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Harnessing the Waves: Women Fisherfolk Mothers and Their Role in Advancing Children's Education

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Abstract

Background/purpose. This study aims to explore the real-life experiences of women fisherfolk mothers as they balance the demanding roles of both breadwinners and caregivers while ensuring their children's education. It seeks to understand the struggles they face, the creative solutions they use, and the personal sacrifices they make to balance earning a livelihood with their children's academic aspirations. This research tries to give voice to these resilient women, recognizing their strength and contributions. Ultimately, it hopes to provide insights that can guide policymakers and educators in creating better support systems for equitable education in coastal communities.

Materials/methods. To investigate the actual experiences of women fishermen, this study employed Husserl's (1970) descriptive phenomenological approach. In-depth interviews were used to gather qualitative data, which was then thematically examined to determine how they manage work and family. This approach gave them a vivid picture of the social, cultural, and economic elements affecting their day-to-day existence.

Results. The study revealed that women fisherfolk mothers play a vital role in their children's education despite facing financial struggles and daily hardships. With unwavering determination, they juggle fishing-related work and household duties, often putting their own needs aside to ensure their children have access to learning opportunities. Their resilience and sacrifices underscore the immense contribution of mothers in shaping the educational future of children in marginalized coastal communities.

Conclusion. The study highlights the vital role of women fisherfolk in supporting their children's education through both economic efforts and active involvement, despite facing financial hardships and geographic barriers. Their resilience and sacrifices underscore the need for targeted support programs to ease their burden and improve access to quality education in coastal communities.

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1. Introduction

The role of women in coastal communities, particularly those engaged in fishing activities, has always been underrepresented in the academic literature. Research often highlights men in the fishing industry and underscores the role of women as just mere mothers to their kids. As the economy worsens, the need for women to help their husbands has led women in coastal communities to become fisherfolk and do what their husbands do. Nowadays, these women fisherfolks contribute significantly to their households and the local economy while facing unique challenges as they navigate the demands of sustaining livelihoods while raising their families (Torell et al., 2020). In many coastal regions, women are only responsible for post-harvest activities like cleaning, sorting, and selling. However, a much greater task for these women fisherfolk is ensuring the well-being of their children. The duality of the role poses a significant burden on these women who need to balance the economic demands while attending to the educational needs of their children (Torres, 2024).

According to UNESCO (2016), education is a widely recognized factor in breaking the cycle of poverty in marginalized communities. In the context of fisherfolk mothers, the intersection of livelihood and education is critical, as the educational support children receive often depends on the time, resources, and knowledge available to their parents (Belardo & Candelaria, 2023). These women fisherfolk frequently have to work long hours and face economic uncertainty, which makes it difficult for them to support their children's educational needs. Despite the many challenges faced by these women in their communities, they serve a vital role in their children's educational development, contributing not only through financial means but also by fostering values of hard work and perseverance (Wolff, 2024).

This study investigates how women fisherfolk affect their children's schooling. It looks at how these women manage to juggle being both breadwinners and nurturers, the difficulties they face, and the methods they use to make sure their kids go to school. This study also aims to show how women in underrepresented fields like fishing promote educational advancement in spite of scarce resources and difficult working conditions by illuminating these interactions. In order to guarantee that children in these communities have equal access to educational opportunities, the study will also offer insights into how policymakers and educational systems may better accommodate the special requirements of families who are fishermen.

This study is a vital contribution to gender studies and rural development, as it brings visibility to the often-overlooked roles of women fisherfolk in sustaining both their households and their children's education. It addresses a critical gap in the literature by examining how economic and caregiving responsibilities intersect in marginalized coastal communities. The findings offer valuable implications for educational policy, highlighting the need for inclusive interventions that address the unique barriers faced by children of fisherfolk mothers. Furthermore, the study informs livelihood programs by emphasizing the indirect benefits of economic support on educational outcomes, thus advocating for integrated development approaches. It also promotes the empowerment of women through the recognition of their dual roles, contributing to the formulation of gender-sensitive policies in fishing communities.

2. Literature Review

Women fisherfolk play multifaceted roles within their families and communities, balancing responsibilities in fisheries-related activities and family life, particularly in improving their children's education. Their contributions, both direct and indirect, are fundamental yet often underrecognized.

A significant number of women fisherfolk are concentrated in Asia, particularly in countries such as the Philippines, Indonesia, India, and Vietnam, where they play essential roles in both fisheries and

aquaculture sectors. In Vietnam, for instance, women comprise up to 80% of the aquaculture labour force, while in Indonesia and China, women represent 42% and 33%, respectively (FAO, 2020). These figures underscore the vital contribution of women to food security and local economies in coastal and rural regions across Asia.

Women are integral to the fisheries sector in many coastal regions. Aside from their participation in fishing activities, they also engage in processing, marketing, and managing household responsibilities. In Kerala, India, women handle multiple tasks such as cooking, childcare, and maintaining family health and hygiene, which support the overall well-being of their fishing households (Gopal et al., 2009). Similarly, in San Fabian, Pangasinan, Philippines, women's roles extend beyond processing and marketing throughout the fisheries value chain, highlighting their importance in both economic and familial contexts (Guzman, 2013).

This study examines the impact of women fisherfolk mothers on their children's education in the coastal communities of Malolos City, where economic and social challenges often hinder their educational access and success. Despite their critical roles as both breadwinners and caregivers, the influence of women fisherfolk on their children's educational outcomes remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by investigating the following key questions:

1. How do women fisherfolk mothers balance their responsibilities in sustaining their livelihoods and supporting their children's education?
2. What are the major challenges women fisherfolk mothers face in ensuring their children's access to and success in education?
3. How do socioeconomic factors such as income, work schedules, and community support affect the educational opportunities for the children of women fisherfolk?
4. What strategies do women fisherfolk mothers employ to overcome barriers and promote their children's education?
5. In what ways can educational institutions and policymakers support women fisherfolk mothers in enhancing their children's educational outcomes?

Many research indicate that fisherfolk parents, including mothers, often aspire for better educational opportunities for their children, viewing education as a pathway to more secure livelihoods. This is supported by a study conducted in the Bicol Region of the Philippines, which revealed that many fisherfolk parents prefer their children to pursue higher education and stable professions, steering them away from the traditional fishing livelihood due to its associated risks and uncertainties (Belardo & Candelaria, 2023). These aspirations are shaped by varying factors, including economic challenges and unfulfilled personal dreams.

Despite the significant contributions of women in fisheries, they often encounter challenges such as a lack of recognition, gender disparities, and economic vulnerabilities. In Bangladesh, gender discrimination limits women's income and employment opportunities, affecting their capacity to invest in their children's education and well-being (The Financial Express, 2024). Moreover, the absence of formal acknowledgement and support worsens these challenges, hindering women's ability to balance their roles effectively.

Women fisherfolk often juggle multiple responsibilities by managing both their contributions to the fisheries sector and their roles as primary caregivers. This dual burden can impact their capacity to support their children's educational pursuits. A study focusing on fisherfolk parents in Samar, Philippines, highlighted the resilience and determination of mothers striving to balance economic needs with educational aspirations for their children, despite facing significant financial and social barriers (Cabaguing, 2023).

Women fisherfolk's roles are integral to their families, the fisheries sector, and the advancement of their children's education. Recognizing and supporting these contributions are important steps toward promoting gender equity and enhancing the socio-economic development of fishing communities.

3. Methodology

This study utilized the descriptive phenomenological approach introduced by Husserl (1970), this approach gathers the qualitative data from in-depth interviews and were analyzed thematically to capture the lived experiences and strategies for balancing work and family responsibilities. This method offered a holistic perspective on the socio-economic and cultural factors that shaped the participants' experiences.

3.1. Approach to the Study

The descriptive phenomenological design was utilized because it offers a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. Husserl (1970) emphasized the importance of studying experiences as they are truly lived, without outside assumptions or theories. Using in-depth interviews, researchers examined personal stories to identify common patterns and themes. This approach provided a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by women fisherfolk, revealing the emotional and social struggles of balancing work with their children's education.

3.2. Participants

This study focused on women fisherfolk who have been engaged in sun-drying and fishing-related activities for at least five years. These women play a crucial role in the fishing industry while also providing for their families. They were specifically chosen for their dual role as both income earners and primary caregivers, ensuring their experiences align with the study's goals.

All participants had children in elementary, high school, or college, showing their continuous support for their children's education despite their demanding work. By including mothers with children at different educational levels, the study explored how they balance their jobs with their commitment to their children's schooling at various stages.

3.3. Data Collection Process

This study collected the pertinent data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with 9 women fisherfolk who had been engaged in sun-drying for at least five years. The interviews focused on their experiences balancing work in the fishing industry with supporting their children's education. Participants were carefully chosen to ensure they had school-aged children at the elementary, high school, or college level.

The interviews took place in the participants' communities to make them feel comfortable and avoid interfering with their daily routines. The researcher used open-ended questions, allowing the participants to share their experiences in their own words. The discussions were focused on how they manage both work and family, their views on education, and the difficulties they face in supporting their children's schooling while maintaining their livelihood. With their consent, the interviews were recorded and documented through detailed notes to ensure accurate data collection.

The study used an open-ended interview guide to understand the daily experiences of women fishermen involved in sun-drying. The questions focused on how they manage their work and their role in supporting their children's education. Participants shared their thoughts on the value of education and how they prioritize schooling despite financial struggles and time limitations. They also discussed the challenges they face and the ways they overcome them. The interview guide encouraged open storytelling while keeping the conversation aligned with the study's goals.

3.4. Data Analysis

The answers from the interviews and the stories shared by nine women fisherfolk in the interviews were carefully examined to identify common themes about their work in the fishing industry and their role in their children's education. Manual coding analysis was used to count the participants' recurring responses. The analysis revealed how they juggle responsibilities and strategies to support their children's schooling despite various challenges. The findings also shed light on the social, economic, and cultural factors that shape their daily lives and decisions.

4. Results

The following results present the key findings of the study, reflecting the participants' profiles, experiences, perspectives, and the patterns that emerged from the data analysis.

Table 1. Age of Women Fisherfolk and Years of Practice in Sun-drying Fishing Activity

Participant Codes	SD01	SD02	SD03	SD04	SD05	SD06	SD07	SD08	SD09
AGE	60	33	44	40	24	57	36	49	50
Years of Practice	40	5	20	20	3	5	7	7	32

Table 1 showed long-term and varied engagement in sun-drying activities, reflecting generational continuity, deep-rooted expertise, and a strong commitment to balancing economic and family responsibilities.

Table 2. Educational Background of the Children of Women Fisherfolk

Participant Code	Number of Children	Educational Background of the Children							
		Preschool	Elem Level	Elem Grad	HS Level	HS Grad	SHS Grad	College Level	College Grad
SD01	7		3		3		1		
SD02	4	1	2		1				
SD03	4		1		1		2		
SD04	3	1	1					1	
SD05	1	1							
SD06	7			1	1	1	2	2	
SD07	3		3						
SD08	7				2	1	1	1	2
SD09	5				1	3			1

Table 2 reveals a wide range of educational backgrounds among the children of women fisherfolk, with some attaining college degrees while others did not complete basic education. This variation highlights the uneven access to and completion of formal education in coastal communities, influenced by economic and social factors.

Table 3. Average Daily Expenses Allotted for Education

Participant Code	Number of Children	Average Daily Expenses Allotted for Education (in Php)
SD01	7	200
SD02	4	200
SD03	4	300
SD04	3	700
SD05	1	100
SD06	7	150
SD07	3	45
SD08	7	2000
SD09	5	300

Table 3 presents the average daily expenses allotted for education by nine women fisherfolk, with values ranging from ₱45 to ₱2,000. Notably, SD08 allocates the highest amount despite having seven children, indicating a significant investment in education. The data reflect considerable variation in spending patterns, which may be influenced by factors such as household income, number of school-aged children, and level of educational attainment pursued.

5. Discussion

The discussion presents an in-depth interpretation of the study's findings, connecting them to the research objectives and relevant theoretical perspectives.

5.1. Age and Years Working

The data collected provided insights into the workforce demographics of this sector. The participants' ages ranged from 24 to 60 years, indicating a diverse group of women contributing to both economic and family responsibilities. The majority were in their late 30s to 50s, with a significant portion nearing or at senior age, which suggests their long-term engagement in the industry.

The number of years working as a woman fisherfolks revealed varying range, with some participants having as low as three years of experience, while others were in the industry for over 40 years. Many of them had been in the industry of sun-drying activities for more than two decades, reflecting their commitment and expertise in their field. The variation in years of working as women fisherfolk highlights the generational continuity in fishing-related livelihoods, where skills and knowledge are passed down through experience, shaping their resilience and role in both economic and familial aspects of their lives.

5.2. Educational Background of Children

SD01 has seven children, but two of them have passed away. Among the five remaining, three did not complete high school, one did not finish elementary school, and one successfully graduated from senior high school. Participant B has four children at varying stages of education, from Grade 10 to kindergarten.

Similarly, SD03 also has four children, two of whom are in senior high school, with the others in Grade 10 and Grade 3. SD04 has three children, one currently in their first year of college, one in special education (SPED), and one in kindergarten.

SD05, who has only one child, has a child in kindergarten. SD06, who also has seven children, has a more diverse range of educational backgrounds: one has graduated from grade school, one is a

college undergraduate, two did not finish high school, two are senior high school graduates, and one is pursuing a BSIT degree.

SD07 has three children, whose education ranges from Grade 1 to Grade 5. SD08, who has seven children, boasts two college graduates, one high school graduate, two college undergraduates, one senior high school student, and one high school student.

Lastly, SD09 has five children. Three have graduated from high school, one has graduated from college, and one is in Grade 9.

This data reveals diverse educational attainment levels among the participants' children, indicating varied access to or completion of formal education.

5.3. Average Daily Expenses allotted for education

The daily budgets allocated for children's education in women fisherfolk families engaged in sun-drying activities vary widely, reflecting financial disparities within the community. Amounts range from 45/day for families with limited resources to 2,000/day for those with more stable incomes. Mid-range budgets of 200/day, 300/day, and 700/day likely support basic educational expenses, while families with children in tertiary education allocate the bulk of their budget to transportation, as they reside on islands. In addition to transportation, some funds are also directed toward random school projects, which may include special assignments, materials, or extracurricular activities. These allocations highlight the challenges faced by fisherfolk families in providing consistent educational opportunities, underscoring the need for targeted support to address these disparities. According to Cabaguig in 2023, women fisherfolk in Samar, Philippines, revealed their resilience as they strive to meet economic demands while prioritizing their children's schooling despite financial and social challenges.

"mahal magpaaral sa kanila sa kolehiyo; napakamahal ng pamasaha papunta sa bayan, doon lang me college" (It is very expensive to send kids to college because of the high transportation cost, but that's the only place with college)

"umayaw ang anak ko na magbyahe pag inaabot ng gabi ang mga klase nya Ang mahal ng bayad pagsolo ang byahe ng bangka" (My kid gave up his college education because of the expensive transportation especially when his class schedule is late as he has to pay the full price of the boat ride")

5.4. Role of Women Fisherfolk's Mothers in the Education of their Children

Women fisherfolk play a vital role in their children's education, balancing their livelihood with household responsibilities despite financial struggles. Beyond earning income from sun-drying fish and other fishing-related activities, they ensure their children's basic needs, such as food and school supplies, are met. Many allocate a portion of their limited budget to cover transportation costs, especially for those in tertiary education who must travel from island communities to schools on the mainland. Some mothers take on extra work or migrate to distant areas to provide financial support, while others personally guide their children in learning how to read and write. This hands-on involvement reflects their deep commitment to securing a better future for their children through education.

"pinaghahanda ko po sila ng pagkain bago pumasok sa eskuwela" (I prepare their food before they go to school)

"nag sisideline po ako para may dagdag po sa pangastos dahil nag aaral pa ang mga anak ko na nais maging sundalo, teacher at ang bunso ko ay nurse" (I do side hustle to have an extra income for their additional expenses because my kids want to become soldier, teacher, and nurse)

"binibilihan ko sila ng pang project" (I buy their school needs like projects)

Despite the challenges, these women remain resilient, finding ways to sustain their children's schooling even with limited resources. In families with multiple children, older siblings often take on

the role of assisting their younger brothers and sisters with schoolwork, easing the burden on their mothers. The struggle to afford allowances and random school projects means that education is often a shared responsibility within the family. Many mothers express that, while they may not have completed their own education, they are determined to support their children until they can stand on their own. Their sacrifices highlight the crucial role of women fisherfolk in breaking the cycle of poverty, demonstrating that education is not just a personal pursuit but a collective effort toward a more stable future. Research conducted in the Bicol Region of the Philippines found that numerous fisherfolk parents encourage their children to seek higher education and more secure careers rather than continue the family's fishing trade, which they view as risky and unstable (Belardo & Candelaria, 2023). Their hopes are influenced by financial hardships and their own unmet aspirations in life.

"Sa matatanda kong anak, ako ang nagtuturo malaunan yun matandang anak kong babae na ang tumutulong sa mga nakakabata nyang kapatid" (I used to teach my eldest kid but later on my eldest daughter helps me in teaching her younger siblings)

"gusto ko sanang makatapos kahit yung isang anak ko lang, kahit mahirap igagapang" (I really want even one of my kids to finish college no matter how hard and expensive it gets)

6. Conclusion

The result of the study emphasized the crucial role of women fisherfolk in sustaining their children's education despite financial constraints and demanding livelihoods. The findings revealed that these women not only provide economic support through their work in sun-drying activities and taking care of the family but also take on active roles in guiding their children's education. The women fisherfolk's commitment is evident in their sacrifices, such as taking on additional work, migrating for better financial opportunities, and personally assisting their children with schoolwork. Despite these efforts, financial limitations and geographic barriers, such as high transportation costs for tertiary students, remain a significant challenge as well variation in the age of the women fisherfolk and the number of years that have engaged in the sun-drying fishing activity. (Reviewer A/ Comment 5) However, their resilience and dedication to the education of their children demonstrate their unwavering belief in its transformative potential. The study also highlighted the need for tailor-fit support programs to improve the financial burden on fisherfolk families and improve their access to quality education. Addressing these structural challenges will be beneficial in ensuring that the children of women fisherfolk have greater opportunities for academic success and economic mobility. Considering the findings, it is recommended that local and national policymakers implement context-specific educational support systems, such as transportation subsidies and targeted scholarship programs, for children of island-based fisherfolk families, to mitigate geographic and financial barriers to tertiary education. Furthermore, integrating gender-responsive livelihood interventions with educational assistance can empower women fisherfolk, acknowledging their dual burden as primary caregivers and economic providers. Lastly, institutionalizing community-anchored academic support structures, including intergenerational mentoring and maternal-led literacy initiatives, may foster sustainable educational engagement in marginalized coastal settings.

7. Suggestion

Based on the findings and discussion, the following recommendations are offered to help women fisherfolk and their families.

7.1. Policy and Institutional Support

Scholarship and Educational Assistance. Educational institutions may work with government agencies, non-governmental organizations, or private institutions that may provide financial aid, scholarships, and educational grants specifically for children of fisherfolk mothers.

Transportation Allowance or Support. High transportation costs are a major barrier to children of women fisherfolk especially in pursuing higher education, policymakers should explore fare subsidies or community-based transport programs for students from coastal areas.

Flexible Learning Programs and Modalities. Educational institutions may implement alternative learning systems (ALS), night classes, or modular education programs tailored for children of fisherfolk families.

7.2. Economic Empowerment for Women Fisherfolk

Livelihood Diversification. Local government units and other related agencies may introduce skills training programs (e.g., fish processing, small business management) to provide additional income sources for women.

Microfinancing and Cooperatives. Establishing women-led cooperatives that offer financial support, savings programs, and access to affordable credit will help women fisherfolk families and their children.

7.3. Community and Educational Support

Non-Formal Education and Capacity Building. The provision of financial literacy programs, parenting workshops, and educational awareness programs to help mothers support their children's schooling.

School-Community Partnerships. Schools and local organizations should work closely with fisherfolk associations and barangay leaders to address education gaps.

Mentorship Programs. We may encourage volunteer tutoring programs where older students or community members assist fisherfolk children with their studies and academic undertakings.

Declarations

Author Contributions. This is a single author manuscript.

Conflicts of Interest. There are NO conflict of interest.

Ethical Approval. The researcher distributed an informed consent form before the interviews, ensuring that participants fully understood the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly upheld, particularly due to the sensitivity surrounding the participants' educational background, and no personally identifying information was collected during the data gathering process.

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