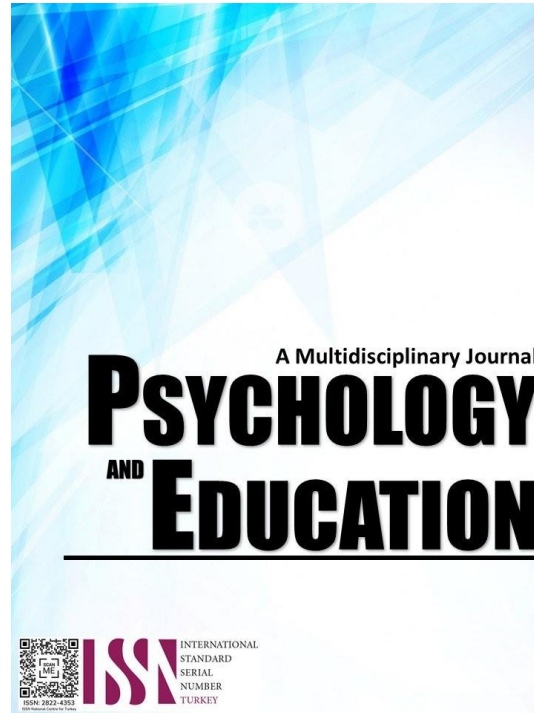


**ANG MGA ILOKANONG EBA SA LAOT: UNVEILING
THE UNHEARD NARRATIVES OF
WOMEN FISHERFOLKS**



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Ang Mga Ilokanong Eba Sa Laot: Unveiling the Unheard Narratives of Women Fisherfolks

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Abstract

This study analyzed and delved into the life experiences of fisherwomen residing in the municipality of Caoayan, Ilocos Sur. Particularly, it aimed to: (1) examine the demographic profile of the participating fisherwomen in terms of their age, annual income, and family structure; (2) determine the challenges fisherwomen encountered or continue to encounter; (3) determine the benefits fisherwomen provide to fishing groups; and (4) create a simulacrum that could elucidate the experiences of fisherwomen. Upon analysis of the responses, the study found that, as fisherwomen, the participants encounter numerous experiences and challenges in their life. Moreover, the study merged their experiences into various themes containing several factors: Perspectives on fishing and gender issues; Balance and Security; and Facing and Resolving challenges. Through this, the study recognized the contributions of their experiences to the empowerment of women in their community.

Keywords: *women empowerment, women fisherfolks, fishing community, qualitative study*

Introduction

Since pre-colonial times, women have played significant roles in their respective communities. Women have been involved in important community decisions in various aspects of social, political, economic, and religious life. They have contributed to the community's growth by managing activities such as weaving, caring for livestock and poultry, and sometimes even hunting in the forests. It cannot be denied that men and women were equal during the time before the arrival of the Spanish in the Philippines (Davis, 1989).

Despite the importance of women's roles, it is evident that fishing was predominantly a livelihood for men. According to BFAR (2004), cited in the study by Gaerlan et al. (2012), women comprised only 6.3% of the total workforce in fishing and aquaculture in 2002. This is further evidenced in Kara David's documentary titled "Mga Anak ng Pugad Lawin," where fathers are shown leaving to fish while mothers stay behind to care for their children (Matutina, 2014). Additionally, many studies, such as Gulati's (1982), suggest that women have long been involved in fishing-related tasks but often not emphasized as the actual fishers.

Recognition of women's abilities and contributions to society is now widespread and timely. It is essential to acknowledge the changes brought about by modernization and feminism, granting women the freedom to pursue livelihoods that were once exclusively for men, such as fishing. Over time, more

studies have emerged on women's roles in fishing, shedding light on their direct involvement in the field, as seen in the research by Shyam and Geetha (2013). However, many of these studies do not originate from the Philippines. While there are studies about the lives of fishermen's wives in the Philippines, like the study by Bermio et al. (2019), there is still a lack of analysis of the lives of actual female fisherfolk. Thus, the aim of this research is to focus on the contributions of selected female fisherfolk in the towns of Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, particularly in the barangay of Villamar, highlighting not only their capabilities as community members but also their unique stories as female fisherfolk in the area."

Research Questions

Overall, this research aimed to examine the livelihood experiences of female fisherfolk. Specifically, its objectives are:

1. To understand the demographic profile of the involved female fisherfolk based on age, annual income, and family structure.
2. To identify the challenges faced by female fisherfolk.
3. To identify the benefits of having female fisherfolk.
4. To create a simulacrum that explains the experiences of female fisherfolk.

Literature Review

Fishing as a Livelihood

As an archipelago, it cannot be denied that fishing plays a significant role in the Philippine economy. The fishing industry thrived greatly, becoming a full-fledged livelihood after the colonial period in the Philippines. As a result, it became one of the primary means of livelihood for Filipino citizens (Melgar, 2022). Currently, the Philippines is among the leading producers in aquaculture worldwide (FAO, 2020). According to BFAR (2019), cited in the study by Tahiluddin and Terzi (2021), nearly two million coastal residents benefit from the bounties of fishing as their livelihood. The fishing industry is crucial as it constitutes a significant portion of the country's exports. In the aquaculture sector, 47% of the production comes from commercial and municipal fishing. In municipal fishing alone, there is a production of 942,000 metric tonnes from the sea. Despite this, fishing is often not the primary livelihood for women. Most women involved in the fishing industry are primarily housewives (Calhoun, 2016) or sellers of the catch from their husbands' fishing trips. Additionally, women are sometimes responsible for preparing nets and other fishing gear (Gaerlan, 2012).

Status of Fishing in Ilocos Sur

According to the Philippines Statistics Authority (2021), fishery production in Ilocos Sur increased by 0.21% in 2021. It was estimated at 6,983.42 metric tons in 2021, compared to 6,974.78 metric tons in 2020. In the entire Ilocos Region, there was a 5.33% increase, with fishery production reaching 189,260.45 metric tons in 2021, compared to 179,683.35 metric tons in 2020. Among the four sectors that contribute to fishery production, marine municipal fishing and aquaculture make the most significant contributions, with marine municipal fishing accounting for 70.26% of the catches, while aquaculture accounts for 14.57% (PSA, 2021).

Commercial Fisheries: This subsector experienced higher production in 2021, with an estimated 343.36 metric tons compared to 336.06 metric tons in 2020, representing a 2.25% increase (PSA, 2021).

Municipal Fisheries: This subsector covers marine and inland fishing. The total production reached 5,622.08 metric tons in 2021, with a 1.66% increase compared to 2020. Within this subsector, marine municipal fishing contributed significantly to the total production, with 4,906.14 metric tons, showing a 9.96% increase from 2020. However, inland municipal fishing experienced a 32.97% decrease in 2021, with an output of 715.94 metric tons, compared to 1,068.16

metric tons in 2020 (PSA, 2021).

Aquaculture: This subsector ranks second in terms of production, with 1,017.71 metric tons. However, this is lower by 8.20% compared to the production in 2020, which was 1,108.66 metric tons (PSA, 2021).

The Role of Women in Fishing in a Global Context
Women play a significant role in the fishing industry, not only in the Philippines but worldwide. However, despite their participation and contributions to the industry, their income and benefits often do not match their efforts. According to the study by Oposa et al. (2019), women make up nearly 70% of the global workforce in aquaculture. Furthermore, women contribute 56% of the annual small-scale catches, amounting to approximately \$110 million in earnings. Despite their importance in fishing-related activities such as harvesting, processing, and marketing, current statistics tend to focus on activities led by men rather than on activities where the majority of women are employed.

Experiences of Women in the Fishing Industry

Women in the fishing industry are often seen as wives of fishermen, and their contribution to the industry involves assisting their husbands. Many of them are resilient and overcome the challenges they face in their livelihoods. They also exercise their rights as women in making decisions within their families (Bermio et al., 2019). The study by Asmal et al. (2020) showed that almost all of the thirty women in their selected area, 93% chose to be housewives, while 7% had jobs to contribute additional income. This study also revealed that women naturally engage with various people in their community, balancing their roles as housewives with social interactions with other women in their area.

Furthermore, the research by Calhoun et al. (2016) highlighted the different roles women play in the fishing industry, particularly in processing and extraction sectors. Many studies have investigated the roles of women in the fishing industry. For example, Cliffe and Akinrotimi (2014) examined the roles of female fishers in various fishing-related activities across ten locations in Nigeria. They found that, although women are highly important in the fishing sector, their roles in the industry are not as emphasized compared to men.

History of the Rise of the Feminist Movement in the Philippines

The roots of feminism in the Philippines run deep. From the absence of gender distinctions in pre-colonial times to the imposition of foreign ideals of machismo and patriarchy by colonizers (Rafael, 2018, cited in Rodriguez, 2022), many milestones mark the continuous advancement of feminism and gender equality in the Philippines, contributing significantly to the country's development as a sovereign and free state.

Early Demonstrations of Feminism in the Philippines
In pre-colonial times, gender equality was not a problem, with women enjoying significant power and the freedom to make decisions regarding their sexual lives (Rodriguez, 2022). The presence of women with substantial authority in various fields like religion, culture, medicine, and theoretical knowledge is evident. These women, known as "babaylan," were tasked with overseeing matters in their communities (Hega et al., 2017). It is recorded in Philippine history that these babaylan were not subservient to the datu; rather, they collaborated in various social functions and activities. However, with the arrival of the Spanish, the significance of the babaylan diminished, along with the concept of gender equality between women and men (Davis, 1989).

The Arrival of Foreigners and the Emergence of Machismo, Patriarchy, and Maternalism

With the arrival of foreigners in the Philippines, they sought to impose their reforms and foreign ideas on the colonized people. This led to the establishment of gender roles that profoundly altered the climate of gender equality in the Philippines (Camacho, 2007, cited in Rodriguez, 2022). From the Spanish colonization to the Japanese occupation, it cannot be denied that Filipino women experienced much suffering. Under Spanish rule, women's status declined, and the babaylan were stigmatized as practitioners of black magic, forbidden from receiving education in universities. If they were educated, the curriculum was tailored to be different from that of men, focusing more on maintaining their modesty (Rodriguez, 2022). During the American era, the idea of maternalism emerged, further linking women to motherhood and limiting their rights to employment and education (Sobritchea, 1990, cited in Rodriguez, 2022). During this time, stereotypes about women became even more prevalent and served as the basis for the gender roles that persist to this day. In the Japanese era, the suffering of women intensified as the implications of objectification became more evident. Women were subjected to violence and brutality, with some being forced into sexual slavery by Japanese

soldiers during World War II. These comfort women were coerced to satisfy the sexual desires of Japanese soldiers, often through rape if they did not comply (Rafael, 2018). The experiences women endured during these times were abhorrent.

Short Glimpses of Feminism Amidst Colonization

From the attainment of Philippine independence from the Spaniards to liberation from the Japanese, there have been several glimpses of feminism in the country (Hega et al., 2017). The involvement of women in wartime is not uncommon, as there were individuals who stood against the Spaniards, such as Teresa Magbanua, Agueda Kahabagan, and Trinidad Tecson, who became generals and captains in the revolutionary battles against the Spaniards. There were also figures like Gregoria de Jesus, Patrocinio Gamboa, Melchora Aquino, and Hilaria Aguinaldo who undertook roles far from the heart of the conflict, caring for documents or tending to wounded revolutionaries (Doran, 2001; Hega et al., 2017). There were also associations formed to raise funds during the war, such as the Asociacion Filantropica dela Cruz Roja, which was managed by women. Additionally, women made intellectual contributions, including published literature that aided the advancement of the revolution, such as *El Heraldo de la Revolucion* and *La Independencia* (Torres, 1998; Camagay, 1998, as cited in Hega et al., 2017). During the Japanese occupation, Felipa Culala, a member of the Hukbo ng Bayan Laban sa mga Hapon (HUKBALAHAP), was well-known and served as its commander (Hega et al., 2017).

Feminist Movements During Colonization

After the Philippine Revolution, several feminist associations emerged in the country. The first to be established was the Asociacion Feminista Filipina led by Concepcion Felix de Calderon, followed by the Asociacion Feminista Ilonga by Pura Villanueva-Kalaw. They advocated for women's right to vote and to have their voices considered in political matters (Hega et al., 2017). There were also the Society for the Advancement of Women and the National Federation of Women's Clubs, which contributed to the fight for women's rights, including the resolution approved to grant women the right to vote, and the Women's Bureau, which demanded maternity leave for pregnant women to ensure they receive proper compensation even while expecting. The Liga Nacional de Damas Filipinas aspired for Philippine independence and better factory conditions for women. The League of Women Voters was formed to educate the public about

political issues to encourage Filipinos to vote.

Filipino Feminism in the Post-War and Contemporary Periods: Even as the country regained its independence from various colonizers, their influence lingered, including genderism and sexism etched into Filipino culture. Even in contemporary times, patriarchal society still prevails, and it is imperative to recognize women's contributions in the ongoing development and the restoration of gender equality alongside men. The Movement of the Free Filipina (MAKIBAKA) faced the aim of connecting issues related to nationalism and women (Santos, 2004). Although one of the most controversial movements in Philippine history, its feminist nature cannot be denied. Some of the more successful advocates of women's democratic rights include the Katipunan ng Bagong Pilipina formed by former HUKBALAHAP members, the Kilusang Kababaihang Pilipina (PILIPINA), the Katipunan ng Kalayaan para sa Kababaihan (KALAYAAN), and the General Assembly Binding Women for Reforms, Integrity, Equality, Leadership, and Action (GABRIELA). These movements fought for rights enjoyed not only by women but also by all, including equality, development, peace, and freedom (Estrada-Claudio, 2005, as cited in Hega et al., 2017).

One of the most significant feminist movements in the Philippines was the EDSA People Power Revolution led by Corazon Aquino, the first female president of the Philippines. Alongside former President Aquino were nuns and other citizens (Hega et al., 2017). This revolution not only showcased the power of the people in a democratic country but also demonstrated that women could lead and contribute to movements that bring real change to the Philippines. In conjunction with these movements, numerous laws were enacted to support women's rights in various aspects. One such law was RA 6725, implemented in 1989, which prohibited discrimination against women in employment (Cudis, 2017). Political parties like Akbayan also defended and promoted bills such as the Reproductive Health Bill, Magna Carta of Women, and Gender Balance Bill (Hega et al., 2017).

Methodology

Study Design

This paper utilized a qualitative research approach. Specifically, it employed a phenomenological narrative research design aimed at gathering the stories of those involved and creating a simulacrum

representing their experiences as female fishermen (Gudmundsdottir, 2001). Through interviews, the experiences of female fishermen were collected and analyzed, including their demographic backgrounds and the challenges they faced in fishing (Bermio et al., 2019).

Population and Sampling

This study involved one or two female fishermen from Villamar, Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, to understand and analyze their personal experiences as female fishermen. It was ensured that participants met the following inclusion criteria: (a) residents of coastal areas for more than three (3) years; (b) primary livelihood is fishing; (c) financial dependence on fishing as a source of income; (d) have more than one year of experience as fishermen; and (e) capable of expressing their thoughts and feelings. Thus, the sampling technique used in the study was purposive sampling or judgment sampling, where participants were selected based on the stated inclusion criteria and their experiences. This was done to directly target relevant experiences needed for the study (Etikan et al., 2016; Bermio et al., 2019).

Research Instrument

Data collection was conducted using a researcher-made interview guide designed to assist in analyzing both verbal and nonverbal cues observed during the interviews. To better analyze the content discussed between the researchers and the participants, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim (Bermio et al., 2019). The content of the instrument was pilot tested to determine its appropriateness for the study.

Data Collection Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Prior to conducting data collection, the researchers wrote a letter of request to the authorities of Caoayan, Ilocos Sur. Once the researchers obtained the necessary clearance to conduct the study, they visited the participants in Villamar, Caoayan, Ilocos Sur, at their respective residences to conduct semi-structured individual interviews. The researchers gathered the demographic information of the participants and later explained the study's objectives and the purpose of the interview. It was ensured that the participants were informed that their participation was voluntary, and that the data collected during the interview would remain confidential. The interviews were continued until data saturation was achieved. Following the study



by Bermio et al. (2019), the researchers created two copies of the recorded interview to facilitate a more thorough analysis of the interview content. The individual transcript contained the chronological sequence of what the participants said during the interview, while the analytical transcript contained the researchers' analysis of the participants' statements. The cool and warm analyses (de Guzman and Tan, 2007) were employed to code and elaborate on the necessary themes for the study.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Profile of the Participants

In this study, the experiences of two women with fishing backgrounds were gathered and explored. Due to the underrepresentation of women in most fishing communities in Ilocos Sur, only elderly women, who had experience in fishing during their time, were identified as potential participants in the study. Both of them still occasionally visit the local markets in their municipalities, such as Vigan Public Market and Narvacan Public Market, and sometimes venture to other provinces to earn their livelihoods. One of them still engages in fishing through "panagkammel" and "panagdaklis" methods, while the other has transitioned into selling the catch obtained from local fishermen or from her own children who are also fishermen. The demographic profiles of the participants are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of Participants*

Participants	Age	Estimated Annual Income	Family Structure
Participant 1	53	PhP 182,500	Extended Family Living with mother, no spouse, two children with four grandchildren
Participant 2	67	PhP 120,000	Extended Family Living with her eight (8) children and their respective children

It can be inferred from the shared data that the first participant is 53 years old, while the second participant is 67 years old. Both interviewees have estimated annual incomes ranging from PhP 120,000 to PhP182,500, which translates to monthly earnings of approximately PhP 10,000 to PhP 15,210. Furthermore, their income depends on the demand for their fish sales and the number of customers buying their seafood products. It is also noted that the

structure of their families is extended, as they live with their parents, children, and grandchildren. The participants, as revealed in their interviews, are of older age and are no longer actively involved in fishing. Nevertheless, despite their reduced fishing activities, they continue to work to meet their families' needs occasionally, engaging in "panagkammel" (gathering fish from shallow waters) and "panagdaklis" (net fishing) practices and selling the caught fish. These contributions should be acknowledged, even if they are no longer frequently going out to sea, as they still possess valuable experiences as female fishermen from their youth.

Regarding the annual income and family structure of the participants, it can be deduced that they fall into the category of low-income households. A family is classified as low-income if the proportion of their monthly income to the number of individuals in the household, or the per capita income in the household, does not exceed PhP 15,000 to PhP 20,000. Based on the participants' data, the first participant has a per capita income of PhP 1,267.5 (PhP15,210 / 12), while the second participant has a per capita income of PhP 1,000 (PhP10,000 / 10). These figures are significantly below the poverty threshold and even surpass the food threshold (Php 8,000), indicating that they can afford to buy nearly enough food but not all the necessary nutrients required by the body (Statista, 2023).

Challenges faced by Women Fisherfolks

Perspectives on Fishing and Gender Issues

In navigating a livelihood dominated by men, women receive various forms of motivation that drive them to continue advancing and expanding their role in a field traditionally defined by masculinity (Bermio et al., 2019). Researchers have identified different factors influencing women's continued participation in the fishing industry, which they have attributed to: (1) fishing is for men, (2) women's penetrating gaze in society, and (3) gender inequality. All these categories are anchored in the elements of women empowerment, shedding light on the sources of motivation received by female fishermen (Tsuma, 2016, cited in Bermio et al., 2019). Undoubtedly, these factors play a crucial role in where women in the fishing industry stand today.

Fishing is for men. Due to the separation of roles between men and women brought about by colonialism, there has been significant attention given to fishing as a male-dominated livelihood. Consequently, there are instances when women are

reluctant to enter this profession (Asmal, 2020). Therefore, one of the most critical aspects of being a female fisherman is the assessment of their desire to continue fishing as a livelihood. Throughout the interviews, both participants shared their views on the differences between the tasks performed by men and women at sea, yet they also recognized the contributions they make as women. Participant 1 pointed out that while there are distinctions in men's and women's activities in the sea, they still recognize their contributions that men may not excel in, such as "*sinusunggan namin yung mga biya/talimusak*" (catching crabs and clams) and "*mga luslusi*" (harvesting geoducks), skills that men may not possess.

The participants had experiences and stated that they were capable of matching the skills of their male counterparts. Participant 2 also mentioned that she joins fishing activities at sea, such as "*sigay*" and "*daklis*," during her time. These modest acknowledgments of their skills reinforce their position as female fishermen. Their acceptance of the idea that they can perform tasks typically seen as better suited for men gives them a sense of self-worth as fishermen. They are recognized for their ability to face the challenges of a profession predominantly viewed as masculine. In these discussions, it cannot be denied that women make significant contributions to the fisheries sector. Although their contributions may be infrequent, women provide valuable skills and talents to fishing that their male counterparts may lack. According to the World Bank (2012), women make up 46% of the 31 million small-scale fishermen and 62% of the three million large-scale fishermen. In total, 47% of fishermen are women, encompassing various roles in fisheries, including harvesting and post-harvest activities. However, women's contributions in this sector are not adequately represented, as most data related to labor contributions are centered around men (Ocampo and Binondo, 2022). Even though they receive empowerment in their own small ways, it is undeniable that much more needs to be done to fully recognize women's contributions to fishing.

Women's penetrating gaze in society. As providers for their families, becoming a female fisherman is challenging because there is no guaranteed daily income. Despite this difficulty, they continue to work in the fishing industry to support their families. According to Medard et al. (2002), when families of fishermen are forced to live "hand to mouth," one of the responsibilities of women is to ensure that there is still food on the table, even in times of hardship. This category identifies various factors influencing women

to continue fishing as their livelihood.

During the interviews, the participants were asked about their roles as family members, and they often linked their fishing income to their family's sustenance. Participant 1 mentioned that, as a family member with a daughter-in-law and eight grandchildren, she prays that she can continue selling in the store to provide for her family. The interviews revealed the sacrifices made by female fishermen to ensure their family's well-being, which is consistent with Bermio et al.'s (2019) findings that highlight the integral role of being a mother.

When not facing family-related challenges, participants also found reasons to continue their livelihoods based on concerns for their future. Health and retirement concerns were some of the issues discussed during the interviews. Participant 1 mentioned saving money for her departure to ensure that her family would not have financial difficulties in managing her funeral expenses. On the other hand, Participant 2 saved money for her daily medicine to treat her illnesses.

In the collected experiences of the two participants, it can be said that one of the pressures of being female and a family member is financial custodianship (Ocampo and Binondo, 2022). This is one of the primary driving forces in their livelihoods as it is expected of them to provide not only for their own needs but even more so for their families.

Responsibilities to their parents were also discovered. As daughters, they felt the responsibility to take care of their parents, even in times of hardship. Participant 1 had to tighten her budget to buy medicine for her mother, stating, "*kaya nga minsan nagigipitan na rin ako sa mga ipambibili ko para sa mga gamot ng aking ina*" (that's why there are times when I have to cut back on my expenses for my mother's medication). While Participant 2 was the only one providing assistance to her mother among her siblings. In essence, these actions may be related to the concept of "*utang na loob*" (debt of gratitude), deeply rooted in Filipino culture. It is one way they reciprocate for the sacrifices their mothers made during their upbringing (Kaut, 1961).

Gender Inequality. It is truly admirable to see women engaged in fishing activities, but how the community treats them within their societal roles as female laborers in a seemingly male-dominated profession is something that requires attention. According to Gustavsson and Riley (2018), gender inequality within

the fishing industry can often be traced back to the underestimation of women's capabilities in fishing, especially in terms of physical strength compared to their male counterparts. However, interviews have yielded new insights into the positive perceptions of male fishers toward their female peers. Participant 2 received compliments from her fellow fishers like, "You can also catch tuna," or "You can also go to sea." She even mentioned that her male counterparts admired her ability to navigate at sea rather than resenting it. According to the participants, instead of harboring negative views, male fishers often provide support, becoming pillars for female fishers to continue their livelihoods in the industry. This aligns with Nozawa's (2001) assertion that relationships between different genders can foster empowerment or disempowerment. While discrimination against women in the fishing industry is less prevalent in the communities of the participants in this study, it cannot be denied that some communities perpetuate gender inequality more than others. Open criticism of the patriarchy's return of power to women is still widespread (Nozawa, 2001). However, communities like Villamar stand as evidence that there is hope for the nation to fully embrace women's capabilities and power.

Benefits of having Women Fisherfolks

Views on Family Security

As individuals, family members, and fishers, it is essential to prioritize balance and security to ensure the well-being of both their families and themselves (Damour et al., 2023). Given that fishing is not a high-paying profession for daily needs (National Wages and Productivity Commission, 2019), securing personal and family financial needs is a significant topic to explore. Within this theme, researchers focused on various aspects of personal life that need strengthening, including (1) personal security, (2) family security, and (3) future security. These aspects are interconnected, ranging from the micro to the macro perspective on current and future security.

Personal Security. Participants often prioritize their families, which can sometimes overshadow their personal security. However, despite their occupation as fishers, they still find ways to attend to their personal needs as women. Alongside these actions, their self-esteem and self-confidence improve. One of the essential factors in empowerment is the ability to value oneself and make independent decisions (Bermio et al., 2019). In interviews, the participants demonstrated these qualities. Participant 1, for example, spoke of

enhancing her appearance with makeup, saying, "It feels good when you do that." Despite criticism from her children, she believes that her fishing work makes her feel more connected to her femininity. Instead of being discouraged by her children's remarks, she even advises them to follow her lead. Participant 2 places more importance on her attire and ensures she dresses neatly, especially for important occasions or when with more educated individuals. Despite financial constraints, these female fishers manage to allocate a budget for their personal needs as women. Perhaps intrinsic to women is the desire to maintain appearances, as Kim and Lee (2018) suggest, as women often face social anxiety, prejudice, and inequality based on their physical appearance. Therefore, personal grooming may serve as a means for women to feel satisfied, confident, and secure in themselves. Wang's (2009) study also suggests that physical appearance can influence a person's chances of success. It can align with society's perception of an individual based on appearance or contribute to a more robust sense of self due to the presence of social security.

Family Security. Given that they are their families' primary breadwinners, it is essential for female fishers to learn how to ensure their family's security. Due to women's resourcefulness (Morales, 2017, cited by Ocampo and Binondo, 2022), they are the primary financial managers in the family to maintain a balanced lifestyle. Throughout the interviews, participants mentioned various ways they ensure their families' well-being, especially when it comes to finding income sources for their families' daily needs. Participant 1 sometimes faces financial difficulties but persists in her work to provide for her family's daily needs. She says, "Sometimes, my child, I encounter problems. Sometimes, there are times when I go out to sell again, and I would have a little more. So my thinking is, 'It's for them.'" Despite the daily challenges, Participant 1 never forgets to prioritize her family. Participant 2 has also worked in other towns like San Fernando, La Union, as a helper, and in Narvacan, Ilocos Sur, selling her catches. Given the numerous tasks they undertake, female fishers do not lose sight of their families and how they will sustain their lives.

Future Security. Because female fishers often earn low daily incomes and allocate most of their earnings to support their families, there is rarely any money left for their personal needs. Unlike men who aspire to financial success or wealth, women aim for financial stability rather than financial success (Zambrano-

Varghese, 2017). As seen in the accounts of the participants, having enough money to maintain a balanced lifestyle is sufficient for them, and they do not aspire for more. Setting aside money for their personal needs is a common practice among Filipinos, known as "alkansya" (savings). According to Zambrano-Varghese (2017), men are better at saving money, while women focus on having a comfortable life.

In Facing and Resolving Challenges

As individuals, female fishers face numerous challenges, both related to their work and personal lives. In their ongoing journey, the crucial skill of facing and resolving these issues cannot be underestimated. Linked to the ability to make decisions based on the five empowerment factors is the effective search for solutions to the challenges encountered (Saravanakumar, 2020; Tsuma, 2016, cited by Bermio et al., 2009). Therefore, it is crucial to understand the experiences of female fishers in (1) facing challenges, (2) resolving challenges, and (3) receiving support to overcome them.

Facing Challenges. Recognizing the challenges they face is crucial to begin addressing and resolving them (Saravanakumar, 2020). Many factors affect how one confronts life's challenges (Heppner et al., 1982), and through interviews, participants shared their ways of confronting challenges in their lives and livelihoods. Throughout the interviews, participants mentioned various issues they encounter concerning their work and personal lives. Health challenges were often cited, such as lifestyle diseases by Participant 2 and accidents by Participant 1. Their recognition of these future challenges is an indicator not only of their problem-solving abilities but also of their strength and resilience amidst adversity. As they age, facing these issues becomes a natural part of their lives. In addition to health issues, they face financial problems resulting from their low-income occupation. Participant 1 mentioned that her earnings were insufficient for her family's daily needs because she was the sole provider for her family's daily necessities and her mother's medical expenses. The participants' recognition of future problems is a sign not only of their ability to solve problems but also of their strength and resilience in the face of adversity.

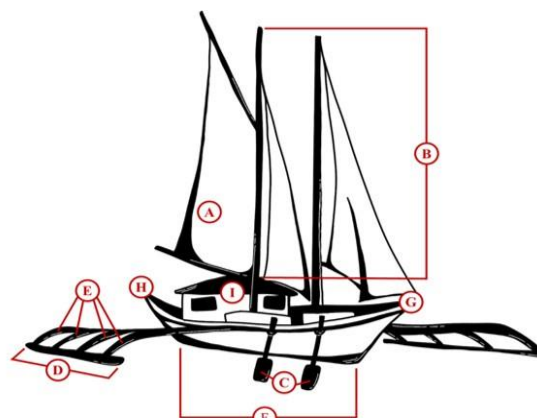
Resolving Challenges. In the challenges they face, participants have often revealed that they rely on prayer to find solace and seek help. They frequently use expressions such as "*Palubos ni Apo*" (Leave it to the Lord), "*Ikakararagko kenni Apo*" (I entrust it to

the Lord), or "*Agyaman ken Apo*" (Thank the Lord). Religiosity is prevalent among women, especially in Christian nations like the Philippines, due to colonial influences. Mitchell (2022) suggests a gender gap in religion, with women being more religious than men, particularly among Christians. However, it is mentioned that if they cannot sell their catches, they sometimes import items to sell from other locations. They also have stalls where they sell their goods, as indicated in the interviews conducted. Female fishers are patient and hardworking, willing to go above and beyond what is necessary to solve their problems (Chen & Mace, 2023). They are diligent and contribute much through their struggles to their families.

Support in Problem Resolution. Participants shared the support they receive to help resolve their problems. Their first source of assistance is often their family. Sometimes, they talk to their children to see if they can help with expenses or ask their siblings for help. Their family members have their own families and sometimes work to meet their own needs, so female fishers often take on most of the expenses for their family and their mother's medical bills. Aside from support from their children, the second participant is a beneficiary of the barangay (local government unit). She mentioned that during times when she was hospitalized, the barangay provided some assistance to cover the expenses. She noted that the aid was not based on her gender or occupation but on her status as a senior citizen. In the Philippines, RA 10642 ensures that all senior citizens receive Philippine Health Insurance. This is evidence that, in the eyes of the law, assisting the elderly is a duty, regardless of gender.

Simulacrum of the study

Balangay (Representation of the Experiences of Female Fisherfolk)



Note: This photograph depicts the various parts of the chosen simulacrum: the balangay. In this description, several parts of the balangay that correspond to different experiences of female fisherfolk have been identified. The parts are as follows: (A) layag or sail; (B) palo or mast; (C) sagwan or oar; (D) katig or outriggers; (E) tadik or outrigger booms; (F) unayan or keel; (G) dulong or bow; (H) ulin or stern; and (I) kubo or hut.

Parts for Advancing the Boat

To enable boats to sail and navigate more efficiently, various parts of the boat play crucial roles in aiding fishermen. The sail, mast, and oars are just a few of the boat components that determine the speed and direction of the boat's journey. Similar to how these parts contribute to the boat's movement, they also symbolize various incentives and advancements achieved by female fisherfolk.

Sail: The sail, known as "*layag*" in Filipino, is one of the boat's components that determine its route. Having a sail is one of the most effective ways to expedite travel time at sea (Stead, 2018). During pre-colonial times, sails were essential for accelerating trade between islands in the Philippines (Stead and Dizon, 2011). Like harnessing the wind to reach further destinations, the sail in symbolism represents the empowerment of female fisherfolk. It symbolizes their wholehearted embrace of their innate capabilities and their defiance of outdated ideas about the roles of women and men. The sail signifies their acceptance of both their femininity and their role as fisherfolk, thereby representing their strength and their confrontations with the challenges of a patriarchal society.

Mast: The mast or "*palo*" supports the sail of the boat. It is common for boats to have three masts, which facilitates the rigging and unrigging of sails, making sailing more efficient (Stead and Dizon, 2011; Stead, 2018). The presence of three masts supports the sail's ability to harness the winds of the ocean effectively. Similarly, female fisherfolk face many challenges and have developed strategies to strengthen their work, such as motivations to support their families by ensuring they have food on the table or ensuring the longevity of their loved ones by purchasing necessary medications.

Oars: Oars, known as "*sagwan*" in Filipino, are one of the primary manual means of propelling a boat through the water. Typically, there are groups of fishermen on each side of the boat. Sometimes, fishermen also row in sync with the outriggers of the boat to cover a wider area while rowing (Stead, 2018). Oars are a powerful means to change the boat's direction and speed, in addition to using the sail itself. Like the additional support provided by the oars in steering the boat, female fisherfolk have experiences where they received assistance in empowering themselves in their chosen profession. They have received feedback from others that helped them recognize their abilities and see their worth and contributions to fishing.

Parts for Boat Stability

To maintain the stability of the boat, various structures were created, such as the outriggers, crossbeams, and keel. These structures were designed to prevent the boat from capsizing due to the powerful forces of the waves. Similar to the different purposes of these boat parts in maintaining the boat's stability, they also represent the balance and security in the lives of female fisherfolk.

Outriggers (Katig): Outriggers, also known as "*katig*," are attached on both sides of the boat to maintain its balance. In the Philippines, they are typically made of wood or metal and are often attached to lightweight or small boats. Sometimes, they are fitted with platforms to provide additional space for fishing (Aguilar, 2006). Like the purpose of outriggers in the boat's stability, the personal security of female fisherfolk involves balancing their priorities to support the continuation of their livelihood. Rather than focusing on enhancing their appearance as women, they choose simplicity in their decisions.

Crossbeams (Tadik): Crossbeams, known as "*tadik*," provide support to the outriggers and sometimes support the weight of the fishermen when they row. These are crucial for ensuring the stability and balance of the boat when it is at sea and to ensure there are immediate solutions to challenges encountered in the ocean (Stead, 2018). Similar to the role of crossbeams in providing additional support against the forces of wind and waves, *tadik* symbolize the security of the families of female fisherfolk. They represent the support of female fisherfolk for their families, not only supporting themselves but their entire family.

Keel (Unayan): The keel, also known as "*unayan*," supports the boat to prevent it from tipping over in the water. It is the fundamental structure of the boat and provides overall support to ensure the boat is not swayed by other winds or waves (National Museum of the Philippines, 2021). The additional support against gusts of wind and waves can be likened to the support provided for future security. Due to the nature of their livelihood, the keel symbolizes the actions of female fisherfolk to sustain their future needs. It represents their roles as providers for their families.

Parts for Facilitating Water Travel

To expedite their journey on the water, fishermen use parts like the bow (*dulong*), stern (*ulin*), and cabin (*kubo*). These three tools are used to ensure safe and well-planned travel on the water. In relation to

symbolism, they represent how individuals face and solve their problems and ensure safe travels in life.

Bow (Dulong): The bow, also known as "*dulong*," is the front part of the boat used to expedite the journey by canceling out oncoming waves (Lee et al., 2019). It is responsible for reducing the resistance the boat encounters from the water when moving forward. This relates to how female fisherfolk confront the challenges they encounter in life.

Stern (Ulin): The stern, known as "*ulin*," is a structure used to minimize the obstruction of water in the boat. It is typically located at the front of the boat, especially at the very back. Furthermore, the stern is used to avoid or reduce the rocking of the boat (Li et al., 2014). In connection to the lives of female fisherfolk, the stern enhances the boat's flow in the water and symbolizes the actions taken to address obstacles or issues in life. This includes procuring goods from distant locations to support their families.

Cabin (Kubo): Although not always present, the cabin or "*kubo*" is one of the parts of the boat. Balangays, as described by Stead and Dizon (2011), are seafaring vessels used for trade between islands, and the cabin is one of the crucial parts for protecting the products to be traded between neighboring islands and the fishermen themselves from unforeseen events at sea. As such, it can be regarded as a symbol of the support that female fisherfolk receive to overcome the challenges that life throws at them. The cabin serves as the home of fishermen at sea, and in the same way, the home supported by family, government, and others represents some of the support they have in addressing their problems.

Conclusion

In summary, the interviewed female fisherfolk have lived through various experiences, whether positive or negative. By the end of the study, three overarching themes with three corresponding categories were identified to encapsulate the experiences of female fisherfolk. It was pointed out that the participants have experiences related to traditional views on fishing jobs and gender issues. Their empowerment as female fisherfolk, their journey towards becoming female fisherfolk, and the additional support for their role as female fisherfolk were recognized. Their experiences in ensuring balance and security in their personal, familial, and future needs were also highlighted. The experiences of female fisherfolk in facing and resolving challenges, particularly in facing, resolving,

and receiving support for future challenges, were emphasized. Through these themes and categories, the researchers have constructed a simulacrum resembling a balangay to represent all these experiences.

Based on the study's results, the researchers recommend a more in-depth examination of the individual themes shared. It is advisable to strengthen the identification of the participants in more profound ways to gather sufficient information that will aid in understanding their diverse experiences. In connection to this, it is also beneficial to develop perspectives and views on women engaged in fishing as livelihood and expand people's knowledge on gender-related issues, which are one of today's societal problems. Furthermore, conducting data collection in various communities would be more appropriate to gain a broader perspective on the experiences of female fisherfolk.

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