IN
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OWN
WORDS

FILIPINO SEAFARER'S
EXPERIENCES OF MARITIME PIRACY

A collaborative research undertaking between

THE PHILIPPINE GOVERNMENT
through the Maritime Training Council
National Maritime Polytechnic
Philippine Overseas Employment Administration

and THE JAPANESE GOVERNMENT
through its Ministry of Land, Infrastructure, Transport and Tourism

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1. BACKGROUND

This study centers on the human cost of piracy from the Filipino seafarers' perspective. It documents narratives of their piracy experiences, lessons learned, and its effects on their psychological, social, and professional dispositions. Guided by the belief that seafarers' voices should hold ground in policy and practice in the maritime industry, this study seeks to bring out the distinct universe of discourse of our Filipino seafarers to whom piracy is a matter more real than any statistic or speculation can show. With these voices from the high seas, as we would like to call them here, as our guide in policymaking and implementation, the murky waters of the piracy issue would not be that dark anymore. The human aspect of piracy, at least from the Philippine side of the seven seas, have finally found a "local habitation and a name."

The following objectives guided the conduct of this study, namely : 1) to unravel Filipino seafarer's experiences of successful and unsuccessful piratical attacks; 2) to gauge from Filipino seafarer's perspectives, the effects of piracy incidents on their personal and professional lives; 3) to cull from their experiences, the lessons they learned from it; and 4) to make Filipino seafarer's piracy experiences, its effects on them, and the lessons they learned from it as inputs to policy recommendations and future actions.

Conducted and completed in 2012, this research is a collaborative undertaking between the Philippine and the Japanese Governments. The Philippine government is represented by then Maritime Training Council, the National Maritime Polytechnic, and the Philippine Overseas Employment Administration while the Japanese government is represented by the Ministry of Infrastructure, Land, Transport and Tourism.

This research is packaged into a Compendium with five (5) chapters. Chapter I is *Voices from the High Seas*, An Introduction, Chapter II on *Gunpoint*, Filipino Seafarers' Stories of Sea Piracy, Chapter III titled *Emotional Trauma, Physical Abuse, Death*, The Rising Human Cost of Piracy at Sea, Chapter IV *Raising the Alarm*, Lessons Learned from Piracy Attacks, and Chapter V is *Protecting Seafarers and Their Families*, Program and Policy Recommendations

2. METHODOLOGY

Results of the study were generated employing the following methods :

.1 This qualitative study used interviews and focus group discussions to extract seafarers' experiences of successful and unsuccessful piratical attacks, its effects on their lives, and the lessons learned from their experiences.

.2 Interviews were conducted on six occasions to participants at LUSWELF, AMOSUP Sailors' Home, and in shipping companies. Additional data from 101 participants were retrieved from shipping companies. A researcher-made, pre-tested interview schedule was used for data gathering.

.3 Focus group discussions were held on five groups of seafarer-victims at LUSWELF, AMOR Office, AMOSUP Seafarers' Center, and in shipping companies. Psychologist from Ugnayan at Tulong Para sa Maralitang Pilipino (UGAT) Foundation facilitated the conduct of focus group discussions. Likewise, two

captains and the psychologists from UGAT Foundation facilitated the Roundtable Discussions at the AMOSUP attended by representatives from the tripartite group – government, employers, seafarers as well as Japanese representatives. An FGD guide was constructed and validated through pre-testing, and was used to facilitate the flow of discussions.

.4 Participants were selected using both purposive sampling and snowballing technique. Seafarers must be victims of piracy themselves to quality as participants in the study. Thus, purposive sampling became the researchers' methodological recourse. The list of shipping/manning companies with vessels hijacked by Somali pirates provided by the POEA guided the researchers in locating participants. For the sampling size to meet prescribed criteria (Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009), the snowballing technique or referral method was used to lead the researchers to more piracy seafarer-victims.

.5 To triangulate, a literature review of studies that dealt with piracy issues in general and the human cost of piracy in particular were conducted. Themes from these studies were used as frameworks from which to reduce the present data.

.6 With thematic frameworks from studies reviewed and the research objectives in mind, data from these interviews and focus group discussions were transcribed and coded. Only texts relevant to the present study were used in the analysis.

4. HIGHLIGHTS OF THE STUDY

Results of the study are contained in three Chapters – from Chapter II to Chapter IV and the recommendations are contained in Chapter V.

.1 Chapter II documents and narrates the stories of Filipino seafarers who experienced piracy in five forms : 1) seafarers attacked; 2) citadel survivors; 3) seafarers taken hostage; 4) seafarers abused and tortured; 5) force collaboration and human shields, with four and five lumped into one overlapping category.

.2 50 or 40% of respondents reported they were taken hostages by pirates, 39 or 31% said their vessels were chased by pirate skiffs, 24 or 19% told researchers that pirates boarded their vessels and some 13 or 10% said their vessels were fired upon and chased by pirates.

.3 Filipino seafarers taken hostage were in captivity for a period of ranging from three (3) days on the shortest to a maximum of ten (10) months.

.4 As to location, the documentation made also centered on the stories of Filipino seafarers who experienced piracy incidents in different parts of the Indian Ocean, Gulf of Aden, West Africa, and the Arabian Sea.

.5 Chapter III categorizes the varied experiences of Filipino seafarers in terms of reactions and effects as analyzed by psychologists from Ugnayan at Tulong para sa Maralitang Pamilya (UGAT) Foundation. These are as follows :

a. Emotional Reactions/Effects
   - *Dreadful fear for life in the initial moments of the attack.* Foremost among reactions of piracy victims during the initial moments of attack is the fear for one's life, with most of them feeling that the incident could result to their death.

- *Guns being fired or pointed at them aggravated the stress.* For most of the respondents, guns being fired or pointed at them also resulted in being traumatized. The mere sight or sound of guns was enough to make them surrender to the threats of pirates.
- *Greatest fear was when the pirates were dropped off.* One of the most common narratives among seafarer-victims was the escalating fear that another group attacks them after the pirates were dropped off, prompting them to seek security assistance from armed personnel or warships.
- *Nervous breakdown.* The gravity of the situation of being subjected to a pirate attack and the range of emotions one has to deal with in the process make extreme reactions, even a nervous breakdown or death, an unfortunate part of the piracy equation.
- *Long-term trauma.* Some victim-respondents showed symptoms of long-term trauma, with those who stopped sailing, articulating the need for psychological help to tackle fears of going back onboard, and exhibiting paranoia especially during the initial months after the incident.
- *Traumatized because of violence witnessed.* There was fear because of killings witnessed or forced to become an accessory of, even if done in the context of self-defense, a kind of guilt as in the fear of seeing ghosts, the memory of those who died coming back during the day, during dreams.
- *Increasing fear because of failures in negotiation between pirates and company.* Seafarer-victims voiced their increasing fear especially during failures in negotiation between pirates and their company.
- *Strength comes from family.* During adverse situations like a pirate attack, the family also becomes a source of strength for the crew.

b. Cognitive Reactions/Effects
- *Thoughts of hopelessness and distress about the uncertainty of release.* Especially during prolonged periods of captivity, there were escalating feelings of hopelessness among the seafarer-victims. In some case, because of the gravity of the situation, the option of fighting back crossed their minds, though the fear of getting captured again made them resigned to their fate.
- *Cannot disclose certain details of the experience to wife/family for fear that it might do more harm than good.* Before telling their families that they were hostaged by pirates, they weigh the possible reactions, the negative this might have. Most of them decided not to disclose the experience to their children. The same is true to old parents of the seafarers.

b. Socio-behavioral Reactions/Effects
- *Able to focus on work despite a piracy attack.* Generally, there was a different effect of trauma for the captain and for the crew members, and it is heavier or more pronounced on the part of the former. The extent of their responsibilities in handling the survival of the ship and the crew, as well as their own safety and that of the families they have left at home, were all taken into consideration by captains during pirate attacks. In terms of their psychological well-being, it was hard for them, but crew on board ship

managed to keep it together and maintain what they call a "presence of mind".

- *Fight back under extremely adverse conditions.* For most of the seafarer-victims, the common reaction during piracy attacks was to cooperate, as taught to them during trainings. But under extremely adverse conditions, there were respondents who were forced to fight back, or become an accessory to the plans of the rest of the crew, including the Captain, even if this meant the death of the pirates and playing witness to this gruesome incident.

c. Physical Reactions/Effects
- *Heightened senses/Hypervigilance.* Seafarer-victims reported nervousness after the incident, which resulted in being extra alert, heightened senses, the sense of being always on guard, of always being in danger, looking for something that might harm them even if there's none, a kind of hypervigilance.
- *Nightmares and anxiety attacks even in sleep.* One of the most common physical reactions or effects of the incident to the seafarer-victims was having nightmares and anxiety attacks even in sleep. For some, months after the incident, these nightmares would continue to recur.
- *Tensed muscles as crew were cramped in little space.* The physical discomfort most of the seafarer-victims experienced was being cramped in little space, with all the crew forced in a single room, and how they slept and spent the days in limited uncomfortable positions.
- *Deprivation of personal necessities.* Seafarer-victims reported that they were deprived of personal necessities, that if they were allowed to go to the comfort room, they were heavily guarded, not given enough time for their personal necessities and the discomfort this generally caused.

d. Spirirual Reactions/Effects
- *Personal reflection.* As traumatic as their piracy experience was, seafarer-victims saw this a time for reflection, to look into themselves, to assess their lives. Realizing the difficulties of their profession and the risks involved, for some victims, their experience on piracy made them decide to venture into other professions like teaching or going into business.
- *Turned to prayers.* Almost all respondents articulated that their faith in God was the one thing that made them survive the incident.

.6 Chapter IV documents the lessons learned that can serve as first-hand guide on preventive measures and coping strategies that other seafarers transiting high-risk areas can also employ. These are identified below :

a. Before an attack
- *Early detections, awareness and training.* Most of the respondents stressed the importance of early detection, awareness and training as effective ways of evading and preparing them in the eventuality of an attack.

- *Presence of armed security personnel.* For most of the respondents, the presence of armed guards made them feel more secure and had a bearing on their mental and emotional well-being.
- *Citadel.* For the respondents, a citadel, combined with other preventive measures, limited their feeling of vulnerability as they have a "safe area".
- *Other preparations prior to entering high-risk areas.* Preparations should be made at least a week prior to entering high-risk areas and these preparations should include reporting to concerned authorities who can provide assistance in times of attacks, doing research prior to entering the areas.
- *Briefing the crew.* There is a need to brief the crew prior to entering high-risk areas. Briefing should include making precautions on the ship, emotionally preparing the crew, making them understand interplay between commercial pressures at stake versus the risks involved.
- *Trusting the captain.* On the part of the crew, the importance of trusting the judgment and leadership of the captain was mentioned as a crucial factor in the team work and group cohesion needed especially in crisis situations.
- *Humor.* In the Filipino culture, humor is a coping mechanism often used as it makes light of adverse situations to make them more bearable. This is also true in the case of Filipino seafarers facing the possibility of a pirate attack, wherein humor is injected.
- *Piracy as part of the profession.* For some of the crew, piracy experiences made them learn that the risk of attacks is no more than a part of their chosen profession, that it is as real as "sinking, collision, fire" and that there is no other recourse but to prepare for this eventuality and maintain a positive perspective.

b. Need to cooperate with pirates/Pakikisama
   - *Need to cooperate with pirates/Pakikisama.* Respondents also learned on how necessary it was to cooperate as much as possible to the wishes of the pirates to avoid further conflict.
   - *Teamwork.* This is a factor in survival in the case of an attack but can become difficult n mixed crew settings

c. After an attack
   - *Need to stay on guard after a piracy attack.* For most of the respondents, it was important to stay on guard at least 4 hours after a pirate attack in preparation for the likelihood of another attack.
   - *Importance of debriefing.* Debriefing was underscored by the respondents, especially the captain, as this serve as venue to discuss what exactly happened, what the entire crew had done right as well as the mistakes in the process, the lessons they learned as a team.
   - *Telling the story as a way of coping.* Respondents felt that telling the story to their families, friends or companies was a way of coping. The process became cathartic in the sense that it made them feel lighter or that a weight was lifted off their shoulders.

.7 Chapter V, Protecting Seafarers and Their Families, provides the following recommendations :

a. *Psychosocial aspect*
- *Resiliency building of seafarers.* Before deployment, there should be a psychological preparedness on the part of seafarers. Through a combination of training and sharing of information before sailing, this resiliency building package should strengthen seafarers in the same way that the Best Management Practices 2011 prepares ships against attacks. With Stress Management as among the trainings included in this package, this resiliency building will help seafarers better handle the psychological reactions they may experience during attack and hostage situations, reducing the negative consequences of said experiences.
- *Good Practice Guide.* There should be a speedy adoption of The Good Practice Guide recommended by the Maritime Piracy Humanitarian Response Programme (MPHRP) which proposes a standardized range of actions to minimize suffering and facilitate the recovery of seafarers who have fallen victims to pirates.
- *Peer Counsellors.* It is important to identify peer counsellors for the crew members to help the entire group during piracy attacks. They will be tasked to monitor the psychological state of the crew members and provide moral support in times of distress.
- *Standardized protocol after the piracy incident.* There should be a uniform standardized protocol or program which all government agencies need to follow after the piracy incident. It will identify victims who need the debriefing sessions only from those who should be given intensive therapy.
- *Post-event care.* The government as well as ship owners should increase current efforts to educate seafarers about symptoms of concern as well as providing means to receive care at sea and at port.
b. *Standardized procedure to compensate seafarers.* There should be a procedure and policy in place standardizing the payment of compensation for stolen personal properties and wages earned during captivity.
c. *Caring for the seafarers' families.*
- *Right information for family members through a Family Liaison Representative*
- *Debriefing for the families upon release of seafarers*
- *Follow-up counselling*
d. *Technical side.* The following recommendations were given by technical experts during the series of roundtable discussions done during the course of the research:
- *Preparations prior to passing high-risk areas*
- *Contacts to establish before transiting high-risk areas*
- *Calling proper authorities during attack*
- *Fast and proper negotiation*
e. *Training interventions.* To develop and conduct a separate training on anti-piracy, other than the STCW requirements on the ISPS Code Training, was underscored. Also worth noting is the development and implementation of trainings toward cultural sensitivity so the crew can avoid offending and angering the pirates.

f. *After-incident reports.* These reports should be prepared and submitted or be made available to Philippine authorities to be used as basis for interventions.

g. *Communication.* Development of a code between the vessel and the family by the companies as a communication clue for the crew and their families especially during piracy attacks.

h. *Entire maritime community.* The problem of maritime piracy requires concerted international action from port states, flag states, shipowners, seafarers, associations and other affected sectors working together to counter this complex issue. However, discrepancies are noted in the legal framework protecting the seafarers from piracy which should be dealt with for a more stringent enforcement of laws and policies against piracy and the protection of seafarers who are constantly subjected to the risk of attacks.

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