

Men experience gender-based violence, too: Exploring the roles and experiences of women and men in tuna fisheries in Fiji

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Introduction

Gender experts in the fisheries field herald the need to understand and take into consideration the role and experiences of women in fisheries management and practice. Women experience gender-based inequalities, including gender stereotyping and gender-based violence that stem from behaviours, roles, power relations, policies, programmes and services that differentially impact on the social, ecological, economic, cultural and political realities of people. My research reveals, however, that men also experience gender inequalities but receive less attention in recent gender-based research in fisheries. Moreover, there are gaps in understanding about how the compounding impacts of multiple identities (religion, nationality, gender, age) might make it difficult for policy-makers and researchers to tease out complex social issues in fisheries.

This research is a first step towards examining gender issues in the western and central Pacific tuna socioecological system (Fig. 1). Applying the methodology presented in Syddall et al. (2021), a mixed-method, place-specific, case study approach was applied to conduct research in 2018 to 2020, including a two-week visit in May 2019 to Suva, Fiji and two villages, Waiqanake and Kalekana. Research questions included: “What role(s) do women play in tuna fisheries in Fiji”, and, “How has the development of the fishery impacted these roles?” Particular attention was given to understanding who benefits from tuna fisheries development and associated policies, and what the unintended impacts are on women. Nineteen semi-structured interviews and a semi-structured focus group discussion were undertaken with representatives

of Fiji’s tuna fishery (interviews) and with six women from Kalekana Village (focus group discussion). Interview participants included industry representatives, independent consultants, regional fisheries managers, non-governmental organisations, academics, recreational fishers, and fishers in Waiqanake Village. Three key findings emerged: 1) traditional gendered roles remain, whereby women are marginalised in either invisible or low paid and unskilled roles, and violence is sanctioned; 2) gender mainstreaming of policy and practice remain simplistic and narrow, but are transitioning towards more equitable outcomes for women; and 3) failure to consider gender within the context of western and central Pacific tuna social-ecological system leads to unintended outcomes that undermine potential benefits of the fishery to broader society, especially to women. These findings are discussed in depth in Syddall et al. (2022). This article highlights one important feature that requires further enquiry. The role of men and an exploration of masculinity is given less attention, but the gender issues cause immense harm, particularly in the Fijian tuna fishery, and extend widely.

Fiji’s tuna fishery, targeting mainly albacore and yellowfin tuna, supports over 4000 jobs, from fisheries to exports, and contributes USD 48 million to the economy from pre-harvest through to post-harvest processing and exporting revenues. Importantly, Suva acts as a hub for the Pacific through its freight connections, infrastructure and labour force. Along the supply chain, Fijian nationals (both women and men) are involved directly and indirectly with this fishery. However, gender issues, including gender stereotyping and gender-based violence, are fraught throughout the socioecological system of Fiji’s tuna fishery.

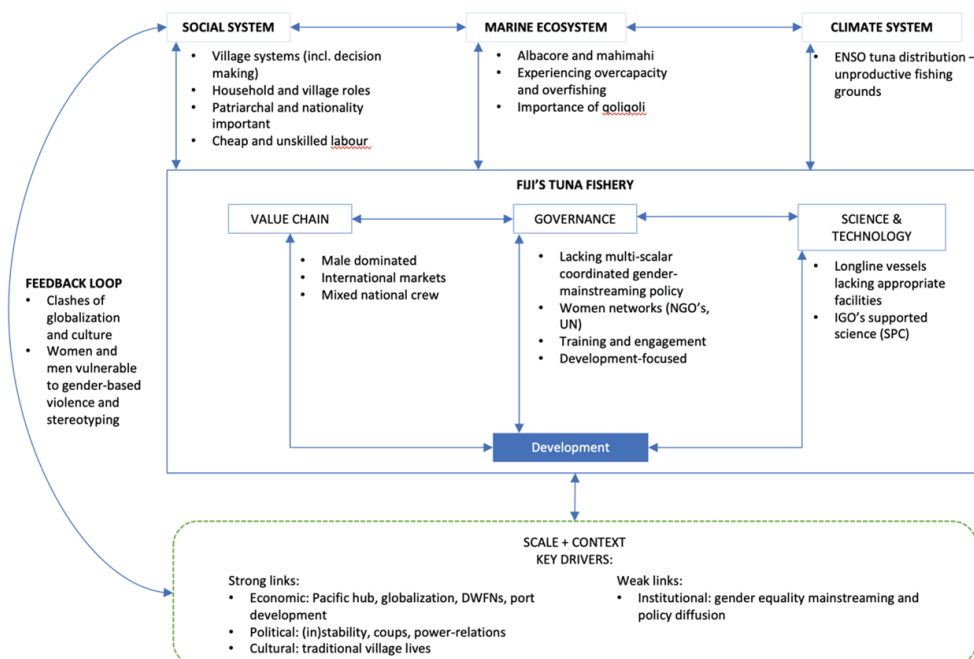


Figure 1. Fiji's tuna fishery socioecological system.

Gender-based violence at sea

Fiji's tuna fishery is "women intensive but male dominated", meaning female workers are consistently overrepresented in low skilled, poorly paid and undervalued positions, while men dominate more powerful (i.e. higher skilled, better paid, more valued) positions. The trend looks to be changing, where more and more women are being included across the board from fishing to policy-making and in leadership roles, although progress is slow and met with its own challenges. For example, while women are becoming trained to go on boats, boats may not be well equipped materially (e.g. separate facilities) and culturally. Meanwhile, men at sea have, and continue to experience, gender-based issues onboard fishing vessels. The mothers, wives, daughters and sisters to crewman are often neglected when considering fisheries economies and supply chains, despite being impacted by their family members' long ventures away from home and the village. These women were the focus of this paper and research. I reframe issues generally considered "slavery at sea" on "risky" and "violent" tuna fishing foreign vessels as gender-based violence.

Violence is an ambiguous term (Stanko 2003) that is context driven (Kaladelfos and Featherstone 2014), and involves acts resulting from power relationships, including threats and intimidation, neglect, physical, psychological, sexual acts or acts of omission (including inadequate sanitation, water, food, and medical attention) (Bott et al. 2005; World Health Organization 2022). Gender-based violence is prominently and commonly associated with violence against women and girls. If used in the context of acts against men in the fishing industry for men, research centres on sexual violence or military violence (Carpenter 2017; Christian et al. 2011; Peretz and Vidmar 2021). Research has adopted a wider more inclusive definition for gender-based violence to discuss a range of harms that are not currently understood within the fisheries industry community: "violence that is targeted at women or men because of their sex and/or their socially constructed gender roles" (Carpenter 2006:83).

Violence onboard fishing vessels has included murders and injuries, but also the everyday violence that precedes these

most violent acts, and which have been documented as "slavery at sea" in the literature but not tagged as gender-based violence. In my research, this is considered to be gender-based due to the strong gender divisions of labour in the value chain being either highly masculine or highly feminine (Barclay et al. 2021). As characterised and reported in our paper, violence by men against men tends to take on the hegemonic masculinity position (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2006), but these assumptions about men and masculinity are taken for granted, and suppress variations and differences in power relations and social interactions. Understanding the fluidity of power, culture and historical workings on masculinity helps reshape how violent acts onboard fishing vessels between men can be "gendered". The concept that men with social differences and unequal power are driven by economic, social, and racial or ethnic factors, which can condition social interactions and be used to justify violent acts, is critical and a more nuanced (intersectional) exploration is warranted.

Case study: Josaia and the women's group

My research in Fiji revealed that men who had been working onboard foreign (e.g. Chinese, Fijian, Korean or and Taiwanese) tuna fishing vessels had been mistreated and/or injured and, therefore, unable to work, or worse, they had been murdered or died while on the job. In 2019, Human Rights at Sea showcased the experiences of Josaia Cama from the fishing village of Waiqanake who was a crew member on a CKP Fishing Company (south Korean) tuna longline vessel (Human Rights at Sea 2019). Josaia was also a participant of this study. His experience of forced labour, which led to the loss of all his fingers, is instructive for this study. Josaia's account of his experiences draws attention to the ways in which power and social constructions of gender condition affect interactions:

“ We finish the fishing aye ... we on the upper deck yeh ... They [Taiwanese boatman/supervisor] said for us to go down again into the bottom freezer ... you unload and you the job is finished aye ... they pull up the ladder, like this aye ... this is the second time, I was forced two hours ... I was a cold ... they give us gloves but the cotton gloves to make the work easier ... the rest who, the older ones see they have experience in, because ... Vaseline and they drink rum to keep them warm, but we had none ... the other Fijian boy he was a big man aye, he didn't want to go in the freezer, he was hiding from the boss ... they put the ladder down again and the thing finished. And I start eating I can't feel my fingers aye so they all numb and it was like someone was banging a hammer ... very painful.”

These physical injuries not only had an impact on his ability to support his family, but also his perception of his masculinity and status as a man: "Because of my disability I cannot help care for my family as a man should, so Virisila [wife] has had to take on that task as well as doing the jobs women do in a family" (Josaia Cama interview, also reported in Human Rights at Sea 2019).



Figure 2. Josaia and his family, Waiqanake, Fiji. ©Victoria Syddall



Figure 3. Josaia outside of his home with village children. ©Victoria Syddall

Women who participated in the focus group and interviews in Kalekana Village in 2019, commented on the poor work standards the men had endured onboard these fishing vessels, including a lack of access to clean water, food and adequate sleep. Josaia shared his experience of feeling that his company had taken advantage of him and not paid him properly “because maybe my appearance and my looks, I was discriminated, aye” (Josaia Cama, Waiqanake Village, 2019).

Gender intersects with other identities such as race and class, which can amplify the risks of gender-based violence onboard vessels. All of the women interviewed in this research had lost someone to the tuna fishery, or relied on men that had been injured and were unable to contribute to the household income or village activities. Onboard fishing vessels, power relations are unequal and in favour of fishing companies (owners and vessel captains). Intersectional subjectivities and a risk-taking culture tied to performances of masculinity onboard vessels, often amplified by excessive drinking and sexual promiscuity, is confirmed by Allison (2013), who explored masculinity in shipside culture. Moreover, while Fijian-owned longline vessels with national crew are family oriented in which no instances of brutality were reported during this study, international vessels with mixed nationality crew are predatory.

Conclusion

Overall, the findings of this study show that, despite recent attempts to improve gender equality, women and men directly and indirectly involved in the tuna fishery continue to be affected by gender-based discrimination, thus leading to disadvantage and ongoing inequality (O’Neill et al. 2018; Prieto-Carolino et al. 2021). Masculinities and femininities in Fijian villages are continually constructed, performed and negotiated through culture but also, as the research reveals, intersect with wider global and ideological structures of the western and central Pacific tuna socioecological systems (Presterudstuen 2019; Underhill-Sem et al. 2014). Male domination and masculine-self identities have often been centred on men’s assigned roles as bread winners in families and tribal communities, and in modern societies, the ability to make money (Presterudstuen 2019). The belief that men are strong heads of households revealed in this research has been identified in other studies that note how cultural values, including strength and humility, are explicitly taught to all Fijian men (Presterudstuen 2019). Cultural values linked to the male body contribute to a complex social order and ethos of authority and hierarchy, and have been influenced (modified) by Western or modern culture and norms to generate gender-based stereotypes. Within the western and central Pacific tuna socioecological system, these stereotypes can lead to discrimination and violence. For Josaia, his

eagerness to support his family by crewing onboard a tuna longline vessel was ultimately met by forced labour, and led to the loss of his fingers. In this example, alternate conceptions and performances of masculinity that recognise cultural differences and power differentials were not possible or were deemed undesirable because of the persistence of hegemonic masculinity (Cornwall and Lindisfarne 2006).

A new approach to the empowerment of women in fisheries is urgently needed. But, a deeper understanding of men and gender is also critically needed, and needs to be positioned into gender equality spaces, rather than slavery at sea.

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