

# The Women in the Furniture Industry of San Vicente, Ilocos Sur

**Agustina R. Tactay**

**Norie T. Tactay**

*University of Northern Philippines*

## Abstract

*The study focused on the determination of profile and role of women in the furniture industry along household, production and decision making activities.*

*Descriptive survey was used in the study. It involved the 35 women engaged in the industry. Majority of the respondents belonged to 36-40 age bracket, married, Catholics, and Ilocanos, who were born in San Vicente, Ilocos Sur. Most respondents have 3-4 children. Household activities are shared among members of the family. The work of the males still prevails in the production activities since tools are purely for them. Females do the weaving and marketing. Decision making is a shared activity. Females, being mothers are involved in home management and care of children.*

**Keyword Index:** *women, furniture industry, San Vicente, Ilocos Sur*

## INTRODUCTION

San Vicente, a town of Ilocos Sur is famous for its beautiful designs, durability and quality of furniture. This is the reason why many tourists and visitors often visit the place. Most of its products and its reproductions are displayed in antique shops not only in Vigan, the heart of Ilocos Sur, but in varied places particularly in the cities of Baguio and Manila. Because of this, San Vicente is considered as the "furniture capital" of Ilocos.

Women have their own roles to play in the furniture industry. They can perform varied tasks. They do searching of woods needed for the production or designs and have these carved (*agburik*) before these are made into living room sets, china cabinets, doors or chairs. When these varied pieces of wooden furniture have

been crafted by the main folks, the women polish (*agliha*) and varnish them which are now ready for delivery to direct buyers or customers who sell them to far places. In the absence of their husbands, they can also make rattan furniture and make the design on the wood.

Some products are not made of pure wood; rather wooden rattan or cane scat materials are used to vary the design and make products more intricate and attractive to prospective customers. By doing this, women are able to earn from their sales amounting to P200.00-P350.00 per week. This means additional income to save for the tuition fees of their children or nephews or nieces and could also purchase a new appliance. For women who are employed, they do it on a part-time basis but it is a big chance too to get orders from co-employees and would then advise their carpenters after office hours.

To spur the growth of the industry, San Vicente has a Multi-purpose Cooperative which lends money to members at minimal interest. The loans are usually used to augment their meager capital for the purchase of wood.

The young generation especially those who can not pursue their high school or college education are engaged in this work. They work with their parents and learn all the necessary techniques needed in its production and sometimes being exposed to the work, they create their own designs which can attract the influx of tourists thus sometimes seen having better designs than their parents. With this initiative, they are motivated and prepared to continue the industry and produce their own, thus preparing them for their own families in the future.

Furniture making is the main source of income for most residents of the place especially those who were not able to finish college. Ordinarily, the breadwinner of the family is engaged in this work to support his family. Due to the desire of parents to give good life for their children, mothers do their share, thus, hand in hand they work with their husbands to realize their dreams.

Today with women's empowerment, San Vicente's women are more free, assertive and helpful. Women are now seen taking active roles in what used to be men's exclusive territory, no longer confined to the traditional household chores.

Women now work and this could be of great help to the financial status of the family thus uplifting the economic conditions of the family.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The study identified the role of women in the furniture industry. Specifically, it determined the profile of women engaged in the industry in terms of (1) socio-demographic characteristics such as age, civil status, religion, ethnicity, number of children, place of origin, and educational attainment; and (2) decision making. It also enumerated the role of women in furniture making; provided data on the production activity of the industry; and discussed how decision makings are shared by men and women.

### **Review of Related Literature**

Gender equality is first and foremost a human right. Women are entitled to live in dignity and in freedom from want and from fear. Empowering women is an indispensable tool for advancing developed and reducing poverty.

Empowered women contribute to the health and development of whole families and communities and to improve prospects for the next generations. The importance of gender equality is underscored by its inclusion as one of the eight Millennium Development Goals. Gender equality is acknowledged and being a key to achieving the other seven goals.

Furniture industry as shown in the study proves of gender equality and women had shown how they can contribute to development. This is not only in the Philippines, particularly in the Ilocos Region but also in North Carolina, U.S.A., India, Canada and Thailand.

In North Carolina, USA, the origin dates back in the 11<sup>th</sup> century when artisans of English ancestry began to settle across the state producing simple yet functional furniture as a small scale until it flourished.

The furniture industry in Thailand continues to be the strongest due to its quality, innovative and modern styling and flexibility (IAFP, 2011).

Bulacan is home to some 200 furniture makers as producers of a wide range of world-class furniture. In many countries including Japan, Singapore, Canada and Indonesia, women make furniture marketing decisions. However, the role of women workers in the furniture industry is weak. Though work of women is important in the industry, they are paid 50 percent less than men.

Training for women to improve their role is done in Indonesia. The training is focused on furniture finishing because most women are working in the finishing phase, particularly sanding. This also envisions that they will move up in the furniture industry work to become business managers and owners.

These readings will empower women and should be a challenge for them to do better for their future.

## METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey was used in the study. Data were gathered through the interviews based on the questionnaire adopted from the gender modified instrument to suit the topic of the study. Gathered data were analyzed using frequency counts and percentages. The study was conducted from November 2006 to January 2007.

### Respondents

The respondents were women of the barangays of Bantaoay, Poblacion, Bayubay Sur and Bayubay Norte who are involved in the furniture industry. Thirty five (35) women engaged in the industry served as the respondents of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### Socio-Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Table 1 presents the profile of the respondents.

**Age.** Twelve (or 34%) of the respondents belong to age bracket 36-40, **seven** (or 20%) are age 41-45, six (or 17.14%) are from 31-35 years old, four are in the 56-60 age category, three (or 8.57%) are in the bracket 51-55, and one (or 2.80%) belong to 21-25 age range.

**Civil Status.** Majority (31 or 88.57%) of the respondents are married, three (or 8.57%) are single and one (or 2.86%) is separated.

**Religion.** All the respondents are Roman Catholics.

**Ethnicity.** Thirty one (or 88.57%) are Ilocanos, two (or 5.71%) are Visayans, one (or 2.86%) is a Tagalog and one (or 2.86%) is a Pampangeno.

**Table 1. Socio-demographic Profile of the Respondents**

Variable	F	%
<b>Age</b>		
21-25	1	2.80
26-30	-	-
31-35	6	17.14
36-40	12	34.28
<b>41-45</b>	7	20.00
46-50	-	-
<b>51-55</b>	3	<b>8.57</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Civil Status</b>		
Married	3	88.57
Single	3	8.57
Scorated	1	100
<b>Religion</b>		
Roman Catholic	35	100.00
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Ilocano	31	88.57
Visayan	2	5.71
Tagalog	1	2.86
Pampango	1	2.86
<b>No. of Children</b>		
1-2	10	28.57
3-4	16	45.77
5-6	6	17.14
No children	3	8.57
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Place of Origin</b>		
San Vicente	31	88.57
Other places	4	11.47
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>
<b>Educational Attainment</b>		
College graduate	1	2.86
College level	8	22.86
HS Graduate	11	31.43
HS level	7	20
Elem. Grad	6	17.14
Elem. Level	1	2.86
No formal education	1	2.86
<b>Total</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>100</b>

Number of Children. Sixteen (or 45.71%) have 3-4 children, 10 (or 28.57%) have 1-2 children, and six (or 17.14%) have 5-6 children.

**Place of Origin.** Thirty-one (or 88.57%) are in San Vicente while four (or 11.47%) come from other places and migrated due to marriage or with their parents.

**Educational Attainment.** Eleven (or 31.43%) of the respondents are high school graduates, eight (or 22.86%) are college graduates, one is an elementary graduate and one has no formal schooling.

## Household Maintenance Profile

Table 2 presents the role of women in furniture making.

**Table 2. Household Maintenance Profile**

Household Activities	Adult			
	f/m	M	F	m/f
a) Household Chores				
1. Cooking	8	3	33	1
2. House cleaning	5	5	30	1
3. Washing clothes	8	3	31	-
4. Ironing clothes	8	4	32	-
5. Dishwashing	8	8	33	-
6. Fetching water	6	33	20	9
7. Gathering firewood	3	35	-	6
8. Others				
b) Home repair/carpentry	-	35	1	-
c) Marketing	31	3	33	1
d) Child rearing	31	3	33	1
e) Budgeting of Finances	15	3	30	2

**Legend:**

**M**— Male

**F**— Female

**f/m** -- tasks done by female and male but predominantly by female

**m/f**—tasks done by female and male but predominantly by male

Fetching water, gathering firewood and carpentry were the dominant chores performed by the male. By nature since they are supposed to be physically stronger than women, they are expected to perform harder tasks.

It is noted also on the table that the female share in all household chores except for carpentry. Some respondents mentioned that their husbands must also help in some works like cooking, dishwashing, and ironing especially if a kid is sick since mothers are supposed to look after the needs of the sick child.

It was observed that males, who were used to do work when they were not yet married, continue with what they started like cooking and cleaning.

Washing clothes is one of the chores that is seen to be done by both aside from cooking and ironing. Males who iron their clothes reveal their concern for their clothes and may like their clothes appear to be neat and orderly. Young females sometimes are easier to command. They even accompany their mothers in marketing so that they will learn how to budget money.

Child rearing is also a house activity that is performed by female children especially on weekends since mothers have to attend to some works like washing clothes and cooking.

Benzon, et al. (2007) mentioned in their study that gender division of labor is evident. The same finding is seen in this study.

### **Furniture Production Activity Profile**

The furniture making is not an easy job to do. It needs training and skill. In the production of furniture, different kinds of wood are used like the bittaog or palomaria (*Calophyllum inophyllum*), acacia (*Samanea saman*), santol (*Sandoricum koetjape*), sagat (*Vitex parviflora*), and narra (*Pterocarpus indicus*). The latter is considered the most durable wood and very expensive.

The table shows that all works in the preparation from cutting of wood, sawing, planing, drilling, and assembling are done by males. Females start their involvement in weaving, carving, polishing and varnishing to marketing

It is clearly revealed in the table that males can do all the work but they have lesser involvement in the tasks which could be performed by females.

Few females with stronger physical endurance participate in furniture production.

**Table 3. Furniture Production Activity Profile**

Activities in the Furniture Making	Adult			
	f/m	M	F	m/f
a. Preparation				
1. Cutting of wood ( <i>pinagririt</i> )	-	32	-	6
2. Sawing ( <i>pinagragadi</i> )	-	33	-	6
3. Planing ( <i>pinagkatam</i> )	-	35	-	3
4. Drilling ( <i>pinagbarrena</i> )	-	35	-	5
5. Assembling ( <i>pinagsangal</i> )	-	35	-	2
6. Weaving ( <i>pinaglaga</i> )	35	5	10	1
b. Carving ( <i>pinagburik</i> )	3	23	5	3
c. Sanding ( <i>pinagliha</i> )	15	8	6	4
d. Varnishing ( <i>pinagpasileng</i> )	13	17	7	5
e. Marketing ( <i>pinaglako</i> )	32	5	10	5

**Legend:**

Multiple responses

**M**--male**F**-- female

f/m – tasks done by female and male but predominantly by female

m/f – tasks done by female and male but predominantly by male

From the log, it is cut into different sizes by either a chain saw or cross cut appropriate for the parts of the desired furniture. These pieces of wood are further cut into smaller sizes by a machine which makes it ready for use. Parts are smoothed by planer and if assembled, a router is used to put holes so that the parts be put together. The assembled furniture can be a table or a chair is carved then later polished for varnishing. The finished product will then be sold.

**Decision Making Profile**

Given below are points which are decisions shared by men and women. Husbands being breadwinners are primarily responsible in decision making both for major and minor points, However, when decision making pertaining to borrowing of money, work assignments of children, setting rules, using contraceptives, and deciding or having another child, it is the wife's responsibility. Her responsibilities as the mother are clearly seen in her involvement in decision making. Being the one greatly concerned until the growing of the children, she is ready to help her kids to know their needs and should know and decide how many she can rear and develop so that she will have responsible children in the future.



Table 4. Decision Making Profile

Decision Points	Respondents		
	Wife	Husband	Others
1. Buyina appliances	3	32	-
2. Buvina production tools	2	33	-
3. Mortaaaina a Property	6	29	-
4. Sellina a Property	8	26	1
5. Buvina a Property	9	25	1
6. Borrowino a Money	20	14	1
7. Work an Assionment of Children	30	4	1
8. Whether a Children Continue or Stoo Schoolino	18	16	1
9. Consullino a doctor	19	15	-
10. Buvina medicines	25	10	1
11. Usina a contraceptives	23	12	-
12. Havina another child	23	12	-
13. Settino rules	24	11	-
14. Disciplinina the children	11	27	-
15. Joinina an oraanization	22	13	-
16. Havina sex	15	20	-
17. Enaaaaina in business	10	25	-
18. Whom to vote in election	14	20	-
19. Celebratina fiesta or not	14	21	-
20. Which church/reloious to join	20	14	1
21. To transfer residence or not	15	20	-
22. For oartner or soouse to work or no	13	22	-
23. House repair/renovation	3	32	-
24. Employment abroad	6	29	-

Some respondents also mentioned that their mothers help them make decisions. This came from respondents who either married early or whose mothers are living with them. There were three single respondents solely depended upon their parents.

## CONCLUSIONS

Majority of the respondents are married, Jlocanos, Catholics and within the 36-40 age bracket who were born in San Vicente, Ilocos Sur.

Most families have 3-4 children.

Many respondents reached high school although there was one who graduated in college.

The furniture industry is the main source of income of the respondents, but it is not enough especially in the families with 5-6 children.

Household activities are seen to be shared among members of the family. The work of males is focused in carpentry, home repairs and gathering of firewood.

The work of males still prevails in the production activities since the tools used are purely for them. Females do the weaving and marketing.

Decision making is a shared activity. Females, being mothers are greatly involved in home management and proper care of children.

### **RECOMMENDATION**

Involvement of women in the furniture industry of San Vicente, Ilocos Sur. can be improved by the introduction and acquisition of new technology like better tools and facilities for better and higher productivity.

### **LITERATURE CITED**

Benzon, M.E.P., Betita, M.C.B., and Oandasan, A. F. (2007). Women fisherfolks in Nalvo. Sta. Maria, Ilocos Sur. *GAD Research Journal*, Vol. I, No. 2 (1908-063).

Center for international forestry research. (2012, April 25). *Training for women working in the furniture value chain*. Retrieved from <http://www.cifor.org/gender/events/events-storage/teak-training.html>

Cater, J. J. (2012, July 27). *The rise of the furniture manufacturing industry in Western North Carolina and Virginia*. Retrieved from [http://www.soc.duke.edu/NC\\_Global-Economy/furniture/overview.shtml](http://www.soc.duke.edu/NC_Global-Economy/furniture/overview.shtml).

International Alliance of Furnishing Publications (2011). Overview of Thailand's Furniture Industry. Retrieved from [www.iafpalliance.com](http://www.iafpalliance.com)