

Women's Voices on Poverty

Understanding Gender Inequality in conflicted-affected Timor-Leste

Clíonadh O' Keefe

The School of Political Science and Sociology, NUIG.

Presentation based on doctoral research on the topic of
Gender equality in the conflict-affected state of Timor-Leste

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Presentation overview

- Paper presents findings from interviews conducted with women living in an **urban village**.

Focuses one of three poverty-related themes emerging from the study.

- **Standards of living**
- Political participation
- Violence

Research Context

Conflict-affected Timor-Leste

Post-independence state-led development

- Build peace and democracy
- Reduce poverty and end gender inequalities through:
 - Economic development
 - Basic social services
 - Gender equality governance reforms including
 - Gender Mainstreaming

Research Scope

Seeks to Address

Theoretical deficits associated with the concept of gender mainstreaming

Concerns in the Empirical literature

Depoliticisation of gender on the ground

Lack of awareness of gender specificity in Timor-Leste

Research Scope

Research question:

What can women's experiences of gender inequality tell us about Gender Mainstreaming?

Research Methodology and Methods

- Qualitative, Feminist Standpoint
- Intersectional approach
- FGD and Unstructured interviews
- Four villages: two urban and two rural
- Thematic analysis

Research Findings

- ***Standards of Living :***
 - Inadequate living conditions
 - Income poverty
 - Food poverty
 - Daily experiences of hunger and food shortages;
 - Elderly women and mothers rearing families alone most vulnerable
 - First generation women believe themselves to be worse off food-wise than rural women and women from Dili

Some of the causes of food poverty in Caicoli homes

- Competing demands on household income;
- Competing demands on women's time
- Lack of access to resources - land, credit - to produce and purchase food
- Conflict and war: displacement and loss of assets

Some of the causes of food poverty in Caicoli homes

- Women's lack of influence over household income;
- Women's stage in life and own ill-health;
- Husbands' stage in life, disability, poor health;
- Husbands' behaviours and attitudes: using money for gambling, drinking and extra martial activities;

Food Poverty

Women cope with and prevent food poverty by:

- Intensifying and diversifying unpaid and paid work;
- Reduce, ration and go without food.
- Source food on credit, borrow money, sell off assets;

As a consequence of food poverty women said they:

- Lack energy, experience fatigue, dizzy, headaches
- Experience high levels of food anxiety;
- Experience domestic violence;

Women's Living Conditions

- **Housing:** Insecure, inappropriate and inadequate
- **Basic facilities:** Lack of piped and safe drinking water, adequate toilets and wash areas;
- Most felt by women rearing families alone, women rearing large families
- Insecure housing a barrier to women escaping gender-based violence;

Causes of Women poor Living Conditions

- Lack of access to resources
 - Land and property
 - Credit
- Displacement and upheaval;
- Unresolved land disputes
- Husbands poor health, disability and old age.

Coping with and addressing Poor Living Conditions

- Generate income and invest savings
- Buy land, renovate property and install basic facilities.
- Put in place gender and age appropriate sleeping arrangements;
- Navigate relations with extended family, neighbours and landlords
- Engage with the state;
- Seek refuge in Church based networks

Consequences for Women of Poor Living Conditions

- Intensifies women's domestic burden
- Gives rise to pressure and anxiety
- Women experience humiliation and inconvenience owing to lack of facilities and privacy
- Fraught family and community relations
- Triggers domestic violence and threatens personal security

Women's Experiences of Income Poverty

- Blamed deplorable living conditions and shortages in food on their lack of personal and family income
- Respondents rearing families alone or without the support of their husbands experience severe challenges generating income.

Causes of low or non-existent family income

- Lack of wages: unemployment high among adult family members
- Low wages
- Husbands' disability, illness and old age;
- Husbands' attitudes and behaviours such as heavy drinking and gambling contribute to household poverty;

Barriers to women making greater financial contributions to family well-being

- Low wages and a lack of wages
- Severe time constraints
- Unemployment
- Discrimination against women
- Unfavourable business environment
- Women lack credit

Barriers to women making greater financial contributions to family well-being

- Low levels of education
- Low level of technical skills and knowledge,
- Husbands' violence and control over women's mobility
- Women's health
- Lack of support from elected women representatives, village council and central government

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