

# **Women's Empowerment and Economic Sustainability During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Davao Oriental, Southern Philippines**

Robie Villamil Catubigan, Jhonnell Pancho Villegas,  
Helina Jean Perez Dupa  
Davao Oriental State University, City of Mati, Philippines

## **Abstract**

The crisis during the pandemic restrained the livelihood of women and disrupted their economic opportunities. Specifically, during the height of the lockdown, when people were restricted from going out, the livelihood of women who sold and peddled seafood products was greatly affected. This paper unfolds women's socio-demographic profile and knowledge regarding the laws for protecting women's rights in the lexis of the Republic Act No. 9710, also known as the Magna Carta of Women, and their economic condition in the informal economy during the pandemic. This descriptive mixed method quantitatively surveyed 70 women and another 10 women for the Key Informant Interviews (KIIs). The findings have shown that women in the informal economy were predominantly in the middle and late adulthood stage, married, the majority had a low level of education (i.e., elementary & high school levels) and were the breadwinners in the family. Also, the average size of each family consisted of 7 members with an average family monthly income of 7,407 pesos. The themes unearthed that informants perceived the Magna Carta of Women as unfamiliar and vague concepts, inconsistent implementation, and responsive leadership. On the other note, informants highlighted that the imagery of women in society gained parity in gender roles. It was revealed that women struggled with delayed assistance, parental obligations, prejudice, and partial treatment.

**Keywords:** RA 9710, livelihood, informal economy, women's empowerment

## **Introduction**

The COVID-19 pandemic heavily impacted the economic activities and conditions in the local setting and across national borders. The pandemic brought several interruptions, like economic tension due to declining revenues and increasing expenses in providing community subsidies. It led to economic constraints that affected labor shortages due to the crises faced by several establishments that reduced employees. It triggered fears and threats to the tenure and financial security of the workers (Shang et al., 2021). It is incontestable that the pandemic seriously affected and displaced both men and women from their work. However, women in the informal economy are among the most vulnerable groups affected by profit loss and disrupted economic opportunities (Clingain et al., 2021; Chriscaden, 2020).

Work displacement and employment losses are the everyday struggles of women worldwide (UN Women, 2020). It was reported that women's labor force participation has deteriorated over the last decades to below 50% just before the pandemic (UN Women and ILO, 2021). In the USA, unemployment jumped to 16.1% for women and 13.6% for men, similar to South American nations falling 16.6% year-on-year compared with 10% for men (Zarrilli & Luomaranta, 2021). Approximately 350,000 Canadian women were displaced and lost their jobs during the pandemic (Shrma & Smith, 2021). The repercussion of the continuous depletion of employed women in the economic sector is more risk of economic uncertainty. Thus, it has more significant risks for women with a lower level of education who are unable to compete with professional women, as more than 65% are engaged in informal sectors (Rubery & Tabora, 2020; Haldevang, 2020). Women suffered the pandemic's consequences, and most lost their jobs compared to their male counterparts (Grekou & Lu, 2021).

The Magna Carta of Women, which was mandated under the Republic Act 9710, opened doors that recognize the "economic, political, and sociocultural realities that affect women's current condition. It also upholds the significant role of women in nation-building" (Philippine Commission on Women, 2010). The crux of equality is evident in advocating and aspiring for equal opportunities for women and men endowed with equal access to resources and development results and outcomes. Despite the relentless effort exerted, the Philippines still struggles with many women working in the informal economic sector and facing higher instability in their job. This is due to a lack of social and labor protections, smaller income and savings, and limited access to social services (Global Network of Women Peacebuilders, 2021). Due to economic insecurity, women have been negatively impacted in balancing filial responsibilities and official duties, affecting their mental health and psychosocial stability (Affouneh et al., 2022). Despite all the substantial progress in recent years toward gender equality, women's economic empowerment continues to lag (Grynspan, 2020).

This economic furlough for women compelled the researchers to scrutinize the knowledge and awareness of their rights in the informal economy of Davao Oriental. There is a need to examine the policy implementation and identify alternatives to mitigate the exacerbated economic condition (Asian Development Bank, 2021). As recovery takes hold, this new normal converges on the mechanisms that elevate opportunities where gender knows no boundaries during the economic recovery and promote sustainable and inclusive growth.

This study is anchored on Golla et al. (2011) Framework of Women's Economic Empowerment. The framework considers that a woman is economically empowered when she has both the ability and the power to make and act on economic decisions by succeeding and advancing economically and having the power and agency to benefit from economic activities. This framework believes that economic empowerment is one of the most powerful routes for women to achieve their potential and advance their rights. It aims to promote strategic mechanisms in meeting poverty-reduction goals, vanquish discrimination against women due to economic inefficiency, advocate equal opportunities to compete equitably and realize women's full potential. When women have the right skills and opportunities, they can help businesses and markets grow (UN Women, 2015). Thus, economically empowered women contribute more to their families, societies and national economies, providing the right route toward sustainable development.

## **Methods**

### **Research Design**

The research espoused a descriptive mixed method. In this design, the researcher collects quantitative and qualitative data, scrutinizes them separately, and interprets the results (Creswell, 2014). Bryman (2006) posited that combining quantitative and qualitative methods provided a comprehensive and substantial output to attain the objectives and answer the research questions. The quantitative data were collected through a survey questionnaire distributed to the participants. The qualitative data were gathered through a researcher-made interview guide with women in the informal economy (Johnson & Christensen, 2014; Cohen et al., 2007). Therefore, using the descriptive mixed method displayed a clearer picture of the quantitative and qualitative data, providing a better understanding and explanation to elucidate a detailed and comprehensive interpretation of data (Creswell and Clark, 2007).

### **Participants**

The participants of the study were women in the informal economy in three (3) municipalities (Baganga, Cateel, and Governor Generoso) and one (1) city (Mati) in the province of Davao Oriental. Seventy (70) women participated in answering the survey questionnaire. The participants were all vendors of seafood products who were peddling and selling in the local market; some were wives of the fisherfolks in their area. Also, ten (10) women voluntarily joined the in-depth interviews as informants who qualified from the set criteria: a) ambulant vending or peddling seafood products; b) 18 years old and above; and c) living in Davao Oriental. The participants were selected purposively since they were competent to share personal experiences and could suffice the data needed (Robinson, 2014).

### **Data Analysis**

The data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and thematic analysis. A descriptive statistical tool was employed for quantitative data. This offers a simplified summary of the sample which is especially helpful in organizing amounts of data (Creswell, 2009). It is appropriate since the available quantitative data can be illustrated through developing graphical or tabular data summaries. While for qualitative data, thematic analysis was utilized by generating codes and making a pattern of themes from the examined data (Neuendorf, 2019).

### **Ethics**

For the ethical protocols, the researchers observed and maintained careful attention to recruitment, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, and risks and benefits throughout the study. The researchers asked permission from the participants by providing written consent. The researchers provided the utmost confidentiality of subject data by keeping them properly and securely. It emphasized the voluntary nature of the participant's involvement, highlighting the affiliation and intention. Also, the participant's right to withdraw from the study without any consequence was elaborated. The researchers ensured that the participants were not harmed in any way

whatsoever during the entire conduct of the study. This study disclosed no conflict of interest to the researchers, and its core intention is for the greater welfare of society.

Results and Discussion

The presentation of the findings emanated from the survey and was supported by the themes from the interview. The results presented the demographic profile of the participants and the participant’s knowledge and awareness regarding the provisions of the laws for the protection of women’s rights. The qualitative data obtained was presented through the themes and sub-themes.

Participants’ Demographic Profile

Table 1 shows the represented number of participants per municipality in Davao Oriental. These municipalities are known for their fishing livelihood. Out of 70 participants, there were 20 (29%) women selling and peddling seafood products in Baganga, 15 (21%) women from Cateel, 15 (21%) women from Governor Generoso, and 20 (29%) women from Mati. The participants in the study were aged 20-60. Women aged 31-40 have the highest percentage (43%) involved in selling and peddling seafood products. Furthermore, it is worth noting that women aged 41-50 with 20 (28%) and 51-60 with 13 (19%) worked for their families. The age group 20-30 with 7 (10%) has the lowest percentage involved in selling and peddling seafood products. Asian Development Bank (2021) confirms that people ages 15 to 24 represent less than 15% of the workforce.

In contrast, middle and late adulthood women still worked for their families. Most women, 67 (96%) in the informal economy, are married, and 2 (3%) women are separated and are solo parents. There is a surge in married women working because the work-from-home arrangement enables them to work remotely and independently. This also allowed them to devote more time to their family while working (Carlson et al., 2020).

Table 1  
Demographic Profile of Participants

Profile	No. of Participants	Percentage (%)
Address		
Baganga	20	29.00%
Cateel	15	21.00%
City of Mati	15	21.00%
Governor Generoso	20	29.00%
Age		
20-30	7	10.00%
31-40	30	43.00%
41-50	20	28.00%
51-60	13	19.00%
61-Above	0	0.00%

<b>Civil Status</b>		
Single	1	1.00%
Married	67	96.00%
Separated	2	3.00%
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
Elementary Level	23	33.00%
High School Level	23	33.00%
High School Graduate	17	24.00%
College Level	7	10.00%
<b>Income (Month)</b>		
Php5,000-below	8	11.43%
Php5,001-Php10,000	53	75.71%
Php10,001-Php15,000	9	12.86%
Php15,001-Php20,000	0	0.00%
<b>No. of Household Members</b>		
1-3	1	1.43%
4-6	28	40.00%
7-9	35	50.00%
10-12	6	8.57%
<b>No. of Household Dependents</b>		
1-3	32	45.71%
4-6	35	50.00%
7-9	3	4.29%

Table 1 also shows that 23 (33%) of women were at the elementary level, and 23 (33%) were at the high school level. Meanwhile, 17 (24%) women finished high school. Also, 7 (10%) women were college-level. Women's educational attainment mainly falls at the elementary and high school levels. One of the primary reasons most women engage in informal sectors is their low academic level, which impedes them from competing with professional women (Rubery & Tabora, 2020; Haldevang, 2020).

In terms of family monthly income, 53 (75.71%) of the participants had a monthly family income ranging from Php 5,001 to Php 10,000, while 9 (12.86%) participants with monthly family incomes ranging from Php 10,001 to Php 15,000. On the other hand, 8 (11.43%) participants had a monthly family income ranging from Php 4,500 and below. The participants' monthly family income is 7,407 pesos less than the average family monthly income, estimated at 25,600 from 307.19 thousand annually (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2022). With poverty being prevalent in the local context, there remains a perennial need to look for economic opportunities to support individual and family needs.

Regarding the family size and the number of dependents, it depicts 35 (50%) of the participants had 7-9 family members; participants with 4-6 household members were 28 (40%); participants with 10-12 household members were 6 (8.57%), and participants with 1-3 household members were 1 (1.43%). Furthermore, 35 (50%) families had 4-6 dependents, 32 (45.71%) families got 1-3 dependents, and 3 (4.29%) families comprised 7-9 dependents. The dependents were not proportionate to the estimated average monthly income of 7,407 pesos. The estimated daily income of the

participants is 247 pesos less than an employee’s expected daily wage, which is 381 pesos (National Wages and Productivity Commission, n.d.). The large household size and number of dependents in the study areas compel women to engage in informal economic activities to augment their family’s livelihood.

**Knowledge and Awareness of the Provisions of RA 9710**

The Magna Carta of Women mandated the state to recognize women’s rights that entail economic, political, and sociocultural realities that affect women’s current condition. It also upholds the significant role of women in nation-building (Philippine Commission on Women, 2010).

Table 2 displays that the respondents acknowledged the existing policies that protect women in the workplace. Sixty-nine (98.57%) respondents recognized their right to association and organized their association; fifty-seven (81.43%) respondents agreed that there is no discrimination towards them, while 51 (72.86%) respondents admitted that there is protection for women against sexual harassment. Only 27 participants, or 38.57%, recognized equal pay for women. Regarding the mechanisms for addressing women’s grievances, sixty-two (88.57%) participants agreed that a labor-management council is available to settle their employment concerns. It is also worth noting that 7 (10%) respondents observed cases of sexual harassment complaints filed within two years. Overall, women from the study locale insufficiently relate these protection and empowerment measures to the national policy on Magna Carta of women.

**Table 2**  
*Knowledge Regarding Laws for the Protection of Women’s Rights*

Items	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Existing Policy on Women’s welfare</b>		
Equal Pay	27	38.57%
Non-Discrimination	57	81.43%
Security of Tenure	0	0.00%
Right to Association	69	98.57%
Protection Against Sexual Harassment	51	72.86%
<b>Mechanism for General Redress of women’s Grievances</b>		
Resources Dept	26	37.14%
Labor Mgt Council Union	62	88.57%
Cases of Sexual Harassment filed in the past 2 yrs	7	10.00%
<b>What medical/health benefits are available for women</b>		
Free Annual Check-up	38	54.29%
Health Insurance	7	10.00%
SSS maternity	70	100.00%
Services of nurse/doctor	56	80.00%
Available free child nursing	0	0.00%

**Benefits Received**

SSS	30	42.86%
Phil Health	69	98.57%
Pag-ibig (Housing)	1	1.43%
Rice Subsidy	65	92.86%
Maternity Leave	0	0.00%
Vacation Leave	0	0.00%
Education Subsidy	70	100.00%
Productivity Bonus	0	0.00%
13th Month Pay	0	0.00%
Christmas Bonus	0	0.00%
Cash Advance	58	82.86%

**Common Health**

Headache	68	97.14%
Eye Problem	35	50.00%
Lung Problem	39	55.71%
UTI	20	28.57%
Muscle Pains	70	100.00%
Skin Problem	37	52.86%
Miscarriage	3	4.29%
Leukemia	0	0.00%
Cancer	0	0.00%

In terms of available health/medical services for women, seventy (100%) participants recognized the presence of Social Security System (SSS) maternity benefits for women. Fifty-six (80%) participants agreed that there are free medical services for nurses/doctors since there is an available health center per barangay and a public medical hospital equipped with facilities. Thirty-eight (54.29%) participants admitted that free annual check-ups are accessible for women. However, only (10%) participants agreed that health insurance is available for women. No participants realized that free child nursing is offered for working mothers, specifically solo parents. International Labour Organization (2017) confirmed that about 55% of the world's population is not covered by social protection, and the coverage of informal workers is particularly inadequate. Social protection schemes and broader social security systems can contribute to women's economic empowerment and gender equality. Women tend to be over-represented in self-employment and work as contributing family workers. They are less likely to contribute to social insurance schemes; even if they do, the contributions are minimal (Tessier et al., 2013).

Participants were surveyed about the benefits they received intended for women. All 70 (100%) participants were recipients of the free education subsidy in different educational levels; sixty-nine (98.57%) availed of the PhilHealth medical assistance from the government, especially those disadvantaged families. During the pandemic, their hospital bills were shouldered by PhilHealth. Sixty-five (92.86%) participants received rice subsidies, especially during the lockdown, as part of the assistance of the government. There were 58 (82.86%) participants who availed of cash advances. There were 30 (42.85%) participants who had Social Security System benefits. However, only 1 (1.43%) participant enjoyed the housing program from Pag-IBIG, a government

financial institution in the Philippines. It is evident in Bertulfo's (2011) findings that women in informal workplaces are most likely to have low incomes and are less able to afford the cost of children's education, housing, and health services for themselves and their families. Thus, they are vulnerable to the depravity of savings for emergencies or to deal with contingencies when they arise.

During the survey, participants also listed the common health problems they experienced while working. Entire 70 (100%) participants experienced muscle pain as their topmost health issue; sixty-eight (97.14%) had headaches; thirty-nine (55.71%) suffered lung problems; thirty-seven (52.86%) faced skin problems due to extreme exposure to heat from the sun; thirty-five (50%) developed eye problems, and 3 (4.29%) experienced miscarriage while working for their families. Kabeer et al. (2013) argue that informal workers face a higher risk of illness than formal workers, yet few have health insurance. Bertulfo (2011) found out that despite the struggles of providing health services, the Philippines and Thailand are among the countries that offer some formal health insurance schemes, which are mainly state-provided and are now available to informal workers. Gozum (2021) added that the pandemic disturbed not only the healthcare system but also the economic plane of different countries. Part of taking care of the citizens' physical and mental well-being is providing them with the basic primary goods of society. The study results emphasize the significance of government support in alleviating women's socio-economic conditions, especially in times of crises.

Amidst the pandemic crisis, women in the informal economic sector were in the spotlight for their introspection. The interview focused on the implementation of the Magna Carta of Women. From the interview conducted, three (3) themes emerged: the Magna Carta of Women in Hindsight, the Imagery of women in society, and the Struggles of Women during the Pandemic.

### **Magna Carta of Women in Hindsight**

Women's lives in the informal economic sector were undeniably challenging as the pandemic struck. In this theme, the perception of informants about their knowledge of the Magna Carta was shared. Several sub-themes emerged, like unfamiliar and vague concepts, inconsistent implementation, and responsive leadership.

**Unfamiliar and vague concept.** The informants admitted they were unaware of the Magna Carta concept for women. Others expressed their inability to distinguish the content of the policy. The informants acknowledged that they do not understand the rationale behind and tenor of the enacted law. From the lens of the women selling and peddling seafood products, the idea is strange and postulated that maybe they forgot what it was all about.

*"I don't have any idea. I haven't even heard that one. I forgot."*

*(Informant 1)*

*"Maybe it offers jobs for women? Maybe benefits! Maybe that is good. What is that, sir? Is that business? It seems strange to me. I haven't heard that yet."*

*(Informant 3)*



The informants have no exact idea about the Magna Carta for Women. Others thought that it would offer a job to them. On the contrary, some informants exclaimed that they had heard it already, but it was not even explained. They pointed out that they were busy working and had no time to study. Other informants also mentioned difficulty learning that thing since they didn't even finish elementary. The priorities of the informants are not on the concepts but on the things that can offer jobs and their basic needs.

The result of this study revealed the unfamiliarity of women of their rights. As opined by Castillo (2022), most female informal workers in the Philippines underwent the challenge on lack of information as regards their rights. However, the study conducted by Perkins et al. (2019) showed that over two-thirds of Bangladeshi women research participants were aware that they have rights pertaining to maternal health, but very few (less than 10%) can enumerate at least three specific rights concerning maternal health. Similarly, in a study conducted by Shaikh (2020) in Pakistan, female research participants also had minimal knowledge about their country's laws for protecting women, which can be due to plain negligence, at least from the perspectives of academics.

**Inconsistent implementation.** Another perception of the informants regarding the Magna Carta of Women is that it is not consistently implemented. It came out that the provision of the Magna Carta is organized but not implemented seriously. Others shared that they don't even experience receiving benefits intended as support for women. Some individuals received benefits, while others were not able to enjoy the benefits.

*The policy provision was in place but was not adequately implemented.  
Other people, they do not know their rights..."*

*(Informant 5)*

*"It was not totally implemented. Maybe only a few were able to benefit.  
I haven't experienced receiving any benefits. I lent money to have capital."*

*(Informant 2)*

**Responsive Leadership.** Based on the informants' shared narratives, they also admitted that subnational governance structures supported the welfare of women. Activities were conducted to address the needs of the people and promote the inclusion and empowerment of women. There were places where they established an association for women in their community. If there were complaints about violating women's rights, these were given fair and impartial treatment by the officials.

*"The implementation of women's rights is visible. Actually, we are included in different activities here in our place. We also celebrate Women's Month."*

*(Informant 3)*

*"The officials were very supportive. We have already established our own association in the Barangay. We really feel and see their support for us."*

*They take action if ever there are complaints and concerns related to women. There is justice.*

*(Informant 6)*

There are also local government officials who are firm and genuine in their service. The informants felt the support in implementing some activities that promote women's welfare. Responsive leadership empowers people to sense that they belong and are valued. It gives them a sense of assurance that whenever they have concerns, the officials are fair and receptive in addressing their needs and concerns. However, unions and associations faced challenges in promoting a united and organized organization to represent a progressively more diverse group of workers (Aliaga, 2021).

### **Imagery of Women in Society**

The pandemic brought changes to the lives of women. Those changes embody different traits and even reveal the potential of women in the informal economy for them to thrive and survive in this complex and uncertain new normal. The next theme presents the role of women and how they view society's response to their respective positions during the pandemic. The theme comprises two sub-themes: resilient women and empowered women.

**Resilient Women.** The Philippine culture demonstrates a patriarchal behavior in which men impose superiority over women. Women are disproportionally treated, and inequality is still the predicament in achieving equal opportunities for women. In contrast, the informants reflected that women today were given equal chances just like men due to their capability to adapt and withstand challenges. Women are recognized as having the same potential as men, breaking the line of prejudice and stereotypes that hold back women's roles in the community. Some informants recalled that people's perspectives evolved and embraced the idea of parity of gender roles compared to before. UN Women (2020) confirms that women make up a large portion of the country's informal sectors and are primarily found in small home businesses, contractual jobs in the manufacturing and service sectors, and other undeveloped sectors of the economy. Women have been impacted immediately during the pandemic and are likely to be more adversely affected in the longer term unless gender progressive intervention is made (Baird & Hill, 2020). Women are resilient in thriving in a complex and volatile environment.

*"Men and women are just the same. What men can do; women can also do it. Women are very persistent and willing to hurdle everything for the family's sake..."*

*(Informants 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 9)*

*"Our time today is far different from before. Women right now were given equal importance. Women can do what men do, endure pain, and sacrifice for the family."*

*(Informants 8 & 10)*

**Empowered Women.** Another image portrayed by women in our society today is the ability to do things and to have control over their decisions. These are how the

informants shared the role of women in the community, that women are at par with men regarding gender roles, abilities, and opportunities.

*"I can say that compared to before, it is far different from now. Women were given different roles and functions in the community. Women are strong and capable of performing men's work."*

*(Informants 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10)*

*"Women were given equal attention with men. We felt our importance and existence in our society. It is also observable that in different aspects, women excel and perform excellently."*

*(Informants 3, 5, 7, & 9)*

The effort to promote gender equality is slowly taking place in the community. The community's perspective now acknowledges women's significant roles in nation-building. Clingain et al. (2021) found out that despite the barriers faced by women, including restrictions on freedom of movement, access to labor markets and social protection, women's ability to earn income, be employed in salaried work, access financial services, and take on responsibility for unpaid work throughout the pandemic is strong evidence of resiliency and empowerment.

### ***Struggles of Women During the Pandemic***

During the pandemic, women faced several struggles that affected their lives and livelihoods. The devastating outcome of COVID-19 impaired their income to sustain the needs of their family. However, the pandemic highlighted the spirit of women to work despite the hazards and dangers of the virus. The sub-themes that surfaced are delayed assistance, parental obligations, and selective and partial treatment.

***Delayed Assistance.*** During the lockdown, the government implemented a social amelioration program through the Baniyahan Act that mandates 5,000 – 8,000 pesos cash subsidies and goods for families. The informants mostly relied on subsidies from the government during the pandemic (International Monetary Fund, 2021).

*"There were times that the assistance they promised took too long to be given. There were instances when our needs were not prioritized. They will just say that we need to wait, but sometimes we get tired of waiting because we are in need."*

*(Informant 2)*

The informants had a hard time on how to survive since the promised assistance was delayed. Their family members depend on the subsidy allotted by the government since most of them have no work. Gudmalin (2021) discovered that the social amelioration program was delayed due to the enormous scope of beneficiaries. Also, the Department of Social Welfare and Development (DSWD) and the Department of the Interior and Local Government (DILG) did not develop a database system to ease the process. They depended on the beneficiary targeting protocols through barangay identification. Another barrier is the health restriction that impedes their distribution, restrictions on traveling from one place to another, and uncoordinated communication

between government agencies (Leyesa & Flores-Obanil, 2021). There were discrepancies complained by citizens regarding the unjust distribution of financial assistance. Government officials were accused of corrupting the supposed aid to the citizens (Marquez, 2020).

**Parental Obligations.** As the government declared lockdown, schools were closed and shifted to module and home-schooling. It causes more struggles for parents since they have to look for ways to have income and, at the same time, assist their children in doing the modules. Women earning below the minimum wage have difficulty hiring tutors to assist their children.

*"When I peddled seafood for our daily income, no one left to take care of my children because I had to sell so that we have food. I was always worried if they were done eating and how's their condition every time I left."*

*(Informant 1)*

Most parents reported that the closure of schools and the unavailability of childcare centers are the primary concerns of working parents. Parents of school-aged children provide most unpaid work at home, greatly affecting their work (Leyesa & Flores-Obanil, 2021). Since schools nationwide have turned to remote learning, parents struggle to juggle raising their children while working to earn (Stevenson, 2021). Many parents have struggled to continue to work as they did before the pandemic. Bauer et al. (2021) posited that women carried the burden of the pandemic facing the challenges of livelihood, employment, and supporting children's academic modules and requirements.

**Selective and partial treatment.** Informants shared there were instances when the assistance distribution was unfair. Some community members enjoyed the assistance, while others could not receive any. Informants rooted to enjoy such benefits since the pandemic brought them to a difficult and unprepared situation.

*"There were times that I never received any cash assistance, and one time I received but not the same amount as mentioned. The sad reality is that there is favoritism and a "who you know" system. If you are in the same party, you will be part of the list, if not, you receive nothing."*

*(Informants 5)*

The subsidy from the government is intended to assist the people displaced from their work due to the lockdown. However, the expected help is curtailed by mismanagement and an inequitable system that adds to the suffering of the people. The United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF) (2021) reported that Filipino families did not enjoy equitable subsidy distribution despite the implemented strategies. There were criteria set that excluded other members from enjoying the assistance. Given that there was no comprehensive list of poor and vulnerable populations available, people were selected and listed, leading to an unjust and selective process. Cho et al. (2021) noted that the list was based on the database covering around 70 percent of the population with socioeconomic status at the

household level collected in 2015. Several lists were asked for and revised for updates, resulting in delayed assistance.

## Conclusions

The significant roles of women in the economy are undeniably vital. However, they are also one of the vulnerable populations to abuse and exploitation. Women have no in-depth idea about the concept and salient provisions mandated by the Magna Carta of Women. Though they are aware of some benefits, there is a superficial level of awareness of the law among women workers, preventing them from availing themselves and enjoying the benefits due to them. On the other hand, women also struggle with the distribution of delayed assistance and inconsistency in implementation during the COVID-19 health crisis. Aside from that, women have difficulty juggling their work and parental responsibilities to their children. Selective and partial treatment in terms of giving benefits is one of the ordeals women encounter. There is a need for the government to revisit the implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of protocols and provide systematic and enabling mechanisms that will produce better services for women. The partnership between agencies and academic institutions must refocus on sustainable and regenerative livelihood programs that should be responsive to the context of the people. Local initiatives should not dwell only on establishing associations but deliver practical and empowering programs that promote awareness of the laws that protect women's rights toward attaining gender equality in consonance with SDG 5.

## References

- Aliaga, M. (2021). Gender inequality during the pandemic: Perspectives of women workers in Latin America and the Caribbean. *International Journal of Labour Research*, 10(1). [https://www.ilo.org/publication/wcms\\_806971](https://www.ilo.org/publication/wcms_806971)
- Asian Development Bank. (2021, December 19). *Youth, women among most vulnerable to job loss in Southeast Asia during COVID-19 – ADB*. <https://www.adb.org/news/youth-women-among-most-vulnerable-job-loss-southeast-asia-during-covid-19-adb>
- Bauer, L., Dube, A., Edelberg, W., & Sojourner, A. (2021, June 03). Examining the uneven and hard-to-predict labor market recovery. The Hamilton Project, Brookings Institution. <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2021/06/03/examining-the-uneven-and-hard-to-predict-labor-market-recovery/>
- Bertulfo, L. (2011). Women and the informal economy. *Australian Agency for International Development*. <https://www.dfat.gov.au/sites/default/files/women-informal-economy-lota-bertulfo.pdf>
- Bryman, A. (2006). Integrating quantitative and qualitative research: How is it done? *Qualitative Research*, 6(1), 97-113.
- Carlson, D. L., Petts, R., & Pepin, J. R. (2020, May 6). *Changes in parents' domestic labor during the COVID-19 Pandemic*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soin.12459>
- Clingain, C., Jayasinghe, D., Hunt, A., & Gray, M. (2021). Women's economic empowerment in the face of Covid-19 and displacement: Restoring resilient futures. HPG Commissioned Report. <https://odi.org/en/publications/womens-economicempowerment-in-the-face-of-covid-19-and-displacement-restoring-resilient-futures>.

- Cho, Y., Avalos, J., Kawasoe, Y., Johnson, D., & Rodriguez, R. (2021). Mitigating the impact of COVID-19 on the welfare of low income households in the Philippines: *The Role of Social Protection*. World Bank Social Protection Policy Note 1. <https://reliefweb.int/report/philippines/mitigating-impact-covid-19-welfare-low-income-households-philippines-role-social>
- Chriscaden, K. (2020, October 13). *Impact of COVID-19 on people's livelihoods, their health and our food systems*. World Health Organization. <https://www.who.int/news/item/13-10-2020-impact-of-covid-19-on-people's-livelihoods-their-health-and-our-food-systems>
- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education*. USA: Routledge Publishing Co.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Creswell, J. (2014). *Educational research: Planning, conducting, and evaluating quantitative and qualitative research* (6th Ed). Pearson Education, Inc.
- Creswell, J. W., & Plano Clark, V. L. (2007). *Designing and conducting mixed methods research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Grekou, D., and Lu, Y. (2021). *Gender differences in employment one year into the COVID-19 Pandemic: An analysis by Industrial Sector and Firm Size*. Economic and Social Reports, 1(5). Statistics Canada Catalogue No. 36-28-0001. Ottawa: Statistics Canada.
- De Haldevang, M. (2020, April 02). *Coronavirus is Imperiling Billions of Informal Workers-especially Women*. Quartz. <https://qz.com/1831326/coronavirus-imperils-billions-of-informal-workers-especially-women/>
- Golla, A.M., Malhotra, A., Nanda, P., & Mera, P. (2011). Understanding and measuring women's economic empowerment: Definition, framework and indicators, International Center for Research on Women (ICRW). <http://www.gsdr.org/docs/open/hdq815.pdf>
- Gozum, I. E. A., Capulong, H. G. M., Galang, J. R. F., & Gopez, J. M. W. (2021). An ayuda to the least advantaged: providing a program for those who were hit the hardest during the COVID-19 pandemic. *Journal of Public Health*, 43(2), 317–318. <https://doi.org/10.1093/pubmed/fdab014>
- Gudmalin, C., Perante-Calina, L., Balbosa, J., Mangahas, J., & Samoza, M. (2021). Protecting the poor and vulnerable against the pandemic. *ADB Development Case Study*, 3 <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/736446/adbi-cs2021-03.pdf>
- International Labour Organization. (2017). *World social protection report 2017–19: Universal social protection to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals* (Geneva).
- International Monetary Fund. (2021, July 02). *Policy Tracker*. Policy Responses to COVID-19. <https://www.imf.org/en/Topics/imf-and-covid19/Policy-Responses-to-COVID-19#top>
- Johnson, R., & Christensen, L. (2014). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. USA: SAGE Publication, Inc.
- Kabeer, N., Milward, K., & Sudarshan, R. (2013). Organising women workers in the informal economy. *Gender and Development*, 21(2), 249–263. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/13552074.2013.802145>
- Leyesa, D. and Flores-Obanil, C. (2021, September 13). SHE-cession: Struggles of Filipinas amidst the COVID-19 Pandemic. Heinrich-Böll-Stiftung Southeast Asia. <https://th.boell.org/en/2021/09/13/she-cession>

- Marquez, C. (2020, May 05). DILG to PNP: Go after local officials behind dishonest SAP distribution. *Philippine Daily Inquirer*. <https://newsinfo.inquirer.net/1269790/dilg-to-pnp-go-after-local-officials-behind-dishonest-sap-distribution>
- National wages and productivity Commission. (n.d.). *Region XI (Davao Region) Daily Minimum Wage Rates*. Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE). <https://nwpc.dole.gov.ph/regionandwages/region-xi-davao-region/>
- Neuendorf, K. A. (2019). Content analysis and thematic analysis. In P. Brough (Ed.), *Research methods for applied psychologists: Design, Analysis and Reporting* (pp. 211-223). New York: Routledge.
- Perkins, J.E., Rahman, A.E., Siddique, A.B., Mazumder, T., Haider, M.R., & Arifeen, S.E. (2019). Awareness and perceptions of women regarding human rights related to maternal health in rural Bangladesh. *Journal of Global Health*, 9. doi:10.7189/jogh.09.010415
- Philippine Statistics Authority. (2022, August 15). *Average annual family income in 2021 is estimated at PhP 307.19 thousand*. Highlights of the preliminary results of the 2021 Annual Family income and expenditure survey. <https://psa.gov.ph/content/highlights-preliminary-results-2021-annual-family-income-and-expenditure-survey>
- Philippine Commission on Women. (2010). *Republic Act No. 9710. The Magna Carta of Women. Implementing Rules and Regulations*. <https://tile.loc.gov/storage-services/service/gdc/gdcovop/2012330658/2012330658.pdf>
- Rivera, V., & Castro, F. (2021). Between social protests and a global pandemic: Working transitions under the economic effects of COVID-19. *Social Sciences*, 10, 145. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci10040145>
- Robinson, R.S. (2014). Purposive sampling. In Michalos, A.C. (Eds) *Encyclopedia of quality of life and well-being research*. Springer, Dordrecht. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5\\_2337](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-0753-5_2337)
- Rubery, J., & Tavora, I. (2020). The Covid-19 crisis and gender equality: Risks and opportunities. In Vanhercke, B., Spasova, S., & Fronteddu, B. (Eds.), *Social policy in the European Union: State of play 2020. Facing the pandemic* (pp.71-96). <https://www.etui.org/sites/default/files/202012/Social%20policy%20in%20the%20European%20Union%20state%20of%20play%202020-web.pdf>
- Shaikh, S.S. (2020). Evaluating the awareness of women's rights in public sector universities. *Grassroots*, 51(11), 309-318.
- Shang, Y., Li, H., & Zhang, R. (2021). Effects of pandemic outbreak on economies: Evidence from business history context. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9(632043). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpubh.2021.632043>
- Sharma, L., & Smith, J. (2021). Women in a COVID-19 recession: Employment, job loss and wage inequality in Canada. *Gender and COVID-19 Evidence Download*. <https://www.genderandcovid-19.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/Women-in-a-COVID-19-recession-Canada-and-economic-impacts.pdf>
- Stevenson, B. (2021). Women, work, and families: Recovering from the pandemic – induced recession. *Economic Analysis*. The Hamilton Project. [https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/20210929\\_Hamilton\\_stevenson\\_womenWorkFamilies.pdf](https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/20210929_Hamilton_stevenson_womenWorkFamilies.pdf)
- Tessier, L., Plaza, M.S., Behrendt, C., Bonnet, F., & St-Pierre Guilbault, E. (2013). Social protection floors and gender equality: A brief overview, *Extension of Social Security (ESS) Working Paper*, 37, Geneva.

- UN Women. (2015). Progress of the world's women 2015–16: Transforming economies, realizing rights, New York. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/digital-library/publications/2015/4/progress-of-the-worlds-women-2015>
- UN Women. (2020, September 16). *COVID-19 and its economic toll on women: The story behind the numbers*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2020/9/feature-covid-19-economic-impacts-on-women>
- UN Women and ILO (2021). Ecosystem landscaping to advance the accountability to implement the women's empowerment principles in ASEAN. <https://asiapacific.unwomen.org/en/digitallibrary/publications/2021/06/ecosystemlandscapingto-advance-the-accountability-to-implement-the-weps>
- UNICEF (2021). *Effects of COVID-19 on child poverty and efficacy of social protection responses in the Philippines: Qualitative assessment of the social amelioration programme*.
- Yanfei, Z. (2021). How women bear the brunt of COVID-19's damages on work. *Japan Labor Issues*, 5(28), 2-10. <https://www.jil.go.jp/english/jli/documents/2021/029-01.pdf>
- Yavorsky J., Qian Y., & Sargent, AC. (2021). The gendered pandemic: The implications of COVID-19 for work and family. *Sociology Compass*, 15, e12881. <https://doi.org/10.1111/soc4.12881>
- Zarrilli, S., & Luomaranta, H. (2021, April 08). *Gender and unemployment: Lessons from the COVID-19 Pandemic*. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. <https://unctad.org/news/gender-and-unemployment-lessons-covid-19-pandemic>

### Acknowledgment

The researchers want to acknowledge the Davao Oriental State University through the Gender Research and Resource Center for funding this research. To the Local Government Units of Baganga, Cateel, Governor Generoso, and the City of Mati for facilitating the coordination with respondents. Also, a warm thanks to those who relentlessly extended their hands for the completion of this project: Ms. Jonalyn A. Dumadangon, Ms. Niña Lapac, Mr. Kevin Lorono, Mr. John Kenny Rafon, Ms. Vanessa E. Asaias, Mr. Philip Yncierto, and Dr. Maria Gloria R. Lugo.

Correspondence concerning this paper should be addressed to the corresponding author Davao Oriental, Philippines, email: [jhonnel.villegas@dorsu.edu.ph](mailto:jhonnel.villegas@dorsu.edu.ph)