

Psychological Pressures among Female Fish Peddlers

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Abstract:

This qualitative study analyzed the psychological pressures encountered by female fish peddlers. The study adopted a case study method, and data were collected in depth by an unstructured interview with the purposefully selected informants. Findings showed that female fish peddlers struggled with unstable and meager income, which led them to engage in lending activity (economic pressure). Other pressures were in terms of harassment by the police and persons in authority (social pressure) insecurity of irregular employment (emotional pressure), and health condition which includes tired body, controlled urination, and back pain while peddling fish for three-four hours every day (physical pressure). As for coping responses, they ran away and hid from the harassment and they treated pressures as part of life. The study concluded that female fish peddlers dared to engage in the dangerous and laborious occupation for survival, which is an additional burden to their routine as housewives. Amid life's difficulties, the female fish peddlers remained resilient and optimistic.

Keywords: psychological, pressures, female, fish, peddlers

Introduction

Many people are in a state of deprivation or extreme poverty. This situation is a severe and perennial social problem among the different types of people in society. The challenging experiences are real among the many street vendors who sell fish in the market or roam around for a living.

For Filipinos, fish vending is an occupation that has been an essential source of livelihood. With 7,107 islands, the Philippines is rich in different fish species, making the fishing industry a better source of income for those who live in the coastal areas. The fisheries sector is an essential source of life and livelihood for millions of people around the world. Fish is rich in protein. Selling fish adds income for many families in the developing world (Dela Pena, 2015).

In the Philippines, males dominate fish vending than females who frequent the fish market. Their presence is widespread, not just in the market but in the street, walking house to house. Other vendors occupy space on pavements or other public places and private areas, either open or covered, with the authorities' implicit or explicit consent. Vending fish is survival; vendors for their income will be for the family's current needs.

Invariably, woman fish vendors undertake the job of fish marketing in addition to the household responsibilities of cooking, raising children, and attending to the needs of the family. Sometimes, they have to carry back home, take care of the unsold fish, clean and salt the fish, and dry it the next day. To add to these problems, the financial responsibilities at home are many.

Severe poverty and deteriorating economic conditions have forced many women from low rural families to work outside their homes who engaged in varied economic activities like fish vending while at the same time continuing to perform their traditional household duties (Swaminathan, 2011). Women mainly engage in these and other activities to supplement their fisher husbands (Israel, 1991 in Dela Pena, 2015).

This study aimed to describe the challenges and struggles faced by women who frequent the street for fish vending. Specifically, the study would answer the following questions:

1. What difficulties do female fish peddlers encounter?
2. What psychological pressures affect female fish peddlers?
3. How do they cope with the challenges and issues they met?

Review of Literature

The following studies support the current research undertaking:

A street vendor is someone who offers goods by selling to the public without having a permanent built-up structure from which to sell. Street vendors perform an essential role in providing services to the urban population, especially the poor. Their contributions are unfortunately hardly ever recognized by the governments. Instead, the governments are more often than not hostile to them (Bhowmik, 2015).

Sharma (2010) reported that women of fishing communities dominate the marketing and processing activities. They predominantly lead in processing and marketing fish, whereas the men engage in fish harvesting. However, despite many women fish vendors, the organizations for women who vend fish were not healthy, reflecting the gender bias inherent in fisheries policy.

Fish vending among the women significantly contributed towards empowering women and subsidized their household expenses. The majority could meet their rent expenses from the fish vending activities and their public health facilities, and their children's school needs (Micino, 2015).

On the other hand, some unorganized markets, fish vendors engaged in the working capital from money lenders as money management. Hence, they encountered difficulty in saving money and keeping aside for their needs. Health issue was also their unaddressed problem (Anitha & Aswathy, 2014).

Mahesh (2014) pointed out that fisherwomen are actively involved in fisheries-related activities such as marketing of fish, net making/repairing, curing/processing, peeling, labor, and other miscellaneous activities. Fisherwomen became the sole and independent decision-makers concerning all aspects of fish marketing such as the source of fish purchase, rate, and amount to be purchased, transportation, amount of ice to be used, selling price, time of fish sales, buying and hiring of equipment and getting and repaying credits.

Gopal, Williams, Porter, Kusakabe, & Choo (2014) shared that financial assistance through cooperatives has a significant impact on fisherwomen's income; However, they need to be more careful with managing their money earned through businesses and they should not spend the money earned from the micro-credit-funded business for their consumption.

Vinotha & Suresh (2019) reported that women fish vendors engaged in microfinance to improve their socioeconomic status, but few women fish vendors used the loan amount for income-generating activities; therefore, they remained economically poor. They need

intervention awareness from economic experts to guide them on using their loans for income-generating activities to empower them economically.

Vending involves enormous physical labor. They walk from one place to another under the heat or cold temperature. They call out loud to attract buyers consumes time and energy. Vendors are prone to mental and physical pressures by city officials. At times, they are involved in riotous situations, which led to property or monetary loss. This pressure also led to exploitation and extortion (NASVI Street Vending Act, 2014).

Sometimes, worst experiences among the fish vendors. Shalini, Rajan, & Divyaranjani (2018) reported the exploited condition of woman fish vendors in having suffered oppressions, harassment from male fish vendors, selling fish in very unhygienic places, lack of basic infrastructures like sheds and other facilities, and brutal exploitation by mediators or money lenders.

Appiah (2017) exposed some factors that inhibit women's fish vending activities in the sector, making them more vulnerable to livelihood insecurity. Most of them had only primary education, no access to credit facilities, do not belong to any social network, have no access to extension service, and no alternative livelihood.

Azzazy (2019) revealed that street vending is a social stigma. Woman street vendors encountered social pressure like harassment and violence, gender inequality limiting continuity in the business as a cultural norm. To improve their livelihoods, saving groups granted access to capital to expand fish vending business ventures.

Soejima & Makino (2018) stressed that women fish entrepreneurs utilized local fish and labor resources by employing women not involved in the fishing industry and making local men both capital investors and practical partners. Fish peddlers maintain constant communication with customers by explaining the fish, the species, the fishing, and the cooking method.

For Kumari (2014), the proportion of women in the fish market has decreased with the main reasons as Insecurity, lack of necessary facilities, and literacy. Harassment from different quarters, such

as the male retailers, administrative, and municipal authorities, have been reported. Lack of security was the main problem they faced in their work. Some women fish sellers became mobile vendors because they felt that this was a safer way to ward off harassment. Apart from these issues, women lack technical knowledge of fish handling, preservation, and pre-processing to develop their trade.

Comparatively, Narayan (2012) stressed that females were more in the fish market than male vendors. They were more responsible for looking after the house chores and marketing-related activities efficiently. Due to limited access to capital and lack of advanced knowledge, they could not process and preserve fish for a longer time and could not earn more income.

Jamuna (2016) found that women fish vendors carry out the fish vending work because of poverty and illiteracy. Most of them were from 60-65 years of age, married, and had reached the primary level. They have engaged in this definitive work for the past 25-30 years. They also borrowed money from an outside source. Their health condition was affected out of vending fish, commonly suffering from leg and hip pain.

Subramanian & Karuppusamy (2015) revealed that fish vendors had low status. They did not even have a primary facility like toilets, a good kitchen, and other bare necessities for life. Most women fish sellers were destitute and widows and brought their children to an elevated social position. They were aggressive and sometimes took the upper hand in forced fish selling. The majority of the sellers sell fish on a random number instead of a particular measurement

enumerated as fish vendors' problems: transport cost problem, financial assistance, old-age pension, and inadequate storage facilities problem for their fish. The middlemen or money lenders exploited them.

Manickavasagam (2019) stressed that street vendors are prone to challenges, especially harassment by higher authorities by way of eviction, bribes, penalties, imprisonment, and hefty charges. They encountered other problems to health and sanitation, drinking water. The feeling of insecure or irregular employment replicates the respondents' fear of unprotected living. Online shopping also affects its small-scale job.

Using technology as a mobile phone is a necessity in vending fish. Joseph (2012) affirmed the importance of the gadget among the fish vendors. Findings illustrated that for many of the fisherwomen, mobile phones had become a necessity. Phones offer connectivity during emergencies, help them feel secure, and benefit their fish vending business.

Waqairatu-Waqainabete, Semisi -Meo, Waqainabete-Tuisese, & Kennedy (2019) emphasized that women primarily fish for food security. They encountered physical injury, bad weather conditions, a lack of fishing resources, and efficient fishing techniques in the activity. Men dominate in making decisions in terms of economic or monetary value in the family.

Panwar (2015) pointed out that many shops and malls affect many street vendors, so they have to live miserable lives. They fear being evicted from their places would result in looking out for new places. Moreover, they need to begin again from scratch and deal with a new set of police and authorities.

Sonawane (2017) observed that street vendors lead a complicated life, their working hours. They hardly rest and relax, which affects their health. They are insecure, having low income, irregular employment, and unstable sales. They are not getting easy financial assistance from banks due to their low income and fluctuation in income.

Street vendors and their fish are exposed to intense sun, heavy rains, and extreme heat or cold. Street vendors face other routine occupational hazards. Many lift heavy loads of fish to and from their point of sale. They are vulnerable to harm from the improper regulation of traffic in commercial areas.

Methodology

Research Design

The study utilized the qualitative research design, precisely, the case study method, which focuses on the desire to gain an in-depth understanding of several "cases" set in their real-world contexts (Bromley, 1986 in Anitha & Aswathy, 2014). The qualitative data were collected in depth by unstructured interviews with the participants to understand the informants' struggles in fish peddling.

The Informants of the Study

The informants of the present study were the ten purposefully selected female fish peddlers in Miagao, Iloilo. Their plight of being harassed by municipal authorities during their fish vending activities in public places went viral. The researcher asked for their individual informed consent for an interview, arranged at their convenient time.

Research Instrument

A semi-structured researcher-made interview guide, based on the objectives of the study, was used. Since the study was exploratory, the questionnaire includes both closed and open-ended questions to explore their challenging experiences. The researcher personally interviewed the individual street fish vendors and group interviews to gather the fish peddlers' challenging experiences in the area where they live. These sessions helped achieve an understanding of the common issues of the street fish vendors.

Data Gathering Procedures

The study employed the purposeful sampling in choosing the informants who were the female fish peddlers harassed by the police while selling fish in a public place. This situation urged the researcher to pay interest in women's gender-related issues. Their experiences of battling for poverty serve as motivation for investigation, as their role as helpmeet in alleviating economic family constraints.

The researcher secured consent for the interview, which used multiple data-gathering techniques, including formal and informal questioning. The researcher established rapport to gain each informant's confidence and conducted a series of talks at the sites where they stayed to establish facts about their actual plights of experiencing economic instability. Interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. Significant statements were extracted and categorized into common or related clusters. The goal was to turn the data into a story to capture the informants' experiences as street fish vendors. After the interview, a triangulation was done by meeting up with the informants' immediate family or those considered "significant others" for relevant information and confirmation of their responses' integrity.

Ethical Consideration

Before conducting an interview, the researcher got the informants' consent and explained the purpose of the study and the interview process. The informants would allow for a recorded interview to ensure that all data would be thoroughly captured. After data gathering, the researcher transcribed the informants' responses to analyze the narratives on fish peddling.

Data Analysis

The study aimed to create a comprehensive and objective view of the female street fish vendors' experiences, and challenges, specifically the harassment they encountered while vending fish in public places. The researcher obtained the informants' essential features and responses during the recorded interview and used matrices for the content analysis and verbal narrative data for the informant's case for the summary synthesis. The researcher looked into the street fish vendors' peculiarities and commonalities of the experiences.

Findings

Sample Case (Summary): Liza, 40, is married with two children. Liza is three years older than her husband, 37, with fishing as a means of livelihood. As a loving and hardworking partner, she noted no problem with him as their relationship went well for 13 years. As a high school graduate, all she knew was to sell fish that her husband caught to earn a living, feeding

her family. In one month, the couple could raise 6000 too meager for the needs of her family. She engaged in money lending, where a portion of her daily income went. She said she had no choice to accommodate the school fees of her children.

Liza's household gets a water supply using a deep well. They do not have much home technology in their house, which is made of light materials. It got burned, along with others in the squatter's area, making their life so impoverished.

Liza's challenges of poverty included the insecurity of irregular employment, which produces their family minimal income. Her family experienced inadequate hygiene in an overly-populated environment, with primarily low-income families like hers. Poor waste disposal was observed, which affected the health of the children. Problem with children, getting hooked on playing computers, who ignore parental advice, and failed grades were additional burdens for Liza. However, the worst of all the problems she encountered was when her house got burned. They stayed in the chapel for refuge with the support of the people around them and the barangay officials.

She was waking up early at 5:00 in the morning, preparing the family's breakfast, preparing the children for school occupied Liza's morning routine before she left the house and sold fish in the streets of the towns. She had to walk far and started to receive "*benta*" (profit) from the fish she vends. They shouted, "*Isda kamo, Nang, Maám,*" later, she found herself so used to a similar phrase that could earn her money for the day. She held on to the thought of "trusting God" while fish vending, even calling the name of God while shouting for the phrase. After selling the fish, she got back home to prepare for lunch and then do laundry for the family. She had to clean the mess and the whole house.

With the hardship of life, Liza finds the support from the government as unsatisfactory, having received less when fire ate up all her property. She shared that she received better support from relatives and neighbors, who helped her start again. Liza's daily activity of fish selling made her tired. She even suffered from acidity and pain in urinating caused by withholding her urine because of wandering around for fish. Amid the poverty she experienced, she aspired to see her children finishing college and somehow experience prosperity. For her seeing them healthy was comfort.

The Analysis

The informants were in their late 30's to early 40's with ages ranging from 28 – 42. They were raising 2- 5 children in each household, with ages 12 and below. Most of the informants attained high school educational level. The informants seemed to pattern their means of livelihood from their parents, who were also fishers and peddlers.

The informants' routine included waking up early to prepare the breakfast for the family, then attending to their children's school. They were then set for fish vending, walking in the nearby streets and sell the fish house-to- house. Peddling for fish is regularly done under the heat of the sun. After hours that their fish were all sold, they were back to their house and prepare food for lunch. In the afternoon, they do laundry and other home chores. From fish vending, the informants' clamor was their tired body and pain on shoulders and back from carrying a load of fish and walking. Their daily routine of home chores before and after peddling for fish made them physically tired.

This situation is similar to Jamuna's (2016) finding that woman fish vendors were forced to carry out the fish vending work because of their poverty and illiteracy. In contrast, however,

most of them were older and had reached the primary level. They engaged in this definitive work borrowed money from an outside source. Their health condition was affected out of vending fish, commonly suffering from leg and hip pain.

Female fish vendors provide fish to many homes. They live in poor conditions, and suffer from many health problems due to the arduous nature of their work.

Often looked down on by others, they even suffer discrimination while traveling in buses to catch coastal villages to the city. Having poor living conditions and lack of financial support forced most of them to go into fish vending. Unlike men, they cannot relax even when their job is done. They have to cook, wash and attend to other chores (The Press Trust of India, 2010).

Female fish peddlers experienced extreme poverty, manifested in their minimal irregular income of 2000 to 6000, with expected food and school needs. They engaged in money lending to provide for their daily needs. Informants owned their tiny homes, and some lived as squatters. The woman street fish vendors encountered Insecurity of irregular employment, inadequate hygiene, poor waste disposal, lack or poor government support, and harassment for selling fish in the streets or public places.

The informants' experiences showed to be similar to what Subramanian & Karuppusamy (2015) observed that fish vendors had poor status and lack other bare necessities for life. They were aggressive and forced to sell fish. Despite the problems they encounter in transporting their fish, lack financial assistance, and inadequate storage facilities for their fish. Mediators or money lenders exploited them.

Competition with other vendors was the least of their problems for altogether, they go and sell fish and share with the same problem of hardships due to severe poverty. The competition lies in those selling fish in the market having the permit and space provided and the capital to sustain their business.

Problems with children, as getting hooked on computer games in the neighborhood and failed grades, were added burdens to these women.

With the progress in technology, online shopping has threatened the small-scale fish vending job. This makes women street vendors feel insecure about their irregular employment, aside from their fear of unprotected living (Manickavasagam, 2019).

The Harassment. The most significant struggles for the informants were vending fish house to house and getting harassed by the police and municipal personnel for selling in public places without a permit. They experienced being reprimanded, scolded, whistled to like criminals, they were pushed and forced to leave and bullied as hard-headed. The harassment experience haunted them. They asked apology for the act of selling fish in public places.

They felt nervous, and they panicked; however, they kept vending fish despite the warning. They hid their fish in order not to get caught. If the police were coming, they started hiding or running away in order not to be harassed.

The informants felt so embarrassed being scolded in public. However, the majority felt numb and ignored the warning because they were after provision of the family needs than getting scolded or caught or harassed. They ignored the shame of getting embarrassed; they retaliated boldly. They avoided the police. They sold fish house to house instead of displaying their fish in public.

The following are the informants' interview transcripts:

"I was carrying two loads full of fish. They scolded me in front of many people for reasoning, but I felt sorry and promised never to do it again."

"I felt so embarrassed because many people witnessed the harassment."

"I was nervous that I panicked about where to go."

"They whistled on us; they kept coming back and forced us to leave."

"We tried to run and hide, for they were arresting us. They still caught us. We kept selling despite this."

"If the police are coming, I hide my fish. We try to hide our fish when we sell in the market without a permit."

"I cannot sell farther because my shoulders are painful carrying the heavy pail of fish."

"I tried avoiding the police I knew reprimanding or catching fish vendors in public places. We are being pushed away. We do not expose our fish to avoid getting caught."

"We were always run after and reprimanded. The personnel told me hardheaded."

"I felt unaffected, for it is our means of livelihood."

"I felt numb and I ignored the fear of selling or getting caught by the police, for I need to feed my children.)"

"There is no one to help us with our needs."

Street vending is a social stigma where women fish vendors encounter social pressure like harassment and violence (Azzazy, 2019). Women street vendors are prone to these harassment challenges by higher authorities through eviction, bribes, penalties, imprisonment, and serious charges (Manickavasagam, 2019).

Lack of protection was the prominent problem fish vendors face in their work. Some women fish vendors were mobile vendors because they felt that this was a safer way to ward off harassment (Kumari, 2014). This finding disagrees with the informants' harassment experience while in public places selling fish.

In sum, the informants' struggles of peddling fish were on economic difficulty, having a meager income that led to the accessibility of finance through lending engagement. Their psychological-social pressures include police harassment, Insecurity of irregular employment (emotional), and physical - health condition which includes tired body, controlled urination, and back pain while peddling fish for three-four hours every day. Fish peddlers tried to respond by running away and hiding from the police harassment, feeling numb, and overcoming the fear of selling fish, treating problems and difficulties as part of life. However, amid life's difficulties and poverty, woman fish peddlers remained resilient and optimistic in fish peddling.

Conclusions

This study explored the female fish peddlers' psychological pressures. These pressures include harassment, insecure livelihood, and the threat of poor health conditions. Despite the struggles, the fish peddlers showed to be resilient and optimistic. Manickavasagam (2019) stressed that women street vendors are prone to different challenges, and harassment by higher authorities is inevitable. Problems to health and sanitation, insecure or irregular employment are part of their daily undertakings. Persistent poverty and deteriorating financial conditions have forced many women from low rural areas to work outside their homes. They ventured into fish vending while performing their traditional household duties (Swaminathan, 2011). Street vending is a social stigma (Azzazy, 2019); however, because of poverty and illiteracy, some women are forced to carry out the fish vending work (Jamuna, 2016). Each day, the fish

peddlers expect a better income for the needs of their families. These activities characterize the woman fish peddlers. Optimism is a direction in which individuals experience their daily lives with an optimistic perspective, a more positive way, and expect more positive results (Chang, Sanna, and Yang, 2003; Kivimaki, Elovainio, Singh-Manoux, et al., 2005 in Jenaabadi, and colleagues, 2015).

Resiliency among the fish peddlers shows how they empower themselves. Once they could not sell all their fish, they were flexible in preserving them for food the next days. They maintain rapport with their customers by continually meeting them and communicating with them. Fish vending greatly contributes to empowering women who help subsidize or meet their household expenses (Micino, 2015). Fish peddlers maintain constant communication with customers by explaining the fish, the species, the fishing and cooking method (Soejima & Makino, 2018).

Considering the above challenges of the woman street fish vendors, the government needs to provide proper attention and consideration to the problem faced by these women through poverty reduction programs that can alleviate their impoverished life and offer opportunities for better nutrition and education processes among their children and household members.

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