ARE FILIPINO FISHERFOLKS HEALTHY OR NOT? 
EXCERPTS FROM 2013 RESULTS 
OF THE NATIONAL NUTRITION SURVEY

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BACKGROUND

The fishing industry is a significant producer of food in the Philippines, yet the fisherfolks remain to be one of the most marginalized sectors in the country. Filipino fishing communities are thought to be at particularly high risk of malnutrition, yet limited studies that assess the nutritional status and dietary intake of fisherfolks are available.

OBJECTIVES

The study aimed to analyze the nutritional status, dietary diversity and food security of fisherfolks.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Using the database of the 8th National Nutrition Survey (NNS) conducted by the DOST-FNRI in 2013, 35,825 households by various occupational groups were included. Data were disaggregated by age, sex and occupational groups, and analyzed using Stata 12.0. Descriptive statistics like mean, frequencies and percentages by population and occupation groups were generated.

RESULTS

Results showed high prevalence of malnutrition among households headed by fisherfolks as stunting (40.1%) and underweight (36.6%) were problems among children, while Chronic Energy Deficiency (CED) among adults (11.4%). On health indicators, fisherfolks had the least number of anemic (8.0%) and diabetics (2.3%). In terms of diet, fisherfolks had the highest fish and fish products intakes (162g), but had the least intake for meat products and poultry (22.7g); eggs (11.3g); and milk and milk products (18.5g). Across occupational groups, fisherfolks had lower percentage of households meeting the energy and nutrients intake (27.2%). They also had the lowest percentage of households meeting the requirement for iron (5.7%), vitamin A (16.2%), calcium (7.3%), and riboflavin (9.7%). In terms of food insecurity, fisherfolks had the highest percentage of food insecure households (82.6%) in all indicators of the Cornell-Radimer hunger scale.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

High prevalence of stunting and undernutrition exist among households headed by fisherfolks. This in-depth analysis revealed significant information on nutritional status, dietary diversity and food security among fisherfolks, and is the first to look at the prevalence of these issues using a nationally representative sample. There is an urgent need to address the problems of malnutrition among fisherfolks, which may have taken root from the multifaceted causes of poverty. Focused intervention may be developed and be implemented to cater to the needs of this group.