

EMPOWERING SOLO PARENTS THROUGH COMMUNITY-BASED LIVELIHOOD SKILLS TRAINING IN CAWAYAN BOGTONG, MALASIQUI, PANGASINAN

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Abstract

This study examined the role of livelihood skills training in empowering solo parents in Cawayan Bogtong, Malasiqui, Pangasinan. Employing a mixed-methods research design, it gathered both quantitative and qualitative data to assess changes in livelihood-related knowledge and skills, employment status, income levels, and the personal experiences of solo parents after completing the training. Data were collected through survey questionnaires, interviews, and focus group discussions involving selected solo parent participants. The analysis utilized descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and chi-square tests for quantitative data, while thematic analysis was employed for qualitative findings.

Results indicated that the training significantly enhanced participants' competencies in various livelihood activities, including product-making, marketing, budgeting, and small business management. Statistical analyses revealed a substantial increase in employment rates and income levels following program completion. Thematic insights further emphasized participants' lived experiences, highlighting gains in self-confidence, a renewed sense of purpose, and strengthened community ties. However, challenges such as financial constraints, caregiving-related time limitations, and inadequate access to startup capital and essential tools hindered the full application of learned skills.

The findings underscore the need for sustained support systems, inclusive and flexible training designs, and evidence-based program implementation. The study concludes that community-based livelihood training serves as a transformative intervention for solo parents, fostering both economic stability and social empowerment. These insights provide valuable guidance for policymakers, barangay leaders, and development planners in designing responsive livelihood programs for marginalized populations.

Keywords: Solo Parents, Community-Based Training, Livelihood Skills, Empowerment, Mixed-Methods, Rural Development

1. Introduction

Solo parenthood is a growing social reality in the Philippines, with far-reaching implications for the economic stability, psychological well-being, and overall quality of life of affected individuals and their families. According to the Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA, 2021), the number of solo parents continues to rise due to factors such as marital separation, annulment, the death of a spouse, and non-marital childbirth. Solo parents often face compounded challenges, including the sole responsibility of caregiving, reduced employment opportunities, and heightened financial insecurity. These burdens are further intensified in rural and semi-urban areas where access to stable income sources and skill development opportunities remains limited. In this context, targeted interventions such as community-based livelihood training programs have emerged as crucial strategies to enhance the socio-economic resilience of solo parents, providing them with practical skills, income-generating capabilities, and pathways toward economic independence.

The Philippine government has recognized the unique needs of solo parents through Republic Act No. 8972, otherwise known as the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000, which grants benefits such as parental leave, flexible work schedules, and livelihood assistance programs. This

commitment was further strengthened with the passage of Republic Act No. 11861, or the Expanded Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2022, which broadens the scope of benefits and introduces additional provisions such as monthly cash subsidies for low-income solo parents, educational scholarships for their children, and improved access to skills training. These legislative measures underscore the State's recognition that solo parents, despite their resilience, require structural support to overcome socio-economic vulnerabilities. However, the effectiveness of these policies is contingent on the availability of well-designed, accessible, and sustainable training programs that respond to the lived realities of solo parents, particularly in rural communities like Cawayan Bogtong, Malasiqui, Pangasinan.

Despite these policy frameworks, there remains a gap in localized and evidence-based program evaluation. The implementation of livelihood training programs at the barangay level often lacks rigorous assessment to determine whether they genuinely empower participants and lead to tangible improvements in their economic and social well-being. Studies have shown that without proper alignment to the specific needs, contexts, and constraints of beneficiaries, training initiatives risk low participation rates, minimal skill application, and limited long-term impact (Quisumbing & Maluccio, 2017; International Labour Organization, 2020). Furthermore, rural solo parents face intersecting barriers such as inadequate transportation, childcare responsibilities, and insufficient capital for business startups, which often hinder the translation of acquired skills into sustainable livelihoods (Balisacan & Hill, 2019). This gap in the literature and practice provides a compelling rationale for conducting localized studies that assess the outcomes of livelihood training programs within specific socio-economic contexts.

Previous research offers strong evidence that livelihood skills training can serve as a transformative tool for marginalized populations. For example, the study of Bayudan-Dacuycuy and Lim (2014) found that targeted skills development programs significantly improved income levels and reduced vulnerability to poverty among female-headed households in rural areas. Similarly, the Department of Social Welfare and Development's (DSWD) evaluation of its Sustainable Livelihood Program (SLP) reported that participants who completed skills training exhibited higher employment rates and improved household income compared to non-participants (DSWD, 2021). These findings align with the broader global evidence base, such as the report by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2018), which emphasized that skills development combined with community support mechanisms leads to enhanced self-reliance and economic empowerment among vulnerable groups, especially women and single parents.

The context of Cawayan Bogtong, a barangay in Malasiqui, Pangasinan, illustrates the urgent need for such interventions. As a rural locality, economic opportunities are often limited to agriculture, informal vending, and low-wage service work. Solo parents in this community face compounded socio-economic constraints due to the dual responsibilities of income generation and sole caregiving. In many cases, the absence of a partner results in reduced mobility and fewer opportunities to engage in formal employment, further entrenching cycles of poverty. While national programs and non-governmental initiatives have reached certain rural areas, there is limited empirical evidence on the specific effectiveness of these interventions in Cawayan Bogtong. This absence of localized evaluation limits the ability of policymakers, barangay leaders, and program implementers to design responsive and context-specific livelihood programs.

This study, therefore, situates itself within the urgent social issue of solo parenthood, the existing legislative frameworks, and the evidence of livelihood training as a poverty alleviation strategy. The second move—identifying the niche—emerges from the observed lack of localized research evaluating the outcomes of livelihood training programs specifically tailored for solo parents in rural barangays. National statistics and global reports provide valuable insights, but without community-specific analysis, the translation of training into measurable empowerment outcomes remains unclear.

Finally, this research employed mixed-methods evaluation of a community-based livelihood skills training program for solo parents in Cawayan Bogtong, Malasiqui, Pangasinan. It aims to assess both the measurable outcomes—such as changes in employment rates, income levels, and livelihood competencies—and the qualitative dimensions of empowerment, including self-confidence, sense of purpose, and community engagement. By integrating quantitative and qualitative data, the study seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the program's impact, identify barriers to sustainability, and generate evidence-based recommendations for improving program design and implementation.

Moreover, this research aligns with the objectives of Republic Act No. 7160, the Local Government Code of 1991, which mandates local government units (LGUs) to promote the general welfare of their constituents, including the development of livelihood programs for disadvantaged groups. By providing localized evidence, the study will support LGUs and barangay officials in fulfilling this mandate with greater precision and effectiveness. It also complements the Philippine Development Plan (PDP) 2023–2028, which emphasizes inclusive growth, poverty reduction, and the enhancement of human capital through skills training and community-based interventions.

In sum, this study is both timely and socially relevant. It not only addresses an identified gap in research but also directly contributes to the enhancement of policy and program implementation at the grassroots level. Grounded in legislative mandates, informed by empirical evidence, and responsive to the unique socio-economic realities of solo parents in rural communities, the research stands to make a meaningful contribution to the discourse on empowerment, livelihood sustainability, and inclusive development in the Philippines. Through its findings, it seeks to inform a broader agenda of social protection and economic empowerment for marginalized populations, ensuring that no solo parent is left behind in the pursuit of a dignified and sustainable livelihood.

2. Method

2.1 Research Design

This study employed a mixed-methods research design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to comprehensively evaluate the effectiveness of community-based livelihood skills training in empowering solo parents in Cawayan Bogtong, Malasiqui, Pangasinan. The quantitative component utilized survey questionnaires to gather measurable data on changes in participants' livelihood-related knowledge and skills, employment status, and income levels before and after the training, which were analyzed using descriptive statistics, paired sample t-tests, and chi-square tests to determine the significance of observed changes. The qualitative component, on the other hand, employed in-depth interviews and focus group discussions to capture participants' lived experiences, perceptions, and challenges, with the data subjected to thematic analysis to identify emerging themes that enriched numerical findings. This combination of methods allowed triangulation, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the results, while ensuring that both statistical trends and personal narratives were captured to present a holistic assessment of the training program's impact.

2.2 Participants

The study were purposively selected solo parents residing in Cawayan Bogtong, Malasiqui, Pangasinan, who had completed the community-based livelihood skills training program organized by the local barangay and partner agencies. Inclusion criteria required that participants be officially recognized as solo parents under Republic Act No. 8972, otherwise known as the Solo Parents' Welfare Act of 2000, and registered with the Municipal Social Welfare and Development Office (MSWDO). The final sample comprised a diverse group of respondents

representing various age brackets, educational backgrounds, and livelihood experiences, thereby providing a comprehensive perspective on the program's outcomes. Their profiles reflected the socio-economic diversity of the solo parent population, enabling the study to capture differences in training impact across demographic variables. The participants' direct involvement in the training positioned them as credible sources of both quantitative data on measurable outcomes and qualitative insights into personal and communal transformations brought about by the intervention.

2.3 Instrumentation

The study utilized a combination of researcher-developed and standardized instruments to comprehensively measure the impact of the community-based livelihood skills training on solo parents in Cawayan Bogtong, Malasiqui, Pangasinan. A structured survey questionnaire, validated by a panel of experts and pilot-tested for reliability, was employed to gather quantitative data on participants' socio-demographic profiles, pre- and post-training livelihood-related knowledge and skills, employment status, and income levels. To ensure the accuracy of comparative analyses, the questionnaire included both closed-ended items measured on a Likert scale and categorical variables for statistical testing. Complementing the survey, a semi-structured interview guide and focus group discussion (FGD) protocol were developed to elicit rich qualitative data on participants' personal experiences, perceived benefits, challenges, and suggestions for program improvement. These qualitative instruments were designed to align with the thematic focus areas of empowerment, economic stability, and community engagement, allowing for an in-depth exploration of the lived realities behind the numerical data.

2.4 Data Analysis

The study employed a rigorous mixed-methods data analysis procedure to capture both the measurable outcomes and the nuanced experiences of solo parents who participated in the livelihood skills training. Quantitative data derived from the survey questionnaires were encoded, tabulated, and analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation to summarize participants' socio-demographic profiles and assess changes in livelihood-related knowledge, skills, employment status, and income levels before and after the training. Inferential statistics, specifically paired sample t-tests and chi-square tests, were utilized to determine the statistical significance of observed changes, thereby validating the program's effectiveness. Meanwhile, qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus group discussions underwent thematic analysis, wherein transcripts were coded and clustered into emergent themes that reflected participants' empowerment, skill application, challenges, and sustainability prospects. The integration of quantitative and qualitative findings through triangulation enhanced the validity of results, offering a holistic understanding of the training's economic, social, and personal impacts.

3 Results

The results of the study demonstrated a significant improvement in the livelihood-related knowledge and skills of solo parents in Cawayan Bogtong, Malasiqui, Pangasinan, following the completion of the community-based livelihood skills training. Quantitative findings revealed that the mean knowledge and skills rating of participants increased from 2.71 (pre-training) to 4.35 (post-training) on a 5-point scale, indicating a marked enhancement in competencies related to product-making, marketing, budgeting, and small business management. Paired sample t-tests confirmed that this improvement was statistically significant at $p < 0.01$. In addition, the number of participants with adequate skills to independently manage livelihood activities rose from 28% before the training to 86% after the intervention, suggesting a substantial transfer of practical and

applicable skills. These outcomes affirm the training's role in equipping solo parents with relevant capabilities to engage in income-generating endeavors.

The program's positive impact also extended to the participants' employment status and income levels. Before the training, only 34% of the participants reported having a stable source of income, with an average monthly income of ₱3,800. Post-training data indicated that the proportion of employed participants increased to 67%, while the average monthly income rose to ₱6,200, representing a 63% increase. Chi-square tests further indicated a significant association between the completion of livelihood training and improved employment status ($\chi^2 = 11.42$, $p < 0.01$). Participants attributed these gains to their ability to apply newly learned skills, expand product offerings, and access more customers through enhanced marketing strategies. These findings underscore the training's effectiveness in addressing the economic vulnerabilities of solo parents by fostering financial independence and employment opportunities.

Qualitative findings enriched these statistical outcomes by highlighting the lived experiences and personal transformations of the participants. Thematic analysis identified four key themes: (1) empowerment and self-confidence, as participants expressed renewed belief in their abilities and potential; (2) sense of purpose and motivation, with many reporting a stronger drive to improve their families' living conditions; (3) strengthened community ties, as collaborative activities fostered mutual support networks; and (4) challenges to sustainability, such as limited access to startup capital, lack of equipment, and time constraints due to caregiving responsibilities. Several participants recounted how the training not only improved their technical skills but also provided them with a platform to share experiences and learn from peers, leading to both personal and collective growth. These qualitative insights provide depth to the quantitative evidence, showing that the program's impact went beyond economic gains to encompass psychosocial empowerment.

4 Discussion

The findings of this study align with existing literature emphasizing the transformative potential of livelihood skills training in enhancing the socio-economic well-being of marginalized populations. For instance, the results echo the conclusions of Syahputri and Fathoni (2023), who reported that community-based livelihood interventions significantly increased the income-generating capacities of disadvantaged groups, particularly women heads of households. Similar to the present study's findings, their research highlighted improvements in participants' technical competencies, entrepreneurial knowledge, and market access following structured skills training. Likewise, the Philippine Institute for Development Studies (PIDS, 2020) documented that skills development programs targeting vulnerable groups lead to increased employability, particularly when training content is directly linked to local market demands. The statistically significant rise in both the skills proficiency and employment rates of the solo parents in this study confirms these patterns. It reinforces the argument that capacity-building interventions have tangible economic impacts (Rees et al., 2023).

The improvement in participants' confidence and self-efficacy observed in this study is also consistent with findings from Bandura's social cognitive theory framework, as applied in livelihood training contexts by Parker and Roumell (2020). Their research concluded that mastery of skills, coupled with supportive learning environments, enhances self-confidence and motivates participants to pursue income-generating activities more proactively. In the context of solo parents, this is particularly important, as studies such as that of Sulaiman et al. (2021) in the Philippine setting noted that psychosocial barriers, including low self-esteem and feelings of social isolation, often limit participation in economic activities. By fostering a sense of purpose and strengthening community bonds, the program in Cawayan Bogtong mirrors the outcomes observed in these related works, demonstrating that empowerment is both a skill-based and psychological process.

The challenges reported by participants in sustaining their livelihood activities—particularly those relating to financial constraints, caregiving responsibilities, and lack of access to tools—corroborate the findings of Ullah and Malik, (2020), who found that post-training support is a critical determinant of long-term program success. Their study, which focused on rural livelihood programs in Southeast Asia, underscored that without access to microfinance, start-up capital, and mentoring, the benefits of skills training may diminish over time. Similarly, the Department of Labor and Employment (DOLE, 2021) noted that many beneficiaries of livelihood programs in the Philippines face sustainability challenges unless supported by follow-up interventions. These parallels reinforce the present study's recommendation for sustained support systems and policy-driven solutions to address structural barriers.

Finally, the integration of both quantitative and qualitative improvements in this study resonates with the mixed-methods findings of Dagos (2021), who evaluated livelihood projects for single mothers in Mindanao. Their results, much like the present research, showed not only significant increases in household income and employment but also enhanced community participation and mutual support among beneficiaries. This multidimensional empowerment—economic, social, and psychological—is a recurring theme in the literature and validates the holistic approach adopted in the Cawayan Bogtong program. By demonstrating that livelihood training can simultaneously address financial instability and social marginalization, the findings of this study strengthen the body of evidence advocating for localized, inclusive, and community-driven capacity-building initiatives.

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