

Workplace Violence and Gender Bias in Unorganized Fisheries of Udupi, India

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Abstract

Fisheries industry in India is an unorganized sector of occupation where considerable proportion of workers is female. However, the prevalent gender inequality in terms of task allocation, wages, and other welfare facilities makes the men as dominant workforce. Furthermore, there are occasions when incidents of workplace violence take place. The present study was conducted to find the prevalence of workplace violence at worksite and study gender bias in such events. In a cross-sectional study 171 fishermen and fisherwomen were interviewed to collect information about workplace violence. The overall prevalence of workplace violence reported was 14.6%. This included 2 (8%) cases of physical assault, 1 (4%) case of sexual harassment of fisherwoman by her colleague and 22 (88%) cases of verbal abuse. A significant ($p=0.002$) association was found between gender and verbal abuse at the workplace. In conclusion, this study highlighted the occurrence of workplace violence among fishery workers in India. There was a gender bias towards females that can be attributed to male dominance in this occupation.

Keywords: Gender; Workplace violence; Sexual harassment; Fisheries; India

Introduction

Women have a significant role in our economy. However, the devastating repercussions of women's inequality have marginalized them in important areas such as training, employment, policy-making, and planning, implementation, and monitoring.^{1,2} Initiatives to address the issue of gender inequality and its effect on women's health have recently brought positive changes in the society. There has been clear recognition that disadvantaged position of women in society is an important factor that hampers their growth and development as well as a clear violation of the human rights.

Against this backdrop, women around the world have joined the labor workforce in unprecedented numbers. In India ap-

proximately 50% of the population is women, who comprise one-third of the labor force.^{3,4} According to the 2001 Census, the work participation rate for women was 25.63% in 2001, which is an improvement from 22.27% in 1991, and 19.67% in 1981.⁵ Only 7% of India's labor force is in the organized sector; 93% is in unorganized, informal sector, and 96% of women workers are in unorganized sector.⁶ These women are concentrated in the lower-income segments, working in survival activities or as casual wage workers or home-workers.⁶⁻⁸

Workplace violence (WPV) has increasingly become commonplace in many countries including developing countries such as India. Workplace violence is defined as any threatening behavior, verbal abuse, or physical assault against workers.⁹ Violence is very contextual, and per-

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Table 1: Socio-demographic profile of the participants by sex

Category	Workers sex, n(%)			p value
	Male (n=99)	Female (n=72)	Total (n=171)	
Residence				
Urban	84 (85)	48 (67)	132 (77.2)	0.005
Rural	15 (15)	24 (33)	39 (22.8)	
Religion				
Hindu	94 (95)	71 (99)	165 (96.5)	0.40
Muslim	4 (4)	1 (1)	5 (2.9)	
Christian	1 (1)	0 (0)	1 (0.6)	
Type of family				
Nuclear	36 (36)	33 (46)	69 (40.4)	0.213
Joint	63 (64)	39 (54)	102 (59.6)	
Marital status				
Unmarried	52 (53)	2 (3)	54 (31.6)	<0.001
Married	47 (47)	68 (94)	115 (67.3)	
Separated/Widowed	0 (0)	2 (3)	2 (1.2)	
Educational status				
No formal education	14 (14)	34 (47)	48 (28.1)	<0.001
Primary	47 (47)	28 (39)	75 (43.9)	
Secondary	14 (14)	5 (7)	19 (11.1)	
Matriculate	18 (18)	5 (7)	23 (13.5)	
12 th Pass	4 (4)	0 (0)	4 (2.3)	
Graduate	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (1.2)	
Ownership of land				
No	29 (29)	39 (54)	68 (39.8)	0.001
Yes	70 (71)	33 (46)	103 (60.2)	
Average monthly salary (INR)				
1000–3000	3 (3)	28 (39)	31 (18.1)	<0.001
3000–6000	39 (39)	40 (56)	79 (46.2)	
6000–10000	35 (35)	1 (1)	36 (21.1)	
10 000–15 000	15 (15)	2 (3)	17 (9.9)	
>15 000	7 (7)	1 (1)	8 (4.7)	

ception of violence has a dramatic impact on the employees' motivation to report. It has been established that perceptions of violence vary significantly across different disciplines.¹⁰ Women working in informal economy sectors are much more vulnerable to such workplace violence where factors such as irregular work, lack of control over earnings, and almost negligible social and financial support further increase their susceptibility.

Fisheries industry is one such unorganized sector of occupation where considerable proportion of workers is female. There are 5.4 million people involved in fishing sector in India, out of which 29.6% (1.6 million) are fisherwomen.^{3,11} Fisherwomen are involved in various post-harvest operations and are mostly engaged in peeling, trading, processing and other related aspects.³ However, the prevalent gender inequality in terms of task allocation, wages, and other welfare facilities makes the males as dominant workforce. Furthermore, there are occasions when incidents of workplace violence take place. We therefore conducted this study to find out incidences of workplace violence experienced by these women at worksites.

Materials and Methods

In a cross-sectional study conducted from February to July 2013 at the Malpe harbor, Udupi, India, 171 workers from fisheries of Malpe were investigated. Ethical permission for the study was obtained from Institutional Ethical committee. Furthermore, informed written consent was obtained from every participant. The study questionnaire included questions regarding occurrence of any events of verbal abuse, physical abuse and/or sexual harassment in past one year. The tool was validated by initially conducting a pilot study among 25 subjects using the questionnaire in vernacular language; the reliability of

the questionnaire was high (Chronbach's α 0.83). Data was analyzed by SPSS® for Windows® ver 15.0. χ^2 test was used to test the association between occupational health problems, gender issues and other socio-demographic variables.

Results

Table 1 depicts the socio-demographic profile of the study subjects. The mean age of the study participants was 32.9 (SD 10.7) years—37.2 (SD 10.3) for women and 29.8 (SD 9.9) years for men. A significantly ($p < 0.001$) higher proportion of women (94%) were married than men (48%). A larger proportion of men (71%) owned lands as compared to women (46). The salary ranged from INR 6000–10 000 (US\$ 88.5–147.5) for majority of men (75%); the range for most of the women (56%) was INR 3000–6000 (US\$ 44.2–88.5).

Twenty-five (14.6%) study participants reported workplace violence in the past one year (Table 2) including 2 (8%) cases of physical assault, 1 (4%) case of sexual harassment of fisherwoman by her colleague, and 22 (88%) cases of verbal abuse. The two fishermen who reported physical assaults were assaulted by their supervisor and colleague, respectively. A statistically significant ($p = 0.002$) association was found between gender and verbal abuse at the workplace. Out of 25 workers who reported incidents of workplace violence, 18 faced it through hands of their supervisors; seven were abused by their colleagues. No significant ($p = 0.629$) association was found between gender and perpetrator of the abuse. More than half ($n = 16$) of the 22 workers who were verbally abused by their supervisors were female workers as compared to male workers ($n = 6$) ($p = 0.007$).

Of the 25 workers who reported any kinds of workplace violence, 18 (72%) reported the incident occurred “sometimes,”

Table 2: Types of workplace violence

Type of violence	Workers sex, n (%)			p value
	Male (n=99)	Female (n=72)	Total (n=171)	
Physical assaults				
No	97 (98)	72 (100)	169 (98.8)	0.51
Yes	2 (2)	0 (0)	2 (1.2)	
Verbal abuse				
No	93 (94)	56 (78)	149 (87.1)	0.002
Yes	6 (6)	16 (22)	22 (12.9)	
Sexual harassment				
No	99 (100)	71 (99)	170 (99.4)	0.42
Yes	0 (0)	1 (1)	1 (.6)	

whereas 4 (16%) reported these incidences were a commonplace and occurred “all the time.” Only 3 (12%) workers reported the incidence of workplace violence occurred only once (including one case of sexual harassment). Out of 25 workers, 24 perceived such incidences as “typical workplace incidence,” except one fisherwoman who suffered sexual harassment considered it an “atypical workplace incident.”

Discussion

The present study showed that around 15% of workers of an informal sector of fisheries industry in India experienced work-

TAKE-HOME MESSAGE

- Workplace violence is an emerging problem in many workplaces.
- There is lot of underreporting for workplace violence.
- Gender bias in workplace violence can be easily appreciated with female workers being the victim in most of the circumstances.

place violence. However, as there is always reluctance in reporting, it is assumed that the reported incidence of workplace violence might be an underestimation. A cross-sectional study conducted on female workers in banks, educational institutes, and shops in Mangalore, Karnataka, revealed that about 28% of the participants experienced some form of harassment, out of whom 37% were less than 25 years of age; the majority of violence (67.3%) were verbal.¹²

In a study on health care workers, it was also emphasized that “reporting” is an important measure for addressing workplace violence. Many victims of workplace violence believe that “reporting” is a waste of time because it usually does not lead to any effective corrective actions. It has been well established in the occupational health community that when employees feel there is a real benefit from doing a safe action, they are more likely to engage in that safety-oriented action; when they believe there is no benefit, they are less likely to do the action.¹³

Though 14% of the participants reported some form of workplace violence, none of these incidences had ever been reported to responsible authorities. All 24 workers said they tried to pretend the incident had never happened. On speculating the reason behind not reporting the incident, there was equal consensus about fear of negative consequences on reporting, finding it useless, or it was not important to report; 41% of the fisherwomen were afraid of the negative consequences of reporting the incident to either the police or seeking help from their friends. Moreover, 47.1% of them found it even useless to report, citing the reason that “no one really cared about it.” Significant ($p=0.004$) association was found between female gender and reasons for not reporting the incident. Other studies also substantiate these findings.^{14,15}

Another issue related to underreporting

of such incidents is probably the absence of a clear definition as to what should be considered as “violence.” Violence is very contextual and perception of violence has a dramatic impact on the employees' motivation to report. It has been established that perceptions of violence vary significantly across different disciplines.

Occurrence of workplace violence or ever bullying are reported to have negative impact on relation to employee retention and productivity.^{16,17} This can occur whenever the perpetrator has more power, such as a supervisor. In the present case where the society is male dominant, the females are usually the victims.

It is important to be aware of the impact of workplace violence on worker retention, productivity, and customer satisfaction, and to understand that the return on investment for an effective workplace violence prevention program is indeed remarkable.^{18,19} Communication of an expectation of acceptable behavior among employees can enhance mutual respect for all people.

Conflicts of Interest: None declared.

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