

Tracking suffering and economic deprivation in the Philippines over time

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In the Philippines, Social Weather Stations (www.sws.org.ph) has conducted and publicly reported many statistically-representative national surveys of social, economic and political well-being. SWS constantly tracks economic deprivation, as measured by self-rated poverty (quarterly since 1992) and involuntary hunger (quarterly since 1998) since eradicating poverty and hunger are popularly and officially recognized as national goals. Since 1985, families that self-rate as poor (on a scale that also includes “not poor” and “border-line”) have ranged between 74 percent and 43 percent, with a broadly downward trend, but with high quarterly volatility. Since 1998, families that involuntarily (qualified by “not having anything to eat”) experienced hunger in the past three months have ranged between 23.8 percent and 5.1 percent. Hunger has had high quarterly volatility, and an upward trend since 2004; it is classified as “moderate” (if experienced only once or a few times) or “severe” (if experienced often or always).

The SWS surveys also have data on suffering, derivable from items on (a) happiness, in 21 survey rounds over 1991-2011, and (b) life-satisfaction, in 18 rounds over 2002 to 2012Q1. Both items use four-point answer scales, where the lower two points indicate “moderate suffering” and “extreme suffering”. Since 1991, the only years without at least one suffering indicator were 1992-95, 1997, 1999, and 2009. In the data-series, those “unhappy” (i.e., not very or not at all happy) have fluctuated between 8 and 24 percent, and those “dissatisfied with life” (i.e., not very or not at all satisfied with life) have fluctuated between 14 percent and 39 percent. Using all SWS surveys with requisite data, this paper shows how the suffering of the poor exceeds that of the non-poor, and the suffering of the hungry exceeds that of the non-hungry. The deviations measure the social accountability for a significant extent of suffering.

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In the Philippines, Social Weather Stations (www.sws.org.ph) conducts and publicly reports statistically-representative surveys of social, economic and political well-being on a regular basis (Mangahas and Guerrero, 2002 and 2008). The typical quarterly Social Weather Survey has a national sample size of 1,200 households, from which the household head and a randomly-selected adult are interviewed.

Surveys of economic deprivation

SWS constantly tracks economic deprivation, as measured by self-rated poverty (quarterly since 1992) and involuntary hunger (quarterly since 1998), since eradicating poverty and hunger are popularly and officially recognized as national goals. The wordings of the survey questions used are in the Annex. The respondents to these particular questions are household heads, and the ensuing statistics thus refer to the deprivation of families rather than to the deprivation of individuals. For reference, SWS uses a national projection of 55.81 million families (for a population of 96.45 million persons), as of 2012Q1.

Since 1985, families that self-rate as poor -- on a scale that also includes “not poor” and “border-line” – (Mangahas 1995, 2008) have ranged between 74 percent and 43 percent. Self-rated poverty has a broadly downward trend, but can be either sticky or volatile from quarter to quarter. In the most recent SWS quarterly report, as of 2012Q1, 55% of household heads rated their families as poor; this was 10 points higher than in 2011Q4 (SWS, May 4, 2012).

Since 1998, families that involuntarily (qualified by “not having anything to eat”) experienced hunger in the past three months have ranged between 23.8 percent and 5.1 percent. It is classified as “moderate” if experienced only once or a few times, and “severe” if experienced often or always. Hunger has had high quarterly volatility, and an upward trend since 2004. In the most recent SWS survey, hunger was at a new record-high 23.8%, with 18.0% being moderate, and 5.8% being severe (SWS, May 11, 2012). Whatever may be the findings, SWS is duty-bound to report its core indicators of poverty and hunger regularly (Mangahas, May 12, 2012).

Surveys of suffering

Data on suffering are derivable from SWS national survey items on (a) happiness, in 21 rounds over 1991-2011, and (b) life-satisfaction, in 18 rounds over 2002 to 2012Q1. Both items use four-point answer scales, where the lower (unfavorable) two points will be interpreted here as “suffering” or ill-being, of either moderate or extreme degree, in contrast to the upper (favorable)

two points which indicate positive well-being, of either moderate or extreme degree. The question wordings, in the Annex, are fairly standard. They are directed towards an adult randomly selected from the household, and thus the statistics refer to personal suffering rather than to household suffering. For reference, SWS uses a national projection of 55.8 million adults (18 years old and above), as of 2012Q1.

Focusing attention on the lower, or ill-being, side, rather than on the upper, or well-being, side, of the happiness/life-satisfaction scales is in line with the Rawlsian philosophy that minimizing vulnerability to suffering is socially more valid than maximizing access to pleasure (Rawls, 1971). It is consistent with the framing of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) in terms of reducing hunger and poverty – specifically, cutting these to half of their 1990 levels by 2015 -- rather than in terms of accelerating growth in average income.

From 1991 to the present, the only years without at least one suffering indicator in the SWS survey series were 1992-95, 1997, 1999, and 2009. In this series (Charts 1 and 2), persons generally unhappy (i.e., not very or not at all happy) have fluctuated between 8% and 24%, with a median of 17%. The latest proportion for unhappiness is 16.6%, for 2011Q4.

Persons generally “dissatisfied with life” (i.e., not very or not at all satisfied with life) have fluctuated between 14% and 39%, with a median of 31%. The latest proportion for life-dissatisfaction is 24.3%, for 2012Q1. Thus the numbers reporting general “suffering” are about 14 points higher in terms of life-dissatisfaction than in terms of unhappiness. There is no clear tendency for general suffering to go down over time.

On the other hand, those extremely unhappy have fluctuated between 0.6% and 5.4%, with a median of 3.1%; the latest proportion, for 2011Q2, is also 3.1%. Those extremely dissatisfied with life have ranged between 4.0% and 11.8%, with a median of 6.8%; the latest proportion, for 2012Q1, is 6.5%. Thus the numbers on extreme life-dissatisfaction are higher, by close to 4 points, than those on extreme unhappiness. There is no clear tendency for extreme suffering to go down over time, either.

The effect of hunger on suffering

Using all the SWS surveys with requisite data, this paper compares the suffering of the poor with that of the non-poor, and the suffering of the hungry with that of the non-hungry, over time.¹ As expected, suffering is directly connected to economic deprivation. The differences in the rates of suffering, between the deprived and the non-deprived, signify the social accountability for human suffering in a society that has formally adopted the MDGs, like the Philippines, and thereby assumed a responsibility for radically lowering poverty and hunger.

¹ The amount of data involved, and their respective time periods, were: 18 surveys, 2000-2011, for relating happiness and hunger; 17 surveys, 2002-2012, for relating life satisfaction and hunger; 19 surveys, 2000-2011, for relating happiness and poverty; and 17 surveys, 2000-2012, for relating life satisfaction and poverty.

Unhappiness and hunger. In Chart 3, general unhappiness (not very + not at all happy) in 18 survey rounds is separately tracked for (a) those not experiencing any hunger (labeled NOHUNGER), (b) those experiencing either moderate or severe hunger (labeled SOMEHUNGER), and (c) those in severe hunger (labeled SEVEREHUNGER). Median unhappiness across the 18 rounds is 16.3% in NOHUNGER, 29.1% in SOMEHUNGER, and 37.2% in SEVEREHUNGER. **Thus unhappiness is over twice as common among the severely hungry, compared to the non-hungry ($37.2/16.3 = 2.3$).**

In each survey, one expects the unhappiness rate in NOHUNGER to be smallest, that of SEVEREHUNGER to be largest, and that of SOMEHUNGER to be somewhere in-between. This entails three tests – i.e. (a) < (b), (a) < (c), and (b) < (c) -- for each survey round, or a total of 54 tests for the 18 rounds. Failure of a test is visible whenever lines in the chart cross; this occurs three times (once in 2001Q2, and twice in 2003Q2), i.e. a success rate of $51/54 = 94.4\%$.

Chart 4 repeats the tests of Chart 3, using extreme unhappiness. Median extreme unhappiness across the 18 rounds is 2.7% in NOHUNGER, 7.3% in SOMEHUNGER, and 13.0% in SEVEREHUNGER. In each survey, one expects extreme unhappiness in NOHUNGER to be smallest, that in SEVEREHUNGER to be largest, and that in SOMEHUNGER to be in-between. **Extreme unhappiness is thus almost five times as common among the severely hungry, compared to the non-hungry ($13.0/2.7 = 4.8$).** This again entails three tests per survey round, or a total of 54 tests for 18 rounds. Failure of a test, when lines in the chart cross, occurs once (in 2003Q2), or a success rate of $53/54 = 98.2\%$.

Life-dissatisfaction and hunger. Chart 5 tracks general life-dissatisfaction, in 17 survey rounds, for the same groups NOHUNGER, SOMEHUNGER and SEVEREHUNGER. Median life-dissatisfaction across these 17 rounds is 28.4% in NOHUNGER, 36.0% in SOMEHUNGER, and 45.8% in SEVEREHUNGER. **Thus life-dissatisfaction is 60 percent more common among the severely hungry than among the non-hungry ($45.8/28.4 = 1.6$).**

The three tests per survey round amount to 51 tests of life-dissatisfaction over the 17 rounds. There were six test failures (in 2002Q2, 2002Q3, 2003Q2, 2005Q2, 2006Q1, and 2010Q3) that occurred, all involving a comparison of SOMEHUNGER and SEVEREHUNGER; the success rate is $45/51 = 88.2\%$.

Chart 6 repeats the tests of Chart 5, using extreme life-dissatisfaction. Median extreme life-dissatisfaction across these 17 rounds is 7.3% in NOHUNGER, 10.2% in SOMEHUNGER, and 14.2% in SEVEREHUNGER. **Thus extreme life-dissatisfaction is almost twice more common among the severely hungry than among the non-hungry ($14.2/7.3 = 1.9$).**

Across the 51 tests of extreme life-dissatisfaction, there were seven failures (once each in 2002Q3, 2003Q4, 2004Q2, 2006Q1, 2010Q3, and twice in 2003Q2), or a success rate of $44/51 = 86.3\%$.

Charts 3 to 6 all show that suffering, whether measured by unhappiness or life-dissatisfaction, and whether general or extreme, is directly related to hunger, taking the entirety of the survey data. The tests of the relationship on each survey separately are successful in 193 of 210 cases, or 91.9% of the time.

The effect of poverty on suffering

Unhappiness and poverty. In Chart 7, general unhappiness in 19 survey rounds is separately tracked for (a) families not self-rated as poor (labeled NOTSRP), and (b) families self-rated as poor (labeled SRP). Median unhappiness across the 19 rounds is 14.4% in NOTSRP, versus 21.8% in SRP. **Thus unhappiness is 50 percent more common among the poor, compared to the non-poor ($21.8/14.4 = 1.5$), considering the data as a whole.**

In each survey as well, one expects unhappiness to be less in NOTSRP than in SRP. Across the 19 comparisons of general unhappiness, only one failed – in 2004Q2, with 19.4% unhappy in NOTSRP, versus 19.2% unhappy in SRP – or a success rate of $18/19 = 94.7\%$.

Chart 8 repeats the tests of Chart 7, using extreme unhappiness. Median extreme unhappiness across the 19 rounds is 2.4% in NOTSRP, versus 4.0% in SRP. **Thus extreme unhappiness is two-thirds more common among the poor, compared to the non-poor ($4.0/2.4 = 1.67$), considering the data as a whole.**

Across the 19 specific comparisons of extreme unhappiness, there were two failures, in 2003Q2 and 2006Q4, or a success rate of $17/19 = 89.5\%$.

Life-dissatisfaction and poverty. Chart 9 tracks general life-dissatisfaction, in 17 survey rounds, for the same groups NOTSRP and SRP. Median life-dissatisfaction across these rounds is 23.0% in NOTSRP, versus 37.6% in SRP. **Life-dissatisfaction is two-thirds more common among the poor, compared to the non-poor ($37.6/23.0 = 1.63$), considering the data as a whole.**

The 17 specific comparisons of life-dissatisfaction were 100% successful.

Chart 10 repeats the tests of Chart 9, using extreme life-dissatisfaction. Median extreme life-dissatisfaction across the 17 rounds is 5.0% in NOTSRP, versus 8.9% in SRP. **Extreme life-dissatisfaction is three-fourths more common among the poor, compared to the non-poor ($8.9/5.0 = 1.78$), for the data as a whole.**

Across the 17 comparisons of extreme dissatisfaction, there was only one failure, in 2004Q2, or a success rate of $16/17 = 94.1\%$.

Charts 7 to 10 all show that suffering, whether measured by unhappiness or life-dissatisfaction, and whether general or extreme, is directly related to poverty, taking the entirety of the survey data. The tests of the relationship on each survey separately are successful in 68 of 72 cases, or 94.4% of the time.

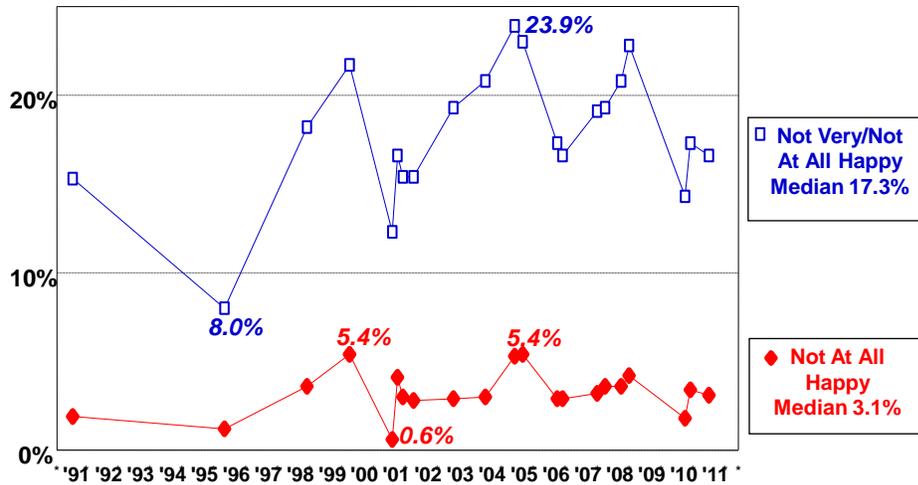
The results of Charts 3 to 6, compared to those of Charts 7 to 10, show that the relative disadvantage of the severely hungry over the non-hungry is much more than that of the poor over the non-poor.

Concluding remarks

The social relevance of surveys of happiness and life-satisfaction is that they also allow us to keep track of **unhappiness** and **life-dissatisfaction**. This paper, based on extensive Philippine survey data, shows that much of such suffering is traceable to the social – rather than purely personal – problems of hunger and poverty.

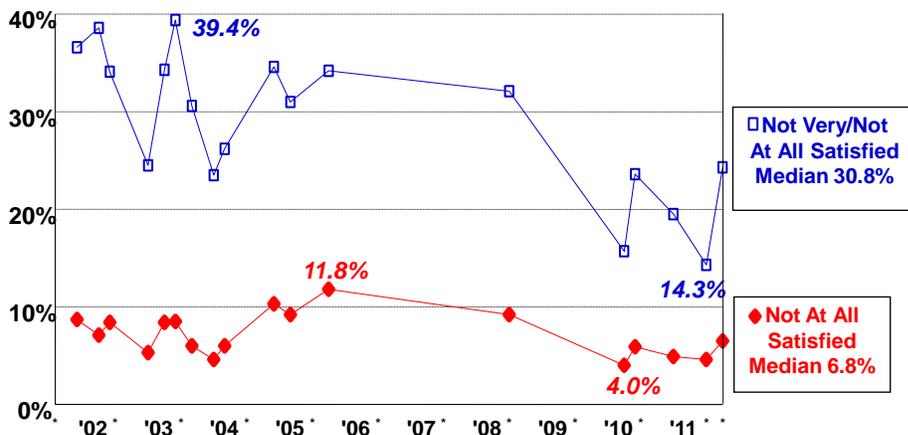
Suffering that is socially undeserved is worthy of social attention. Helping the least of our brethren is more likely to be achieved by closely examining the painful side, instead of the pleasurable side, of happiness and life-satisfaction surveys.

Chart 1. % UNHAPPY, PHILIPPINES, 1991-2011



Q. If you were to consider your life in general these days, how happy or unhappy would you say you are on the whole? Are you... (Very happy, Fairly happy, Not very happy, Not at all happy)?

Chart 2. % DISSATISFIED WITH LIFE, PHILIPPINES, 2002-2012



Q. On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the life you lead? Would you say you are...(SHOWCARD)?

Chart 3. % UNHAPPY, BY DEGREE OF HUNGER, PHILIPPINES, 2000-2011

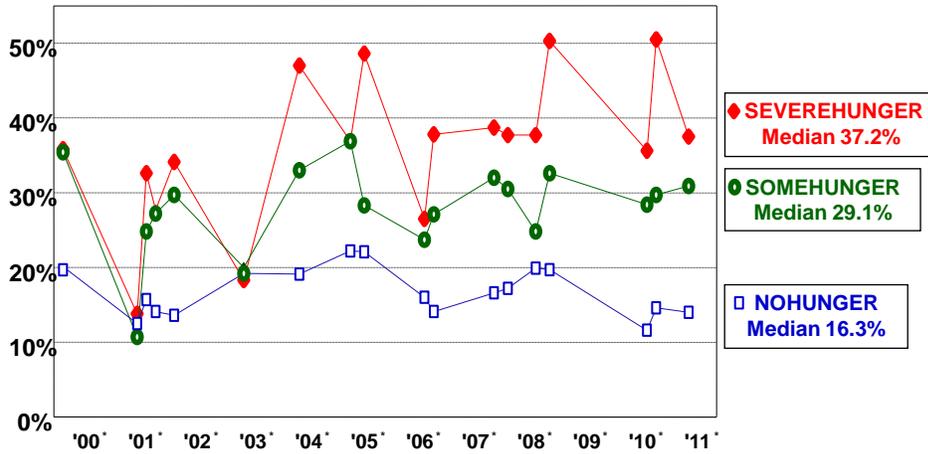


Chart 4. % EXTREMELY UNHAPPY, BY DEGREE OF HUNGER, PHILIPPINES, 2000-2011

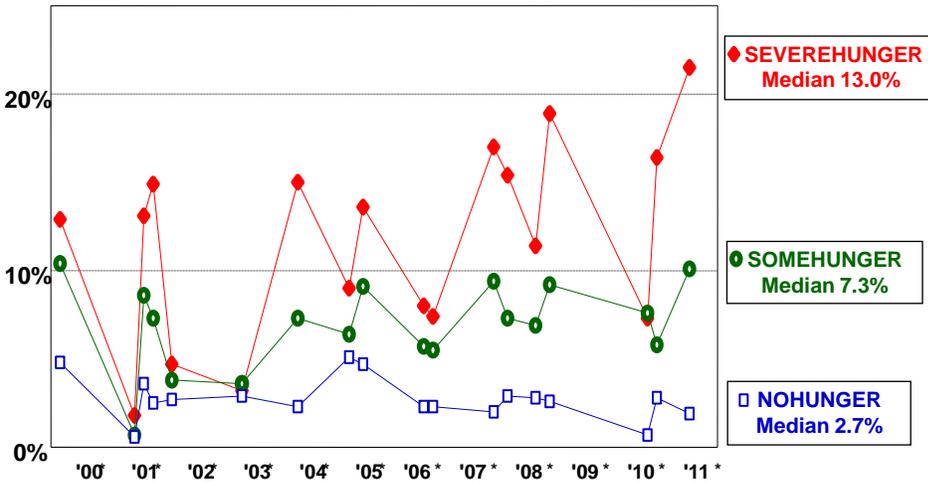


Chart 5. % DISSATISFIED WITH LIFE, BY DEGREE OF HUNGER, PHILIPPINES, 2002-2012

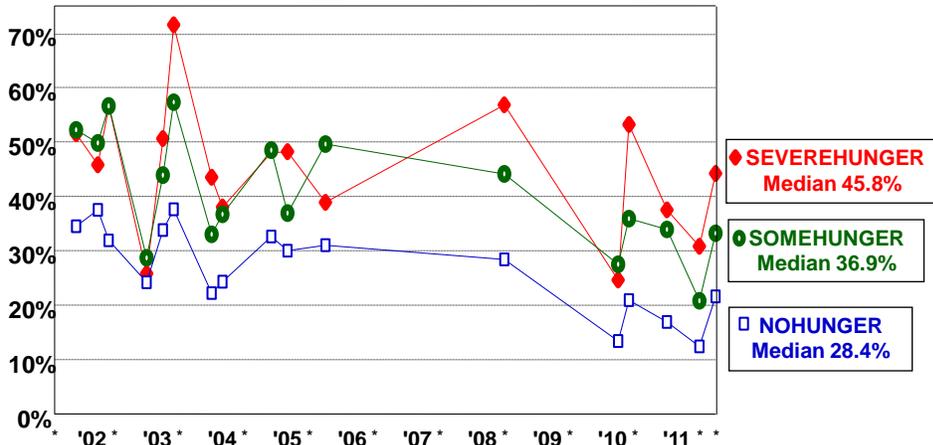


Chart 6. % EXTREMELY DISSATISFIED WITH LIFE, BY DEGREE OF HUNGER, PHILIPPINES, 2002 -2012

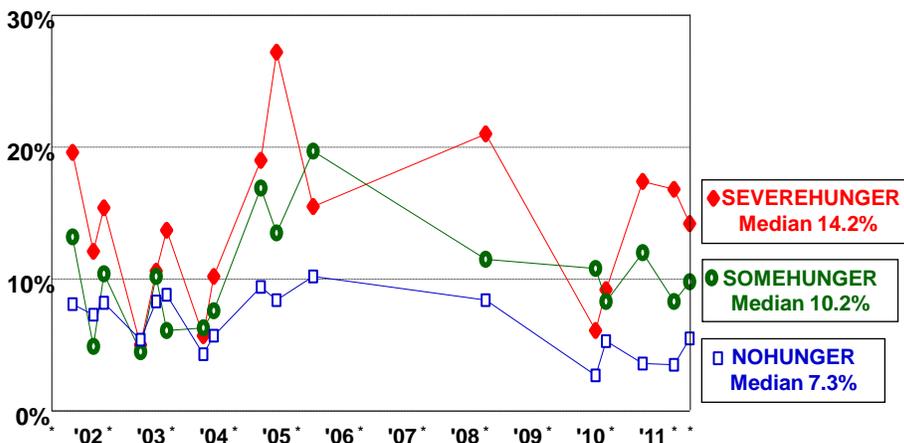


Chart 7. % UNHAPPY, BY SELF-RATED POVERTY, PHILIPPINES, 1991-2011

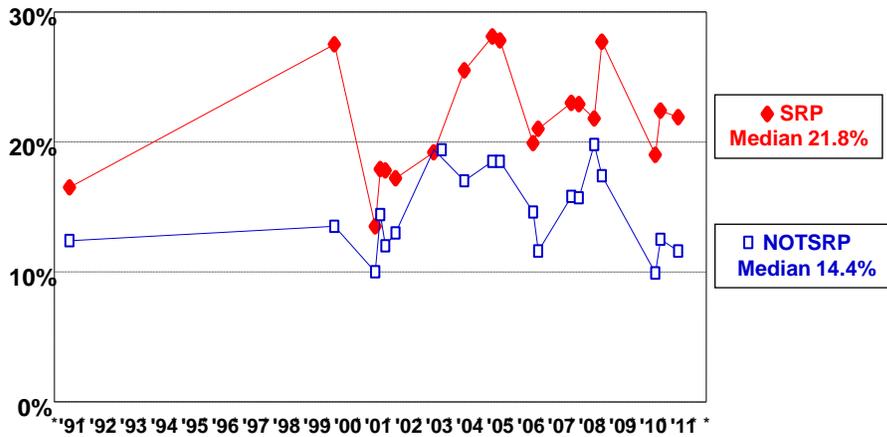


Chart 8. % EXTREMELY UNHAPPY, BY SELF-RATED POVERTY, PHILIPPINES, 1991-2011

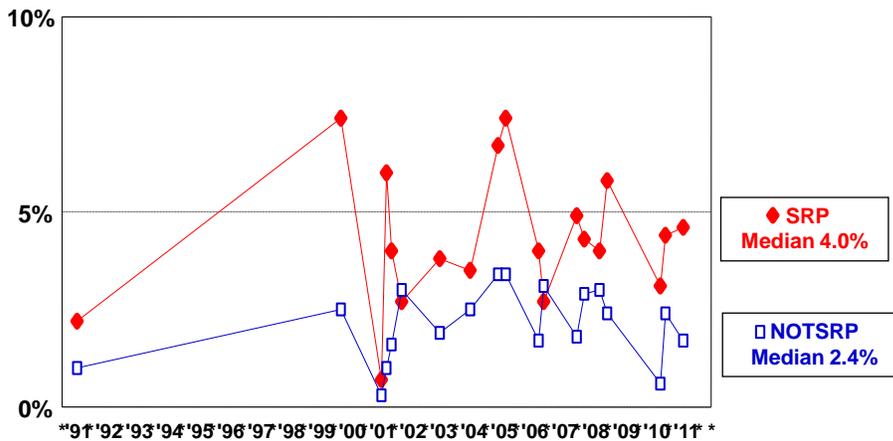


Chart 9. % DISSATISFIED WITH LIFE, BY SELF-RATED POVERTY, PHILIPPINES, 2002-2012

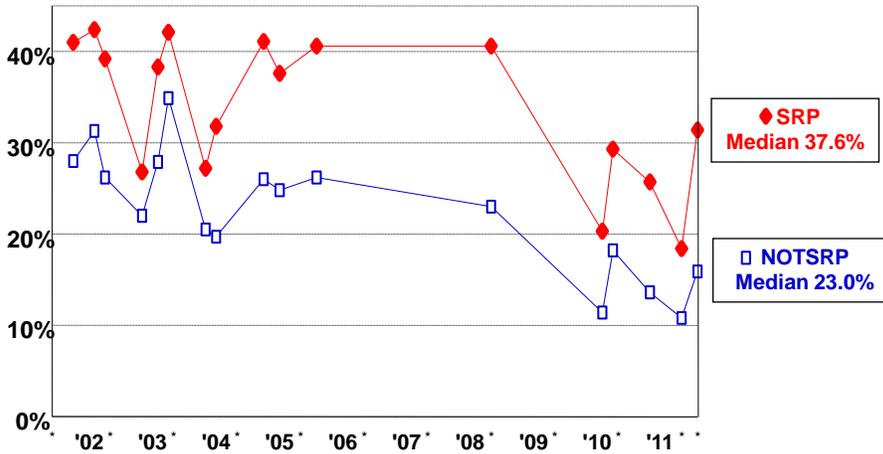
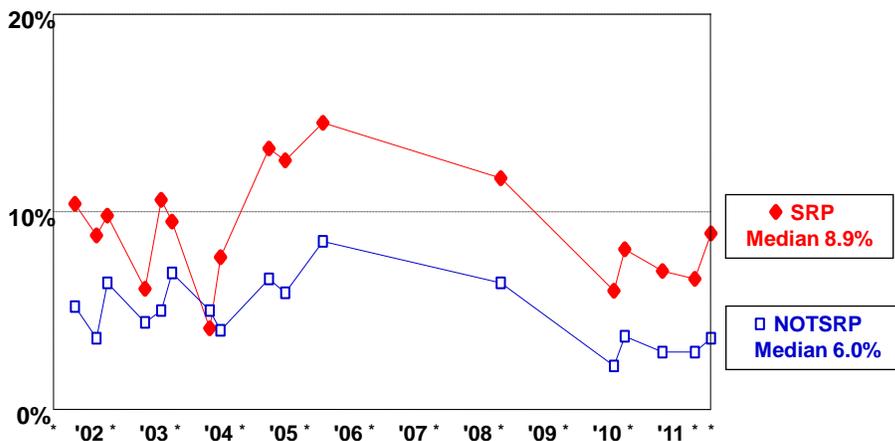


Chart 10. % EXTREMELY DISSATISFIED WITH LIFE, BY SELF-RATED POVERTY, PHILIPPINES, 2002 - 2012



Annex. SWS questions on life satisfaction, happiness, poverty and hunger

C-2. LIFE SATISFACTION (asked of a random adult in the household)

5. Sa kabuuan, kayo po ba ay... (SHOWCARD)... sa buhay na inyong nararanasan?
On the whole, are you... (SHOWCARD)... with the life you are experiencing?
- | | |
|---|---|
| LUBOS NA NASISIYAHAN (Very satisfied) | 1 |
| MEDYO NASISIYAHAN (Fairly satisfied) | 2 |
| HINDI NASISIYAHAN (Not very satisfied) | 3 |
| LUBOS NA HINDI NASISIYAHAN (Not at all satisfied) | 4 |

C-3. HAPPINESS (asked of a random adult in the household)

6. Kung iisipin ninyo ang inyong buhay sa kabuuan sa ngayon, masasabi ba ninyo na kayo ay... (SHOWCARD)?
If you were to consider your life in general these days, how happy or unhappy would you say you are on the whole?
Are you... (SHOWCARD)?
- | | |
|---|---|
| TALAGANG MASAYA (Very happy) | 1 |
| MEDYO MASAYA (Fairly happy) | 2 |
| HINDI MASYADONG MASAYA (Not very happy)..... | 3 |
| TALAGANG HINDI MASAYA (Not at all happy)..... | 4 |

B-1. SELF-RATED POVERTY (asked of the household head)

4. Saan po ninyo ilalagay ang inyong pamilya sa kard na ito? (SHOWCARD – DO NOT READ)
Where would you place your family in this card? (SHOWCARD – DO NOT READ)
- | | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| HINDI MAHIRAP (Not poor)..... | 1 |
| SA LINYA (On the line) | 2 |
| MAHIRAP (Poor)..... | 3 |

C. HUNGER (asked of the household head)

8. **Nitong nakaraang tatlong buwan,** nangyari po ba kahit minsan na ang inyong pamilya ay nakaranas ng gutom at wala kayong makain?
In the last 3 months, did it happen even once that your family experienced hunger and not have anything to eat?
- | | |
|-----------------|------------------------|
| OO (Yes)..... | 1 → CONTINUE |
| HINDI (No)..... | 2 → SKIP NEXT QUESTION |
9. **KUNG OO:** Nangyari po ba yan ng MINSAN LAMANG, MGA ILANG BESES, MADALAS, O PALAGI? (SHOWCARD)
IF YES: Did it happen ONLY ONCE, A FEW TIMES, OFTEN or ALWAYS? (SHOWCARD)
- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| MINSAN LANG (Only once)..... | 1 |
| MGA ILANG BESES (A few times) | 2 |
| MADALAS (Often) | 3 |
| PALAGI (Always)..... | 4 |

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