

## Navigating dreams: exploring the aspirations of adolescent fisherfolks

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**Abstract:** This study is about adolescent fisherfolks, their dreams and fears for the future and how their lives evolved into young adulthood. These adolescents lived in three fishing communities in Roxas City with the highest percentage of adolescents recorded. They represent a wider group of adolescents who are identified in government reports as ‘fisherfolk’, vulnerable to underachievement and disadvantaged by low expectations. The phenomenological exploration on which this study is based on gives voice to 36 adolescent fisherfolks, offering insight into their experiences as adolescent fisherfolk that affected their aspirations and influenced their decision-making. With this, the study offers a unique appreciation of how a group of adolescents held their own aspirations with the educational opportunities perceived to be available to them. Their experiences of navigating a way to live the fisherfolks’ life provide us all with important messages to consider when seeking to provide tailor education that supports individual aspirations into successful achievement.

**Keywords:** Adolescence, Fisherfolks, Aspirations

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### INTRODUCTION

Culture and social norms shape people’s aspirations and how the context of poverty slashes the ability of the poor to develop high aspirations. It is suggested that socio-economically challenged people may be trapped in a vicious circle of poverty and low aspirations, either by being unable to develop motivating aspirations given their context or becoming discouraged by being unable to achieve them (Appaduarai, 2004 as cited in Fruttero et al., 2024).

Aspirations are set based on what is known that can be achieved or what an individual can do to realize an ambition. There is evidence that aspirations are linked to outcomes both at the individual and group levels. At the individual level, it is explained that aspirations drive efforts and choices, which in turn influence outcomes (Dalton, Ghosal, and Mani 2016; Genicot and Ray 2020 as cited in Fruttero et al., 2024).

#### *Adolescents’ aspirations*

A study by Gao & Eccles (2020) among adolescents suggested that the development of career aspirations exhibits significant diversity of preferences, activities, behaviors and abilities in adolescence thereby influencing the patterns association between aspirations and achievement. Stoet and Geary (2022) noted that when it comes to adolescents’ career aspirations in combination with student achievement in mathematics, reading, and science, as well as parental occupations and family wealth, boys aspired for things-oriented or STEM occupation and girls aspired for people-oriented occupation.

Relatedly, in a study that examined the career aspirations of 3,367 adolescents (age 13–18 years) from 42 U.S. states conducted by Hoff et al. (2022), it was revealed that most adolescents aspired to careers with low potential for automation. Almost 50% of adolescents aspired to either an investigative or artistic career, which together account for only 8% of the U.S. labor market. There were also notable trends across age and gender, such that aspirations

were more gendered among younger adolescents, whereas older adolescents appeared less influenced by gender stereotypes. Overall, findings indicated important discrepancies between young people's dream jobs and employment realities.

### *Aspirations and fisherfolk*

The aspirations of fisherfolk, while diverse and individual, often share similarities. Their unique way of life, the challenges they face, and their deep connection to the livelihood practice form a network of support and understanding between and among them allow them to establish a strong fiber of connection that is not easily severed even in the depths of their darkest days.

The research by Hart (2016) found that aspirations are held concurrently and are relational, they are dynamic, often connected to other aspirations held by the individual as well as by others. While multi-dimensional, varying in importance and timescale, aspirations may be latent, unarticulated, evolving, abstract and uncertain) and can surface suddenly or emerge slowly. With this Hart (2016) further noted that aspirations may, for example, be institutional, political, legal and shared by family members. Aspirations may relate to home, school, work, national or international life. Furthermore, he posited that while aspirations are future-oriented they may also pertain to the continuity of a present state of being. Hart (2016) expressed that aspirations matter as they signifiers of what has come to have meaning and value for us, as individuals, or as social groups. They offer guidelines and navigational reference points, lode stars for action. He further declared that aspirations matter because they are a manifestation of the freedom to aspire which is valuable for human flourishing in its own right. With this it can be noted that aspirations also establish the foundation of many important capabilities that make a human prosperous.

Hart (2016) further reiterated that group aspirations enable change to occur where individuals alone would not succeed. To illustrate this, he cited that by calling on governments to secure rights for minority groups, ensure legal protection and entitlements, offer foreign aid, act sustainably, refrain from developing or using nuclear weapons, pay the living wage, and to advocate for those unable to do so themselves. Along that line, accordingly, he stated that social aspirations can set the course of public action, policy, investment, regulation, legislation or act as a rallying cry for justice and freedom.

The study by Smuker and Wisner (2021) entitled *Fishing for a Future: Local Institutions, Aspirations and Agency in a Complex Climate Adaptation System* showed the use of a theoretical approach that is informed by the adaptation, institutions and livelihoods (AIL) method anchored on the a theoretical framing by Gibson and Wisner (2016) that emphasized cultural geographic research framework emphasizing the importance of everyday risks, residents' perceptions of these risks, and their aspirations. The result of this study by Smuker and Wisner (2020) revealed social mobility characterized by movement of an individual to a higher social stratum as indication of desire to improve quality of life, is an aspiration of the members of the fishing community. They further advanced that Peoples' lived experiences do not direct them, not merely to have alternative source of livelihood but rather to seek coping strategies and solutions to the economic insufficiency, health risks, climactic effect to catch, demand of labor in fishing vessels, market value of catch, and market conditions.

More specifically, in a study by Belardo and Beloria (2023) on *Aspirations of Fisherfolk Communities on their children's Education*, the results revealed that the majority of the fisherfolk parents do not want their children to continue fishing as their main source of livelihood because of potential risks, hardships, and cultural factors like collectivism, close family ties, and dependence on the elders. The parents' aspirations were shaped by their persistence over various threats, fears, personal unfulfilled dreams, and career opportunities thru education. Most of the parents desired a college education and a safe and secure

profession for their children. The study deduced that these challenges can be a contributory factor for the declining number of fisherfolks surrounding the gulfs. Influencing this sector is the factor motivating fishers in their aspirations for their children's education.

The research raised important issues about adolescent fisherfolks' aspirations that are presented through their perspectives. Their 'voice' is a key element of the themes explored within this book, offering insight into factors affecting their aspirations and in particular, the impact of lived experiences on their mindset.

## METHODOLOGY

The study utilized a phenomenological type of qualitative research design which focused on the aspiration of 36 adolescent fisherfolks who live in the fishing communities of Dayao, Libas and Dumog. Identified by purposive sampling through the snowball method, the participants are 13- 30 years old and engaged in more than 30 hours of fishing-related income generating activity. Data were gathered through and semi-structured interview that had been validated by experts. Gathered data were transcribed and translated by a language expert and were then were back to the location of the study for triangulation. Data was analyzed guided by Merriam and Tisdell's (2016) six step analysis.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *Aspirations of the adolescent fisherfolks*

Twenty-nine (29) out of thirty-six (36) participants have expressed that they aspire for education and training. They further expressed these aspirations are positively influenced by their lived experiences as adolescent fisherfolks. As Participant 1 shared:

"I do not go to school anymore. I can read and write (smiled). I aspire to take Criminology. I do not earn that much but I could help in the household expenses. But it is not enough for school. There may be a chance that I could reach my dream of finishing The participant aspires to finish a degree in criminology. Criminology. If there is financial help."

Participant 1 aspires to finish a degree in criminology. This aspiration is positively influenced by his lived experience in terms of the fact that lack of financial resources has motivated him to invest in his future education. He further added that he wishes there were a financial program that would help them financially.

Participant 3 shared: "I have only reached grade 11. I aspire to go back to school if there is a chance. I hope they do away with grade 11 and 12 altogether so that we all go straight to college."

Participant 3 aspires to go back to school and finish college if given a chance. He further expresses that he wishes there were no senior high so he could finish high school in a few years and go straight to college.

Participant 5 shared: "I am hesitant at telling. I am hesitant at going back to school. I aspire to take Criminology."

Participant 5 aspires to go back to school and earn a Criminology degree. but he is hesitant at telling and hesitant at going back to school.

*Desire to finish school*

Twenty out of thirty-six participants expressed that they aspire to finish school. This aspiration is positively influenced by their lived experiences thereby rendering their aspiration to finish school. Specifically, the aspirations expressed by participant 7, participant 11, and participant 18 demonstrate the desire of the participants to finish school as positively influenced by their lived experiences as adolescent fisherfolks.

Participant 7 shared:

“I aspire to finish school. But it is difficult because we cannot go to school. I wish it were modular so we could work on the lessons weekly. We could not go to school because it is distant and expensive. If we had a book to submit then maybe we could finish school.”

Participant 7 aspires to finish school. He further expresses that he wish there were modules they can work on in lieu of attending school on a daily basis. He further expressed that going out to sea and school days conflict so it is difficult to work and study at the same time. However, these modules which they can work on in times when they need not go out to sea to fish could be done and could be completed. butHis lived experiences have positively influenced the participant in terms of the fact that lack of financial resources has motivated him to invest in his future education.

Participant 1 shared:

“I do not go to school anymore. I can read and write (smiled). I aspire to take Criminology. I do not earn that much but I could help in the household expenses. But it is not enough for school. There may be a chance that I could reach my dream of finishing Criminology. If there is financial help.”

Participant 1 aspires to take Criminology if given a chance. His lived experiences have positively influenced the participant’s desire to help in the family’s household expenses in terms of the fact that lack of financial resources has motivated his ability to invest in his future education.

This conformed with Garcia-Carrion, et al. (2018) who expressed that circumstances transformed the educational and social prospects of vulnerable youth in these communities suffering from lack of financial resources are in need of support. These youth who were following the path to failure now dream of continuing their studies to improve the quality of life. Aspiration play a crucial role in the decision making at this most significant stage of a youth’s life because it could impact their future. Furthermore, these youth are acting as role models for younger children in primary education, helping to prevent school dropout and early school leaving from early ages. The case shows how the community participation in decision-making processes transformed the climate and expectations regarding education in the neighborhood. This conformed with Cahaya (2015) who revealed that the survival strategy of rural poor fishermen by adopting a multiple income strategy that involve family members in economic activities like fishing, it is recommended to train and educate the members with good skills so that the business can be managed properly to increase their income. In addition, the capital assistance to the poor fishermen should be given without collateral requirement, so that they can manage their business well.

This further conformed with the study by Belardo & Candelaria (2023) who expressed that the yearnings of fisherfolks on their child’s education, and hindrances shape their desire as parents. Field observations and key informant interview among elder members of fisherfolk communities surrounding the Albay, Ragay, and Asid Gulfs of the Bicol Region was utilized. The study revealed that the majority of the fisherfolk parents do not want their children to continue fishing as their main source of livelihood because of potential risks, hardships, and cultural factors like collectivism, close family ties, and dependence on the

elders. The parents' aspirations were shaped by their persistence over various threats, fears, personal unfulfilled dreams, and career opportunities thru education. Most of the parents desired a college education and a safe and secure profession for their children. The study deduced that these challenges can be a contributory factor for the declining number of fisherfolks surrounding the gulfs. Influencing this sector is the factor motivating fishers in their aspirations for their children's education..

Ten participants have expressed that they aspire to earn a specific college degree. They further expressed that these aspirations are positively influenced by their lived experiences as adolescent fisherfolks.

Participant 3 shared: "I have only reached grade 11. I aspire to go back to school if there is a chance. I hope they do away with grade 11 and 12 altogether so that we all go straight to college."

Participant 24 shared: "I aspire to earn a degree in Food Tech. Fish drying helps to provide me with daily stipend."

Participant 34 shared: "I aspire to join the cruise ship. I would like to help my parents."

This conformed with Kirk et al. (2012 as cited in Richards, 2017) who described how educational aspirations and expectations embedded young people's hopes, fears and fantasies into what was they saw as their future lives. This was affected by perceptions of what was 'possible' (idealised aspirations) or 'probable' (realistic expectations) and then adjusted through external experiences that influenced self-perception and school behaviour. Believing what will be obtained is particularly important among disadvantaged and marginalised groups because expectations are usually lower than aspirations and more susceptible to external influence. Furthermore, Elliot (2010) found out that high aspirations were more likely to result in a professional career, even if this wasn't the one predicted, and the greatest gaps were experienced by working-class boys, middle- and working-class girls. found similar differences between primary school children's career aspirations, which reflected their sense of hope for the future and adolescence, 'where aspirations changed from vague plans to ones that involved their interests, abilities and options open to them' (Flouri and Pangourgia (2012) in Richards 2017).

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