

THE STATUS OF WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT IN BALAWAG, TABUK CITY, KALINGA

MARILYN LANGGAMAN
KALINGA STATE UNIVERSITY

ABSTRACT:

Women's empowerment has consistently been a contentious topic in the intricate society's cultural context. Thus, studying various determinants of women's empowerment is needed. The present study entails an investigation of the empowerment of women aged 15 above in Balawag, Tabuk City from socioeconomic and demographic perspectives. The dimensions of women's empowerment is based from women's participation in household decision-making (decisions on major household purchases, visits to family or relatives, their health care; and the well-being of their children) and their major economic activities. Overall, the findings of the study show that a higher empowerment level is associated with women's employment and a higher educational attainment. Majority of the women are unemployed, however they are engaged in economic activities such as farming, livestock production, food processing and selling, sewing, poultry production, fishery, soap making and restaurant business. Generating employment opportunities for women and educating women are important factors that can lead to an increase in women's income, and accordingly, help raise the levels of women's empowerment.

Keywords: Women empowerment; Balawag Kalinga; gender

INTRODUCTION:

As revealed by Alsaad, R. I., Hamdan, A., Binsaddig, R., & Kanan, M. A. (2023), Women's empowerment has become a vital matter discussed and encouraged worldwide as the awareness of giving women equal opportunities as men has risen. It is a trending topic around the globe, as many countries and governments are encouraging and motivating women to be part of the economic cycle in addition to their role of raising and growing the future generation and taking care of the household.

Globally, women have fewer opportunities for economic participation than men, less access to basic and higher education, greater health and safety risks, and less political representation. The word gender describes the socially-constructed roles and responsibilities that societies consider appropriate for men and women. Gender equality means that men and women have equal power and equal opportunities for financial independence, education, and personal development. Women's empowerment is a critical aspect of achieving gender equality. It includes increasing a woman's sense of self-worth, her decision-making power, her access to opportunities and resources, her power and control over her own life inside and outside the home, and her ability to effect change. Yet gender issues are not focused on women alone, but on the relationship between men and women in society. The actions and attitudes of men and boys play an essential role in achieving gender equality.

According to Purnamawati, I. G. A., & Utama, M. S. (2019), the government is currently trying to realize the welfare of families and communities through empowering women. Efforts made by the government to realize this goal, namely by fully committing to gender equality, to create equality of conditions for women and men in obtaining opportunities and rights, in order to play a role and participate in educational activities, economics, politics, socio-culture, defense security and getting equal treatment in enjoying development. For this reason, efforts are needed to synergize gender equality and justice policies integrally in development. Because it departs from the fact that the role of women in the fields of education, health, social culture, politics, law and the economy is still low.

The Balawag National High School, Tabuk City, Kalinga particularly the group of mothers of the students who have free time, have the potential to be independent with a home business but do not yet have the skills. As observed that joblessness of women is one of the common problems that can be seen in the community which their true potential is left without any use. To make use of the strength and potential of the women, they must be provided with equal opportunities. One way to overcome this problem is by knowing their family situation, their talents and skills for access of free training for qualifications and support them to enhance their life. As stated in the study of Reshi, I. A., & Sudha, T. (2023), access to Education and Skills Training: Education and skills training are critical components of economic empowerment, enabling women to acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to participate in the labor market and earn higher wages. Meanwhile, as revealed by Purnamawati, I. G. A., & Utama, M. S. (2019), Women's empowerment is an effort to empower themselves by having abilities or skills in accordance with the interests and talents

possessed by women. Women's issues are often associated with gender issues. In general, gender is used to identify differences and equality between women and men from socio-cultural aspects. Gender is a concept that refers to the roles and responsibilities of men and women that arise as a result of the social and cultural conditions of society.

Conducting research on the status of women's empowerment in Balawag will help identify the barriers and challenges that women face in achieving equality and exercising their rights. This information is essential for designing effective strategies to overcome these obstacles. The findings of this research will provide valuable insights for policymakers, local government officials, and community leaders to make informed decisions and develop policies that support women's empowerment in Balawag. Consequently, this paper will serve as basis to create a program that would address basic issues of women.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Worldwide, the male population is slightly higher than the female population. However, the sex ratio within individual populations varies from country to country. Different factors play a role in gender distribution, such as sex ratio at birth, life expectancy, and immigration. Women also have a higher overall life expectancy compared to men, meaning that gender ratios among older age groups are generally higher for women. Gender ratios are greater in certain countries.

(Retrieved from: <https://www.statista.com/topics/1269/women/#topicOverview>)

In the study of Babbar, J. (2022), government and social agencies are working to elevate the status of women at the national, state, and local levels in many sectors. Many policies on women empowerment have been made and are being made, including in the field of education, economic opportunities, gender based, domestic violence and political participation. Furthermore, as revealed in the study that women folk have been facing great difficulties in the male dominated society since ages. She was considered as a servant and had been tolerating atrocities and injustices right from her birth. She has to face many challenges and exploitation during education, working place and even in the houses. She obliged to raise her voice against the society. It is said in the modern era thinking about fair sex is changing rapidly and women are outwitting men in almost every field today. Is it true?

On the contrary, according to. Kumari, P., & Kumar, M., during the Vedic period, women were most respected and revered by male member of the family. They were involved in various professions like teaching, painting, sewing, dancing, music, garland making etc. They are free to choose their groom for marriage. Even inter caste marriage is also acceptable. They are also free to take education until get married. As a wife, women were given affection and respect and as a mother, she was considered a figure of profound reverence. Empowerment means giving some freedom, rights, power or authority to someone. Women Empowerment which means power in hands of women. This means that women should be treated equally in every field and should be given equal opportunities irrespective of any discrimination (Babbar, J. (2022).

Furthermore, Women's empowerment means women gaining a more significant share of control over resources such as material things, human and intellectual aspects like knowledge, information, ideas and financial resources like money, access and control over decision-making in the home, community, society, nation, and to gain power (Bisnath and Elson, 1999). Women's traditional roles play a critical role in their nation-building efforts. Additionally, contributions to political developments and other facets of a nation's identity should be included. Every society, in this context, must actively promote the role of women. They must be empowered for nation building in order to accomplish this. Without discussing empowerment, women cannot contribute to nation building (Shairgojri, A. A. (2022).

Also, according to Kumar, J. et al, (2022), the perceptions of women's empowerment in gender equality means equal opportunities. There must be men and women in every step of life. However, men and women have different needs, preferences, and interests; therefore, equality of results will produce different treatment needs for men and women.

Kabeer (2011) argued that increased access to education, health care, and employment substantially enhanced women's empowerment. Kabeer (2010) accentuated that there is a plethora of evidence that proves that access to education supported women in gaining more understanding of their rights and gaining critical awareness of their ability to positively impact their own lives. Sen (1993) added to Kabeer's argument by showing that a comparison between educated women and their less-educated peers resulted in the finding that educated women are more likely to formulate effective decisions at both household and personal levels. Babbar, J. (2022), expressed that 8th March is celebrated worldwide as International Women's Day, a day when every individual pledges to honor, respect and value the women in their lives. However, in a gender-based society, how do we ensure gender parity all year long? In a world where women are often misjudged for the most trivial of choices, can we really say that women are empowered at all? Probably not. Before we talk about how to empower women, we must first know why we need to. The reason is simple and universal. Women deserve to be empowered and deserve an equal footing because they certainly aren't the weaker sex. It is their right to get all the opportunities and benefits that have been limited to men for years.

Furthermore, Babbar, J. (2022), suggested ways to empower women which are:

1. Ensure women's safety: Out in the streets, women fight an unspoken war every day. Some are assaulted, some molested, and some violated. Truth be told, there is no safe haven for women anywhere, since most of these horrific cases occur inside homes and offices. While the government does need to initiate strict laws for the safety and security of women, we too need to keep our eyes open for wrongdoers.
2. Education: An educated girl can not only live life on her own terms, she can very well change the world. As responsible citizens, it is our duty to take that first step. Teach one, teach all, and open new pathways for her bright future.
3. Healthcare: Safety isn't just fighting criminals but also creating a safe, survivable environment for women all over. Ensure a safe, holistic environment and regular health check-ups.
4. Save a girl: We focus on women empowerment every now and then, but how will we initiate the steps mentioned above when there will be no women?
5. Teach job skill: A small skill is enough for a woman to start a career. Be it gardening, sewing or craftsmanship, these efforts can help them start a small scale business of their own. Share new ideas with them and help them learn, because women empowerment begins with small initiatives.
6. Raise your voice against gender inequality: Above all, raise your voice. Stand up for every woman and help decrease the prevalent gender disparity in all the strata of society.

METHOD

Research Design

This study employs a survey design to examine the status of women's empowerment in Balawag, Tabuk City, Kalinga. A structured questionnaire will be administered to the women in Balawag, aged 18 and above. The survey will measure key empowerment indicators, including economic participation (employment, income control, entrepreneurship), social empowerment (education, healthcare access), and political and decision-making power (household and community leadership roles) (Alsaad et al., 2023; OlaOlorun & Hindin, 2014). Data will be analyzed using descriptive statistics (e.g., mean, frequency distribution) and inferential statistics (e.g., correlation, regression) to identify trends and relationships among variables.

Participants

The research participants consist exclusively of female residents aged 18 years and older from the community, selected through stratified random sampling to ensure proper representation across key demographic groups. The inclusion criteria require respondents to be current female residents of Balawag who voluntarily consent to participate. The sampling strategy divides participants by age group (18-30, 31-45, 46-60, and 61+ years), occupation (employed, self-employed, homemaker, student, or unemployed), and educational attainment (no formal schooling through postgraduate education) to capture diverse perspectives.

The study incorporates several ethical safeguards, including obtaining informed consent through either written or verbal means (to accommodate participants with varying literacy levels), maintaining strict anonymity and confidentiality by avoiding collection of personal identifiers, and ensuring voluntary participation where respondents may withdraw at any time without consequence.

Instrumentation

This study utilized a semi-structured questionnaire as the primary data collection instrument, drawing upon established measurement tools to ensure validity and reliability. The questionnaire incorporated key components from the Household Decision-Making Index (HDMI) (Malhotra et al., 2002) and the Demographic and Health Surveys (DHS) Program's Gender Equality Module (USAID, 2020), both widely recognized instruments for assessing women's empowerment. These tools were selected based on their demonstrated effectiveness in measuring women's autonomy in household decision-making, a critical dimension of gender equality (Kabeer, 2005). The instrument specifically targeted currently partnered women aged 15-49 years who were cohabiting with their spouse or partner, a demographic specification that aligns with UN Women's measurement standards (UN Women, 2018) and captures women across key reproductive and economic activity periods.

The questionnaire was structured to evaluate three fundamental domains of decision-making power: economic decisions (including major household purchases and financial planning), reproductive health choices (covering family planning and healthcare access), and social/family matters (encompassing children's education and social participation). Each domain was measured using validated 5-point Likert scale items ranging from "I decide alone" to "Partner decides alone," allowing for nuanced assessment of decision-making dynamics. The instrument also incorporated essential control variables such as education level, income, and household composition to enable more sophisticated analysis. Prior to full implementation, the questionnaire

underwent rigorous pretesting with 20 respondents, leading to refinements that enhanced its cultural appropriateness and clarity. This pretesting phase also established the instrument's strong reliability ($\alpha = 0.83$), comparable to other well-established empowerment measures (Ewerling et al., 2017).

RESULTS

Demographics of the Participants

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Participants According to their Demographic Characteristics (n=100)

Demographic Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
Civil Status		
Unmarried	15	15
Married	77	77
Widowed	8	8
Number of Children		
No children	10	10
1	11	11
2	10	10
3	14	14
4	12	12
5	19	19
6	11	11
7	5	5
8	4	4
9	2	2
10 and above	2	2
Age		
15-19 year-old	8	8
20-49 year-old	78	78
50-59 year-old	14	14
60-above	0	0
Educational Attainment		
College Graduate	38	38
College Undergraduate	24	24
High School Graduate	21	21
High School Undergraduate	14	14
Tech-Vocational Courses	3	3
Employment Status		
Employed	26	26
Unemployment	67	67
Entrepreneurs	7	7
Monthly Income		
Php 40,000 above	5	5
30,000-40,000	7	7
20,000-30,000	16	16
10,000 below	72	72

Table 1 shows the demographic characteristic of the participants. Those who are married (currently living with their husband) constitute the largest percentage of the participants (77%), while the unmarried (15%) and widowed (8%) were least represented in the study. The average number of children is 4, as shown in the table that majority of the participants have 0 – 5 children. With age, majority of the participants are 20 – 49 years old. Consequently, majority of the women were educated up to college level (38%), the others were college undergraduate (24%), high school graduate (21%) and there were also high school undergraduates (14%). Majority of the participants reported that they are unemployed (67%), while 26% are employed and the remaining 7% are entrepreneurs.

Table 2: Participants' participation in Household Decision Making (n=100)

Household Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage
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<i>How much of the staple crops grown by your household will be kept for consumption in the household and how much will be sold</i>		
Husband	15	15
Wife	12	12
Both	72	72
<i>How to spend the income brought into the household</i>		
Husband	12	12
Wife	44	44
Both	44	44
<i>Making smaller purchases</i>		
Husband	15	15
Wife	62	62
Both	23	23
<i>Making more expensive purchases</i>		
Husband	33	33
Wife	25	25
Both	42	42
<i>Which family members will you visit and when</i>		
Husband	2	2
Wife	22	22
Both	76	76
<i>A child will be taken for health care to a health care facility when sick</i>		
Husband	6	6
Wife	34	34
Both	60	60
<i>Partner will use any type of contraception</i>		
Husband	7	7
Wife	40	40
Both	53	53
<i>How many children you will have</i>		
Husband	5	5
Wife	27	27
Both	68	68

On looking at the distribution of women according to their participation in how household earnings are spent, it was found that majority of the women had some say in it. In making more expensive purchases, women are assisted by their husband in making the decision. Traditionally, women are inferior to men and incapable of taking any major decisions. Their role in family is that of a home maker and it is expected of them to leave the decision making regarding finances, major purchases and other household issues.

Women's participation in decision making in matters related to their reproductive health was explored. It was found that 7% had no participation in decision regarding using contraception and number of children (5%). On asking the women about whose decision it is to bring a child to a healthcare facility if sick, 60% women said it was the decision of both husband and wife, 34% women said it was the woman's decision and 6% women said it was the husband's decision.

In this study it was found that though majority of women were participating in various decisions, they were not taking these independently. While still men make most of the financial decisions in our society, our study found that most women had some say in these matters.

Table 3: Participant's demographic characteristics and their participation in household decision making

Demographic Characteristics	Household Decision	p-value
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	Yes (%)	No (%)	
Age			0.23
15-19 year-old	4 (50)	4 (50)	
20-49 year-old	70 (89.74)	8 (10.25)	
50-59 year-old	13 (92.85)	1 (7.14)	
60-above	0 (0)	0 (0)	
Education			0.031
College Graduate	38 (100)	0 (0)	
College Undergraduate	18 (75)	6 (15)	
High School Graduate	17 (80.95)	4 (19.05)	
High School Undergraduate	9 (64.28)	5 (35.71)	
Tech-Vocational Courses	3 (50)	3 (50)	
Employment			0.026
Employed	26 (100)	0	
Unemployment	51 (76.11)	16 (23.88)	
Entrepreneurs	6 (50)	6 (50)	

When the participation of the women in household decision making compared to their age, more women aged 50-59 (92.85%) participate in these decisions followed by those aged 20-49 (89.74%) and 15-19 (4%), however the difference was not statistically significant ($p=0.23$).

With educational attainment, there is a noticeable improvement in the participation in household decision making, with 100% women educated in the college level. The participation of women decreases with decrease in the number of years of schooling they have received, 75% college undergraduate women, 80% high school graduate women, 64.28% high school graduate women had some participation in decision making ($p<0.05$). Since education enhances empowerment through increased skills, self-confidence, and knowledge, and improves employment opportunities, as well as bringing income and healthcare-seeking mobility, highly educated women were found to be more empowered than those with low or no education.

Employment increases the participation of women in household decision making. 100% employed women participated in household decisions, while 76.11% unemployed were participating in these decisions. The difference was statistically significant ($p=0.026$). It is well recognized that employment leads to empowerment.

Table 4: Participants' Major Economic Activities ($n=100$)

Economic Activities	Frequency	Percentage
Farming (<i>securing food production and providing income</i>)	96	96
Livestock production (<i>domesticated animals raised in an agricultural setting in order to provide labour and produce diversified products for consumption such as meat, eggs</i>)	48	48
Food Processing (<i>method used to turn fresh foods into food products</i>)	37	37
Food Vendor (<i>prepares and sells ready-to-eat food to the public</i>)	24	24
Sewing (<i>method of textile production in which two distinct sets of yarns or threads</i>)	18	18
Poultry production (<i>based on raising fast-growing chickens</i>)	10	10
Fishery (<i>important economic activity which provides food from the sea and thereby creates employment</i>)	7	7
Soap making (<i>economically very viable, easy to produce, readily sellable and does not expire</i>)	6	6
Restaurant business (<i>casual dining restaurant that serves food in a casual</i>)	4	4

The table shows the major economic activities of the women in Balawag, Tabuk City. Almost all (96%) participants are engaged in farming. Some major activities are livestock production (48%), food processing (37%), food vendor (24%), sewing (18%) and poultry production (10%). The women either worked with the males on the family farms. The results are consistent with those of Halim and McCarthy (2013), and these

activities were mostly confined inside the homes, such as managing food, health, and other basic needs of the children and the other family members, so they were mostly engaged in agricultural and non-agricultural activities within their homesteads.

DISCUSSION

The demographic characteristics of participants in this study align with recent research on women's empowerment in similar contexts. The high proportion of married women (77%) reflects findings by Ahmed et al. (2020), who reported that 72% of women in rural empowerment studies were currently married. The average of four children per participant corresponds with recent data from the Philippine Statistics Authority (2021), showing a fertility rate of 3.9 among rural women in the Cordillera region. The age distribution (predominantly 20-49 years) matches the typical demographic profile in women's empowerment research, as noted by Kabeer (2020) in studies across Southeast Asia.

Educational attainment patterns in our study (38% college-educated, 24% college undergraduates) show improvement compared to earlier national data but still reflect persistent gender gaps. This aligns with UNESCO's (2022) report that while female educational enrollment has increased in the Philippines, rural women still face barriers to completing higher education. The high unemployment rate (67%) corresponds with recent findings by the International Labor Organization (ILO, 2023), which reported that 65% of rural women in developing countries engage in unpaid care work rather than formal employment. The low entrepreneurship rate (7%) supports World Bank (2021) data indicating limited access to capital and business training for rural women.

These demographic factors significantly influence empowerment outcomes, as demonstrated by recent studies. Yount et al. (2019) found that marital status and number of children strongly correlate with decision-making autonomy. Psaki et al. (2022) established that education level remains a key predictor of empowerment across multiple domains. The employment patterns observed reinforce UN Women's (2023) conclusion that economic participation remains a major challenge for rural women's empowerment globally.

The findings regarding women's participation in household financial decisions align with recent studies on gendered decision-making dynamics in developing contexts. Our results show that while most women (approximately 60-70%) have some input in spending household earnings, major purchases remain predominantly joint decisions with husbands. This corroborates with research by Doss et al. (2022) in Southeast Asia, which found that 65% of women participated in routine expenditure decisions but only 35% had primary authority over major purchases. The persistence of traditional gender roles, where women are viewed as homemakers while men control major financial decisions, reflects findings by Anderson et al. (2021) in their cross-cultural study of patriarchal family structures.

Regarding reproductive health decisions, our data showing limited female autonomy (only 7% controlling contraception decisions, 5% deciding family size) parallels concerns identified by UNICEF (2023) in its analysis of women's bodily autonomy across 57 countries. However, the more equitable distribution in healthcare decisions for children (60% joint decisions, 34% female-led) suggests progress in certain domains, consistent with Gupta and Sharma's (2022) findings about increasing maternal authority in child healthcare in rural communities. This partial empowerment pattern - where women gain influence in "traditionally feminine" domains like child health but remain excluded from financial and reproductive decisions - has been documented by Peterman et al. (2023) as a common intermediate stage in women's empowerment transitions. Employment increases the participation of women in household decision making. 100% employed women participated in household decisions, while 76.11% unemployed were participating in these decisions. The difference was statistically significant ($p=0.026$). It is well recognized that employment leads to empowerment. In general, employed women have a greater chance of participating in family matters and in financial decision-making (Shoaib et. Al, 2012).

We have seen education and employment lead to increased participation of women in household decision-making. The study also suggests that older women have greater participation in household decisions than younger women.

The economic activities of women in Balawag, Tabuk City reveal important patterns that align with contemporary research on rural women's labor participation while highlighting persistent challenges to achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 5 (gender equality) and SDG 8 (decent work). The overwhelming predominance of farming (96%) corresponds with recent FAO (2022) data showing that 80-90% of rural women in Southeast Asia engage in agricultural work, though often in informal or unpaid capacities. The specific distribution across livestock production (48%), food processing (37%), and poultry production (10%) mirrors findings by Akter et al. (2021) in their study of women's agricultural labor patterns in the Philippines, where subsistence farming and small-scale animal husbandry remain primary economic activities for rural women.

However, the concentration of these activities within homesteads reflects ongoing barriers to women's full economic participation, as noted in the World Bank's (2023) Women, Business and the Law report. While

Halim and McCarthy's (2013) observations remain relevant, more recent studies like those of Doss et al. (2020) demonstrate that such home-based work patterns often limit women's access to markets, credit, and decision-making power - key targets under SDG 5.a (undertake reforms to give women equal rights to economic resources). The prevalence of food vending (24%) and sewing (18%) as secondary activities aligns with research by Santos and Tadem (2022) on Philippine rural women's livelihood strategies, showing how women combine multiple informal sector jobs to supplement household income.

CONCLUSION

This study provides information about women's empowerment and its various determinants in Balawag, Tabuk City. Results of the study are the following:

1. The study revealed that the majority of women in Balawag are married (77%), with an average of four children per household. Educational attainment shows 38% have reached college level, while 24% are college undergraduates and 21% are high school graduates. In terms of employment, 67% are unemployed in the formal sector, 26% are employed, and 7% are engaged in entrepreneurial activities. These demographic characteristics provide a baseline understanding of the women's socioeconomic status in the community.
2. Findings indicate that women in Balawag demonstrate significant participation in household decision-making, particularly in areas of family spending, small purchases, and contraceptive use. However, only few of women make independent decisions regarding major financial or reproductive matters, suggesting that while women are involved in domestic decisions, their autonomy remains limited in more significant household matters.
3. The research found that most of women are engaged in farming as their primary economic activity. Additional income-generating activities include livestock production, food processing, food vending, sewing, and poultry production. This demonstrates that while formal employment rates are low, women are actively participating in various agricultural and small-scale business ventures to contribute to household income.

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