

1

Low-Skilled Working Women in Cagayan de Oro: A
Comparative Analysis of Domestic, "Small Scale,"
and Factory Employment

by

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S u m m a r y

This study represents a comparative analysis of low-skilled women employed in three distinct settings. These are, first, domestic helpers (maids); second, women employed as low-skilled workers in locally-owned "small scale" establishments (e.g., shop girls, waitresses, manicuristas); and, third, women working as "base" workers in the canning section of a large food-processing factory operated by a well-known multinational corporation. The major reason for drawing the sample from these three types of occupational categories lay in the belief that they represented an approximate way of analyzing, within the confines of a survey conducted at one point in time, the various "stages" of the industrialization process. Domestic employment was considered as the most "traditional" type of low-skilled employment while factory work was seen as the most "modern" work setting. The small scale employees were hypothesized to represent a transitional category between the other two. The purpose of the study was to see if, after controlling for other salient factors such as education and rural-to-urban migration, there would be significant differences between these three groups on a number of economic, sociological, and social psychological variables.

Three equal subsamples of low-skilled women were chosen for a total of 600 respondents. Thus, 200 domestic helpers were interviewed along with 200 small scale workers and 200 factory employees. Somewhat different techniques of sample selection were used for the three subsamples but all three represented probability samples.

The major findings of the study can be divided into five main categories: 1) social and economic background of the respondents, 2) level of living, 3) job satisfaction and occupational mobility, 4) institutional participation, and 5) social psychological measures. The findings for these five areas are summarized briefly below.

Regarding background factors, domestic helpers were found to be most likely to have come from rural or lower class families. Small scale workers, in turn, came from poorer backgrounds than the factory employees. Factory workers had achieved the highest levels of educational attainment, followed by the small scale employees. Factory workers also tended to have spent more time at their job and in the city of Cagayan de Oro.

Three indicators of a respondent's level of living were utilized: a housing indicator, an indicator of ownership of consumer goods, and the respondent's salary. Maids (nearly all of whom lived with their "master" and "mistress") were found to be living in the best housing while

the factory employees were living in the worst. Factory workers, though, owned significantly more consumer goods, followed by the small scale employees. Average monthly salaries for the three groups were as follows: ₱448.34 (factory workers), ₱187.44 (small scale), and ₱75.69 (maids). All statistical comparisons for this variable were highly significant. The fact that the small scale and domestic workers were receiving substantial non-cash payments per month (food and lodging) was also stressed, however.

Job satisfaction was measured by means of a summary indicator composed of four dimensions: satisfaction with the job's salary, with the job's hours, with the opportunity the job gives to socialize with other people, and with whether the job is viewed as monotonous or not. No significant differences were found between the three groups on the summary indicator derived from these items. There was some tendency for the factory workers to be more satisfied with the hours that they work and with their job as being interesting rather than boring. The small scale workers were the most satisfied group with regard to on-the-job socializing and the factory employees were least satisfied with their salaries. This last and somewhat surprising finding was explained by means of the theory of "relative deprivation."

Little evidence was found on the proposition that domestic service represents a transitional occupation which can enable the rural-born female worker to start an urban work career which, through subsequent social mobility, would lead to the attainment of higher status jobs. A moderately large proportion of factory workers had once labored in a small scale establishment, though, indicating that there is some mobility between these two levels of employment. Factory workers who had previously worked in another job also showed signs of experiencing the greatest gains in job satisfaction as compared to women in the other two groups.

With regard to institutional participation, a number of significant differences were again found between the three groups. The domestic helpers were found to rank relatively low in terms of participating in family life, politics, the economy (saving money and holding high aspirations for purchasing consumer goods), voluntary associations and modern types of health care. They were, however, found to rank somewhat higher in terms of such traditional areas as religious activities and neighborly socializing. They were also found to have a surprisingly strong pattern of access to the mass media. Factory workers, in contrast, rank high in terms of economic activity, political knowledgeability, participation in voluntary organizations and the use of modern medical facilities. Finally, the small scale workers tended to take an intermediate position between the other two groups on most of the institutional spheres under consideration.

The last topic considered was social psychological differences between women in the three occupational categories. A strong tendency was found for the factory workers to show evidence for a more "modern" type of personality than the other two groups. The small scale employees were, in turn, more modern than the domestic helpers. Relatively few differences, however, were found between the three groups in terms of their adherence to traditional Philippine values or in their opinions about the status of women. Three indicators of personal maladjustment were also used in the study: an "anomie" scale, an index of "psychosomatic symptoms" and a scale of self-reported happiness. Although each of these

three scales showed a moderately large correlation with each other, they tended to give somewhat different results when used to compare the three occupational groups. Thus, factory workers were found to score highest in terms of self-reported happiness while at the same time obtaining a relatively high score in terms of psychosomatic symptoms and anomic attitudes. In general, though, it was the small scale workers who tended to rank high on all three measures of maladjustment, a finding which might again be attributable to a sense of relative deprivation among this transitional group.

The study proposed the following indicators for measurement in the National Sample Survey:

1. Levels of living
 - a. Non-appliance ownership index
 - b. Cash salary
 - c. Changes over time in non-appliance ownership
 - d. Changes over time in cash salary
2. Job Satisfaction
 - a. Open ended questions on "good" and "bad" things about present job
 - b. Plans to return to place of birth
3. Institutional Participation
 - a. Amount of money sent to family of orientation
 - b. Membership in voluntary associations
 - c. Consumer aspirations
 - d. Savings behavior
 - e. Indicator of access to mass media
4. Modernization
 - a. Indicator of personality modernization

Policy Implications and Recommendations:

1. Efforts to improve the social and economic status of household working women through increased industrialization are not likely to give many immediate benefits to women coming from less privileged family background since recruitment into factory work is a selective process with those having least education, least urban experience being least likely selected.

2. Data on housing characteristics may be a relatively poor indicator of an individual level of living at least when the population being analyzed includes a large of unmarried females residing in the house as a boarder, friend or employee.
3. The data do not provide much evidence for the idea that slum and squatter areas serve as the only or even the major type of transitional community between rural and urban residences.
4. There appears to be relatively little evidence that domestic service is a transitional occupational category between the rural and the urban labor force.
5. Relatively high levels of exposure to such modern forms of mass media as television and the movies were found to be common among the servants and small scale employees. Agents of social change in the Philippines, such as persons engaged in family planning propaganda campaign, should not, therefore, reject the use of these media merely on the assumption that they are only accessible to the upper class.
6. Low-educated women were found to have become significantly more modern due to employment in urban setting while the effects on better-educated respondents was less noticeable. From a "cost/benefit" perspective, this finding would support the "social justice" viewpoint that development programs should be directed specifically towards the most marginal members of society.
7. Factory employment appears to be more rewarding, in an economic sense, than work as a small scale employee or a domestic servant. In social-psychological terms, however, the beneficial effects of factory work was less impressive. It was concluded that programs that will function to provide jobs that would serve to have the dual effect of raising incomes as well as increasing social participation and the sense of psychological well being are needed.
8. Further research, using more numerous and detailed items, is needed along a number of dimensions. These would include the development of an index of anomie more applicable to Philippine culture, further items on the institutional participation of low-skilled working women and more detailed information on the salience of the 4 areas of job satisfaction studied by the project.