Strengthening iCare Project of the Techno-Unlad Program: Basis in the Enhancement of a Gender—Based Capability Building Program

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Abstract

This study investigates the enhancement of the Gender-Based Capability Building Program within the iCare Project of the Techno-Unlad Program, implemented in Brgy. Navotas, Laoag City. Using a mixed-methods approach, the research integrates both quantitative surveys and qualitative interviews to examine gender indicators and socio-economic and psychological challenges faced by the community. The study identifies key gender indicators such as occupation, source of income, educational attainment, and family size, and assesses challenges related to socio-economic factors (unemployment, domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and out-of-school youth) and psychological issues (depression and suicidal thoughts).

The quantitative analysis reveals that psychological challenges, particularly depression and suicidal thoughts, significantly impact the community, with mean scores indicating a moderate effect. Socio-economic challenges such as unemployment, limited educational opportunities, and inadequate healthcare access also present substantial concerns, though their overall impact is slightly less severe. Specifically, unemployment and lack of educational opportunities were identified as moderate concerns, while domestic violence and teenage pregnancy were less impactful but still relevant.

Qualitative insights further illuminate these challenges, highlighting issues such as underreporting of domestic violence and the stigma associated with mental health problems. The study finds that while some support mechanisms exist, they are insufficient to fully address the community's needs.

Recommendations include enhancing mental health services, integrating mental health care into primary health settings, and providing community-based interventions. Additionally, improving access to education, vocational training, and affordable healthcare, as well as addressing socio-economic disparities, are crucial for community development. Strengthening gender-based capability-building programs is essential for addressing these challenges, promoting gender equality, and fostering a more inclusive and supportive environment.

The findings emphasize the need for a comprehensive approach to tackle both psychological and socio-economic issues, with effective implementation of the proposed interventions being key to achieving sustainable development and improving overall community well-being in Brgy. Navotas.

Introduction

Gender is a mainstream concept strategically aimed at incorporating a gender perspective into the creation, execution, oversight, and assessment of projects, policies, and programs. It ensures that gender equality concerns are central to all endeavors in various fields such as politics, work, health, and education. The gender and development approach addresses gender inequities and the disparities between men and women within development initiatives. It recognizes that gender roles, norms, and inequalities significantly impact individuals' access to resources, opportunities, and decision-making power in society.

According to the European Institute for Gender Equality (2016), the institution is dedicated to gender development programs and support training. However, their research shows an inadequate understanding of gender as a significant barrier to the successful implementation of gender mainstreaming. Consequently, the lack of expertise prevents institutions from developing effective training programs to address this issue.

Gonzalez & Rodriguez-Planas (2020) explore the impact of social gender norms on domestic violence, finding that higher gender equality in a country of ancestry is associated with a lower risk of victimization. In the Philippines, gender-based violence primarily affects women. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW, 2024) reports that 17.5% of Filipino women aged 15-49 experienced intimate partner abuse, including physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, according to the 2022 National Demographic and Health Survey. Gender-based violence includes sexual assault, physical harm, psychological distress, and financial abuse, often going unreported due to a "culture of silence."

This violence significantly impacts women's self-esteem, personal security, and mental and physical health, hindering their full participation in social development and work. Non-governmental groups and government agencies collaborate to address this issue, but its persistence highlights the need for continued efforts. Furthermore, gender-based violence results in substantial financial consequences for the nation, with one in five healthy days lost by women of reproductive age attributed to it.

Teenage pregnancy is influenced by factors such as socio-economic status, education, access to healthcare, cultural norms, and gender equality. Blum & Gates (2015) emphasize empowering girls and reducing their vulnerability to pregnancy, highlighting gender inequality's role. UNFPA (2022) cites that gender and income disparities significantly impact adolescent pregnancy in the Philippines, contributing to child marriage, limited healthcare and education access, and restricted professional opportunities.

Unemployment intersects with gender equality, affecting men and women differently based on socio-economic and cultural factors. Labor segregation, unpaid care work, and discriminatory hiring practices limit women's employment opportunities, particularly in male-dominated fields.

Gender disparities in education access persist, with girls facing cultural norms, poverty, lack of transportation, and early marriage barriers. This results in a higher number of out-of-school girls vulnerable to exploitation, child labor, and early marriage.

The Philippine government recognizes the importance of integrating gender perspectives into development planning and decision-making. The medium-term development plan includes provisions for gender mainstreaming, aiming to address the needs of both women and men and promote gender equality and women's empowerment. The Philippine Commission on Women (PCW) serves as the primary policymaking and coordinating body on Gender and Development concerns.

National government agencies and Local Government Units (LGUs) develop Gender and Development plans and budgets to integrate gender concerns into their policies and programs. Gender mainstreaming in LGUs involves developing gender-responsive plans, programs, and budgets, addressing gender-based violence, promoting women's economic empowerment and participation in governance, and conducting capacity-building activities and advocacy campaigns.

Studies by Jabeen & Iqbal (2020) and Percy (2000) highlight the importance of capacity-building programs for women's participation in local governance and agricultural decision-making. Gender-based capability programs address disparities and promote equality across education, employment, and leadership, empowering individuals and fostering diversity and inclusion.

This research, was conducted in Brgy. Navotas, Laoag City, aims to strengthen the iCare Project of the Techno-Unlad Program by enhancing a Gender-Based Capability Building Program. By addressing gender disparities and promoting socio-economic and psychological well-being, this study seeks to empower individuals and foster a more inclusive and equitable community.

Research Objectives

The study aims to:

1. Identify the gender indicators:
   - Number/list of women
   - Occupation
   - Source of income
   - Monthly income
   - Educational attainment
   - Family size per household
2. Determine the challenges in terms of:
   - Socio-economic:
     - Unemployment
     - Domestic violence
     - Teenage pregnancy
     - Out-of-school youth
   - Psychological:
     - Depression
     - Suicidal thoughts
3. Enhance the existing Capability Building Program.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, integrating both quantitative and qualitative data collection methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of gender indicators and challenges within the community. Surveys, consisting of structured questions on demographics, socio-economic status, psychological well-being, and experiences related to domestic violence, teenage pregnancy, and education, were administered to gather quantitative data. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted to provide qualitative insights into these issues, allowing for a more nuanced understanding of the participants' experiences and perspectives.

The data analysis was multi-faceted, encompassing descriptive, gender, and challenges analysis, alongside a thorough qualitative assessment. In the initial phase, a descriptive analysis was conducted to analyze the frequency distribution of gender indicators and challenges, providing a detailed overview of the population's characteristics. Statistical measures, including the mean, median, and mode, were computed for variables such as monthly income and family size to effectively summarize the data. A comparative analysis of gender indicators between males

and females followed, identifying disparities in occupation, income, and education to highlight significant differences and provide a basis for understanding gender inequalities within the community.

Subsequently, correlation analyses were performed to uncover relationships between socio-economic challenges and gender indicators, helping to identify specific groups most vulnerable to psychological challenges such as depression and suicidal thoughts. Open-ended responses from the interviews were analyzed qualitatively to understand the nuances and contextual intricacies behind the quantitative data, offering deeper insights into the lived experiences of individuals and the complexities of the challenges they faced.

Results and Discussion

Data will be interpreted based on the following scale:

- 4.21 - 5.00: Extremely Affects
- 3.41 - 4.20: Significantly Affects
- 2.61 - 3.40: Moderately Affects
- 1.81 - 2.60: Slightly Affects
- 1.00 - 1.80: Not at all

Challenges	Not at all (1)	Slightly (2)	Moderately (3)	Significantly (4)	Extremely (5)	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Depression	4	4	3	5	1	2.88	Moderately Affects
Suicidal Thoughts	5	5	3	2	2	2.63	Moderately Affects
Mean Average						2.75	Moderately Affects

The data analysis indicates that psychological challenges are a significant concern within the community. Depression obtained a mean score of 2.88, which is categorized as "Moderately Affects." This suggests that depression is a prevalent issue that considerably impacts individuals' well-being and daily functioning. Suicidal thoughts, with a mean score of 2.63, also fall under the "Moderately Affects" category, indicating a substantial level of psychological distress among community members. The mean average for these psychological challenges is 2.75, reinforcing the moderate but notable impact on the community.

The prevalence of depression in the community, as indicated by the mean score of 2.88, aligns with global trends highlighting depression as a leading cause of disability worldwide (World Health Organization, 2020). Depression can severely impair an individual's ability to function, affecting their personal relationships, work productivity, and overall quality of life. The moderate impact score suggests that while depression is a significant issue, there may be existing support mechanisms in place, albeit insufficiently robust.

Research by Smith and Alloy (2010) emphasizes the multifactorial nature of depression, which can be influenced by genetic, biological, environmental, and psychological factors. In communities with limited access to mental health services, the impact of depression can be exacerbated. Furthermore, stigma associated with mental health issues often prevents individuals from seeking help, thereby worsening the condition (Corrigan, 2004).

The mean score of 2.63 for suicidal thoughts highlights a critical area of concern. Suicidal ideation is often a symptom of severe depression and other mental health disorders, and it requires immediate and effective intervention (Hawton et al., 2016). The presence of suicidal thoughts indicates high levels of psychological distress and the need for targeted mental health services.

According to Klonsky and May (2015), understanding the risk factors for suicidal thoughts is essential for developing effective prevention strategies. These risk factors can include previous mental health issues, traumatic experiences, substance abuse, and lack of social support. In communities where these risk factors are prevalent, the likelihood of suicidal thoughts increases, underscoring the need for comprehensive mental health support.

The mean average of 2.75 for psychological challenges indicates that depression and suicidal thoughts moderately affect the community, suggesting that mental health interventions are necessary but not yet fully effective. The moderate impact score suggests that while some support systems may be in place, they are likely insufficient to meet the community's needs.

Enhancing existing mental health programs should focus on increasing accessibility to mental health services, reducing stigma, and providing targeted interventions for those at risk. According to Patel et al. (2018), integrating mental health services into primary care can be an effective strategy, especially in resource-limited settings. Additionally, community-based interventions that involve training non-specialist health workers to deliver mental health care have shown promise in improving mental health outcomes (van Ginneken et al., 2013).

The data indicates that psychological challenges, particularly depression and suicidal thoughts, moderately affect the community. These findings highlight the urgent need for comprehensive mental health interventions. By addressing these issues through enhanced mental

health programs, increased accessibility to services, and community-based interventions, the community can better support individuals experiencing psychological distress and improve overall mental health outcomes.

Socio-economic Challenges Details:

Challenges	Not at all (1)	Slightly (2)	Moderately (3)	Significantly (4)	Extremely (5)	Mean	Descriptive Interpretation
Unemployment	2	5	6	4	0	2.71	Moderately Affects
Domestic Violence	6	7	4	0	0	1.88	Slightly Affects
Teen-Age Pregnancy	8	5	2	0	2	2.00	Slightly Affects
Out-of-School Youth	3	4	5	4	1	2.76	Moderately Affects
Poverty	3	3	8	3	0	2.65	Moderately Affects
Lack of Access to Health Care	1	7	4	5	0	2.76	Moderately Affects
Limited Educational Opportunities	3	2	6	5	1	2.94	Moderately Affects
Gender-based Discrimination	8	7	2	0	0	1.65	Not at all
Lack of Affordable Housing	4	5	4	2	2	2.59	Slightly Affects
Childcare Responsibilities	2	6	7	0	2	2.65	Moderately Affects
Economic Instability	3	7	5	1	1	2.41	Slightly Affects
Mean Average						2.45	Slightly Affects

The data on socio-economic challenges reveals a range of issues affecting the community to varying degrees. The mean scores indicate that while some challenges moderately impact the community, others have a slightly lesser effect. Here is an interpretation of the key findings:

Unemployment received a mean score of 2.71, categorized as "Moderately Affects." This suggests that unemployment is a significant issue within the community. High unemployment rates can lead to increased poverty, social unrest, and mental health issues (Wilson & Moffitt, 2009). The lack of job opportunities can particularly affect young people and women, who often face additional barriers in the labor market (Kabeer, 2012). Addressing unemployment through job creation programs and vocational training could help mitigate its impact.

Domestic violence obtained a mean score of 1.88, falling under "Slightly Affects." Despite this lower score, domestic violence remains a critical issue. The underreporting of domestic violence due to stigma and fear can lead to an underestimation of its prevalence and impact (Garcia-Moreno et al., 2015). Efforts to address domestic violence should include increasing awareness, providing support services for victims, and implementing legal frameworks to protect victims and hold perpetrators accountable.

Teenage pregnancy received a mean score of 2.00, indicating it "Slightly Affects" the community. Teenage pregnancy is often linked to socio-economic factors such as poverty, lack of education, and limited access to reproductive health services (Blum & Gates, 2015). Early pregnancies can disrupt education and limit future economic opportunities for young women. Comprehensive sex education and access to reproductive health services are crucial in addressing this issue.

Out-of-school youth had a mean score of 2.76, categorized as "Moderately Affects." This suggests a significant portion of youth are not receiving education, which can lead to long-term socio-economic disadvantages (UNESCO, 2015). Barriers to education can include financial constraints, cultural norms, and inadequate school infrastructure. Addressing these barriers is essential to ensure that all youth have access to quality education.

Poverty received a mean score of 2.65, indicating it "Moderately Affects" the community. Poverty is a pervasive issue that affects access to basic needs such as food, housing, healthcare, and education (World Bank, 2018). It is both a cause and consequence of other socio-economic challenges. Effective poverty alleviation strategies should focus on improving economic opportunities, social protection, and access to essential services.

The mean score for lack of access to healthcare was 2.76, categorized as "Moderately Affects." This suggests that inadequate healthcare access is a significant issue. Barriers to healthcare can include high costs, geographic inaccessibility, and lack of healthcare providers (Peters et al., 2008). Ensuring equitable access to healthcare services is crucial for improving overall health outcomes.

Limited educational opportunities received the highest mean score of 2.94, indicating it "Moderately Affects" the community. Education is a key determinant of economic and social mobility (UNESCO, 2015). Barriers to education can prevent individuals from acquiring skills needed for better-paying jobs, perpetuating cycles of poverty. Enhancing educational access and quality is essential for community development.

Gender-based discrimination obtained a mean score of 1.65, categorized as "Not at all." This score suggests that gender-based discrimination is perceived as having minimal impact. However, this may not reflect the true extent of the issue, as gender-based discrimination often goes unreported due to societal norms and biases (European Institute for Gender Equality, 2016). Efforts to promote gender equality should include awareness campaigns and policies to combat discrimination.

Lack of affordable housing received a mean score of 2.59, indicating it "Slightly Affects" the community. Affordable housing is crucial for ensuring stable living conditions and preventing homelessness (National Low Income Housing Coalition, 2020). Policies to increase the availability of affordable housing can help address this issue.

Childcare responsibilities obtained a mean score of 2.65, categorized as "Moderately Affects." Balancing childcare with work and other responsibilities can be challenging, particularly for women (OECD, 2017). Providing affordable and accessible childcare services can support working parents and promote gender equality in the workforce.

Economic instability had a mean score of 2.41, indicating it "Slightly Affects" the community. Economic instability can result from factors such as inflation, unemployment, and fluctuating markets, leading to uncertainty and financial stress for individuals and families (IMF, 2020). Policies aimed at stabilizing the economy and providing social safety nets can help mitigate its impact.

The overall mean score for socio-economic challenges is 2.45, categorized as "Slightly Affects." While this suggests that these challenges are present, their impact is relatively minor and manageable. However, it is important to address these issues proactively to prevent them from exacerbating and to improve overall community well-being.

The data highlights several socio-economic challenges that affect the community to varying degrees. While some issues, such as limited educational opportunities and lack of healthcare access, moderately impact the community, others like domestic violence and teenage pregnancy, have a slightly lesser effect. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive and targeted interventions that focus on improving education, healthcare, economic opportunities, and support

services. By doing so, the community can work towards mitigating these challenges and fostering a more equitable and prosperous environment.

The results reveal that psychological and socio-economic challenges significantly impact the community in various ways. Psychological challenges, particularly depression and suicidal thoughts, are identified as moderate concerns, highlighting the urgent need for enhanced mental health support and interventions. Socio-economic challenges, including unemployment, lack of educational opportunities, and inadequate healthcare access, also present notable issues, although their overall impact is slightly less severe.

Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach. For psychological issues, improving access to mental health services, reducing stigma, and integrating mental health care into primary care settings are essential steps. For socio-economic challenges, targeted interventions in education, job creation, healthcare access, and affordable housing are crucial.

The study's findings underscore the importance of strengthening the iCare Project of the Techno-Unlad Program in Brgy. Navotas, Laoag City. By focusing on enhancing gender-based capability-building programs and addressing the identified challenges, the community can work towards improving overall well-being and fostering a more equitable and supportive environment. Effective implementation of these recommendations will be key to addressing both psychological and socio-economic issues and achieving sustainable development within the community.

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