

Empowerment in Coastal Areas: Wives of Fisher Folks' Perspectives

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ABSTRACT

This study explored the feelings and thoughts of women who are wives of fisher folks regarding empowerment based on their experiences. The eight participants-wives of fisher folks of the study were residents of Caoyan, Sta. Catalina, and Santa, Ilocos Sur, respectively, for 3-5 years, at any age during the data gathering, married to fisher folk, and capable of expressing self. Key themes arose from the data, mainly self-worth and manifestations of empowerment. The central theme that appeared from the study is that the participants as a wife, mother, neighbor, and as a member of the society perform responsibly their multifaceted undertakings. Relevantly, the participants are also enjoying their right as women in terms of making choices. Likewise, their being wives of fisher folk do not prohibit them from joining social organizations. The result of the study poses a challenge to the government: 1) The Local Government Unit (LGU) staff shall encourage the wives of fisher folk to continuously join in organizations, especially the fish vendor association, for them

to be protected with their rights and privileges and the Municipal Health Office (MHO) should implement maternal services with an emphasis on the protection of women's reproductive health.

Keywords: decision making, gender roles empowerment, fisherfolk

INTRODUCTION

Women have been subjected to consistent rights abuses while shouldering an overwhelming burden of responsibilities at home. Regardless of social status, religion, or ethnic group, women continue to be disadvantaged when it comes to owning, acquiring, and controlling the property. Also, they have a lesser contribution in terms of decision making in the family and are treated as inferior by men.

The household is the basic unit of society where children first learn their gender roles through socialization, and where power relations built around gender is founded. The gender norms learned in the households are reinforced in the community and institutions within society. It is the parents whom children develop concepts on gender equality and later on practice in their everyday living.

Similarly, both authors also added that wives of fisher folks augment meager household incomes, and to provide for family food needs, the women resort to rearing pigs or poultry in their backyards. Feeding and cleaning livestock adds to their multiple household chores.

In Ilocos Sur, women of fisher folks were mainly active in homemaker types of organizations such as those for health and social welfare. They tend to join Rural Improvement Club (RIC), Fish Vendor Association, and serve as Barangay Health Workers. In the school, they are the ones who attend to parents' meeting, and mostly attend to whatever school obligations and activities required to parents in the school. Oftentimes, they help their husbands in selling their catch and attend to their husbands need. They usually represented their husbands in assemblies of fisher organizations or make themselves as members too. And lastly, they usually perform all the household chores, child rearing and the likes.

Gender equality is a social state in which women and men share the same privileges and a balance of influence, position, chances, and payments. Gender equality can be generally operationalize by men and women taking 1) just access and usage of means, 2) even handed participation in relations, the home, the community, and administrative arenas, and 3) safety and freedom from violence

(Rolleri, 2013).

According to ACQUIRE Project (2008), as cited by Rolleri (2013), gender equity is defined by the Interagency Gender Working Group (IGWG) as “the process of being fair” to people of different genders. Without impartiality, people do not have reasonable access to resources and opportunities that let them to function in society as contemporaries. IGWG also makes the point that “To ensure justice, actions must be taken to compensate for historical and social disadvantages that inhibit women and men from operating on a level playing field.” The goal of gender equality can be achieved through gender equity. An instance of a gender equitable rule in the United States is Title IX, financing and assisting girls’ involvement in school sports, which has traditionally been led by boys. Gender equality does not mean that women and men should become similar, but that women’s and men’s rights, responsibilities, and opportunities will not be governed by whether or not they are males or females. When gender equality happens, a society correspondingly values men’s and women’s likenesses and variances. Because principles about sexual category are determined by several forces and varied experiences in the the Philippine setting (e.g., peers, dating relationships, family, school, community, media, business/industry, government, etc.), using an ecological approach to design interventions to support gender equality in our society is most appropriate.

Empowerment has been defined as the process of increasing the capacity of individuals or groups to make choices and to transform those choices into desired actions and outcomes. On the women’s part, it refers to their being able to decide for themselves, their children and the management of the house as well. However, when it comes to other choices, like major decisions that concern the family, they seemed to have lack the power and ability. Their actions have not been transformed into outcomes that could lift their spirits as women, thus making them vulnerable (In, 2017).

The European Institute for Gender (2017) defines “women empowerment” as the process by which women gain power and control over their own lives and acquire the ability to make strategic choices. Empowerment is the process where women is given the freedom to act by themselves in all aspects, free from restraints, which include the so-called “glass ceiling.” Also, it is something that women nowadays would like to achieve and somehow remove the dilemma put into the heads of every women housewife. That somehow, the power and the choice to change their status as women will change no matter what. The society dictates what it meant to be under the glass ceiling and what it meant to move

freely.

Tsuma (2016) said that, expanding women's economic opportunities means: additional and healthier jobs for women across a broader array of sectors. Also, it denotes business climate that cares for women in initiating and rising the business. Aside from that, it indicates developing their management and entrepreneurial skills, that involves a financial segment in which profitable banks and microfinance establishments offer women with effective contact to a series of financial amenities and goods. These financial amenities and goods are tailored to their necessities like credit and investments instruments most especially in times of expensive food and fuel, greater livelihood, safety for women in remote areas,, and susceptible environments.

It has been a constant scene that household wives of fisher folks take so many responsibilities in the management of the house, the rearing of the children, the service, and devotion to their husbands. These responsibilities make them unable to engage in some activities like the utilization of health services that could help them achieve their optimal health, moreover, for them to take part in worthy community and social activities that will help them operational workers and builders of society. Though they are not entitled to any holiday, rest or break, their sacrifices are often not appreciated, unseen, and unaccounted. To men's eyes, ordinary housewives are dependent on them for the livelihood of the family. Hence, decisions are solely up to the men- a known weakness on the women's part since they were not economically empowered like them.

It is with this premise that the researchers wanted to explore and deal with the thoughts, feelings, and experiences of housewives regarding empowerment in selected coastal areas in Ilocos Sur. Likewise, the study explored how gender empowerment is exercised by them regardless of their status as housewives of fisher folks. It also dealt with some issues and problems concerning their being wives of men who provide for the family. Results of the study would serve as a basis for the government to develop interventions for women's empowerment and improvement in bargaining power. Furthermore, this study would also serve as an eye opener for the government to design programs to address the needs of women who are deprived of their rights. Lastly, the data may be used as a foundation for further studies.

FRAMEWORK

Access to and control over financial assets are often the cornerstone of power in the household. In a country where most women are in the informal sector, men hold the financial advantage in relationships. Financial resources are vital for women's economic self-reliance and development.

According to Courtenay (2000), in numerous communities all over the world, forms of gender inequality occurs where women and "the feminine" were frequently undervalued. Furthermore, men and masculine personalities are favored. Often, men enjoy more authority to regulate decision making in private, civic, and governmental arenas, and women's wants and comforts are under recognized or not sufficiently acknowledge. In such societies, the acquired belief that men should uphold control at all times puts women in situations that impend their health and well-being. When a drive to sustain supremacy over others was enrooted in men, it puts them at risk to various undesirable health consequences.

Hondrade and Rodriguez (1994), as cited by Siason (nd), believed that women in the Philippines regarded men as the "foundation and the head" while women are the "light" of the home. He further said that men should provide for the family financially and must carry heavy work load, while women must solve all the problems and needs of the family and household, safe keep and apportion the husband's meager salaries, and be able to spend wisely for the home needs. The women perceived themselves more as supporters rather than leaders. They sacrificed a lot in doing their home obligations and oftentimes neglect their personal needs. Their role performance is manifested in the duties they render daily. They include child bearing, child-rearing, dishwashing, laundering, house cleaning, vegetable gardening, fuel, and water gathering.

Tsuma (2016) stated that there are five components of women empowerment such as: 1) Women's feeling of self-value, 2) Right to have and make choices, 3) Right to have contact to chances and means, 4) Right to have the mechanism to manage their lives, inside and outside the home, and 5) Ability to impact the way of social change to create a fairer communal and commercial order both in national and international. These five components apply to the profitable range, where women's economic enablement can be attained by implementing initiatives to increase women's economic chances; strengthen their legal status and rights, and safeguard their ability to speak, involvement, and contribution in financial decision-making.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

This study aimed to explore the perspectives of the wives of fisher folks about empowerment based on their experiences.

METHODS

This study employed the qualitative research design of descriptive phenomenology. The phenomenological approach talked about the personal experiences and encounters of the women housewives of fisher folks. The respondents were personally interviewed by the researchers that comprised the totality of their experiences as housewives. The study was conducted from April to July 2019 at the selected coastal areas in Ilocos Sur. The study considered the following participants based on the inclusion criteria: a) resident in the coastal area of Ilocos Sur for 3-5 years b) at any age during the data gathering, c) married to a fisher folk, and d) capable of expressing herself.

The researchers wrote a letter of permission to the Mayors of the different municipalities of Ilocos Sur before the conduct of the study. The participants who met the inclusion criteria were visited in their dwelling and are subjected to individual guided interviews. Before the interview, they were informed about the study, including the purpose, the benefits that they can derive from the study, and the nature of participation. The participants are assured of their privacy and confidentiality. These were done to enable them to participate in the conduct of the study voluntarily.

Audio-recording is done during the interview. A researcher-made interview guide was used as the data gathering instrument because all the data that are observed and shared by the participants, including the non-verbal cues, were taken note. The specific techniques such as informal conversation, semi-structured individual in-depth interview, active and good listening skills, patience, non-judgmental attitude, openness, and flexibility are used during the conduct of the study. The conversation was audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. The data collection was continued until data saturation was met, which means until the time when there was no more new information that was extracted from the interviews.

After collecting the necessary data, a soft copy of the file and hard copy were used for clustering and classifying data. There were three types of files used, namely: the transcript file, personal file, and analytical file. The transcript

file contained the raw data of the interviews and observations. The individual file enclosed the detailed chronological accounts of the participants and their situations. The analytical file restricted the comprehensive examination of the thoughts that developed about the research question as the study progressed as well as the reflections and perceptions related to the research that influenced its direction.

Colaizzi's strategy is used for the analysis. It is done through the following steps: 1) Each transcript file was read and re-read to obtain the overall sense about the whole content, 2) For every transcript file, significant statement was extracted on another sheet noting their ages and line number; 3) Meanings were formulated from the noteworthy statements; 4) The formulated meanings were organized into groups, clusters of themes and themes; 5) The conclusions of the study are combined into an exhaustive explanation of the phenomenon under the study; 6) The fundamental structure of the occurrence is described; 7) Validation of the findings was sought from the research participants to compare the researchers' descriptive outcomes.

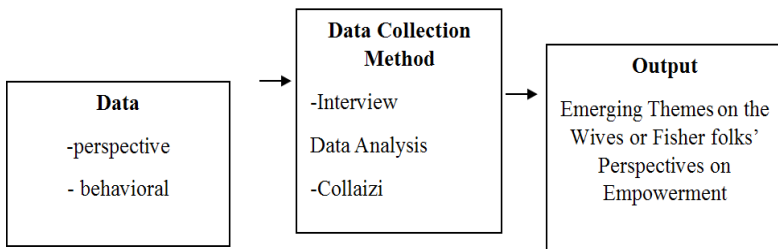
Ethical Considerations. Ethical considerations are observed before the conduct of the study. This study is subjected to review by the Ethics Committee of the University of Northern Philippines to protect the rights and privileges of the participants.

Table 1

Profile of the Respondents

Since the study is qualitative, women were asked only for their age, educational attainment, family structure, and religion on their socio-demographic profile.

Respondents	Age	Educational Attainment	Family Structure	Religion
A	23	College undergraduate	Extended	Roman Catholic
B	43	College undergraduate	Nuclear	Roman Catholic
C	45	Elementary graduate	Nuclear	Roman Catholic
D	32	High School Undergraduate	Nuclear	Roman Catholic
E	34	High School Graduate	Extended	Roman Catholic
F	24	High School Undergraduate	Nuclear	Roman Catholic
G	24	College undergraduate	Nuclear	Roman Catholic
H	33	High School Graduate	Nuclear	Roman Catholic

*Figure 1. The Conceptual Map*

The themes were formulated based on the perspectives and behaviors toward the empowerment of the participants that were derived through interviews. Colaizzi's strategy is used for the analyses of the data gathered.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In today's generation, more and more women are becoming empowered in a lot of aspects. Even stay at home wives of husbands slowly emerged in the limelight and shed empowerment in their specific way. Wives of fisher folks are not the least exempted in their display of this so called empowerment. They have risen from being mere housewives to be a significant other to their husbands, whose foremost role is to provide for the family.

Role performance, most of the time, is based on biological orientation. There is a marked difference between the male and the female as defined and dictated by society as time goes by. Education, domestic labor, child care, professional obligations, societal concerns are the several duties or happenings in a typical social framework. Traditionally, these works had been based on sex like when a female is generally predicted, indulged to do, or concerned in a household effort, child care, and education, leaving professional and societal roles more for the males. However, due to the passage of time, women started to change roles, with men thus creating a sense of empowerment in them.

Theme 1: Self-Worth

This theme focuses on the participants' self-worth based on the roles they perform being a wife, a mother, a neighbor, and a member of the society which were found out during the researchers' examination of the participants.

Role as a wife. This subtheme explains the duties of the participants within the family. According to the participants, their role as wives circulates in the home and in the society in general. As a wife of fisher folk, it is expected of them not only to do the household chores, as emphasized by Participant 1 said: "I can feel that I am important to my husband because I know I can help him." On the other hand, they act as sellers of their husband's catch. Participant 3 said: "I am a big help to my husband because I am the one selling his catch." Almost all of the respondents are selling their husbands' catch, except for one whose mother in law is the one selling her husband's catch.

According to Siar and Cañeba (1998), women subsidized at least 22% to the household cash salary and 40% of the value of voluntary labor. Women's regular partaking in worthy activities, such as fish vending, makes them a great contributors in fishery resources. Because they are expected with the responsibility of solving problems, they were also challenged to make their dream possible in enrolling their children to schools to enable them to overcome scarcity. This

situation, alone makes women one of the toughest investors in the workable growth of fishery incomes.

Another role which is an incidental finding during the interview is the wife's feeling towards the husband, especially during those times that he needs to work. According to a participant, being a wife to a fisher folk is both satisfying and at the same creates a sense of agitation in them. As a wife, they feel happy because they knew that each time their husbands went out for fishing, they know that he would come home providing for the family's needs. Participant 2 said: "I am happy when I see him preparing for work because I know that he will be able to bring income to our family." Participant 3 said: "I am happy that in just one of his catch, I can sell up to 2,000." Economically speaking, the husband can provide for the needs of the family if that is the case. However, on the other side, they fear two things. Participant 1 said: "I fear when he went home bringing nothing because we would not be having money if that is the case." Secondly, Participant 4 said: "I pity my husband because I know his work dangerous and sometimes I do not know what will happen to him while he is there."

Role as a mother. This subtheme explains the responsibilities of the participants to their offspring. It was found out during the interview that as wives, it is expected of them to be looking after the needs of the family, more importantly, the needs of the children. As a mother, they send their kids to school assuring that all of their needs are met from the basic needs up to their needs in school and in other aspects. Participant 5 said: "I am in charge of looking over the needs of our children because I know it is one of my responsibilities as a mother and I know my husband is busy with his work (fishing)."

The discoveries of the study agree with the findings of the research study of Geheb in many societies around Lake Victoria, like other parts of Africa. It was found out that children are the sole responsibility of women, and given the cost of feeding, clothing and sending them to school (Medard, Sobo, Ngatunga, & Chirwa, nd).

Role as a neighbor. This theme explains the tasks of the participants towards other people in their community. According to the wives, their neighborhood comprised of happy individuals sharing common things, from their family's source of income up to their kind of living. Each time one of them needs help, all of them will always be willing to help in any way they can. Participant 4 claimed: "We have a good relationship here ma'am especially that most of us are relatives." Participant 4 further added: "If someone is in need, we do not hesitate to help and no one here in our place fight with each other." Participant 5 jokingly added

when the researchers' noticed them all in manicure, that: "We usually agree to have our manicure done especially when there is an occasion."

Role as a member of the community. This subtheme explains the duties of the participants in their respective barangays. As a member of the community, they got to avail community health services given for free by the government. Most of the respondents said that they go for free prenatal check -up especially when they are pregnant. They go to avail free medicines for themselves and the children. Participant 1 said: "My husband does not prevent me from going to the RHU especially when I go there for check- ups. I can get medicines and vitamins for my children there."

In terms of their involvement in the community as a member in the barangay, they said they participate during clean- up program in the barangay especially in times of festivities. Participant 4 stated: "During fiestas, they have the chance to watch programs in the barangay either as a group (neighbor) or together with their husbands." Participant 6 claimed: "My husband permits me to watch during fiesta, sometimes he even accompanies me."

The findings of the study negate the outcome of the study of Paul, Rumsey, and Rozario, as cited by Story and Burdgars (2012), the husband is frequently involved in assessments about his wife's health care, particularly when it entails her to leave home. This decision making is apparently due to women's restricted mobility and inadequate educational and economic openings in Bangladesh. Since a large number of physicians in Bangladesh are male, women repeatedly need their husband's approval before consultation at the health facility.

Theme 2: Manifestation of Empowerment.

This theme discusses the participants' participation in making choices within the family and with self as well as their contribution to the community organizations in their respective barangays.

Subtheme 1: Decision-making Capacity.

This subtheme describes the capacity of the participants to arrive into important recommendations regarding the necessities of the family and self need of the respondents.

Family matters. This theme focuses on the household needs, everyday expenses, and schooling of kids.

Most of the wives interviewed by the researchers are the primary decision makers in terms of matters affecting the family. Participant 2 said: "I am the

primary decision-maker when it comes to the kids. From going to school and to giving them permission wherever they want to go.” Similarly, Participant 6 said: “I am the one who decides because I know what is needed or I am the one who budgets for the family.” “I am the one who manages our money since I am the one holding the money from the proceeds of my husband’s catch.”

The participant further claimed that their every decision is respected by the husbands as a way of giving them freedom. They feel so happy that their husbands never treated them inferior. Participant 2 said: “I am happy that my husband respects me. He is giving me the right to decide for the family that include the schooling of the children and all expenses at home.”) These statements imply that the wives are no longer just wives that the husbands can dictate upon. They were already given the voice to decide for the family even if they are just plain housewives.

There are two wives, however, who said that both of them make the decision especially when buying items for the family. Accordingly, Participant 5 said: “We usually talk whenever we buy some things. We see to it first that there is something to be left for our expenses. If the money would not be enough, we will not buy.”

Roles and making decisions is a regular part of family dynamics. Also, Becker et. al, Cowen, and Cowen claimed that women often make more decisions about the family (Dekker, 2009).

The upshots of the study conform to the effect of the study of Waseem (2004) wherein management of household finances, as opposite to the control of spending decisions, large with the wife. According to him, in the study made by Edward, low-income family finances were more likely to be managed by the wife; almost all (95 per cent) males, however, had either joint or exclusive control. Few households had joint control of finances.

The outcome of the study conforms to the result of the study conducted among the 72 married couples, by the Iowa University in 2007, wherein women are “the boss” at home. They manifest superior situational authority -- in the form of governing behaviors -- than their husbands during problem-solving deliberations. Women were verbalizing more commanding messages and men were replying to those messages by approving or letting in (Warner, 2007).

Furthermore, Murphy, as cited by Warner (2007), believed that there had been an investigation that proposes that it is an indicator of a healthy marital relationship, that men admit the contributions from their wives.

These findings conform with the statement of Blumstein and Schwartz (1983),

as cited by Dekkers (2009), that mutuality in trust, respect, and understanding were key factors in having successful communication. Likewise, Wiligen and Drentea, as cited by Dekkers (2009), said that communication appeared to be a crucial factor in maintaining and working toward equitable relationships.

The result of the study opposes the analysis issued in 2013 using the European Union Survey on Income and Living Conditions, wherein couples divide and conquer the tasks, as joint decision making about money is less frequent when one half of a couple stays at home (Spencer, 2014).

Personal choices. This theme refers to preference of the participants regarding matters that concern their delicate needs.

Almost all of the wives said that in terms of making personal choices, their husbands never interfered in their decisions. These choices include the use of family planning method, clothing, and their use of cosmetics. Participant 5 claimed: "I have the freedom to go to our health center. I go there to get pills, and I was the one who decided on that." There were two, however, who said that the use of a family planning method was both her decision and her husband. Participant 6 said: "Public services are good, like for example, now, I am using Depo-provera. My husband and I made the decision because of our financial difficulties. We are poor. It is difficult to always give birth. I just bear with its side effects." Participant 5 said: "I am using pills. My husband and I made the decision because of our financial difficulties."

When it comes to clothing and the use of cosmetics, the respondents decide on their own. Participant 3 said: "I just buy if I like it, I do not tell it to my husband anymore because it is cheap anyway, and I do not buy often because there is someone giving us clothes." Participant 3 also added: "I just buy it, I do not tell my husband anymore because my clothes are cheap and affordable, for I am just a simple person."

Regarding the use of cosmetics, Participant 1 said: "I do not tell my husband anymore if I want to make myself pretty like having a pedicure. He just says, "Good for me, if my foot gets injured from the pedicure, but only as a jest." Some of their husbands are also supportive when it comes to making themselves pretty. Participant 3 added: "When it comes to making myself pretty, I do not do it often; my husband himself is telling me to make myself pretty."

Subtheme 2. Membership and being active in different associations/organizations

This subtheme indicates the affiliations and involvement of the participants in the organizations of women and fish vendors in their communities.

As to membership in organization, the husbands let their wives decide on what organization they would like to be affiliated with. Almost all of them are members of Pantawid-Pamilya Pilipino Program 4P's, Rural Improvement Club (RIC), Women' Association, and Fish Vendor Association.

Accordingly, their membership somehow have given them the freedom to be associated with other members as well as bring them sort of confidence. Participant 6 said: "I am a member of Women's Association and my husband did not prohibit me from joining." One of them is even a Barangay Health Worker (BHW). Participant 7 added: "I am a BHW. But since I am pregnant, especially that I have high blood pressure, my husband already forbids me. We are the ones accompanying the doctor on information dissemination". Lastly, their membership somehow has brought them contentment and happiness. Participant 6 stated: "We are happy ma'am, especially when our organization has programs and celebrations. We are contented that even if we are just housewives, we have an organization that we can be proud of."

According to Jentoft and Chuenpagdee, as cited by Población and Siar (2018), fisher folk groups are varied, multiple, and lively. Their presence, achievement, and solidity over time are, therefore, reliant on a complex set of various factors like the environmental, cultural, political, and social factors.

According to FAO, World Fish Center, and ARD, as cited by Población and Siar (2018), the countless assistances made by women and the manifold roles they play in fisheries have gained growing appreciation globally in the past years.

Taking into account the extent of their involvement of women as stated by Weeratunge, Snyder and Choo, as cited by Población and Siar (2018), and the involvement of women to fisheries as claimed by Harper et al., as cited by Población and Siar (2018), one would presume women to possess equal access to membership and decision making in fisher folk organizations.

Adequate respect of women's human rights would create equal access to fisheries organizations and decision-making positions in fisheries-related associations. Whereas equal access to sharing and control in fisheries is still a thrusting goal, there are fruitful cases from which crucial teachings can be learned to guide efforts to reach this aim (Población & Siar, 2018).

Served as a model to others despite being a wife of a fisherfolk. This theme discusses how the participants could influence others to create a social change.

Despite being a wife of fisher folk, the respondents are proud to be a model and an inspiration to others. Their husbands are proud of their ability to manage their earnings, especially that most of them do not go out and get loans from

the lending facility. Participant 1 said: “I am proud of my ability to manage the earnings of my husband. We do not go and avail loans from the lending organizations.”.

According to them, they do not feel ashamed that they are selling their husband’s catch. To them, it is a decent job, and they know that they are doing their best to fulfill their duties and obligations in the family. Participant 2 said: “I will never be ashamed that I am a wife of a fisher folk because I know that I can be a model of fisher folk’s wife.” Participant 6 said: “I know how to prioritize my family and that I know how to manage our money.

Based on the result of the study, there are two broad emerging themes that are fomulated: 1) self-worth and 2) manifestations of empowerment.

CONCLUSIONS

Women perform multifaceted roles not only as a wife to their husbands but as a mother to their children, as a neighbor, and as a member of the community. The performance of their multiple tasks makes them have a sense of fulfillment or self- worth as a woman. There being an active decision- maker in the family gives them the power to exercise their rights and helps them enjoy their lives to the fullest.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The results of the study pose a challenge to the government to:

- 1) The Local Government Unit (LGU) to encourage the wives of fisher folk to continuously and actively join in the different organizations, especially the fish vendor association, for them to be fully protected of their rights and privileges and;
- 2) The Municipal Health Office (MHO) to actively implement other maternal services for women with emphasis, on the protection of women’s reproductive health like Pap Smear since FP and prenatal are the only services they have availed.

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