

The Role of Interpersonal Communication in the Empowerment of Female Heads of Household in Cianjur, Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

The potential of female heads of households is very important to be developed, but unfortunately they have not been able to fully participate because they still have limited power and a weak position in society. To empower them, an empowerment program for female heads of households is carried out. This research describes efforts conducted by members of the program to overcome hindrances faced in their position as female heads of household, particularly within their roles in both domestic and public spaces. This study uses a case study approach in which data were collected using in-depth interviews to eight informants including PEKKA members, officers, and corresponding household members. Participatory observations are conducted in three months, looking into PEKKA-related activities and the informants daily practices. The findings from this study reveal that through close and dialogic communication processes between the female heads of household and PEKKA officers, they can openly share their problems and receive support to solve their problems. Interpersonal communication helps the female heads of household in gaining trust and becoming role models for their families. This form of communication also enables wives to gain their husbands' trust and render them equal partners. It is concluded that through the processes of interpersonal communication, female heads of household can position themselves as subjects that challenge the impeding patriarchal values. Interpersonal communication in the PEKKA program, both as practice and shared knowledge, is considered effective as a means to empower female heads of household.

Keywords: *Interpersonal communication process, female heads of household, social roles, empowerment program, PEKKA programme.*

INTRODUCTION

There is a need for community participation in development, including those that come from women's groups, which notably have the potential to play an essential role in nation-building. This notwithstanding, particularly in Indonesia, these groups are often disregarded as subjects (Setiawanto, 2018). This is also true in regard to their position as a member of the community and their own families, where women have limited access to resources and power, and thus a weaker status in society. In this article, we observe the above phenomenon specifically in female heads of households (FHHs), a status acquired due to various factors, including the death of their spouse, divorce, husbands practising polygamy, and husbands being permanently ill (Singerman, 2021).

As a marginalised group, FHHs, and women in general, are still unable to voice their aspirations, desires, and concerns because often, they also view themselves negatively (Miftah, 2022). Our institutional counterpart in this study, the Foundation for the

Empowerment of Female Heads of Households (PEKKA Foundation), notes that some of the personal barriers that FHHs have to endure in regard to their marital identity have rendered themselves lacking the confidence to manage organisations, and thus posed a problematic challenge in the empowerment process (Pratiwi, 2018). In addition, FHHs are also marginalised by means of existing labels or stereotypes, which eventually affect their position and situation in society. Women's social roles are not valued the same as men's. Despite the fact that women may contribute to the household economy and play an apparent role as a leader in the family, they are still not in a position to negotiate for power. To illustrate, when an FHH negotiates for a role in business, political or government activities, the public scrutinises this as contrary to her nature as a woman.

In substantiating our argument, this article builds a case study in our documentation of problems experienced by FHHs in Sukanagalih Village, Cianjur, Indonesia, one of the selected villages in the preliminary programme of PEKKA's programme in Indonesia. The empowerment programme with which PEKKA Foundation assisted has been carried out in the study site for over a decade, beginning in 2002. PEKKA Foundation was founded by a group of people who are aware of, and care about, ways to build capacity and improve the well-being of FHHs. Even though the FHH has participated and has been assisted by the PEKKA foundation through their cadres for over two decades, some women affected by those risky activities still exist. They are vulnerable to refusing unregistered marriage and divorce, so receiving official population document and government grant becomes a problem.

Female heads of household have been experiencing discrimination by the communities in conducting their activities as if a widow is not allowed to have a similar social life to a male as a head of the family. They are also unable to refuse discrimination from their family members – their husbands and sons. They face obstacles in delivering their ideas and will. PEKKA Foundation notices that to gain access and acknowledgement from their surroundings, FHHs need to start with self-disclosure, which is one important part of interpersonal communication. In the case of FHHs, this interpersonal communication can also contribute to helping one's mental health, in addition to creating effective communication (Pratscher et al., 2019). We view that, in reality, the empowerment of FHHs is socially constructed, and it is built from the interaction between women and their environment. We raise an issue on the ways in which women face obstacles and yet find it difficult to express their problems. For this reason, we argue that these problems can be resolved through an interpersonal communication approach made between PEKKA officers and PEKKA FHH members.

Whilst the objective of studying interpersonal communication lies in the hope of producing information that will enhance social interaction and human relationships, scholars also seek to uncover and articulate what might be called "solutions" to communication problems (Dwivedi, 2016). Referring to many studies that look into the means to empower women who are victims and silenced (Siregar & Rosramadhana, 2022; Lin & Yang, 2019; Lamontagne-Godwin et al., 2018), as well as various forms of collective action in the empowerment process (Lockley et al., 2019); this study focuses on women as agents of change in their position as FHHs, along with the interpersonal communications established to play out their roles. This study explores how these actors can overcome the various cultural barriers they face through their interpersonal communication with various parties, either within the family, group or society that adheres to patriarchal values.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the bulk of literature that shapes our theoretical stance, we notice, on the one hand, that women who act as FHHs try to perform their various roles well. As Mustofa et al. (2021) state, women's role and status can be seen through their involvement in the bonds of unity in the social groups in which they participate. However, a study by Lockley et al. (2019) shows that isolation and low self-confidence due to the negative stigma attributed to FHHs render them less likely to be involved in both social life and wider development programmes. Additionally, Pirak et al. (2019) also address that many women are trapped in various socioeconomic and support-related problems, as well as difficulty in adjusting to life after divorce. This condition is also exacerbated by women's powerlessness in addressing gender inequality (Siregar & Rosramadhana, 2022).

Discrimination against women raises the powerlessness experienced by women, as asserted through *the muted group theory*: "Language as part of the culture does not use all speakers equally, because not all speakers contribute to the same way of the formulation. Women (and other members of subordinate groups) are not as free or able as men to say what they want, when and where they want because the words and norms they use have been formulated by the dominant male group" (Griffin, 2006, p.494). In a sense, words used by women are often cut off, and their thoughts are devalued in society. When women try to overcome this injustice, masculine communication control puts them at a huge disadvantage. The language made by men becomes a tool in defining, reducing, and eliminating the existence of women. Women, particularly FHHs, consequently become a silenced group. For this reason, Lockley et al. (2019) argue that problems faced by women linger on, including domestic violence, child marriage, stigma against female heads of household, poverty in women, and lack of involvement in decision-making, both at the family and community levels.

Nwokoro and Ogba (2019) demonstrate that despite the vulnerability, frustration, and obstacles that FHHs experience in society, they also have the awareness to create transformative choices in addressing their life's challenges, highlighting their agency in the process. For this reason, for women to participate in sustainable development, empowerment must be pursued. As Maracle (2018) argues, no community development process will truly benefit a nation without the involvement of women in it. It is then imperative that a more intimate form of communication between FHHs should play an important role, allowing trust and acceptance to be obtained. As mentioned by Parkinson et al. (2018), human social networks are highly homophilic: individuals tend to befriend others who are similar to them in various physical attributes (e.g., age, gender). Good relationships among FHHs built on a common ground would thus allow them not only to share experiences, but also increase their chances of being assimilated and used for behaviour modification.

PEKKA Foundation, through women empowerment, has strived to elevate the FHH from helplessness and poverty through various training and women group facilitating programmes. Those women were split into specific groups based on a residential area. Their activities take place at one of the members' houses. They are generally neighbours even though some of them are relatives. Therefore, they know each other and have a good relationship.

On the other hand, many studies address the role of interpersonal communication in empowerment. The existence of women groups in the empowerment of the FHH is precious. They regularly gather to share their issues in small groups of 6-13 people. For instance, Lin and Yang (2019) address how interpersonal communication can facilitate community

members to deliver stories of previous experiences, empower them to save themselves from specific debilitating memories, and help them face the past and live more effectively in the present. In addition, sharing "secrets" between FHHs can be an entry point for mutual support. Lamontagne-Godwin et al. (2018) stated that how male and female farmers use and build preferences for accessing information sources can differ. Women, in this case, rarely use agricultural data sources and instead value interpersonal communication more as an informal source of information.

In empowerment programmes, FHHs generally practise dyadic communication or communication that takes place between two people and in a small group that still maintains closeness and eye contact. These characteristics follow the definition of *interpersonal communication*: "communication between two persons or among a small group of persons. The communication emphasised in the study of interpersonal communication is a communication of a continuing personal (rather than temporary and impersonal) nature; it is communication between or among intimates or those involved in close relationships—friends, romantic partners, family, and coworkers" (DeVito, 2015, p.2).

The role of interpersonal communication in empowerment reviewed by Su and Asyiek (2015) revealed that if a female farmer has several accesses, such as information to some sources of personal communication, she will be aware of increasing knowledge and making a decision. Bahua (2015) reinforced the research that interaction among villagers, families and local leaders affects farmers' dynamic in their agribusiness activities, needs awareness and independence in making the decision.

METHODOLOGY

This research used qualitative research with a case study approach. The central question of this study is how interpersonal communication, as practised by FHHs, can strengthen their gender roles in society as a means to overcome their perceived obstacles. Creswell and Creswell (2018) attempt to analyse the case of FHHs' powerlessness in conveying their social roles as the head of their families to the community. In this study, we specifically documented PEKKA Foundation's empowerment programme for FHHs, which sought to raise the dignity of its members as a conduit for a more active role in the community. This study explores forms of communication that support this goal of empowerment in Sukanagalih village, whose residents still impose a patriarchal culture.

Sukanagalih village is a part of Pacet district, Cianjur, West Java province. The village is a mountainous area with many vegetable and flower farms, as well as is famous for tourism areas, such as Taman Bunga Nusantara (national floral garden). As a result, many cottages are built and rented for either local or international tourists.

According to data from the survey, Sukanagalih village has the most FHH, and many contract marriages were found (Akhmadi et al., 2011) between local females and male tourists. In addition, the human development index of economic, educational, and health rates in the Cianjur regency is considered the lowest in West Java province (Central Bureau of Statistics of West Java, 2021). The FHH generally graduated from junior high school and worked as factory workers, traders, homemakers, or farmers.

The phenomenon under study is closely related to the social and personal contexts of the research subjects, which therefore requires data that is immersed within those specific social and personal contexts. The nature of the data from this research comes in the form of daily conversations that take place in the community life of the FHHs, or what Rukin (2019)

views as the natural attitude of the perpetrators, in such a way that it becomes part of a social phenomenon or problem in the daily life.

With reference to this, data were collected within four months through various methods, namely observations of the empowerment-related activities and the milieu of FHHs' residence, as well as interviews with informants, who were personal and subjective, allowed us to acquire critical findings. In addition, we also conducted desk evaluation through the literature published by the National Secretariat for the Empowerment of Female Heads of Households, as well as other publications.

There are eight informants selected through a purposive sampling method. We set the selection criteria as follows: FHHs who had actively participated in empowerment groups facilitated by PEKKA Foundation in Sukanagalih Village, Cianjur-Indonesia, for at least two years, were able to express their experiences and opinions and were willing to participate in this research. Efforts were made to select participants with maximum variations in age, employment, and other criteria for FHHs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that interpersonal communication is the most appropriate approach to assist women in Sukanagalih Village, Cianjur, as a way of empowerment and de-stigmatisation in their role as the head of the family, as we will elaborate further. This goes in line with DeVito (2007)'s argument that the most crucial level of human communication is interpersonal communication, which manifests as individual relationships with others in a social context. In our case, it is related to the empowerment of FHHs, in which processes of interaction and sharing of meanings, ideas and feelings occur. These processes, furthermore, help in minimising gender inequality that is formed by patriarchal cultural practices.

Cultural Barriers to Woman's Self-Concept as Subject

Women in Sukanagalih Village, Cianjur, live in a patriarchal culture that, since birth, has been instilled in the identity of a boy through the ego of masculinity while at the same time neglecting his femininity and consistently positioning men in a higher position and role than women. Adisa et al. (2019) assert that strong patriarchal norms and negative tendencies can affect the balance of women's lives and, in turn, their productivity. These characteristics and values related to gender roles in our society develop further into norms that are strengthened, socialised, and maintained until they are considered traditions.

This subjective concept develops in the mundane life of society, resulting in an imbalance between the roles and positions of women and men. It is this gender perspective that gives rise to the subordination of women. This has transpired, for example, in gender inequality in the most basic forms, such as prioritising boys over girls for school. Gender cultural inequality refers to inequality that manifests at the individual level, wherein factors such as traditional and stereotypical gender roles influence the way individuals construct and, in turn, behave towards men and women (Royce, 2018).

One factor contributing to the low level of formal education among the FHHs in Sukanagalih Village can be illustrated as follows. A decade ago, the distance of the closest senior high school to the village was more than 5 km, with limited access to public transportation. Consequently, this became a constraint for girls seeking access to education; the parents would not allow girls to go to school because they were worried their daughters

would be tired of walking long distances. This leads to senior high school being prioritised for boys. As stated by Informant VA1:

Those who attended high school were the eldest and youngest brothers only, and all girls only finished junior high school. The consideration was that finishing junior high school was enough as they later would live with their husbands anyway. That was what we first thought (Informant VA1).

Subordination also grows to the point in which women internalise the value that the needs of their children, husbands, and other family members are more important than their own, even to the basic needs such as food, health, education, and decision-making. This is illustrated in the case of Informant TJ3, for instance, who works early in the morning to provide for her grandchildren. As a woman, she is helpless as a subject when she is entrusted with caring for her children with minimal remittances. Similarly, for Mrs NI, who is easily exhausted due to her acute anaemia, eating twice a day with side dishes is a luxury, considering her work as a female janitor at school who is paid below the regional minimum wage (UMR). This aligns with what Azubire and Hongbin (2017) have found in their study, that gender inequality has been associated with institutional and structural barriers, in addition to the dual role of women, cultural and customary barriers and negative attitudes and perceptions about women in general.

Moreover, there is a lingering stereotype of women as housekeepers whose duties are in the domestic area, i.e., managing the family's needs at home. When women need to do activities outside their homes, culture dictates that domestic affairs, such as cooking, washing, tidying the house, and meeting the needs of family members, should first be completed. This cultural barrier is indeed a form of gender inequality. Some families scold women who are widows for doing activities at night, labelling this as inappropriate behaviour (*Jamali*). Women should be detached from social life and from interacting with the community, which would have allowed them to broaden their insight and expand their relationships.

This cultural barrier increases for FHHs who experience structural discrimination (Akhmedshina, 2020). People still consider that women's role as heads of families goes against the common conception. This refusal is justified by religious interpretations, customs, or just reasons of entitlement. Parker et al. (2016) underpin that contempt for female heads of households is considered an expression of "normal" power, which allows those with that power to separate, classify, and assign inferiority to those who are "different".

De jure, in a patriarchal society like Indonesia, FHHs have not been officially recognised. In the population registration form that contains data on family relations, this set of data is still categorised on the basis of the status of the head of the family (the husband), wife, and children. If a woman is a widow and lives on her own, the form will put her status as the Head of the Family, but it will also include the legal status of the divorce. At official meetings in the neighbourhood, where heads of household are invited, a female head of household that is not recorded in the registry would indeed not be invited. Even if she were registered, there would have been a reluctance for her to associate with male household heads in the said meetings, stemming from the psychologically-socially stigmatisation of FHHs.

Women-Headed Household as Gender Role in Society

Walter (2018) asserts that the primary distinction between gender roles is between roles ascribed to the public and those that are assigned within the private sphere. The role of the public sphere relates to the wider societal role of public offices (e.g., party executive or president) and the employment sector (e.g., taxi driver or secretary). In his study, Giuliano (2020) also underpins the existing gender bias that distinguishes the roles, positions, and responsibilities of men and women in family life, society, and economic development. The socialisation of such gender-oriented roles takes place between generations, throughout a person's life, based on stereotypes and role dichotomies according to biological understandings, which lead to the subordination of men towards women.

For this reason, women as heads of families could strengthen their (stigmatised) roles in society through empowerment communication, exemplified by how PEKKA Foundation empowers their members, communities, and the wider society. Following the fact that a woman or wife is the one that supports a family, of course, conceptually, a woman is indeed the head of the family. Mosse (2020) states that as women can lead their role as heads of households, so are households being characterised by women-headed or women-maintained, namely women who bear the sole responsibility of supporting their families. Thus, although women are in a marital relationship with their husbands, they can act as the head of the family.

Considering the fact that female heads of households in Sukanagalih Village generally come from low-income and uneducated families and that they work in the informal sector (such as cleaning workers, small traders, farm labourers, and factory workers), it is necessary that their existence be fully acknowledged in the institutional settings. This marginalised group requires the full support of related stakeholders to become independent and lead their children to better education and quality of life.

PEKKA Foundation carried out various activities to empower female heads of households, including in Cianjur Regency, for over a decade, which was considered quite successful in advocating for women's identity as heads of families. Our interview with VS8, PEKKA Administrator, reveals this issue:

PEKKA's struggles are related to women's identity as heads of families and gender values so that it is different from other empowerment activities. It may not show an improvement in well-being, but PEKKA has a bargaining position in our society. In addition, the products produced by PEKKA may not be of good quality. However, behind it all, there is a story and a process that continues to unfold. PEKKA is not just a programme, and it is the bearer of value worth learning (Informant VS8).

With assistance from the PEKKA Foundation, FHHs are able to play a role as heads of families that care for their well-being and provide that care for their families. In addition, through learning carried out in the form of interpersonal and group communication, FHHs can play a part in the policy-making processes, which leads to their own benefits. As stated by informant NR2:

Yes, in training, they [PEKKA] teach us financial management, how to be a leader, but there are [technical aspects such as] cooking lessons. [They also teach] how to raise and guide children, teaching us that boys and girls are only two different sexes that should not transpire into different parenting systems (Informant NR2).

This substantiates another study by Giuliano (2020), which shows how these gender roles are interchangeable, and recognising the importance of cultural factors can facilitate the government to find optimal policies that support these roles.

FHHs have made a notable endeavour to increase their capacity and remain empowered, which will be even stronger when the milieu is stable and supportive. This can be achieved, among others, by pushing towards continuous social learning on all fronts. The transformation of female heads of households as a form of gender roles can indeed be strengthened through cultural transmission within the family, encouraged by the broader public authorities, such as teachers and role models, and others. Giuliano (2020) argues that we should reinforce the need to explore the relevance of female heads of households in shaping gender roles in both standard vertical (how mothers influence their children's gender roles) and skewed transmission channels (how they influence their peers).

Empowerment and Interpersonal Communication

In the PEKKA Programme, the focus on empowering FHHs begins through strengthening FHHs' own capacity, which is important, especially for women who come from the very marginalised elements of society. This is particularly relevant because members of the FHH Union in Sukanagalih mostly come from poor and vulnerable groups. Capacity-building programmes carried out by several partners, including the PEKKA Foundation and government agencies in charge of women's empowerment, seem to improve and maintain this positive trajectory.

Efforts to strengthen the role of women in the subject position require *awareness of empowerment*, namely a state in which a woman develops feelings of personal power, command and independence over the material and inherent choices she has to make, as well as the socio-cultural processes involved in it. Sabur and Mahmud (2008) called it an attempt to create space for women to renegotiate gender relations and increase decision-making power and access to and control resources. We cannot simply say that this is a cultural issue. Cultures do change, but it takes serious and ongoing effort to steer those changes towards the right direction (Azubire & Hongbin, 2017).

Women's empowerment refers to efforts to actualise the potential that women already have. The importance of women's empowerment activities stems from the perspective that within our society, there is injustice between men and women. For this reason, women's empowerment is about bringing women groups who are weak in access and assets to become independent. As mentioned by Komariah (2019), empowerment strategies can be approached through the individual, group, or collectively, particularly through fellow women in groups or organisations, especially women's organisations.

The technique of empowering women in the PEKKA programme begins and is mostly done through an interpersonal approach. Here, a woman influences the decision-making power of other women through interactions and with them working together. Some interactions are built through dialogue and close communication, including visits by PEKKA

officers (members of the PEKKA Union who have received training) to the residence of the FHHs, making light conversations about what recently happened around them and their families.

Communication is built by understanding the needs and problems faced by FHHs. As stated by Stacey (2019), the first thing to note in empowerment-related activities is visiting each person to identify her specific problems and needs. This was particularly done by PEKKA Foundation, as stated by Informant VS8, who is the administrator of the organisation. PEKKA Foundation began its programme by conducting a social analysis based on the experiences of FHHs themselves and the results of their observations. This includes the extent of unpleasant experiences the FHHs have had since their childhood up until the present. Departing from those experiences, the programme helps the participants to see the current reality in a more critical stance and find the roots of the problems that lead them to their current state.

The interpersonal approaches taken by the officers have enabled FHHs to build intimate communication with their fellow FHHs. They are no longer hesitant to open themselves up in expressing their concerns. Officers and other members of the FHH group also share openly to provide input and suggestions based on their experiences. FHHs acquired support for their potential after participating in several skill-enhancing pieces of training. These skills include those which can be used as a source of income as well as which can help increase their self-confidence in the community.

A few studies also highlight the tenet that the capacity to build relationships in interpersonal communication necessitates a vital role of a communicator (Triwardhani et al., 2020). In their role as communicators, PEKKA officers' interpersonal communication is fairly good because what has been conveyed has touched the hearts and minds of FHHs. As stated by Informant NG4:

Initially, I often sat in the corner in women's group activities, but the officers invited me to be more open in conveying my experiences as an FHH, so I was motivated to further develop myself (Informant NG4).

We observe that the way in which FHHs self-disclose themselves has the potential to reduce the tension that results from keeping secrets or worries. In the end, this process exercises them to be skilled in communication.

Krämer and Schäwel (2020) state that self-disclosure is defined as the provisioning of personal information about oneself to others. It is a prerequisite to developing interpersonal relationships. It is a form of trust which occurs at the individual level and can contribute to self-expression, capacity development, self-identity, and friendship building. One informant felt such values, saying that gathering and sharing experiences with friends in the women's group made her comfortable and increased her knowledge.

Through this process, FHHs realise that increasing their capacity through participation in empowerment programmes can overcome the existing obstacles. With interpersonal support, in this case, including communication, women can comfort each other, revive, and feel more empowered in the face of vulnerabilities (Lin & Yang, 2019). In turn, this process of becoming an empowered woman can bring an impact, benefiting the people around her, including her nuclear family, neighbours, and relatives.

The above finding is based on the fact that the empowerment of FHHs requires reciprocities that involve various authorities and stakeholders. It is a commitment to social changes that stem from the involvement of FHHs themselves, as has been done by the PEKKA Foundation, whose main goals are social action and transformation. A community development programme must emerge through collective actions, although it is by no means a stand-alone project. In the end, community development programmes can lead to both individual and interpersonal empowerment.

In this regard, Setyowati (2019) states that the development of interpersonal communication is a way to encourage individuals to learn together continuously. Effective interpersonal communication skills, as practised by internal and external stakeholders of the Female Heads of Household Union, will be a determining force in forming the necessary social networks. According to a study (Sell & Minot, 2018), women's empowerment may lead to a situation whereby family well-being improves in accordance with a larger and more significant role of women in household decision-making.

In addition to this, FHHs also gain an understanding of communication that can be practised in overcoming their problems, such as in how FHHs should accompany their adolescent children entering puberty. Solving this problem requires knowledge and forms of communication that prioritise gender equality in such a way that children can establish healthy and harmonious relationships with the opposite sex.

PEKKA officers deliver the content of women's empowerment, especially in building opinions and transforming behaviour, to FHHs through personal and collective approaches. In interpersonal communication theory, dialogue and interactions that occur more personally are considered the most effective. As highlighted by Akbar et al. (2019), communication that leads to the changing of attitudes, opinions, and behaviour of the communicant, which is seen as persuasive efforts, is a necessary component of empowerment.

The results of capacity building for FHHs, especially in terms of knowledge and interpersonal communication skills gained through interactions within the groups, have rendered them successful in gaining the trust of their children in their position as heads of families. This particular role, which is generally played by the father, can instead be performed well by the mother. For example, a mother can provide a trustworthy recommendation for her child when they are choosing a degree that would relate to the desired job market. As narrated by informant LS, her second daughter agreed to her mother's suggestion to continue her studies in the kindergarten teacher's education programme with scholarship support from the PEKKA Foundation. Her daughter believes and accepts the argument that the kindergarten teaching profession is still very much needed in the job market. Her daughter also followed in her mother's footsteps to participate actively in community activities, including as a population census officer.

There is also an informant who uses his mother, who is a PEKKA officer, as a trusted person to acquire information about empowerment programmes: "Mama often shares her knowledge, about what FHH is, about reproduction, or child marriage at every meeting, *seueur materna* (she shares many content materials). Triwardhani and Chaerowati (2019) addressed the phenomenon as an aspect that strengthens interpersonal communication between parents and children, which is built based on their shared interests. Parents and children are attracted because there are similarities between them, both physically and behaviourally.

Interpersonal communication is also carried out so that the information that the officers have obtained can be disseminated as widely as possible, especially to FHHs and other beneficiaries. This can also be useful and have a positive effect on the immediate environment of FHHs, while at the same time also affecting the husbands of extraordinary PEKKA members, namely the woman with a spouse. However, she herself acts as the head of the family. To give an illustration, Informant AF5's active participation in empowerment activities engenders her husband to treat Informant AF5 as an equal partner. As a requirement to become a member of the community of FHHs, an extraordinary FHH member must first obtain permission from her husband. In response, the husband often believes that the PEKKA group's activities are beneficial. In addition, the knowledge and skills his wife has acquired can help the family's economy as well as improve the quality of care for their children.

Another example is Informant NG6, whose husband migrates as an inter-island interprovincial bus driver, who usually returns once every two months. Informant NG6 helped her household through the existence of a saving-and-loan cooperative and the training that Informant NG6 has participated in. With the support of this group, Informant NG6 is able to avoid toxic social environments, and maintain work in a factory while at the same time juggling her role as the head of the family when her husband is away.

Another example is Informant NR7, who mentioned that after receiving training on child care methods, she learned that the upbringing of boys and girls should not be differentiated based on their gender. She advocated for the same and equal treatment and access to education given to boys and girls. She communicated this insight with her husband, and together they agreed to practice a non-discriminatory parenting method for their children, which was a stark contrast to the way they did parenting before.

It is an effort to give an equal opportunity for girls and boys to proceed with an education based on their particular interests and abilities with the assumption of supporting their families. Research by Amâncio and Santos (2021) indicated that if a woman enables access to a man's traditional work is generally considered an achievement in successful education, a belief of individual achievement and individual strategy required for inclusion and tackling discrimination.

CONCLUSION

Female heads of households (FHHs) still bear a low self-concept due to the intense practice of subordination of women, thus affecting their ability to be independent as a subject. Therefore, they actively participate in FHH communities to overcome the existing patriarchal culture that hinders their roles as heads of the family. Stigma to the role of FHH enables it to be combated through empowerment with interpersonal communication-based facilitated by the PEKKA foundation through their cadres.

This study has shown that the empowerment-oriented communication facilitated by PEKKA Foundation through its officers has been done effectively through interpersonal communication to address the barriers mentioned above. The interpersonal communication built by the FHHs helps them in playing their role as the agent of change in both their families as well as the wider society. We conclude and advocate the importance of interpersonal communication as a conduit for FHHs to overcome patriarchal values that previously became obstacles in their lives. Moreover, interpersonal communication in the PEKKA programme, both as a practice and shared knowledge with female members, is considered effective as a means to empower female heads of household.

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