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FISHKARTE: The Adaptation Strategies of Fish Vendors Amid Rising Prices

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Thea Margaret B. Aparri
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Abbie Kate F. Villacampa
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Czar Edenn T. Alum
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Ronnelle Carl R. Ferrater
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Hallie Kate Y. Ybañez
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Edzyl Peth B. Mangyao
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Eliza Chloe C. Requilino
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
Joseph L. Torres
Tanjay City Science High School, Tanjay City Division, Negros Oriental, Philippines
https://orcid.org/0009-0008-1516-1743

Abstract

The ever-rising prices of goods have created problems for petty vendors, especially in managing family income, business expenses, and fish stocks. These changes require fish vendors to reduce their spending and find practical ways to keep their businesses running. Thus, this study aims to explore fish vendors' experiences with rising prices and identify the strategies they use to cope with these challenges. The study used a qualitative exploratory research design to understand the experiences of the participants. The participants were selected through convenience and snowball sampling techniques, and data were gathered through interviews to understand their experiences and ways of dealing with the rising prices of goods. The responses of the participants were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify common ideas among the participants. Study results showed that the rising prices of goods made it difficult for fish vendors to sustain their income, buy enough stocks of fish, and control their expenses. However, with these difficulties, the vendors managed their costs, managed their cash carefully, and used their diskarte or resourcefulness to keep their business alive. They also showed determination and patience when prices were shifting, and sales were slow. Also, more capital allowed them to buy more fish stocks, remain at the prices quoted by fishermen, and keep their business. The study revealed that fish vendors use different ways to cope and maintain their businesses in the face of rising prices. These strategies helped them continue serving customers despite ongoing financial challenges daily.

Keywords: *Fish vendors, rising prices, inflation, adaptation strategies, business challenges, livelihood, resourcefulness*

Introduction

The Philippines is a coastal country, blessed with rich marine resources that make the fish vendor industry one of the most dominant sectors when it comes to the production of foods and livelihood (Food and Agriculture Organization, 2024). With its extensive coastline and diverse aquatic ecosystems, it has supported the source of income of dozens of Filipinos and a very important role in national food security and the local economy (Philippine Statistics Authority, 2024). Fish is a major source of animal protein in the country because it is widely available and relatively affordable compared with other sources of protein (Garcia et al., 2005). As a result, many consumers prefer to buy fresh fish because of their accessibility, the variety of seafood available, and the competitive prices. However, although fish vending is important for food security and local livelihoods, there is still limited qualitative research on how fish vendors experience and adapt to the challenges brought about by rising prices of goods.

Fish vending plays a vital role in the society, ensuring the continuous supply of fresh fishes or seafood from fishermen to consumers. Fish vendors not only support local food distribution but also depend on fish vending as their primary source of livelihood. As one of the small-scale livelihoods in the Philippines, fish vending helps families earn a living and contributes or supports the economic well-being of communities. Despite this, the fish vendors are among one of the sectors that have been highly affected by the rising prices of goods. Alteration in fish supply and changing consumer demand further impact their profitability and daily operations. Tadifa et al. (2022) observed that the conversion in market supply and demand contributed to the postharvest losses and had reduced the economic value of fishery products. The rising prices of goods has a significant effect even in sectors that supply goods as well which shows how hard their daily hardships are. In order to deal with these challenges, vendors usually adjust their selling prices, manage their inventory more carefully, cut off some operating expenses, or employ other strategies to keep their business going.

Although studies have explained the importance of fish vendors, inflation, and strategies of small and medium-sized enterprises in times of crisis, there is still a gap in studies. Because most studies look at economics when it comes to selling fish, business, or small businesses in general, but not so much when it comes to the personal experiences of fish vendors both inside and outside public markets. In addition, many studies use numbers or review the literature, which means they don't give a deeper understanding of how fish vendors feel about the prices increasing everyday. Because of these limitations, researchers still don't know how local fish vendors adapt to inflation or higher prices of goods. This study focuses to fill this gap by exploring how fish vendors experience the effects of inflation and the strategies they use to continue their livelihood.

This study aims to explore how fish vendors adapt to the rising prices of goods. By understanding their experiences and how they adapt to the rising price of goods, this study aims to provide insights of the fish vendors that may help them, local government units, policymakers, and future researchers develop initiatives that strengthen the resilience and sustainability of small-scale fish vending businesses. To ensure a focused examination the experience of fish vendors, the study is based on the following research questions:

1. How do rising prices of goods affect the business operations and daily work of fish vendors?
2. What coping strategies do fish vendors use to manage the impact of rising prices?
3. How do rising prices of goods influence the daily lives of fish vendors?

Literature Review

Fish Vending as a Livelihood

Fish vending serves an important role in the small-scale fisheries section by acting as the connection between fishers and consumers. Not only does it provide income, it also balances the economy making sure that communities have access to fresh fish, which can contribute to food security and local economic activity. Cohen et al. (2019) emphasized that fish traders and vendors have important roles in fisheries, but their contributions are often ignored in its management. The authors argue that long-lasting or sustainable fisheries must also include the people who are involved in the marketing and distribution, not just fish production. Making sure vendors have equal access to markets, resources and choice-making can help the means of living and lead to long-term sustainability. This view supports the present study by giving attention and recognizing the experiences and adaptation strategies of fish vendors.

This argument is further supported by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO, 2015) through the Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication. The guidelines recognise that post-harvest workers, traders, processors and vendors are part of the fisheries value chain and should be included in policies and development programmes. They point out that access to markets, improved economic opportunities and the protection of the rights of all parties in small-scale fisheries help reduce poverty, ensure food security and build sustainable livelihoods. The guidelines focus on the importance of understanding the response of fish vendors as active participants, rather than passive suppliers, to economic challenges. This further supports the present study as the knowledge of adaptation strategies of fish vendors could offer practical insights that can guide local governments to sustain livelihoods and market stability.

Findings by Cohen et al. (2019) and FAO (2015) both stated that fish vendors play a huge role in the sustainability of small-scale fisheries and local food systems. How they respond to shifts in the economy affects not only the availability and price of fish to consumers, but also just the vendors' livelihoods. Rising prices of fuel, transportation, electricity and other operating costs may disrupt the marketing chain and force vendors to develop strategies to stay in business. A review of these strategies can provide insights on the realities of fish vendors and contribute to the larger discourse on building resilient small-scale fisheries. The current study triangulates these perspectives to provide a stronger theoretical basis to explore how adaptation enables fish vendors to continue supporting household incomes, community food security and the local economy under economic pressures.

Inflation and Rising Prices

Inflation is characterized as the increase in prices of goods. This occurrence leads to a decrease in the demand for these goods, as well as an increase in the amount of money needed to start a business. The reason why the price of food, particularly fish and seafood, is identified as one of the significant determinants of inflation in the Philippines is that these goods are among the list of items in the country experiencing inflation (Philippine Statistics Authority [PSA], 2026). Changes in the prices of goods affect fish vendors in terms of additional expenditures incurred in the purchasing, transporting, and selling processes, which makes it difficult for them to decrease prices in order to gain profit. While inflation leads to a reduction in the rate at which individuals buy food due to the high prices, fish vendors experience additional expenditures that may influence their daily income. Getting to understand how additional expenditures and changes in prices affect fish vendors helps highlight how these issues influence their means of livelihood and the need to adjust to the changes in the market environment.

The effects of changes in prices on fish vendors are closely related to the overall state of the fisheries market. Such factors as the amount of the catch, production methods, and transportation resources greatly impact the price situation within the fisheries market. For instance, the researchers analyzing the fish market situation in the Philippines revealed that changes in supply accounted for increases in fish products' supply and prices (Macusi et al., 2022). Therefore, fish vendors are greatly affected by the overall state of the fisheries market before they sell their products. Thus, it could be argued that prices of fish products are dependent on the overall situations within the fisheries market.

In addition, the effect of inflation on individuals and businesses depends on the level of their income and financial status. According to the report provided by PSA (2026), fish and other seafood products were partially responsible for the country's food inflation in June 2026, suggesting that changes in these products' prices accounted for a significant proportion of the country's food inflation rate. Overall, based on the reviewed literature, it could be concluded that food inflation and changes in prices are closely associated with several other factors associated with the supply-demand situation, distribution, and consumption. However, the majority of the reviewed articles highlight the national situation and general trends associated with fish and seafood consumption and fisheries market situation. Therefore, it could be argued that further research should focus on the opinions of fish vendors in order to get access to the ways in which changes in the prices correlate with their work process and adaptability to the new situations.

Effects of Inflation on Fish Vendors

The effects of inflation on fish vending were determined by various interrelated factors, each of which has a considerable impact on the profitability of fish vending. In this regard, Bermas et al. (2023) emphasize the significance of several key elements, including product, price, demand, supply, and competition, in ensuring the income of fish vendors. From this perspective, an increase in the prices of fish and other goods and services significantly affects the income of fish vendors, forcing them to adjust their strategies to remain profitable. Nevertheless, given the nature and demand for the product, fish vendors face considerable difficulties maintaining their income level and ensuring stability in the face of changing and volatile prices. Therefore, fish vending is characterized by its sensitivity to inflation, and accordingly, fish vendors face considerable challenges in maintaining their previous level of income profitability.

As prices rise, fish vendors are forced to meet these additional costs as well, increasing their expenses in terms of purchasing, transporting, storing at appropriate temperatures, selling, and maintaining a fish product. At the

same time, these additional expenditures aren't always offset by increased prices, as customers may be unable or unwilling to pay more for a given product. Thus, fish vendors are faced with the need to balance their desire for higher income and profitability with a lower price to ensure a continuous demand for their product. Therefore, inflation creates additional challenges for fish vendors and significantly complicates their work, affecting their operations, ranging from buying stocks to selling and maintaining a constant income. Thus, while the study demonstrates how fish vendors operate under conditions of inflation and how their profitability is affected, the research presents only one side of the story.

In the study, Bermas et al. (2023) provide a brief overview of the impact of inflation on the income of fish vendors, emphasizing the importance of key factors that must be considered when examining the relationship between the two. Nevertheless, the study lacks an in-depth analysis of fish vendors' experiences and responses to these financial challenges. Moreover, the sample used by the researchers is limited to one specific market, which raises questions about the representativeness of the results for other fish markets. Thus, further research is needed to fully understand the nuances of the situation and better understand the experiences of fish vendors. In turn, this allows the researchers to comprehend the situation in depth and draw more accurate and valuable conclusions about the impact of inflation on the fish vendors' livelihood.

Adaptation Strategies of Small Businesses

Korporcic et al. (2025) conducted a study "Resilience of Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises in Times of Crisis: an Umbrella Review" that aimed to discover how small and medium-sized enterprises respond to such phenomena as inflation and economic crisis. The authors haven't participated in interviews with participants directly; instead, they performed an umbrella review, that is, analyzed the existing literature. According to the study, SMEs can weather economic storms through proper financial management, staff flexibility, market responsiveness, multiple selling channels, and relationship building with partners. The study highlighted the importance for organizations to be as adaptable to rapid and unpredictable economic changes as possible since such an approach allows them to remain resilient. This implies that small businesses can withstand financial losses by adjusting their management practices instead of relying on a single solution. The article suggests that economic resilience doesn't come from one particular approach, but it is achieved through a continuous process of adaptation.

These findings are also related to the present study because most fish vendors are also small business owners who also use the same strategies to cope with inflation or the rising prices of goods. Fish vendors have to change the way they do business every day to try to maintain their income as inflation pushes up the prices of fish, transportation, ice, fuel and other business costs. Similar to the SMEs in the study, they may be careful on their budgets, reduce unnecessary expenses, adjust their selling prices, look for cheaper suppliers, or improve their relationships with loyal customers to keep their businesses afloat. Understanding these adaptation strategies can better explain the fish vendors' response to economic challenges and factors that help them to continue their livelihood in the face of rising prices, which the present study can better explain. The results of Koporcic et al. (2025) offer a useful framework to further support the analysis of coping mechanisms and resilience of fish vendors in the local context.

A strength of this study is it combines evidence from many reliable studies, making it more dependable. The results of the study aren't based on a particular case or place but rather on a broad evidence base as the study reviews the results of many research articles. This provides a clearer picture of how small businesses tend to respond to economic recession and increases the confidence in its findings. However, its limitation is that it focuses on SMEs in general rather than fish vendors and it doesn't also include the personal experiences of business owners that study aims to explore. Like the present research, it doesn't explore the lived experiences, emotions and day-to-day challenges faced by individual fish vendors in adapting to inflation. This study, therefore, seeks to bridge this gap by offering an in-depth understanding of the personal experiences and coping mechanisms of fish vendors with the rising prices of goods.

The Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) (2015) discussed small-scale fisheries value chains in the "Voluntary Guidelines for Securing Sustainable Small-Scale Fisheries in the Context of Food Security and Poverty Eradication." The guidelines discussed activities related to fish handling, transportation, marketing, and trade, as well as challenges involving market access, prices, and infrastructure. This reference is relevant to the present study because these activities and challenges are also connected to the daily operations of fish vendors. It

provides a broader understanding of the conditions that can influence the livelihood and business activities of people involved in small-scale fisheries.

The Philippine Statistics Authority (PSA) (2024) provided information on the prices and marketing conditions of selected agricultural and fishery commodities in the Philippines. Its statistical information changes in the prices of commodities and marketing conditions that can affect fish vendors. This reference supports the present study because the changes in prices may influence purchasing costs, selling prices, income, and business decisions of fish vendors. The data also provide a broader economic context for understanding why fish vendors may have to change their business practices when prices rise.

Theoretical/Conceptual Foundation

The study is anchored on the Resilience Theory which explains how people and communities adapt to challenges and keep striving and moving forward even in the face of difficult situations. The theory says resilience is the ability to recover, to adjust. The study is based on Resilience Theory which studies how people and groups respond to challenges and survive adversity. This theory deals with the resilience concept Resilience is the ability to bounce back, adapt and sustain livelihoods in the face of problems such as inflation, increasing prices and economic uncertainty. The fish vendors are tactful in their business dealings maximizing on the little resources and employing practical ways to keep their businesses afloat even when the prices of goods keep on rising.

Resilience can be described as both an inherent characteristic or trait and a process of development by constantly adapting to changing situations, based on the resilience theory. As said by Masten (2001), resilience is "ordinary magic" because people cope with challenges through ordinary decisions, resources, and supportive relations instead of extraordinary abilities. In this case, resilience of the fish vendors is demonstrated by adapting their way of doing business so as to minimize the impacts of inflation, developing friendly relationships with the suppliers and clients, adjusting the pricing, and financial planning. Because of these adaptive actions, they have managed to take care of their families and earn for themselves during difficult economic periods.

The study is also supported by the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping, developed by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984. The transactional model suggests that whenever people are faced with stressful experiences, they initially consider the nature of the problem or situation before coming up with appropriate coping mechanisms. This coping mechanism will allow them to cope with the stress, or at least minimize the adverse effects of stress on them. For fish vendors, coping mechanisms may include lowering the price of fish, cutting down expenses, buying fewer amounts of fish, finding another source for their fish, or better managing their fish supply.

Additionally, there is a difference between problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping in the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping. Problem-focused coping is a strategy that involves actions intended to tackle the problem causing the stress. Emotion-focused coping, on the other hand, involves dealing with the emotions that one experiences in reaction to the problem that he/she is facing. Problem-focused coping strategies used by the fish vendors may include change of pricing strategies, looking for cheaper suppliers, cutting down on expenses and careful management of inventory. Emotion-focused coping strategies may include maintaining a positive outlook, seeking help from family members, having faith in God and temporarily tolerating financial losses while continuing with the business. This understanding provides a broader explanation of the psychological effects of inflation on fish vendors.

Resilience Theory and the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping together make a complete theory that helps in analyzing the adaptation strategies of the fish vendors. Through Resilience Theory, an analysis of how the vendors survive economically under difficult circumstances is provided, while Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping provides a basis for understanding the decision making and coping mechanisms of the vendors in response to financial stress.

Methodology

This section is about the methodology used in this study. It covers the research design, research locale, research participants, research instrument, data analysis, data gathering procedure, trustworthiness of the study, and

ethical considerations. The approach used in this research is qualitative exploratory study in order to gain deeper understanding of the experiences and adaptation strategies of fish vendors when faced with rising prices. Data was gathered online through a semi-structured interview guide with participants selected through snowball sampling. The mentioned techniques not only allow the researchers to collect in-depth and relevant data to address the objectives of the study, but it also gives convenience to the participants that they aren't disturbed during their daily work.

Research Design

This study used qualitative research with an exploratory study research design to understand the adaptation of fish vendors to the increasing prices of goods. This study is qualitative because it seeks to gather experiences, opinions, and ways of coping and adapting to the challenges brought by inflation. This approach focuses on gaining insight into the real life experiences of the participants through interviews. Exploratory study is appropriate because the study aims to explore and understand the experiences of fish vendors both inside and outside public markets from different places with increasing prices. Detailed information was obtained from the participants by means of interviews. The exploratory approach allows the researchers to identify common experiences, challenges and strategies that may not have been fully explored in previous studies.

This study uses convenience sampling and snowball sampling for the participant selection. Convenience sampling The researchers first determined the fish vendors that are readily available, willing to participate and meet the criteria of the study. First, it enables investigators to access participants who have first-hand experience of the effects of rising prices with ease. The first few participants were identified through snowball sampling by asking them to recommend other fish vendors who have experienced the effects of rising prices and are willing to participate in the interview. The researchers continued this process until they got enough data and information for the study. The use of convenience and snowball sampling is appropriate because it enables researchers to reach available participants and to also identify other fish vendors with relevant experiences. Employing this method, the researchers are able to get useful information that meets the study objectives.

Research Locale

The study was conducted both face-to-face and online through messenger chat, whichever was convenient for the participants. The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide to understand how the fish vendors adapt to the increase of prices of goods. The study was conducted among fish vendors from different cities and municipalities of Negros Oriental. Rather than focusing on a single city, the study included participants from multiple areas to gather a broader understanding of the topic.

The chosen participants were those who have a minimum of two years experience of selling fish. They were selected because of their ample experience in the rising prices of fish, transportation, fuel, and other business-related expenses. Their stories provide new and important insights on the impact of inflation on their livelihoods and the many ways they are able to continue doing business despite increasing costs.

Research Participants

The participants of this study were selected through convenience and snowball sampling, which means that the researchers first asked qualified fish vendors that are close to them to participate, and then asked them to recommend other fish vendors who also meet the requirements of the study. The importance of this method is that it helps the researchers to locate the participants who have the appropriate kind of experience and are willing to be involved in the study. This is particularly important since not all fish vendors might be available or have the interest to participate. Must strictly be a fish vendor, at least 18 years old, have a minimum of two (2) years' experience as a fish vendor, and willing to participate voluntarily. These criteria ensure that participants have enough experience with the effects of inflation or rising prices of goods and can share useful information about the strategies they use to continue their business. Using both sampling methods helps gather meaningful data that supports the purpose of the study.

Research Instrument

The researchers used a semi-structured interview guide as the instrument for the data collection process. The interview guide consists of open-ended questions to obtain necessary information from fish market vendors on how they adjust to inflation. This method allows the researchers to ask clarifying questions and gain in-depth responses from participants while ensuring that all of the important topics are covered sufficiently.

The validity of the chosen instrument was ensured by consulting the research adviser, who reviewed the guide prepared by the researchers and provided feedback or recommendations that may be implemented to improve the effectiveness of the interview guide. To achieve reliability and consistency, the researchers asked the same set of main questions following the same order in all interviews. Moreover, all participants have received the same explanation regarding the study and the interview process. In addition, the researchers were able to ask follow-up questions to better comprehend the participants' perspectives or obtain more information on the topic. With the participants' consent, the interviews were recorded to ensure that their responses are captured accurately. The recordings were then transcribed verbatim, meaning that the exact wording of the participants' responses were written down as they were stated during the interview. The transcripts were reviewed and compared to the recordings to ensure accuracy before proceeding to the stage of thematic analysis of the data.

Before conducting the interviews, potential participants were contacted via social media or face-to-face to explain the nature of the study and obtain informed consent to participate. The participants were then interviewed either face-to-face or via Messenger, depending on their preference and the researchers' availability. The questions included in the interview guide seeks to uncover the participants' perspectives, challenges, and coping mechanisms related to adjusting to rising prices. Specifically, the questions pertain to the participants' experiences with increased prices, the impact of these changes, the methods for mitigating the effects, and the efficacy of these methods as well as the potential recommendations.

Data Analysis

This study uses thematic analysis to collect and analyze data from the semi-structured interviews. This method was developed and widely described by Braun and Clarke (2006). In this study, this approach was applied to organize, identify, and interpret themes and patterns within the qualitative data. The researchers firstly transcribed the responses from the participants verbatim and they read the transcripts several times to get a clearer and better understanding of the data. Key statements were selected and initial codes were created. The codes were then categorized and these codes were used to develop themes that reflected the common experiences and adaptation strategies of fish vendors as they faced the rising prices of goods.

To ensure the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, researchers used member checking, triangulation, peer debriefing, and referential adequacy. The participants engaged in member checking, reviewed their interview responses and the researchers interpretations to ensure accuracy or to make corrections if necessary. Triangulation was done by comparison of the interview data with related similar studies and published literature. Peer debriefing was done by asking the research adviser or other researchers to review the coding process and the identified themes for consistency. Referential adequacy was achieved by keeping the interview transcripts and other research records organized and secure so they could be reviewed when necessary. Last, the themes were interpreted based on the research questions to provide a clear understanding of the experiences and adaptation strategies of the fish vendors.

Data Gathering Procedure

Before the actual gathering process, the researchers prepared all the necessary requirements to ensure that the study is conducted in a systematic, ethical and in accordance with the research guidelines. First, the researchers obtained a letter of approval from the school principal to conduct the study. Once they got their approval, they identified or selected their participants who met their criteria or qualified to join the study. They asked their participants to refer to other fish vendors through convenience and snowball sampling techniques.

Data was collected through semi-structured interviews with the chosen participants. Interviews were conducted both face-to-face or through an online messaging (Messenger) in consideration to the participants preferences and availability. This flexible approach allowed the researchers to accommodate the participants' needs but still

use a consistent interview guide. The semi-structured format enabled the researchers to have questions prepared related to the participants' experiences as fish vendors and their strategies to cope with increasing prices and at the same time also allows follow-up questions to be asked when more clarification or elaboration is needed.

The interviews were audio-recorded with the participants' permission to ensure that their responses are captured accurately and completely. The researchers also took notes on important answers and relevant observations made during the interview. Participants were encouraged to answer freely and also share their personal experiences, challenges, and strategies as fish vendors amidst the increasing prices. This method allowed the researchers to acquire detailed and firsthand information that could give a deeper understanding of how fish vendors adapt to the economic challenges brought about by rising prices.

All the recordings were transcribed verbatim by the researchers after all the interviews to accurately capture all the statements by the participants. Each transcript was read and re-read carefully to ensure that it is accurate, complete and consistent with the actual recording of the interview and field notes where in situations of vague or missing data, the researchers were able to verify and check to avoid misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the data. Once the transcripts are validated, the researchers started to systematize the data to identify meaningful statements, recurring ideas, and relevant to the study. The answers were coded and grouped into categories and general themes which are reflective of the challenges encountered by fish vendors especially on the increasing prices of goods.

The identified themes were analyzed and interpreted by the researchers to relate them to the research questions and objectives of the study. This process helped explain the fish vendors' experiences of inflation, how these problems affect their daily operations and livelihood, and what adaptation strategies they had to use to cope with economic hardships. This systematic analysis enabled the researchers to obtain important insights from the participants' answers and have a clearer picture of their lived realities. Finally, the interpreted themes now also serve as a guide to the discussion and conclusion of the study, connecting the participants' experiences with the literature and the overall aim of the research.

Trustworthiness of the Study

The credibility of the study was attained by accurate representation of the experiences of the participants throughout the process of the research. The semi-structured interviews were conducted online and face-to-face with the fish vendors who had first-hand experience of dealing with inflation. The participants were given enough time to answer and state their experiences, as well as in clarifying them. Following each response, the researchers shared their interpretation of the data with the participants directly to determine whether their reading is similar to what the participants intended to convey. The data collected were compared and contrasted with each other and with other sources and observations to find connections, recurring themes and further understand the participants' experiences. The researchers then presented their findings to disinterested peers after organizing the data, to get more opinions and to look for holes in the analysis, particularly those that indicate bias. These strategies were useful in ensuring that the findings reflected the experiences of the participants.

The researchers gave details about the research setting, the participants, and the procedures done and used in the study. This included the description of the setting which was with fish vendors from different municipalities and cities which have experienced the fast rising of prices and its effect on their lives. These included fish vendors who are active for at least two years as they have gone through enough background in sharing about how they adapted to inflation. The study also provides a detailed description and discussion of the lives of fish vendors inside and outside the market and the challenges faced by each participant. Additionally, the researchers noted that the interviews were done face to face and online through Messenger chat, whichever was convenient to the participants so as not to interrupt their daily schedules. This information gives a guide for readers and future researchers to evaluate the level to which the findings may be transferable to particular economic conditions.

The process of the research was done systematically all throughout. From the title selection, research proposal preparation, consent and interview guide development, identification of participants, interview conduction, responses transcription, data analysis, until the writing of the findings, were all carefully documented and recorded. A daily research log was kept to record the progress of the study, decisions made, changes to the

research process and challenges encountered. The documentation was a guide for the researchers whenever they had to review or verify any part of the study. The same semi-structured interview guide was used in each interview to ensure that the participants share their experiences on the same key topics as to not go astray with the purpose of the study. Moreover, the researchers followed consistent procedures in the data collection and analysis for accuracy. The research adviser and other disinterested researchers reviewed the research process, interview questions, coding, and interpretation of the findings throughout the study to make sure the study was done carefully, consistently and objectively.

The researchers knew there were personal points of view that could influence the interpretation of the data and so they concentrated only on the information given by the participants so as not to influence the study. The researchers listened attentively to the interviews and only asked follow-up questions when needed and didn't lead the participant toward any particular answer. Findings and themes were developed based on the actual responses of the participants and not on assumptions or expectations of the researchers during data analysis. Throughout the study, interview transcripts, coding sheets and other documents related to the research were carefully organized to guarantee transparency. The researchers also compared the responses of all participants to identify patterns, which could help in accurately reflecting the experiences of participants. These were all then reviewed by the research adviser as well as other disinterested researchers to verify that they are objective and are supported by the collected data.

Ethical Considerations

This study adhered to ethical principles in order to ensure the rights, dignity, privacy, and wellbeing of the participants. Initially, the researchers received informed consents from the fish vendors. They explained the nature, objectives, and the time it would take to accomplish the study as well as clarify their rights. The participants were told that they could decline to answer a question or withdraw from the study if they felt uncomfortable, harassed, or threatened in any way. They were also informed that the information gathered from them would remain confidential and used solely for the purposes of the study.

The participants' identities were kept anonymous and confidential. The personal information gathered from them was used exclusively for the study. Additionally, the researchers ensured that the results of the study didn't contain any information that can reveal the identity of the participants. If necessary, the participants were referred to by their pseudonyms or numbers. All the documents that contained the participants' personal information were stored securely to prevent unauthorized access. The researchers destroyed all the information collected from the participants after finalizing the thesis in accordance with the institutional policies.

The researchers strictly followed a beneficence principle to ensure that the study did not cause harm to the participants. The interviews were held in a manner that caused no discomfort or inconvenience to them. The researchers respected the time of the participants by scheduling the interviews according to their convenience. They also avoided pressuring the participants to provide the required information. The researchers reported the results of the study veraciously without altering the facts or inventing new data. They always told the truth and adhered to the principles of integrity, honesty, and transparency throughout the research process. In addition, they ensured that the research was accurately represented when reporting the results.

When developing and editing the research manuscript, the researchers utilized the Artificial Intelligence (AI) technology, specifically ChatGPT and Quillbot, as a tool to enhance the clarity, accuracy, and precision of the document. They used it as an aid in organizing the information logically and expressing their thoughts more effectively. However, the researchers did not rely on the technology to substitute their professional judgment, expertise, and analytical skills. Additionally, the AI technology was not used to generate any form of data, participants' responses, interview transcripts, or the results of the study. The researchers were solely responsible for interpreting the results of the study and analyzing the information collected from the participants. They made sure that the information generated by the AI software was relevant, credible, and accurate before incorporating it into the final version of the manuscript. As a result, the AI technology was only used as an ancillary tool, whereas the researchers maintained their responsibility for the accuracy, reliability, and integrity of the study.

Findings

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This section shows the results of the research. By analyzing the data gathered from the participants, the researchers identified the themes related to the hardships the participants experienced and how they coped with the rising prices. The themes derived from the interviewees' responses represent their challenges regarding finances, work, and sources of support and how they managed these challenges.

Table 1. Thematic Map

CODES	THEMES
Wholesale buyers pick it up and sell it Not sell as much Small profit Fish spoils quickly Experience a loss Discipline in spending Consider before increasing price Reducing expenses Save money Insufficient income High expenses Borrowing money Seeking additional capital Rising prices of commodities Fishing for food Shared household bills Reducing ice usage Adjusting ice purchases Stress Lack of sleep Less amount bought Ask for discounts Chooses another product Bulk buying	Financial Challenges and Resource Management
Sells out immediately Products keep selling Effective Multiple suppliers Multiple sources of income Add other items to sell Use sales from fast-selling items Using someone else's boat for fishing Became independent through fishing Look for solutions Changing the capital and strategies Products on consignment	Livelihood Continuity and Diversification
Increase the price of the fish Base it on the prices at the market Make the prices affordable for our customers Explain to customers Immediate selling of fish to maintain freshness Social media marketing Offer free delivery Choose profitable fish	Market and Customer Adaptation

Observe the customers Observe the products	
God Family Customers Selective aid Provide what is lacking Financial assistance Additional capital Educating vendors Permits Giveaways Outreach program	Social and Institutional Support

Discussion

Financial Resilience Amid Rising Prices

This theme talks about how fish vendors end up dealing with money trouble, higher costs, and just limited things to work with when they're trying to stay in business. It mentions the kind of hurdles they have keeping sales steady and staying profitable, because prices keep shifting and customers don't buy the same way as before, so their income gets affected. It also shows that vendors try to be financially strict, like setting their budgets, cutting down on costs that feel unnecessary, and using what they have in a careful, almost deliberate manner.

Then there is the part about how they handle pressure when the finances get tight, for instance borrowing, looking for extra capital, and trying to get their resources back when what they earn turns out to be too small. The theme also points to how both business costs and household needs keep climbing, and how that turns into stress and real hardship for the vendors as they manage those competing demands. Besides that, it describes how vendors react when customer purchasing patterns shift, like customers buying smaller amounts, or becoming more price sensitive, even if everything else stays the same.

Participant 1 said, "Profit is just enough to buy what we need."
Participant 2 stated, "It still depends on how disciplined you are with your spending."
Participant 4 explained, "Borrowed money" and "just to recover."
Participant 5 added, "One whole block is already 180 pesos."

The findings show that fish vendors live with financial pressure because costs are getting higher, it eats into their profits , then they end up growing their business spending as well as household spending. In the end it becomes harder for them to keep enough income coming in . Instead of using just one way to face it, vendors seem to handle these issues with careful spending, managing resources properly, borrowing or looking for other additional capital, and also adapting to shifts in how customers buy. But this trouble doesn't stop at the shop level , because they also still need to juggle household costs like food, electricity, schooling, transport, and other day to day needs.
The participants also mentioned that to deal with financial challenges you really need to make careful calls about where the limited resources go. They stressed that expense control matters a lot, and that avoiding unnecessary spending , and using the capital they do have, is key. They said in plain terms that they shouldn't spend beyond what they can afford. When their income isn't enough, some rely on borrowing or other means of capital , just to recover the losses and keep the business running. At the same time, changes in customers' purchasing habits can hit sales too, especially if buyers start taking fewer items , or if they become more price sensitive when prices rise. All of this pushes them into stress , worry, tiredness, and uncertainty, so the financial problems clearly touch both their business situation and their everyday life.

These findings are sort of supported by more recent studies on fish-vending profitability, financial access, and the way fishing households become vulnerable . Bermas et al. (2023) reported that fish vendors in Iriga City

Public Market were affected by product,price,demand,supply, and also competition, and that inflation tends to shift selling prices, plus it shapes how customers choose , especially when people lean toward lower prices . They also really stressed financial management, along with know-how in pricing, demand, supply, and competition ,as a way to cope with the profitability issues that show up. Likewise, Coulthard et al. (2020) found that when small-scale fishing households have limited access to financial services , it can limit their capacity to get financing and even manage their cash flow, for both household needs, and business-related investments. The paper further observed that informal lenders help fill some of those gaps,which then backs the current finding where borrowing might be used when vendors are under financial strain. Palanca-Tan (2020) also pointed out economic vulnerability among fishing dependent households around Laguna Lake, particularly with regard to consumption expenditures, financial behavior, assets, and their ability to generate income. The study noted that food consumption takes up a big portion of total household spending ,so managing limited income together with basic household needs becomes pretty important.

However, the present findings, they also differ from some previous research in a few important ways. Bermas et al. (2023) mostly looked at how fish-vendor profitability is influenced by product, price, demand, supply, and competition, but the current study is taking in a wider set of real life financial experiences. Things like household expenses, borrowing, and resource recovery, plus financial discipline, stress, and those small customer purchasing adjustments. Then again, Coulthard et al. (2020) concentrated mainly on financial inclusion and access to financial services, as the pathway for building economic resilience in small-scale fisheries. By contrast, the present findings indicate that vendors aren't just dealing with inclusion or access, they also handle financial pressure through routine, day-to-day choices, like trimming expenses, steering purchases, using what's at hand carefully, and reacting to customers changing buying patterns. So, it looks like there is a gap in understanding how these financial pressures line up and work together inside the everyday lives of fish vendors.

The findings about how customers buy are also kinda backed up by research on food demand in the Philippines. Hernandez et al. (2022) reported that shifts in price and income affect how Filipino households divide up food spending, where households often end up cutting back on foods that are relatively more costly, like fish, when they experience income drops or price shocks. So, it fits with what the participants here observed , that some customers reduce the amount of fish they get, or they switch to cheaper options. Still, this study didn't show a single, same pattern for everyone. Some customers kept on buying even when the prices went up, others bought in larger quantities , and some stayed with their regular choice mainly because the fish was fresh. That difference matters, because it suggests responses to price changes aren't uniform , and people react in different ways. In that sense, the present study contributes a more diverse, vendor-observed view of what actually happens when prices change in a real fish-vending setting.

Lastly, the financial pressures identified here also line up with work arguing that money constraints can shape both livelihood activities and everyday well-being. Matsue et al. (2021), studying small-scale fisheries in the Philippines, showed that low revenue and limited access to finance can create socioeconomic struggles and also push people into relying on informal financial arrangements. Taken together , these studies and the current results indicate that financial troubles for fish vendors aren't only about reduced profits. They also involve how business resources are handled alongside household needs, plus the way customers purchase, the borrowing that may happen, and even the personal strain linked to financial uncertainty.

Sustaining the Fish-Vending Livelihood

The theme continues discussing the ways fish vendors cope with economic hardship resulting from transforming market needs, prices' fluctuations, fish supply shortages, and financial issues while sustaining their business. It particularly focuses on their compensation for the loss of one source of income by another through alternating their business and customer base, as well as adapting to the fishing industry's dynamics and business's external conditions. Moreover, the theme describes how fish vendors overcome adversities by constantly selling their goods and maintaining their business as a whole, which means altering their methods and finding new opportunities to survive. Thus, the described theme and fish vendors' attitudes towards their business can be seen as an example of how individuals handle economic and business-related challenges.

Participant 1 said "Products keep selling."
Participant 2 stated "So we adapted by trying different businesses instead of relying on just one."

Participant 3 explained “I look for a solution and look for an idea.”
Participant 5 added “Reduced fishing during monsoon.”

The results of the study show that despite the challenges in terms of their livelihood, the fish vendors continue doing their business while finding ways to stabilize, increase and even improve their sales. Their resilience was manifested through multiple coping mechanisms such as continued efforts in terms of sales, seeking other options of livelihood, adapting to the changes in terms of fish supply, and remaining persistent in the face of challenges. Instead of choosing one option, the vendors opted to use multiple ways in order to ensure their livelihood and improve their lives.
The participants asserted that in order to continue their livelihood it is important that they remain flexible and persistent throughout the process. They had to continuously deal with the challenges in terms of customer demands, pursue alternative options of livelihood, adapt to changes in terms of fish supply, and remain persistent in their efforts in sales regardless of their losses and struggles. This way the fish vendors could be able to persist and adapt to the different circumstances and continue being resilient.

The results of the study are congruent with prior studies done regarding business and coping mechanisms and are consistent with Resilience Theory and Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping. According to Bermas et al., (2023) the fish vendors in the study encountered supply issues, demand issues, pricing issues, competition issues and profitability issues and therefore had to adapt in order to persist with their business. Likewise Koporcic et al. (2025) revealed that in order for small scale business to be sustainable it must be resilient by adapting to market changes, overcoming financial challenges, pursuing multiple options of livelihood and maintaining customer relationships. Additionally, the results of the study align with the idea of Resilience Theory which emphasizes on development processes that promote adaptation to the surrounding environment, and the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping of Lazarus and Folkman in 1984 which posits that people assess situations and deal with stress by managing the sources. These theories therefore show that the persistence, adaptability and multiple efforts of the fish vendors in coping with their challenges enable them to continue their livelihood despite the circumstances.

Market and Customer Adaptation

In the midst of rising prices, fish vendors should stay updated and adapt to the changing market conditions while still giving attention to the customers’ needs and demands. This theme focuses on the vendors strategies on the change of prices for more affordable commodities but still earning money. This method enables customers to buy more. Participant 5 said, “We try to make the prices affordable for our customers.” This implies that vendors focus more on customers loyalty and sales sustainability, not just raising prices to cover increased expenses. The findings also displayed that vendors are starting to be more creative in advertising their products. Instead of just relying on walking customers, some vendors have started to utilize online platforms. This is in Participant 1’s comment, “We post our fish on social media.” Moreover, the theme highlights the importance of careful observation and experience in making business decisions. Vendors are constantly tracking the consumer habits, demand for the product and sales performance to identify the products which generate profit and those which may generate losses. “Little by little, you observe and watch your customers and your products,” explained Participant 3. “you can learn where you can make money and where you lose money.” This implies that effective adaptation isn’t just all about the changes in prices but also on learning from the day-to-day business experience and making informed decisions.

Results suggest that adaptation is about being flexible and responsive to market conditions and customer needs, as vendors understand that consumer purchasing behavior changes in times of rising prices and need to change their strategies to stay afloat. By marketing and watching the market all the time, they are able to better sustain customer demand and minimize financial loss, through offering affordable pricing. According to Bermas et al. (2023), inflation had a huge impact on fish vendors’ ability to sustain their income. Fish Vendors should have careful price adjustments and supply change while considering the purchasing power of customers.This is consistent with participants’ experiences of keeping prices as low as possible to keep customers in the midst of rising costs. Similar to research, Koporcic et al. (2025) emphasized that even small and medium-sized businesses that adapt remain functional by adapting to the frequent changes in the market conditions, observing performance of business, and maintaining strong customer relationships. This displays that the participants have carefully observed the behaviors of the customers and understood the current demands so that they know

which products were profitable and which strategies were in the need of improvement. In agreement with the present findings, Amarelle and Dañas (2026) also supports the idea that small businesses facing increased costs survive by modifying their daily operations. Their research discovers that entrepreneurs respond to higher costs by making small price changes, closely monitoring sales, focusing on more profitable goods and building better relationships with customers through improved service. Such strategies are reflective of the experiences of the fish vendors in this study who carefully regulate prices to make them affordable, monitor products that make income or losses and resort to alternative selling strategies such as marketing their products on social media.

Furthermore, these findings are supported by the Resilience Theory, which conceptualizes resilience as an ongoing process of adaptation to changing and challenging circumstances, rather than as a simple recovery from adversity. The adaptive capacity is shown by the fish vendors' readiness to change their sales, pricing and marketing methods. In addition, Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (1984) indicates that individuals deal with stressful situations by using problem-focused coping methods that directly address the source of the challenge. Instead of giving in to inflation, participants sought practical solutions by monitoring market conditions, altering business decisions and discovering new ways to draw in customers. The studies' findings are supported by existing studies which show that the sustainability during times of high inflation includes financial resources partnered with the vendors' ability to adjust, make informed decisions, satisfy customer wants and needs, and develop good relationships.

However, there are also contrasting ideas to the findings from existing studies, showing that adaptive strategies alone don't always guarantee the sustainability of the business. The same study by Bassett et al. (2022) shows that despite various adaptive methods in response to economic challenges, these are still often limited by outside factors they can't control which indicates that the benefits that come from the strategies may not always be enough when market conditions and customer behavior restrict sales. In the same way, Macusi et al. (2021) provided a more detailed picture of persistence in participants. It was described how determination and persistence weren't enough to protect vendors from losing income and experiencing financial problems. The strategies also have to be practical, like managing resources properly to adapt to market competition while still responding to customer needs. In general, both studies reveal that to sustain business and livelihood, consumer demand and market accessibility should be addressed with the collaboration of vendor's strategies and external economic conditions.

The findings show that to cope with rising prices and changing market conditions, fish vendors use their determination and innovativeness to adapt. Their strategies of keeping prices affordable despite inflation, using social media for marketing, and managing products and expenses show that they are capable of making adjustments according to economic conditions to sustain their livelihoods. However, the results also have its limits to adaptation as economic factors beyond the vendors' control such as purchasing power, market disturbances, and increasing operation costs appear. Thus, resilience and persistence are necessary for vendors to survive high inflation, but long-term livelihood sustainability will come from continuous adaptation, making good financial and business decisions, and being sensitive to customer needs and the overall economic environment.

Social and Institutional Support

This theme describes the strength of the fish vendors and the support they get from their family, faith, their friends and the people around them even when things get hard because of rising prices. It's about how family and friends give them the reason or motivation to keep working and keep going." It also tells how the government can help by giving money, teaching skills, giving training, and offering other kinds of help that can make their business better. It also says how important it is to stay friendly, be respectful not fight and act in a way in the fish-vending community. These kinds of help from people and from organizations show how vendors depend on people, on groups and on good relationships to deal with problems and keep their way of life.

Participant 2 explained that "the reason we persevere and stay motivated in our livelihood is our family."
Participant 4 stated that "my parents and my friends who are like family" provide support and motivation.
Participant 7 shared that "my family and children" motivate them to continue their livelihood.

The findings indicate that family, faith, and social relationships serve as important sources of strength and motivation for fish vendors. Despite the financial difficulties caused by rising prices, the participants continue working because of their responsibilities toward their families and the encouragement they receive from people around them. Their experiences show that resilience isn't only developed through individual effort but is also strengthened through supportive relationships.

The participants also emphasized the importance of government assistance in strengthening their livelihood. Financial assistance, additional capital, permits, giveaways, and outreach programs were identified as possible forms of support for fish vendors. This is supported by Ballesteros et al. (2025), who discussed how government livelihood projects in the Philippine fisheries sector provide training, livelihood development, and infrastructure support to fishing households. However, their study also emphasized that challenges in program implementation can affect the success and sustainability of livelihood assistance.

The findings further show that maintaining good relationships and responsible conduct is important within the fish-vending community. Respecting fellow vendors and fishermen, avoiding unnecessary conflicts, and maintaining positive relationships can promote cooperation and a supportive working environment. This is consistent with the study of Nunan et al. (2023), which found that social connections among small-scale fish producers can provide access to livelihood assistance, information, cooperation, and support during difficult situations.

These findings are also supported by Yulita et al. (2020), who found that family and government support can contribute to entrepreneurial readiness, particularly when combined with resilience. Similarly, Powell and Eddleston (2017) found that family-to-business support can contribute to positive entrepreneurial outcomes, including business performance and commitment to remaining self-employed. These findings are further supported by Resilience Theory, which views resilience as a process of adapting to challenges using available personal and social resources, and by Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping (1984), which explains that people cope with stressful situations by evaluating their circumstances and using available resources and support. Together, these studies and theories reinforce that family support, faith, social relationships, government assistance, and responsible community relationships can help fish vendors remain resilient and sustain their livelihoods despite economic challenges.

Conclusion

The study concludes that the increase in prices of commodities greatly impacts the business operations and daily routines of fish vendors. They have to pay more for fish, gasoline, electricity and other necessities which reduces their income and eats into their profits, making it harder for them to keep up their sales. As the fish supply and the purchasing capacity of consumers change, vendors need to adapt and also change their practices. Vendors are practicing financial management, business adjustment, diversification, and market adaptation to cope with these challenges. They control unnecessary spending, manage available resources, change the prices with the affordability of the customers, promote their products through social media, observe customer demand, and look for additional income or capital when necessary. These strategies allow them to continue operating despite financial difficulties.

The rising prices also affect the vendors' daily life and their well-being. They are more stressed, worried, tired, sleepless, and have difficulty paying for their expenses like food, school needs, and bills. Even so, families, friends, faith, and community connections provide motivation and offer support to them. In general, vendors are able to cope with rising prices through practical adjustments and support from others, enabling them to continue their livelihood in the face of changing economic conditions.

Recommendation

Based on the findings and conclusions of the study, the future researchers who continue to explore this study may utilize it and investigate further, focusing on local government units and relevant agencies that provide accessible livelihood assistance and financial programs specifically designed for small-scale fish vendors. Since the participants identified additional capital and financial assistance as important forms of support, programs such as low-interest livelihood loans, small business grants, and accessible capital assistance may help vendors maintain sufficient fish stocks and manage increasing operating expenses.

The researchers also recommend the provision of business and financial management training for fish vendors. Although the participants already practice budgeting, reducing unnecessary expenses, and carefully managing their capital, formal training in bookkeeping, budgeting, pricing, inventory management, and cash-flow management may further strengthen their ability to make informed business decisions during periods of rising prices.

Furthermore, market-related support and training may be provided to help vendors respond to changing customer preferences and market conditions. The participants already use strategies such as adjusting prices, observing customer behavior, and promoting fish through social media. Additional training in digital marketing, product promotion, customer relations, and identifying profitable products may help vendors expand their market and maintain customers despite increasing prices.

The researchers further recommend that future studies examine areas that weren't explored extensively in the present research, particularly the long-term effectiveness of the vendors' coping strategies. The present study identified different adaptation strategies, but it didn't determine which strategies are most effective over a longer period. Future researchers may investigate whether borrowing, diversification, social media marketing, price adjustment, or other strategies contribute to the long-term sustainability of fish-vending businesses.

Lastly, future researchers may explore the well-being and mental and emotional experiences of fish vendors in greater depth. The present study found that rising prices were associated with stress, worry, tiredness, lack of sleep, and financial pressure, but these experiences weren't examined as a separate major focus of the research. A future study could investigate how prolonged economic difficulties affect vendors' well-being and how family, community, and institutional support may help them manage these challenges. Future research could explore the effects of prolonged economic crises on vendors' well-being and the role of family, community and institutional support in coping with these challenges.

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