

PROFILE OF FILIPINO OVERSEAS WORKERS¹

(Results from the 2000 Census of Population and Housing, NSO)

by
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I. INTRODUCTION

Contemporary views on migration depart from the premise of the push-pull theory. According to this theory, people move either because social and economic forces in the place of origin impelled them to do so, or because they are attracted to places of destination by one or more social and economic factors there. Observers of migration flows have long seen the vast changing nature of migration. Unwanted by the local economy, they are forced to seek employment abroad, unmindful of the onerous contract terms and risks, if only to escape poverty and unemployment at home. Migration also has an impact in the social lives of both the migrants and the families left behind. Filipinos, being extremely family-oriented, would above all remit earnings to the family left behind while, migrants bring to the receiving countries many customs, practices, and behavior patterns from the country of origin.

For over two decades, the Philippines has embarked on labor export program. The Philippines launched its overseas employment program in 1974, which was meant to be a stopgap measure to ease the country's high unemployment and foreign exchange problems. The enactment of RA 8042 (Migrant Workers and Overseas Filipinos Act of 1995) to protect the Filipino migrant workers and the promotion of their welfare, in general, is the highest priority concern of the Philippine Foreign Service Posts. This pronouncement, however, in spite of the increasing volume of overseas workers over the years, has remained hollow for there is lack of assurance in protecting their welfare and lack of indication of the relative permanence of government programs, not to mention the returning Filipino overseas workers' need for a coherent reintegration programs from the government to help them assimilate in the society.

Filipino overseas workers create a growing middle class and contribute in building a more stable Philippine economy by investing their hard-earned money in industries, like transportation, housing, construction, education, and manufacturing. Their role as economic saviors or, according to the government, as "modern-day heroes" should be enough reason to entitle them for protection from widespread abuses, exploitative working conditions, and job insecurity. For the families left behind, prolonged separation, psychosocial pressures, and changing values have caused the breakdown of families, delinquency among the youth and disruption of normal child development.

This paper will not delve on such economic and social repercussions of overseas employment. However, the recognition of said problems is vital in pushing government

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planners and program managers to formulate policies, plans and programs for overseas workers. The government should find ways by which it could return back the economic benefits these “modern-day heroes” bring forth to our country.

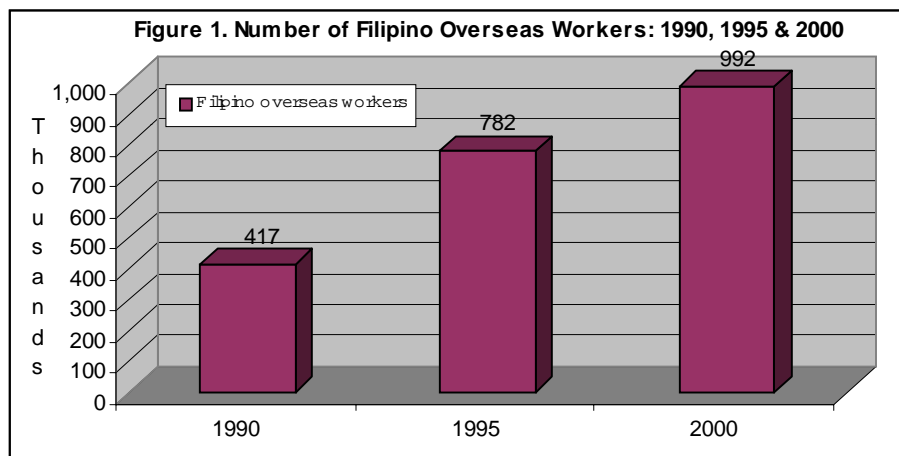
This paper made use of the 2000 Census of Population and Housing (Census 2000) conducted by the National Statistics Office (NSO) in May 2000. The census of population is the source of information on the size and distribution of the population as well as information about the demographic, social, economic and cultural characteristics of the population. The census of housing, on the other hand, provides information on the supply of housing units, their structural characteristics and facilities, which have bearing on the maintenance of privacy, health and the development of family conditions.

This paper presents the socio-demographic, household, and housing characteristics of the overseas workers. The information included here pertain only to those overseas workers who had left their families behind. Those who brought their entire families to their host country were not covered by the census. The numbers include both documented and undocumented overseas workers, as reported by members of the households that they left behind.

II. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS OF OVERSEAS WORKERS

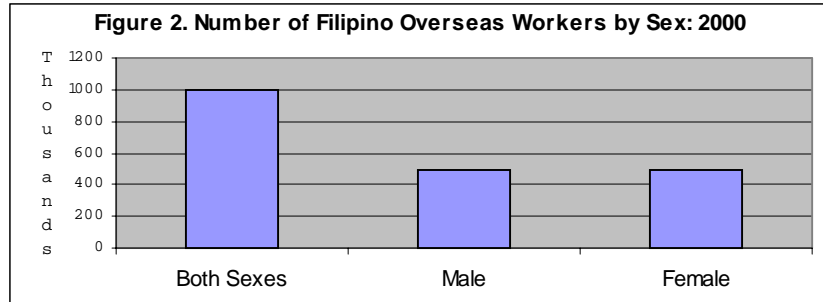
Overseas workers more than double after a decade

The number of overseas workers, based on the 2000 Census of Population and Housing, was 992,397. This accounted for 1.3 percent of the population and an increase of 210,100 persons over the 1995 census results. From only 417,301 in 1990, the number of overseas workers more than doubled after 10 years.



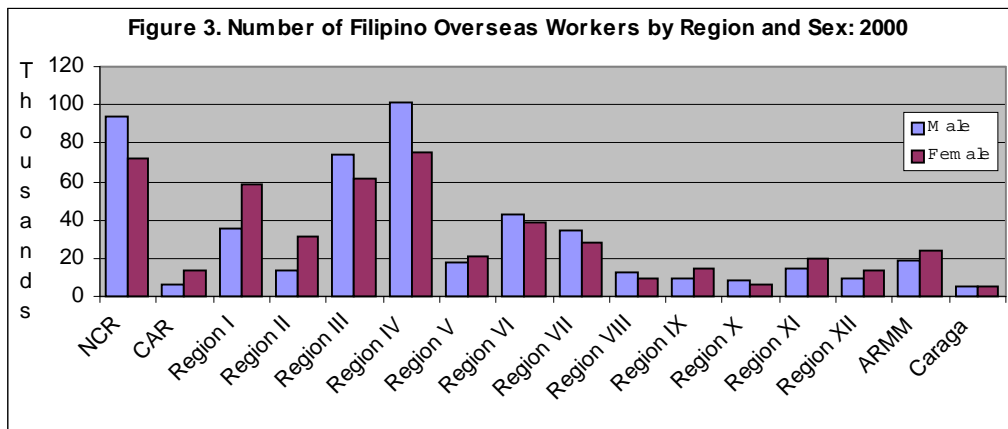
Number of male and female overseas workers almost equal

Overseas deployment by sex was almost even with the males (50.27 percent) at a little advantage over the females (49.73 percent). This translated to a sex ratio of 101 males for every 100 females. Also, there was a male overseas worker for every 77 males in the Philippine population. The same was true for the females.



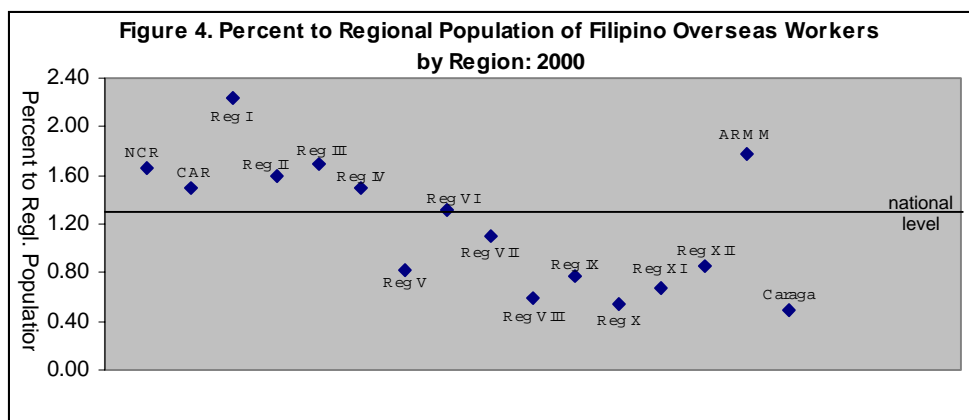
Largest proportion of overseas workers were from Southern Tagalog

Southern Tagalog (Region IV) contributed 177,155 overseas workers or 17.85 percent of all overseas workers. This was followed by the National Capital Region (NCR) with 165,575 persons and Central Luzon (Region III) with 135,802 persons. Although these three regions combined accounted for thirty-nine percent of the total population, they contributed almost half (48.2 percent) of the overseas workers. This could be attributed to the relatively high unemployment in these areas. Another possible reason is that many employers and recruitment agencies were based in NCR and the other two neighboring regions. Caraga region contributed the smallest number of overseas workers, with 10,279 persons (1.04 percent).



A cursory look at the proportion of male and female overseas workers by region revealed that males dominated among the overseas worker in NCR, Regions III, IV, VII, VIII, X and Caraga. However, women overseas workers outnumbered their male counterparts in Regions I, II, V, IX, XI, XII, and ARMM.

Figure 4 shows the percentage of the number of overseas workers to the total regional population. Eight regions in the country registered a proportion of overseas workers higher than the national level (1.30 percent). These regions were Ilocos Region, (2.24 percent); ARMM, (1.78 percent); Central Luzon, (1.69 percent); NCR, (1.67 percent); Cagayan Valley, (1.59 percent); Southern Tagalog, (1.50 percent); CAR, (1.50 percent); and Western Visayas, (1.32 percent). On the other hand, Caraga (0.49 percent) had the lowest percentage to the regional population.



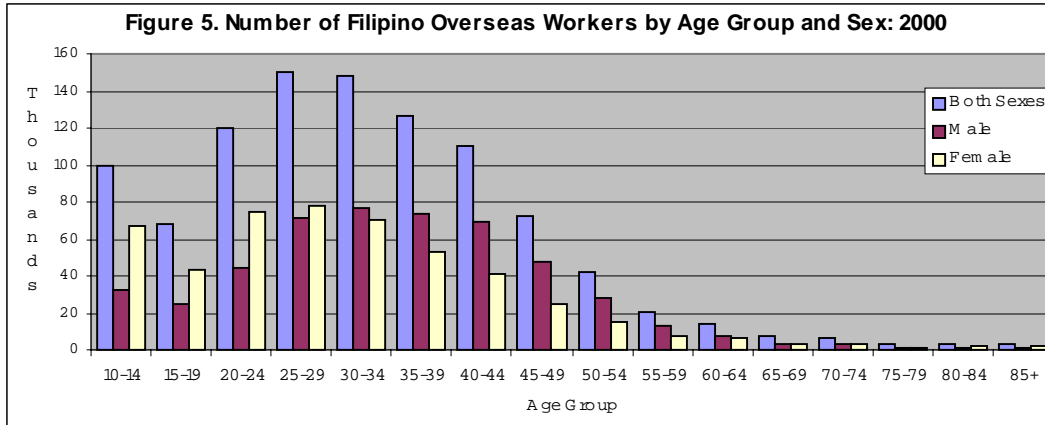
Overseas workers had a median age of 32 years

Overseas workers recorded a median age of 32 years. This means that half of our overseas workers were below 32 years old. Even at an almost equal number of male and female workers, the distribution showed disparities by region. Male overseas workers had a higher median age of 35 years than that of the female overseas workers (29 years). Across regions, median age of overseas workers was higher than the national average in Southern Tagalog and National Capital Region (34 years); Cordillera Administrative Region, Ilocos, Central Luzon (33 years); and the lowest in Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (25 years).

Table 1. Median Age of Filipino Overseas Workers by Region and Sex: 2000

Regions	Total	Male	Female
PHILIPPINES	32	35	29
National Capital Region	34	37	29
Cordillera Administrative Region	33	34	32
Ilocos	33	35	32
Cagayan Valley	30	32	30
Central Luzon	33	36	29
Southern Tagalog	34	36	31
Bicol Region	29	32	26
Western Visayas	32	34	29
Central Visayas	29	33	24
Eastern Visayas	32	34	29
Western Mindanao	26	29	24
Northern Mindanao	31	33	29
Southern Mindanao	29	32	27
Central Mindanao	27	30	25
Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao	25	27	24
Caraga	31	34	27

There was also a high proportion of overseas workers in the 10 to 14 age group (10.04 percent). This implies that young people who are not allowed to work under Philippine laws go into overseas work notwithstanding possible child abuse and exploitation in the receiving countries. This indicates possible misreporting of the age of these overseas workers to recruitment agencies and to host countries.



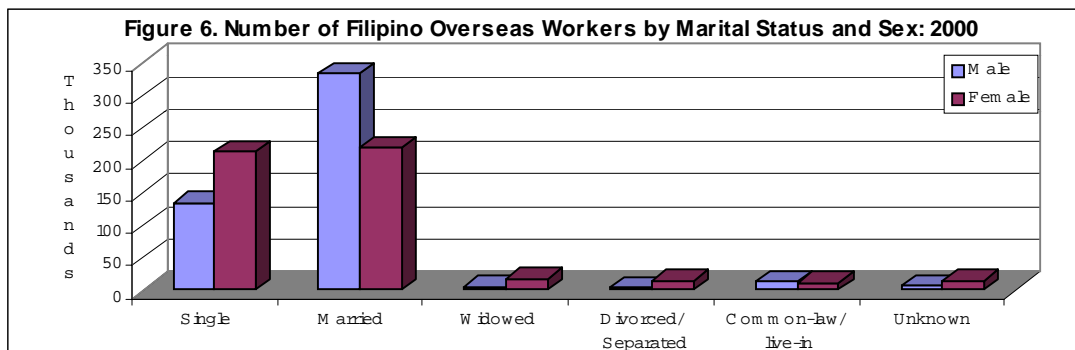
Six out of every ten overseas workers in the age group 29 years and below were female. The disparity was even greater in the 10 to 14 year age group, where two out of every three overseas workers were female. On the other hand, males outnumbered women in the older age groups with the highest proportion of males in the 50 to 54 year age group (65.25 percent).

More than half were married

Slightly more than half of overseas workers (55.8 percent) were married. This can be partially attributed to the fact that married individuals have greater economic responsibility and hence, an option is to have either of the couple go abroad to earn money. On the other hand, 35.10 percent of the overseas workers were never married. The rest were widowed, separated/ divorced, common-law spouses, or did not report their marital status.

A higher proportion of married over single individuals can be observed in all regions, except in the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) where there were more single (48.60 percent) than married overseas workers (44.43 percent). This can be attributed to the observation that ARMM had a young median age for migrants.

Six out of every ten single overseas workers, were women. In contrast, only four out of every married overseas workers were women.



Males were mostly the heads of the households

Household heads constituted 30.83 percent of all overseas workers. This maybe attributed to the fact that census respondents regarded these overseas workers as household heads even if they were absent from the household since they had bigger incomes than the other members of the household. Nine out of every ten overseas workers who were household heads were males.

Among male overseas workers, 54.7 percent were considered household heads. On the other hand, 52.2 percent of female overseas workers were daughters of the household heads.

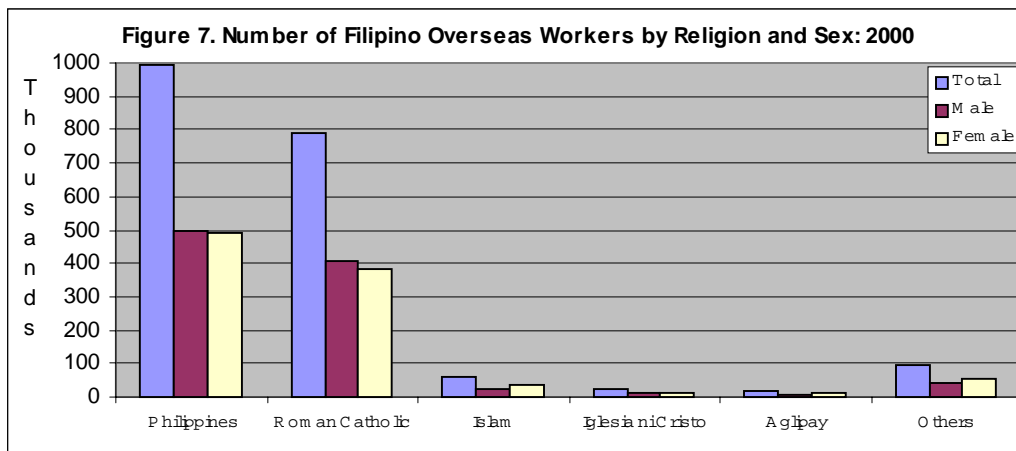
Table 2. Number of Filipino Overseas Workers by Relationship to Household Head and Sex: 2000

Relationship to Household Head	Total	Male	Female
PHILIPPINES	992,397	498,843	493,554
Head	305,996	272,939	33,057
Spouse	141,246	8,765	132,481
Son	156,456	156,456	-
Daughter	257,807	-	257,807
Others	130,892	60,683	70,209

Most overseas workers were Roman Catholics

Eight out of every ten overseas workers were Roman Catholics (79.77 percent). Other major religious affiliations were Islam (6.09 percent), Iglesia ni Cristo members (2.36 percent) and Aglipayans (2.09 percent).

Across regions, majority of the Filipino overseas workers were reported as Roman Catholics except for Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao, where Islam comprised 94.43 percent of the total overseas workers. Roman Catholics accounted for only 2.28 percent in that region.



Almost all were literate

Filipino overseas workers had a very high rate of literacy at 96.1percent. This was much higher than the 92.28 percent national literacy rate. Literacy rate of female overseas workers was almost the same as that of the males. At the regional level, the

highest literacy rate was observed in the National Capital Region (98.7 percent) and Ilocos Region (98.6 percent).

Tagalog was the predominant ethnic group

It was noted earlier that Regions III, IV and NCR had sent the highest number of Filipino overseas workers. People in these regions classified themselves as Tagalog. This is the predominant ethnic group of the overseas workers with 34.11 percent of the total overseas workers. The other major ethnic groups were Ilocano (14.81 percent), Cebuano (8.24 percent), Hiligaynon/Ilongo (7.23 percent), Kolibugan/Kalibugan (5.57 percent), Bisaya/Binisaya (4.72 percent), Bikol/Bicol (4.43 percent).

More than 13 percent were academic degree holders/with post baccalaureate courses

The median educational attainment of overseas workers was high school level. About 29.24 percent had attended/finished high school, 19.20 percent, elementary education, and 18.93 percent were college undergraduates. Overseas workers with academic degree and with post baccalaureate courses constituted 12.28 percent and 0.88 percent, respectively.

Education by sex revealed that up to high school level, there were more females than males. On the other hand, majority of the overseas workers who had reached post secondary education and higher were males. This shows that among overseas workers, males are better educated than females. This pattern is the reverse of that of the population left behind, where females dominated the higher levels of education. This implies that males would seek overseas work which require higher education, while women who work abroad would have less academic qualifications.

Table 3. Number and Percentage Distribution of Filipino Overseas Workers by Highest Grade Completed and Sex: 2000

Highest Grade Completed	Total	Percent	Male	Percent	Female	Percent
Total	992,397	100.00	498,843	50.27	493,554	49.73
No Grade Completed	16,521	1.66	6,739	40.79	9,782	59.21
Pre-school	1,295	0.13	416	32.12	879	67.88
Elementary	190,530	19.20	76,701	40.26	113,829	59.74
High School	290,171	29.24	126,000	43.42	16,4171	56.58
Post Secondary	145,608	14.67	95,929	65.88	49,679	34.12
College Undergraduate	187,878	18.93	103,090	54.87	84,788	45.13
Academic Degree Holder	121,836	12.28	70,408	57.79	51,428	42.21
Post Baccalaureate	8,692	0.88	5,018	57.73	3,674	42.27
Not Reported	29,866	3.01	14,542	48.69	15,324	51.31

III. HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS OF OVERSEAS WORKERS

Average household size of overseas workers was 5.86 persons

The number of households with Filipino overseas workers in the country was placed at 800,051 households in 2000, constituting 5.24 percent of the total households in the country. This implies that there were households with more than one overseas worker among their household members. The average household size of households with

overseas workers was 5.86 persons, higher than that of the national average (five persons). On the other hand, the average household size of households without overseas workers was 4.95 percent.

Across regions, the NCR recorded the smallest average household size of 5.44 persons. Other regions with less than 5.86 persons per household were Southern Tagalog (Region IV) with 5.63 persons and Central Luzon (Region III) with 5.75 persons. The largest average household size of 6.89 persons was recorded in ARMM.

The same trend was observed for the average household size without overseas workers. NCR (4.58 percent) recorded the smallest average household size while ARMM (6.08 percent) had the largest.

Table 4. Number of Households, Household Population and Average Household Size Of Households With and Without Overseas Workers by Region: 2000

Regions	With Overseas Workers			Without Overseas Workers		
	Number of Households	Household Population	Average Household Size	Number of Households	Household Population	Average Household Size
PHILIPPINES	800,051	4,690,940	5.86	14,478,757	71,641,530	4.95
National Capital Region	135,294	735,901	5.44	1,997,695	9,144,201	4.58
Cordillera Administrative Region	16,987	102,441	6.03	246,864	1,258,170	5.10
Ilocos	76,021	452,907	5.96	755,528	3,743,369	4.95
Cagayan Valley	36,136	212,926	5.89	518,355	2,596,594	5.01
Central Luzon	112,710	648,438	5.75	1,519,337	7,372,887	4.85
Southern Tagalog	145,169	817,637	5.63	2,267,874	10,946,609	4.83
Bicol Region	31,686	197,324	6.23	862,147	4,483,787	5.20
Western Visayas	68,676	419,883	6.11	1,143,128	5,782,548	5.06
Central Visayas	51,237	314,792	6.14	1,082,530	5,375,022	4.97
Eastern Visayas	17,840	106,583	5.97	697,230	3,497,125	5.02
Western Mindanao	18,669	119,309	6.39	577,162	2,966,013	5.14
Northern Mindanao	12,235	73,990	6.05	529,836	2,669,904	5.04
Southern Mindanao	28,839	170,032	5.90	1,037,360	5,011,267	4.83
Central Mindanao	17,625	110,634	6.28	484,245	2,480,838	5.12
Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao	22,269	153,407	6.89	371,000	2,257,438	6.08
Caraga	8,468	53,626	6.33	384,894	2,037,879	5.29

Households with overseas workers had more household amenities

A larger proportion of households with overseas workers owned of major amenities than households without overseas workers. For example, while only half of the households without overseas workers had television sets, three out of every four households with overseas workers had television sets. As Table 5 below shows, majority of households with overseas workers had radio/radio cassettes, television sets, and refrigerators/freezers. Four out of every ten such households had labor-saving appliances such as washing machines. One-third of such households also had telephones/ cellphones. Moreover, one out of every five households with overseas workers had motor vehicles, in contrast with only 11.6 percent of households without overseas workers.

Table 5. Number and Percentage Distribution of Households With and Without Overseas Workers by Type of Household Conveniences: 2000

Type of Conveniences	Total Households		With Overseas Workers		Without Overseas Workers	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
PHILIPPINES	15,278,808	100.00	963,175	100.00	14,315,633	100.00
Radio/Radio Cassette	1,490,718	75.21	825,771	85.73	10,664,947	74.50
Television Set	8,056,985	52.73	722,502	75.01	7,334,483	51.23
Refrigerator/Freezer	5,020,011	32.86	557,787	57.91	4,462,224	31.17
Video Cassette/Recorder	3,163,362	20.70	424,943	44.12	2,738,419	19.13
Telephone/Cellphone	2,164,512	14.17	344,086	35.72	1,820,426	12.72
Washing Machine	3,120,718	20.43	387,366	40.22	2,733,352	19.09
Motorized Vehicle	1,866,210	12.21	209,670	21.77	1,656,540	11.57

IV. HOUSING CHARACTERISTICS OF OVERSEAS WORKERS

Ratio of one household per occupied housing unit

Households of Filipino overseas workers resided in 795,264 housing units, about 5.34 percent of the Philippine housing units. This translates to a ratio of 1.01 household per occupied housing unit or a ratio of 5.90 persons per occupied housing unit. On the other hand, housing units without overseas workers had an almost equal ratio of 1.03 household per occupied housing unit but a lesser ratio of 5.08 persons per occupied housing unit.

Predominantly single housing units

There was no significant difference between housing units of households with overseas workers and those without. Households of overseas workers mainly dwelled in single-type housing units (86.36 percent). There were very few who resided in other types: 8 percent multi-unit residential types and more than 4 percent, duplex. Across regions except NCR, at least 85.53 percent of the overseas workers were residing in single housing unit. In NCR, aside from single housing unit (59.75 percent), multi-unit residential (29.34 percent) was another common building type for households of overseas workers.

Housing units of overseas workers were made of strong materials for roofs and walls

Four out of every five occupied housing units of overseas workers had roofs made of galvanized iron/aluminum (80.98 percent). The rest lived in houses with cogon/nipa/anahaw (9.19 percent), half galvanized (5.04 percent) and wood (1.39 percent). On the other hand, only two out of every three housing units of households without overseas workers had roofs made of galvanized iron/aluminum (66.88 percent) while 22.97 percent had roofs made of cogon/nipa/anahaw.

More than half (51 percent) of the housing units of overseas workers had concrete/brick/stone as construction materials used for walls. Moreover, 21.43 percent had walls made of half concrete/brick/stone and 13.26 percent, made of wood. On the other hand, a lower proportion of housing units of households without overseas workers were made of strong materials. Housing units with walls made of concrete/brick/stone walls accounted for 29.7 percent, while those with walls made of and half concrete/brick/stone were 18.79 percent. The proportion of housing units of non-overseas

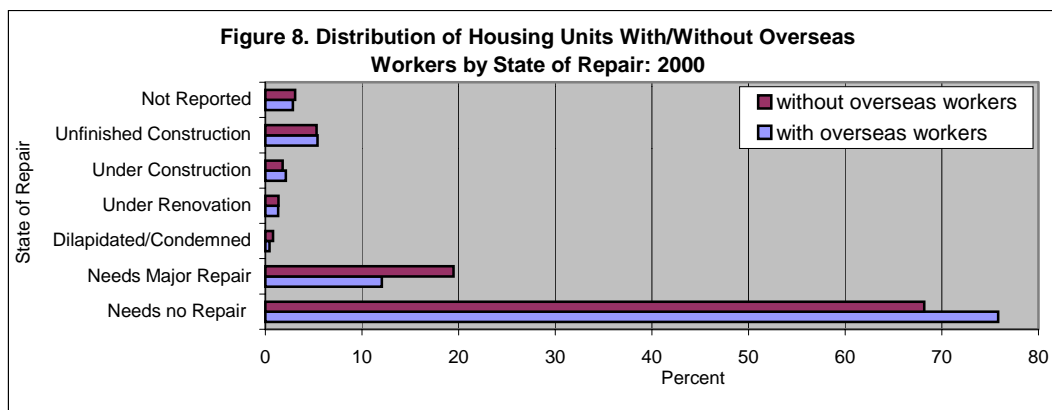
workers with walls made of wood was 23.23 percent, while that of bamboo/sawali/cogon/nipa was 23.49 percent

Table 6. Occupied Housing Units of Filipino Overseas Workers by Construction Materials of the Roof and Outer Walls: 2000

Construction Materials of the Walls	Occupied Housing Unit of Overseas Workers	Construction Materials of the Roof								
		Galvanized Iron	Tile/Concrete	Half Galvanized	Wood	Cogon/Nipa/Anahaw	Asbestos	Makeshift/Salvaged	Others	Not Reported
PHILIPPINES	795,264	644,015	10,995	40,094	11,044	73,045	720	2,434	1,238	11,679
Concrete/Brick/Stone	405,598	386,393	8,760	5,884	732	2,814	449	189	377	-
Wood	105,480	76,856	487	2,740	7,540	17,393	69	248	147	-
Half Concrete/Brick/Stone	170,431	133,700	1,238	28,894	1,221	4,973	120	165	120	-
Galvanized Iron/Aluminum	7,200	6,076	104	684	152	153	7	21	3	-
Bamboo/Sawali/Cogon/Nipa	83,107	33,640	-	1,375	1,176	46,235	-	294	380	7
Asbestos	438	301	53	25	14	-	44	-	1	-
Glass	253	203	27	10	3	-	9	-	1	-
Makeshift/Salvaged	3,961	1,696	-	85	34	633	-	1,460	51	2
Others	1,358	896	11	15	5	284	2	10	135	-
No Walls	1,023	747	80	48	47	61	2	25	3	10
Not Reported	16,415	3,507	235	334	120	499	18	22	20	11,660

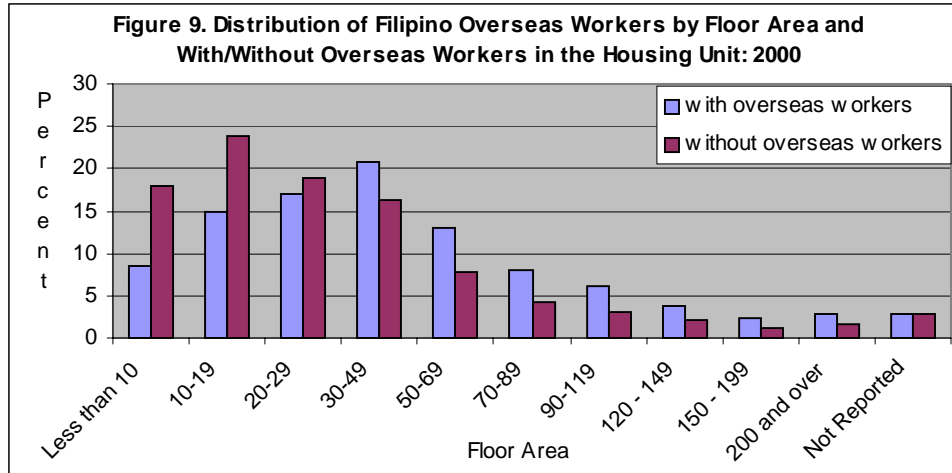
Housing units of overseas workers needed no repair

More than three-fourths (75.82 percent) of the housing units of overseas workers needed minor repair or no repair at all. As shown below, a smaller proportion of housing units of households without overseas workers did not need repair (68.18 percent). Consequently, a larger proportion of housing units non-overseas workers needed major repair (19.48 percent).



Overseas workers preferred housing units with 30 to 49 square meter floor area

Households with overseas workers had bigger floor area than those without overseas workers.. The median floor area of housing units of overseas workers was 39.40 square meters, while that of housing units of households without overseas workers was 28.56 square meters.



V. SUMMARY

Based on the Census 2000, there were 992,397 Filipino overseas workers, accounting for 1.3 percent of the total population. Almost half of the overseas workers came from Southern Tagalog, the National Capital Region, and from Central Luzon combined.

There were 101 male overseas workers for every 100 of their female counterparts. Half of the Filipino overseas workers were below 32 years old. One out of every ten overseas workers was less than 15 years old. There were more women in the younger age groups, while men dominated the older age groups. More than half of the overseas workers were married.

More than half of male overseas workers were heads of their households; more than half of the female overseas workers were either daughters or spouses of their household heads. Eight out of every ten overseas workers were Roman Catholics. One out of every three belonged to the prominent ethnic group of Tagalog. Half of the workers had attended/finished high school. Almost all were literate

There were 800,051 households with at least one Filipino overseas worker. Households with overseas workers were larger than those without overseas workers

Housing characteristics of overseas workers revealed that they were economically better off than the average household with no overseas worker. This was manifested in the bigger houses (median floor area of housing units of overseas workers was 39.40 square meters while the median floor area of non-overseas workers was 28.56 square meters), stronger materials of roofs and walls of the housing units of overseas workers, and higher proportion of ownership of major household amenities like radio, television set, and refrigerator.

VI. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

Identification of Filipino overseas workers and knowing their characteristics could help the policy makers prepare programs to reduce abuses and exploitation in the host country. Some of the areas which can be given attention to help both the overseas workers and the country are the following:

Sustain and expand employment opportunities

Despite strenuous government efforts to expand local labor pool, the number of Filipinos working abroad further increased. Government, NGOs, and private sector agencies need to work together to redesign or expand policies to meet this burgeoning number of Filipino overseas workers. Local expansion should be done so that low paying overseas workers need not work out of the country, since workers in low paying companies abroad are susceptible to abuses. Moreover, there must be effective labor policies and programs to address most of the problems of overseas migrants and to facilitate the reintegration of the returning overseas workers.

More strict recruitment policies

The data show the presence of overseas workers below the legal age for employment. The evolution of overseas employment policy has been a product of incidents involving Filipino workers at the worksite. An example of the latter is the imprisonment of Sarah Balabagan, a minor, in Saudi Arabia. This and other similar incidents caused national outrage in the Philippines and the government was forced to enact legislation to give greater protection to Filipino overseas workers. As a preventive measure, the government must tighten its laws to a certain extent and exercise some degree of control by watch-listing recruitment agencies with dubious records, and disqualifying them from participation in the overseas employment program. Stricter procedures for screening applicants should be instituted so that deployment of minors below 18 years old will not be repeated.

Closer family ties

The data show that more than half of the male overseas workers were considered as household heads even in their absence. This indicates the value put on the economic contribution of the men, as opposed to that of the women, more than half of whom were considered as daughters or spouses of the household heads. Values are instruments of social control. In order to create a strong family relationship, there is a need for the government to introduce campaigns on closer family ties as a desirable value, which every Filipino should possess. One of the main focuses of the campaign is to inculcate family values in school children. Values stem from beliefs, which tend to be enduring and difficult to change. Thus, by placing a strong emphasis on closer family values in the cultural and social environment of young children, they will grow up placing those values as important. Teachers also, being the second mother of the children could aid in the formation of desirable values by emphasizing that certain family values are deemed desirable, and therefore are right. Children are the future of a nation, and by shaping

their system of moral value, the government has set its sights on making closer family ties an important value for the future generations.

Target policymakers and leaders for sustained commitment

The data show an increasing trend in the number of overseas workers. Perhaps the worst case scenario that could happen to our overseas workers is, if it has reached a level that is over than the ability of our government to manage, in terms of providing services and guarantees, not to mention the huge social costs to migrant families as a result of prolonged separation, the breakdown of families, the deterioration and underdevelopment of the psychosocial growth of their children. Life would not be half as bad if the Filipino overseas workers who are called the unsung heroes enjoyed a measure of genuine protection on their rights and provide services and guarantees in mitigating the social cost of migration to the families left behind. Researchers and advocates must make sure that policymakers have a realistic understanding of the behavioral situation and an appreciation of the dynamics of Filipino overseas workers. They must also convince policymakers to sustain these focused efforts and expand long-term support for broader absorption of the programs. The Philippines has an unprecedented opportunity to avert a disaster by acting before it is too late.

Let us not evaluate the overseas workers contribution only in terms of the incomes remitted. Rather, we should help our Filipino migrants by conducting studies, investigations and policy formulations that could immediately and efficiently resolve the issues and problems confronting the Filipino overseas workers. The paper has modestly contributed to the understanding of the Filipino overseas workers' characteristics so that government and private sectors support programs can be better geared to maximize and optimize the overseas workers' contribution to our nation's growth.

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