

# Best Practices of the Bontoc Women's Brigade in Crime Prevention

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## ABSTRACT

The study is about the women's involvement in crime prevention in Bontoc, Mountain Province through the Women's Brigade. It determined factors that led to their participation, roles and best practices in crime prevention, and the difficulties encountered in the conduct of their duties. The Bontoc Women's Brigade revealed the following as their motives in joining crime prevention: concern for the security and peace in the community, self-fulfillment and the belief that the Bontoks have high regard for women. Their roles in crime prevention include conducting peaceful negotiations, counseling and ensuring the safety of the drunk and his/her belongings. Their best practices include placid approach to conflict resolution, sending home drunk minors as well as securing the drunk and his/her possessions. The difficulties they endure are aggressive behavior of drunks and restricted mobility due to old age.

The Women's Brigade became an important implementer of various municipal orders relative to peace and order. Their active participation brought the municipal down significantly. Despite the difficulties encountered, the women continue to serve the municipality as part of their social responsibility. They believe that as elderly women, they can provide guidance and keep society safe for the younger generations

## Keywords

Best Practices, Crime Prevention, Difficulties, Motives, Roles

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## Introduction

For the longest time before the turn of this century, crime prevention has been a realm dominated by men. Peacekeepers and crime busters were men; rarely were there women involved in crime prevention and in the criminal justice system.

But with women's rights advocacies gaining prominence over the last decades, women have started to play roles in crime prevention matters. Initiatives around the globe prove this.

In 1984, the US Congress created the United States Institute of Peace (USIP). It is an autonomous funded by the federal government that was established to initiate peaceful conflict-resolution mechanism worldwide. In Columbia, USIP acknowledged the role of women in the peace-keeping process. Women were involved in the development of non-violent methods of conflict-resolution and in ensuring that survivors still have a dignity to hang on to. All these contributed to in achieving peace and reconciliation ("Columbia: Encourage Gender Perspective", 2015).

In October 2000, Resolution 1325 was adopted by the United Nations Security Council, which called for the institutionalization of women's participation in peace negotiations. All governments were enjoined to recognize the importance of women's perspective in the process of rebuilding peace. This initiative came about after the UNSC realized that women and children are by and large the recipients of the adverse effects of war (Council on Foreign Relations, 2003).

In 2002, the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM) came to a similar realization of the potential of women being involved in the process of rebuilding peace. This realization came about after the UNIFEM documented and analyzed the devastating effects of war and crimes and females in Rwanda, East Timor and Afghanistan. As a result, women were then empowered to actively participate

and work with the government and civic organizations to restore peace and rebuild the economy (Council on Foreign Relations, 2003).

In 2010, US Secretary Hilary Clinton presented the Women's Action Plan at the International Conference on Afghanistan. The said plan epitomized the initiatives that must be available to women in order that they can contribute to rebuilding the peace in Afghanistan. It includes access to judicial institutions, opportunities to lead, and most of all protection from gender biases (Verveer, 2010).

In November 2012, Women's Society Organizations were the subject of an open debate conducted by the UNSC, particularly how these groups contributed to the peace-making and conflict-resolution process. In a way, the event presented a chance to evaluate what headways were implemented and what actions still need to be enforced since the adoption of Resolution 1325 as above mentioned ("Women's Role in Peace and Security," 2012).

Recently, Dr. Archibong et al. studied the role of women in preventing and controlling crime in Nigeria. They found that women are recognized in local communities and in the nation as a whole to have a significant part in fighting crime (Archibong, Udobong, and Antia, 2014).

These aforementioned initiatives underline the significance of women and their roles. Adding to their natural roles as mothers and teachers, women are now playing a part in fields like crime prevention. The natural instinct to nurture and to guide as a mother and teacher has been extended outside of the home. Recina (1998) mentions that the role of women in the prevention of crime can be initially found in the basic unit of society – the family. Following their natural and indispensable role of being the light of the family, women provide guidance to their children. This guidance reminds the children to behave well not only at home, but even when they go out in the society.

Kofi Annan, former UN Secretary General (1997 to 2006), affirms this role of women when he said "women have

served as peace educators, both in their families and in their societies for generations” (United Nations Population Fund, 2001).

In the Philippines, a big leap in forwarding women’s concerns is felt. Most efforts concerned with the inclusion of women in thwarting crimes were prompted by violent circumstances and victimizations experienced by women and their family. These efforts are now manifested to mention a few, in the Magna Carta for Women (Republic Act 9710), the Women in Development and Nation Building Act (Republic Act 7192), and the Anti-Violence Against Women and Children Act of 2004 (Republic Act 9262).

In the Cordillera Administrative Region (CAR), indigenous women are now capacitated to take active roles in the governance and in society’s progress by virtue of the Indigenous People’s Rights Act of 1997.

In Mountain Province, particularly in the municipality of Bontoc, women have played vital roles in ensuring a safe environment for their children (Prill-Brett, 1975). In the 1980s, for example, the construction of the Chico River dam endangered villages along the path of the said project. This forced the Bontoc women to do their part in protecting their land. With their naked bodies, the women barricaded the area. The continued uprisings by both men and women forced the Philippine government to stop the project (Casumbal, L, 2012).

At present, even when widespread conflict is not so evident in the municipality, the womenfolk of Bontoc continue to do their roles in ensuring peace and order in the town. This time, the Bontoc women have organized themselves into an organization called the Bontoc Women’s Brigade. In December 2002, then Mayor Luis Claver issued Executive Order 015-2002 which formally recognized the Bontoc Women’s Brigade (WB) as a civilian volunteer organization focused in helping maintain peace and order in the municipality.

To recognize the roles of women in crime prevention in the local setting, this study endeavored to know and understand why women joined the organization and how the members of the Bontoc Women’s Brigade were able to carry out their roles and best practices as ambassadors in crime prevention. Finally, challenges were also identified in order to pinpoint specific areas for improvement.

The aim of this study was to explore the uniqueness of the Bontoc Women’s Brigade – a civilian organization helping out in the maintenance of peace and order in Bontoc, Mountain Province. Centered on identifying the best practices of the organization, this study also culled the motivations of the women in involving themselves in crime prevention and looked into their roles in the organization.

## Materials And Methods

This study used qualitative descriptive method, specifically the ethnographic approach.

The researcher observed the participants in their natural environment to understand the motivations, roles, practices and challenges encountered in the conduct of their duties in the Women’s Brigade. The researcher joined night patrols of the WB to see the women in action and to observe how community members reacted to the actions of the WB.

Moreover, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews were conducted among the four (4) active pioneer members of the WB.

To substantiate data from the WB members, interviews with the Barangay Captains of the four central barangays (Bontoc Ili, Poblacion, Caluttit and Samoki) were also done.

Transcription was made after the FGD and interviews were conducted. The transcribed data were shown to an English Professor and another faculty researcher at the Mountain Province State Polytechnic College (MPSPC) for validation. It was also cross-checked by a science researcher at the Research Development and Extension Unit of the same institution.

After the transcription of data, answers from the participants were analyzed and synthesized. These were coded, categorized, and counted systematically based on their occurrences to reach the point of saturation. Based on these data, themes were determined.

## Results And Discussion

### Motives of WB Members

The strongest reasons why women joined the Bontoc Women’s Brigade were: concern for the security and peace of the local community, self-fulfillment and the belief that Bontoks have high regard for women.

Concern for the security and peace in the local community.

Bontoc women acknowledge that the business of keeping their community safe and peaceful does not only rely on the shoulders of police force. To achieve peace and order in the community, members, like the women, have to pitch in and help, too.

The daily routine of the women start before the curfew hour in the central barangays of the municipality. Before the clock strikes 10 in the evening, the women start their patrol.

“Our policemen and policewomen are not enough to patrol all areas of our community. It is for this reason that we are helping out. We cover those establishments and areas which may not be visited by the local police every night,” said one WB member.

“When locals see us, most are reminded that the curfew time is near and readily go home without prodding. By our presence alone, we are like friendly reminders to the people,” said another participant.

The women members concede that doing patrol is difficult but the benefits derived by the whole community as a result of their nightly patrol outweigh the difficulties of doing so.

“I have this feeling of self-gratification whenever a night has passed on without incident. It means we have maintained the peace within the community by joining the patrols,” revealed another member.

The above statements by the WB members support the claim of the United Nations (2012) that a woman is not only concerned with her immediate environment; instead, she looks at the whole which makes her an effective safe keeper. In this case, the WB members do not only look after the welfare of their family but also that of the community.

Self-fulfillment. Participants to this study claim that when they know they have contributed to the peace and order of their local communities, they have a sense of self-fulfillment. This goes with Maslow’s theory that as people

grow older, their sense of fulfillment no longer centers on basic needs. Instead, people feel contented when they look out for more than just themselves and their desires (McLeod, 2014).

“When we assist our community through our patrols, we know we have also done something good to members of different families. Knowing that, we feel happy. That is enough payment for our efforts,” shared a WB member.

Belief that Bontoks have high regard for women. Members of the Bontoc Women’s Brigade shared that they feel safe even as they patrol at night time due to the fact that locals respect women, more so with older women.

“If I know that our people are violent towards women, I wouldn’t put my safety on the line. But that is not the case here. In our locality, when an older woman talks to minors and men who are drunk, the latter usually keep quiet and do as bidden (go home),” stated a WB member.

“We are thought of as mothers or grandmothers to the delinquents we reprimand. Most of them do not need a lot of prodding to do as we have advised,” added another participant.

Given these reactions to the members of the Women’s Brigade, they are encouraged to continue with their civilian initiative of maintaining peace and order.

### Roles in Crime Prevention

**Negotiators in disputes.** In the conduct of their nightly patrols, members of the Bontoc Women’s Brigade sometimes encountered arguments. These arguments could be between the WB members and the drunks, between the WB members and the bar owners or operators or between drunks and other drunks.

Using peaceful negotiation techniques, WB members were usually able to send minors and drunks home without a lot of resistance on the part of the latter. As for the operators or owners, the WB members were also successful in convincing them to stop serving liquor beyond the curfew time and close their stores.

When they chanced on a quarrel among drunks, WB members were also able to pacify those involved in the argument. By gentle chiding and prodding, fights were dissipated.

These are evidences that women are effective peace negotiators. These are also corroborated by the study of Maoz (2009) which found that women were more adept at handling peace negotiations than men.

Catajan’s (2006) article also recounted stories of eye witnesses who attested that WB members were highly skilled in pacifying fights among drunks.

**Guidance Counselors.** The Women’s Brigade members also acted as counselors. They advised minors not to stay late at night and to refrain from excessive drinking of liquor. Apart from this, if the minors could not bring themselves home, the WB members assisted them.

**As elderlies in the community with experience and integrity,** WB members are influential to minors and other locals. Their words are taken seriously and their pieces of advice were heeded.

**Safety Officers.** In the course of their patrol, WB members chance on drunks sleeping on dark alleys, or stubborn bar customers who refuse to get out of the establishments even

after curfew hours. In these cases, the women carry the drunk person to a lighted area where he can be seen.

“This is better. It lessens the chance that he might be robbed or abused by anyone else. At least he is visible,” said one member when asked why they do it.

When customers were stubborn, the women wait out until the customers relent and go home.

With these actions, it is revealed that WB members indeed ensure the safety of community members even if they are delinquents. Unlike men, these women generally had the patience to wait until the persons concerned heed the advice of the women.

### Best Practices of WB on Crime Prevention

**Placid approach to conflict resolution.**

As opposed to direct and aggressive approaches to conflict resolution, WB members opted for the quiet or gentle approach.

Whenever members of the WB saw minors loitering around in bars, they convince them to go home. In cases when the minors were wasted, the women accompanied them home to ensure their safety. In addition, the WB members follow-up the minors the next day in their homes. It is during these times that they give advice to the young.

“When they are drunk, there is no use giving them advice. We know they are not in their right mind. So our priority is just to send them home or accompany them home,” shared a WB member.

Another participant expounded that counseling the delinquent youth when they were sober was much more effective than when they were intoxicated.

“The young get riled up when advised when they are drunk. But they are more accepting of counsel when the alcohol has worn off from their brain,” stated a participant.

The barangay captains also attested to the negotiating skills of the WB members. One barangay captain recounted an incident when the organization was able to settle marital problems. Another said that when barangay tanods, who were usually men, reprimanded youngsters who were intoxicated, the minors usually shouted invectives and picked fights. But with the WB, the youngsters kept quiet and went on their way home. In the case of liquor establishment owners, they were more willing to close their stores following the curfew hours after being reminded by women than when reminded by police officers. As a consequence, less and less minors were going home late intoxicated since no stores were open beyond 10 o’ clock in the evening.

**Sending home minors.** The safety of the locals is premium to the Bontoc Women’s Brigade. Hence, part of their duties as they did their nightly patrol was to constantly remind the young or the drunks to go home. The women were always concerned about the minors and prioritized them over grown-ups.

“These are the youth of our community. Even if they go the wrong way, it is still our obligation to lead them to the right path,” said a WB member.

“If they can’t go home by themselves, we assist them. We do not leave them where they are. They are vulnerable,” explained another.

Another participant said it is heavier on their hearts to leave minors on their own after some reminders to go home. "We are also mothers. If it were our children who are in this drunken state, we would appreciate it very much if someone cared enough to help our children arrive home safely," she said.

Securing the drunk and his valuables. As mentioned earlier, WB members exert effort to carry the wasted ones to an area where it is lighted to discourage other delinquents from abusing the drunks.

"We can't just leave them where they are. Our conscience won't let us do that. We have to carry them to safety," explained a WB member.

In cases when the drunk was carrying with him valuables such as cash or cellphone, the women confiscated these items for safekeeping. These were then returned to the person the next day, with a little admonishing from the women. A number of persons appreciated this practice of the WB as their valuables were kept safe despite their drunken state the previous night.

### Difficulties Encountered by the WB

Restricted mobility due to old age. Most members of the Bontoc Women's Brigade are senior citizens. Having retired from the daily grind of 8-5 jobs, they now give service in the area of peace and order.

Being physically old, these women are frail. But despite these physical impediment, they continue with their nightly patrols.

"Sometimes, the youth ran away from us and we cannot give chase."

"At other times, others cannot join our group due to health concerns. And when we are quite few, we also feel scared about our safety."

"Those who do not respect us have the nerve to throw rocks at us. It's scary. We might get hit and we can't move fast enough to avoid danger."

The aforementioned were some of the recounts told by the members which support that their biggest challenge in the pursuit of their civilian volunteerism is old age.

Aggressive Behavior. It is inevitable that the Women's Brigade meet youngsters and drunken people who misbehave or pose aggressive behaviors towards them as they implement the different ordinances geared towards crime prevention.

In some cases, these clients would pick a fight, talk back dirty and even threaten members of the brigade. Some even throw stones at the members.

"They even resort to namecalling and shouting," said a participant.

"Others would mock us and tell us to go instead. They tell us it's not our job to tell them off," another volunteered.

### Conclusions

The formation of the Bontoc Women's Brigade is a redefinition of the roles of women in society. It attests that women are no longer just beneficiaries but stakeholders in the crime prevention. This study proved that when women are given an opportunity to be involved in maintaining public order, they could come up with ingenious ways to

help. This is the brand of women empowerment that the Women's Brigade has demonstrated.

The Women's Brigade is not perfect. The personal struggles of the members limit their abilities. However, it could still be said that the contributions of the Women's Brigade in the pursuit of peace and order of Bontoc are beyond compare.

The Women's Brigade sets a framework that other women could follow in the attainment of peace and order in the local setting

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