers
- In another interesting study conducted by Gregorio (2013) he cited STI (herpes and gonorrhoea) for Filipino seafarers working on dry cargo/tanker vessels. He also listed hypertension, heart attack, fever, and common colds to be common medical problems amongst them.

Other health problems but lesser frequency: muscle and back pains, diarrhoea, fatigue, 'tanker effect', burn, skin, asthma.

Tanker effect: The illness was common among those chronically exposed to fumes, usually those who have been working as seafarers for a long time. It was said to be manifested by absentmindedness, irritability and having blank stares, or showing signs of insanity.

Passenger luxury liners: hypertension, back, knee, and muscle pains, diarrhoea due to Norwalk (Noro)virus, varicose veins, high blood sugar, etc. Elevation in liver enzymes specifically SGPT on passenger luxury liners due to high alcohol and fat intake.

Unhealthy diet: unlimited amount of food servings available and lack of control over food choices. Quality of food: meaty, salty and fatty.

“Hypertension is due to food that we were served with, if the chief cook is lazy, he would always serve us adobo (pork in vinegar and soy sauce boiled to tenderness), steak, pata tim (por legs cooked in vinegar and soy sauce) “Jollibee” which means chicken, we call those types of food as “killing me softly”.”

“Arthritis comes first before hypertension, this is because of the greater amount of meat in the diet, there were vegetables but limited, sometimes other seafarers do not like vegetables. You have no choice because the food served is adobo, pork bone marrow and entrails.”

In a study by Pabico (2003), he noted the findings of The Research Unit of Maritime Medicine in Denmark which concluded that the risk of cancer is high among seafarers. This could be due to occupational exposures, especially in the engine room and on tankers and other ships carrying dangerous cargoes.

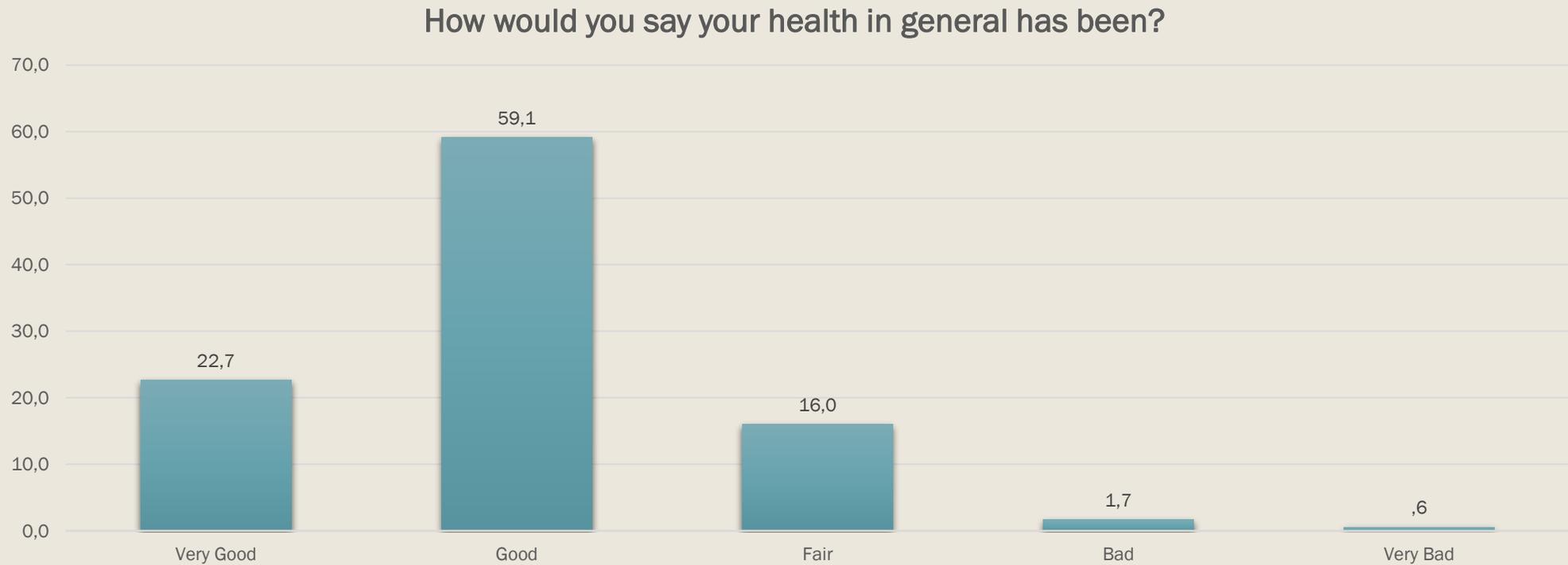
Among those working in the engine room, the hazards include the presence of asbestos (which has been used extensively on ships as an insulation material), mineral oils, polyaromatic hydrocarbons from oils, organic solvents and exhaust gases.

Crews on tankers are also exposed to airborne carcinogens like benzene and organic solvents that affect the nervous system. Pabico also claimed that other researches suggest an increased risk of cardiovascular diseases among seafarers.

SIRC study: Health and Self-medication 2010-2011

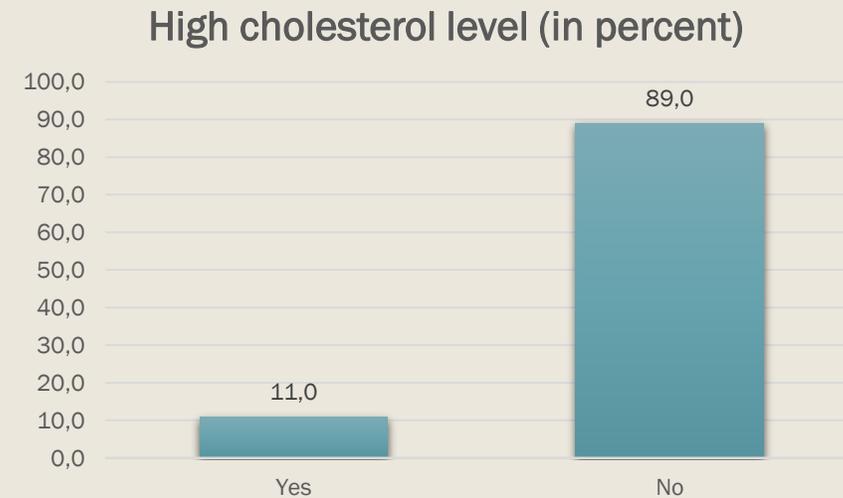
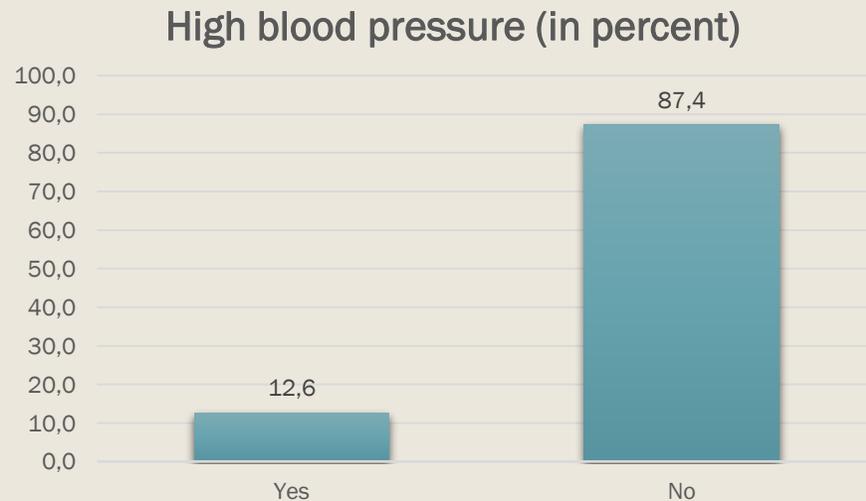
- A total of 1,026 seafarers completed a questionnaire and 182 of them were Filipinos.
- The minimum age was 18 and the maximum was 62 with an average of 35 years old.
- In terms of years at sea, the minimum was 1 and the maximum was 41.
- The highest proportion of our respondents were married (121); 53 were single and 3 were living with a partner while 5 were separated.
- 106 seafarers who participated in this study were on container ships, followed by bulk carriers (23), general cargo (19) and others.
- We visited UK and German ports. Ports visited include Felixstowe, Liverpool, Southampton, Immingham, Bristol and Cardiff in the UK and Hamburg in Germany.
- Questionnaire distribution was mostly undertaken in seafarers' centres and if it was possible and permitted, some questionnaires were also distributed on-board ships.

Perception of health in general



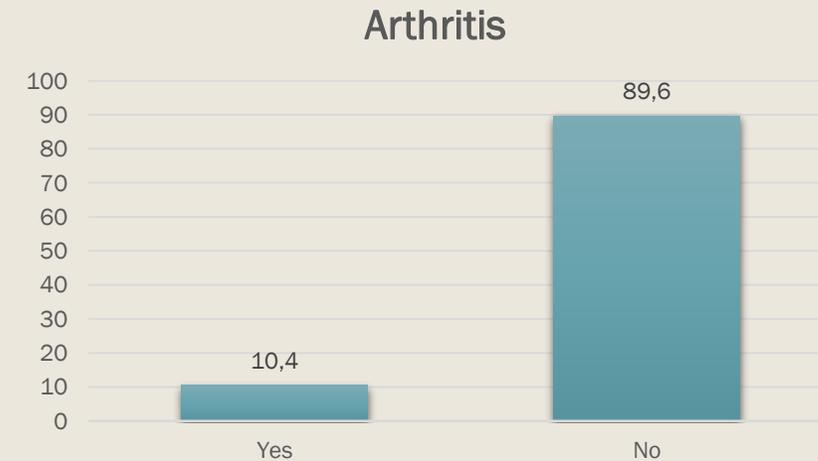
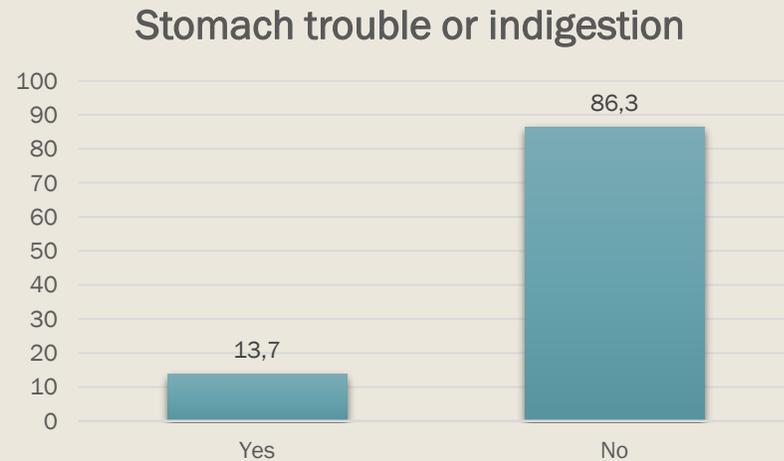
Most prevalent medical conditions:

- Having had the following diseases: Angina, High cholesterol level, Diabetes, Stroke, Heart attack, High blood pressure, Nervous trouble or depression, Asthma, Emphysema, Bronchitis, Cancer



Recurring health problems

- Bronchitis, Arthritis/rheumatism, Sciatica/lumbago or recurring backache, persistent skin trouble, asthma, hay fever, recurring stomach trouble or indigestion, being constipated all or most of the time, piles, persistent foot trouble, trouble with varicose veins, nervous trouble or persistent depression, persistent trouble with gums or mouth



General findings: (covering all seafarers surveyed)

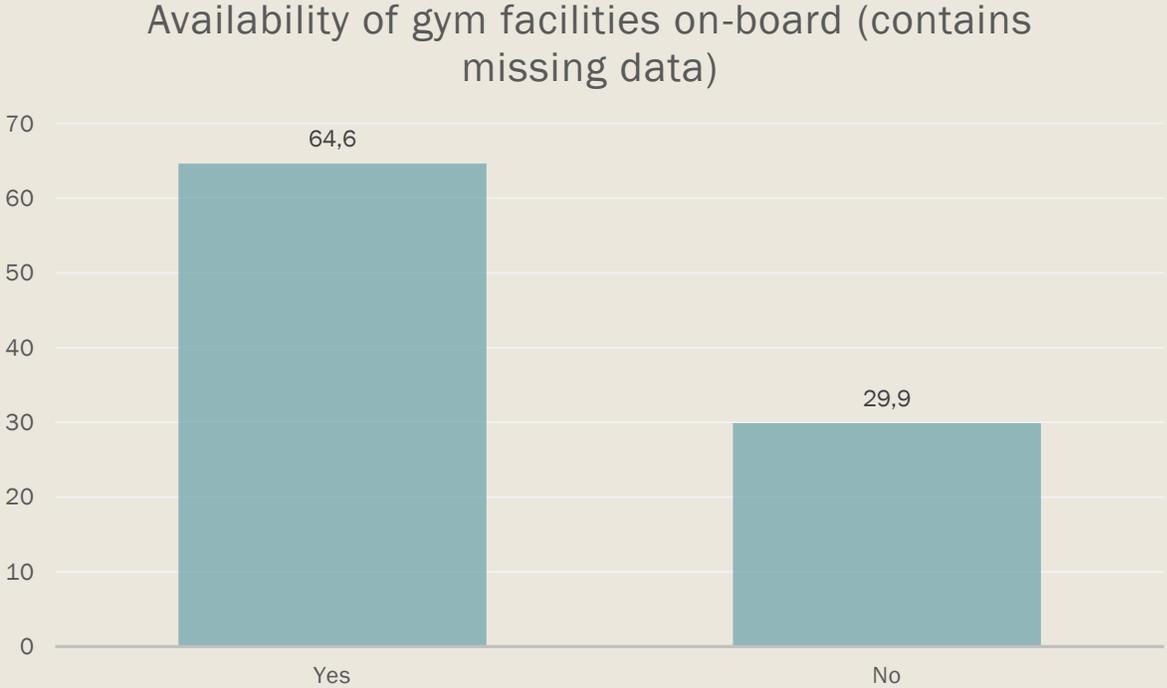
■ Chronic conditions diagnosed

- High blood pressure appeared to be the most prevalent condition (9.2%) (12.6 Filipinos) followed by high cholesterol (8.8%) (11.0 Filipinos). In most cases, and as anticipated due to the aforementioned 'healthy worker effect', seafarers compared well with land-based populations of similar workers in relation to most of the specified conditions. This seems to suggest that in many cases seafarers with diagnosed chronic health problems are successfully excluded from the workforce.

■ Recurring conditions

- The majority of seafarers (66.8%) reported that they had not experienced any of these problems in the past 12 months. The remaining 340 respondents (33.3%) reported that they had suffered from at least one condition. Of these conditions, indigestion or stomach trouble was the most prevalent (10.1%) (13.7 Filipinos), followed by persistent skin trouble (6.5%), arthritis or rheumatism (5.9%) (10.4 Filipinos) and recurring backache (5.9%). In relation to common recurrent health problems which may or may not have been diagnosed by a physician, seafarers suffer disproportionately from indigestion and stomach 'trouble'.

Recreation provided on-board (on-going study on seafarer accommodation 2015-2016)



Conclusions

- In general, Filipino seafarers tend to be healthy which could be attributed to what we call 'healthy worker effect'. Rigorous health screening could be said to minimise the employment of seafarers suffering from ill-health. And with a deep pool of reserved workers, those who are ill could be easily replaced by those who are fit and healthy.
- However, life on-board poses innumerable challenges to the health and well-being of seafarers like sedentary lifestyle, the unavailability of sports facilities, unhealthy diet, amongst others
- Though the industry has been stepping up to the challenge, more could be done through sustained education of seafarers, and the persistent reminder from those who constantly interact with them that what you eat and what you do (when not working) affect your longevity in the trade

References/Further readings:

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