

Common Health Problems of Filipino Overseas Household Service Workers: Implications for Wellness*

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Abstract

For over 40 years now, the Philippines has been supplying Household Service Workers (HSWs) globally. As a requirement of the Philippine Overseas Employment Agency (POEA), all Filipinos applying for overseas work undergo medical examination and a certificate of good health is submitted to the foreign employer before hiring. However, there are workplace-related health problems that develop during employment such as musculoskeletal strain or injury, back pain, hypertension and other illnesses. Some workers are in good working conditions but are on call more than 12 hours per day. There are also those who experience heavy physical work with short rest periods or time off. They can also be easily exposed to disease outbreaks and epidemics. The objective of this study is to determine the common health problems of Filipino Overseas Service Workers and to analyze their implications to wellness in the workplace. Specifically, the study describes the work conditions of HSWs and the work-related factors affecting their health. It also identifies the medical care that they avail of and determines how they perceive their health and wellness. Finally, it proposes ways to promote wellness among HSWs. This study focuses on physical illnesses and does not include mental problems experienced by HSWs. Using a questionnaire, primary data were gathered online and through a survey of HSW rehires who were retaking Pre-Departure Orientation Seminars at recruitment agencies. The 2010 Health Benefit Availment data from the Overseas Workers Welfare Administration (OWWA) were also utilized. Descriptive analysis was employed on the data gathered. Key stakeholders in the migration industry were also interviewed. Previous research studies, reports, and literature on migration and wellness were used as secondary data. The study found that Filipino overseas HSWs are vulnerable to physical injury and experience body pains such as back, hip and shoulder pain. Long hours of work, work hazards and lack of rest due to poor accommodations can aggravate their physical condition. Although health insurance and health care are available, HSWs are not aware of how to avail of them. On the basis of the findings, a Wellness Program can be designed that includes health awareness, health care availment, occupational ergonomics, safety and health, work and leisure balance, developing emotional intelligence, anger management, and spirituality.

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