

Life Narratives of Women-Recipients of University-Designed Extension Programs

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Abstract Women's involvement in community activities is common in university-designed extension programs. This paper explores the life stories of women who believed there were changes in their quality of life and relationships with their families and other women as a result of participating in these activities. Focusing on producing gourmet gourami (bottled fish), a focus-group discussion was conducted among nine women-volunteers in a rural community in Quezon, Philippines. The academic and community collaboration produced women who perceived themselves as equals to their partners and advocates for change. This translational process from theory to practice was seen as helpful by the participants and led to motivating others to participate. The research may be a platform for stakeholders, especially academicians and policy-makers,

to consider concentrating on how university-learned ideals and knowledge can be beneficial for community members.

Keywords: *community work, extension programs narratives, women, life-narratives, women-empowerment*

Introduction

Translating knowledge and research to be understandable for communities is an immense task. Helping communities become better has been a primary goal of universities when it comes to addressing its tripartite responsibilities – instruction, research, and extension. Under extension, the goal of universities is to develop community programs that are reflective of their vision and advocacies. When it comes to teacher-education institutions in the Philippines, community advocacies range from literacy, livelihood education, community leadership, and parenting, among others. Moreover, there are examples of improving the livelihood (Daquis, Flores, & Plandez, 2016), welfare, and wellbeing of barangay folks (Laguador, Mandigma & Agena, 2013); empowering the vulnerable members of society to be self-reliant citizens, responsible and conscientious individuals (Codamon-Dugyon, 2016); and women in agricultural communities (Trauger, Sachs, Barbercheck, Kiernan, Brasier, & Swartzberg, 2010). Others include helping women to have more income at their disposal which would improve health, nutrition, and education for children (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2013); how students benefit from their involvement in extension activities (Laguador & Chavez, 2013); and the academe in general (Llenares & Deocarís, 2018). In other countries, research in community programs developed by universities involved analyzing youth violence and gang membership (Bhatt & Tweed, 2018); fostering social support, leadership competence, community engagement, and

resilience (Yeh et al., 2015); listening to women's experiences (Koelsch, Bennett, & Goldberg, 2017). There is also evidence that community engagement among rural women promotes empowerment among adult women and adolescents to claim their rights, specifically, those pertaining to their womanhood and reproductive rights (Metwally, Saleh, El-Etreby, Salama, Aboulghate, Amer, et al. (2019).

In terms of societal contributions, Filipino women have continuously contributed to the development of their communities. In fisheries for example, women are instrumental in developing the municipal fisherfolk and establishing productivity enhancing and market development programs in fishing (Sharma, 2004). In addition, their roles in fishing communities encompass pre-harvest to fish processing to taking care of their families. This study seeks to add to the growing literature on women's family roles in the context of fishing communities by highlighting women's voices.

Women's participation in communities is noteworthy. In addition to their roles in fishing, women play crucial roles in the care and nurturance of their families and communities. The concerns of these women extend from needing to know about fishing depletion and degradation of resources, to looking for other sources of available income to help run the family (Sharma, 2004). In the case of women in non-fishing communities, participation in various programs developed for their communities is indispensable. In Micik's (2011) article, advances in technology are opening doors for women and farming is now seen as a viable career choice. With the socioeconomic changes in the country, leading women in communities to find ways to provide for their families is one of the ways the academic sector is perceived to be empowering women. Women undertake community activities alongside their home duties and this helps them develop cohesion as a group of women engaged in similar household and community responsibilities (Cortiñas et al, 2011). When community

members are provided with ways to use their resources, they become more capable of recognizing, analyzing and utilizing local knowledge to produce products that they can make a living for. This is the case with rural communities in the Philippines where members rely on the available community resources. Natural resources are also the main consideration of agencies in designing programs for these communities. This will highlight the kind of transformative aims that will strengthen women's ability to make decisions and to act for themselves as well as maximizing the outcomes of their efforts (Mutongu, 2012). Furthermore, according to Henry (2011), community participation becomes meaningful if it extends beyond physical involvement to include generation of ideas, contributions to decision making, and sharing of responsibility.

Context of the Community Development Program

The community program developed by Philippine Normal University which is a teacher education institution (TEI) is a livelihood program using the community's natural resources. Situated in the Quezon province, the community is near a lake which is an endemic source of fish usually consumed fresh or dried. Some of the catch include tilapia (African cichlid fishes), mudfish, catfish, jungle perche, gobies, and gourami among others. The extension program was developed sometime in 2014, however, earlier activities related to community development were implemented under the different departments. This had been monitored by the university over the past 8 to 10 years.

Prior to TEI-entry, the women community members' sources of income were weaving fans and selling sweets made from sticky rice. The TEI developed a community program, training the women to increase their livelihood skills by teaching cooking (e.g. siopao), and preparing gourmet tuyo, or gourami fish in bottles like the sardines

in oil that are usually sold in stores. The skills learned and developed were used in developing other gourmet-related preserved food.

Women and Community-Based Programs

Rissing (2013), posited that livelihood programs intended for women provide not only mentoring and networking, but also camaraderie and interpersonal relations among women. Participation in community-based development depends on the accountability from central authorities to community organizations, in this case the local government unit (e.g. barangay board). Community programs are successful because of its increased efficiency and cost effectiveness in such a way that projects depend heavily on changes in behavior at the community level. The academic-community partnership ensures social and civic-engagement when it comes to the implementers (usually the faculty and students) because the programs designed had been based on theory and practice; and the receivers, the community members, since the programs may mean an improvement of their current situation.

The program was anchored on the empowerment theory of Perkins and Zimmerman (1995) as this is applicable for the community setting (Herwaman, 2005), or neighborhood organization (Charvis and Wandersoon, 1990). The theory highlights increasing community or group competencies while promoting diversity (Moritsugu, Vera, Wong, & Duffy, 2013). The objective of empowerment is to set individuals, groups, and communities to reach their full potentials (Perkins, 2010) or gain control (Peterson & Zimmerman, 2004) through democratic participation (Rappaport, 1987), encouraging participatory actions (Perkins, 2010) or active approach to problem solving (Kaminski et al., 2000) and citizen participation (Xu, Perkins, & Chow, 2010). It is focused on building a community (Moritsugu, Vera, Wong, & Duffy, 2013).

Empowerment theory (Perkins & Zimmerman, 1995) encompasses both processes and outcomes. Zimmerman (1995) described empowerment as a process, “how people, organizations, and communities become empowered” and outcomes “the consequences of those processes.” Perkins (2010) mentioned that the observable outcomes of empowerment activities is the life and outlook-changing view of the individuals, organizations, and whole communities in the domains of adult well-being, positive youth development, locality development, and social change (Maton 2008). In order to maximize the effectiveness of empowerment activities, Perkins (1993) recommends doing it with smaller, locally-organized community interventions at the grassroots level (Perkins, 1995) and equipping them with the appropriate type or level of support (Vargas, Flores, Beyer, Block, & Vella, 2015).

The entry of educational institutions in the community to share their resources and expertise is considered empowerment interventions (Faucette & Colleagues, 1984) to increase individual control over important aspects of their lives. The process of intervention by these educational institutions is to develop, design and implement programs to train individuals to learn new social technologies and apply it to solve community problems or enhance community resources (Faucette, Seekin, Whang, Miriu, and Suarez de Balaguer, 1984) The resources developed may include special skills (e.g. leadership, problem-solving) social support, or knowledge (Zimmerman, 2000). It can be also described that the kind of engagement of the community and the school-based professionals is more of collaborators instead of authoritative experts (Perkins, & Zimmerman, 1995). That is why, in the delivery of empowerment programs the goal is to work collaboratively with local leaders to make community organizations more effective and responsive

in addressing social, economic, health, education, and environmental problems (Perkins 2010), and wellness, (Christens & Perkins, 2008). The theory of empowerment is aligned to universities extension activities as it hopes to build and help local communities that are inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable through its extension projects, programs, and activities.

The increased efficiency and cost effectiveness of community programs can be reflected in the changes into the lives of the community members. Studies on extension programs in the Philippines are concentrated on agriculture and are done by institutions with agriculture-related courses (Ammakiw, 2013; Laguador & Chavez, 2013; Llenares & Deocarís, 2018). It is interesting to note that published studies on successful university-designed programs were primarily related to how the community sustainably uses their natural resources. In Leyte, for example, Baynes et al. (2011) looked into farmers' mental models in addressing agroforestry concerns such as visual tree establishment, wherein concerns were discussed and investigated. On the other hand, Rubio et.al. (2016) explored how students saw the benefit of conducting extension programs in various communities when it comes to studying how these communities grow. The present study provides information on how women, in particular, have formulated understandings on the essentials of the extension program afforded to them. Most importantly, the study delves into the lives of these women and navigates how they learned sustainable living, and explores its impact to their families.

When it comes to women-participation, protecting women against discrimination brought about by long-standing cultural traditions, is strengthened by promoting gender equality. Increased female participation has been observed in communities where women are considered part of the decision-making process (Christia, Enikolopov,

Beath, & Bank, 2013). It can also be noted that community programs, especially interventions towards abuse, gang-related violence, and the like, increase women's involvement in community life as reflected both in women's increased activity outside the household and in making men and women more accepting of empowered women (Deka & Borbora, 2017). As manifestations of empowered women in the community, females should be allowed to participate in community governance to improve economic conditions (Cortiñas, Dalwampo, De Guzman, Galomo, Untalan, 2011). Specifically, communities became accepting of women leading them such as in selecting those who will serve in community and village councils. The study outcomes showed an increase in the perceptions of women-socialization and community-economic participation. Likewise, income-generating jobs determine women's economic independence. This is aligned with the notion that the economic lives of women improve, as their economy develop. As the economic situation improves, women are given opportunities to have better access to various institutional options such as education and empowerment. Building the human capital of women and girls are essential building blocks for agricultural productivity and economic growth (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2013).

Women's Role in the Community

On the other hand, women's choices affect economic development, which includes market work, family production and leisure in various ways (Mon, 2000). As an economy grows, females become more educated, and increasingly aware of the importance of being independent. Hence, they may choose to participate more actively in the market. A better understanding of how women are empowered include being part of community organizations and having a voice on a national and international level. The representation brings about meaningful participation and

would better address the needs of other women. If women acquire authentic participation, they can gain more control over their own lives and become more fruitful in it alongside males (Mutongu, 2012).

The study is mainly concerned with the life changes that happened among the women who participated in these extension activities. The research addresses the insights that formed among the women recipients as relationships between them were formed over the years. As the women's roles in the family were explored, relationships formed between and among the members of the extension groups were highlighted. Most importantly, the narratives emphasized how the women used what they learned in improving their family's quality of life and ensuring their families have a good life.

The study is significant because there is a dearth of research about what happens after extension programs have been implemented. The study explores whether the women see what has been taught as something useful or aligned with what they need. Lastly, it highlights the roles of women in contributing to their well-being and that of their families based on what they learned from programs which could be a significant data for future gender and development programs involving women.

Theories of Women Empowerment

The main unit of analysis of the study focused on contextualizing through the life narratives analysis and in general it made reference to the Social Relations Approach (SRA) gender-analysis framework (Carr, 2003; Miles, 2016; Ofreño, and Hega, 2010). However, the study focused on how communities benefit from the changing roles of women and empowerment and did not highlight the institutional

analysis of gender inequality (Miles, 2016). The study utilized Kabeer's (1994) conception of development as well-being. Development is seen not just in terms of the economic realm, but goes beyond it and looks at the individual as a whole person. Thus, Kabeer (1994) sees development as covering the various dimensions of well-being (e.g. autonomy, dignity). In this research, women's sense of dignity in improved relationships within the community and family contexts emerged from the narratives as effects of the extension programs provided by an educational institution.

This framework was likewise used in analyzing women empowerment in Malaysia (Miles, 2016) and the Philippines (Ofreneo and Hega, 2010). In the Philippines, women empowerment studies focused on strengthening food security in response to disasters. The inequalities were addressed by women establishing organizations among women informal workers to create sustainable livelihood programs to address food security concerns and increase their income. The organizations established increased women empowerment and has done a great impact in transforming gender relations.

Women's Stories and Community Studies

The study's narrative analysis was based on McAdam's life narratives perspective. Narrative identity (McAdams & McLean, 2013) is defined as a person's story which is evolving. It reconstructs the past while creates an imagined future. Women's narratives in the literature of community studies focused on representations of alcohol use among women (Drabble & Trocki, 2014); how country women are driven to work in China's factories due to need for labour (Edwards, 2011); poetic representations to depict their life and their emotions (Ram, 2007); women's attributions of their successes in science, business and finance, and politics

(Schlosser, 2001); and in describing how economic insecurity prompted women to work in jobs previously presumed to be beyond their capabilities (Evans, 2014).

The identities that women took and how these developed over the course of being part of an extension program are integral to determining their sense of self and community. The life narratives as described by McAdams (2013) details changes when it comes to changing roles and dynamics within the family. In order to explore the life-changes of the women in the community after being part of the various development programs ran by a TEI, the following are further addressed: describe the life experiences of women in the community and identify the life changes women experienced when provided the opportunity to be part of an extension program in the areas of roles and insights

Methodology

Research Design

The study used McAdam's framework in analyzing the community women's life experiences. Life narratives provide information on a person's identity construction, internalized and evolving life story (McAdams & McLean, 2013). Narratives as a qualitative design was chosen because studies involving women in communities highlighted stories of belonging, achievement and success (Yeh et al., 2015). The life narratives were expected to be told focusing on describing their lives prior to programs provided by the institution and the changes they experienced after learning and being an active part of the community.

In using the life narratives, the respondents are able to unbox their goals and aspirations (McAdams, 2001)

based on the stories they disclose. These chapter-like sharing reveal integration and meaning, which will eventually provide a picture of how a person developed. Likewise, life stories reflect the relational dynamics of the story-teller, his or her values, norms and power differentials inherent in the society the person belongs to (McAdams, 2001).

Participants

Participants included nine women aged 32 to 65 years old with a mean age of 47.22. All are residents of the community and had been there for more than 10 years with one living there all her life. All are married, some with children, while two already have grandchildren. The participants volunteered to be part of the study based on a request to be interviewed forwarded to the community officials. Incidentally, six of the women were active members of the community council (barangay level). All participants consented to taking part in the study after they read the consent form. The risks and benefits were discussed, and they were provided options to withdraw from the interview process if they are not comfortable with the process. All interviews were recorded by electronic device. To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, the participants were given a code name or pseudonym for the purpose of data reporting.

Instrument

An interview guide with a general script was developed in Filipino (as the medium of instruction). The questions were prompts for the respondents to share their stories, which is why it follows a chronological view of providing answers such as what happened before, during and after their decision to be part of community activities. The questions focused on descriptions about their community and the relationships between and among the community members.

A focus group discussion (FGD) was undertaken among the women respondents. The process took two hours and 35 minutes to finish. The focus group discussion served as an effective tool since the narratives were perceived as multi-voiced and co-constructed (Figgou & Pavlopoulos, 2015). Narratives were collected from the shared experiences of the community women. A process observer was assigned to take note of the discussion-flow and to examine whether there were questions left unanswered and conflicts that were unresolved. The whole process was recorded after the women gave consent to participating in the study. Demographic questionnaires were provided followed by discussing individually with the participants the nature of the study, risks and benefits of participating, and how their narratives would inform the improvement of the extension program delivery.

Data analysis was done through analysis of the life stories by addressing the temporality of the individual's reconstruction of their narratives (Demuth & Mey, 2015). However, the small stories pertaining to the changes occurring before and after the extension programs were highlighted. A narrative thematic analysis was used to scrutinize and focus on the experiences of the respondents. The analysis was based on Butina's (2015) thematic analysis using five stages. The stories were first organized and prepared in such a way that what happened before, during and after the extension programs became the flow or format of the narratives. This was followed by obtaining a general sense of information, e.g. when did the women experience difficulty and when did they feel liberated from those difficulties. Third, coding was done in relation to getting the meaning of the narratives based on the co-constructed views of the participants. This was followed by obtaining a general sense of information, such as when did the women experience difficulty and when did they feel that they were liberated from those difficulties.

Data Verification and Validation

An expert audit review and audit trail were done to verify data and ensure its validity. The findings were presented to a group of graduate students and the researchers' colleagues (referred to as auditors) to assess the quality of data analysis. The expert audit review showed areas where the auditors agree on the themes based on scrutinizing the coding process. In the process of the review, the researchers discussed with the auditors their biases (assumptions, past experiences, and orientation) that might shape the interpretation of the study. Lastly, validation was performed by means of an audit trail where a documentation of the trail or steps were presented to the experts in the audit review. Detailed procedures used for data collection and analysis were authenticated by the experts and were found to be in order in as far as objectivity is concerned.

Findings: The Life Experiences of Women in the Community

The narratives were concentrated on how the community women lived as a member of the Lalaguna community. They described their difficulties in making ends meet as a homemaker and as a partner of their husbands in earning money for their families. Lastly they narrated how their lives were affected by the extension program of the university.

The life narratives provided a multifaceted view of how the community women saw the extension program developed by a university. The following themes emerged from the life stories and brought context to how the community women believe the programs affected their lives.

The community provides resources, safety, and a feeling of “oneness”

The women saw their community as rich in natural resources. Their descriptions of the natural flora and fauna include having enough space for different types of vegetation, and the possibility of raising livestock. However, the narratives focused on marshlands where they can harvest a variety of fish and serve as tourist attraction during the dry season.

The community’s rich resources provide its community members with varied livelihood possibilities. The area has plenty of coconut trees and fan palms used in making fans, which is the community’s main livelihood. Likewise, the women see their community as safe and that the people cooperate and work towards their community’s development. The women see their community as relatively peaceful.

“Dito po sa amin sa barangay lalaguna ay tahimik po ang lalawigan naming.... Nagkakaisa kapag nagpapatawag ng meeting, ay nagsisidalo sila”. (Roxanne, 36) (Our barangay is tranquil. We work as a team, like when there is a meeting, our community members attend).

This perception is resonated in the descriptions of the other women interviewed. They see their community as a place where they can raise their families safely.

Life changes among Community Women

The life stories were further analyzed in terms of changing roles and insights gained by the women. Descriptions as regards to their participation were explored and the person they have become during, before and after the program were explored. Women participation is based on need, obligation, or a desire for emancipation.

Most of the women respondents were initially reluctant to be part of the program. Some of them, Patricia (38), Roxanne (36), and Teresa (42) shared that they joined because they had no means of earning a living. Participation means making money out of what they will learn. Other members saw participation as an obligation. Being married to a community official (barangay kagawad) meant they are required to participate in such activities. Lastly, there were those women who intrinsically want to learn because they know that by being a part of the group they will be able to personally develop and fulfil their need for learning.

“Ako po ma’am dati po ay simpleng maybahay lang po. Yung asawa ko po dati, pag-aalaga po ng baboy talaga ang pinagkakakitaan po namin.” (Malou, 32). (I used to be just a simple housewife. My husband and I, we used to make a living just out of raising livestock).

In identifying themselves as being poor, the community women saw this as a lifelong struggle. This propelled them to become part of activities that promise to give them new skills by using the resources they have. Their participation in the university-designed program made them see that they can provide for their families. The women were able to learn from the university new skills specific to preserving food, making bread, and creating crafts.

“Sa akin malaki po ang naitulong ng xxxx dahil nga sa aking natutunan ay naibahagi sa aking kapurok, kabarangay.” (Armi, 59). (I learned a lot from the university, and I share them with the other members of the community).

The additional learning made them capable of earning for their families, thus being able to provide for the needs of their children. These needs include the basic necessities and their educational needs.

The community women acknowledge the need to provide for their families but see their limitations

The theme focused on what women believed before the program. Before the program, the community women narrated knowing one livelihood skill, making abaniko/pamaypay (hand-held fan). Although they tried and are still earning from selling cooked food, they acknowledge that they need to address most of their children's education-related needs. Addressing the needs include strengthening one's faith because they believe that by praying, their wishes will be fulfilled. Almost all of the women interviewed wish for their children to finish school and get a college degree.

Although there were efforts to provide the women with training, some of them consider the lack of capital to jumpstart the activities. While expressing discontentment with their status, the women persevered by encouraging others to join them in the program. This driven attitude led to more women participating in the various activities developed by the university. Thus, the university became part of their households because the women cooked for their families using the techniques learned from the activities.

The community women became active supporters of the program.

The women became advocates of the program. They were able to pass on what they learned to their neighbors and children, as well as promote the program in the nearby communities. There were also narratives about how the women promoted the program through the establishment of their own small enterprise by applying the cooking skills that they learned from the university-designed extension program

“Nagnegosyo pa rin po ako para makatulong ako sa barangay. Sa paghuluto naman po, naturuan

din po ako, kasi hindi po ako marunong magluto. Sabi ko “ay salamat, matututo na rin akong magluto.” (Teresa, 42). (I started my business to help the community, I learned to cook because I did not know how to. I was thankful because I learned to cook (because of the program)).

The sense of community formed between and among women motivated those who were having problems in participating. The problems include tending to their children and ensuring that their families will have something to eat. The women helped one another by letting children go with their mothers during the sessions, be fetched from their houses before the session begins and provided emotional support to each other.

The community women described the extension program as a lifetime commitment. Likewise, they saw the program as an extension of their lives and had taken the responsibility to entice other women to join them. This self-development process led them to appreciate their roles in their communities as provider of support to members who may need to be trained in the areas taught to them and in terms of social support. That is why some of the women are unhappy when other women they invite are unable to join them.

“Nakakalungkot po na kahit patuloy kaming nanghihikayat na sumama at naghahanap ng trainee, pero dahil nga rin po sa kahirapan, hanggang pagpapamaypay lang po muna sila, kaya kami at kami lang po yung nakikinabang.” (Roxanne, 36). (I am sad when I invite other trainees, they cannot come because of poverty. That is why only a few are given the opportunity).

The women noticed higher participation rates among those who were interested to learn. They recognized changes between and among them: one member used to be

shy but has become expressive with her thoughts as the program progressed. Others were able to apply what they learned and used it to earn for their families. Ultimately, the women recognized their role in empowering other women to participate.

The community women became a “*katuwang*” of their partners

One emerging theme from the narratives include a changing perspective among women with regard to their role in their families. The women see themselves as a “*katuwang*” or an equal partner of their husbands. In the earlier narratives, the women described themselves as being a homemaker and do not have the means to financially provide for their families. However, due to their participation in extension activities by the university, they admitted seeing their roles change.

“Natutuwa po yung mister ko dahil siya’y nangingisda rin, napakinabangan naman po yung natutunan. Nakita ko rin naman din po.” (Malou, 32). (My fisherman husband is happy because he saw that I was able to make use of what I learned. I am also aware of it). Is this the correct translation?

The women felt empowered because of the changing role and expressed how they want others to benefit from the program.

When probed about the way they see themselves as mothers and women community members, the women described their families as not having enough. Except for Armi (59), Tita (64), and Chie (65), who narrated having better lives now, most of the community women saw themselves as having the burden to address their family’s needs. There is a general perception of not having enough for the family among the interviewed women. This leads to

perceived inability to contribute to one's family stemming from their financial shortcomings. Problems such as producing the right amount of capital to start up a business arise as well as pressure to look for ways to contribute to the family needs.

“Sa akin naman po noong kami ay bagong mag-asawa sa totoo lang kami ay walang wala Ang hanapbuhay namin ay pag-aabaniko. Ang naging puhunan lang po namin sa paghahanapbuhay ay pag-aabaniko.” (Armi, 59) (When my husband and I were just newly married, the truth is, we were really poor. We made a living through making fans. We did not have any other means of making a living except for making fans).

The point of views of the women centered on being poor and making ends meet for their families. They have been doing what they learned from their parents, making fans and have accepted their fate as fan-makers.

Discussion

Life stories provide perspective on the physical, behavioral and social development as influenced by the local, social and ecological conditions (Vigil & Geary, 2006). The stories provided by the women reflect both the communal experience of living in poverty and the diverse perspectives in relation to getting by. All women participants were married, this affected their views of their responsibilities. The married women with no children saw themselves as partners of their husbands, however, their goal was to be able to save money to buy land or livestock. The goal becomes different among women with children, their goal is to ensure that their children would have a better future. This highlights having more resources

to invest in parenting and that parenting quality affects child development (Vigil & Geary, 2006).

Experiences and activities associated with the university-designed extension programs were significant to the women when it came to skills development, livelihood improvement and relationship enrichment. The women specifically pointed that their relationships with other women improved because they felt responsible for the other women to be part of the program too. This feeling of social support is particular in studies highlighting the cultural values of collectivist communities (Yeh et al., 2015). The communal view that they are all working towards the improvement their families led to looking out for each other rather than competing with each other. The women saw that the natural resources can better be used when others are included. This inclusive-focused perspective is the highlight of the women's meaning-making process. Having a sense of close ties with community persons is perceived to be a protective factor among women (Bhatt & Tweed, 2018). Moreover, resonant with Kabeer's (1994) ideas on development as beyond the economic dimension, the quality of relationship between wife and her partner changed with the help of the community programs. This improved the woman's sense of dignity. The participant is more able to contribute in making the family financially-able. If the woman did not use her learnings for income, she still sees herself as able to improve her family's quality of life by integrating what she learned to address her family's needs and teach her children these learnings. The community women saw themselves as better parents and because they perceive themselves as better, the children are protected from a host of negative effects found for children who come from families in adverse conditions (Graham-Bermann & Miller-Graff, 2015).

The current study resonates with the findings of

women-empowerment studies (Miles, 2016). The women-participants were able to muster strength in their connections with other women. Although this may highlight change in their families, work should still be done in being able to gain power in the community. The information that the women are currently serving the community council is a good indicator of the change in power, however, there should be further investigation with regard to power dynamics and social relations between the women-recipients and the other older and male members of the community.

The partnership between the community and institution gave numerous opportunities to practice the women's organizational skills. The women are able to go from house to house and invite other women to participate in the university's extension programs. Although a number of women are not able to participate because leaving their families meant not being able to earn for the day, the women that they were able to invite turned out to be satisfied with their involvement. This community of support among women is one take-away of the program. The connection and dynamics between and among women showed how programs can increase community engagement (Yeh et al., 2015). The women who had limited access to resources were provided with opportunities to explore their environment and widen their skills as a result of creating something from what is predominantly available.

The community women advocated for change

The theme concentrates on how women saw themselves as advocates for change. Their narratives show how they encourage other community women to participate in the extension program. This is done by asking their neighbors to come with them to the activities, share their life stories and find courage from doing things together.

Likewise, the women learned to teach what they have learned to other women, thus giving them opportunities to provide for their families. They believe that the women may be able to use the learning whether it may be to have additional income or contribute to their families (e.g. improved meal plans). Lastly, the community women related that they pass on to their children the skills they learned.

Limitations

In general, the areas seen to be improved were on relationships, roles taken and their quality of life. The women became empowered and advocated for the programs to continue with the aim of sustaining the program by putting up support groups for other women. However, the women who shared their stories were all married, and the perspectives of those who are single have not been captured in this study. While the extension programs were designed to include women who are single and young, their participation was limited due to reasons including studying, taking care of their siblings, or participating in other community activities for adolescents and young adults. Likewise, the extent of the program covered include a three-year designed program with food preparation and preservation as the main livelihood program.

Conclusion

The theory of empowerment was demonstrated by the sample respondents through the diversity of their stories while promoting a sense of oneness in actualizing the vision articulated by the program. Findings from this study showed how university-designed extension programs influence the lives of community women. The study presented women who were able to become effective decision-makers

at home and had influenced other women to take an egalitarian stand in the community. One of the worthwhile outcomes of the extension program is community engagement. The women became advocates of change as far as empowerment is concerned. The changing roles led to their male partners seeing them as equals. This study which focused on community development and women's studies provided significant insights as to how changes in family and community dynamics have been observed and are continually happening. One relevant insight from the study is that when given the opportunity to earn and develop on their own, women continue to choose to look after their family's welfare. This being the case, a number of studies may be directed to exploring changes in women's lives brought about by the different private and public institutions' programs. The community women at the start believed that life was difficult, although they may still have the same beliefs, involvement in the program improved this perception and engaged the women to take active roles in pursuing the good life. A significant take-away from the study is that in implementing community programs, it is important to teach women, because in return they will seek to teach the other members of the community and their families. These cycles of teaching and re-tooling through the women who were once participants, are indicators of success in a program designed to help communities. This may be a platform for stakeholders, especially academicians and policy-makers, to consider concentrating on how university-learned ideals and knowledge can be translated to knowledge that will be beneficial for community members. The goal of using research to qualify and quantify change in extension programs is a valid direction to gauge the types of programs to be developed.



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