

Braving the Waves: Narratives of the Women Drift Net Fisher Folks

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ABSTRACT This study examines the experiences of women engaged in pamukot or drift net fishing in Buenavista, Guimaras, Philippines, where women's contributions to small-scale fisheries are often undervalued. Guided by the Gender Dynamics in Fisheries Participation Framework, the study explored their fishing activities, roles, motivations, and challenges. Five women with at least 15 years of experience were purposively selected as informants, and data were gathered through in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and document analysis using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Results revealed that women play crucial roles in fishing and household livelihoods, ranging from assisting their husbands, preparing and repairing nets, and marketing products, to managing conflicts and providing emotional support. Their motivations stem from economic necessity, family cooperation, and a sense of enjoyment. However, they face challenges such as inclement weather, equipment loss, occupational health risks, and balancing childcare with fishing duties. The study highlights the need for gender-sensitive programs, safety training, livelihood support, and disaster preparedness to strengthen women's participation and promote sustainable fisheries development.

Keywords: fishing, gender development, life experiences, resiliency, vulnerability, women

Introduction

The participation of women fisherfolk in drift net fishing in the Philippines reflects a complex interplay of social, environmental, and economic factors that shape their roles within small-scale fisheries. Historically, women's contributions to fisheries have often been underestimated or overlooked, despite their significant participation in fishing activities and post-harvest processes. Understanding these dynamics is critical for developing effective management strategies that foster gender equity and enhance the sustainability of fishery resources. An examination of women's roles in drift net fishing communities provides critical insight into the complex interplay of gender, labor, and resource management in the Philippines. This analysis not only underscores the resilience and adaptability of women in securing household incomes and food security, but also exposes the significant challenges they face, including the "double burden" of balancing domestic and fishing-related work, and their limited access to productive resources, decision-making platforms, and formal recognition.

Recent studies have highlighted the various ways in which women engage in fishing and related livelihoods in coastal communities. In many instances, gender norms dictate the roles of women, often relegating them to less visible, informal, or traditional aspects of fishing, such as saving fish caught by men or participating in bait collection and fish

processing (Fabinyi & Barclay, 2021; Siar, 2003). These roles are essential, not just for family sustenance, but also play a significant part in local economic structures, ultimately impacting community resilience and food security (Eder, 2005; Marriott et al., 2021; Launio et al., 2010). For instance, women's involvement in fisheries is vital in regions where they serve as primary caretakers and resource managers of household food supply, assuming responsibility for their community's nutritional needs.

The integration of women's voices into fisheries management is also paramount. Studies indicate that recognizing and incorporating women's local ecological knowledge enhances community engagement and resource management efforts ("Sustainable marine conservation, baselines, and systematic monitoring—a few lessons from coastal resource management in the Philippines", 2021; O'Donnell et al., 2010). In areas with active marine protected areas (MPAs), for example, women fisherfolk can provide invaluable insights into the ecological changes observed over time (Samonte et al., 2016). Despite these contributions, there remains a significant gap in how institutions approach co-management practices, with women's roles often marginalized due to prevailing societal and cultural biases (Segi, 2014; Christie et al., 2002).

Moreover, the unique challenges faced by women in fisheries necessitate targeted interventions to address their concerns and facilitate their involvement in policy-making. Addressing socioeconomic disparities among fisherfolk must include initiatives designed specifically for women, acknowledging their dual roles in both production and domestic spheres (Cleland et al., 2010; Fabinyi et al., 2013). Organizations advocating for sustainable fishing practices, such as community-based fisheries management, must actively include women to ensure their perspectives and experiences shape conservation strategies that are equitable and effective (Onsay et al., 2022).

This qualitative study explores the experiences of women engaged in "pamukot" or drift net fishing in the coastal areas of Buenavista, Guimaras, Philippines

Objectives of the Study

1. To establish the different fishing activities and the roles performed by the women in drift net fishing.
2. To ascertain the motivation, challenges, and issues encountered by women in the fishing industry.
3. To provide baseline data for the different programs and trainings to be conducted by the Guimaras State University – Gender and Development.

Theoretical Framework

This study was anchored to the Gender Dynamics in Fisheries Participation Framework. This is the theoretical framework for understanding women's participation in drift net fishing in the Philippines, which emphasizes a multidimensional approach that integrates gender, socio-economic factors, and ecological knowledge. Recognizing and addressing the barriers women face, alongside leveraging their inherent knowledge of local fisheries, is essential for developing inclusive and effective fisheries management strategies. Such approaches not only highlight the critical operational roles that women fulfill but also promote sustainability within the fisheries sector.

Legal Frameworks

The Philippine Constitution and subsequent legal instruments provide a framework that can potentially support women's participation in fisheries. The Fisheries Code of 1998 (Republic Act No. 8550) aims to protect the interests of traditional fisherfolk, and emphasis on equitable access to resources could be interpreted to include women (Wong, 2016). However, existing laws often lack gender-specific provisions that adequately address the challenges women face in gaining equal access to fishing rights and resources. The need for reinforcing and creating laws that explicitly support women's roles in fishing is vital for enhancing their agency and participation in sectors like drift net fishing.

Methods

Informants

The informants of the study were 5 purposively selected women drift net fisher folks from the coastal barangay of the Municipality of Buenavista, Province of Guimaras. The participants were qualified based on the following criteria: a) women who are currently engaged in "pamukot" or drift net fishing as a main source of income, and b) have at least 15 years of experience in drift net fishing.

Research Instrument

This study utilized the interview schedule validated by the panel of experts from the field of the fishing industry, gender and development, education, and qualitative research. Furthermore, the trustworthiness of this qualitative research was established based on Connelly LM (2016). The interview schedule has two parts. Part 1 gathered the personal data of the informants. Part 2 collected the statements, feedback, and testimonies of the informants on their experiences in relation to the drift net fishing.

Data Collection Procedures

The study was conducted upon the approval of the University Research and Development Committee. The researcher coordinated and obtained necessary permissions from local government units and fisher folks' organizations of the identified coastal barangays in Buenavista, Guimaras.

Moreover, the informants were identified based on the qualifying criteria set. After obtaining the required permission from the informants, the researcher scheduled and conducted the in-depth interview. Moreover, the researchers conducted a follow-up interview through direct and phone calls to collect sufficient data and clarify specific details that were not captured in the previous interview. Furthermore, a focus-group discussion was conducted after the initial analysis of the interview. The researchers prepared the transcripts of the interview and the focus-group discussion (FGD) for data analysis.

The digital audio and video recorders were used with the approval of the informants. An audio recorder was utilized to ensure that nothing would be omitted or altered during the conduct of the interview. Also, a digital video recorder was utilized to visually determine informants' hand and facial gestures that can be used to supplement the findings of this

study. Additionally, pertinent documents and other evidence for verification were gathered with the approval of the informants.

All data were collected in compliance with the strict health protocols implemented by the Guimaras local government unit. Moreover, the data collected were used for the sole purpose of this research and were handled with strict adherence to data privacy and confidentiality.

Data Analysis Procedures

This qualitative study utilized an interpretative phenomenological analysis. The recorded in-depth interview of the informants and the focus-group discussion were transcribed into the actual language used. The researcher compiled, proofread, and thoroughly analyzed each of these transcribed responses. To make sense of these collected data, initial categories of the information about the experiences of the identified women drift net fisher folks were formed. From the formed codes, categories, and subcategories were identified. The researchers formed descriptions of these categories and subcategories based on the data gathered. A coding book was formulated containing the categories and their corresponding description.

To establish inter-rater reliability, the rater's table containing the experiences of the informants was developed and rated by two experts, including the researcher. The raters established a strong inter-rater agreement with a Kappa value of 0.832. After the inter-rater agreement was substantially established, the researcher rated and classified the entire set of experiences as stated by the informants. The formulated classifications of the experiences of the women drift net fisher folks were defined and described based on the data gathered.

Furthermore, the researcher verified the results of the in-depth and FGD through the analysis of the gathered documents, artifacts, pictures, and videos collected. The initial results were determined and were subjected to the informant's validation. Upon the informant's validation of their revealed experiences, the findings were finalized.

Results and Discussion

Generally, the experiences of the women engaged in "pamukot" or drift net fishing can be categorized in terms of their (a) reason of engagement, (b) fishing activities participated, (c) roles performed, (d) challenges encountered, (e) strategies employed to overcome the challenges, (f) advantages and disadvantages of women engaged in drift net fishing, (g) source of motivation and strength, and (h) necessary values to survive in drift net fishing.

Reasons for Engagement in "Pamukot" or Drift Net Fishing

The informants emphasized that they were only involved in "*pamukot*" or drift net fishing after their marriage. The results revealed that women engaged in "pamukot" or drift net fishing because of three (3) main reasons: (a) "pamukot" as their main source of income, (b) to assist their husband, and (c) sense of enjoyment.

"Pamukot" as the Main Source of Income

The informants stated that "*pamukot*" is their family's main source of income. This sustained their daily needs, which include the education expenses of their children, food, payment for electric and water bills, medical expenses, and other financial obligations. This is evident in the statements of the informants.

As Donna (2023, p. 1) stated "*Kami ni banahon, gapamukot gid na kami kay amo ma lang na palangitan-an namon mo halin pa sang una.*" (Translation: My husband and I engaged in drift net fishing because that is our only source of income ever since.) Roxanne (2023, p. 6) added "*Sa pagstart ko yah, syempre una-una wala ka pangitan-an.*" (Translation: I started drift net fishing because you don't have a source of income.) This was further supported by Patricia (2023, p. 3), "*Amo lang na ang ginasaligan namon ang pamukot. Amo na sya ang amon pangabuy-an sa pang adlaw-adlaw nga tanan. Diri kami gakuha sang mga allowance sang kabataan, foods namon, kag pangbayad sa amon kuryente, tubig, bulong nmon, kag iban pa nmon nga kinahanglanon.*" (Translation: We rely on drift net fishing. It is the means in our daily living. It is the source of our children's allowance, food, payment for our electric and water bills, and other needs.)

The recurring reliance on drift net fishing as the main source of income underscores the deep connection between the practice and the survival of these families. It reveals that, for many, "*pamukot*" is not just a means of making a living but is woven into their daily routines as the only dependable option. The lack of alternative livelihood opportunities is evident, and this dependency highlights the importance of exploring sustainable practices, financial literacy, and support systems to ensure their long-term well-being.

Assisting their Husband

Another reason for the women's engagement in "*pamukot*" or drift net fishing is to assist their husbands. Primarily, all informants indicated that they started "*pamukot*" or drift net fishing to assist their husbands. Some stated that their husband are doing it alone or with assistance from their neighbors. Consequently, the vigorous tasks involved in "*pamukot*" or drift net fishing influenced their decision to assist their husband.

As Carah (2023, p. 2) specified "*Nag-upod ako pamukot kay wala sya upod. Alang alang nga paupdon ko duwa ko ka bata nga gaeskwela.*" (Translation: I joined my husband in drift net fishing because he is alone. Our children cannot assist him because they are studying.) Furthermore, the informants emphasized that assisting their husbands ensures that the entire income belongs to their family. As Maria (2023, p. 8) specified "*Kung mangita ka pa sa iban nga tawo ya, may porsyento pa na sila ya. Kung kamo ya nga mag asawa, ang inyo income buo gid.*" (Translation: If you will look for someone for assistance, then they will receive some percentage of the income. However, assisting my husband will provide us with the entire income.)

The decision to assist their husbands is deeply rooted in practicality and financial strategy. By working together, families maximize their income, which is crucial for their survival. This also underscores the value of unity within the family structure, as the collaboration strengthens their ability to meet daily needs without external interference. The implications suggest that fostering a sense of cooperation and mutual support in family businesses or livelihoods is essential for both emotional and economic stability.

Sense of Enjoyment

Some informants expressed a profound sense of enjoyment in being on the sea. Donna (2023, p. 6) indicated, "*Enjoy man ako sa lawod. (... joyfully laughing) Namian man ako nga daan sa lawod kag nami man kung managat ka ah.*" (Translated: I enjoy being on the sea. I like the sea and fishing.) In addition, Maria (2023, p. 6) stated, "*Namian ako magpalawod kag managat kapin pa gid may kuha ka nga banagan kag mga isda nag dalagku.*" (Translation: I like to go fishing, especially when you can catch lobster and huge fish.)

These responses illustrate that fishing is not merely an economic activity but also a source of intrinsic joy and cultural attachment. The sea becomes a space of recreation, fulfillment, and personal satisfaction beyond livelihood concerns.

The sense of enjoyment highlights the emotional and cultural value of the sea for coastal communities. This implies that sustainable fisheries management and marine conservation should not only consider the economic benefits of fishing but also its role in promoting well-being, identity, and social cohesion. Recognizing the sea as both a livelihood resource and a source of happiness can strengthen advocacy for marine protection programs, as community members are more likely to support initiatives that safeguard something they deeply value and enjoy.

Fishing Activities Participated in by the Informants

Initially, the informants engaged in "*pamukot*" or drift net fishing. However, this was later extended to other related fishing activities. These include (a) *Paglibod* or ambulant fish vending, (b) *Panglukos* or squid fishing, (c) *Pamunit* or angling or bait fishing, (d) *Labay* or longline fishing, (e) *Panginhas* or shoreline shell seeking, and (f) *Panulo* or night fishing.

The participation of women in *pag-ilibod* or ambulant fish vending was also evident. Roxanne (2023, p.7) stated, "*Nagalibod ako isda. Ginabaligya ko ang amon isda diri sa amon barangay kag sa tupad nga mga barangay. Bali ginadul-ong ko gid na house-to-house.*" (Translation: I am selling our caught fish in our barangay and other neighboring barangays. I am selling it from one house to another.)

Donna (2023, p. 15) shared, "*Gapamukot kami sang akon bana. Gapanglukos kami. Kag gapamunit man kami kung wala kami gapamukot.*" (Translation: My husband and I do drift net fishing, we do squid fishing, and angling or bait fishing if we are not doing drift net fishing.)

Patricia (2023, p.11) stated, "*Gapanglabay kami na. Gapanalom na sya abi, gaupod man ako na sang una. Pero subong bawal na ang panalom mo. Panglabay ya ginapulawan gid na nmon asta mag-aga.*" (Translation: We do longline fishing. Previously, I accompanied my husband when he went spear-hunting. However, spear-hunting is now prohibited. We are doing longline fishing for the whole night until dawn.)

On the other hand, Maria (2023, p. 9) specified, "*Kung hunas, nagapanginhas kami sa baybay kung adlaw kag gapanulo kung gab-i.*" (Translation: If the tide is low, we are doing shoreline shell seeking during the day and night fishing at night.)

These testimonies reflect the diversity of fishing practices among coastal families, where both men and women take on complementary roles to sustain their livelihood. The shift from one method to another also demonstrates adaptability in response to seasonal changes, resource availability, and fishing regulations.

The diversification of fishing practices implies that coastal households adopt multiple livelihood strategies to maximize resource use, reduce risk, and ensure food and income security. The involvement of women in paglibod further underscores the gendered dimension of fisheries, where women contribute significantly to post-harvest activities and household income. These findings suggest that fisheries management and livelihood programs should not be designed with a one-size-fits-all approach. Instead, they should recognize the variety of practices and the roles of both men and women. Supporting diversified and sustainable practices—while enforcing regulations such as the prohibition of destructive methods—can strengthen household resilience, promote gender inclusion, and align with long-term conservation goals.

Roles Performed by Women in relation to “Pamukot” or Drift Net Fishing

When the informants were asked about their roles as women in **“Pamukot”** or Drift Net Fishing, it was established that they (a) assist in performing tasks directly associated with drift net fishing, (b) negotiation and communication with other fisher folks, (c) product preparation, (d) product marketing, (e) repair of damage fish net, (f) processing of legal documents, and (g) purchase of materials and equipment.

Assist in Performing Tasks Directly Associated with “Pamukot” or Drift Net Fishing

Women performed various tasks directly connected to *pamukot* or drift net fishing. These include *paglimpyo*, *pagsinsay*, *pamuna*, *pag-ariya*, and *pagbatak*. The accounts of the informants highlight the significant contribution of women in both preparatory and actual fishing activities.

Roxanne (2023, p. 9) shared, *“Gabulig ako ya kay banahon sa pagpanglimpyo sang pukot kag pagsinsay sang pukot.”* (Translation: I am helping my husband with cleaning and arranging the fish net into the boat.) *Paglimpyo* refers to the process of cleaning the fish net by removing caught trash, twigs, stones, rotten fish, crustaceans, and other objects. She further explained, *“Magsiling ka naman ya limpyohan ang pukot, ginakuha mo ang mga higko, bato, stick, drift woods, dunot nga isda, dawat, kasag kag iban pa nga basura.”* (Translated: Cleaning involves removing trash, stones, sticks, driftwood, rotten fish and crustaceans, and other garbage.)

On the other hand, *pagsinsay* was described as the procedure of properly arranging the fish net into the boat in preparation for the next *pamukot*. As Roxanne (2023, p. 9) described, *“Ang pagsinsay sang pukot, ikalaging or i-arrange mo sya sa pumpboat before ka mag-ariya.”* (Translation: *Pagsinsay* is arranging the fish net into the boat in preparation for the next drift net fishing.)

Moreover, women also engaged in *pamuna* or repairing minor damages in fishing nets. Carah (2023, p. 10) stated, *“Kung may mga guba sa amon pukot, mga buho tungod*

sa mga bato, kahoy kag iban pa, ginapuna ko lang. Ang pagpuna, bali ginatahi ko lang ang mga buho para makayo ang amon pukot." (Translation: I am stitching damages in our fish net like holes caused by stones, tree parts and other objects to fix our fish net.)

Additionally, women assisted in pag-ariya or putting the drift net into the sea and pagbatak or retrieving the nets from the sea. Maria (2023, p. 8) explained, *"Gabulig man ako sa pag-ariya ukon paghulog bala sang pukot sa dagat. Pagkatapos, balikan na namon kag batakon para makuha na namon ang amon hulik."* (Translated: I am helping in dropping the drift net into the sea. Then, we will return to pull the drift net back into the boat to gather the fish and crustaceans caught.)

Aside from these tasks, women also played a support role during fishing expeditions. Patricia (2023, p. 16) emphasized her responsibility in navigation, *"Kung galarga kami palawod, ako na ang gatan-aw sang alagyan sang amon baroto. Ginhambalan ko ang akon bana kung may mga mabunguan kami nga basura ukon pukot sang iban."* (Translation: When we go to the sea, I watch the pathway of our boat. I inform my husband if there are obstacles such as trash or the nets of other fisherfolk.)

These testimonies clearly demonstrate that women's work extends beyond household duties into direct involvement in physically demanding fishing tasks, contributing significantly to the overall productivity of the household's livelihood.

The active participation of women in Pamukot underscores their critical yet often undervalued role in small-scale fisheries. Their engagement in both pre-harvest (e.g., net cleaning, arranging, repairing) and harvest-related activities (e.g., dropping and pulling nets, navigation support) reveals that fishing is a collaborative household enterprise rather than an exclusively male domain. This implies that fisheries development programs and policies should adopt a gender-sensitive approach that acknowledges women's direct contributions, provides them with adequate training and support, and ensures their representation in decision-making. Recognizing women's labor not only affirms their role in sustaining household economies but also strengthens inclusive and sustainable fisheries governance.

Negotiation and Communication with Other Fisher Folks

It was further determined that women played an important role in negotiations and communication with other fisherfolk. Informants shared that disagreements and disputes occasionally arose among fisherfolk, particularly during fishing activities. In such situations, husbands often remained silent, while women took the lead in negotiating and communicating with others. Their assertiveness and calm approach ensured that conflicts were resolved without escalation

Patricia (2023, pp. 14–15) recalled, *"Kung kis-a indi gid mag intindihanay kami sa iban nga gapanagat. Gasingitanay pa na kung kis-a. Gahipos nalang na dayon ang akon bana kag ako na gaistorya sa iban nga gapanagat."* (Translation: There were times that we had disagreements with other fisherfolks. A few times, drift net fisherfolk were shouting at each other. My husband remained silent, and I was the one who talked to the other

fisherfolk.)

Similarly, Maria (2023, p. 11) explained, "*Ako na lang ang gaistorya sa iban nga gapanagat kung may mga isyu para indi na magdaku ang gamo.*" (Translation: I am taking the lead in communicating with other fisherfolk if there are issues to avoid escalation of the issues.)

These accounts highlight women's active role as mediators, negotiators, and peacekeepers in community fishing practices. Their involvement extended beyond household and physical fishing tasks into the social and relational aspects of sustaining harmonious community ties.

Women serve as crucial agents of social cohesion within fishing communities, often acting as the unseen anchors that hold the social and familial fabric together. Their assertiveness in negotiations not only prevents conflicts from escalating but also fosters cooperation and mutual respect among fisherfolk. This highlights the importance of integrating women's conflict resolution and leadership roles into fisheries governance and community-based resource management programs. By formally recognizing and strengthening these roles, local organizations and policymakers can promote more inclusive, peaceful, and resilient fishing communities where women's voices are valued in decision-making and dispute resolution.

Source of Strength and Hope

It was also revealed that women provide strength and hope to their husbands, encouraging them to remain resilient and strong in the face of challenges. They served as constant reminders to persevere and live meaningfully despite hardships. Donna (2023, pp. 8–9) shared, "*Kung kis-a gahambal ang akon banahon nga natak-an na ako sang pangabuhi ta ma. Ginahambalan ko sya, anhon ta kay amo na nadangtan ta, alangan man ta mawithdraw sa pangabuhi. Wala na na ya. Sulong lang gihapon.*" (Translated: Sometimes my husband says that he is sick of our living conditions. And I tell him, we are already in this situation, so we cannot just withdraw from life. Let us just move forward.) Similarly, Roxanne (2023, p. 11) emphasized, "*Bisan mabudlay ang pangabuhi, padayon lang. Kung ano man nga problema, sulong lang ah. Kaya ni!*" (Translated: Just continue despite the difficulty in life. Regardless of the problems, just move forward. We got this!)

These accounts highlight the crucial role of women as emotional anchors within the family. Their words of encouragement not only uplift their husbands but also cultivate an atmosphere of perseverance and shared responsibility. This demonstrates that resilience is not only an individual trait but also a relational strength that emerges from spousal support. The implication is that women's capacity to inspire endurance within their families contributes to household stability and strengthens coping mechanisms against economic or social hardships. Consequently, empowering women and acknowledging their role in sustaining family resilience is vital in community development and policy-making initiatives.

Production Preparation and Marketing

Women also play a significant role in the preparation and marketing of their caught sea products. Their participation ensures not only the quality of the products but also the efficiency of the marketing process. The preparation tasks involve (a) keeping the products

in cold temperatures by storing them in boxes with ice, (b) sorting the products in terms of types and sizes, and (c) weighing the products for selling. As Maria (2023, pp. 7–8) elaborated, *"Ginabutang ko na dayon ang amon isda sa styrobox nga may ice. Pagkatapos, isorting depende sa klase sang isda kag kadalagkuon. Dayon ikilohon na kag ibaligya."* (Translated: I immediately place our fish in a styrobox with ice. Then, I sort them by type and size, weigh them, and sell them.)

In terms of marketing, the informants have innovated their approaches. Previously, they worked as ambulant vendors. Recently, however, they adopted two efficient and effective strategies. First, they placed their products in a strategic position beside the road, which reduced selling difficulties and encouraged cash transactions. Carah and Patricia shared, *"Nabutang lang namon ang amon isda sa kilid sang karsada. Mas tawhay sya kag Cash basis ang baydanay. Wala na utang."* (FGD, 2023, pp. 13–14) (Translated: We are placing our products beside the road. It is efficient and transactions are on a cash basis. No debts.)

The second strategy involved utilizing social media platforms and online payment systems. By posting their products online, women were able to expand their markets beyond their immediate community, even reaching overseas Filipino workers who ordered remotely and paid through online channels. Roxanne (2023, p. 17) explained, *"Bisan sa akon isda subong, ginaFacebook ko na sya para dasig mabaligya. Kung gina-social media ko na sya, wala utang. Cash na sya."* (Translated: To sell our fish quickly, I am posting it on Facebook. It is paid in cash.) Similarly, Maria (2023, p. 14) added, *"Mas nami nga ga-social media kaya bisan abroad pa na ya makabakal gid. Gaorder lang sila nga idul-ong sa ila balay, baydan lang nila dayon G-Cash."* (Translated: Social media is good because even those staying in other countries can place the order and make the payment through GCash.)

These findings imply that women not only contribute to household income but also drive local economic innovation. Their ability to adapt to modern technologies, such as social media and digital payments, reflects resilience and entrepreneurial capacity in the face of changing market dynamics. This shift demonstrates that women are not passive participants but are central agents in sustaining and modernizing traditional fishing livelihoods. Moreover, their practices suggest that digital literacy and access to technology are vital tools for rural women in enhancing economic opportunities. At the community level, such innovations may serve as models for other households, contributing to collective resilience, food security, and sustainable livelihood strategies.

Preparation of the Needed Materials

Some informants were actively preparing the necessary materials used during drift net fishing. These include, but are not limited to, rope, fuel or gasoline, drinking water, a flashlight, and a cell phone. Donna (2023, p. 6) stated, *"Ginaprepare namon ang mga kalat, gasoline, tubig, flashlight kag cellphone."* (Translated: We are preparing the ropes, gasoline, drinking water, flashlight, and cellphone.) Similarly, Maria (2023, p. 10) emphasized the importance of communication devices, saying, *"Importanti gid ang pagdala sang cellphone*

kay in case bala may matabo sa lawod like aberya, pwede ka ya ka-contact sa higad kag pwede ka kapasugat.” (Translated: You must bring your cellphone. If anything happens at sea, like a boat malfunction, you can contact someone for help.)

These accounts imply that careful preparation reflects not only the informants’ sense of responsibility but also their ability to mitigate risks inherent in fishing activities. Ensuring the availability of necessities and safety tools, such as a cellphone for communication, highlights the value of precautionary measures in securing both livelihood and life. This indicates that women play an indispensable role in enhancing operational efficiency and safety during fishing expeditions. At a broader level, it underscores the importance of promoting safety awareness, access to communication technologies, and preparedness training among small-scale fishing communities, which can significantly reduce vulnerability to accidents and emergencies at sea.

Challenges Encountered by the Women Drift Net Fisher Folks

The challenges that the informants experienced can be classified into: (a) personal issues and constraints, (b) natural-caused issues and problems, (c) Human-caused issues and problems, (d) Mechanical and Technical issues and problems, and (e) other issues and problems.

Personal Issues and Constraints

Lacking Swimming Skills

Considering that the informants have at least 15 years of experience in drift net fishing, it is surprising that the majority of them admitted they do not know how to swim. The remaining participants emphasized that they only have basic or beginner-level swimming skills. When asked how they could survive during disasters, given their low-level swimming ability, they stated that staying on the boat would keep them safe. Carah, Patricia, and Maria stressed that they do not know how to swim and would never let go of their boat if something unfortunate happened at sea.

This finding implies that despite their long engagement in fishing, safety practices are largely dependent on their reliance on the boat rather than on personal survival skills. This underscores a critical vulnerability among small-scale fisherfolk, as their lack of swimming competence increases the risks of mortality during accidents, strong waves, or boat malfunctions. It also reveals a gap in safety education and preparedness within fishing communities. At a broader level, this situation highlights the importance of integrating swimming lessons, life-saving techniques, and access to safety equipment (such as life vests) into community-based fisheries programs. Strengthening these capacities would not only protect the lives of fishers but also enhance the resilience and sustainability of their livelihoods in the face of maritime hazards.

Physically Demanding Tasks

“*Pamukot*” or drift net fishing involves several physically demanding tasks. All informants specified that “*pagbatak*”—the process of retrieving the fishing nets from the sea into the boat by hand—was extremely difficult. Patricia (2023, p. 14) explained, “*tama ka bug-at magbatak sang pukot kapin pa gid kung madamo sang ruruk.*” (Translated:

Retrieving the drift net from the water into the boat is extremely heavy, especially if it caught "*ruruk*".) The difficult process of "*pagbatak*" often resulted in physical strain, causing "*lap-ok*" or blisters and calluses on the hands, as well as shoulder pain and fatigue. "*Ruruk*" refers to tree branches, bamboo, and similar debris carried by the current that often gets tangled in the net, making the task even more strenuous. Moreover, continual and prolonged exposure to the heat of the sun caused skin burns, irritation, and dehydration. Roxanne (2023, p. 15) stated, "*Tungod pirmi ka lang nabulad sa initan, nagakasunog man ang imo panit kag nagagaras.*" (Translated: Because you are always exposed under the sun, your skin gets burned and irritated.)

These findings imply that drift net fishing, while a vital livelihood, exposes fisherfolk to significant occupational health risks. The physical strain of retrieving nets not only causes short-term injuries such as blisters and sunburn but also has long-term implications, including chronic musculoskeletal problems and heightened vulnerability to heat-related illnesses. This highlights the need for improved occupational health awareness, provision of protective gear (such as gloves, hats, and hydration supplies), and the development of appropriate fishing technologies or mechanical aids to reduce manual strain. On a broader scale, it underscores the importance of integrating occupational safety into fisheries management programs, ensuring that the sustainability of livelihoods is aligned with the well-being of the fisherfolk who depend on them.

Time Management.

One of the main challenges specified by the informants was time management. Typically, they begin drift net fishing between 2:30 and 3:00 in the morning and return around 9:30 a.m. Upon arriving, they immediately prepare their catch for marketing by sorting, icing, weighing, and delivering the products to customers. As a result, this routine often disrupts their eating schedule and leads to irregular meal patterns. Maria (2023, p. 13) explained, "*Una gid nga problema, ang time management. Ang pamukot namon gabugtaw kami mga tag 2:30 asta 3 sang morning. Pagkaabot sina isorting pa na sya nmon, butangan ice, kilohon ko naman kag ilibod sa akon customer. Tapos adlaw ka na makakaon, pag abot mo pa sa balay mga 9:30 amo pa na pagpamahaw mo.*" (Translated: Our first problem is time management. We wake up around 2:30 to 3:00 in the morning for drift net fishing. When we return, we still need to sort, ice, weigh, and deliver the fish. By the time we get home, it is already 9:30, and only then can we eat breakfast.)

This finding implies that the demanding and irregular schedule of drift net fishing not only strains the physical endurance of fisherfolk but also affects their health and overall well-being. Skipping or delaying meals may lead to nutritional deficiencies, fatigue, and long-term health complications that can weaken their capacity to sustain their livelihood. Moreover, it reflects how the dual roles of production (fishing) and post-harvest processing intensify women's workload, leaving little room for rest or self-care. At a broader level, this situation highlights the need for livelihood support programs that consider the health and nutritional needs of fisherfolk, such as community-based feeding initiatives, health education, or time-saving technologies in fish processing. Addressing these challenges can improve not only productivity but also the quality of life among small-scale fishing households.

Losing Children's Supervision

As mothers, the informants faced several challenges in supervising their children. Since drift net fishing requires them to wake up very early and often sacrifice sleep, their children were usually left under the care of relatives or left on their own. Donna (2023, p. 4) shared, "*sobra pa lang isa ka tuig asta magdinalagko sila, ginabaya-bayaan na namon kay ugangan para makakita kami nga duwa sang kwarta.*" (Translated: *When my children were still very young until they grew up, we often left them under the care of their grandmother so we could earn money.*)

Most informants also revealed that the highest educational level attained by their children was high school. They explained that many of their children decided to start families at a young age instead of pursuing further studies. Among all the participants, only Roxanne was able to send her children to college. She expressed her gratitude by saying, "*Ang akon bata maGraduate na gid yah sa College, tungod sa pagtinguha para sa allowance, mga project, sa iban pa nga galastusan. Kag blessed gid ako kay maggraduate na ang akon bata.*" (Translated: *My eldest child will graduate from college because of the efforts to provide for allowances, projects, and other expenses. I am blessed that my child will graduate.*) (Roxanne, 2023, p. 11).

The demanding nature of drift net fishing, coupled with limited income, often forces parents—particularly mothers—to prioritize immediate survival over long-term educational investments. The lack of consistent parental supervision may contribute to early family formation among children, perpetuating cycles of poverty within fishing households. Roxanne's case illustrates that with sufficient perseverance and resources, breaking this cycle is possible, but such opportunities remain rare. At a broader level, these accounts underscore the importance of accessible educational support programs, scholarships for fisherfolk children, and livelihood interventions that reduce the economic pressures on families. Strengthening these areas can help ensure that children in fishing communities achieve higher education, thereby enhancing the prospects for intergenerational mobility and community development.

Fear and Uncertainties

Natural-caused Issues and Problems

Inclement Weather

The storm surge, heavy rains, and strong winds that generate huge waves and strong water currents were among the extremely difficult challenges faced by the informants. All of them testified that they have personally encountered storm surges, strong winds, and rough waves while engaged in drift net fishing. Maria (2023, p. 15) described her experience, stating, "*Gaulan gid ya kag grabe ang hangin, kag kung kis-a gaZero-zero visibility ang dagat.*" (Translation: *The rain was heavy, the wind was strong, and sometimes, the sea had zero visibility.*)

In addition, the informants shared their experiences of unfortunate sea accidents that instilled fear in them. Some of the common incidents identified were capsizing, locally referred to as "*nagkulob*", and flooding, or "*nagkapan*". Several informants also revealed

that they had drifted away due to strong currents after losing control over the direction of their motorboats. Carah (2023, pp. 4–5) recalled, "*Pag-upod ko panagat sa akon bana, gulpi lang nabaskog ang ulan. Nagkulob gid ang amon motorboat. Maayo lang kay nakaguwa kami kag narescue sang iban nga mananagat. Gakulurog gid ako sang kulba.*" (Translation: I accompanied my husband in drift net fishing. Suddenly, our motorboat was capsized. Fortunately, we were able to swim out of the motorboat and were rescued by other fisherfolk nearby. I was trembling in fear.)

These accounts reveal the high vulnerability of small-scale fisherfolk to unpredictable and severe weather conditions. The risks they face not only endanger their lives but also threaten their livelihood, as accidents can result in loss of equipment, damaged boats, and reduced fishing productivity. Such experiences emphasize the urgent need for stronger safety measures, early warning systems, and community-based disaster preparedness programs. Moreover, the testimonies highlight the importance of providing fisherfolk with access to more resilient fishing vessels, proper training on maritime safety, and support systems during emergencies. Without such interventions, fisherfolk remain highly exposed to the adverse impacts of climate change and extreme weather events, further perpetuating cycles of poverty and livelihood insecurity.

Loss and Damage of Fishing Materials and Equipment

In some cases, the informants reported losing or sustaining damage to their fishing materials and equipment due to inclement weather or debris, such as tree parts, bamboo, and other materials carried by the strong currents. These floating objects often became entangled in their nets, making them difficult, if not impossible, to retrieve. Carah (2023, p. 17) explained, "*Kung mga dalagku nga kahoy kag mga kawayan nga masab-it sa pukot (ruruk), maguba gid na kag indi mo na makuha ang imo pukot kay kabug-at kag ginabaruron nila ang imo pukot. So bilin mo na gid na ang imo pukot sa dagat.*" (Translation: If large trees or bamboo get entangled in the net, it will surely be damaged, and you cannot retrieve it because it is too heavy and pulls the net down. So you are left with no choice but to abandon the net at sea.)

The loss and damage of fishing gear have significant economic and ecological implications. For small-scale fisherfolk, the cost of replacing nets and other equipment is a heavy financial burden, reducing their already limited income and threatening household food security. Abandoned or lost fishing nets, meanwhile, can lead to "ghost fishing," where marine organisms continue to be trapped and killed, thereby contributing to resource depletion and ecological imbalance. This situation highlights the need for support mechanisms such as insurance for fishing equipment, access to affordable and durable gear, and training in net maintenance and recovery. Additionally, policy interventions on marine debris management and community-driven coastal clean-up initiatives could help minimize the risks of equipment loss and safeguard both the livelihood of fisherfolk and the sustainability of marine ecosystems.

Conclusion

The experiences of women drift net fisherfolk in Buenavista, Guimaras, reveal their critical yet often underrecognized role in sustaining household livelihoods and

community fisheries. Their participation extends from direct fishing tasks to post-harvest processing, marketing, conflict mediation, and emotional support for their families. Despite these contributions, they continue to face formidable challenges, including exposure to occupational hazards, loss of equipment, vulnerability to inclement weather, and constraints in balancing fishing with childcare and household responsibilities. These narratives highlight the resilience and adaptability of women fisherfolk, while also exposing gaps in safety, livelihood security, and institutional support. Ultimately, the study underscores the necessity of integrating women's voices and experiences into fisheries governance to foster inclusive, equitable, and sustainable coastal development.

Recommendation

It is recommended that fisheries programs and policies adopt a gender-sensitive approach that formally recognizes the vital roles of women in drift net fishing. Providing capacity-building initiatives such as safety training, swimming lessons, and access to protective gear can reduce risks and enhance their resilience at sea. Moreover, support systems such as affordable and durable fishing equipment, microfinance, and insurance schemes should be made accessible to ease the burden of losses from damaged or abandoned gear. Educational scholarships and childcare support are also crucial to address intergenerational poverty and help fisherfolk children attain higher education. In addition, strengthening early warning systems, disaster preparedness programs, and resilient boat technologies can mitigate the risks of climate-related hazards. Finally, enhancing women's access to digital literacy and market platforms will expand livelihood opportunities, improve income stability, and ensure that their contributions to fisheries are sustained and valued within the broader framework of community development and marine resource management.

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Transcripts

- Donna (2023). Interview with Researcher
- Roxanne (2023). Interview with Researcher
- Carah (2023). Interview with Researcher
- Patricia (2023). Interview with Researcher
- Maria (2023). Interview with Researcher
- FGD (2023). Interview with a Researcher