

# Gender Participation and the Living and Working Conditions of Women

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## ABSTRACT

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The study explores gender participation and the living conditions of women in the Jolason, Tubungan, and Iloilo weaving communities. Using a mixed-methods approach reveals significant disparities in gender participation and the challenges faced by community members. Data was collected through direct observation, in-depth interviews, and focus group discussions. The findings highlight women's critical role in preserving weaving techniques and the limited access to resources, market opportunities, and skill transmission to younger generations. The study highlights the need for targeted interventions to empower women and engage youth in the weaving tradition. The findings can help policymakers, local government units, and NGOs support the revitalisation of the weaving industry and promote gender equity.

**Keywords:** Challenges, Gender participation, Living conditions, Women.

## INTRODUCTION

As a major attraction, Iloilo develops tourism by highlighting its culture and heritage. Handloom weaving is one of the most ancient crafts in the Philippines. It is a part of the Ilonggo culture that has survived for a thousand years.

This intricate craft, characterised by its vibrant colours and elaborate patterns, has been a cornerstone of Ilonggo culture, reflecting its rich history and regional identity.

Historically, handloom textiles were highly regarded and sought after as trade items in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. Iloilo had a small industrial sector dominated by artisan production and small home-based businesses. In the later part of that century, the development of a large-scale weaving industry started the movement of Iloilo's surge in trade and economy in the Visayas. It was then that Iloilo was referred to as the "Textile Capital of the Philippines," where handloomed textiles were exported to Manila and other foreign countries. There has been a tremendous demand for these Panay fabrics. This ushered in a period of unparalleled prosperity for the Ilonggos.

Handloom weaving is a time-consuming, laborious process that has remained unchanged for hundreds of years. It is not only an artistic expression but also a vital source of livelihood for many communities.

However, since the late 1980s, the weaving industry has faced significant challenges, primarily due to a decline in interest among the younger generation. This shift has raised concerns about preserving this cultural legacy, as traditional skills and knowledge risk being lost to modern economic pursuits.

Various initiatives have emerged to revitalise the hablon industry and engage youth in its practice in response to this pressing issue. A notable development is the establishment of the Regional Yarn Production and Innovation Centre (RYPIC) by the Iloilo Science and Technology University (ISATU) in collaboration with the Department of Science and Technology - Philippine Textile Research Institute (DOST-PTRI). This centre aims to produce high-quality yarns from natural fibres such as abaca and pineapple, blended with cotton, thereby supporting local weaving efforts and aligning with Sustainable Development Goal 11.4, which emphasises the protection of cultural heritage.

Preliminary assessments and discussions with the Office of the Provincial Tourism in Iloilo have underscored the urgent need to empower women in the community by enhancing their skills and identifying effective interventions to safeguard this cultural tradition. Focus group discussions (FGDs) and interviews with the Jolason Women's Group have revealed a troubling trend: Families in Barangay Jolason are struggling to pass down the weaving tradition to their children. As a result, the craft is at risk of disappearing, with younger generations increasingly drawn to alternative sources of income such as agriculture and livestock farming. While some women sell traditional snacks (kakanin) made from their produce, the rich heritage of weaving remains under threat.

This research explores the barriers to transmitting weaving skills within the community and proposes actionable strategies to preserve and promote the craft. By addressing these challenges, we can ensure that weaving continues to thrive as an essential aspect of Ilonggos' cultural identity, fostering artistic expression and economic empowerment for women in the region.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Legal Bases**

An essential resource for researching gender participation is the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which defines discrimination as any sex-based distinction, exclusion, or restriction that prevents women from being recognised, enjoying, or exercising their rights in a variety of contexts. A framework and advocacy tool called the Beijing Platform for Action (BPFA) seeks to eliminate obstacles to women's equal involvement in decision-making at all societal levels. Gender participation scholars can look at many topics, including women in leadership and decision-making, education and training, women and the economy, and women and the media (Sira et al., 2022).

The 1987 Philippine Constitution and Republic Act No. 7192 and the Women in Development and Nation Building Act provide a strong legal foundation for studying gender participation in the country. These laws mandate fundamental equality between women and men and require government agencies to eliminate gender prejudice in their regulations. Research must examine how these commitments translate into tangible realities for women's political, economic, social, and cultural participation.

The Magna Carta of Women (MCW) in the Philippines provides a strong legal basis for studying gender participation due to its explicit definition of substantive equality and mandate for temporary special measures to address historical and systemic discrimination against women. The CHED Gender and Development Focal Committee and Secretariat provides a legal basis for studies on women's gender participation in the Philippine higher education sector, aligning with national GAD mandates and expertise. Studies conducted under this framework can help understand how the higher education sector contributes to or hinders women's advancement and participation in the national development agenda.

### **Weaving Industry of Iloilo**

Hablon is a traditional handwoven fabric from Iloilo, noted as an essential component of the province's character and economy (Pacquiao, 2025). Since the pre-Spanish era, when the Ilonggo people woven textiles from abaca, cotton, and silk, Iloilo has been the Philippines' leading hub for textile and weaving arts (Funtecha, 1998). However, modern economic transformations that took place, particularly in the development of large-scale commercial weaving, have had a lasting impact on the inhabitants and economy of the province. In addition to Miagao, Oton, Santa Barbara, and other locations, Jolason in Tubungan, Iloilo, is among the numerous places for the weaving industry.

### **Gender Participation and Weaving**

Women played a significant role in creating textiles for their families and communities, making weaving a home activity. As cultures changed, the weaving community needed more specialised positions to meet the growing need for textiles.

Gayao et al. (2018) studied gender engagement in Baquio's textile industry, where men and women can find employment and investment opportunities in this unorganised sector. 97% of the leaders in the textile sector in Baguio City and Benguet Province are women. They oversee the house, food, childcare, education, weaving, wholesale, and retail enterprises. With monthly incomes ranging from PhP750 to PhP70,000, women in the sector feel more empowered and have more influence over domestic choices.

According to a 2013 Case Study on the Weaving Progress for the Miagao Hablon Industry: Gender-Responsive Value Chain Analysis of Hablon Weaves in Miagao, Iloilo, Hablon weaving is a women-led trade in which skilled female labour is widely available in the area because loom weaving skills are passed down through the generations. Elderly weavers teach girls how to use looms. The younger generation is prepared to weave through this practice, enabling them to take the position of the elder women weavers in the workplace and support their families.

### **Living and Working Conditions**

Living and working conditions are essential aspects of weaving for women since they directly affect their general well-being, productivity, safety, and health. Extended periods of manual labour, exposure to dust and materials, and repeated actions that might cause strain or injury are all common in weaving. Unhealthy working conditions can worsen these risks, resulting in health problems and a lower standard of living (Punnet, L., & Wegham, D. H., 2024).

Furthermore, women who work in weaving frequently do it from home or in modest production facilities, making it difficult to distinguish between work and personal life. Women must have safe and comfortable living and working environments to handle their duties, pursue their chosen occupations sustainably, and maintain a healthy work-life balance.

Favourable working conditions allow women to gain economic and social empowerment, support their families, make a steady income, and develop confidence in their abilities (Mehra, R., & Gammage, S., 2010). Women who work as weavers can advance their careers and enhance their general quality of life by emphasising safe and healthy working conditions. Kabeer, N. (2012) pointed out that their economic empowerment and inclusive growth significantly impact women's personal lives in the labour market and business development.

Recognising the significance of living and working conditions, we can strive to create a more sustainable and favourable work environment for weaving women, which will ultimately improve their way of life and career prospects.

### **Challenges in Weaving**

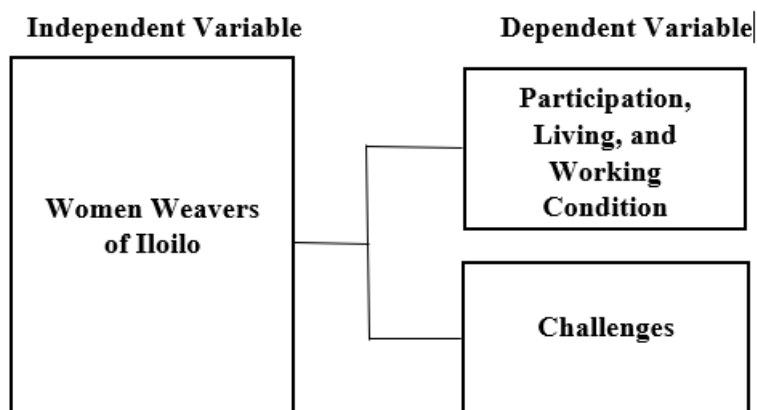
Weavers and artisans face many problems and challenges from scratch to the finished product, and they make sacrifices in their working environment as well as in their livelihood (Problems or Challenges Faced by Handloom Weavers—From an Ergonomic Perspective and Solve the Ergonomic Issues).

According to Nardas Handwoven & Crafts, modern weaving technology, consumerism, and a stronger and faster exchange of cultural influences provide numerous obstacles for the Philippine Cordilleras' weaving sector. Another challenge is the annual decline in skilled weavers. The younger generation is uninterested in the heritage, and the weavers are elderly. Other areas include product development, enterprise management, and market development.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY**

This study aims to assess the participation of men and women and the living and working conditions of the community in Jolason, Tubungan, and Iloilo. Specifically, it seeks to gather the community's profile, analyse gender roles, identify monthly income and its sources, and explore the challenges faced by community members.

## Conceptual Paradigm of the Study



**Figure 1.** The Conceptual Paradigm of the Study.

This conceptual framework suggests the relationship of the study's variables. As an independent variable, women weavers act as a crucial determinant of their participation, their living and working conditions, and the nature of the challenges they confront within the community.

## RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches to comprehensively understand the practices and challenges faced by the community in a selected barangay of the Municipality of Tubungan, Iloilo. Recognised for its rich weaving tradition, this barangay provided an ideal context for the investigation. This design combined quantitative data collection with qualitative insights, ensuring a well-rounded perspective.

### Respondents and Sampling Plan

The study specifically targeted individuals directly involved in the textile-related industry, selected through purposive sampling to ensure that participants possessed relevant experience and knowledge about the weaving craft.

### Instrument and Data Gathering Procedure

Researchers conducted field observations to gain first-hand insights into the community interactions and the socio-economic environment. This method allowed for the identification of contextual factors influencing community practices.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with key informants, including community leaders and local entrepreneurs. An interview guide elicited detailed responses regarding participants' experiences, challenges, and perspectives on preserving weaving traditions.

Focus Group Discussions (FGDs) were organised to foster collaborative discussions among participants, allowing them to share their views and experiences in a group setting. This method enriched the data collected by encouraging dialogue and exchanging ideas.

Data collection tools included an Interview guide designed to prompt detailed responses from participants, focusing on their experiences, challenges, and suggestions for preserving the community's tradition. Structured observation protocols were used to systematically document observations during field visits, ensuring consistency and reliability in data collection.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis involved both quantitative and qualitative methods. The quantitative analysis utilised descriptive statistics, including frequency counts and percentages, which were employed to characterise the household profiles,

their gender roles, their sources of income, and the challenges they encountered. This quantitative data provided a foundational understanding of the community's demographics and economic activities. The qualitative data derived from interviews and FGDs were analysed thematically, identifying key themes and patterns related to the experiences and perspectives of participants. This analysis provided more profound insights into the cultural significance of weaving and the challenges faced by the community.

### **Ethical Considerations**

The study follows ethical guidelines and obtains informed consent while examining women's participation in the community. Researchers are taught to conduct interviews with empathy and respect. Participants can withdraw from the study anytime and are advised of its goals, methods, and dangers. Data collected was kept private and securely disposed of after six months.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Participants' Demographics**

Jolason is a hilly barangay in Tubungan, Iloilo province, with 667 residents. Situated on the island of Panay, the barangay has a diverse demographic and socio-economic landscape. As of 2022, it has 156 households, with an average household size of 5 individuals, resulting in a total population of around 780 residents. The community has a relatively low population density of 4 persons per square kilometre. Most residents (69%) are married, with a small percentage being single, widowed, or cohabiting. This high marriage rate is attributed to cultural emphasis on marriage, family values, economic considerations, and religious beliefs, which often promote early marriage and discourage alternative living arrangements.

The distribution of household heads by sex in Jolason reveals a significant male majority, with approximately 80% of households led by men. This trend reflects traditional gender roles with men as the primary providers and decision-makers within families. Such dynamics can have profound implications for family structures, decision-making, and resource allocation, often reinforcing existing gender disparities in both social and economic contexts. The predominance of male household heads aligns with a conventional view that men were assigned the roles of breadwinners and leaders. This practice not only perpetuates stereotypes regarding gender capabilities and responsibilities but also reinforces a societal framework where male dominance is normalised. As a result, economic resources and opportunities may be disproportionately controlled by men, which can limit women's access to financial independence and their participation in the economy. Moreover, the male majority in household leadership can shape social norms and expectations within the community, potentially marginalising women's voices in family and community decision-making processes. This marginalisation can hinder women's ability to advocate for their rights and interests, further entrenching gender inequalities.

When examining the distribution of senior citizens within households, the data indicates that the majority of households in Jolason (49 households) have one senior citizen. Additionally, 22 households include two senior citizens, while only one household accommodates three senior citizens. This distribution underscores the commonality of having senior citizens as integral members of family units in the community. The prevalence of senior citizens in households reflects the community's commitment to family cohesion and support for older generations. It also highlights the potential for intergenerational relationships, where younger family members can provide care and assistance to their elders while benefiting from the wisdom and experience of senior citizens. Understanding this distribution is crucial for addressing the specific needs of senior citizens in Jolason, including healthcare, social services, and community support programs. By recognising the role of senior citizens within households, stakeholders can develop targeted initiatives that enhance the quality of life for seniors and their families, fostering a more inclusive and supportive community environment.

The demographic data from Barangay Jolason in 2022 reveals that a significant majority of households—approximately 70%—comprise 3 to 4 family members. This trend indicates a clear preference for smaller family units, which may be influenced by various factors, including economic considerations, changing societal norms, and individual lifestyle choices.



The inclination towards smaller families can be attributed to several interrelated dynamics. Smaller family units may be more manageable regarding resource allocation, allowing for better financial stability and improved living conditions. Additionally, evolving societal norms, such as increased access to education and career opportunities, may lead individuals to prioritise personal and professional development over larger family sizes. Individual lifestyle choices also play a crucial role; many families may opt for fewer children to focus on quality of life, education, and health. This shift reflects broader trends in many communities where family planning and reproductive health are increasingly prioritised.

Household heads by sex in Jolason reveal a significant male majority, with approximately 80% of households led by men. This gender dominance can have profound implications for family structures, decision-making, and resource allocation, often reinforcing existing gender disparities. Most households report earnings ranging from Php 3,001 to Php 5,000, with a smaller proportion falling within the Php 5,001 to Php 7,000 range. The small number of households earning less than Php 1,000 per month can be attributed to social safety nets, government assistance, and community support. The small number of households earning less than Php 1,000 can be attributed to social safety nets, such as government assistance and community support, which help families maintain a basic standard of living.

Additionally, even the lowest-wage labour typically provides an income above this threshold, as many households engage in multiple small-scale income-generating activities to meet their essential needs. This income distribution highlights the socioeconomic challenges faced by the region, including limited access to higher-paying jobs, widespread low-wage employment, and systemic income inequality. The concentration of households in lower-income brackets reflects a predominance of unskilled or semi-skilled workers, with fewer opportunities for upward mobility into higher-income categories. Ultimately, the data underscores the urgent need for economic diversification and investment in skills development to enhance household incomes and reduce inequality in Jolason.

### **Living and Working Conditions**

Jolason's demographic landscape is primarily shaped by its agricultural sector, with most residents engaged as farm labourers. Cultural, geographical, and economic factors have historically positioned farming as the primary occupation in the rural community. The region's fertile soil, abundant water resources, and favourable climate make agriculture a practical and sustainable livelihood for most residents.

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The data from Barangay Jolason reveals significant insights into the community's economic landscape, particularly regarding household income and employment patterns. Approximately 50% of households have three members actively working and earning a living, while 33% have two working members, and only 17% have one member contributing to the household income. This distribution indicates a robust level of economic activity within the community, suggesting that families often rely on multiple income sources to meet their financial obligations. The

presence of numerous income earners in many households highlights the necessity of collaborative financial support, especially in areas with high living costs or limited job opportunities. Couples frequently work together to cover essential expenses such as housing, education, and healthcare. Additionally, cultural norms and expectations may influence employment participation rates, particularly for women, as working together to support the family is common in many cultures.

Beyond farming, two primary sources of income have emerged: construction work and motorcycle driving. The prominence of construction jobs in the area likely reflects infrastructure development, including projects on road construction, housing, and public facilities. These initiatives create valuable employment opportunities, particularly for residents with limited formal education, as construction roles typically require on-the-job training rather than advanced qualifications. While construction work is physically demanding, it remains relatively accessible, offering a practical option for households looking to supplement or diversify their income. Motorcycle driving has also become a vital source of income, addressing the transportation needs of residents in Jolason. With limited public transport infrastructure, motorcycles are crucial in commuting, delivering goods, and reaching remote locations, resulting in a consistent demand for drivers. The barriers to entry for becoming a motorcycle driver are low, requiring minimal investment and training, which makes it an appealing occupation for many. Some residents operate motorcycles as informal transport services, such as "habal-habal" (motorcycle taxis), while others utilise them for delivery or courier services. Both construction work and motorcycle driving often serve as supplementary income sources for households, especially during periods when agricultural income is low due to seasonal fluctuations. Additionally, Jolason's proximity to urbanised areas or regional growth centres may further enhance opportunities in these sectors, allowing residents to commute or engage in nearby economic activities.

### **Challenges**

According to this research's findings, women in Jolason face various challenges. Women often face societal expectations that prioritise their roles as homemakers, limiting their opportunities for education and employment. Limited participation in decision-making may restrict women's involvement in community and household decision-making processes, undermining their voices. Women who pursue non-traditional roles may face social stigma or disapproval from their communities, discouraging them from seeking independence.

Numerous women may lack access to mental health resources or support networks, making it challenging to address psychological issues effectively. The pressure of fulfilling traditional roles, combined with economic stress, can lead to anxiety, depression, and other mental health challenges. Societal expectations and limited opportunities can contribute to feelings of inadequacy and low self-worth among women. Women may face barriers to accessing healthcare services, including reproductive health care, leading to untreated health issues. Limited access to prenatal and postnatal care can pose significant risks to maternal and child health. Women may experience domestic violence or harassment, impacting their physical safety and well-being.

Women rely on male family members for financial support, limiting their independence and ability to make economic decisions. Due to educational barriers and societal norms, women often have fewer job opportunities, particularly in higher-paying sectors. Even when employed, women may earn less than their male counterparts, contributing to economic inequality and financial instability. The challenges women face in Jolason, Tubungan, are multifaceted and deeply rooted in socio-cultural, psychological, physical, and economic factors. Addressing these issues requires targeted interventions that promote gender equality, enhance access to education and healthcare, and empower women economically and socially. By fostering an environment that supports women's rights and opportunities, the community can work towards improving the overall well-being of its female population.

Social stigma, limited decision-making participation, and societal expectations provide many obstacles for women in Jolason, Tubungan. Their inability to obtain mental health resources frequently results in anxiety, depression, and low self-esteem. The lack of access to healthcare also puts the health of mothers and children at risk. Well-being and physical safety may be impacted by domestic abuse or harassment. Male family members' financial support restricts one's autonomy and decision-making ability. Social conventions and educational limitations can limit women's employment options, particularly in higher-paying industries. Even when working, women could make less money

than men, exacerbating economic inequality and instability. Targeted measures supporting gender equality, expanding access to healthcare and education, and empowering women socially and economically are necessary to address these problems.

### **CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

Jolason, a small farming town with strong family traditions and values, faces financial struggles due to its reliance on farming. The town's economy is weak due to the reliance on crops and the lack of other jobs. To improve the situation, Jolason must diversify its economic opportunities by investing in education and skill development programs that empower residents to explore various career paths beyond agriculture.

Younger women often assume the role of heads of households in their 20s and early 30s, while men typically take on this responsibility in their mid-30s to early 40s. This trend can be attributed to traditional gender roles, which shape the life trajectories of both men and women. As women marry and start families, their access to education and employment opportunities diminishes, forcing them to take on household leadership at a younger age.

The community in Jolason strongly cares for its elders, with many seniors living in family homes. To help seniors, the community needs to know how many live in each house so they can create good healthcare and support programs.

Traditional roles in Jolason limit women, giving them less education, fewer jobs, and little say in decisions. This limitation leads to anxiety and depression, as well as a big gap between the rich and the poor. To address these issues, Jolason needs to change its views and value women beyond their traditional roles so they can be equal and empowered. Women in Jolason struggle with mental health due to pressure from conventional roles and money problems, leading to anxiety and depression. They also struggle to get needed healthcare, especially reproductive care, which puts mothers and children at serious risk, harming the health of families. Darroca et al. (2024) noted in their study on gender discrepancies in the Filipino hospitality industry that despite progress in gender equity, gender gaps persist in the global workplace, discouraging women's access to leadership positions across sectors, fair compensation, and opportunity. These discrepancies also lead to reduced earnings, fewer job options, and less productivity, which impacts individuals, businesses, and society (World Bank, 2022; Economic Forum, 2022).

In addressing Jolason's economic vulnerabilities, the following recommendations are suggested: implement high-demand skills programs, empower women's caregiving responsibilities through education and vocational training, conduct community awareness campaigns, set up training centres beyond farming, establish community mental health clinics, and provide vocational training and microfinance opportunities. These measures aim to challenge traditional gender roles, promote gender equality, and support women's cooperatives and income-generating projects while respecting the cultural context.

### **AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTIONS**

#### **First Author: Jeanneth F. Darroca**

As lead researcher, Dr Darroca played a key role in developing the study's central research questions about gender participation and its complex connection to women's living and working circumstances. She oversaw the development of the study's general framework and the choices of suitable research techniques, such as mixed-method approaches, qualitative interviews, and quantitative surveys.

#### **Second Author: Tadema B. Formarejo**

She was in charge of methodically gathering information about women's living and working conditions, ensuring the information was pertinent to the study's emphasis on gender participation. Additionally, she analysed the gathered data statistically, particularly looking at patterns, correlations, and possible causal links related to gender within the context.



**Third Author: Emily A. Dela Cruz**

Carried out a thorough literature review with a particular focus on gender participation in various fields and the specific difficulties women face in their living and working environments. She was also in charge of creating and outlining the theoretical framework that guides this investigation, making sure it specifically tackles the gender-related problems that have been identified and offers a prism through which to view the results.

**Fourth Author: Gilbert G. Marin**

Made a substantial contribution to the theoretical formulation of the research questions, focusing on clarifying the underlying gender dynamics at work in the context of women's living and working conditions and gender participation. He also actively contributed a gender-informed perspective to interpreting the research findings during its analysis.

**Conflict of Interest:**

There is no conflict of interest in this study.

**Acknowledgement:**

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