
**PROMOTING WOMEN’S SOCIO-ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT THROUGH
TOURISM IN BARRIO BARRETTO, OLONGAPO CITY**

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Abstract

This study investigates the role of tourism in promoting the socio-economic empowerment of women in Barrio Barretto, a prominent tourism hub in Olongapo City, Philippines. Guided by the Input-Process-Output (IPO) model, the research employed a descriptive design, utilizing both structured questionnaires and unstructured interviews to gather data. A total of 150 women employed in tourism-related establishments including hotels, restaurants, wellness centers, and local shops participated in the study. Empowerment was assessed across three dimensions: personal development, family roles, and job roles. Findings reveal that most respondents were 23 years and older, married, and employed in regular or contractual tourism-related positions. High levels of empowerment were observed overall, with the greatest impact noted in personal growth, family responsibilities, and job roles. Significant variations in perceived empowerment were identified based on age, marital status, educational attainment, number of children, and household size. Conversely, no notable differences emerged when respondents were grouped by employment type, spouse’s employment, or monthly income across most dimensions. The study underscores tourism as a strategic avenue for enhancing women’s agency through employment opportunities, income generation, and increased decision-making in both domestic and professional settings. Based on these findings, the study recommends local action plans that emphasize skills development, health and welfare support, legal rights education, community-based women’s groups, and inclusive policy frameworks. Such strategies are vital for institutionalizing gender-sensitive tourism initiatives and fostering sustained socio-economic empowerment among women.

Keywords: Socio-economic empowerment, Women, Tourism, Personal development, Family roles, Job roles

Introduction

The Magna Carta for Women emphasizes the state’s responsibility to recognize, protect, and promote the human rights and fundamental freedoms of women, particularly marginalized groups, across economic, social, political, and cultural spheres. It mandates the full integration of women’s concerns into mainstream development, ensuring opportunities to enhance decision-making, acquire skills, secure productive employment, and contribute meaningfully to their families and communities.

Globally, women account for approximately 70% of the 1.3 billion people living in poverty, yet they earn only 10% of total global income despite contributing two-thirds of the world's working hours (UN Women, 2023). These disparities highlight the urgent need for inclusive economic opportunities that empower women financially and socially.

Tourism has increasingly been recognized as a key sector for promoting women's economic and social empowerment within sustainable development frameworks. Between 2020 and 2025, research has demonstrated tourism's role in creating employment, enhancing mobility, and encouraging entrepreneurship among women, thereby increasing economic autonomy and improving overall quality of life (PIDS, 2023; UNWTO, 2023). Unlike many traditional industries, tourism offers accessible entry points for women, enabling participation in both formal and informal economic activities. Such participation challenges gender norms and fosters equity (Emerald Publishing, 2022; The Guardian, 2024). Successful initiatives in countries including the Philippines, India, Sri Lanka, and Tanzania illustrate tourism's transformative potential in strengthening women from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. Examples include the Lakhpathy Didi program in India and female-run tourism enterprises in Madhya Pradesh, which demonstrate how localized tourism development can drive inclusive growth and social change (Times of India, 2024; Indiatimes, 2024).

Empowerment is defined as the process by which individuals gain the motivation, resources, and agency needed to enhance personal growth and reduce poverty. For women, empowerment involves attaining meaningful employment, financial independence, and the ability to contribute effectively to domestic and societal well-being (Kabir, 2021). Education plays a critical role in this process by equipping women with the knowledge and skills required for informed decision-making regarding careers, services, and access to resources (ICRW, 2022). Gender equality, as defined by the UN Population Fund (UNFPA), entails the equal enjoyment of rights, responsibilities, and opportunities by women and men, highlighting the need to address disparities and enhance women's autonomy (UNFPA, 2020).

In Barrio Barretto, Olongapo City—a renowned tourist destination featuring resorts, restaurants, and cultural attractions—women constitute a significant portion of the local workforce. This environment offers opportunities to enhance personal development, strengthen family roles, and promote professional growth. In this context, empowerment refers to women's ability to thrive in personal, family, and occupational domains. Strong personal development encompasses financial independence, contributions to household income, improved health and lifestyle, access to training, ownership of personal property, informed decision-making, and awareness of women's rights.

Empowered family roles involve shared decision-making, contributions to domestic welfare, responsibility for childcare, financial support, and equitable distribution of household duties, along with the ability to express oneself within the family unit. Empowered job roles include creativity and innovation in the workplace, equal opportunity, accountability, prospects for promotion, workplace flexibility, freedom from discrimination, and meaningful contributions to business performance. Women's demographic profiles—including age, marital status,

education, employment status, income, and household composition—are expected to influence the level of empowerment achieved through tourism engagement.

Methodology

The study used a descriptive research design to investigate the socio-economic authority of women working in the tourism industry at Barrio Bareto, Olongapo City. Descriptive research is appropriate when objective observation is to describe the current conditions or characteristics of the population based on observable facts (Creswell & Creswell, 2022). Research focuses on profile women in tourism and assessing their authority in terms of personal development, the family's role and job roles. In addition, the study focuses at the present condition and to find new truth. A survey technique is useful in proving the value of facts and focusing attention on the most important things to be reported. The research described the women empowerment in the aspects of personal development, family role and job role in order to describe the significant difference of its demographic profile. The population chosen are the residents of the Barrio Barretto, Olongapo City. According to the recent census of Barrio Barretto there are twenty-three thousand (23,000) residents and nine thousand five (9,005) women. A total of 150 women were chosen using targeted methods of sampling and convenience. This combination allowed researchers to focus on participants working in tourism-related establishments such as resorts, restaurants, bars and wellness centers. The sampling technique was guided by the criteria that respondents must be at least 17 years old and permanent residents of the area. The inclusion of younger women (aged 17–18) reflects policies such as the Department of Labor and Employment's Special Program for the Employment of Students (DOLE-SPES), which allows limited youth participation in the labor force for educational and financial support (DOLE, 2022).

Results and Discussions

Table 1 shows the respondent's empowerment in terms of personal development. Respondent are agree that they are financially independent with a mean of three point fifty-nine (3.59), are agree that they in value reputation of being a woman with a mean of three point forty – one (3.41), are agree that they knowledgeable about the rights of woman with a mean of three point thirty – seven (3.37), are agree that they can improve and maintain good health status with a mean of three point twenty – eight (3.28), are agree that they are confident about capability to decide for her improvement with a mean of three point twenty seven (3.27), are agree that they are in control of sexual activity with their partner with a mean of three point thirteen (3.13), are agree that they have the ability to improve lifestyle with a mean of three point twelve (3.12), are agree that they can solely decide to acquire personal property with a mean of three point ten (3.10), are agree that they can contribute to household income with a mean of three point ten (3.10), are agree that they can acquire training and development activities.

With an average mean of three point twenty - four (3.24), result implies that respondent women are empowered to personal development. Employment is the most consideration that contributes to empowerment.

Personal development among women ultimately enhance their employability that may contribute to their household, improve their lifestyle, values, their reputation, self-improvement and knowledgeable about their rights.

Table 1. *Respondent Women Empowerment on Personal Development*

PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT			Remarks
Mean			Agree
Financially independent		3.59	
Values reputation of being a woman	3.41		Agree
Knowledgeable about the rights of woman	3.37		Agree
Ability to improve and maintain good health status		3.28	Agree
Confident about capability to decide for herself improvement		3.27	Agree
In control of sexual activity with partner		3.13	Agree
Ability improve lifestyle		3.12	Agree
Solely decide to acquire personal property		3.10	Agree
Contribute to household income		3.10	Agree
Acquire training and development activities		3.07	Agree
		Average	3.24 Agree

Table 2 shows the family role of the respondents. Respondents are agree that they share decision in difficult situation with a mean of three point fifty-five (3.55), they are agree to enjoy responsibilities to improve home environment with a mean of three point thirty- five (3.35), they agree that can contribute and improve family quality of life with a mean of three point twenty - nine (3.29), they agree that they to enjoy the appreciation of partner and family members with a mean of three point twenty - nine (3.29), that they are agree to shows strong authority in deciding for children's welfare has a mean of three point twenty - nine (3.29), that they are agree to contribute to family expenses with a mean of three point twenty seven (3.27), that they are agree to enjoy expressing thought and feelings during challenging situation with a mean of three point twenty - three (3.23), that they are agree to share decision in acquiring family property with a mean of three point twenty-two (3.22), that they are agree to enjoy the delegation of the household chores among members of the family with a mean of three point seventeen (3.17), and that they are agree to enjoy the delegation of the household chores among members of the family with a mean of three point seventeen (3.17).

With the average mean of three point twenty-eight (3.28), study implies that the respondents agree that they are empowered in their family role. According to the study women who are empowered are capable to enhance and develop a good quality of life, contribute to family expenses, enjoy expressing their feelings and appreciated by their partner and family members

(Sultana et al., 2024; Idris et al., 2023; Khademi et al., 2023). Anyone who can contribute to improve quality of life are commonly appreciated than those contribute less or nothing.

Conclusion

Based on the summary findings, the researchers concluded that, Women working in the tourism sector of Barrio Barretto are moderately to highly empowered in their personal, family, and professional roles. Socio-demographic factors such as age, education, and family structure play a significant role in shaping empowerment levels. The tourism industry provides a critical platform for enhancing women's economic participation and social agency.

Recommendation

Based on the conclusion, the researcher propose to local officials of Barrio Barretto the following recommendation to further strengthen the empowerment of women in Barrio

Barretto;

1. In order to equip women with the skills and knowledge needed to flourish in the tourism industry, it is mandatory to implement the targeted capacity setting initiative. Relevant public agencies, especially the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI), should constitute an organization of business development workshops designed to remove the specific requirements for female entrepreneurs. These workshops should cover important subjects such as financial literacy, marketing, customer service and entrepreneurship. In addition, continuous vocational training should be given, which focuses on new and highly excellent areas such as tourist management, welfare services and digital entrepreneurship. This ongoing support will not only improve women's technical competence, but will also promote innovation and adaptability in a competitive industry
2. Provided that the woman's physical and mental welfare is important for their authority and productivity, social-based health and wellness programs should be preferred. Initiatives such as training activities, stress management workshops and nutritional training can help improve the general health results. Collaboration with local health offices is recommended to facilitate regular reproductive health training and mental health care. These interventions will allow women to maintain a balanced lifestyle, which is important for continuous participation in the workforce and active community engagement.
3. Empowerment is out of financial participation; It also includes ensuring the protection of women's rights and security against exploitation and discrimination. Therefore, partnerships with the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD), as well as recognized non-state organizations (NGO) should be strengthened to conduct a comprehensive legal consciousness campaign. These workshops should educate women about their rights in the workplace, the mechanism for reporting harassment and abuse and the importance of legal support. Such knowledge will strengthen women to safely go in and contribute to a safe and more just work environment

4. In order to build solidarity and collective power in women working with tourism, it is strongly recommended to form the formation of local women's associations. These groups can serve as platforms for colleagues support, share knowledge and collective negotiations. In addition, tourism companies and local authorities should work together to develop and implement policies in the workplace that promote gender equality. The installation of the clear anti -Opponent protocol and the complaint mechanism will ensure that women feel safe and respected, which is fundamental to their continuous participation and progress in the tourism sector.

5. Sustainable empowerment requires systemic changes anchoring in sound policy. Local authorities (LGU) are encouraged to integrate the findings and recommendations of this study in their tourism development and gender mainstream schemes. In order to ensure the efficiency and responsibility of these guidelines, it is necessary to install regular monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. These systems should consider progress towards empowerment goals, identify challenges and report necessary adjustments. By institutionalizing such practice, LGU can promote responsibility, openness and continuous improvement in the development of gender -friendly tourism.

6. Finally, by investing resources and efforts in these strategic fields, including stakeholders - public agencies, voluntary organizations, tourism companies and local communities - can significantly strengthen tourism's role as driver for inclusive development in Olongapo City and authority of women. This overall approach will not only improve the woman's socio -economic status, but will also contribute to the general sustainable development of the local tourism industry.

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