

Status of Women Working in Entertainment Establishments for Men in the Countryside Philippines

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Abstract

This study is a descriptive research and aimed to investigate the status of women working in entertainment establishments in the Philippine countryside, specifically Catbalogan City, Samar. A one-on-one face to face interview using a guided structured questionnaire prepared in vernacular, the Waray-Waray language and administered by women psychologists and social science major interviewers. All entertainment establishments in Catbalogan were identified, and the women workers were the respondents in this study. The average age of women respondents is 21, 7.5% admitted to being below 18. About half of the respondents were lured to enter into this kind of jobs by their relatives, were married/separated and had kids. Majority of them says they are in their current jobs to earn money or to augment the very low income of the household. Nine of every 10 are aware of STI/STD where five have it from the local rural health unit. It was also found out that the women in the entertainment sector do not regularly submit to medical check-up. The establishments are registered as beer houses and videoke bars, but the majority of workers also engaged in sexual activities making them officially prostitutes.

Keywords: women, prostitution fronts, Catbalogan, STI/STD exposures, countryside prostitution

I. INTRODUCTION

More than a billion people live in unacceptable conditions of poverty (UN Women, 1995), 70% are women, and several of them are situated within prostitution and sex trafficking (Kara, 2010). Poverty among women is directly related to the poor access to economic resources and often force them to a situation in which they are vulnerable to sexual exploitation (UN Women, 1995). Philippines is a third world country with poverty incidence estimated at around 26.9% of the entire population in 2009 (<http://www.nscb.gov.ph>, Accessed 10/20/2014). About 80% of the country's

poor live in the rural areas. They are mostly the indigenous peoples, small-scale farmers who cultivate land received through agrarian reform, landless workers, fishers, people in upland areas and women (www.ruralpovertyportal.org, Accessed 3/3/2014). The decline in the productivity and profitability of farming and depleted fishing waters are among the causes of poverty (ibid). This scenario tends to push marginalized families to enter into odd jobs.

Provinces in Samar Island are among the poorest in the Philippines. Eastern

Samar, Northern Samar and Samar (Western) are ranked fifth, tenth and 19th poorest out of 85 Districts and Provinces (www.nscb.gov.ph, Accessed 10/20/2014). With its resources dwindling, marginalized families are pushed to shift labours, from agriculture and fisheries to jobs like pedicab driving and working as entertainers in videoke bars among others. Former environment secretary of the Philippines Angel Alcala said that the country has exceeded the carrying capacity of the marine environment resulting in depleted resources (Ubalde, 2009). This reduces family income that forced women to share a role in providing for the family. Women who cannot endure this work often go out to find other jobs, some are tempted to go into prostitution (ibid). Many of these women migrates to urban areas in the country and abroad. In 1997, the committee on the elimination of discrimination against women stated that women migrant workers (from rural to urban and overseas) were employed as entertainers and domestic helpers (UM, Accessed 10/2/2013). Of the two common employment for migrant women, domestic helpers are paid significantly less than those working as entertainers making it more attractive to them. Women working as entertainers in clubs, disco and beer houses are prone to exploitation and abuse and are often engaged in prostitution. In 2007, around 375,000 women and girls were engaged in the sex trade in the country (CBC News, Accessed 11/14/2013).

According to Republic Act No. 9208, prostitution in the Philippines is illegal (Congress of the Philippines, 2003). Prostitution in the country is often available through bars, videoke bars (also known as KTVs), massage parlors, brothels (also known as casa) street walkers and escort services (McEvoy, 1993).

Sex remains a thriving industry both domestically and abroad (William

Sparrow, 2008). Many Filipinas play the world's oldest profession in an attempt to overcome crushing poverty and the oppressive economic crisis gripping their homeland. Furthermore, even Filipinas who work overseas legally - as maids, nannies or in other legitimate occupations - often find themselves turning to the sex trade to supplement meager incomes and to send money home to the Philippines.

A report from the International Labor Organization (ILO) estimated that as of 1998 there were as many as 500,000 women working in the sex trade in the Philippines. Sen. Pia Cayetano further cites in her "Anti-Prostitution Act" (Senate Bill No. 2341) that the number of women's prostitutes is now growing to 800,000.

Observation shows that the sex trade in Catbalogan City is becoming a boom using videoke or karaoke entertainment bars as a front. Men who usually go to these places are at first, looking for entertainment and wanted to enjoy but when got drunk they may tend to "take out" these women.

In spite of being illegal workers, they are still part of the Magna Carta for Women. Besides, R.A. 9710 seeks to eliminate discrimination against women by recognizing, protecting, fulfilling and promoting the rights of Filipino women. These rights include all rights in the Philippine Constitution and those rights recognized under the international instruments signed and ratified by the Philippine Government. And, one of these rights is "Women should have a comprehensive health services and health information and education". Furthermore, the chair of National Commission on the Role of Filipino Women (NCRFW), Myrna Yao said that these rights must be true to all Filipino women, particularly those in the marginalized sector."

The abovementioned facts are the

reasons why the researchers came up with this study. The researchers wanted to explore the situation of these women especially those in Catbalogan City, their needs and preferences for health services and the possible barriers accessing these services areas.

II. METHODOLOGY

This study is a descriptive research and was conducted using semi-structured interviews and informal discussions with women working in night-clubs and karaoke bars.

“Waray-Waray”, the vernacular used in the locality, was used to conduct the interview. Experts validated the semi-structured questionnaire guide. It was also pre-tested on some the women who were not part of the study in Calbayog City. The interview guide was composed of four major parts: Profile of the Respondents, Physical Health and Health Seeking Behavior of the Respondents, Services Offered by the Respondents to the Costumers, and Awareness on STI/ STD.

The study used the total enumeration. Negotiations with the owners and procurers facilitated access to these women. The researchers facilitate communication with the entertainment establishments targeted by the research. There were three women working in the entertainment sector who refused to be interviewed for some personal reasons.

The initial phase of the research involved meetings with relevant organizations and informants. Hiring and identifying interviewers were discussed and deliberated by the four researchers. There were four interviewers chosen, all are female teachers who are arts and sciences and social science major. Interviewers were oriented by a member of the research team who is a psychology

graduate and is proficient in handling sensitive questions. The said researcher was also part of the interviewer team.

No names were recorded during the interviews, and the locations of the night-clubs or karaoke bars were not reported, to ensure confidentiality. Some interviews were conducted in karaoke bars or night-clubs, where the women worked and lived.

The interview notes were collated and analysed by the two primary researchers and the draft report was translated into English for editing. Based on the result, the researchers then made recommendations or suggestions for intervention activities or programs that were necessary for this group of women.

III. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Videoke and Karaoke Bars:

The establishments are registered as entertainment bars as per record from the City Hall. The establishments are open from 3:00 P.M. to 7:00 A.M. on the following day. According to the interviewed women, customers usually come in at around 4:00 P.M. and leave by 4:00 A.M. They offer videoke (singing), dancing, food and refreshment, and they allow their workers to sit beside their customers or “Table Customers” as they call it. According to one of the managers, if the women worker are taken out by the customer, the management is no longer responsible because they do not offer such services in the bar.

The average number of customers served by women in the bars ranges from 40 to 55 in a week but during holidays and long weekends they served an average of 15 to 20 customers in a day.

Most of their customers are in middle adulthood or ages 40 to 59 years old.

According to the interviewees, they also have customers from ages 17 to 19 years old. Those adolescents go to these bars for experience or to observe at first, but later on start to “table” the women. Aside from that, these bars also have costumers who are in their young adulthood or ages from 20 to 39 and late adulthood ages from 60 and up.

The usual customers in the bars are the soldiers, police and those who are working in the offices within Catbalogan City. They also have customers who are teachers, “balikbayan”, foreigners, engineers, lawyers, drivers and tricycle drivers.

Most of the customers go to the bars to drink beers and to entertain themselves with videoke and karaoke. However, according to one of the interviewees, if customers are already drunk they will start to “table” women workers and if not contented yet, they offer women have sex with them. But there are customers who go to the bars to “table” and “takeout” the women workers.

Profile of Women

The following represents the basic information of women working in the entertainment sector.

Age: The videoke bars in Catbalogan also employs underaged women and are considered illegal. According to Republic Act 7610, if the child is 15 to 17 years old, his or her working hours should not be more than four hours a day or not more than 40 hours a week. Also, they should not be allowed to work between 10:00 pm and 6:00 am of the following day. In the same law, allowing a child to work in a hazardous undertaking is considered one of the worst forms of child labor. The employer cannot assign tasks or activities that threaten the child’s life, safety, health and morals or that which impairs his or her

Table 1.
Age Distribution of the Subjects

Age	No. of Respondents	Percentage
16	1	2.5
17	2	5
18	8	20
19	4	10
20	5	12.5
21	4	10
22	6	15
23	2	5
24	4	10
27	3	7.5
37	1	2.5
Total	40	100%
Mean	21.15	
Median	20.5	
SD	3.8	

normal development. DOLE Department Order No. 004-99 declares that work which exposes children to physical, psychological or sexual abuse, such as in lewd shows, cabarets, bars (KTV, karaoke bars), dance halls and similar places work and activities are considered hazardous.

Civil Status: About half (47.5%) of the women are single, while the other half are either married or separated and has one to five number of children.

Place of Origin: Most (87.5%) of the women respondents come from Samar while very few comes from Leyte, Metro Manila and Mindanao. Most of the women come from the barrios of Samar. Currently, the women live within the establishment while others stay in boarding houses.

Highest Educational Attainment: Data pegged that most or 32.5% of the women are high school level only, and two or 5% were not able to go to school. But there are two or 5% of the women who were able to graduate a vocational course and College.

Table 2.
Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Highest Educational Attainment	No. of Respondents	%
No formal Schooling	2	5
Elementary Level	8	20
Elementary Graduate	8	20
High School Level	13	32.5
High School Graduate	7	17.5
Vocational Graduate	1	2.5
College Level	1	2.5
Total	40	100

Table 3.
Highest Educational Attainment of the Respondents

Person(s) Influence	No. of Women	%
Friend	8	20
Husband	1	2.5
Cousin/Relatives	20	50
Self	6	15
Procurer	1	2.5
Establishment Owner	4	10
Total	40	100

Most of the women who were interviewed also told the interviewers, that they do not want to work in karaoke bars and night clubs. Since, most of them are in high school level only, or were not able to continue formal education, job opportunities are very limited for them.

Working Condition

Person/s Influenced: The data shows that half of the women respondents revealed that they were influenced by their cousins and relatives including husbands.

Present Work: Survey shows that 90% of the women respondents served as waitress. Some of them has several roles like being a singer and cashier. Four in every ten women respondents also sit by the customers to entertain them.

Status of Employment: Data on status

of employment indicate that 50% of the women are in permanent status while the rest are contractual, on-daily basis, and freelancer (working in multiple bars).

Monthly Salary: The data indicates that 45% of the interviewed women were receiving a monthly salary of P5,000.00 and below. The data simply implies that these women are receiving below the minimum wage rate for Region VIII, per Wage Order No. RB VIII-17 b/, effective on October 16, 2012. (DOLE National Wages and Productivity Commission)

Reasons for Working

Before their current employment, other respondents worked in a variety of other jobs such as saleslady, housemaids, and helping their parents in selling vegetables and fish in the market. However, their income were still not enough because of the following reasons:

1. 50% have children;
2. 17.5% want to send their children to school;
3. 17.5% are supporting their families;
4. 15% are self-supporting only;
5. 10% have to pay debt or of their parents;
6. 5% husbands are unemployed, and
7. 5% husband/father are in prison;

Aside from the monetary reasons, 5% of women answered because of family problems. They wanted to stay away from their parents and live alone. The remaining 5% stated that they just want to experience working in videoke and karaoke bars.

Furthermore, because ordinary income from the bar is still not sufficient for their needs, 50% of these women sit with customers for a commission from every bottle consumed by the customers. Thirty-five percent (35%) of the women prefer to

Table 4.
Husbands/Parents Source of Income

Livelihood	No. of Respondents	%
Fisherman/Fishing	9	22.5
Fish Vendor	1	2.5
Farming	16	40
Construction Workers	3	7.5
Tricycle Driver	2	5
Shoe Maker	1	2.5
House Errands	2	5
None	6	15
Total	40	100%

go with their customers and offer sex for an additional payment ranging from PhP 500.00 to PhP 2,500.

Sources of Husbands or Parents Income

Table 4 revealed that 40% of the women's parents/husbands are into farming, 22.5% are into fishing, and 15% are jobless. According to the interviewees, income of their parents or spouses were not sufficient for their basic needs. This is one of the reasons why they look for other jobs. This profile coincides with the report of the National Statistical Coordination Board on Poverty Statistics for Basic Sectors for 2012 that Fishermen and Farmers remain the poorest basic sectors.

Health Status/Health Seeking Behavior

One of the interviewed employees of the City Hall said that they require health document from the women workers in bars. As per record in the health center of Catbalogan City there are women working in bars who regularly seek medical check-up. On the other hand, there were 15% of the interviewed women who stated that they were not asked to present any health document by the establishment.

Moreover, 30% of the interviewed women

said that they are not required to go for medical check-up regularly.

Medical Check-up: The data reveal how often the women go for medical check-up:

1. Most or 27.5% of them go for medical check-up only if they are not feeling well or if they are sick;
2. 22.5% weekly;
3. 20% twice a year;
4. 17.5% monthly;
5. 5% once a year;
6. 2.5% twice a week, and
7. 2.5% never been to the doctor for medical check-up.

Place for Seeking Health Services: The data shows that most or 67.5% of women usually go to the Health Center to seek medical check-up, and 30% of them go to the hospital.

According to the interviewees, they could seek health services anywhere they want because even though they are required to secure a medical check-up, they are not required to go to a specific clinic for it. Some of the women also said that even if they are not required for medical check-up they still go for their own safety. But 1 or 2.5% of the interviewed women said that she never visited any hospitals or clinic for medical check-up.

Three of the interviewed women said that they do not go to the hospital because they are not sick nor suffering any illnesses.

Public Health Facilities: All or 100% of women go the public hospital and health center for medical check-up only to avail free medicine. The 27.5% of these women also reported that they have availed free trainings and seminars on proper health care.

Health Benefits: According to the interviewed women they do not have health cards or any benefits if ever they

got sick. On the other hand, 5% of women working in the bars said that their managers offered medical assistance. 17.5% said that their managers shared some medical assistance while the 77.5% said that they spent their money for check-up and medication.

Awareness on STIs/STDs

Awareness on STIs/STDs is an important factor in preventing the spread of this disease. This awareness is particularly important for women working as sex workers.

85% of interviewed women were aware of STIs/STDs particularly on gonorrhea or “tulo”. 47.5% of them got the information from their friends, and 43% received the information from Rural Health Unit. Some women also reported that their clients had told them about STIs/STDs.

Although 85% of interviewed women are aware of STI/STD, only 53% of them are knowledgeable with where they could avail services and get treated if ever they get infected specifically in health centers.

Half or 50% of the interviewed women said that they had already availed services from health center on how to avoid STI/STD. They also reported that they have attended meetings/discussions, and they are aware of the programs on STI/STD for women working in bars.

Most women are aware of STIs/STDs as well as programs offered by the government. However, there is still a notable percentage of women who were not well informed or aware of STIs/STDs. So, there is a need to intensify information dissemination and awareness campaign on STIs/STDs particularly to women working in bars.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion

In the light of the discussion above, the following conclusions were drawn:

1. Women working in karaoke bars comes from marginalized sectors, specifically farming and fishing. Nine in every ten have other jobs prior to working in karaoke bars. However, they were influenced by their family members including a husband to work in these entertainment establishments to earn more.
2. Almost all has no degrees, 40% are in the elementary level/graduate and 50% are high school level/graduate.
3. Nine in every ten works as waiters and these waitresses also entertained customers, while about three in every 10 go with the customers for sex for an extra fee ranging from PhP 500-2500.00
4. Four in every 10 of the women working in bars are receiving a salary of P5,000.00 or less which is below the minimum wage rate. 30% of these women cannot reveal or could not quantify how much they earn.
5. Health of women working in the entertainment sectors is not regularly monitored. They submit for medical check-up on a non-regular at their expense. Three in every ten only seek medical attention when they feel sick, some have not even consulted a physician.
6. Eight in every ten women are aware of STIs/STDs, and they

got the information from the rural health unit and friends. Half of them don't know where to get help when they acquire STI/STDs

working in videoke and karaoke bars, to the procurers and to the management of videoke and karaoke bars in Catbalogan City.

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations were set forth by the researchers in line with the conclusions of the study:

1. In consonance with RA 9262 or Violence Against Women and Their Children and RA 7610 or Child Labor, the Local Government Units of Catbalogan City should have strict supervision of women working in the entertainment sector. The LGU must see to it that regular medical examination of women working in this sector must be conducted to help reduce transmission of STI/STDs.
2. City government should provide better job opportunities to women to avoid any form of exploitation at work. There is a need to intensify and bridge LGUs services for farmers and fishermen. Helping them will prevent women to work in this kind of establishments.
3. Indirect sex workers should be able to obtain health care services where there is no discrimination, and their privacy is upheld.
4. Regular IEC activities about STI/STDs and AIDS should be conducted.

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