

Journeys of a Mr. Mom

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Abstract: *One of the family issues that the society faces today that has resistance to change is the situation of a husband as the caretaker of the house. The question 'who takes care of the bill and who takes care of the house' causes conflict. Focusing on women empowerment and become the breadwinners of the family, men are put in the sidelight. Basing on the experiences from the husbands' everyday endeavors and feelings on this kind of family set-up, the researcher trusts to assess the impact on their personality and ego, their relationship with their wives, relationship with friends, relationship with in-laws, and career advancement. This research used phenomenological approach where in-depth interviews were conducted to seven househusbands. It revealed that some husbands said that they lost confidence, and they feel intimidated by their wives which often lead to disagreements. They feel that their friends perceived them as weak in terms of making decisions. Their relationship with in-laws left them feel aloof and awkward whenever there are family gatherings. These husbands still want to work, but some of them do not know where to start. These dilemmas often left the husbands feel useless, have low self-esteem, and weak personality. This role reversal, to some husbands, often result in misunderstandings with their wives, and, to some, to their in-laws. Through these findings, this study is hoping to serve as an eye-opener to all that not all husbands who stay in the house, or that their wives are earning higher than them, are doing nothing. The wife, the society, and the people that surround the husband need to understand that behind every great woman, there's often a slightly aggrieved, under-appreciated man. The perception of the husbands needs to be changed, and a series of seminars and consultations with marriage counselors are suggested supported by the Community Extension Services in partnership with Gender and Development of Nueva Ecija University and Science and Technology.*

Keywords: househusbands, role reversal, women empowerment

1. Introduction

Empowering women. This is always the focus of researches to promote women's full potential and development for their contribution to society. Studies show that women are empowered now by analyzing the result of Statistics on Labor Force Survey (LFS) in 2005-2013 where women excel in their job and profession with 0.1 increase to 49.8% (from 49.7% in 2012) and 0.2 decreases for males at 78.12% from 78.3% in 2012. There was also a significant increase of participation of women in the labor force with higher positions than men as illustrated in the statistics that 2.5 million women were working as government officials, corporate executives, managing proprietors, managers, and supervisors while men in the same group were estimated at 2.4 million. These were interpreted that women now are beginning to hold higher positions for career development and employability than men thus, female breadwinners arise. There were studies on the lived experiences of female breadwinners showcasing their feelings, stress, disappointments, and their everyday struggles to succeed in their endeavors.

In society and culture, change is inevitable. And in every change, resistance is common. One of the reasons for resistance of change that a society face is the situation of a husband as the caretaker of the house. Some still want or do not want to change the role of men and women in the house. The question 'who takes care the bill and who takes care the house' is always the start of argument that many people are still debating. Focusing on women empowerment and being the breadwinners of the family, men are put in the sidelight. Few researches give in-depth studies on the feelings of the husbands having wives as the breadwinners of the family. As the field of study on women empowerment gains popularity, its counterpart – the side of the househusbands,

their struggles, feelings, and impact on their personality, are given little attention. Also, the literature available is mostly foreign. Studies were concentrated among American, Canadian and European househusbands (Madlambayan & Calma, 2015), and only few studies were among Filipino househusbands.

From the study of Catalan (2016), she posits that not all families can afford hiring babysitters and housemaids that lead the couples no other choice but to choose who among them will work and stand as the breadwinner of the family. When the couple decides that the wife will be one to work, there will be implications for both of them.

It is in this light that the researcher wants to find out its effect on the personality of the husband, considering their masculinity is affected because the society is used to having the husbands as the heads of the family, and the providers of the food on the table. Basing on the experiences from the husbands' everyday endeavors and feelings on this kind of family set-up, the researcher trusts to come up with common elements for possible recommendation to address the difficulties they are facing in life.

This study is hoping to serve as an eye-opener to all that not all husbands who stay in the house, or that their wives are earning higher than them, are doing nothing. The wife, the society and the people living around the husband need to understand that behind every great woman, there's often a slightly aggrieved, under-appreciated man. The perception on the husbands needs to be changed. After all, they are and still THE MAN of the house.

Focusing on the experiences of the husbands whose wives are the breadwinners of the family, the researcher aims:

- 1) To assess the experiences of the husbands if having wives as the breadwinners have a great impact on their:

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- a) Personality/ Ego;
 - b) Relationship with wives;
 - c) Relationship with friends;
 - d) Relationship with in-laws; and
 - e) Career advancement.
- 2) To formulate plans of action for the husbands to improve their personality, relationship with wives and friends, and career advancement.

2. Method

The method of research to gather data is descriptive and evaluative. The researcher used the phenomenological approach, where in-depth interviews were conducted. This type of method was useful in providing comprehensive analysis on the lived experiences of househusbands.

Participants of the study were identified using the exponential non-discriminative snowball technique. This sampling technique involves the referral of participants' friends and other informants who personally know men that fit in the qualifications given for the study: (a) Husbands do not have a job; (b) husbands are financially dependent on wives; and (c) husbands do the chores and taking care of the kids. Seven (7) participants met these qualifications.

Interview guides were drafted to focus on the topics needed for the study, as presented in the objectives of the study. Rapport building was also considered due to sensitivity of the issues discussed and to get their trust on the researcher that their answers were treated with utmost confidentiality. In phenomenological approach, (a) summary of the findings were arranged according to the themes and topics in order to draw out key issues discussed by the participants; (b) discussion session where the researcher grouped the themes and eliminate redundancies; and (c) final section on issues and implications and formulating a plan of activities to support the househusbands.

3. Results and Discussion

The flow of the interview and guide questions with the house husbands were based on the objectives of the study to focus on the issues concerning them.

Impact on Personality and Ego

When personality was discussed, the focus of discussion revolved in being their total characteristics and distinct identity that make them as a particular individual.

When asked about their feelings when their wives are the breadwinners of the family, one of the participants said that since they decided on this kind of set up, he has no qualms about it. However, there are times when he feels that he is useless and contributes nothing to the family. When it comes to dealing with self-confidence, the researcher got positive and negative responses. Four of the participants negatively say that their current situation should be reversed. They thought that they should be the ones who will work for the family and not their wives. Self-pity was very evident in them since they are left alone in the house when their wives leave for work and their children go to school. One of them said that it is the loneliest time of the day, having no one to

talk to, and doing the household chores alone. This feeling was affirmed by Doucet and Merla (2007) where the findings in their study of stay-at-home fathers in Canada and Belgium that self-concept is affected in househusbands. However, three of the respondents positively viewed them a chance to prove to others that it is another form of masculinity, taking care of the family is a manly thing. When asked on what are the things they do to overcome their negative feelings, some of them replied that they learned to accept the situation and think that no one else will do the household chores but them. One of them said that he learned to enjoy doing the chores anyway.

Impact on Relationship with Wife

The identified factors on why wives are the breadwinners of the family can be attributed to wives' better career opportunities (Barbarez, 2004). Two of the respondents replied that due to the financial condition of the family, it is more practical to let their wives work than them because the salary that their wives are receiving is much higher than theirs. The situation to let their wives work leaves them no choice but to stay in the house because they cannot afford to have babysitters and maids. Given this kind of situation, all of the participants said that they still maintain their loving relationship with their wives. They just learned to adjust to the mood of their wives. Some participants said that they understand the demand of their work, thus quality time with their wives are more important. One of the husbands sees to it that when his wife is at home, he lovingly serves his wife with the food she wants and does not let her do the household chores. He jokingly said that he does this to set the mood of his wife for the night. The other husbands said that they are not demanding of their wives' time because they know that it is a part of their wives' job, giving them curfew and being demanding will lead to arguments, and they are left with no choice but to understand their wives.

Impact on Relationship with Friends

It is remarkable to note how these husbands maintain their positive views on being househusbands even they are faced with the general truth that what they are doing is basically for women. Although they learned to admit of this role reversal, other husbands cannot help to be emotional when they deal with public scrutiny. There are times that they feel ashamed when their friends joke that they are "*Ander the saya*" a filipino term for always doing things on wife's command. Some husbands have time to have drinking sessions with their friends, where often, they are the center of the joke of the night. Feeling of embarrassment is evident when their friends hear their situation. The negative effect of stereotyping where the househusbands are perceived lazy and irresponsible often leads to low self-worth (Catalan, 2016). And it seems like adding more wounds to injury when they ask money from their wives when they need to go out with their friends. One of the husbands said that they rather stay at home because he is ashamed of asking money from his wife. He used the term "*palamunin*" whenever it comes to his mind that it is the wife who works for his night outs. However, two of the husbands do not feel the same way. They said that their wives insist them to go out with their friends and even give them allowance every week. These husbands said that they are used to this kind of situation.

Impact on Relationship with In-laws

Participants disclosed that at first, when they decided that they will stay at home, they thought of the things that their father/mothers-in-law will say. Four of the husbands shared that indirectly, their in-laws, particularly their father-in-law and brothers-in-law, always ask their wives, "...*anoginagawa ng asawamongayon?*". They said that it's like being scrutinized whenever they visited them. One of them said that his mother-in-law even asked him, "...*anobapwedemongpagkaabalahan?*". Other participants feel aloof whenever they have family reunions because they feel that they are not suitable for their wives. One participant said that the most painful words that he overheard during the conversation of his wife with her father were, "*sayang, e di kung yungnanliligawsayo noon ang nakatuluyanmo, di ikawmaghihirap ng ganyan.*" In spite of all these, participants are grateful for their wives because their wives still fight for them. The husbands say that they learned to adjust with their in-laws. One of them said that they please their in-laws by way of cooking meals and cleaning their backyards whenever time permits. While others feel low self-esteem with their in-laws, some of the husbands gained support from them especially financially, through paying the tuition of their children. This kind of support from family members is also evident in one the studies of Barbiarz (2004) and Santos (2008).

On Career Advancement

When the topic was raised on their plans of working or finding a job, some participants said that whenever they plan to work, the problem narrows down on who will take care of the kids and the house. Talks on the possibility of bringing their kids at their parents' house brought issues with their respective in-laws. Some considered that they reverse their roles again, but when deliberated, they realize that they cannot afford to give up the wives' salary. Some of the participants want to work again since they had previous work, but they do not know where to start. All of the participants said that at this time, the option of finding a job is not their priority. However, one of the participants said that he considers accepting laundry jobs since they live near students' boarding houses. He said that at least he earns. And the other one said that he is still hoping that he can still find a job that will not hamper his duties at home, "*pangpataas lang ba ng sarilinahindiakonakaasalahatsaasawa ko,*" he jests.

4. Conclusion and Recommendation

Given the facets of role reversal of couples, it can be gleaned from the result of the experiences of the house husbands from the interviews conducted, and from other related studies, husbands are confronted with challenges as they adopt the responsibility of feminine tasks and managing domestic affairs. Adding to this responsibility is maintaining a smooth marital relationship and struggling for social acceptance of friends and in-laws. Negative feelings of embarrassment, self-pity, and low self-esteem are evident at times, but house husbands learned to cope with these feelings because they are in any way supported by friends and family. It is recommended that they may seek professional help from family counselors in order to talk on how to cope with these challenging situations. Providing the

house husband with series of seminars will develop their involvement in role reversals and make them realize the importance of enhancing marital relationship, develop personal values and work-related skills. These activities may be conducted by the Community Extension Services of Nueva Ecija University of Science and Technology through the support of the Gender and Development of the university by identifying househusbands to improve their way of life.

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