

Women in the Lines: A Case Study of Packing Workers

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Abstract: *The paper explores the economic disempowerment of married female factory worker as a result of being a mother, a working woman, and a community affairs participant. Most of the time women are forced to sacrifice on their careers than men. They wrestle with their triple burden role as a woman. Moser (2003) argues that women's work is reproductive work, productive work, and community managing work. These roles prevent women from utilizing their full potential as a worker as they juggle their career with their other roles as a woman.*

It is imperative that women must be given voice, choice, and agency on what they want to do (Gascon, 2017). Women must not be caught up with their triple roles which hinder their freedom to make their own choices. The traditional roles of women hinder their freedom to have better life chances such as becoming a successful worker without having the threat of giving up such opportunity should the need arises just because she is the woman, the mother. The expectation of society that women can work but have to take care of family matters should be changed. Women must not be put into a situation where her career is compromised to put family first. It is about time that we find ways to eradicate this thinking of "because she is the woman."

Keywords: triple roles, economic disempowerment, to do and to be, voice, choice, and agency

I. Introduction:

A person born a woman automatically reduces her chances of living a quality life (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). Quality of life elements according to Nussbaum (2011) composed of ten capabilities and one of these is affiliation which entails equal treatment with others, nondiscrimination on the bases of race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, caste, religion, national origin, and sex. However, women do not enjoy this fully. In times of emergency, women are the first to sacrifice. When no one can take care of the children, it's the woman who must stop to work. When one must stop to work because the children demand time, it is the woman who stops working. Women are caught up with their reproductive, productive and community roles (Moser, 2003). Most often than not, women are not able 'to do' what they want and do not become what they want 'to be' at the same time (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999). Most of the time women are forced to sacrifice on their careers than men. They wrestle with their triple burden role as a woman. Moser (2003) argues that women's work is reproductive work, productive work, and community managing work. These roles prevent women from utilizing their full potential as a worker as they juggle their career with their other roles as a woman.

II. Literature Review:

Gender

One of the core parts of our society is gender. It actually begins in our lives early and persists throughout our lives. Gender has been defined in so many ways. The United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) defined gender as the "array of socially constructed roles and relationships, personality traits, attitudes, behaviors, values, relative power and influence that society ascribes to the two sexes on a differential basis. Gender is an acquired identity that is learned, changes over time, and varies widely within and across cultures." (Sabina & Nicolae, 2013).

Clearly, the definition of INSTRAW did not particularly mentioned about being a man or a woman because gender a social construct and an identity that is acquired. Even so, we still see discrimination and divide between men and women. As a result, United Nation's development agenda tackles gender inequality and discrimination (Sabina & Nicolae, 2013).

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Women

Women are a significant part of our society who have hindrances in their rights. One, wherever you are in the world, you can see that women are the family caretakers especially children and senior members of the family. However, they are only given the secondary role in the family and the society (Sohail, 2014).

Consequently, this unequal treatment of women inside the household despite the major role they play is because of the fact that the opportunities for them to enter the working force is very few (Duflo, 2012). This is because it is seen that women who are not part of the working force are perceived to be weak.

This stereotype on gender are societal preconceptions about women's characteristics and attributes. Stereotypes can be both positive or negative, however, there is a discrimination among women particularly. These negative stereotypes may result to violations to women's rights in different aspects (United Nations, 2014).

In addition, a report from World Bank (2014) people face deprivations which include women. Sadly, no enough discussions that women and girls are not able to own basic properties. And freedom of women from these deprivations are actually denied to them.

Women's Economic Disempowerment

According to former President Bill Clinton, "Women perform 66% of the world's work, and produce 50% of the food, yet earn only 10% of the income and own 1% of the property. Whether the issue is improving education in the developing world, or fighting global climate change, or addressing nearly any other challenge we face, empowering women is a critical part of the equation". (GENDERNET, 2011).

Several factors contribute to the economic disempowerment of women such as job opportunities are very few, the decision-making power of women are very weak and when women make decisions, most of the time it's for the benefit of others first (Bradshaw & Linneker, 2003). Another sad reality is that women are not treated the same as men when they enter the labor force (Sohail, 2014).

III. Objectives:

Women must be able to actively exercise their human rights 'to be and to do' (Nussbaum, 2011; Sen, 1999) particularly in their choices to be not the one to sacrifice when taking care of the family becomes an issue. This paper particularly highlights the live experiences of a women factory worker in one of the banana factories in the Philippines. Specifically, this paper intends to understand and to identify ways to address to empower women economically considering their triple burden roles.

IV. Methodology:

This study used Participatory Action Research (PAR) to understand and to identify the economic disempowerment of women in one of the banana factories in the Philippines. This study conducted key informant interviews with the women factory workers in one of the banana factories in the Philippines. The researcher explored the issue by asking "what are their sacrifices as a working woman?" The findings of the study are based on two (2) case studies collected from the fieldwork. At least seven (7) women were interviewed through theoretical sampling (Auerbach & Silverstein as cited by Gascon, 2017).

V. Results and Discussion:

This section presents the two (2) case studies based on the lived experiences of the women factory worker, both are banana factory line workers, in one of the banana factories in the Philippines. Case 1 is about the life of Rose who works away from her family and plans to give up her job to take care of her child in the future. Case 2 is about Beth who was only able to work because her children are all grown up already where her life before is full of hardships and sacrifices.

5.1 Case Study 1 - Rose of Calinan

The case of Rose, not her real name, who is working in one of the banana factories in the Philippines while her 7-year old daughter is living with her mother-in-law in General Santos City, Philippines. Rose without a choice because she needs to bring additional income to the household, sacrifices to be away from her kid even if her daughter is beginning to be away from her and won't even talk to her when she calls home. Her husband, a fisherman, is also seldom at home. Rose and her husband decided that in the near future after debts are paid, Rose must stop working and take care of their child.

"Naka decide konamga next year kay mouliko, perodiligudingonnamo resign, kay gusto niyapaulionkoniya kay nisaad man gudadong August namouliko kay pista man guddidtotaposwala man konakauli kay something na financial nakuanba. Mao

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nakanangmanawagkosacellpon kay magduhaduhanagudsya, kailangangudnauyonuyunan pa sya para mostoryanako. Pero mo resign rakopuhon, perosapagkakaran, dirilangsako kay naa man gudkoygi loan."

(I have decided that next year I will go home, but not really to resign, because she wants me to go home because I promised her last August that I will go home as it is our town's fiesta and then I wasn't able to go home because of finances. That is why when I call her she will not talk to me immediately, you have to be patient so that she will talk to me. But, I will resign in the future, but for now, I will still work here because I still have a loan.)

5.2 Case Study 2- Beth, The Weigher

The case of Beth, not her real name, is also working in one of the banana factories in the Philippines as weigher. Beth was a stay at home mother until all her children are already grown up and can already take care of themselves especially her eldest daughter. She just was able to work full time because the children need not be taken cared of as before.

"Sa una man gud kay maglisodman ko kay gagmaypamanniakongsakop, atimanunonpaman. Sa balayrakosauna, pero mag tindatindarakosaunamaskinnaakosabalayperoakotrabahotanansabalay."

(Before I really have a hard time because my children are still very young, they still need to be taken cared of. I was a stay at home before, but I also sell things even if I was at home, but all the household chores are all on me.)

Gaining aChoice

Among the participants of the study, Rose and Beth and the rest of the participants do not have the capacity to make their choices to make these choices into what they want their lives and the lives of their families to be. They are not empowered that is why even the most basic such as financial independence, they are not able to achieve. It can be observed that they also do not have the access to basic resources to help them improve their financial status. Their present workplace is located in the outskirts of the city. We all know that job opportunities are better in the city. However, when they were asked why they chose to work in their current organizations, unanimously, they answered said that it is not possible for them to work in the city as they have to take care of their families. Although, Rose, the mother who is away from her 7-year old child is working away from home, she will soon return home with the ultimate reason of taking care of her child. Beth and the rest of the participants are one and the same, they cannot be away from their families.

In addition, all the women participants expressed that they cannot really unleash their full potential as working women because of their other tasks in their respective homes.

They were just able to work because their children have grown already or they have help from their families or relatives in taking care of their children. Commonly, they mentioned that because of the other tasks that they need to perform in their households, they have become less free and less productive in terms of helping the family to have a more stable income.

Enabling Resources to gain a choice

All the participants were also asked what would enable them more freedom in choosing what they want their lives to be and the lives of their families. They mentioned that they were able to work outside their households when their family, community and organization support them.

Support from the family

The participants made mention that they were only able to work in the banana factory because they have a supportive family. One of the participants works with his husband in the same company. Because they are a working couple, they have help from their in-laws in taking care of the children when they are not around. Rose for example whose child is in General Santos City, miles away from where she works, left her child in the care of her mother. Beth, on the other hand was able to work in the company because her children are already grown up and understand the need for her to have a regular job.

Support from the community

The community has a very important role in the battle of our society to defeat women disempowerment. The presence of a united, strong coalition of women in the community can lead to empower women as they boost their confidence. A collective voice a stronger voice that can be easily heard. The participants of the study may have

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participated in the community women organizations but they don't have the capacity to be full-time members as they have juggle between their job and their family.

Table 1

Marital Status

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage
Single	1	14.29%
Married	6	85.71%

As seen in table 1, among the seven (7) respondents interviewed, only 1 or 14.29% was single and without a child or children. The remaining 6 or 85.71% respondents are married with children. All of these women are working in one of the banana factories in the Philippines and at the same time take care of their household.

VI. Conclusion and Recommendation:

This paper explores the economic disempowerment of women brought about by her triple roles as a mother, a working woman, and a community affairs participant. Women today may have the freedom to work outside the household but still, comes emergencies and other circumstances where there is a need to choose who will sacrifice one's career, automatically, more often than not, it is the woman who will give up her source of income. The story of Rose will tell us that a woman has to be the one who will sacrifice because she is the mother, and mothers should be the one who will take care of the children. The story of Beth manifest that women are restricted from movement out of their household, it seems that Beth had no choice but to stay at home.

The traditional roles of women hinder their freedom to have better life chances such as becoming a successful worker without having the threat of giving up such opportunity should the need arises just because she is the woman, the mother. The expectation of society that women can work but have to take care of family matters should be changed. Women must not be put into a situation where her career is compromised to put family first. It is about time that we find ways to eradicate this thinking of "because they she is the woman."

As initial steps to resolve the economic disempowerment of women because of their roles of being a mother, a working woman, and a community affairs participant are the introduction of gender into local government policies on poverty reduction, promote more policies that specifically aim for the economic well-being of mothers in the communities and open up policies other than that of poverty reduction such as capacitating women in terms of education and financial management. These policies should take into consideration the roles that women perform in and outside of their homes. These policies must be as flexible as possible.

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